

MANAGERS' STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVE IMPLEMENTATION IN TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL AND TRAINING COLLEGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Limited access to people with disabilities in institutions of higher learning is unfortunately a common trend in South Africa. The purpose of this paper was to explore strategies to implement in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in order to promote inclusive education effectively; that is, to create smooth access for students with disabilities. Research that explored strategies regarding the implementation of inclusive education in TVET colleges had not been previously conducted in South Africa. Hence, this paper's contribution focused on strategies for the implementation of inclusive education through the lens of students with disabilities. It also fits into the human pedagogy model that advocates accommodation of students as they are. This research was underpinned by a qualitative approach utilising the Interpretive Phenomenological Design. Data was gathered through document analysis and in-depth interviews involving twelve managers from four TVET Colleges in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The findings indicated that although the managers understood the need for the implementation of inclusivity in colleges, very little was done to support students with disabilities. College management did not take ownership for driving, managing, and implementing their strategic plan. The findings also revealed the following: a lack of support structures, absence of the Disability Services Units, lack of partnerships with schools, no control over strategic planning, no evidence of policies on inclusion, lack of funds, and delays in providing services that support students with disabilities. It was recommended that managers implement strategies to create support structures, Disability Services Units, partnerships with similar schools, a strategic management plan, inclusion policies, and fundraising schemes to promote access to students with disabilities in colleges.

Keywords: *Access, disability, human pedagogy model, implementation strategies, inclusive education.*

1. Introduction

It is common among people with disabilities to assume that access to higher education learning opportunities is difficult to achieve. However, the implementation of inclusive education in HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) ensures that all learners are included in the education system, regardless of their disabilities (Pienaar & Raymond, 2013). The White Paper on Rights of People with Disabilities (2015) states that most disabled youths between the ages of 20-24 were not attending any tertiary education institution (Department of Social Development, 2015). Subsequently, all the relevant legislative frameworks in South Africa emphasized the importance of the inclusion of individuals with disability in the education system.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college leadership shoulder a huge responsibility and obligation to generate strategies that accommodate the diversity of students in a variety of educational programmes (Coco, 2011). One of leadership's obligations is to manage the access of students with disabilities, and to provide guarantees that inclusive education is properly implemented and monitored (Naidoo, 2010). The TVET colleges are positioned academically between the schools and universities since they have pre-matric and post-matric programmes (Balkrishen, 2016). Unlike universities that have autonomy to implement their policies, colleges are governed (Kraak, Paterson, & Boka, 2016) in terms of the White Paper for Post School Education and Training which was developed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and ratified by the Cabinet (DHET, 2013). This promoted a post-school system (TVET and HEIs) that recognized the right to access an educational institution regardless of race, age, and disability.

Although there were attempts in some colleges to address the problem associated with disability and inclusivity, these were not sufficient to address the needs of these students (Delubom, 2017). We advocate that it is crucial that all stakeholders in the TVET sector embrace innovative ways of thinking in order to execute innovative strategies to implement inclusive education successfully. This would signal Government's commitment to education in general, and in particular to the post-secondary educational needs of people with disabilities (DHET, 2013).

Globally, many countries have reviewed and adjusted special education policies to accommodate inclusive education (Muyungu, 2015). Research studies conducted internationally exposed the inefficiencies in current scenarios, especially those pertaining to strategic planning and legislation concerning the implementation of inclusive education (Khron-Nydal, 2008; Saidu, 2017). In South Africa, White Paper 6 (2001) provided a blueprint for inclusive education to become entrenched in our education system. This was aimed to address the imbalances of the past that excluded children of colour with disabilities from the education system (Department of Basic Education, 2016). This investigative enquiry is necessary to understand how TVET colleges strategize to accommodate inclusivity and diversity despite their position of being in the middle of school and university systems. Hence, this paper aimed to explore TVET college managers' strategies concerning entrenching and improving inclusive education implementation policies.

2. Methods

This study was based on a qualitative research approach which was the most suitable approach because it was directed towards the in-depth perspectives of participants which considered their personal and subjective narratives concerning the phenomenon under study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2015) which in this case was the management of inclusive education. Additionally, the qualitative method was appropriate since it analyses feelings, attitudes, perceptions and views. This study's aim was to dissect managers' strategies on improving the implementation policies and their enactments regarding inclusive education in the TVET colleges. A phenomenological research design was adopted since it was necessary to understand participants' perceptions of inclusive education, their understanding of challenging situations, as well as their lived experiences (Waters, 2017).

3. Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that although participants were unanimously in favour of the implementation of inclusion in all colleges, there was not much that was done to support this vision. There were strategies that the participants advocated that were related to support structures, Disability Services Unit, partnership with schools, strategic planning management, development of policies, and fundraising drives.

3.1. Support structures

The data generated from interviews and the document analysis reflected that there was an absence of internal structures to support mainstream students with disabilities in the colleges. The participants mentioned that the Higher Health, a national student support agency, deployed officials who provided 'disability' support. It was evident that some managers had knowledge of the Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA); however, they were not clear about its functions. Also, the managers admitted that colleges did not intentionally neglect the inclusion and support of students with disabilities, rather they did not have strategies in place to guide them (managers) to effectively implement inclusive education. These remarks illustrate the lack of planning from the college managers who are the decision-makers, and who shoulder the responsibility to design visionary initiatives to effectively implement inclusion of students with disabilities (Chiwandire, 2020). The idea of the formation of a forum for students with disability is an indication of managers' intention to improve this situation. This indicates that some managers have an idea of what was needed to be done as they wanted to hear the disabled students' views by acknowledging the slogan, 'nothing for us, without us' (Charlton, 2000). However, having this idea is not enough - it needs to be translated into action. It was apparent that there was no planning or guidelines that were followed, instead there were ad hoc attempts regarding inclusion.

3.2. Disability Services Unit

Managers mentioned that it would be beneficial if colleges could have fully-fledged units that facilitate inclusion of students with disabilities. The managers' responses illustrate the perception that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) does little to support colleges to establish the units. Disability Services Units are needed to facilitate inclusion and integration of students with disabilities. As long as the institutions are not fully transformed, the need for such units will remain. The establishment of disability units involves massive funding from Government and other stakeholders (e.g. the private sector) as there is a need for recruiting specialized personnel and the building of disability infrastructures. Since colleges do not have autonomy (Mothapo, 2019), their funding is allocated mainly for certain programmes (DHET, 2016). Moreover, they do not take their own decisions, rather they work in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education [DBE] (Kraak et al., 2016).

3.3. Partnerships with schools

The findings indicated that managers saw the need to establish partnerships with schools so that they share their best practices. Additionally, colleges should be informed of the programmes that they could offer, especially those which would accommodate all students regardless of their disabilities. Moreover, it is necessary for the colleges to be responsive to community needs.

It is evident that colleges cannot work in isolation, but in collaboration as they are public institutions that should serve the needs of the community. However, it is necessary to dissect and understand the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) policy on inclusion in terms of the alignment of programmes that are offered in colleges to those offered in Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) schools and vice versa. This will establish the different streams - not all students from schools will take the academic stream as some will prefer skills-based subjects because of their learning disabilities. Without partnerships with schools, colleges may miss the advantage of gaining incisive and valuable information to promote inclusion.

3.4. Strategic Planning Management

Some managers recognized that they were the custodians of strategic planning, but others who were campus-based shifted their responsibility to the managers at central office. One manager indicated that if strategic planning is a document that is written to guide the department, then this reveals that the problem stems from within the institutions. Managers understood that one of the strategies they should develop was to manage, review, and evaluate their planning processes. This illustrates that when there is a strategy in place, it would be easier to monitor progress being made (if any) where all role-players would be accountable. Based on the above findings, it is apparent that there was a lack of responsibility and accountability on the part of the strategic management team. Hence, it is imperative that managers acknowledge that they are responsible for the execution of strategic planning, and not to shift the blame onto others.

3.5. Training and development of lecturers

The training and development of lecturers concerning inclusive education was included as one of the significant strategies that could drive inclusive education implementation. Managers realized that lecturers were key people who deal with students daily and therefore they should be capacitated to create inclusive classrooms. The findings illustrate the lack of responsibility on the part of managers. Since lecturers are core personnel at colleges, managers have the responsibility to recognize their professional development needs as this is provided for in the DBE's budget (Kraak et al., 2016).

3.6. Development of policies

It emerged from the findings that there is an urgent need to develop and revise policies that guide the process of inclusive education. These policies should address matters related to infrastructure, fundraising, admission, and ongoing support of students with disabilities. Managers understood the significance of policies on the implementation of inclusive education. They also were informed about the challenges that may lead to ineffective implementation. There seems to be gaps and anomalies in terms of guidelines in colleges resulting in not executing the mandate of the college in terms of the implementation of inclusive education. This can also be due to the lack of interpretation of policies and guidelines on the implementation of inclusive education, in addition to the lack of resources.

3.7. Fundraising drive

Fundraising initiatives were identified as a strategy that could assist colleges to enhance inclusive education. All participants acknowledge that colleges were not treated as autonomous as universities, thus the use of funds was restricted. Managers' responses illustrated the need for solid fundraising plans. Colleges have the right to adopt initiatives to raise additional funds. These findings demonstrated a lack of vision and initiative from college management when it comes to raising funds. Even if the colleges depend on the Department (DHET) for funds, they have the principals who are the accounting officers to consult to raise further funds, especially for inclusive education. Hence, principals are supposed to envision the future needs of the college, and to take the initiative to boost funding for colleges. In the process of document analysis, it was revealed that capacitating teaching staff towards fundraising initiatives was part of the set of strategic objectives. Although policies that were approved in 2019 were listed, none spoke to inclusive education in terms of support structures for students with disabilities and the establishment of a Disability Services Unit.

4. Conclusion

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) managers generally agreed that inclusive education is predominantly a need that has to be astutely managed at all colleges to promote access to students with disabilities. Findings revealed that there was insufficient support for students with disabilities, and the lack of the implementation of strategies to increase access concerning inclusive education. This paper suggests strategies for the formation of support structures, partnerships with schools, the establishment of Disability Services Units, development and reviewing of policies, fundraising drives, and effective management and monitoring of strategic planning processes to enhance inclusive education implementation. From a Department (DHET) perspective, this research assists in providing insights into how to strategize and manage the implementation of inclusion in TVET colleges. Since TVET colleges are institutions that are mandated to accommodate the diversity of students, managers who view colleges as not having autonomy, should circumvent this barrier by being innovative in their responsibility as custodians of strategic management in colleges. The strategy of establishing the Disability Services Units can be viewed as an example to measure the success regarding the access of students with disabilities in colleges. Future research should assess the experiences of students with disabilities in TVET colleges which should give an indication of the effectiveness of the Disability Services Units. This research study contributes to current literature by suggesting an integrated strategy to implement inclusive education in TVET colleges.

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