

EDUCATORS' PREFERRED FORMS OF SCHOOLING FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN NAMIBIA

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Abstract

This paper is an abridged extract from one of the chapters of my dissertation which attempts to develop an insight into the preferred forms of schooling for learners with special educational needs in Namibia. A questionnaire was administered to a stratified sample of 616 Namibian primary, combined, and secondary school educators. Educators had to give their views regarding the inclusion of learners with special educational needs into regular schools. Educators also had to indicate the type of schooling that learners with predetermined categories of disabilities should receive. Some of the major findings were the following:

- *The majority of respondents felt that learners with special needs would be better off in special schools and that teaching of learners with special needs should remain a separate specialised field.*
- *The results further showed that the majority of respondents suggested one of the following options for learners with disabilities: a regular classroom, a special class, and a special school. Very few chose a residential facility, a home or a hospital.*
- *The results also showed that as the level of disability increased there appeared to be a decline in willingness amongst educators to include either a learner with hearing impairment, physical impairment, conduct impairment or learning difficulties in a regular classroom.*

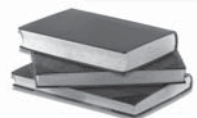
In view of findings it becomes vitally important to address educators' views and concerns before inclusive educational policies are implemented.

Introduction

The way in which we educate our learners is a reflection of our views and beliefs. Segregating learners on the basis of disabling conditions reflects the belief that these learners are different, - different in their needs and aspirations, and incapable of benefiting from that which is provided to "normal" learners.

Views about learners with special needs vary from society to society in accordance with the particular socio-cultural, economic, political and religious dimensions. They also vary according to the different categories of disabling conditions, and in most societies it is possible to note a "hierarchy of disabling conditions", where disabling conditions are ranked in terms of the public's degree of acceptance or dislike. There are many resilient forces against change within the established views present in particular societies.

Sometimes change is opposed by those who have a vested interest in segregated systems of provision, and in other instances it may just be the general folks who adhere to the "It's ok-but not in my backyard" phenomenon (Miron, 1994). This latter group can be typified by parents of "normal" learners who fear that the quality of education will deteriorate when learners with special educational needs attend the local school. As highlighted by these examples, the roles of views, both collective and individual, is important and influential in the provision of services for learners with disabilities.



It is argued that educator's beliefs and views are critical in ensuring the success of inclusive practices. There have been a number of attempts to study the views of educators towards inclusive education. These have ranged from descriptive methods, anecdotal records, interview data and questionnaires.

A potentially important area that has been largely omitted from discussions of inclusion is the nature and severity of learners' disabilities. Although inclusion implies the acceptance of learners with a range of disabilities, prior research suggests that educators' views and expectations regarding learners vary as a function of learner disability (Shotel, Ian & McGettigan, 1992; Soodak & Podell, 1993).

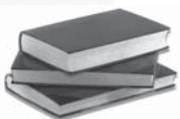
Several researchers have argued that the interpretation of findings concerning inclusive education would be greatly facilitated by desegregation of learners with disabilities by type of disability (De Stefano & Wagner, 1991; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). In one of the few studies that explicitly explored the views towards inclusion in relation to learner characteristics, Wilczenski (1992), found that educators held more positive views toward learners with social or physical disabilities and held more negative views about the inclusion of learners with academic or behaviour problems.

In support of the foregoing findings, Barnartt and Kabzems (1992) also sought educators' beliefs in Zimbabwe regarding integrating learners with four different types of disabilities (physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual), either full- or part-time. Learners with a physical disability were accepted four times more often than those with an intellectual disability, with 42% of educators considering they should be integrated full-time and 52% part-time. Only 11% considered that a learner with an intellectual disability should be integrated full-time and 35% proposed part-time inclusion.

In another study, Cant (1994), reported that in Alberta, Canada, where since 1987, the Government had been committed to providing "full and equal participation" for learners with a disability, educators were most concerned about the inclusion of learners with behaviour disorders. In particular, educators were reluctant to accept a learner who displayed psychotic behaviour as they considered themselves inadequately trained to deal with such problems. This preference ranking for acceptance indicated the different views of educators when considering different disabilities and the degree of inclusion, but did not take into account the severity of the disability. Stewart (1983), reported less acceptance as the type of disability becomes more severe.

While variations in practice are enormous, both from country to country and within the same country, a need exists in Namibia to examine the common practices regarding inclusion that will bring about change in schools in order to be able to attain the goal of education for all.

The main purpose of this paper is to solicit information regarding Namibian educators' preferred forms of schooling for learners with special educational needs.



Method

Research design

A quantitative non-experimental research design was chosen and a survey was conducted with the help of a questionnaire to describe views and beliefs of educators. The descriptive survey lends itself to the investigation of conditions or relationships that exist and views that are held by a specific sample at one point in time (Mertens, 1998).

Population

The population for this study comprised of Namibian primary, combined and secondary school educators. The educator profile reflects diversity regarding language, academic qualifications, gender as well as socio- economic background.

Sample

A systematic stratified sample of 616 educators was drawn from the defined population. To do this, the population was divided into educational regions. The regions were Windhoek, Keetmanshoop, Khorixas, Ondangwa-East and Ondangwa-West.

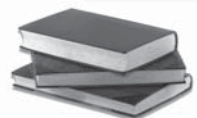
The schools from which the subjects of the study were drawn were selected at random from a list of schools given to the researcher by the Ministry of Education. The study included 118 schools, which is 10 % of the number of schools in the five selected educational regions. At each school, 10 % of the educators were randomly identified to participate in the study.

Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of several sections. The first section sought information on background variables such as teaching level, region, gender, age, mother-tongue, qualifications, teaching experience, post held by educator, class size and training in special education. The second section assessed educators' views regarding several aspects relevant to inclusive education. Views were sampled in eight categories namely, funding, curriculum, teacher education, support services, parent involvement, competence, who should be included as well as academic and social development. In the third section, educators were asked to rate whether a learner with a particular disability should be included, as well as the extent of inclusion. This paper focuses specifically on the section regarding who should be included in inclusive classrooms and educators' preferred forms of schooling for learners with special educational needs as well as their views on the type of schooling that learners with predetermined categories of disabilities should receive. The questionnaire consisted of a combined set of scaled, checklist, open-ended and yes and no questions. In each area some of the statements were worded in a negative direction and some in a positive direction. The order of the statements was randomly determined. Each statement about inclusion was scored from "I strongly disagree" to "I strongly agree".

Procedure

After pilot testing and adapting the questionnaire, it was administered to all 118 schools identified. To obtain access to educators in the schools, permission was obtained from officials of the Ministry of Education and principals of sampled



schools. At each school, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to the school principal and the sampled educators and anonymity were ensured.

Data Analysis

Data were prepared for computer entry, cleaning and processing at the University of Namibia's Computer Centre by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). While the bulk of educators' responses were analysed with computer assistance, the open-ended questions were manually transcribed in the most objective way possible and interpreted qualitatively. The main test statistic used in this study was the chi-square (χ^2). Descriptive analyses, frequencies and percentages were also used.

RESULTS

In the results section the researcher presented the views of educators regarding who should be included in inclusive classrooms as well as an examination of the relationships and differences between biographical variables and the views of educators. Also included in this section were educators' opinions regarding the type of schooling for learners with special educational needs, as well as their views on the type of schooling learners with predetermined categories of disabilities should receive.

WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED:

There were four statements in this section. Looking at the trend of responses it seems as if the majority of respondents felt that learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools and that the teaching of learners with special educational needs should remain a separate specialised field (statements 1 and 2). However, this trend was reversed when slightly more than half of the respondents were of the opinion that learners with special needs in primary schools are ready for social and academic inclusion (statements 4 and 5).

An analysis of table one reveals that 66.7 % of the respondents agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools while 62.8 % of the respondents were of the opinion that the teaching of learners with special educational needs should remain a separate specialised field of education.

Of all the respondents 57.3 % disagreed that the learner with special needs in primary school is not ready for social inclusion. 56.7 % of the respondents disagreed that the learner with special educational needs in primary school is not ready for academic inclusion.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BIOGRAPHICAL VARIABLES AND THE VIEWS OF EDUCATORS TOWARDS WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED

A chi-square (χ^2) analysis of these data revealed that there were significant differences in educators' views with respect to school type, region, gender, highest qualification, mother tongue, position and teaching experience.

School type:

Table 2 revealed that more educators from primary schools (73.0%) than educators teaching in combined schools (66.%) and secondary schools (60.%) agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

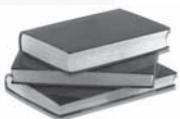


TABLE 1: VIEWS TOWARDS WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED

ITEM	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement									
	Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		No response			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools.	142	23.1	56	9.1	411	66.7	7	1.1		
2. Teaching learners with special educational needs should remain a separate specialized field.	174	28.2	52	8.4	387	62.8	3	0.4		
3. I feel that the learner with special needs in primary school is not ready for social inclusion.	353	57.3	107	17.4	150	24.4	6	1.0		
4. I feel that the learner with special needs in primary school is not ready for academic inclusion.	349	56.7	104	16.9	153	16.9	10	1.6		

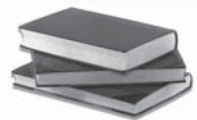


TABLE 2: WHETHER ALL LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS ARE BETTER OFF IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS, BY SCHOOL TYPE

SCHOOL TYPE	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	55	21,1	16	6,1	190	73,0	261	100,0
Combined	50	26,0	16	8,3	127	66,0	193	100,0
Secondary	37	24,0	24	15,6	93	60,0	154	100,0
TOTAL	142	23,4	56	9,2	410	68	609	100,0

Note: $\chi^2=19, 22$; $df=8$; $p<0.01$

Region:

Table 3 showed that at regional level more educators from Khorixas (77.0%) , Windhoek (74.4%) and Keetmanshoop (70.0 %) than educators from other regions agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 3: WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ARE BETTER OFF IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS, BY REGION

REGION	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Windhoek	15	17,0	8	8,9	67	74,4	90	100,0
Keetmanshoop	17	23,3	5	6,8	51	70,0	73	100,0
Khorixas	12	12,0	12	11,8	78	77,0	102	100,0
Ondangwa- East	46	29,0	17	10,6	97	61,0	160	100,0
Ondangwa-West	462	28,3	14	7,6	118	64,4	184	100,0
TOTAL	142	23,3	56	9,2	411	67,5	609	100,0

Note: $\chi^2=26,80$; $df=16$; $p<0.05$

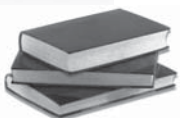
Gender:

The variable gender indicated in table 4 that more female (69.0%) educators than male (64.2%) educators agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 4: WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ARE BETTER OFF IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS, BY GENDER

GENDER	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	53	23,0	31	13,2	151	64,2	235	100,0
Female	88	24,0	25	6,8	255	69,0	368	100,0
TOTAL	141	23,4	56	9,3	406	67,4	603	100,0

Note: $\chi^2=14,10$ $df=4$; $p<0.01$



Highest qualification:

A surprising picture emerged in table 5 when more educators with teaching diplomas plus further qualifications (72.3%) and degrees plus further qualifications (71.1%) than other qualifications agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 5: WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS ARE BETTER OFF IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS, BY HIGHEST QUALIFICATION

Highest qualification	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Degree+ further	22	17.2	15	11.7	91	71.1	128	100,0
Degree	8	33.3	3	12.5	13	54.2	24	100,0
Teaching diploma+ further	14	16.8	9	10.8	60	72.3	83	100,0
Teaching diploma	55	27.0	16	7.8	134	65.4	205	100,0
Certificate	43	27.0	13	8.1	105	65.2	161	100,0
TOTAL	142	23.6	56	9.3	403	67	601	100,0

Note: $\chi^2=28,56$; $df=16$; $p<0.05$

Mother tongue:

When analysed according to mother tongue, data in table 6 revealed that more Afrikaans (72.4%), Herero (72.1%), Oshindonga (62.0%), and Khoekogowab (61.2%) speaking educators than Lozi (48.0%) and the English (43.4%) speaking educators, agreed that educating learners with special educational needs should remain a separate, specialised field of education. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 6: WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS SHOULD REMAIN SEPERATE, BY MOTHER TONGUE

MOTHER TONGUE	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	9	30,0	8	26,7	13	43,4	30	100,0
Afrikaans	27	22,0	7	5,7	89	72,4	123	100,0
Khoekogowab	14	29,0	5	10,2	30	61,2	49	100,0
Herero	11	26,0	1	2,3	31	72,1	43	100,0
Oshindonga	100	30,0	28	8,3	209	62,0	337	100,0
Lozi	10	43,5	2	8,7	11	48,0	23	10
TOTAL	171	28.2	51	8.4	383	63.3	605	100,0

Note: $\chi^2=43,64$; $df=20$; $p<0.01$

Position:

The influence of post held was shown in table 7 when more principals (67.0%) and heads of departments (61.0%) disagreed than educators holding other positions that the learners with special educational needs in primary school are not ready for social inclusion. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

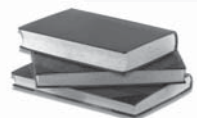


TABLE 7 WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ARE NOT READY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION, BY POSITION

POSITION	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Principal	46	67.0	10	14.5	13	19	69	100.0
Deputy Principal	9	53.0	6	35.3	2	12.0	17	100.0
Head of Department	43	61.0	5	7.0	23	32.4	71	100.0
Subject Head	36	53.0	14	20.6	18	27.0	68	100.0
Educator	219	57.0	72	18.7	94	24.4	385	100.0
TOTAL	353	57.9	107	17.5	150	24.6	610	100.0

Note: $\chi^2=26.08$; $df=16$; $p<0.05$

Teaching Experience:

A surprising trend emerged when data were analysed according to educating experience. Table 8 showed that more educators with less than 20 years of teaching experience disagreed that the learner with special educational needs in primary school is not ready for academic inclusion. The difference was found to be statistically significant.

TABLE 8: WHETHER LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS ARE NOT READY FOR ACADEMIC INCLUSION, BY TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching experience	Extent of agreement or disagreement with statement							
	Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 1 year	19	63.3	6	20.0	5	17.0	30	100.0
1-5 years	64	52.4	29	23.8	29	24.0	122	100.0
6-10 years	72	60.0	16	13.3	32	27.0	120	100.0
11-15 years	103	66.0	25	16.0	28	18.0	156	100.0
16-20 years	37	56.1	12	18.2	17	26.0	66	100.0
21-25 years	25	55.0	11	20.0	19	35.0	55	100.0
More than 25 years	29	51.0	5	8.8	23	40.3	57	100.0
TOTAL	349	57.6	104	17.2	153	25.2	606	100.0

Note: $\chi^2=42.48$; $df=24$; $p<0.01$

Another question concerning inclusion inquired about the opinions of educators concerning the type of schooling that learners with six types of predetermined categories of disabilities should receive. Five educational options were provided from which respondents could choose. These five options included regular classroom, special class, special school, residential facility, and home or hospital. The definition of each of these five options, as well as examples, were verbally explained before the questionnaires were distributed.

Table 9 depicts the average distribution for respondents on all six categories of disabling conditions.

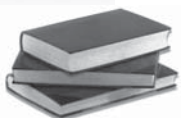


TABLE 9: DISTRIBUTION OF SCORES FOR EDUCATORS ON SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

CATEGORY OF DISABILITY		Regular Classroom	Special Class	Special School	Residential Facility	Home or Hospital
Hearing	Severe	3.6	14.0	63.5	6.2	7.1
	Moderate	11.4	50.8	24.8	2.8	1.1
	Mild	57.5	19.3	7.5	2.1	4.1
Visual	Severe	6.0	12.2	61.2	7.6	5.5
	Moderate	13.3	45.3	25.5	3.9	2.6
	Mild	49.5	24.7	9.4	2.6	3.1
Intellectual	Severe	7.8	13.5	46.4	13.0	12.3
	Moderate	12.7	41.2	27.3	7.3	1.5
	Mild	43.5	26.9	13.6	2.4	2.3
Physical	Severe	10.7	9.7	29.7	14.3	26.9
	Moderate	21.1	25.3	30.5	11.5	2.9
	Mild	49.7	18.5	14.9	3.6	2.8
Conduct	Severe	12.0	15.4	31.2	17.2	14.3
	Moderate	19.6	29.7	28.6	8.6	2.9
	Mild	46.6	19.6	14.3	4.9	3.4
Learning	Severe	11.7	27.9	43.8	6.7	2.1
	Moderate	24.0	49.0	14.9	3.7	1.0
	Mild	58.6	18.3	9.6	1.9	2.6

The majority of respondents suggested one of three options for learners with disabilities, namely regular classroom, special class or special school. The educational option which received the most responses was "special school". As the level of disability increased, there was a marked decline in willingness to include a learner with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, conduct impairment or learning difficulties into a regular classroom. From the responses, one can see a kind of hierarchy of disabling conditions according to preferences of the respondents. Learners with mild disabilities were often deemed to be able to take part in regular classrooms; learners with severe disabilities were most often thought to require special schools, while learners with moderate disabilities were destined for special classes. However, this pattern changed with regard to learners who are moderately physically impaired. Significantly more respondents believed that learners who are moderately physically impaired should be placed in special schools compared to those who have selected regular classrooms and special classes as possible options for these learners. A very small portion of the respondents believed that learners with one of the six disabling conditions could be placed in a residential facility, home or hospital.



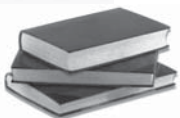
DISCUSSION

An attempt was made in the preceding section to analyse and report the results. The objective of this section is to interpret the results. The interpretation of results will be done in the order in which they were presented in the preceding section.

The majority of respondents felt that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools and that the teaching of learners with special educational needs should remain a separate individualised field. This finding mirrors findings by Barnartt and Kabzens (1992); Giangregio, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman and Schattman(1993); Hudson, Graham and Warner (1979) who noted that educators' views towards inclusive placements were in general very negative. When analysed according to teaching level, the data revealed that more primary school educators than educators teaching in combined and secondary schools, expressed the view that learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The message that could be communicated here is that most primary school educators who are not trained in special needs education find it very difficult to teach learners with special educational needs. Educators in primary schools consequently see special schools as a solution to their problem instead of requesting in-service training in the field of special education. Regional data furthermore showed that significantly more educators from Khorixas, Windhoek and Keetmanshoop than educators from other regions agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. Consistent with earlier results it could mean that educators in these regions are observing that learners with special educational needs are not benefiting from the regular education system and thus might be better off in the special schools. It was reported earlier that these educators might have a better understanding of the needs of learners who have special needs.

The data also revealed that more female than male educators felt that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools. The deduction that could be made is that the majority of educators that are currently educating learners with special needs are female. It also became clear earlier that most of them are not trained in the area of special needs education. Owing to their lack of knowledge and skills in the area of special needs education, they might hope that special school provision could be the answer to their problems. The data also revealed that significantly more educators with teaching diplomas plus further qualifications and degrees plus further qualifications than educators with other qualifications agreed that most learners with special educational needs would be better off in special schools.

The deduction that could be made is that educators with further qualifications have a better understanding with regard to the education of learners in regular schools at present. Their observation could be that learners with special educational needs are not benefiting at present and therefore should be placed in special schools. The results also seemed to show that more Afrikaans, Herero, Oshindonga and Khoekoegowab speaking educators compared to Lozi and English speaking educators were of the opinion that educating learners with special educational needs should remain a separate specialised field of education. A possible deduction could be that Afrikaans, Herero, Oshindonga and Khoekoegowab speaking educators might not have training in special needs education and therefore find it difficult to accommodate learners with special educational needs in their classrooms.



With respect to position, the data revealed that more principals and heads of departments disagreed that the learners with special educational needs in primary school are not ready for inclusion. This could mean that principals and heads of departments do not have any problem with regard to the social inclusion of learners with special educational needs in primary schools.

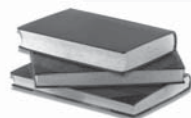
The data furthermore seemed to show that more educators with less than 20 years of teaching experience disagreed that the learner with special educational needs in primary school is not ready for academic inclusion. The deduction could be made that educators with fewer years of teaching experience do not have any problem with regard to academic inclusion of learners with special educational needs in primary schools. It could also be that they have more training in special needs education.

Another question concerning who should be included inquired about the opinions of educators concerning the type of schooling that learners with six predetermined categories of disabilities should receive. The educators were given five educational options to choose from: a regular classroom, a special class, a special school, a residential facility, and a home or hospital. The majority of respondents suggested one of the following three options for learners with disabilities: a regular classroom, a special class, and a special school. Very few chose a residential facility, a home or a hospital. The educational option which received the most responses was a special school. As the level of disability increased, there appeared to be a decline in willingness amongst educators to include either a learner with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, conduct impairment or learning difficulties into a regular classroom. Educators suggested that learners with mild disabilities be placed in regular classrooms, learners with severe disabilities be placed in special schools, while learners with moderate disabilities should be placed in special classes.

This finding is supported by Stewart (1983), who noted that the educators become less accepting as the type of disability becomes more severe. The finding was furthermore supported by research done by Barnartt and Kabzems (1992) who found that respondents were more willing to integrate learners with physical disabilities than learners with intellectual disabilities. The deduction that could be made from this is that Namibian educators are willing to accommodate learners with special educational needs in the regular classroom depending on type and level of disability. A further deduction that could be made is that educators nevertheless suggested a continuum of service delivery options for learners with special educational needs. Furthermore, these results suggest that a model should be adopted in Namibia which will gradually introduce the practice of inclusive education.

CONCLUSION

The inclusive education movement is driven by a concern for quality of provision for all learners and a desire to enhance the quality of life of all learners with special educational needs. If inclusive education is imposed on unwilling educators, this initiative could be derailed at considerable expense to the state. Policy-makers in Namibia should be cautioned to take cognizance of educators' preferred forms of schooling for learners with special needs and to couple the implementation of inclusive education with a concerted drive to address educators' fears and



concerns regarding the implementation of inclusive education. Educators should thus be involved throughout the process of policy formulation.

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