

**THE COMPETENCIES OF NEWLY QUALIFIED
TEACHERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO TO ENGAGE IN INCLUSIVE PRACTICES
AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL**

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Hundreds of teachers have graduated with a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree from the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) since 2010 and are currently employed at primary schools across Trinidad and Tobago. The purpose of the study was to determine whether Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) believed that they acquired the competencies to engage in inclusive practices. It also sought to investigate how NQTs implement inclusive practices, and to unearth their experiences. A mixed method approach was adopted using purposive sampling with one hundred and twenty NQTs. Data collection procedures included questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with focus groups and reflective writing. Data were analysed using an integration of quantitative and qualitative procedures. The results indicate that NQTs believe that they have developed the competencies to engage in inclusive practices, and they implement inclusive practices by using a variety of teaching/ learning strategies. The experiences of NQTs are encapsulated in four major themes. However, participants complained that they face major challenges. It can be concluded that there should be support, resources and a digitized forum for teachers to share best practices. This research has implications for the review of the B. Ed. programme at UTT, other higher education institutions, and for the teacher education in general.

Introduction

Background of the Study

In July 2006, there was a major pedagogical shift in teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago. The last cohort of teacher trainees graduated from the two existing teachers' colleges (Valsayn and Corinth) which were

subsequently closed and the Ministry of Education (MOE) relinquished its governance on teacher education. Teacher education made its transition to a tertiary institution, a newly established local university, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), which offers a four-year degree programme in its Centre for Education Programme (CEP). This initiative was part of a major thrust of education reform as articulated in the *Education Policy Paper 1993-2003* (MOE, 1992) and emphasized in the *Strategic Plan, 2002- 2006* (MOE, 2002).

Recently, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has reiterated its commitment to meet the needs of diverse learners. In reporting on the action to be taken to address the performance of the nation's children in the school system, the Government has stipulated that there is a need "to transform our teaching and learning strategies to address the diverse backgrounds, aptitudes and learning styles to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to succeed" (MOE 2012, p. v). According to this education plan, the recommendation by the Ministry of Education is to adopt a student-centred approach towards the development of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

The focus of the MOE therefore, is to maintain, mainstream, inclusive classrooms to promote equality and equity under the same umbrella. Hundreds of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) who have graduated from the University are currently employed and entrusted with this task at primary schools across the country. An examination of the competencies of NQTs to engage in inclusive practices in the delivery of quality education for every student is therefore a justified study.

Significance of the Study

Meeting the needs of diverse learners at primary level requires a wide range of teacher competencies to be developed in teachers through pre-service education. Failure to do so would be detrimental to the school and to society, thus, it is necessary to find out from those who interface with the schools to determine the gaps to be closed and the needs to be met. The pre-service teachers who have experienced and graduated from the programme at UTT, have made their transition into the primary schools as NQTs. They are strategically placed as key stakeholders to meet the needs of all learners, in particular those learners who are deemed 'at risk' because they have special needs. The *Education Policy Paper 1993-2003* espouses, "Mainstreaming of children with special needs except for severe cases will be the norm" (MOE, 1992, p. 12), while the MOE outlines, "Inclusive: We expect all students will learn in a welcoming environment,

regardless of place, culture or learning needs” (MOE, 2012, p. xi), as a guiding principle for educators.

The *Strategic Plan, 2002- 2006* outlines the MOE’s vision to be “. . . a pacesetter in the holistic development of an individual through an education system which enables meaningful contributions within the global context” (MOE, 2002, p. 31). Underpinning this vision is the philosophical tenet that “Every child has an inherent right to an education which the development of maximum capability will enhance regardless of gender, ethnic, economic, social or religious background” (MOE, 2002, p. 31). Guided by the vision projected by this plan, the need arises to investigate the how NQTs implement inclusive practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by various theories including, andragogy as proffered by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) and constructivism as participants construct their own meaning, interpretations and experiences. Also, Vygotsky’s (1978) social development theory, Gardner’s (1995) theory of multiple intelligences and Carol Ann Tomlinson’s (2005) theory on differentiated instruction underpin the research as they inform teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Inclusivity

Amidst a multiplicity of definitions and conceptualizations advanced for inclusive education, the one outlined by Thousand and Villa, (2000) as “welcoming, valuing and supporting the diverse learning needs of all students in shared general education environments” (p. 73), was considered in this study but the broader developing concept of inclusivity was also addressed. An analysis of the discourse on inclusive education reveals that the concept of inclusion transcends the original idea of including children with disabilities in mainstream schools. Mainstreaming refers to the inclusion of special students in the general education process . . . gifted and talented individuals, students from culturally and diverse backgrounds, and students at risk for school failure (Lewis & Doorlag, (2011). In their extensive research on special education O’Gorman and Drudy (2011) skilfully traced the changing concept of special education from a medical model to a social model. This revised model recognizes diversity and uniqueness in individuals and also establishes that the school has the responsibility to address and accommodate these needs.

The philosophy behind inclusivity is that all students should be educated and given equal opportunities as their peers in mainstream classrooms. Teachers acknowledge, appreciate, and respect students' varied talents, skills, abilities, interests, backgrounds and intelligences (Navarro, Zervas, Gesa & Sampson, 2016). But, Cain (2012) lamented “the lasting impact that childhood experiences both in school and in the home could have on an individual’s beliefs about teaching, learning and schooling in general” (p.103).

Many of today's classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, which holds true for primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. As such, the role of the teacher becomes more significant. It is therefore incumbent on teachers to enhance and broaden their working knowledge of special needs and to develop skills and competencies to address the special needs of children in schools. This shift in thinking in meeting the needs of special children in the mainstream classroom will also require a rethinking of the teacher’s role, as well as their preparation for teaching.

In the B. Ed. programme offered at the UTT, the training that NQTs received was designed to empower them with the skills and competencies to practice inclusive education. However, it is realistic to expect that the NQTs may encounter challenges in the implementation of inclusive practices (Lavia, 2008) in their respective classrooms. Hodkinson (2005), of the University of Chester, in his exploration of the understanding and knowledge base of NQTs, suggested that many of the barriers to implementation resided within the schools themselves. Clough and Garner (as cited in Hodkinson, 2005) reported that inclusivity became problematic in educational institutions because of a lack of thorough understanding of implementation practices for inclusive education, whilst Corbett (2001) reported a lack of proper training as a major problem. According to Hodkinson (2005), a significant concern is that NQTs do not apply the same understanding of inclusive education.

However, McMillan (2008), in her studies on inclusive education, reported on the success of inclusive practices. A significant finding was that inclusive practices yielded academic as well as social benefits. But she found that such inclusive practices are more likely to be successful when there was cooperation among colleagues.

UTT Training – B.Ed. programme

UTT offers a comprehensive programme with a number of pedagogical courses to provide students with the skills to implement a variety of approaches to make education available to all learners in the primary school. UTT has attempted to equip students with the skills to make

inclusivity a reality in tandem with the 1994 Salamanca Statement and international support for full inclusion (UNESCO, 2009). When classrooms are transformed into an inclusive system, students are better poised to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. Implementing a variety of student-centred approaches is one of the key components to making this process of development a reality.

The courses UTT presents incorporate in-house sessions with simulated activities that allow students to be involved in hands-on and vicarious experiences. These are converted into real-life classroom situations during the practicum which form a critical component of training every semester. When students engage in field practice in schools they are also mentored by UTT instructors as well as cooperating teachers and administrators to embrace inclusivity. NQTs therefore learn to integrate pedagogical content knowledge, that is, “subject matter for teaching . . . content most germane to its teachability” (Shulman, 1986, p. 9) and procedural knowledge (or how to teach) to enhance their skills and competencies for inclusive classrooms. The expectations are, therefore, that NQTs are empowered to embrace the challenges of an inclusive classroom.

Multi-Modal Instruction

In inclusive classrooms teachers implement a variety of instructional strategies to cater for diverse learners. For example, with tiered instruction they maximize learning opportunities for the slow, remedial, average and gifted students. They use multiple modalities to cater for different learning styles including, visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic (Lenz, Deshler, & Kissam, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001). With the use of multiple modalities students process information better (Wood, 2006), and are more creative in problem solving as there is appeal to different senses (Swanson, Solis, Ciullo & McKenna, 2012). There is the enhancement of different skills, experiences and motivation through oral presentations, cooperative learning and the use of technology. McKenna, Shin and Ciullo (2015) note,

Within a structured class, teachers systematically delivered mathematics lessons using specific procedures—introducing objectives, reviewing previously learned concepts, modelling new skills, and providing guided and independent practice. Through this method . . . teachers applied procedure-based mathematics instruction to support students with LD [learning difficulties]. (p. 8)

A Community of Support

Inclusion is also about engendering a sense of community, belonging and encouragement from administrators, family, and professionals. The family as a collaborative partner (Salend, 2011; Skrtic, 1991; Wood, 2006) also enables a palatable learning environment (Choate, 2004). According to Wood (2006) “Collaboration requires effective communication” (p. 30) among all stakeholders, especially parents. “Among the most sweeping changes taking place in our schools is the redefinition of teacher roles and responsibilities” (Choate, 2004, p. 15) and some teachers are willing to “adopt an individualized working style, focused on the child's needs” (Blândul & Bradea, 2017, p. 337). Also, educators collaborate to minimize curricular barriers and proactively solve emerging problems (Heacox, 2002; Thwala, 2015). But collegial support, sharing ideas and resources, are also essential for successful implementation of inclusive practices.

Inclusive Practice – The dilemma

Teacher attitudes and beliefs about inclusive practices may impact negatively on inclusivity. While many educators have bought into the philosophy of inclusion, some advocate individualized programmes for challenged students. In a study conducted in Swaziland, Thwala (2015) found that teacher stress and their inability to deal with new responsibilities impacted negatively on inclusive practices. In addition, a study on the impact of inclusion on teachers by Salisbury, Gallucci, Palombaro and Peck (1995) revealed mixed results.

Also, students’ behaviours such as truancy and indiscipline may constrain teachers’ motivation for inclusivity. In a study done in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, Bergsma (2000) found that for inclusive education, the powers that be have fewer ideas with respect to policy development and implementation when it comes to the school system and the micro level . . . principals, teachers, pupils, and parents and guardians get lost, and the “at-risk” children start to lose their battle with the mainstream (p. 29). Sands, Kozleski and French (2000) note that educational changes are unrelenting and overwhelming and, often, at cross purposes, while Skrtic (1991) argues that the inclusion debate will be amplified in the twenty-first century.

Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to investigate whether NQTs from the University of Trinidad and Tobago believed that they acquired the knowledge, skills and competencies to engage in inclusive practices to ensure that every student learns. In addition, the research focused on how

the NQTs are implementing inclusive practices to meet the needs of diverse learners at the primary level and it also sought to determine the experiences of NQTs in the implementation of inclusive practices in their classes.

Research Questions

1. Do NQTs from the UTT believe that they are equipped with the necessary competencies to engage in inclusive practices at the primary level?
2. How do NQTs from the UTT implement inclusive practices in their classes?
3. What are the experiences of NQTs in implementing inclusive practices?

Sample

The sample involved 24 schools, two of which were from Tobago, with a total of 120 NQTs from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. The participants successfully completed a four-year Bachelor of Education programme at the institution. The NQTs are currently employed as teachers by the MOE in primary schools where they teach at different levels. They serve in government, denominational and private primary/elementary schools located in several educational districts in Trinidad and Tobago.

The major commonality, however, is that all participants graduated from UTT. They were exposed to a synthesis of the same pedagogical content knowledge, instructional methods and assessment procedures. An established standard was upheld by UTT by conforming to all standards, all validation requirements and also by being fully accredited, on par with other universities in the region.

Data Collection Methods

In this study, a mixed method approach was utilized to investigate the beliefs of NQTs about their competencies, the implementation strategies they use and their classroom experiences with inclusive practices at primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. A mixed analysis involves using quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques within the same study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

A questionnaire with both open and closed ended questions was used. This was administered to 120 NQTs, UTT graduates, who are currently

teaching at primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The instrument was pilot tested to determine the suitability of the questions, some of which had to be modified based on feedback.

Face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 focus groups. Each group was asked the same questions to maintain consistency of the data analysis. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to establish credibility and accuracy of the data. The transcripts were returned to participants for checking, which allowed for authenticity of data.

Participants were also asked to engage in ongoing reflective writings which included some of their experiences and how they implement inclusive practices in their respective classes. The different data gathering methods using questionnaires, semi-structured focus group interviews and written reflections, allowed for validation and triangulation of data. Participants were advised about voluntary participation, confidentiality of data and anonymity from inception. Interviewees were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from study at any time.

Data Analysis

In this study quantifiable data were analysed using descriptive statistics to provide a synthesis of the information. The findings were corroborated with the data derived from the qualitative analysis to establish congruency and “increase understanding of the underlying phenomenon” (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011, p.1). The qualitative data analysis procedure outlined by Creswell (2012) was adapted and utilized for “*complementarity* i.e., results from one analysis type [e.g., qualitative] are interpreted to enhance, expand, illustrate, or clarify findings derived from the other strand [quantitative]” (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, p. 4).

The data were read reiteratively (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) and compared to establish patterns as well as determine outliers. Data analysed from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with focus groups and reflective writings formed a crystallization of codes, categories and themes.

Results

The data revealed that 81% of the respondents believe that they are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to engage in inclusive practices at the primary level. Fifteen percent found that they

were prepared for the “ideal” classroom while another 4% disclosed that they were not well prepared. The latter cited personal concerns such as lack of effective communication skills and problems with classroom management which they believed curtailed their proficiency. A summary of the data is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Beliefs About Competencies for Inclusive Practice

Beliefs	Percentages (%)
Equipped with Competencies	81
Prepared for ‘Ideal’ Classroom	15
Not Well Prepared	4
Total	100

Data on the implementation of inclusive practices demonstrate that the NQTs implement inclusive practices on a regular/daily basis by using various teaching methodologies. A total of 108 participants reported that they use cooperative learning regularly while 97 outlined that they differentiated instruction in terms of content, process and product. Eighty-four participants used tiered learning for instruction, aligning the complexity of the content to the learning readiness and previous knowledge of the students. Seventy-six NQTs also identified inquiry-based learning and 75 outlined peer tutoring as strategies they used to cater for diverse needs of students. Table 2 gives a summary of the data.

Table 2. Some Inclusive Strategies Implemented by NQTs

Strategies	Total No. of NQTs (120)
Cooperative Learning	108
Differentiated learning	97
Tiered learning	84
Inquiry-based learning	76
Peer tutoring	75

NQTs used the following methods on a more limited basis: theme-based learning, scenario-based learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, games and simulations as well as activities involving the use of technology.

As shown in Table 3, 27% cited the lack of administrative support as the reason for limited implementation while 47% complained about the lack of resources. Nine percent bemoaned a lack of collegial support; 12% lamented that the culture of the school was a mitigating factor, while 5% felt that they lacked confidence to implement inclusive practices.

Table 3. Reasons for Non-implementation of Inclusive Practices

Non-Implementation Reasons	Percentages (100%)
Lack of Administrative support	27
Lack of resources	47
Lack of collegial support	9
Culture of the school	12
Lack of Confidence	5

The themes that emanated about experiences of NQTs from the qualitative data, that is, eleven focus group interviews and reflective writings, include: (1) *Proficiency*, (2) *Gratitude for Practicum and Practice*, (3) *Student Centred Strategies*, and (4) *Refining Techniques despite Challenges*. The anecdotal statements below were selected based on the collective agreement of members of the focus groups. Eleven groups were included because of varied demographics.

Focus Group 1.

UTT has equipped me with the professional skills. I enjoy the challenge . . . I need to go out there and be the best teacher in a diverse class . . . differentiating instruction, bringing our real-life examples, for example when I am teaching ratios, I tell the children about cooking, cooking involves ratio . . . UTT gave us the privilege to go out in the schools and practise and I practise what was taught to us, so I have the skills.

Focus Group 2.

Field teaching is tedious . . . difficult but the experience gave me practice . . . the experience in the teaching field benefitted me the most . . . I could handle any class . . . my cooperating teachers said they like my confidence . . . there are problems . . . but I feel ready.

Focus Group 3

I think I am competent enough to go into the classroom and teach all the topics . . . I teach each of them (students) in the way they understand and help them to understand and I assist in any way I can . . . I do research . . . I have to do oral assessment sometimes.

Focus Group 4

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UTT made us spend a lot of time on lesson planning . . . that was real tough . . . I learn to plan, and with the practical teaching I developed the skills . . . I am catering for culturally relevant pedagogy.

Focus Group 5

My experience was confusing at first . . . but practicum after practicum, year after year made me into a teacher, a very skilled teacher. I use cooperative learning, games and other methods.

Focus Group 6

Challenging . . . but if you give the proper attention to the students, they learn and respect you . . . if you are always behind that child and you keep supporting that child he will learn . . . you have to show the students different ways to solve problems . . . I learnt different ways in UTT and I put them into practice.

Focus Group 7

Yes and no, it really prepares you for the ideal classroom but I use a lot of manipulatives and strategies . . . previous knowledge is very important because you cannot go to a classroom and start teaching if the children don't have the previous knowledge . . . the fact of the matter is that it is 'trying' but I get every child to learn even if it is one sentence or to solve one problem.

Focus Group 8

The class is crowded, and it is really hard to find activities but I try to make learning meaningful for each child in my class . . . I used the technology . . . it was fun because they like the games . . . but I had to facilitate with my laptop . . . but I have to work on my communication skills.

Focus Group 9

I break down the content and focus on student understanding . . . practicum was difficult, but I am a better teacher. UTT has done all it can to equip me to be able to effectively manage diverse learners in classrooms.

Focus Group 10

It is still an issue in my mind, but I am learning to deal with it more and more by practising every day . . . I used cooperative

learning so every child was involved . . . but it was difficult, we barely had space to walk through the class.

Focus Group 11

I have developed the competency . . . but classroom management . . . I implement different methods like grouping the children . . . but I tell you classroom management . . . I feel a little embarrassed . . . I tell you my classroom management is really a huge problem.

Reflective Writing A

There are at least three children with serious learning disabilities. However, I have made a plan for assisting them with their learning problems. I have discussed the plan with the principal . . . I believe that I do possess the necessary skills to deal with the problems.

Reflective Writing B

I do make an effort to enhance my teaching methods on a daily basis. I think my students are now more interested in their work. I do have students with reading problems . . . I have grouped the children in such a way that peer learning is possible . . . I realize that I have the skills. I just need to plan and make a conscious effort to implement more student-centered approaches.

Reflective Writing C

I use student centred approaches and I do make and use resources, especially manipulatives in the teaching of Mathematics. I will admit that it is difficult to be creative all day long and there are times that I drift into the traditional methods. . . . but I will admit that the students are more interested when I employ a variety of teaching strategies. I think that I do have knowledge of the skills to be employed in meeting the needs of the diverse learners in my classroom and I do implement them regularly.

Discussion

The results revealed that NQTs believe that they possess skills and competencies to deal with the diverse needs of learners at the primary level. The majority of teachers indicated that they have developed the confidence based on practical experiences in the classroom during practicum throughout their tenure at UTT. While they have given full

credit to UTT some have mentioned the input of cooperating teachers and the role they played as mentors.

Participants believe that their experiences have been fulfilling and satisfying when they engaged in inclusive practices. NQTs provide a supportive, student friendly environment and use a variety of activities to enhance students' learning. However, they experience challenges and difficulties which are discouraging, even leading to frustration, confusion, anxiety. They bewail that there are classrooms that are not conducive to learning as well as an acute lack of resources and collegial support in the schools. "It is not uncommon for teaching staff to complain that they do not have appropriate time and resources available to them to effectively carry about such collaboration" (Rix, 2005, p. 134).

NQTs believe that devising creative ways of engaging in inclusive practices becomes tedious and time consuming especially because they are faced with a content loaded curricula. The structure of national assessments together with teacher responsibility to enhance students' ability to pass examinations impact on the frequency and quality of inclusive practices particularly at the upper levels. In addition, pressures from parents, administrators and school-supervisors, who have a traditionalist philosophy, may be demotivating for NQTs.

The NQTs disclosed that in addition to traditional methods such as discussion, they used constructivist student-centred approaches to teaching and learning. By implementing cooperative learning, for example, NQTs were able to engage students in structured activities, where there was teamwork incorporating positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal participation and simultaneous interaction (Kagan, 1994).

Tiered learning provided appropriate opportunities for the remedial learners and sufficient challenge for gifted, advanced learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Peer tutoring also allowed students to work collaboratively, give and receive feedback, accept responsibility and evaluate their own learning. The main focus of inquiry-based learning was to provide opportunities for questioning, problem solving and creative thinking. The strategies NQTs employed demand astute planning and organization for effective implementation. Therefore, NQTs demonstrated a passion for teaching as well as commitment and dedication to ensure that no child is left behind. NQTs indicated that they incorporated varied activities using technology with videos, games and simulations. However, they found it time consuming and difficult to deal with the associated technological problems. By the use of varied interactive, student-centred methods and activities, in different subject areas, NQTs practised inclusivity as well as

catered for the different learning styles and the holistic development of the students.

The participants attributed their confidence and proficiency in the execution of the strategies and activities to the hands-on, experiential practice they received as part of their training at the UTT. They expressed gratitude for the practice during their practicum mandated by UTT. However, they acknowledged that they are still refining their pedagogical skills and are willing to continue to “perfect” them. NQTs are also aware that continuous self-learning is an essential benchmark for continuity towards successful inclusivity. Holdsworth (2005) notes, “It is the experimentation and the ability to reflect about the needs of children, about their varied strengths and weaknesses, about the choices in methodology, and how to maximize the potential of all children that make for inclusive styles” (p. 131).

While no one outlined the term *differentiated instruction*, some participants mentioned that they simplified content into sub-components (whereby they differentiated content), utilized multiple teaching strategies such as cooperative learning (process differentiation), and used different modes of assessment such as oral presentations (product differentiation) (Joseph, Thomas, Simonette, & Ramsook, 2013). NQTs adopted differentiated instruction by continuously adjusting instruction so that the needs of all students were met. When there is differentiated learning, all students make accelerated progress (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007; Tomlinson, 2005).

The terminology *tiered learning* did not arise but some respondents revealed that they devised activities so that students may work at different levels of complexity to accomplish the same task. Efforts were made to scaffold students to their next level of learning. By adopting interactive approaches NQTs ensured that all students, including the average, slow and remedial, learnt fundamental concepts and skills. The gifted learner was also taken into account with the provision of enrichment exercises and opportunities for independent learning. This suggests that students’ developmental stages and maturational levels were also taken into account.

NQTs recognized the importance of previous knowledge and the concepts of going from the known to the unknown, simple to complex, concrete to abstract and the use of symbolic, enactive and iconic representations. Lewis and Doorlag (1995) advise teachers to “Break the learning tasks into teachable sub-components” (p. 98). They used realia, manipulatives and real-life examples so that concepts were explicit, meaningful and culturally relevant.

However, NQTs indicated that the inclusive classroom is very challenging and sometimes the daily school routine is so overwhelming that in order to survive they are forced to revert to traditional methods of rote learning or catering for the average learner. They recognize that there are no quick fixes; that they are plagued with multiple problems such as lack of resources and sometimes the systemic problems repress their targeted goals and objectives to engage in inclusive practices. Skrtic (1991) argues that teachers are constrained by the machine bureaucracies of the school.

Some NQTs lamented that they felt discouraged as the culture of the schools mitigated against their inclusive practices. While some were deterred, others made proactive interventions which encouraged at least one principal to buy into the practice. NQTs outlined that a collaborative approach among staff members is minimal if not obstructionist. Other NQTs have attributed their limitations to personal factors such as self-esteem, confidence, and inability to manage classes properly and to communicate effectively. Only one NQT enunciated that a collaborative effort was forged among the staff, heads of departments and the principal in a particular school for the promotion of inclusivity

In summary, researchers such as Tomlinson (2005), and McKenna, Shin and Ciullo (2015) observe that teacher-belief in inclusivity is an investment in education. NQTs reported that inclusion is amenable in that they believe in their competence and that UTT has equipped them to engage in, adapt and implement inclusive practices. They also reiterated that their experiences convey that inclusivity is beneficial to all students. In spite of these indicators, they claim that they are plagued with many challenges which can serve as deterrents to best practice.

Conclusion

All stakeholders benefit from inclusive education. When NQTs practise inclusion, they feel a sense of accomplishment. Students are motivated and learning becomes fun. The NQTs from UTT demonstrate high levels of efficacy and proficiency in catering for the needs of every child but they acknowledge that they are still developing their skills. While there are mitigating factors such as the culture of the schools, students' indiscipline and lack of support from other educators, greater collaboration must be forged between the University, teachers, the MOE and other stakeholders. Perhaps the inclusion of a course in counselling offered by UTT as well as other higher educational institutions, or piloted by the MOE will enhance the skills of NQTs in engaging in inclusive practices. Also, professional support for NQTs should be provided for teachers and an evaluation unit

with capacity for referral should be established by the MOE to determine the severity of students' problems. The unit should be well integrated for monitoring purposes. Additionally, a digitized/virtual forum for teachers whereby successful practices and solutions of new and emerging problems can be shared and will add a new dimension to enable teachers and create an environment for inclusion in today's globally challenging, competitive society.

Recommendations

This investigation into how NQTs cater for inclusivity may generate interest for future studies into inclusive practices throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It may spark interest into the functionality of the Student Support Services of the MOE as an integral part of the education system. Many administrators need to be sensitized to improved practices and into the philosophy of inclusion. Such a movement should also contribute to the re-engineering of the culture of schools where inclusive practices are not encouraged. Such a move may contribute considerably to the aspiration of the Government to transform the education system to ensure that all students are given equal opportunities to succeed.

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