
Report on Inclusive early childhood education and care in Southern and Eastern Africa

Action Research Projects 2018 – 2022



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QueenMaudUniversityCollege
OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Report on Inclusive early childhood education and care in Southern and Eastern Africa

Action Research projects

2018 – 2022

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Foreword

For those of you who will approach this report as an interesting collection of academic articles, I believe you will enjoy the read, as you will feel a sense of closeness to the challenges and dilemmas facing Early Childhood Education (ECE) practitioners today. For those of us who have been privileged to be part of the process, however, this is more than just a report or an interesting read. This collection of articles represents a milestone.

In 2018, members of the Capacity Building Network (CBN) for ECE were gathered at a conference in Eswatini. Representing 11 institutions from seven different countries, they agreed on the following ways to advance their professional network: (1) with or without project funding, they would continue to encourage one another and exchange professional resources across geographical and national boundaries; (2) they would explore action research as a tool and method for mutual benefit between academics and practitioners; and (3) they would allocate extra attention on inclusive education in their action research.

This report reflects the decisions made in 2018 and represents a commendable first step towards that direction. The number of working hours and the amount of professional efforts invested since that meeting in Eswatini have been immense. Participants and contributors have conducted action research on top of their busy schedules filled with professional obligations, including teaching, institutional researching and supervising. The journey has, by no means, been straightforward.

As we gathered in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in late 2019, status reports were delivered for all research projects. The atmosphere was optimistic. Progress looked promising, and we had a detailed plan for the coming year. However, just like the rest of the world, the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caught us all by surprise. In 2020 and 2021, all project participants and researchers found themselves faced with all sorts of practical obstacles as they were beset by the consequences of the pandemic. Some of our colleagues lost their jobs as children were forced to stay home as mandated by the health and safety regulations in their respective countries. Others experienced delays or challenging discontinuities in their action research projects. Even worse, others had to suffer through the closure of entire research institutions due the drastic reduction of incomes during the pandemic. This is an admonition to all of us about the vulnerability of an underfunded ECE sector in several countries in South and Eastern Africa, as we are clearly reminded of in one of Dr. Thwalas' chapters in this report.

With these challenges in mind, it has been a privilege to observe and get to know this group of professional ECE practitioners who remain dedicated to ensuring that young boys and girls in their communities and countries get a better start to their education than previous generations. Moreover, it has been inspiring to be a part of an environment where practitioners

take on the role of curious researchers dedicated to ensuring that improved practice is built on the back of a contextualised empirical knowledge base.

From a Norwegian development perspective, it is encouraging to look back to this journey of ECE relations between Norway and several countries in Southern and Eastern Africa.

It is nothing short of remarkable to see how this evolving community of like-minded colleagues, including the ECE institutions they represent, has contributed to the improved quality of ECE in their respective countries and local communities over the past decades.

New community pre-school institutions have been established, a growing number of professionals have been educated and new ECE educational institutions have paved the way for thousands of students to pursue their pedagogical ECE training.

It is my conviction that this network of professionals and researchers has the potential to play a key role in the coming years and decades if they continue to engage in opportunities to contribute their unique combination of research experience and practical, professional passion.

The report has been edited by Graceana Luambano, the project coordinator and principal of St. Mary's teacher college in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Assoc. Prof. Gjertrud Stordal and Professor Morten Sæther from Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education in Trondheim, Norway. We offer our profuse gratitude to the editors. Without their professionalism and dedication, this journey would not have been possible.

Thank you also to Digni, who believed in the action research project and made it possible through their two-year funding in 2019–2020.

I hope you enjoy reading this report. I most certainly did!

Stig Stordal

Director of Aid and Development
Norwegian Pentecostal Mission

REPORT ON INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND CARE IN SOUTHERN AND EASTERN AFRICA: ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS (2018–2022)

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Abbreviations

Digni	An umbrella organisation for 19 Norwegian mission societies and churches engaged in long-term development cooperation.
ECDE	Early childhood development and education
ECE	Early childhood education
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
	ECDE/ECE/ECEC refer to a holistic and integrated approach to health, nutrition, protection and educational needs and services for children from birth to compulsory primary school age.
NPM	Norwegian Pentecostal Mission
QMUC	Queen Maud University College

INTRODUCTION

Graceana Luambano

Graceana Luambano is the action research project coordinator and the principal of St. Mary's Teachers College in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

This report presents the results of a professional development project in early childhood education (ECE), whose aim was to develop knowledge and strategies to promote inclusive education for all children in their early years. The project was introduced following the end of the Capacity Building Network (CBN), a network of early childhood teacher education institutions founded in 1999 in East and South Africa and Norway. This network provided opportunities to share and develop knowledge and experiences of early childhood in order to establish a sound and relevant basis for early childhood teacher education. The CBN project included institutions from seven countries:

Bokamoso Early Childhood Teacher Training in Ghanzi, Botswana

Karen Christian College in Nairobi, Kenya

Instituto de Formacao de Professores de Prescola in Maputo, Mozambique

University Pedagogica of Mozambique in Maputo, Mozambique

National Early Childhood Development (NGO) in Windhoek, Namibia

Free Evangelical Assemblies Teacher Training College, Helemisi in Manzini, Eswatini

Saint Mary's Teacher Training College in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania,

Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University in Lushoto, Tanzania,

College of Education in Korogwe, Tanzania,

Zion College of Education in Dodoma, Tanzania

Queen Maud University College (QMUC) Trondheim, Norway

Promoting knowledge about the importance of and mechanisms for inclusion in ECE was a key concern of the CBN, where inclusive ECE was defined in the outcome of a research project initiated by the members of the CBN group and approved by Digni in June 2018. Following the end of the CBN and as the result of a continuing dialogue among Digni, the Norwegian Pentecostal Mission (NPM), Queen Maud's University College (QMUC) and the project coordinator, it was decided that the project partners should extend the projects and, together with the NPM, apply for



Action Research Project members 2018-2022

what Digni called a “professional development project” for the period 2019–2020. In 2019, it was finally approved by Digni, and implementation began despite some initial challenges in finance and administration. The project is based on the arguments and political agenda concerning early childhood development and pre-primary education, as acknowledged in the United Nations Sustainability Goal nr. 4: *To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Providing stimulation and equitable services to all children in the early years is a fundamental part of this achievement, and ECDE is one of the targeted objectives: *To ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education* (UNSDG 4.2).

Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 has led to a focus on inclusive ECE as an area of concern for project partners. Based on the global attention of national and international policy organizations, such as the Dakar Framework for Action 2000, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the previous UN Millennium Development Goals, inclusive ECE has been included in policy instruments in most African countries. However, its implementation has not been straightforward, often due to lack of training and qualified teachers in ECE, lack of equipment and overcrowded classrooms, a lack of appropriate methods of assessment, inaccessible curricula and lack of unsuitable infrastructure (Thwala, 2018).

Developing competence in the initial training of preschool teachers and continuing professional development in the classroom are fundamental in terms of creating inclusive early childhood practices. Action research methodology is a strategy used to develop and carry out professional development projects because it is a practice-based method through which people research their own situation in order to learn and improve practice within a selected area. It is set in real life, deals with real-life problems and implies reflection as well as critical thinking (McNiff, 2013). Therefore, the focus of this professional development project was on inclusive ECE, with the purpose of doing action research to develop knowledge and find ways to implement inclusive early childhood classrooms both systematically and methodologically. Action research is a way of strengthening the competence of participants as they examine a specific topic in order to change, develop and improve a situation. The project partners gained some experience in the pilot, which was evaluated at a conference in Eswatini in 2018, and found it highly motivating to utilize the benefits of this methodological approach for the further development of inclusive ECE.

The professional development project had two main objectives, the first of which was to produce and present action research-based knowledge, with the expectation that ECE institutions would reach supervision level and incorporate action research development projects in their institutional plans. Also, it was expected that the ECE institutions would produce and present a report on inclusive ECE based on action research methodology. The second objective was to implement and evaluate the action research-based knowledge. The expectations were as follows: the ECE institutions would implement their action research reports to change pedagogical methods and/or plans in ECE preschool institutions and their teacher training courses. Also, some of the ECE institutions would have later produced research-based knowledge for publication in national or regional reports or academic articles.

The organization of the professional development project was based on a collaboration between several partners. The NPM was the applicant organization responsible for project implementation and financial management. QMUC had responsibility for the academic, methodological and professional deliverables. The project coordinator (PC) was the third position with the role of coordinating and administering the research study activities, monitoring the research implementation in different institutions, facilitating the regional workshops and reporting and keeping records. The project steering committee (PSC), the fourth position, comprised the project coordinator, one key person from the NPM, one key person from QMUC and one of the senior members of the CBN. The PSC ensured a sufficient amount of dialogue between all stakeholders and focused on achieving the project objectives, enabling discussion around concerns and allowing strategic adjustments in the project. Finally, there was the project Working Group, selected from various regional organizations and institutions in South and East Africa, as proposed during the Eswatini conference in 2018, and working under the mandate and supervision of the PC.

The chronological plan guided the project from commencement in April 2019 to finalization in January 2021. The plan was for the project to have one international workshop, which would include all participants, two regional workshops and one international conference. Two physical workshops were held. The first was an international workshop, which was held in Dar es Salaam and hosted by St. Mary's Teachers' College. The second was a regional workshop, which was held in three regions in Eastern and Southern Africa by combining members from Tanzania with those from Kenya in Nairobi, Kenya, and hosted by Karen Christian College. Members from Eswatini and Mozambique convened a workshop in Maputo, Mozambique, hosted

by Instituto de Formacao de Professores de Prescola. Members from Namibia and Botswana held a workshop in Botswana, which was hosted by Bokamoso Early Childhood Teacher Training.

During the second workshop, the professional development project comprised several action research projects in inclusive ECE:

- How to include children with autism in ECEC classroom teaching (by Dumsile Mngomezuli, Dr. S'lungile Twala and Nellie Thulie from Eswatini)
- Private preschool management strategies in enhancing inclusive social interaction among squeezed preschool children (by Graceana Luambano and Waikili Luwango from Tanzania)
- Play as an instruction strategy for developing social skills among preschool learners (by Dennis Likwelile and Robert S. Japhari from Tanzania)
- Culture and language: inclusive early childhood education (by Tsholofelo Legase and Kaaherue Korujezu from Botswana)
- Challenges faced by ECD caregivers in understanding inclusive education in the formal settlement of Khomas Region (by Aune H. Ondulami, Frieda Nangura Hamukonda and Ramona Beukes from Namibia)
- Inclusion strategies for preschool children with special needs (by Jan Andre Mangumbule from Mozambique)
- Disability as a factor of exclusion in preschools (by Marta F.C. Inguane from Mozambique)
- Assessment methods for preschool children with special needs (by Antonio Z. Wante from Mozambique).
- Impact of childhood educator training on the inclusion of children in Maputo preschools (by Bernardo A. Mutemba from Mozambique).
- Use of concrete materials to enhance inclusive ECD and education at Karen Christian College (by Cosmos Mbogo from Kenya).

Strategies used by teachers in inclusive primary schools in Tanzania to meet the diverse needs of learners (by Josephat Mbuli Semkiwa from Tanzania).

Unfortunately, the project was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of mandatory lockdown conditions, some of us lost our jobs. Social distancing and travel restrictions were

imposed, preventing project members from travelling cross-country. Therefore, the steering committee made the decision to replace the planned workshops and, instead, held two international virtual workshops. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, few action research projects were concluded.

The initial chronology of the project was as follows:

	2019	Activity	Responsible
	April	Final approval and start of project	Digni
	May–August	Preparations, signing of agreements, invitations and detailed planning	NPM
	September	Workshop 1/4 (everyone) in Dar es Salaam	PC + QMUC
	October–November	Participants working on action research projects under the supervision of the PC and QMUC	Participants QMUC
	November	Workshop 2/4 (separated in 3)	PC + QMUC
	December	Regional workshop reports to PSC/NPM	QMUC
	December/January	Participants report to QMUC on action research progress for 2019	Participants

	2020	Activity	Responsible
	January 31st 2020	Annual report 2019 submitted to Digni	NPM
	January 31st 2020	Audited accounts for 2019 submitted to Digni	NPM
	January–April	Participants working on action research projects under the supervision of the PC and QMUC	Participants PC + QMUC
	March–April	Regional workshop 5 and 6	PC + QMUC
	April–May	Regional workshop reports to PSC/NPM	QMUC
	April–October	Participants working on action research projects under the supervision of the PC and QMUC	Participants PC + QMUC
	June	Participants report on action research progress	Participants
	October	Final conference	PC/ QMUC/NPM

So far, the expected outcomes regarding professional development have been achieved because each project participant was able to pursue an action research topic and attend the two regional workshops, where they acquired a great deal of skills towards modifying their action research. The participants gained new knowledge about action research in their professions, and some institutions incorporated the action research methodology into their subjects in order to transfer the knowledge to preschool teacher trainees. The professional development concluded with four finalized action research studies on ECE, each adopting a different perspective and focusing on a specific context, even though the project was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with some researchers being unable to access participants physically. Furthermore, because of the pandemic situation, some organizations and institutions missed their action research project deadlines.

The following chapters will provide further details about what was being done in the field in the professional development projects, that is, in relation to inclusive ECE. The report also includes chapters based on the lectures held during the seminars and workshops, such as those on inclusive education, action research methodology and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children in ECE.

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Approaches to Inclusive Early Childhood Education Training in Southern and Eastern Africa

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Keywords: Inclusion, diversity, ECEC training, differentiation, learning methods

The Concept of Inclusion

In some countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners. It presumes that the aim is to eliminate social exclusion as a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in terms of race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society. This points directly to the emphasis on equity, which implies a concern with fairness (Ainscow, 2007).

Inclusion in the school setting, therefore, is defined as the process of addressing and responding to the diversity of the needs of all learners through an increase in participation in learning, cultures and communities and by reducing exclusion within and from education (Allan, 2008). It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, policies and strategies. Inclusive education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broad spectrum of learning needs in formal and non-formal educational settings. Rather than being a marginal theme on how some learners can be integrated into mainstream education, inclusive education is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and see it as a challenge and a form of enrichment in the learning environment rather than a problem.

The overall goal of inclusive education is to have schools where all children participate and are treated equally. Inclusive education seeks to address the learning needs of all children, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. At the core of inclusive education is the right to education, the significance of which has been reaffirmed in many international human rights treaties, for example, the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of Children; the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All; the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework of Action on Special Needs; the 2001 EFA Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities; the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal 4.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2005) issued a general comment on early childhood, emphasising that young children are rights-holders and that their right to education begins at birth. The UNCRC has been ratified by Mozambique, Eswantini, Botswana, Namibia, Kenya and Tanzania, and thus, all countries are obligated to implement its provisions. A number of articles are particularly relevant to the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity: Article 28 on reaching the child's fullest potential; Article 29 on the right to rest, leisure and play; Article 31 on the right to an adequate standard of living and Article 27 on the right to safety and protection.

Approaches to Inclusive Early Childhood Education Training

A number of pedagogical approaches and strategies have been presented in support of teachers working with students in inclusive learning environments. These approaches, many of which are still evident in classrooms around the world today, were developed in the late 20th century and were largely derived from special education models. Based on approaches that appear to have been effective, a set of principles for the development and implementation of inclusive education pedagogy, as identified in the academic literature, can be discerned. Examples of inclusive approaches that align with some basic principles of inclusive pedagogy include differentiated instruction, universal design for learning and the inclusive pedagogical approach in action framework (2013). Good teachers ensure that all learners participate and achieve. They

know that all learners learn in different ways and may need different types of support. The next section presents an overview of five strategies aimed at promoting effective inclusive education.

Using differentiation in class

According to the Enabling Education Network (2000), differentiation is the manner in which a teacher plans for and responds to the needs of different learners. In order to meet learners' varying learning needs, teachers modify the teaching content, the way they teach and the methods used by learners to learn. Differentiation is teaching in ways that make learning accessible to all learners. It is the concept of inclusion that responds to the idea that within every classroom, there are students with unique needs, backgrounds, interests and preferred learning styles. It is recognized that every child is unique and capable of learning, just not on the same day or in the same way. It is a kind of approach that provides children with multiple options for receiving information and making sense of ideas. Differentiation requires teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching, for example, adapting the curriculum and teaching methods rather than expecting learners to fit into the curriculum (Janney & Snell, 2013). Active learning requires teachers to engage learners of all abilities in the learning process. By using differentiation, a teacher adjusts or modifies teaching methodologies, teaching and assessment strategies and curriculum content to motivate and enable each learner to access learning and experience success.

There are three categories of differentiated learning: differentiation by access, differentiation by teaching style and differentiation by learning objectives. Differentiation by access involves choosing appropriate ways of ensuring curriculum access and participation for and by all pupils. This could be in terms of sitting arrangement, adapted material and equipment, choosing a suitable language and determining the appropriate method of communication, modifying physical infrastructure and ensuring physical aids are available and functioning properly. Differentiation by learning objective has to do with setting suitable learning objectives. A maximum of three objectives should be clearly articulated with a clear indication that all learners' needs have been considered. The student should choose learning outcomes that are appropriate and attainable for them in the chosen class. Lastly, differentiation by teaching style entails choosing a teaching method(s) that takes into account the learning styles of learners (Nghipondoka, 2001).

Modifying and adjusting instruction to allow all students in a classroom to access the general education curriculum is at the core of inclusive education. Despite the increase in teachers' awareness that differentiation provides better opportunities for learning, it appears that traditional teaching methods in which all children receive the same instruction continue to be popular among many teachers (Kurth et al., 2012; Vlachou & Fyssa, 2016). However, it is essential to note that good teachers ensure that all learners in their classes participate and achieve. They know that all learners learn differently and may need different types of support. Mehta-Parekh and Reid (2005) observed that when teachers effectively differentiate instructions, constantly assess learners' understanding, teach responsively and enable learners to demonstrate competence in varied meaningful ways, most learners can successfully participate as full members of inclusive classrooms.

Co-teaching

Co-teaching has been recommended as an approach to foster the transition from a dual to a more blended and up to-date educational practice for students with and without disabilities who are educated in an inclusive classroom (Friend et al., 2010). In a co-teaching relationship, teachers share roles and responsibilities, including differentiated instructional methods, in an attempt to blend their expertise regarding students with and without disabilities. Friend et al. (2010) described six approaches/variations of co-teaching that co-teachers can implement based on students' needs: 'one teach, one assist', 'station teaching', parallel teaching', alternative teaching', 'teaming', and 'one teach, one observe'.

According to Dlamini et al. (2010), inclusive education is enhanced when teachers cooperate with one another and receive flexible support from a range of colleagues. This seems to be effective for the development of academic and social skills of pupils with special educational needs. Strogilos and colleagues (2015) maintained that there is limited information in the international literature about the development, use and quality of modifications provided in single-taught and co-taught classes with students with disabilities. Importantly, however, additional support needs to be flexible, well-coordinated and planned if co-teaching is to be effective.

Co-operative learning

Co-operative learning involves the heterogeneous grouping of learners, which allows learners with a variety of skills and traits to work together. It encourages the high-achieving group to assist learners who are having academic difficulty in understanding and performing better (Van Zyl, 2002). Heterogeneous grouping and a more differentiated approach in education are necessary and effective when dealing with the diversity of pupils in the classroom. Targeted goals, alternative routes for learning, flexible instruction and the abundance of homogenous ways of grouping enhance inclusive education. Heterogeneity is of high importance, given the expressed needs of countries seeking to address diversity in the classroom. It is also a prerequisite for co-operative learning (Winter, 2006).

Peer tutoring or co-operative learning is effective in both cognitive and affective (social-emotional) areas of pupils' learning and development. Pupils who help each other, especially within a system of flexible and well-considered pupil groupings, profit from learning together. Moreover, there are no indications that pupils with no special needs suffer from this situation in terms of missing out on new challenges or opportunities provided by more co-operative learning tasks (Musibala, 2000).

Activity-based learning

According to Nghipondoka (2001), inclusive education requires curricula that are activity-based and that allow students to learn through personal experiences. This is achieved through activities that lead to discovery, movement and interaction with the community. Van Zyl (2002) concurred that activity-based learning places emphasis on learning in a natural setting, thus moving from an exclusively classroom-based activity to encouraging and preparing learners to learn in a community setting. Learners who experience barriers to learning often have problems with learning. Some are hyperactive, while others are slow in learning. Some lack motivation to learn and get bored easily. Being actively involved in their learning can boost their morale and help them develop self-confidence. Nghipondoka (2001, pp. 29–30) highlighted some classroom aspects of teaching that can promote active participation:

- Learning through experience
- Lesson based on discovery, movement and interaction with the environment

- Differentiated activities
- Clearly differentiated objectives leading to meaningful activities
- Clarification of skills and concepts to be mastered
- Sound interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners and among learners themselves
- Co-operative learning and peer tutoring

Effective teaching

Finally, the focus on effective education should be emphasized. The literature on effective schools and effective instruction can be adapted to include inclusive education: setting goals, education based on assessment and evaluation, high expectations, direct instruction and feedback. However, there is a need for curriculum accommodation not only for those with special educational needs (SEN) at the lower end of the continuum but also for all pupils, including non-SEN learners. With regard to pupils with SEN, in most countries, this approach is instantiated through the individual educational plan (IEP). An important consideration from our examples of good practice is that the IEP should fit within the normal curricular framework (Okech, 2010).

Mugambi (2017, pp. 101–102) summarized the key features of inclusive classroom procedures and inclusive practices as the establishment of a classroom routine that is sensitive to the individual needs and cultural norms of learners:

- Ensuring that classroom responsibilities are inclusive and not stereotyped
- Provision of instructional resources that reflect diversity among learners
- Ensuring that all learners feel accepted and gain a sense of belonging
- Providing each learner with a balance of challenge and support to scaffold new learning
- Emphasis and modelling values of fairness acceptance, kindness, respect and responsibility to and for all people
- Making education relevant to students' needs and interests
- Teaching and modelling independent learning skills
- Recognizing and valuing learner improvement and acknowledging the success of each individual learner

- Use of equitable evaluation methods
- Taking into account the diversity of learners' life experiences and learning needs, for example, the refugee experience
- Use of flexible approaches to eliminate barriers and transform learning experiences. Teachers should provide differentiated instruction by acknowledging that students learn at different rates and in different ways.

Implications for teaching and learning

Teachers are key to translating education policies into practice through the teaching and learning process. The success of inclusive education therefore depends on the ability of teachers to respond to diversity in the classroom. Teachers' understanding of teaching and learning styles is key to the implementation of inclusive education. Those who have a positive attitude towards inclusion are able to change and adapt the way they work in order to benefit learners with a wide range of learning needs. Teachers must have appropriate skills and be able to modify and adapt their lesson formats. They should also be in a position to arrange groups of learners according to their needs as well as change the way instruction is delivered, use different materials and provide alternative tasks. Teachers should provide differentiated instruction, bearing in mind that children learn at different rates and in different ways.

Relevant learning may require a review of existing curricular frameworks; teaching and learning content, pedagogy, materials and classroom teaching practice; assessment frameworks and teacher training and professional development. A holistic and coherent curricular approach will require alignment between curriculum content, assessment, teacher training and school leadership and management. Training institutions and schools should build and upgrade education facilities that are child-, disability- and gender-sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. There is also a need to increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries.

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Chapter 2

Project Design: Action Research Projects on Inclusive Education

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Keywords: Methodology, action research, collaboration, ECDE teacher education

Introduction

Inclusive education in early childhood development and education (ECDE) is multidimensional and complex (see chapter 1). It requires both conceptual knowledge about its many interrelated dimensions and practical skills on how to implement, organize and develop inclusive realities and practices in ECDE settings. The overall purpose of this professional development project was two-fold. First, the aim was to find strategies for the purpose of supporting teachers to implement inclusive education in ECDE. Second, the aim was to develop research-based knowledge on inclusive ECDE of relevance to local contexts and local needs. All participants in this project are educators concerned with the importance of providing adequate training and support for ECDE teachers. Therefore, one of the project objectives was to provide important and relevant knowledge that can inform the teaching strategies and curricula of ECDE teacher institutions as well as inform and be shared with relevant stakeholders, planners, teachers and colleagues faced with the challenges of implementing inclusive education.

While setting up the projects, the groups were in search of a methodological approach that would allow the participants to develop knowledge on inclusive ECDE and at the same time move beyond the theories and concepts relating to the daily life of ECDE settings. To achieve this, the group chose action research as a methodological framework for the projects. According to McNiff (2013, p. 23), action research is a form of on-the-job research, often referred to as practitioner research, undertaken by professionals intending to learn and develop practice in a systematic, collaborative way. This approach enables systematic research on practical, real-life situations and is aimed at finding solutions to targeted problems while also developing knowledge about the

multiple dimensions of inclusive education in ECDE. Drawing on action research methodology, the project group set out to answer the following overall research questions:

1. *What are the challenges faced by preschool teachers in applying the inclusive education skills and competences in which they have been trained?*
2. *Are teacher training institutions adequately preparing preschool teachers for inclusive ECE?*
3. *How are teachers currently being supported in the implementation of inclusive education?*

This chapter will elaborate on the methodology of the overall design underpinning the projects and outline the collaborative foundation across the individual projects.

Initial Preparations

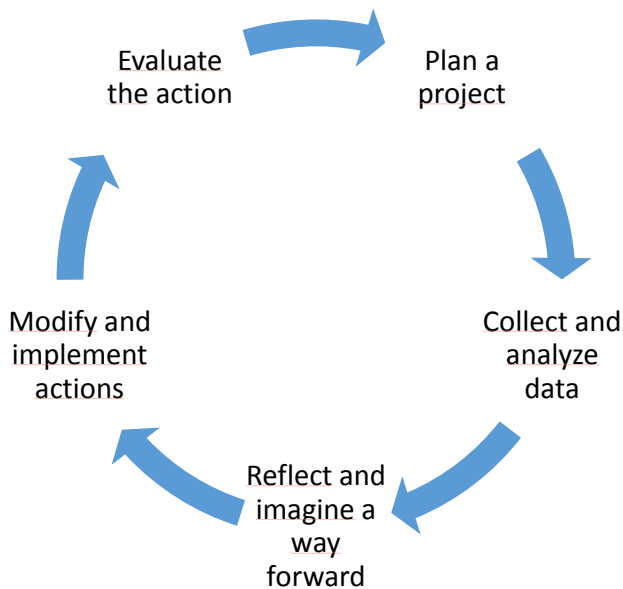
Action research allows for a variety of approaches and methods (Mcniff, 2013, p. 54). Prior to the main project, the groups conducted a small pilot study in their local ECDE teacher institution. The aim of the pilot was to test out and experience the main elements of an action research process so that all participants could establish a sound foundation upon which to manage a real-scale project. Following the pilot projects, the relevance and benefits of action research were discussed, and the participants agreed that action research methodology provided an interesting and valuable approach to inclusive ECDE. For example, action research involves collaboration and teamwork with partners and stakeholders at the local setting. For inclusive education to become a reality, educators, practitioners, managers and families must work together to find the best solutions to the situations they face. A major challenge for inclusive education, however, is bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and real-life situations. Therefore, increasing the capacity to translate theory into action and building a strong foundation for well-developed and -researched practical solutions are necessary in order to transform inclusive policies into practices and realities. Action research is practical, hands-on research while on the job and represents an opportunity for ECDE teacher educators to get out and get involved.

In order to provide collaboration and collective support for the projects, the participants established an action research community across the project groups. The overall goal of the community was to allow for collective discussion and reflection, sharing and learning from the ongoing projects as well as colleague mentoring and joint problem-solving. The project groups

met in regular workshops organized throughout the project period. The workshops consisted of a mix of project presentations, lectures, work sessions and discussions on the various aspects of the research process.

The action research cycle

As a point of reference, an action research cycle was designed, allowing a joint starting point for the projects. The cycle was based on a Lewinian action–reflection cycle, emphasizing planning, action, observation and reflection (Cloghan & Brannick, 2014, p. 9); however, it was adjusted to the timeframe and the available resources and needs of the project groups. Additionally, each project group would make their own adjustments to the cycle during the course of their project.



Model 1: Action research cycle

Planning and setting up the projects

Each project group designed their own action research project according to their interests and the specific needs and characteristics of their educational and local context. The first workshop

took place in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, in September 2019 and focused on the initial steps of the action research process. This involved identifying relevant aspects to be investigated, asking questions about how they could be investigated and imagining an achievable future situation. Planning the projects involved identifying research questions and methods to review the current situation. Plans were made for the process of collecting data and monitoring of actions as well as approaches to documenting the research process and questions about ethical concerns and consent.

Action research is always collaborative and involves other participants as co-researchers and critical learning partners (McNiff 2013, p. 123). In the projects, collaboration and collective effort were fundamental and involved working in partnership at various levels. In addition to regular meetings and collaborations within the research groups, each project invited partners from a local preschool and ECDE teacher education as co-researchers. The projects could also involve engaging with partners such as colleagues, community leaders, school management and staff, students, caregivers and families as well as ECDE teachers. The engagement and involvement of stakeholders at every level of the research process were pivotal to ensuring the ownership and relevance of the project as well as validating the findings and solutions.

Analysing data and planning of interventions

Following a period of initial action and data collection, the next workshop focused on the second and third steps of the action research cycle. The groups met to share the results from the initial data collection process. The workshop also focused on the data analysis process, searching for evidence of improved learning and how it has affected practice (McNiff 2013, p. 111). The project groups engaged in joint interpretation of and reflection on the implications of their findings and discussed the way forward. Based on the results and reflections, the project groups suggested ways to modify and try out new actions and made plans for relevant interventions that could be implemented. The second workshop was held regionally and took place in Mozambique (Maputo), Kenya (Nairobi) and Ghanzi (Botswana) in November 2019.

COVID disruption

Inevitably, life happens. People come and go, change jobs or retire; however, no one could foresee the outbreak of the pandemic that would disrupt the projects and prevent further progress in the middle of the process. At the outset of COVID-19 in March 2020, some projects were still on the planning board, some were about to initiate their first actions, and some had initiated a few interventions. All projects were, however, affected by the pandemic as social distancing was enforced, and schools, communities and nations went into lockdown.

The groups were preparing for the third workshop when the pandemic set in. As schools were closed and people prevented from going to work, the projects were put on hold and had to wait for the reopening of schools and an opportunity to continue the action research process. In addition, travel restrictions made it impossible to meet for the third workshop. During the first year of the pandemic, an online meeting was organized, focusing on the dramatic effects of social distancing and lockdowns, such as economic hardships and the challenging situations caused by the pandemic in the participating countries. It became evident that COVID-19 had severely affected children and families, the ECDE institutions providing services for families as well as the educational institutions that provided training and education for aspiring teachers. As a result of the pandemic, several projects were stalled, handicapping the final steps of the action research process.

The final steps of the projects would involve the implementation of interventions, evaluations of their impacts and evaluations and evidence of project results. However, as the pandemic continued to delay the projects, the groups moved on to the process of documenting the results of the projects at their current stages. Documenting action research projects is fundamental in order to communicate the knowledge being developed. A project report represents evidence of the learning that has taken place and, more importantly, provides a baseline for discussions, further reflection and continuing development. The action research report talks about how to understand the situation at hand and the actions that have been taking place. It can influence others to conduct projects of their own. Often, the action research project does not provide all the answers and conclusions but presents the reader with new questions and topics that one might want to look into. Therefore, writing the report is central to the process of doing action research and an important part of continuous professional development.

Concluding remarks

For inclusive education to become a reality, it requires teachers who are involved in the process of developing inclusive practices, who collaborate in trying out new practices in their context and who take ownership of the results and research process (Makoelle, 2014). Action research methodology provides an opportunity for educators, practitioners and teachers to come together to examine established practices and develop strategies for change based on practical, hands-on and locally based knowledge. Action research implies reflecting critically and systematically about the situation at hand. This way, the distinction between teaching and research becomes blurred, and educators become researchers with the ability to develop, evaluate and implement new knowledge tailored to the local context.

Despite the pandemic and the challenging conditions under which this project was implemented, some project groups successfully managed to find strategies to support teachers in implementing inclusive education in ECDE. Action research is, however, a continuous and ongoing process of inquiry that can begin and end at various stages of the process. Therefore, the action learning that took place during the project cannot be underestimated, including the involvement of all the project groups and participants of the process. Action research involves collaboration and engagement in collective knowledge development. Even though several project groups did not reach the end of their project, all participants took part in the learning process and contributed to the development of research-based knowledge to promote inclusive ECDE that was relevant to local contexts and local needs. Creating inclusive realities and practices in ECDE is a collective effort, which gradually becomes a reality as stakeholders share knowledge as well as the desire and commitment to take action for the purpose of improving the situation for the better, aiming to offer high-quality inclusive ECDE to all children.

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Teacher Strategies for Including Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

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This action research project was completed at the FEA Pre- and Primary school in Manzini, Eswatini. The project leader was Dumsile Mngomezulu, and the project partners were special education teachers, preschool class teachers, occupational therapists and the local community.

Keywords: Autism spectrum disorder, strategies, inclusive education

Introduction

The topic was chosen based on the fact that the FEA Pre- and Primary School admitted children with autism, and therefore, it was interesting to find ways of accommodating them in the school setting so that their needs could be met by the school. The research questions guiding our project were as follows:

1. *What strategies are employed by teachers to include learners with autism in classrooms?*
2. *How capacitated are the teachers to implement strategies for including learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom?*
3. *What support do teachers receive to successfully implement teaching strategies to include learners with ASD?*

The assumption was that learners with ASD were not properly included in school, and thus, their needs were not being met. This project was informed by Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach, which stresses the importance of the role of social interaction in the development of children's cognition. He strongly believed that the community plays a central role in the process of meaning making as social learning precedes development.

The interventions

While the FEA Pre- and Primary School admitted children with ASD, the support and accommodation of these children into the mainstream classroom remained minimal. Therefore, children with autism were not benefiting much from the school; it was simply a matter of integrating them, with very little support being provided to meet their needs. The teachers struggled to teach children with autism, and thus, there was a need to provide them with support so that they could effectively engage with children with autism.

We conducted both focus and individual interviews as well as observations to assess the situation at hand. After analysing the interview material, we presented the results to the teachers and identified the gap. We found that there was a need to prepare the teachers as they were not fully empowered to engage with children with ASD. We held discussions with the teachers, where they shared their views and made suggestions as to how they could be assisted. Thereafter, we conducted a workshop for teachers to enable them to handle learners with autism.

The results were an eye-opener because prior to the project, we were not aware that the children had not been benefiting much from pre- and primary school, despite daily school attendance. We were able to identify the gap and tried to meet the children's social and academic needs.

The results and significance of our project

This project has practical significance because it will help teachers implement appropriate strategies in their teaching, which may decrease the level of challenges in teaching children with ASD in inclusive classrooms. Teachers stand to benefit because they will be able to confidently discharge their mandate to these learners as well as embrace diversity. We are beginning to see

changes in the way in which learners are taught and will likely see further results.

This project will help the ECE Teacher Training College understand the increasing need to train teachers in the field who are working with learners with ASD in order to effectively engage with these learners. It will also help the ECE Teacher Training College to regularly review the curriculum in order to meet the needs of students and, in the process, avoid having many mainstream classroom teachers who lack understanding of learners with autism.

Based on our experiences from this project, we can suggest the development of a ‘scaffolding’ approach to learning, which encompasses an individualized educational programme for learners. This will allow teachers to be aware of the specific needs of every child in the classroom. The emphasis should be placed on the proper use of the individualized educational plan while maintaining concrete structures and routines. Teachers should also be encouraged to use a variety of instructional formats so that they can maintain the provision of an inclusive environment for every learner. Peer tutoring should also be encouraged among learners so that learners with ASD can receive some support from their peers.

Conclusion

Based on the study findings, we can conclude that teachers in mainstream classrooms use strategies such as pictography, fixation, routines, motivation, dedication and classroom sitting arrangements and that they are still not sufficiently equipped for the inclusion of learners with ASD. They need a great deal of support from parents, teaching assistants and the government. The lack of knowledge on how to implement inclusive strategies affects teachers’ effectiveness. One can conclude that the needs of learners with ASD in mainstream classrooms are not being fully met since the strategies employed are not effectively implemented.

Knowledge of the importance of teachers practising proper and differentiated strategies revealed the need for workshops that will bring all mainstream teachers together and equip them with more effective classroom strategies. These workshops can also give teachers an opportunity to share their experiences. There is also a need for all teacher training centres to include inclusive education in their curriculum so as to avoid having many mainstream educators who do not understand the concept. Perhaps policy assessment tools that are realistic to our society could yield

more positive results. Current tools are informed by practices from countries that are far ahead in terms of development and inclusive education and do not help our specific country situation.

We recommend the following topics for further investigation:

1. A project or topic on how other learners in the mainstream classroom can help include learners with ASD.
2. A topic on parental involvement in the inclusion of learners with ASD in the mainstream classroom.

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge various individuals for their efforts in helping to successfully complete this project: project managers and mentors who have assisted us throughout the project; action research project members whose underlying support and sympathetic mentoring made this task a success; our colleagues, the preschool teachers and occupational therapists whose underlying support and contributions made this task a success and our sponsors for their financial support.

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Chapter 4

Private Preschool Management Strategies to Enhance Inclusive Social Interaction among Squeezed Preschool Children

Graceana Luambano & Wakili Luwago

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Keywords: Inclusive education, social interaction, private preschools, preschool management

Introduction

This project focused on private preschool management strategies in enhancing inclusive social interaction among private preschool children who are restricted between home and private preschool settings. This was an important topic as it sensitized the stakeholders towards advocating and monitoring the enhancement of inclusive social interaction among preschool children as part of holistic child development. The topic was interesting due to the fact that it opened the minds of other researchers to work on preschool management in facilitating the inclusion of private preschool children and finding solutions for improvement.

The identification of this topic was based on experience gained from daily routine, including the exercise of working with the preschool children in their homes and preschools. The main case was that private preschool management in Tanzania engages in picking children up from their homes at 6:00 am and returning them at 12:00 noon with homework. This practice allowed the children time for social interaction through free play in their natural environment. It resulted into squeezing the children between home and private preschool and limiting their inclusiveness through social interaction within free play. Therefore, this research sought to examine how preschool management enhances the inclusive social interactions of these preschool children.

The project members were Graceana Luambano and Wakili Luwago, both of whom played a special role in its execution. At the beginning, we searched and discussed the project title and agreed to work on strategies of private preschool management in enhancing inclusive social interaction among private preschool children. The second task was an ethical consideration, and which we had to seek permission from the appropriate government authorities for the data collection. Graceana Luambano, as the project principal, wrote a letter of introduction to the government authorities for permission to carry out data collection in the sampled area. Wakili Luwago was tasked with following up on the government official so that the action researchers could be granted the necessary permission to collect the data from the sampled private preschools. The third task was the data analysis where we all worked on data presentations, generating the results, interpreting them and writing the project report.

The project

The project deployed social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which states that every function in the child's cultural development appears at the social and individual levels. This theory was supported by the theoretical framework of Topcin and Myftiu (2015), which explains that social interaction between people and individual children plays a fundamental role in developing the child's cognitive abilities. The theory asserts that the developmental process of human beings depends on social interaction, which leads to social learning and cognitive development. Social interaction, therefore, is central to learning.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's social development theory assumes that learning is a social process supported by parents, caregivers, peers and society. Social interaction among knowledgeable family members and the community is the primary means through which children acquire behaviour and cognitive capacities relevant to their society. Thus, it plays a fundamental role in children's cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The project partners, who were invited to participate in the project, were private preschool teachers and managers. Private preschool management in Tanzania practices the routine of picking children up from their homes at 6:00 am and returning them at 12:00 noon with a great deal of homework. This practice restricts squeezes children between the home and preschool and limits their inclusive social interaction during 'free time' and play, where they would acquire knowledge of social skills through discovery. This situational practice guided the project members towards

action research by visiting three private preschools to interview and observe as well as discuss with the preschool management and teachers in order to collect primary information about the situation. The three private preschools had similar challenges, for example, the preschool timetables and routines were congested, and the facilities did not allow inclusive social interaction among the preschool children.

Findings

After analysing the collected data from the interviews and observations, three themes emerged from the results. The first involved private preschool management strategies, where it was revealed that private preschools placed greater emphasis on classroom teaching in order to fulfil parental needs than extracurricular activities because they believed that children socialized in the homes and on school buses. This implies that private preschool management had no strategies for social interaction and instead had strategies for academic development in order to fulfil parental needs/desires.

The second theme concerned the time allowed for inclusive social interaction. It was revealed that private preschools used break time and a few hours on Fridays to socialize children through play on the playground or free play in preschool corridors. However, most of the time was spent in the classrooms. Furthermore, children requiring special care sometimes remained in the classroom for protection because of potential harm from upper classes as the preschools are in the same settings as the primary schools. This suggests that the private preschools did not have appropriate strategies for providing enough time for social interaction, considering that most of the time was spent focusing on academic performance.

The third theme dealt with ways of handling children with special needs in inclusive classrooms and enhancing their social interaction. The findings revealed a lack of strategies by preschool management for the proper handling of children with special needs, other than using practices such as putting them in front of the class while teaching. Furthermore, the private preschool teachers were not sufficiently skilled to handle children with special needs and the preschool environment lacked enough facilities for children with special needs. The timetable was congested in such a way that it did not allow enough time for the children to interact because it ran from 7:00 am to 15:20 pm.

The findings further revealed that there were no clear strategies for enhancing inclusive social interaction in private preschools as the timetable was congested from morning to afternoon. The learning environment and facilities did not consider children with special needs, and instead, further stigmatization could be observed in inclusive socialization. The teachers simply used the normal experience from primary education because there were no special programmes and facilities for children with special needs. In addition, children with special needs had little interaction, especially during playtime, because the layout of the private preschools did not consider children with disabilities. Some children were not included in the interactive activities because they had mental health disabilities. Following some discussion, the private managers agreed to modify their facilities to accommodate the idea of inclusion for children with special needs and allow them access to social interaction.

Interventions

The action researchers intervened in the situation by educating the preschool managers about the importance of social interaction as part of the holistic development of preschool children. The action researchers asked the private preschool managers to allow enough room for social interaction for the private preschool children because it was a vital part of their learning, growth and cognitive development. The action researchers learnt that the private preschools lacked skills on how to handle inclusive social interaction among preschool children because the concept of inclusive education was not clear to them. Furthermore, we observed that there was integration of children with special needs in classrooms despite the lack of strategies to allow them full participation in various activities as an indicator of inclusiveness. The visit was successful since the preschool management supported our suggestion to rearrange their timetable in order to give the preschool children opportunities for social interaction through games, play and sports. In addition, the action researchers learnt that the private preschool management focused more on enhancing academic performance and had few extracurricular activities such as local games and free play in natural areas.

Discussion

This project focused on private preschool management strategies in enhancing inclusive social interaction among the squeezed preschool children. Children were found to be restricted between their homes and preschool and lacked playtime and other social interaction. It is necessary to devise strategies for further social interaction among children during their daytime as it is important for their holistic development. It is also important to include children with special needs. The project was guided by Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, and the results revealed that there were no robust preschool management strategies aimed at enhancing inclusive social interaction. The researchers intervened by educating the preschool managers on the importance of social interaction among private preschool children and asked them to allow enough room for the children's social interaction. In addition, the action researchers imparted knowledge on how to handle inclusive social interaction among preschool children and emphasized the need to include parents to assist in their children's social interaction activities at home.

Conclusion and recommendations

Preparing strategies for social interaction in private preschools is very important for the holistic development of preschool children and the success of their future development. Therefore, it can be concluded that private preschools must prepare a clear strategy on enhancing inclusive social interaction. Children need enough time to explore by themselves outside of organized activity and practice simple discovery of materials within their learning environment.

The project results are very significant for policymakers, providing them with knowledge about private preschool management strategies aimed at enhancing inclusive social interaction among preschool children. The project is also of significance to private preschool management, preschool teachers and children because it sensitizes them towards implementing more precise arrangements for inclusive social interaction in daily routine operations. Teacher training colleges now emphasize knowledge about social interaction in teacher training as they expect teacher trainees to become preschool managers/leaders. In addition, the project contributed to knowledge for ECEC teacher training colleges by including the topic of action research in the course on research, measurement and evaluation.

Based on the project findings, the following recommendations were made by the action researchers. First, private preschools management has to prepare clear strategies aimed at enhancing social interaction among preschool children. Second, private preschool management should review their daily routine in order to allow time for preschool children to engage in social interaction. Third, private preschool management should deliver seminars on methods that can help preschool teachers manage children with special needs within the preschool setting.

Focusing on the project findings, we recommend that future studies focus on the following areas:

1. The influence of parental involvement in inclusive preschool routines for effective learning among preschool children.
2. Preschool teachers' perceptions of managing the inclusive preschool classroom.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank God for enabling us to reach the end of the project. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to the stakeholders who funded this project, QMCU who mentored us on action research methodology, the project members who provided inputs that modified this project and the management of the private preschools for enabling us to collect data on our topic.

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Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Development (ECD): Experiences of Caregivers Living in the Informal Settlements of the Khomas Region, Namibia

Aune Ondulami

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Keywords: Inclusive education, monitoring, disabled children, childhood development

Introduction

According to UNESCO (2013), inclusive education involves many changes and adaptations within the school community and in curricula, staffing, assessments, school premises (e.g. building) and even the school philosophy and ethos. Inclusion can be described as the process of taking action in order to address the wide diversity of needs among all children. Inclusivity is an ongoing process and can also be considered in terms of equity vs equality, where equality means giving the same resources to all students, while equity means giving each student the resources they need to learn and thrive (Waterford, 2022).

This project focused on inclusive education in early childhood development (ECD) centres in informal settlements in the Khomasdal Region. Underwood (2012) defined inclusive education as the education of children with disability alongside their non-disabled peers. This statement supports the researcher's understanding of inclusive education in this specific situation.

In recent years, the government of Namibia has increasingly focused on providing universal quality and inclusive early childhood development education (ECDE) to children. A national ECD policy was put in place in 2007, providing information on early childhood education and care (ECEC). This policy is under review as we write, but ECD centres across the country have been provided with guidelines by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPESW). Furthermore, ECD centres are mushrooming within informal settlements where ECD caregivers often have little or no formal knowledge or training in ECD, not to mention that inclusive ECD is practiced either improperly or not at all.

This project focuses on action research in inclusive ECD education and aspires to invoke curiosity to know, learn and share knowledge as we go along. Inclusive ECE became the main focus during the Competence Building Network (CBN) deliberations, where all project group members shared the same desire to learn, share and know more about action research on inclusive education in ECD. By engaging in this topic, we will be able to provide informed advice to caregivers and help them develop strategies on how to include and engage children with special needs or disabilities in their ECD centres.

The aim of the project is also to help caregivers understand and help children with disabilities. More specifically, the project aims to unveil the challenges that ECD caregivers face or may face in the context of inclusivity. These prerequisites need to be implemented to ensure that inclusive education becomes a reality.

Research questions

In our project, we decided on the following research questions to help us gather the information needed.

- 1. What does an ECD caregiver understand by the term 'inclusive education and care'?*
- 2. Is the caregiver adequately trained/prepared to apply 'inclusive education' in ECD institutions?*
- 3. Did the caregiver receive any kind of support/follow-up (e.g. through methodologies, monitoring, etc.) after the initial training?*

The project group consisted of Aune Odunlami, the main researcher and author of this report. She is an ECD caregiver trainer with the National Early Childhood Development Non-Governmental Organization (NECD-NGO Association). Her experience in ECD spans more than ten years, and she has been involved in the development of the ECD basic curriculum within the MGEPESW. She continues to participate in similar activities, and one of her roles as a caregiver trainer is to keep abreast with new developments within the ECD arena and pass on information about new developments where needed, either through training or sharing with communities.

Ms. Frieda Hamukonda had been participating as a part-time editor and typist until she found employment outside the Khomas Region. Ms Ramona Beukes was the administrative assistant in November 2019 during the CBN Group Workshop in Ganzi, Botswana, and her roles

included the further deliberation of action research and providing progress updates since the last action research conference held in Dar-es-Salaam in September 2019.

Project partner and initial meeting

Initially, three ECD kindergartens from various informal settlements were targeted and visited. However, due to financial and time constraints, only one of them was selected, which then consented to participating in the project. This kindergarten is located in an informal settlement on the outskirts of Windhoek and is run by one caregiver and her assistant, providing daily care to children in the area since 2016. The caregiver and owner of this kindergarten accepted the invitation to take part in the project.

The action research project was initiated by CBN for all CBN Africa partners to engage in a project about inclusive education in ECD institutions. For the researcher, it was a challenge due to lack of familiarity with action research. However, the researcher became more interested in learning by doing and embarked on learning through reading, enquiring and sharing. The researcher learned more during the three workshops she attended in the following countries: Mozambique, Eswatini, Tanzania, and Botswana under the supervision of our Norwegian team.

The researcher met the owner of the kindergarten in early 2018, who was renting a place for her activities. The kindergarten owner later moved the kindergarten into a portion of her house because she could no longer afford to pay rent. During our initial visit, we met a bedridden disabled child who was not receiving any attention apart from being in a safe place. We chose this kindergarten because after explaining our mission to the caregiver, she was open to working with us. The kindergarten needed more teaching as well as other relevant skills compared to the other kindergartens visited. Although she attended many workshops on ECD, she hardly practiced what she was taught. We realized that she did not understand the materials written in English but had at least been keeping the children in a safe place while the parents worked. However, only minimal learning was taking place.

The situation prior to the interventions

Following the project orientation and planning phase, we chose a mixed-method approach which involved observing and interviewing the caregivers in order to provide us with in-depth insight into the situation regarding the kindergarten. Initially, the research team (myself and Ms Frieda Hamukonda) paid several visits to the kindergarten in order to familiarize ourselves with it and get to know the caregiver better, focusing on questions such as what the ECD caregiver understood by the term ‘inclusive’ education and care, in addition to how prepared and equipped she was in applying inclusive education.

During the visits to the centre, we came to realize that the caregiver’s main aim of opening her kindergarten was to generate income. The setup and provision of ECD activities was motivated by the economic opportunity to sustain a livelihood for the caregiver. For example, among the children, there was one child with multiple complex disabilities, unable to move his body by himself and, therefore, was bedridden. Every day, his mother would carry him to the kindergarten, as she needed someone to look after him while she worked. However, the skills delivery and setup were disorganized, and the child was mostly left to himself and not cared for. The rest of the children were taught according to the caregiver’s own understanding of ECD, using whatever skills and abilities she had available to teach. The caregiver was unfamiliar with the concept of inclusive education, and the kindergarten was run despite this knowledge gap and without any clear aims and objectives, let alone having someone there to monitor or mentor her.

The facilities at the centre were poor. Some materials were available, such as a box of basic information about ECD. However, the caregiver told us that she did not know how to use the information box because she did not understand how and where to start. The parents of the disabled child seemed to have been ‘in denial’ about the child’s disability, which is a common response of some parents when it comes to their children’s special needs situation. When someone is in denial, they will often not acknowledge the need to open up about their child with special needs in order to get the relevant help.

From the initial visit to the centre in 2018, we concluded that some activities were taking place; however, drastic improvement was needed in order to create any significant impact. Clearly, there was a need for adequate training focusing on the concept of inclusive education and the practical implementation of inclusive education in the classroom. This included support and training in classroom management, lesson planning, the use of available classroom facilities and

teaching materials as well as advocacy to promote the involvement of all parents in their children's learning, especially those whose children have special needs.

The interventions

The information from the first visits were presented and discussed with our fellow action research colleagues at various workshops held in Tanzania and Botswana in 2019. The data were analysed using a thematic approach, and issues were highlighted and discussed. During the workshop, we decided to prioritize a combination of actions:

1. Pay another visit to the respective kindergarten to discuss the situation and validate the findings.
2. Invite the kindergarten caregiver and her assistant for a refresher course. (Only the caregiver had attended the course.) The course contained theoretical aspects and some roleplay concerning inclusive education and developing materials focusing on the creative use of available (waste) materials, etc.

Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and the implementation of some of the planned activities was prevented due to the lockdown and closure of the ECD centres for almost three years. Nevertheless, we managed to schedule several visits to the centre, particularly this year, in order to continue building relationships and mapping needs based on urgency and priority. Together with the caregiver, we took actions based on various needs, as outlined below:

1. This year, during our visit, we discovered that there was no fencing around the centre, which is very close to the road. To form a boundary, we decided to plant some hedges which are resistant to hot conditions and therefore do not need a lot of water. We also decided to seal the leaking corrugated iron roof of the house.
2. We provided basic training in teaching methodologies and lesson planning, applying 'My Family' as a theme and using dolls to illustrate relationships (e.g. father, mother, brothers and sisters) and for language development (e.g. parts of the body). This was for the 4–5-year age group.

3. We provided some teaching materials made from local resources to make them easy and less costly and time consuming. For the dolls, we used old clothes, buttons, artificial hair and plastic bags.
4. We provided necessary information about where to go or how to refer parents who need help if they have children with special needs. We collected contact numbers and street addresses for the parents.
5. We negotiated with the Mukhulu Child Development Trust's representative from South Africa to add our kindergartens from the informal settlements to join other 'formal' kindergartens in their two-week training skills course on language and social development using a 'wordless book' as a tool for language development for children. The researcher attended the first week in order to monitor the training and how the caregivers applied what they had learned with the children in the kindergarten.

All the above activities came about when we discovered first-hand how caregivers dealt with the children in their kindergartens in the informal settlements, especially children with disabilities. Since action research is carried out with the aim of bringing changes (McNiff, 2013), we were able to bring about some changes through the activities illustrated above.

The results and significance of the project

On one of the last visits to the centre, the kindergarten caregiver told us that she had really improved her outlook on ECD caregiving, especially looking back at 2018 when she had no knowledge of how to include a disabled child because she did not know how to engage them. The centre's intake this year has increased from 6 to 16 children, including another child with a disability. The caregiver also told me that she has made improvements regarding hygiene, maintenance and classroom management. Although I noticed that there was still room for improvement, she is now more equipped in classroom management, administration and lesson planning. She now has the confidence to register her kindergarten with the MGEPEWS as per its standards indicated in its guidelines of 2012.

As an ECD caregiver trainer, the project researcher now feels that she can confidently approach the Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare to suggest addressing the gap in the ECD basic curriculum and place emphasis on inclusive education. Additionally, mandating ECD caregivers

to attend practical training in government institutions that cover inclusive education should be taken into serious consideration. The project is also eye-opening to the complexities of ‘inclusiveness’ in ECD. Inclusive education is a multidimensional concept that embraces a wide range of aspects, from inclusive physical standards and availability of ECDE offers to children with disabilities to organizing and structuring offers and everyday inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, from the project, we learnt that in order to achieve inclusive education, fundamental ECDE structures need to be in place, including the understanding and dissemination of knowledge among caregivers themselves.

Additionally, the project was able to create an opportunity to reflect on the fact that one may consider education as a right, although others undergoing unfavourable circumstances may consider it a privilege. Knowledge sharing is a blessing, and nothing should be taken for granted. For example, showing those who cannot afford to buy adequate materials how to use recycled or reused materials as teaching materials is very important. Future plans for the project include reinforcing the skills that make an impact, raising funds to add a classroom and furniture at the kindergarten in order to accommodate different age groups (as there is currently one mixed classroom) and perform regular monitoring and evaluation for further skills enhancement.

Overall, the action research has broadened the researcher’s knowledge about the implementation of inclusive education in our centres. Inclusive education intake differs from area to area or centre to centre and is based on the availability of the right facilities and training of caregivers. We hope to share the knowledge we gained through this project with others for the betterment of our ECD centres, particularly how to care for our children in an inclusive manner.

Suggestions and recommendations

We have several suggestions for measures and actions to develop practices and structures for a more inclusive ECE: Since many caregivers in Namibia, particularly in the informal settlements, do not yet understand the concept of inclusive education in ECD, it is very important that we also look at issues, such as infrastructure, that need to be in place because of their potential to positively or negatively impact ECD, especially for children with disabilities. Additionally, there should be practical training for many ECD caregivers so that they can know what to do when they have children with disabilities in their care.

Another proposition would be to place a suggestion box within kindergartens so that parents or visitors can make suggestions, which could serve as an activity evaluation/monitoring mechanism, and ask questions when necessary. More hands must be brought on board in order to assist and improve the current situation, especially teaching materials and methodologies in inclusive education and care. This should apply to all training institutions in the ECD space. National organizations dealing exclusively with children living with disabilities should be encouraged to open their doors to ECD trainees so that they can pursue practical attachments and gain practical knowledge/experience with these children.

Workshops on how to make basic teaching materials, including how to use these materials in the classroom, should be organized and offered to all ECD caregivers and parents. Additionally, it would be useful to publish information pamphlets for parents about inclusive education. This could be used to encourage parental involvement and socialization for the purpose of sharing. It would encourage parents to take the lead in their children's education by educating themselves on the importance of ECD, in particular, inclusive education. Below are some suggestions for topics that could be studied in the area of comprehensive ECE.

1. Parental education in inclusive ECD education
2. Structure and its impact on quality ECDC
3. The importance of action research in improving knowledge on inclusive education in Namibia
4. Stigmatization of children with special needs: A cause for concern

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Chapter 6

Strategies Used by Teachers in Inclusive Primary Schools in Tanzania to Meet the Diverse Needs of Learners

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Keywords: Inclusion, diverse needs, equitable, access, quality education

Introduction

The school selected for this action research was a public school established by the colonial government as a boys' middle school. It is located in one of the districts of Tanga Region in Tanzania. In the 1960s, it began admitting learners with visual impairments and blindness, albeit only boys. In the 1990s, it began admitting girls, and in the 2000s, it opened its doors to both boys and girls with albinism.

According to the Tanzania National Strategy for Inclusive Education (2009), inclusive education is a system of education in which all children, youths and adults are enrolled, actively participate and achieve in regular schools and other educational programmes regardless of their diverse backgrounds and abilities, without discrimination, through the minimisation of barriers and the maximisation of resources.

In this case, inclusive education is when all students, regardless of challenges, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes in their own neighbourhood schools to receive high-quality instruction, interventions and support that enable them to achieve success in the core curriculum (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Bui et al., 2010). The school and classroom operate on the premise that students with disabilities are as fundamentally competent as students without disabilities. Therefore, all students can be full participants in their classrooms and in the local school community.

This means that students with disabilities are with their peers without disabilities to the maximum degree possible, with general education being the placement of first choice for all students (Alquraini & Gut, 2012). Therefore, all students can be full participants in their

classrooms and the local school community. Therefore, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept; it is about schools changing to improve the educational system for all students.

Teaching for diversity refers to acknowledging the range of differences in the classroom. Teaching for inclusion signifies embracing difference. Teaching for equity allows differences to transform the way we think, teach, learn and act such that all experiences and ways of being are handled with fairness and justice. Inclusive teaching strategies are intended to ensure that all students feel supported such that they can learn freely and explore new ideas, feel safe to express their views in a civil manner and feel respected as individuals and members of groups. Intentionally incorporating inclusive teaching strategies helps students view themselves as people who belong to the community of learners in a classroom and university (Diversity and Inclusive Teaching, 2022).

Diversity refers to the range of identities that exist in a group of people. Common identity categories referenced when discussing diversity include race, class, gender, religion and sexual orientation. Diversity in education represents a broad range of ideas and initiatives to create learning environments that are safe, inclusive and equitable for as many identities as possible. Recognizing, fostering and developing sensitivity to the needs of people in various identity categories are the primary aims of educational diversity.

The Study

This study focuses on the strategies used by teachers in inclusive pre-and primary schools in Tanzania to meet the needs of diverse learners almost ten years after the first National Strategy for Inclusive Education was implemented by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania in 2009. Tanzania implemented the National Strategy on Inclusive Education in 2009 in order to meet the international goals of education for all and universal primary education, as expressed in the Millennium Development Goals. The main objective of the National Strategy on Inclusive Education was to ensure that all children, youth and adults in Tanzania had 'equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings' by the year 2017.

This compelled me to undertake this study in order to assess what has been achieved thus far in the ten-year period since the implementation of the policy. The main study question is as

follows: Which strategies were used by teachers to meet the diverse needs of their learners? The following sub-questions guided me towards the data collection:

- 1. What is the relevance of the teaching and learning materials used to meet the diverse needs of learners?*
- 2. How appropriate are the teaching and learning methods employed by teachers in relation to the diverse learning needs of learners?*
- 3. Is the learning environment sufficiently conducive to meeting the diverse needs of learners?*

The study was guided by Brunner's (1974) theory of social constructivism. Accordingly, a teacher functions as a facilitator rather than an instructor, and their role is to aid the student in reaching their own understanding. Furthermore, individuals are expected to construct new ideas or concepts based on prior knowledge or experience. The task of the instructor is to translate information to be learned into an appropriate format for the learner's current state of understanding.

Social constructivism is a sociological theory of knowledge according to which human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. The theory states that people work together to construct artefacts. The social constructivist sees education as a civil human right for all students, including those with disabilities. Children with disabilities have the right to be educated in the same settings as their same-age peers. The social constructivist also believes that all children, regardless of their differences, are smart, competent learners. This leads to varying approaches to inclusion for students with disabilities (Dudley Marling & Burns, 2010). Furthermore, curricula should also be organized in a spiral manner so that students continually build on what they have already learned.

The visits

The inclusive pre- and primary school visited for this study was a public school established by the colonial government as a boys' middle school. It is located in one of the districts of Tanga Region. Later, it began admitting learners with visual impairment and blindness, although only boys, and by the millennium, it opened its doors to girls and then both boys and girls with albinism. Being a public school in the city of Tanga catering to children with low vision and blindness, I

expected the school to be a role model in inclusion. This came to my mind because the government of Tanzania implemented the National Strategy on Inclusive Education in 2009 in order to meet the international goals of education for all and universal primary education, as expressed in Millennium Development Goals, as well as ensure that all learners have equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings.

My visit to the school uncovered that from pre-school to primary level two, children with low vision and blindness study in their own classrooms. They are only taught by special education teachers in order to be equipped with different skills such as Braille alphabet, how to use Perkin machines, how to read large print for those with low vision, how to use magnifiers and CCTV machines, how to use a stylus as well as reading, writing, counting and other skills. They join inclusive classes when they reach primary level three.

Moreover, the sitting plan in the classrooms was such that learners with low vision sat up front, and the distance from the writing board was between three and four meters, depending on the visual acuity. However, light from the windows in some classrooms was too bright for children with low vision to see what was written on the blackboard, and 'blackboards' were no longer black but whitish.

Accessibility to every room was a challenge, especially to classrooms built during the colonial era, because they had steep staircases with no ramps, something which jeopardizes the mobility of the blind and those with low vision. Furthermore, some classrooms were overcrowded, making it difficult to move easily inside the classroom.

There was a shortage of teaching and learning materials, especially books, because of frequent curriculum changes, which did not consider the printing of Braille books. Furthermore, large-print books did not arrive on time. For example, only books for class six were received by the school from the government. CCTV was available and could have helped learners with visual impairment but they could not be placed in the classrooms because of overcrowding. Another obstacle was the security of the classrooms. The rooms were not sufficiently secure to keep such valuable machines. Thus, learners were using glass magnifiers and hand lenses. Other learners and school inspectors complained that the Perkin machines were noisy while the blind students wrote their notes, which can lead to the stigmatization of such children.

Results

For the data collection, I conducted individual interviews with teachers and learners as well as some class observations to ascertain the methods used by teachers in meeting the diverse needs of their learners and how learners interact in their classrooms. Moreover, I held a focus group discussion with both teachers and learners in order to get their opinions on how to improve the situation.

The findings revealed that non-special education teachers needed to be assisted by their special education colleagues on how to teach in inclusive classes. Together with special education teachers, we advised the learners without disabilities and non-special education teachers that, for the time being, when there were no recorders, learners with low vision and blindness be allowed to use Perkin machines to write their notes rather than seeing the machines as a nuisance.

Another area of concern was shortage of teaching and learning materials, whereby teachers decided to make their own teaching and learning materials from locally available materials such as maps, materials for teaching science, geography and history, drawings and other tactile and auditory materials. On top of this, government officials from the Tanga City Council were tasked with buying recorders so that learners with visual impairments would be able to record what was being taught in class and write notes later on.

Summary

This project has practical significance not only for teachers but also for government officials and other stakeholders because it represents a kind of evaluative project after ten years of the implementation of the National Strategy on Inclusive Education. The project will help teachers understand the importance of team teaching between special education teachers and non-specialist teachers; special education teachers can educate other stakeholders, for example, school inspectors on the importance of Perkin machines and recorders. Teachers will be more creative in preparing teaching and learning materials from locally available materials. This project will also make pre- and primary school teacher education curriculum developers more aware of the importance of including the topic of inclusive education and/or special education in their programmes in order to equip all teacher trainees to meet the needs of all learners.

Based on my experiences from this project, I suggest that the school inspectorate authorities employ school inspectors who are conversant with the needs of diverse learners rather than raising challenges relating to equipment, such as Perkin machines, something which can be translated into stigmatization.

Like any classroom, the learning environment for the visually impaired should not have distracting light, and the blackboard should be black enough to enable those with low vision to read what is written. The government should ensure that changes in the curriculum coincide with the timely preparation and supply of texts books for learners with visual impairments so as to depart from the current practice where it may take up to five years for materials to reach the target group. Moreover, all buildings should be accessible to all learners, and classroom congestion should be checked in order to allow ease of mobility.

Related to my project, I see the following topics as important for future investigations and action research projects:

1. Attitudes of parents of children without disabilities on inclusive education
2. Is inclusive education a practical agenda or political?

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The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on ECDE in Southern and Eastern Africa

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Keywords: COVID-19, social distance, vulnerable children, lack of equipment

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the treaty that brings together the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of children and specifies that all children should be given the opportunity to fulfil their potential. These rights apply to all children under the age of 18 and are particularly important for early childhood education (ECE) as governments around the world are moving to compulsory pre-school and early education. As specified in the Sustainable Development Goals, Target 4.2, governments need to prioritize access to quality early childhood development (ECD), care and pre-primary education for all children by 2030 (United Nations, 2005). With this international agenda, developing ECE in light of children's human rights has become a necessary yet challenging consideration – a challenge increased with the COVID-19 global health pandemic (McNair et al., 2021).

The effects of COVID-19 on the inclusion of children in Southern and Eastern Africa

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced millions of children to stay at home, with 46% of the world's learners being impacted by school closures. Poverty is a critical dimension which further exacerbated exclusion from education, health and social inclusion during the pandemic. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 to everyday life meant that as many as 40 million children worldwide missed out on ECE in their critical pre-school year. In particular, in developing countries, 1.8 billion children live in the 104 countries where violence prevention and response services were disrupted due to COVID-19. As noted by Motsa (2021), COVID-19 increased the presence of diverse minority groups in schools and brought to light a number of advocacy issues

in need of addressing. Benach (2021) concurred, stating that COVID-19 has come with a potential pandemic of educational inequality, again inclined towards the poor and vulnerable in our communities. Children's rights experts have been considerably concerned that various lockdown measures developed as emergency responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative impacts on children: While the restrictions sought to protect rights to health, survival and development, other rights were too often and easily sidelined, leading to profound short and long-term repercussions (Lundy et al., 2021; Peleg et al., 2021).

It is indeed true that the educational effects of COVID-19 on the world's poor and socially vulnerable have been devastating (Gaynor & Wilson, 2020), and Southern and Eastern Africa are no exception. According to Motsa (2021), COVID-19, coupled with Eswatini's school restrictions, has revealed further structural and compromising contexts for the educational performance and success of vulnerable children. The COVID-19 pandemic has come as a further threat to the already compromised social and educational life of the poor while at the same time further compromising and constraining their equitable participation and success (Motsa & Morojele, 2019). Social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 meant that children were deprived of their freedom and right to play. With social distancing, children were not permitted to play in close proximity to each other, despite play being the language that children know. Play is the way of their communication and way of life. The indefinite closure of all learning institutions, including ECEC centres, meant that children were deprived of access to school friends, teachers, social workers and the safe space and services that schools provide.

Furthermore, it is imperative to note that in the African context, some ECEC and schools are not only centres for teaching and learning; they also provide feeding schemes for learners. With the closure of schools, many children who depend on school feeding for their daily meals were immediately exposed to hunger, worsening an already volatile situation among families who were finding it difficult to provide for their children. In Eswatini, for instance, the government provided some relief in the form of food packages and emergency relief funds, but these initiatives were poorly planned and coordinated and, as a result, did not reach most of their intended recipients. The relief was also one-off and, thus, not of much help for families who continue to experience food insecurity. This shows how the government's response to COVID-19 has negatively impacted the assurance of the child's rights to education, food and shelter. It appears that ECEC was not prioritized in the government's response. Tomlinson et al. (2021) concurred, stating that the

COVID-19 crisis increased the numbers of children not attending ECCE programmes and disrupted the early learning and nutrition support provided through these programmes. Consequently, many children's risk exposure has been exacerbated by the escalated poverty, violence and food insecurity levels, compromising caregivers' physical and mental health and their capacity to provide responsive care for their young children.

With mounting unemployment rates, nationwide school closures and stay-at-home orders, the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly upheaved the daily lives of young children and families across the globe. In particular, the disruption and stress caused by the pandemic presented significant risk of increased family violence, including child abuse. The resulting parental job loss also presented significant risk of child abuse and child maltreatment. There were multiple reports of spikes in domestic, family and sexual violence following home isolation from the closure of schools and work facilities as measures of COVID-19 containment. Kenya, for instance, reported a 34% rise in domestic violence, while in South Africa, there was a 37% spike in gender-based violence complaints in the first week of total lockdown. In Eswatini, there were 9,399 cases of gender-based violence from January to September. Children are often victims of and/or witnesses to domestic/family violence, which has a harmful impact on their physical health and mental development and well-being (Howes et al., 2020).

From an equity perspective, there was growing concern regarding the potential exclusion of the most marginalized groups, in particular, children with disabilities. Research indicates that children with disabilities and their families are more vulnerable as they are more likely to be poor and less likely to have access to vital information.

Education as a human right was affected by the use of technology, which was introduced in education systems around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to engage in a kind of transformation. The government of Eswatini, for instance, through the Ministry of Education and Training, put structures in place as a means to ensure that learners would not be delayed by an entire year. This was done by conducting lessons through the national radio, daily newspapers and national television stations. However, rather than being practicable, such aspirations further exposed the most vulnerable children in the country as they were not inclusive and neglected children deemed vulnerable in the education system. Only those with resources were catered for, while it was never considered that vulnerable children were not in a position to access such platforms (UN, 2020). A majority of learners, particularly from public schools, poor

backgrounds and rural settings, were unable to access learning through these modes due to not having access to a television, radio, newspaper or equipment for online teaching and learning, thereby exacerbating the unequal access to information (Pitikoe et al, 2020).

According to Hart (2019), the designed educational processes and procedures were far from being inclusive; rather, they were oppressive as they were discriminatory and placed vulnerable children at a further disadvantage in terms of educational access and success. Access to education was affected by the digital transformation of everyday life. Today's children are not equally equipped for their technology-rich futures: various kinds of digital divides still prevail in the society and affect the young generation and their digital futures (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). It is without a doubt that COVID-19 has increased the presence of diverse minority groups in the preschool and schools and brought to light a number of advocacy issues in need of addressing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, children's rights appear to have been ignored during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown measures. It is clear that the right to education as a human right and the right to social inclusion were compromised. Any approach to listening to children and respecting their views, allowing them to share in decisions that affect them, keeping them safe and protected and in education seems to have had little impact on the various government responses to COVID-19 around the world. Teachers, civil society organizations, health personnel, researchers and other relevant stakeholders need to collectively ensure the safety and protection of children, especially during pandemic times. Changes should focus not only on what can or should be done but also how to do things differently for a sustainable impact under such rapidly changing circumstances.

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Chapter 8

Music in Inclusive Education in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Institutions

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Keywords: Music pedagogy, inclusive education, musical prerequisites, music therapist

Introduction

This chapter discusses inclusive music education in the context of early childhood education (ECE). This chapter is the result of previous research and a theoretical reflection on the definition of how we should understand the concept of inclusion. Working for an inclusive community was the subject of chapter 3 on the purpose and content of early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions in the Norwegian framework plan for ECEC institutions (Ministry of Education, 2017, pp. 16–19). Here, my special interest in this topic is based on my own experience as a music teacher and special educator in both primary school and community art school. In Norwegian ECEC institutions, music constitutes part of the interdisciplinary subject area of art, culture and creativity (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Children with special needs, in the same way as all other children, need to both experience and be able to express themselves musically. In Norwegian settings, music in special education is very often associated with music therapy (Evang, 2009; Skogdal, 2015). It is also common for children and students to be referred to music therapy, which might result in them being excluded from cultural offers. In fact, some are excluded from cultural participation where everyone is entitled. This article answers the following research question: *How can music activities assist in the realization of an inclusive community in ECE institutions?*

Research and methodology

In 2014, I conducted an action research study in an ECEC centre alongside a music therapist who was employed there. In addition, together with this music therapist, I participated in the action research project about music with children with special needs, the purpose of which was

to promote inclusion (Sæther, 2014). This project was a while back, so I was curious about music practice in the special education field today (2021). I interviewed another music therapist working in an ECEC centre to investigate factors in music pedagogy that promote the inclusion of children with special needs. Thus, this article is a retrospective reflection of my previous research (Sæther, 2014) as well as reflection from rather new qualitative research that includes a research interview with a music therapist.

This interview is based on certain criteria to ensure quality. I chose to conduct an interview with an individual with long and broad experience both as an ECEC teacher and a music therapist. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the quality of research interviews is about fulfilling some specific criteria, with the three most important being a) that interpretation of the interview largely takes place while it is ongoing, b) that during the interview, the interviewer tries to verify their interpretations with the interviewee and c) that the interview represents a narrative that does not require additional explanation (p. 175).

Anchoring theoretical perspectives

This will be important in clarifying the concept of music education in the context of music pedagogy when teaching music to children with special needs. Importantly, it is not about music therapy. The concept of music therapy or music pedagogy is related to the goals of teaching; it is not about the children's capacity. The music therapist Trondalen (2006) stated that music therapy means doing music to promote good health. There is no need to create a sharp distinction between the concept of music pedagogy and music therapy.

According to Lubet (2009), there are few research contributions about music as a tool to promote inclusion. He saw music as a vital human capacity and, therefore, a human right, including for people with special needs.

An inclusive music pedagogy and communicative musicality are key topics that the music therapist focused on in the interview. These topics embody my own understanding and experience from my action research in ECEC institutions in Norway.

The concept inclusion

The term inclusion is often used in public debate. In this context, the concept is linked to education in general and ECEC institutions in particular. What are the requirements for the realization of an inclusive pedagogical practice today?

Inclusion was placed on the international agenda through the Salamanca Declaration at the World Conference on Special Education in Spain 1994. The declaration contains principles, policies and practices for special education in general. Characteristic of these documents is the use of the term inclusion and the recognition of the need to create educational opportunities for everyone. Ninety-two countries participated in the conference, which has had tremendous international significance for the development of special education in schools and later on in ECEC institutions. The main message of the declaration is that all children must have the right to education and that the education system must be designed so that it takes into account individual characteristics and needs. What is particularly interesting and clear in this declaration is that all children (pupils) must have access to regular schools that will meet their needs through the application of a pedagogy centred around the individual child (Salamanca, 1994).

Inclusive music pedagogy

An inclusive music pedagogy is about providing opportunities to create a musical community where every participant can feel accepted and can experience a real contribution to the music activities. In this setting, it means customizing activities for children with special needs so that they can have opportunities through music activities to experience themselves as actors in musical expressions alongside other children. There will be various challenges related to children's focus and concentration when, for example, they are learning new songs, rhythm parts and melodies. Therefore, music activities in smaller groups can contribute to better concentration and an overview of what is happening musically. The particular relevance is the psychological dimension of inclusion when it comes to an inclusive pedagogy (Qvortrup, 2012).

Experience of inclusion

Inclusion, according to Solli (2010), is a continuous, dynamic process that should never be taken for granted. It means a process with opportunities for learning, identity development, experience of mastering and a feeling of being a contributor in a community. The music teacher

can set up conditions for incorporating children's own musical ideas. Their ideas might fit very well into the musical part or a song being practiced. In such a context, for example, a child with special needs can achieve acceptance by other children and adults participating in the interaction.

How the teacher understands the concept of musicality is important in this context so that children with special needs can experience inclusion, what Qvortrup (2012) defined as *psychological* inclusion. A musical aesthetic community experience can provide a 'real' experience of being included.

Small (1987), who was inspired of Balinese music and culture, became interested in how the Balinese people expressed music as a form of togetherness. Small then introduced the concept of *musicking* to describe how the phenomenon of music can be understood. According to him, 'Music is not primarily a thing or a collection of things, but an activity in which we engage. One might say that it is not properly a noun at all; but a verb' (p. 50). Small emphasizes here that the importance of music is the activity itself: 'The main point being that musicking through the social construction of meanings becomes a ritual where all participants explore and celebrate relationships that constitute their social identity' (p. 36). Small's concept of musicking is about a process where people tell stories about relationships between people and ourselves. All art is, therefore, about human relations (Varkøy, 2009).

Inclusion is also about the development of social relationships between children and between children and adults (teachers). Musical and social interaction have many similarities. Characteristic features of good social interaction include being able to listen, take initiative, wait one's turn, show agreement and reciprocity (Løkken, 2004).

Children's musicality

The phenomenon of musicality belongs to the field of music pedagogy, although music teachers and researchers have had different understandings of the phenomenon. A great deal of research in the field of human musicality has dealt with measuring people's musical abilities and skills (Hallam, 2006) and whether they can read music, play a musical instrument and be a good singer. Musicality has also been seen as hereditary (Seashore, 1938).

Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) proposed differing opinions about the phenomenon of musicality. They saw it as communicative, which means that musicality is found in all people. At the very beginning of life, human beings use basic musical elements when they communicate. This

is an example of a relativistic understanding of the concept, a broad understanding that includes everyone. It also means that musicality is part of children's holistic development (Brändström, 2006). A music therapist or music teacher will understand communicative music elements as basic competences for communicative development.

To make music with children who have not developed their spoken language, musical expression can be an opportunity for communication through musical participation. The musical and dynamic nature of the communication tells a lot about the meaning of what is expressed without words. How the adult talks to the child becomes more important to the child than what is said (Hannås & Hanssen, 2014; Jederlund, 2011). Basic musical elements such as timbre, pitch, dynamics, tempo and rhythm can be emphasized when singing and reading stories to children. Playing with these elements with children creates possibilities for an inclusive practice.

Research interview with a music therapist

I chose an individual interview with a music therapist with extensive experience with kindergartens. She also has competence attending to children with special needs and children in hospital. The interview was well prepared, and the informant received the questions in the interview. I chose an open interview guide with quite a few questions, which could help the informant to elaborate on specific themes. This is an intersubjective situation as the reflections represent the person's daily life and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Tjora, 2012). The interview was not concerned about children with special diagnoses but, rather, a general thinking of how music could be a tool for inclusive music pedagogy.

The whole manuscript was read by the informant prior to publication. She had the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the references, also described as member-check, thereby rendering greater transparency to the text and results (Postholm, 2018; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Analysis and results

During the analysis process, I identified several themes that the music therapist was most focused on. The process was inspired of the qualitative researchers Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 203) and a six-step model constructed for analysis and interpretation (Tjora, 2012). Tjora explained this process as a step-by-step inductive and deductive approach, which means that while the

analysis process is based on the data materials, the researcher's experience, knowledge, earlier research and theoretical studies are important for interpreting the data material.

The main focus of the interview was how to create an inclusive music pedagogy for children with special needs so that they can feel and experience being included. The following themes emerged from my analysis: 1) *building prerequisites for inclusion*, 2) *playing music as an individual and in groups* and 3) *creating music and musical improvisation*. These themes are discussed below.

Building prerequisites for inclusion

The music therapist emphasized the importance of a team of professionals around the individual child and what they can contribute to the child. It is important that the special educator is part of the regular staff in ECEC institutions so that the child becomes a natural member of the children's group. The music therapist also emphasized the importance of strengthening child-related prerequisites in order to succeed with inclusion in music activities. In this case, it is especially necessary to facilitate musical provision for children with special needs. The therapist maintained that 'it is important to see the child as healthy, regardless of whether the child is in hospital or has special needs'. Musical expression can be a recourse for the child during practice with varied music activities. Musical activities can help strengthen important aspects of the child's development, for example, language development. This approach is supported by research showing clear connections between musical and communicative development (Bråten, 2004; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). Jederlund (2011), for example, highlighted prosodic development, what can be described as 'the melody in talking language', which is important in order to be able to listen, understand and further produce coherent speech. Songs, rhymes and poems can help stimulate the basic prerequisites for, among other things, the development of spoken language.

According to the music therapist, when the musical aspect is emphasized in interaction among children and among children and adults, the opportunities for mastery in children with special needs can increase. The path to verbal communication can therefore start from the prosodic aspects of language in addition to gaze, body language, movement and rhythm. Dissanayake (2012) showed that children's first narrative is of a musical nature. Narratives are expressed through the musical aspects of language. Therefore, strengthening children's prerequisites for musical inclusion is about seeing the possibilities for the child through versatile aural expression

– that the music educator or music therapist has a relativistic view of musicality, which means a relational and communicative view of musicality (Brändström, 1997, 2006; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009). The development of musical and communicative skills can be the key to inclusion. Skills are about developing familiarity with basic musical elements such as timbre, dynamics, pulse, rhythm, tempo and structure (Sæther, 2019).

Individual or group music activities?

According to the music therapist, when it comes to the actual organization of music activities, variation is important. She pointed out that varying between individual follow-up and participation in both small and large groups is precisely what can give children with special needs the opportunity to cope, which is important for the experience of inclusion.

As described in the introduction, the music therapist has made inclusion an overall goal. She believes that children in ECEC institutions who need special arrangements can feel excluded, even if they are constantly with others and contribute to the activity. She maintained that it is primarily about experiencing mastery and that the child experiences themselves as important in the community.

Individual follow-up, which means practicing to develop musical skills, becomes essential. This means, for example, that pulse and different rhythm patterns are practiced on a drum. The premise, according to the music therapist, is that ‘special training’ should be able to contribute to the children in question having more opportunities to acquire musical skills. The musical skills that the child develops can become a resource for participation in musical interaction in a larger group of children. The music therapist was of the view that some inclusion measures can occasionally incorporate some level of segregation. According to her, ‘We look for situations where the child is in the flow zone, feels mastery and is motivated to learn more’. In interaction situations in the children’s group, it is necessary to facilitate situations where the child with special needs is an expert so that they can show their resources and gain recognition from other children.

The terms ‘feeling’ and ‘experience’ were also clearly expressed during the conversation with the music therapist when she elaborated on what she perceived as inclusion. It is particularly important that the child experiences being listened to, experiences being able to contribute to musical dialogues. This becomes central for the child to experience both participation and mastery.

Music and improvisation

The content of the music activity itself can be decisive in creating good interactive situations with children. For example, what should the children's group play or sing? In music education contexts, it is common for the teacher, or the therapist, to prepare interaction by arranging music or songs for those who will participate. It may be that the music teacher or music therapist composes or arranges music themselves so that the activity is as much as possible in accordance with the requirements for the child or children's group. This can apply to adaptations with regard to both social and musical skills. The music event itself then becomes an important tool for achieving an inclusive music pedagogy. In the interview, the music therapist pointed out in particular that 'music is very adaptable because it is easy to facilitate children's mastery, regardless of the conditions'.

Music practice in ECEC institutions is about children singing and playing music. Music can consist of a multitude of rhythms, voices and musical instruments where different demands can be made and where it is not fundamental that everyone who participates in the musical interaction must be at the same level of musical skill. Also, in professional music orchestras, the level of challenge can be differ, and this is where the music teacher or music a therapist can adapt musical challenges to the child's level and still create something that sounds good. All contributions are important to the piece of music. This contribution can give the individual child participant the experience of being seen and heard as a real contributor.

The music is created and communicated in a here-and-now situation together with the child. This is also in line with Small's understanding of music, that is, where music becomes real when it is made and shared in a community. This understanding of music also includes improvisation. A good improviser is essentially a deep listener (Baily, 1991; Sæther, 2017). The music therapist held the view that improvisation is a tool that can contribute to the experience of being included in the musical community.

Summary

The results from the interview with the music therapist are linked to the factors that she believes are of great importance to the fact that participation in music activities can contribute to children with special needs experiencing inclusion. This is about music pedagogy, whose aim is to strengthen the child's musical skills. Music can be perceived in many ways but consists of the

basic elements of sound and silence. Music can be experienced as ‘interesting’ sound integrated into a form. Sounds thus become the essential material for creating music.

The music therapist noted that the starting point is the individual child’s functional ability and musical skills. It is about choosing music activities so that all ‘voices’ have a real meaning in the musical expression. I see this as a significant contribution to understanding what can form the very basis for an inclusive music pedagogy.

According to the music therapist, in music activities with children with special needs, she ‘has often seen that inclusion is not necessarily doing the same thing but doing something that leads to the child feeling a community, feeling significant and feeling that he or she can contribute something which leads to them gaining recognition from the other children’. There are many ways to get there, and one may occasionally have to provide direct individual help to strengthen the prerequisites for the child to master playing music with other children in ECEC institutions.

Teaching music to promote inclusion is about analysing the ‘whole’ to find the various parts that the individual child can contribute to the children’s group. In this way, children with special needs can contribute their musical part to this whole.

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Chapter 9

Project Overview

Project title	Strategies of private preschool management in enhancing inclusive social interaction among squeezed preschool children
Researchers	Mrs. Graceana Luambane and Waikili Luwango
Institution	St. Mary's College of Early Childhood Education Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania
Project	<p>Children are restricted between their homes and preschool, lacking time for play and social interaction. It is necessary to devise strategies for more social interaction for children in the daytime. Social interaction is important for the holistic development of children, including those with special needs.</p> <p>This study intends to explore how preschool management can enhance inclusive social interaction among restricted preschool children.</p>
Approach/Methods	A qualitative approach, including interviews with preschool teachers. Interviews were conducted with a focus on three questions.
Result and findings	The results revealed no robust strategies among preschool management aimed at enhancing inclusive social interaction. Managers simply used normal experiences from primary education, with no special programmes for children with special needs.
Actions, planned	<p>The researchers will invite parents, teachers and representatives of preschool management to discuss the possibilities of devising strategies to enhance social interaction among children.</p> <p>Teacher training colleges will have seminars with preschool management teachers on strategies for enhancing inclusive social interaction among preschool children.</p>

Project title	Play as an instruction strategy for developing social skills among preschool learners
Researchers	Dennis Likwelile and Robert S. Japhari
Institution	SEKOMU University, Lushoto Tanzania
Project	<p>Despite research on instructional strategies to develop social skills in Tanzania, the importance of play as a useful tool to develop social skills has been ignored by many researchers and practitioners.</p> <p>Key concepts: Social skills and play</p> <p>Inspired by Paulo Freire’s theory of empowerment and the co-construction of meaning.</p>
Approach/Methods	Qualitative mixed methods: Photovoice: Pictures from natural settings; focus group discussion. Process of analysing the findings: Co-constructed meaning, dissemination, action
Result and findings	Skills identified: Relationship management, self-management and communication (expressive speaking, receptive listening, pragmatism and turn taking)
Actions, planned	Roundtable discussion with the teacher; discussed what was observed from the photos.

Project title	Culture and language in inclusive early childhood education
Name	Mrs. Tsholofelo Legase and Mrs. Kaaherue Korujezu
Institution	Bokamoso Early Childhood Teacher Training, Ghanzi, Botswana
Project	In order to access all children for ECDE, a system of playgroups was rolled out across Botswana in October 2019. The challenge was to reach all children, in particular, children from minority groups such as San. The project aims to help teachers find strategies to accommodate all children, including minority-language children. A long-term goal is to find strategies to involve parents.
Approach	Mixed-method approach: focus group discussion and interviews in a preschool/playgroup in the district of Ghanzi
Main results and findings	Language is a major barrier to learning for minority-language children (in particular, Herero speakers), especially at the beginning of the term. Classroom strategies are teacher-centred, and games and songs from the local communities rarely utilized, as is the use of local materials and cultural experiences to support learning. There are few/no incentives from the preschool management to encourage cultural inclusiveness in the classroom. Teachers need a lot of support and are torn between the expectations of the community (e.g. school readiness) and trying their best.
Actions, planned	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocate for the recruitment of a Herero speaker as an assistant to volunteer in the preschool at the start of the term 2. Invite the preschool teachers for a refresher workshop on the importance of catering for all children, including minority-language children, and the use of local materials, games and songs 3. Provide training on ECDC management and administrative work for VDC, focusing on IE (community leaders responsible for the preschool) 4. Do follow-up visits to preschools for monitoring and one-to-one coaching of teachers

Project title	Inclusion strategies for children with special needs in preschool
Researcher	Mr. Jan Andre Mangumbule
Institution	Universidade Pedagogica de Maputo
Project	Inclusion Strategies for Children with Special Needs in Preschool Provide training on game-based methodologies and responsive children with special educational needs to kindergarten educator
Approach/Methods	Questionnaire and observations in ECEC classrooms
Result and findings	To be determined.
Actions, planned	To be determined

Project title	Disability as a factor of exclusion in preschool
Researcher	Mrs. Marta F.C. Inguane.
Institution	Instituto de Formacao de Professores de Preschola (IFPP). Maputo, Mozambique
Project	What are the benefits of including children with disabilities in preschools?
Approach/Methods	Document analysis and interviews with the community (parents) and preschool teachers
Result and findings	To be determined
Actions, planned	To be determined

Project title	Assessment methods for children with special needs in preschool
Researcher	Antonio Z. Wante from Maputo, Mozambique
Institution	Instituto de Formacao de Professores de Preschola (IFPP). Mozambique
Project	Research question: What is the impact of the different forms of assessment on children with special needs? How did the teachers evaluate children with communication problems?
Approach/Methods	Questionnaire and interviews. The interviews focused on how the teacher evaluated children with special needs.
Result and findings	To be determined
Actions, planned	To be determined

Project title	Impact of childhood educator training on the inclusion of children in Maputo preschools
Researcher	Mr. Bernardo A. Mutemba
Institution	Instituto de Formacao de Professores de Preschola (IFPP). Maputo, Mozambique
Project	Contextualize preschool education in Mozambique in terms of training and inclusion; Identify the involvement of IFPP graduates in special education in Maputo.
Approach/Methods	Observation, interviews and inquiry

Result and findings	To be determined
Actions, planned	To be determined

Project title	Use of concrete materials to enhance inclusive ECD and education at Karen Christian College
Researcher	Mr. Cosmus Mbogo
Institution	Karen Christian College, Early Childhood Education, Nairobi, Kenya
Project	<p>The purpose of the project is the use of concrete materials to enhance inclusive early childhood development and education at Karen Christian College.</p> <p>The study will enhance material development skills. The research question is as follows: What type of concrete materials would enhance inclusiveness in ECDE in KCC? In what ways can we acquire these concrete materials to enhance IECDE in KCC? What competencies among ECDE teacher trainers would enable them to effectively implement IECDE curriculum?</p>
Approach/Methods	Mixed methods: Observation and photographs of teachers making materials; questionnaire with rating scales provided to teachers; focus group discussions after action research with learning materials in preschool
Result and findings	<p>A long list of different types of concrete teaching materials were presented as outcomes from the teachers' questionnaires. One finding was that the materials could be sorted into different development programmes such as language and mathematics.</p> <p>The list was inspired by the Montessori and Vygotsky frameworks. The results of the data collection gave a perspective of the situation.</p>
Actions, planned	Bring the materials to the children in the preschool for use in the teaching practice. The researcher will participate and observe the teaching.

Project title	Strategies used by teachers at Inclusive Primary School to meet the diverse needs of learners
Researcher	Mr. Josephat Semkiwa
Institution	SEKOMU University, Lushoto Tanzania
Project	In 2009, Tanzania implemented the National Strategy on Inclusive Education to provide 'Equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings'. The objectives of the project are to explore the relevance of the curricula used in meeting the diverse needs of learners and ascertain whether teachers employ appropriate teaching methods in relation to the diverse learning needs of children.
Approach/Methods	Qualitative mix methods: Focus group discussions, individual interviews, observation and document analysis.
Result and findings	Blind learners are not included in regular classes. They learn in their own classrooms using the Perkin Machine. They join inclusive classes when they are in primary level three. There are no recorders in the classrooms.
Actions, planned	Devise a plan together with the teachers at inclusive preschool on how to include children with visual disabilities. Conduct inclusive evaluations and observations in the classroom. Hold discussions with the teachers on ways to meet the needs of all learners.

Project title	Enhancing the safety and security of learners in Kenyan schools to promote inclusive education
Researcher	Mr. Pastor Stephen Makwae
Institution	Karen Christian College, Early Childhood Education Nairobi, Kenya
Project	The Education Act seeks to fulfil the prescribed minimum requirements of health and safety and conform to building regulations. The Children's Act (chapter (586-2001) emphasizes the protection of all children. Children who have negative experiences or live in unsafe environments often have trouble focusing on learning. Their primary concern is safety.

	There is a need to ensure a predictable and orderly environment where learners can feel safe both physically and psychologically. The research question is <i>What are the available and existing safety and security standards for schools in Kenya?</i>
Approach/Methods	Qualitative mix methods: Observation, focus-group discussions, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. Project participants will include both teachers and learners in the preschool.
Result and findings	To be determined
Actions, planned	To be determined

