



Primary School Principals' Readiness and Qualification to Implement Inclusive Education in western Oromia: Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out primary school principals' readiness and qualification to implement inclusive education in western Oromia. Quantitative research design was followed. The sample of the study was 225 primary school principals. Data was collected from participants using questionnaire to answer. For the purpose of data, percentage, mean and standard deviations and independent t-test were used. The result indicated that, among the sample respondents 141 were responded to attend special needs education course in their pre-service training program. This group comprises 62.67% among the sample. To the contrary 84 (37.33%) didn't take any course related to special need education during their pre-service training. Based on the result of the study recommendations were forwarded training and workshops should be organized for principals on general inclusive education techniques to improving overall quality of teaching.

Keywords: *Inclusion; Pre-Service and in-Service Training; Special Need and Attitudes*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

UNESCO states: Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. ... [As such,] it involves a range of changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13). According to UNICEF (2012:4), Inclusive education had been included in the design of training, but this was not realized in practice because factors such as trainers' lack of

experience in inclusive practice, meaning they could not translate inclusive principles in training into useful practical guidance for trainees.

There are different approaches around the world to providing education for people with disabilities. The models adopted include special schools and institutions, integrated schools, and inclusive schools. Separate system of education has been challenged, both from a human rights perspective (modern form of hiding children) and from the point of view of effectiveness. (Ekelindh and Brule, 2006). To overcome the limitations Separate system of education, inclusion approach which addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners developed. According to UNESO (2008) inclusive education had been included in the design of training, but this was not realized in practice because factors such as trainers' lack of experience in inclusive practice, meaning they could not translate inclusive principles in training into useful practical guidance for trainees.

Good administration is the key to the successful achievement of educational goals and objectives laid out in the national education policy and the policy is translated into action to ensure that children throughout a country are getting into school and receiving an education of a good quality (UNESO, 2008). One of the most important keys to successful inclusion has been preparation of school principals whole school support is difficult to achieve unless it is fostered from the top Effective preparation at the school level requires a participatory approach engaging all teachers and other staff. This avoids the common problem that arises when it is assumed that the issue of including children with disabilities is only the concern of those teachers who may have such children in their classes. An inclusive school needs a dynamic on-going programme of professional development and support, which allows both problems and solutions to be seen as the responsibility of the whole staff (Dorothy, Donna, & Connie, 2007)

Experience and qualification are required to increase roles of school principals to achieve goals of education and keep the pace of educational reform in the 21st century. As stated by Cheng (2003), school principals are expected to play the roles as 'goal achievement leader' which is aimed at ensuring achievement of stated education goals and confirmation of students' academic achievements and ensure personal developments. As a goal achievement leader, a principal is expected to energize the school community to develop appropriate strategies to achieve the expected educational goals (Loreman, Sharma and Earle, 2005).

Cortiella (2009) as cited in (Lucy, Ezekiel and John, 2015) asserts that a major constraint is serious shortage of educational resources; lack of schools, inadequate facilities, and lack of teachers and shortage of professionally trained qualified staff, lack of modern learning/ instructional materials. Regarding the readiness of each school to accommodate students with special educational needs, it was reported that teachers of regular schools lack the knowledge and training on the education of special educational needs students and that they rely on their experience and love for these students (Tsakiridou, 2014:215).

To help special needs students learn, principals can do the following: create a positive school culture that supports their academic success, use knowledge of special education laws that protect students' rights, understand how teachers and specialists can better assist disabled students, and work continuously and collaboratively with their key stakeholders to address all students' learning needs. Principals must also provide high-quality professional development for all personnel to enhance disabled students' outcomes (David, 2012:34).

Governments should ensure that there are sufficient well-trained personnel in all aspects of the delivery of education to children with disabilities, from early intervention to tertiary level, with particular attention to trained teachers, teacher assistants, and ancillary support professionals (UNESCO (1994). The responsibilities of principals of inclusive schools in the implementation of inclusive education should be clearly defined and the ministry of education and education authorities at all levels should ensure that the

principals are continuously trained, guided, informed and involved in the implementation process (UNICEF (2012).

Head teachers or principals should receive awareness training to develop expertise to transform their schools into inclusive schools and should be required to conduct training within the school to prepare teachers and students for the changes that may be necessary when children with disabilities are attending schools for the first time (UNESCO Bangkok, 2009: 62). In-service training should be held on a regular basis, both in schools and in support centers, for regular school teachers to increase their expertise in teaching children with disabilities in their classes and to trouble-shoot problem areas and to develop and share problem solving strategies (Lucy, Ezekiel, and John 2015).

In 2006 the Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed Federal Special Needs Education strategy which focuses on the promotion of inclusive education to meet the Millennium Development and EFA goals (MOE, 2006). According to this document the government's strategy for improving the provision of educational services for children with special educational need is based on the principle of inclusion. The special needs education (SNE) strategy aims to make the education system inclusive by educating teachers and establishing support system in regional education bureaus (REBS), woreda education bureaus (WEBS) and in schools (MOE,2006). The strategy recognizes the need to identify and remove barriers by considering learners' diversity through for example transcribing textbooks in to Braille, using sign language as a medium of instruction and other activities (UNESCO, 2007).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In the transition towards inclusive education great responsibility has laid upon School principals (Dorothy, Donna & Connie 2007). The support they provide teachers and their duty of leading, coordinating and facilitating the school affairs is a critical one in building and maintaining an atmosphere where all students learn according to their need and feel belongingness in the school community (Riehl, 2000). School leaders play an important role in promoting and sustaining change in schools. Without their efforts, schools cannot change or improve to become places where all students are welcome, and where all students learn essential academic and non-academic lessons in preparation for life in the community (Salisbury, 2005). The quest for inclusive education necessitates a systemic process of initiating school reforms in order to create quality, participatory and socially just educational communities for learner diversity. Principals' role is considered as being crucial in this process, for they are expected to lead transformative changes to challenge the status quo, and to mobilize contextual struggles for the realization of an inclusive discourse (Liasidou and Antoniou, 2014)

Effective inclusive practice requires visionary leadership at all levels that demonstrates inclusive values and develops the positive ethos and environment for learning that form the basis of quality education. Throughout the whole school, inclusive values should be evident in all policies and development plans and demonstrated through the mutually supportive working relationships and practice of all school leaders, staff and learners (Borg and et al, 2011). Inadequate training and support for teachers may not have the time or resources to support disabled learners (Bines,2007). In resource-poor settings classrooms are frequently over- crowded and there is a severe shortage of well trained teachers capable of routinely handling the individual needs of children with disabilities (Chimedza, 2001). The majority of teachers lack sign-language skills creating barriers for Deaf pupils (Hualand and Allen, 2009). Other supports such as classroom assistants are also lacking (Kuyini, & Desai, 2007).. Advances in teacher education have not necessarily kept pace with the policy changes that followed the Salamanca Declaration. For example, in India the pre- service training of regular teachers includes no familiarization with the education of children with special needs (Bines, 2007).

In Ethiopia, the role of school principals in transforming the schools towards inclusive education seems unsatisfactory. The inclusive movement in the country has reported to be entangled with a number of chronic problems which is related to physical and social barriers, inflexibility of curriculum, teachers' preparedness, and poor collaboration between the school and stakeholders among others. Though several studies confirm (MoE,2012; Tirussew, 2006; UNESCO,2009) the existence of the barriers from several angles (for e.g., teachers, resource, and curriculum) which hinder the implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia, there is shortage of studies done on the principals' readiness to realize school for all. Therefore, the intention of the current study is to assess primary school principals' readiness and qualification to implement inclusive education in western Oromia.

1.3. Basic Research Questions

- To what extent do primary school principals had professional training to coordinate inclusive education?
- Do primary school principals possess attitude difference toward the inclusion of students with special needs in their schools due to training?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

- ✓ To investigate the extents to which primary school principals had professional training to coordinate inclusive education
- ✓ To examine whether primary school principals have attitude difference toward the inclusion of students with special needs in their schools due to training

1.5. Significances of the Study

This research will have a number of importances which will contribute to the ultimate realization of inclusive education in the country broadly. Specifically the result would help any organization working on inclusive education. As school leaders are key in implementing inclusive education, identifying their problems will help the government and others to alleviate the factors hindering principals in the course of leading schools which are transforming to inclusion. Moreover, this study would shed light on the problems from principals' point of view so as to consider and intervene from another angle which is less studied. It is also expected to improve the relationship among school and local community which will have positive contribution for all students' learning. The study will also be expected to result in facilitated conducive social environment in the schools. It will provide necessary input for policy makers, principal trainings, and principal assigning bodies to improve the condition.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Study Design

In this research quantitative research design was followed. To achieve the objective of the study design was employed via quantitative data analysis. This design is also useful to gather data on a one-shot basis and hence is economical and efficient, represent a wide target population, generate numerical data, and provide descriptive, inferential and explanatory information.

2.2 Study Population

The population of the study is primary school principals in western Oromia. They are primary school principals in the following zones. These are West Showa, South West Showa, Jimma, Illu Ababora, Horo Guduro Wallaga, East Wallaga, West Wallaga, and Kelem Wallaga. Total number of the principal was 4,261 according to Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2005 E.C. (OEB,2014).

2.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique followed for this study was multi stage random sampling technique. First zones in western Oromia were selected, then wereda/towns selection followed, and after that kebeles were selected. Lastly, primary schools were selected using simple random method. At the beginning, among the 8 zones (West Showa, South West Showa, Jimma, Illu Ababora, Horo Guduro Wallaga, East Wallaga, West Wallaga, and Kelem Wallaga) found in the western oromia three zones were selected randomly. At the second stage, woredas under the three zones were selected randomly. Lastly, principals in cluster schools under the selected woredas become automatically members the sample of the study. The sample of the study was 225 primary school principals.

2.4 Instruments of Data Collection

Questionnaire was employed to collect data in this study. The questionnaire had three main parts including demographics, training and experience. The questionnaire was supplemented by document review (available polices, and Ethiopian Professional Standards for school Principals). The instrument was prepared in English language then it was translated to Afan Oromo. The questionnaire was piloted to experts of special needs education to improve it so that it will measure the construct it was developed for. Moreover, the experts reviewed and evaluated the questions' validity for measuring the variables. After the review the questionnaire was piloted on primary school principals to determine and improve its reliability and thus vague items, unclear idea or ambiguous items etc were corrected based on the feedback.

2.5 Reliability and Validity of Instruments

The instrument of data collection was evaluated through conducting pilot test before final data was collected. The pilot test was conducted with 35 participants to check the internal consistency reliability of the instruments. The total reliability of instrument was ($r=.873$). This implies that instruments have very good internal constancy reliability to measures what it intended to measure. After preparing the

instruments for data collection; validation of the instruments was done using other experts' review and discussion. In addition to experts' review and discussion, forward and backward translation was made to minimize meaning differences in the two languages. Hence, first the English version was translated to Afan Oromo with the help of both language experts. Next Afan Oromo version was translated to English language so that the valid instruments for collection of the required data.

2.6 Data Analysis Mechanisms

The relationship among variables presented in the research questions were answered by analyzing percentage, mean, standard deviation and independent t-test were comp whether primary school principals have attitude difference toward the inclusion of students with special needs in their schools due to due to training.

2.7 Inclusion criteria

The following is criteria to be used to include school principals in the study:

- ✓ Permanent, formally assigned principals
- ✓ government school Principals
- ✓ Principals in cluster schools

2.8 Ethical Consideration

The participants were informed that the information they provide will only be used for the study purposes and that it will not bring any harm or danger to them. In addition, the researchers insured confidentiality by making the participants anonymous.

3. Results

This chapter presents data interpretation from questionnaire filled by respondents. The analyses have been carried out to achieve the objective which is to find out School Principals' training and attitude related to implement inclusive education in western Oromia schools.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

To find out attitudes of primary school principals toward the inclusion of students with special needs in their schools 225 principals were filled the attitude scale questionnaire. The demographic information of the respondents includes gender, age, and educational level of principals.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Participants

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Male	200	88.89
	Female	25	11.11
	Total	225	100
Age range	<30	122	54.22
	31--40	72	32
	41--50	29	12.89
	50+	2	0.889
	Total	225	100
Educational Level	2nd Deg	18	8
	1st Deg	79	35.11
	Diploma	125	55.56
	other	3	1.333
	Total	225	100

The sample of the study was comprised of 225 primary school principals from western Oromia. Among the respondents 200 were male and only 25 were females. Male principals hold about 90% of the sample. The female principals comprise only 11.1% which shows female leaders gap and call for further affirmative action to bring more females to the leadership positions. Among the sample principals slightly greater than half were in the age range which is less than 30. Their number is 122 among the 225 total samples. This shows that younger leaders are more prevalent in western oromia primary schools. The next more prevalent age group observed in the sample was age range between 31 to 40. Approximately about one third (n=72 or 32%) of the sample lie in this age range. There are only 29 principals (12.89%) in the next higher age range (41 to 50) among the total 225 respondents. There were only 2 primary school principals observed in the sample. It is clearly seen in Table 1 that as the age range increases from below 31 years to 50 years and above, the number of observation decreases drastically.

3.2. Principals' Professional Training

Participants were asked whether they obtained training on special needs and inclusive education during their teacher education program as well as after becoming a teacher. Table 2 displays the statistics.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Principals about training obtained

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Pre-service training on special needs and inclusive education	Obtained Training	141	62.67
	Didn't Obtain Training	84	37.33
	Total	225	100
on job training on special needs and inclusive education	Trained	31	13.78
	No training	194	86.22
	Total	225	100

Among the sample respondents 141 were responded to attend special needs education course in their pre-service training program. This group comprises 62.67% among the sample. It is known that as of 1990s the pre-service teacher education programs at teacher education colleges and universities incorporate a course on special needs and inclusive education. It could be assumed that the younger principals got the chance to take the course in the pre-service program. From Table 2 also slightly more than half of the respondents were in the younger age group (relatively recent graduates who might get the course in pre-service training). To the contrary 84 (37.33%) didn't take any course related to special needs education during their pre-service training. These principals might be those who completed their teacher education prior to (1990s) the introduction of course on special needs and inclusive education to teacher education colleges and universities. Table 2 also shows that 194 (86.22%) of the principals didn't get any types of training or refreshment course on job. Only 31 (13.78%) principals got training opportunity on on-job bases. Training of principals on special needs and inclusive education should be one of the necessary conditions to efficiently and effectively deliver their tasks in inclusive schools. Without being equipped with the basic pedagogical knowledge and skills, it would be hard and difficult for them to lead the regular class teacher to accommodate the needs of all learners including children with disabilities.

3.3. Attitude Difference due to Training

The researcher used questionnaire to gather data on attitude difference between school principals who attended training in SNE during their pre-service teacher education programs at teacher education colleges and universities and training in SNE on in-service base. Concerning the pre-service training 141 principals who attended the training and 84 principals who didn't attend was participated in the study. On the other hand, there were 31 principals who got in-service training and another 194 principals were compared to see difference in attitude towards inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classroom.

Table 3 provides the results for the analysis conducted on whether there is a significant difference in attitude towards inclusion due to obtained pre-service training course in SNE and in-service training of SNE.

Table 3. Independent sample t-test result for Principals' Training

Variable	group	N	Mean(M)	SD	t	sig
pre-service training course in SNE	Attended training	141	69.36	12.52	7.33	0.007
	Didn't attended training	84	64.92	10.8		
in-service training of SNE	Attended training	31	73.65	9.27	9.01	0.003
	Didn't attended training	194	66.75	12.22		

Table 3 shows variables, groups of variables, the number of respondents (N), mean (M) being compared, standard deviation (SD), t value, and statistical significance level (Sig) from left to right.

In order to test whether there is statistically significant different in attitude among school principals due to exposure to pre-service training course in special needs and inclusive education between groups who attended training (N=141, M=69.36, SD=12.52) and those who didn't attend training (N=84, M=64.92, SD=10.8), independent sample t-test was computed using SPSS. The result indicated that there was statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ ($t = 7.33$, $p = 0.007$) in school principals attitude towards inclusion of students with disabilities among groups who attended training and those who didn't attend training.

The analysis for in-service training of special needs and inclusive education between groups who attended training ($N=31$, $M=73.65$, $SD=9.27$) and those who didn't attend training ($N=194$, $M=66.75$, $SD=12.22$), was statistically significant at $p<0.05$, ($t=9.01$, $p=0.003$) with the actual probability being at the .003 level which is less than 0.05. Contrary to the current finding, a significant negative correlation between the training and experience of school leaders and their attitudes toward inclusion was found (Ball & Green, 2014). According to the study, the more training and experience that principals had, the more negative their attitudes tended to be toward inclusion. Researchers hypothesized that the reason for the negative correlation may lie within the quality of principals' experience and training, instead of the quantity. In line with current study, in 2003, a significant positive correlation was found between principals' attitudes and inclusiveness (Praisner, 2003). The results suggest that principals who hold positive dispositions of inclusion are more inclined to place students with disabilities in more inclusive learning environments. Significant positive correlations were also found between principals' attitudes and their number of years of experience, number of special education classes/workshops attended, and in-service hours. A later study found that principals who are more knowledgeable about inclusion tended to provide additional provisions for inclusion in their school (Kuyini & Desai, 2007). The results suggest that there is a relationship between the number of specifically targeted special education training courses that the educators have taken and their dispositions regarding inclusion. This finding is not surprising given that the greater number of courses an educator attends, the more knowledgeable and confident they may feel in accommodating students with disabilities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

School principals play an important role in promoting and sustaining change in schools. Without their efforts, schools cannot change or improve to become places where all students are welcome, and where all students learn essential academic and non-academic lessons in preparation for life in the community. Principals serve as catalysts for the key stakeholders. They play a unique role in helping students, staff, and parents to think and act more inclusively. Their role is to guide and support the course of change, drawing together the resources and people necessary to be successful.

Even though, principal's positive attitude toward inclusion is a critical prerequisite for successful inclusion the current study revealed that they possess negative attitude. It was also uncovered that the majority of the principals neither obtained pre-service nor on job training regarding provision of special needs education. Respondents did not feel prepared to meet the needs of their students with disabilities in inclusive setting. There was significant attitude difference between principals who obtained training and those who didn't. Pre-service and on job training is one of the necessary conditions for principals to efficiently and effectively deliver their tasks in inclusive schools. Without being equipped with the basic knowledge and skills on how to deal with diversified need, it would be hard and difficult for the principals to lead the education of all learners including children with disabilities.

4.2 Recommendations

For inclusive education to succeed, it is vitally important that teachers, principals and other education stakeholders maintain a positive attitude towards inclusion. They must be firmly convinced of the benefits that inclusive practices bring to all children. Even if inclusive education is mandated by law, it will never succeed without the enthusiastic support of its practitioners. Obtaining such support involves behavior

and attitudinal change which is not a quick or easy process. Therefore, the following recommendations are forwarded.

- Training workshops should be organized for principals on general inclusive education techniques, especially those which highlight how such techniques can benefit all children by improving overall quality of teaching.
- Awareness about inclusive education should be integrated into schools' continuous professional development activities.
- Knowledge about the benefits of inclusive education should be emphasized into initial training programs for student teachers in colleges and universities.
- Mass media activities and materials should be developed to emphasize the value of inclusive education.
- Awareness of the many benefits of inclusive education should be increased through the interaction of principals with people with disabilities.
- Attending Inclusive education courses should be a compulsory prerequisite subject for all school principals.
- Special Needs and Inclusive Education professionals should be assigned at schools to support principals.

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