

A comparative perspective on teacher attitude-constructs that impact on inclusive education in South Africa and Sweden

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This article is based on joint research, between academics from South Africa and Sweden, comparing the influence of South African and Swedish teachers' attitudes towards the practical application of inclusive education (IE) in the classroom. The aim of the study was to identify and investigate problem areas pertaining to teachers' attitudes to IE. Attitudes often relate to interaction with others. This study departs from Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, which deals with the influence of people's attitudes and attitude change. In this research teachers from South Africa and Sweden completed the same questionnaire on perceptions pertaining to IE in their school system. A number of attitude-constructs were derived from the data via exploratory factor analysis methodology. Attitude-constructs included policy issues and specialised support; practical implementation of IE; teacher support structures; teachers' receptiveness of IE implementation; feasibility of proposed IE practices; and role of special schools in an IE environment. Negative responses to some of the attitude constructs identified problem areas in Swedish and South African inclusive systems. The comparative nature of the work enabled the researchers to suggest remedial action within each country's socio-economic setting, and in this way affect change in teacher attitudes.

Introduction

The philosophy of IE drew attention at a conference held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 and another in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. The application of an IE policy challenged all nations to provide quality education for all learners, including those with special needs (Kuyini & Desai, 2007:104). However, each government interprets international guidance and ultimately national policies on IE in terms of its own history, traditions, values and structures. It is ultimately the teacher in the classroom situation who has to implement a government's policy.

The role of the teacher in the application of a government's policy cannot be emphasized too much. According to the Swedish authors Jerlinder, Danermark and Gill (2010:45), the role of teachers as facilitators of inclusion and managers of IE environments is crucial. The same can be said of inclusion in the South African context. Engelbrecht, Oswald and Forlin (2006: 122) emphasise the importance of schools principals' leadership roles in effecting bringing about change. This should foster a climate of collegiality and collaboration among teachers and a culture of support.

This article is based on a joint research project that originated as a result of the involvement of academics from the University of Stockholm in the training of teachers in IE in South Africa. The South African academics acted as two of the many trainers used during the in-service teacher training. This training was part of a field test on the implementation of White Paper 6 which was mainly funded by Swedish and Finnish donors. This project came to an end

in July 2009. During discussions between the Swedish and South African academics the attitude of teachers to IE repeatedly surfaced and the authors of this article eventually realised that in both South Africa and Sweden the ways in which teachers experience inclusion in their classrooms are pivotal to the success of IE in a country (Department of Education, 2001).

Although research on teachers' attitudes to IE has been conducted in both countries, the attitudes of teachers have not been compared and evaluated in a joint research project using the same IE attitudes questionnaire. The questions used in the questionnaire gave rise to the formation of attitude-constructs that will be discussed in the research methodology.

The current research was therefore undertaken to compare teachers' attitudes in South Africa and Sweden. The research not only provided interesting insights into teachers' attitudes, but the researchers from Sweden and South Africa also realised that their countries could learn from each other. Research publications by both parties, which reflect the perspectives of the two countries, are furthermore envisioned.

The research conducted should be considered within the social model of disability. This model of disability shifts the focus from medical to social intervention which is what is happening in the Swedish and South African school systems. The point of departure of the social model perspective is that barriers arise because of the interaction between people, in the case of this research learners at school and their environments. The environments include *inter alia*, policies, cultures, infrastructures social and economic status. These environments can have a direct influence on the progress of learners (Booth, 2001:19).

IE in South Africa and Sweden

In South Africa and in Sweden, IE forms part of the education policies of the national governments. Sweden along with other Scandinavian countries has a long tradition and an active policy of inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities in their society and schools. In terms of national legislation all schools for all children (Moen, Nilssen & Weidemann, 2007:284) must have IE and it has thus been part of the education system for a long time. Previous changes in IE in Sweden consisted of reforming the special education system so that its services and programmes could be extended to regular schools. Thus a unitary education system was created that responds to special needs in education of Swedish children. Sweden emphasises regular education for learners with special needs and does not embrace a pedagogy of separation (Michailakis, 2004:146). In Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries there is therefore a move away from special schools. The Scandinavian countries use terminology such as 'comprehensive schools', 'common schools for all' and 'schools that suit every child' (Flem & Keller, 2000:198).

As far as policies are concerned, Sweden advocates IE, which means that the vast majority of Swedish learners with disabilities attend mainstream schools. But there are voices in Sweden that say the aspirations of IE have not been met in all instances. According to Persson (2008: 345), the goal of inclusion in Sweden to allow all learners to attend mainstream schools that have been part of the public policy for decades, has not been matched by developments in practice at school level. According to the National Agency of Education, evidence of this trend is an increase in special schools placements and extra provision for such placements during the same period (Jerlinder, Danermark & Gill, 2010:47).

South Africa is a newcomer to IE. In South Africa it originated from a rights perspective that was informed by liberal, critical and progressively democratic thinking. It originated as part of the process of transforming the education system in South Africa to be more democratic

and inclusive. In 2001, the South African Ministry of Education released *Building an IE and Training System — Education White Paper 6: Special needs education* (Department of Education, 2001). This white paper has now become the official policy of the Department of Education. It advocates the establishment of so called full-service schools in which provision is made for all the types of education needs that may hamper learners' progress at school. The objective is to change as many as possible of the existing special schools into resource centres (Department of Education, 2001:29). These resource centres will provide resources to surrounding schools so that learners with special needs can be supported in these schools. The expertise of teachers in special schools will also be used to train and equip teachers in the surrounding schools to support all learners in their classrooms (Department of Education, 2001:30).

In South Africa as a developing country, it is accepted that special educational needs derive from intrinsic factors which are predominantly associated with disabilities or health, as well as extrinsic factors. The HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, for instance, is an integral part of intrinsic barriers, but could also be regarded as an extrinsic barrier when it comes to the support of children who have been orphaned because of HIV/AIDS or because of a shortage of teachers or sick teachers in some schools. Extrinsic factors that can cause barriers to learning include socio-economic factors, unsafe environments, non-involvement of parents, lack of healthcare facilities and factors in the school such as overfull classrooms, untrained teachers and an inappropriate language for learning and teaching (Engelbrecht, Oswald & Forlin, 2006:121). These extrinsic factors are associated with learners in disadvantaged environments (Naicker, 2006:2-3).

In Sweden, however, special needs in education have been associated with disabilities as intrinsic factors. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of learners with intellectual disabilities in secondary schools. This increase may be ascribed to a rise in psychic and psychosocial problems among adults, unemployment, the divorce rate and economic problems that impact on the home environment (Michailakis, 2004:146-160). Hence, there is a growing awareness in Sweden that extrinsic factors such as social and cultural influences can give rise to learners with special educational needs. This is in contrast to the context in South Africa.

According to Swart and Pettipher (2005) important characteristics of IE are the effective utilisation of existing resources and increasing additional resources. Owing to the legacy of apartheid and the unequal distribution of resources, which are still perpetuated by the differences between rich and poor in South Africa, many schools lack certain facilities and resources to support all learners, especially learners with special needs. This hampers the progress of learners (Engelbrecht *et al.*, 2006:128). Two of the objectives of the IE Field Test: 2004–2009 were to establish one full-service school per district and to provide these full-service schools with the necessary resources to accommodate a diverse range of learning needs and to strengthen education support services to provide coordinated support to all schools (Department of Education, 2009:4). However, these objectives have not been fully achieved. Schools in Sweden have been well equipped to cater for the educational needs of learners with special needs. Municipalities responsible for the provision of funding for resources and equipment have, however, decided to reduce economic resources to schools. This has contributed to Sweden's current educational problems (Michailakis, 2004:146-160).

Research by Kuyini and Desai (2007:110) highlights the fact that policies and even sound policies will not ensure the success of IE in schools. Teachers and teachers' attitudes play a

pivotal role in ensuring the success of IE because successful inclusion hinges on developing and sustaining positive attitudes. In Sweden there has been a positive attitude to inclusion among teachers. However, the face of IE is slowly changing in Sweden as reported by Jerlinder and co-authors, and there is uncertainty about whether teachers' attitudes to IE will remain positive (Jerlinder *et al.*, 2010:52-53). Many teachers in South Africa are ill prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners — hence the development of a negative attitude towards inclusion. This is exacerbated by the lack of strategies for teacher support (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007:2). Heiman (2001:46) believes that systematic training and intensive preparation would improve teachers' attitudes to inclusion.

The influence of attitudes

An attitude is usually defined as a tendency to react positively or negatively towards a certain object, be it a person, idea or situation. Attitudes are closely related to one's opinions and are based upon previous experiences. Attitudes often relate in some way to interaction with others and represent a vital link between social and cognitive psychology. Even though Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance was developed during the late 1950s, it is still one of the best known and most researched frameworks pertaining to attitude change (TIP: Concepts, 2010:1).

Festinger believes that if a person holds two cognitions that are psychologically inconsistent, he or she experiences dissonance. This experience of dissonance is unpleasant and people usually struggle to find a way to change one or both cognitions to make them more consonant. Festinger thus managed to forge a dynamic marriage between the cognitive and the motivational (Massaro, 1997:128). Festinger underscores the importance of cognition in social psychology. If teachers' cognition is addressed by supplying them with well-planned information about IE, it could influence their motivation which could ultimately change their attitudes. Attitudes are deemed to be judgments and judgments develop on the ABC model, i.e. affect, behaviour and cognition (Attitude (Psychology), 2010).

Research has shown that there is a correlation between positive attitudes of teachers to the mainstreaming of learners with special needs and the support they receive from management, as well as other more technical variables. These variables include having more resources, smaller classes, more time available to design special teaching materials, and opportunities for personal development gained from further learning (Talmor, Reiter & Feigin, 2005:116).

As stated earlier, the primary condition for successful inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom is a change from negative to positive attitudes of regular school teachers towards learners with special needs and their inclusion in the regular classroom. Another necessary condition for the successful implementation of inclusion is continuous support and assistance to teachers by others (Talmor *et al.*, 2005:216).

The authors of this article therefore deemed it necessary to determine what factors influence teachers' attitudes to IE in South Africa and in Sweden. It was believed that by addressing reasons for negative attitudes to IE among teachers and by supplying well-planned training that considers the attitude constructs relating to IE, as well as the necessary support needs of teachers, positive attitudes to IE could be established and maintained. This is necessary to ensure the success of IE in any school situation.

Aims of the study and problem statement

The aim of this research project is to discern and compare common and country-specific teacher attitudes to IE in Sweden and South Africa. It will then be possible to determine the

implications of these attitudes for policies and practices in the historical and economic contexts of South Africa, a developing country, and Sweden, a developed country. The long-term aim is to use knowledge of the teachers' attitudes for training purposes by providing relevant knowledge and information to these teachers so that they can develop a positive attitude to IE.

The preceding argument is based on the fact that most researchers agree that a crucial condition for the successful inclusion of learners with special needs into mainstream classrooms is a change in teacher attitude (Talmor *et al.*, 2005:216). because so few South African teachers have been trained to teach inclusive classes, they tend to feel inadequate (Bothma Gravett & Swart, 2000:201; Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettipher, 2002:180).

In South Africa, the implementation of the outcomes-based, revised national curriculum (premised on the principle of IE), has compounded the problem and placed an additional demand on teachers. Martinez (2003:478) states that in view of increasing inclusive practices in both South Africa and Sweden, researchers should investigate the best means to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion. Teachers have to be equipped to implement IE in both countries. These concerns prompted the authors to embark on this study.

The research problem therefore centres on the identification of attitude constructs in IE and simultaneously identifying problem areas in IE as they present themselves through negative attitudes towards areas of IE. It is envisaged that by addressing problem areas reflected in negative attitudes, attitudes can be swayed and inclusion promoted. It is envisioned that recommendations of this research will contribute to equipping teachers with the necessary tools to implement IE effectively. Cognisance is taken of the differences in economic position, population composition and educational culture in South African and Swedish society.

Research methodology and hypothesis formulation

The problem statement implies that teachers develop negative attitudes when they encounter stumbling blocks in IE implementation, particularly those linked to policy, economics, population composition and cultural issues. If problem areas can be identified, understood and addressed against this background, teacher attitudes towards IE could be improved. Based on the argument above, a broad research hypothesis was formulated:

Underlying IE attitude-constructs, referred to as IE problem areas, exist, and once identified, understood and addressed, will sway negative teacher attitudes to IE implementation in South Africa and Sweden.

The hypothesis implies that the existence of IE attitude-constructs has to be investigated and teacher perceptions towards these identified constructs evaluated to monitor progress towards effective IE implementation in both countries.

Development of a measuring instrument

The South African authors of this study developed an IE perception questionnaire during exploratory research in South Africa during 2004. This questionnaire formed the basis for discussions in initial, collaborative efforts between South Africa and Sweden. The joint South African/Swedish questionnaire that evolved from these discussions was used to validate and refine IE attitude-constructs that transpired during the initial South African research in 2004. It was envisaged that IE constructs would collectively organise problem areas in IE.

In the current study, data on potential problem areas in IE were therefore collected by means of an improved IE questionnaire which was based on the 2004 South African questionnaire. A wide range of IE issues relevant to both countries was probed.

Issues identified in this way could then be collectively interpreted by comparing the IE

constructs from an implementation phase perspective in South Africa to a well-established IE systems perspective in Sweden. Cross-country similarities and dissimilarities could also be interpreted against the intrinsic and interactive social systems in both countries. This argument guided the analysis methodology outlined in the next section.

The 105 responses to the research questionnaire were evaluated on a five-point Lickert scale, with a rating score of 1, indicating strong disagreement, to a rating score of 5, indicating strong agreement. The original English questionnaire was translated, by the Swedish authors, into Swedish before it was administered in Sweden. Language compliance between the countries to ensure a reliable measuring instrument was carefully assessed. The impact of translation and the finer nuances of language and different educational and cultural structures across countries were considered. The translation was evaluated to ensure that exactly the same meaning was conveyed to both language groups. This necessitated the omission of certain 2004 questionnaire items from the analysis. The questionnaire was originally administered in English in South Africa. Most teachers in South Africa are proficient in English because English is the language of learning and teaching in most South African mainstream schools, and teachers also receive all policy documents and correspondence from the Department of Education in English. Since the bulk of the statistical analyses were conducted in Sweden, the findings of the analyses were translated into English as well. During cross country visits between the researchers of Sweden and South Africa, the research and the research findings were discussed in depth to iron out any discrepancies that could have arisen because of the translation work and to ensure that the two statisticians were in agreement with the presentation and interpretation of the findings.

The target population of the research was teachers involved in IE implementation. In South Africa, teachers attending a national conference on IE in mainstream schools in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal in 2008, were sampled ($n = 500$). In Sweden (2008) questionnaires were distributed to 200 teachers in mainstream schools in three educational regions. To comply with ethical guidelines of confidentiality and informed consent, the questionnaire indicated that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality would be adhered to. Since all completed questionnaires were included in the study, sampling was regarded as purposive. A total of 503 questionnaires were analysed representing 375 South African and 128 Swedish responses.

The quantitative nature of the data collected in the research called for a quantitative research design (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2005:137; 166).

The objective of the questionnaire was to evaluate attitude-constructs of teachers regarding IE and as such the research departed from a positivist philosophical stance. The approach was followed in an attempt to achieve a reliable and valid enquiry into the social sciences (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:14). According to the positivistic paradigm, reality is independent of the knower. Objective reality exists and can only be known by objective means. Reality is inherently ordered and the main aim of positivism is to control and predict human and natural phenomena (Peca, 2000:1-2)

Analysis methodology

Once the frequency distributions of the biographical attributes of respondents had been determined, the analysis strategy focused on the identification of underlying attitude-constructs common to both countries, and, on cross country comparisons of extent-of-agreement measure regarding these attitude constructs. To this effect the following analyses were performed:

- Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the combined South African/Swedish data set to identify attitude-constructs.
- Scale reliability testing was done to validate the internal consistency reliability of these constructs.
- Means and standard deviations per country were calculated on individual questionnaire items (grouped according to constructs). Cross-country standardised differences and *t* tests were calculated to measure perception differences and/or agreement between countries.
- Attitude construct tables were compiled which summarized the above results for each of the attitude constructs.

The SAS (Statistical Analysis System) software package, version 9.1, was used most in both countries to conduct analyses.

Analysis and deductions

Exploratory analysis on biographical characteristics described the South African sample as teachers with less general teaching experience than their Swedish counterparts (59% compared to 30% Swedes with less than ten years' teaching experience) and proportionately slightly less qualified with 87% South Africans and 83% Swedes in possession of a three or four-year educational diploma. The Swedish respondents in general had more experience of teaching learners with barriers to their learning than their South African counterparts (63% Swedes and 80% South Africans had less than ten years' experience). Biographically, the Swedish respondents presented a slightly more experienced and qualified component of the sample.

The exploratory factor analysis conducted on the questionnaire data identified six attitude-constructs. The factor analysis was performed by the Swedish component of the research team. These constructs are described by subsets of questionnaire items and addressed different aspects of IE which influenced teacher attitude. These included,

- **Specialised support policy issues in IE.** This attitude-construct described respondents' perceptions of the implications of policy issues on specialised support in IE.
- **Implementation of an IE policy.** This construct probed respondents' perceptions of the implications of IE implementation
- **Teacher support structures.** This construct dealt with teachers' perceptions of IE support structures.
- **IE receptiveness, which is dependent on IE practice and policy knowledge.** This construct evaluated respondents' receptiveness towards the system of IE in schools.
- **Feasibility of IE practices.** Respondents' perception of the feasibility of IE implementation was evaluated in this construct.
- **Mainstreamed IE and the role of special schools.** This construct evaluated teachers' perception of the role of special schools in IE.

Scale reliability testing conducted on the subsets of questionnaire items describing each of the above attitude-constructs produced Cronbach alpha coefficients ranging between 0.6 and 0.81 which verified internal consistency reliability for each attitude-construct.

Once the IE attitude constructs had been appropriately named and internal consistency reliability established, comparisons between the two countries could be made for each IE attitude-construct. The general level of agreement on each attitude construct between countries was compared, as well as agreement/disagreement ratings between countries on a specific questionnaire item within the subset of questionnaire items that described a attitude construct.

In comparisons between countries standardised response differences were used. Response means and standard deviations on questionnaire items describing the IE constructs were calculated for both countries. The difference between paired South African/Swedish response means for each item was calculated and divided by a pooled standard deviation for the relevant item to obtain a standardised difference statistic. *t* Tests were conducted to establish significant deviation from zero for each individual standardised difference. Only questionnaire items that displayed large (i.e. significantly different perceptions) and small differences (i.e. similar perceptions) within each attitude construct were further investigated and discussed.

The analysis results for each attitude-construct were summarized in a table of agreement rating means (Sweden and South Africa) and standardised differences (between the countries) for each questionnaire item that described the particular attitude construct. Results of the first attitude-construct, namely, *Policy issues on specialised support in IE*, are presented in Table 1. The table was included to illustrate how results were interpreted for the specialised support policy issues attitude-construct. Tables for the other attitude constructs are not presented, and only the deductions derived from the tables are discussed. (The deductions were derived in similar fashion to those illustrated in Table 1.)

Attitude-construct one: *Specialised support policy in IE*

The overall perception of IE and the role of specialised support linked to policy regulation were rather neutral to somewhat negatively perceived by respondents from both countries, with Swedish participants significantly more negative (overall mean perception, 2.84) than their South African counterparts (overall mean perception, 3.07).

Respondents' attitude was explained in more detail by singling out the largest and smallest standardised differences between the two countries in Table 1. These figures pointed to significant perception differences (large standardised differences) between South Africa and Sweden; or similar perceptions (small standardised differences) held by the countries on issues in the specialised support construct.

The following questionnaire items indicated significant differences in the extent of agreement between countries:

Q12: Mainstream schools cannot provide for learners with impairments (Sweden (SWE) agrees statistically significantly more than South Africa).

Q70: The school should supply assistants to help with individual learners (SA agreed more strongly than SWE).

The following items indicated significant cross-country perception differences regarding the extent of indifference/disagreement included:

Q20: Barrier learners should be accommodated in special schools (SWE disagreed, SA undecided+).

Q58: Lower educational standards must be provided for barrier-learners (SWE disagreed, SA undecided).

Q64: Apparatus should be placed out of learners' reach (SWE disagreed, SA undecided).

Q75: Using special apparatus in class disturb other learners (SWE disagreed, SA undecided).

Q89: Special schools should focus on problems of the learner (SWE undecided, SA agreed).

Table 1 Attitude construct one: Policy issues on Specialised Support in IE

| SA | SWE | Std diff. | Score means | | Item description |
|-------------|-----|--------------|---------------|---------------|--|
| | | | SWE | SA | |
| 12n | 10 | -0.46 | 4.38 a | 3.88 a | Mainstream schools cannot provide for learners with impairments |
| 19 | 15 | -0.10 | 3.71 a | 3.60 a | I believe specific tests should be used to place learners in special schools |
| 20 | 16 | 0.61 | 2.33 d | 3.13 u | Learners experiencing barriers to learning should be accommodated in special schools |
| 50 | 43 | 0.12 | 2.65 u | 2.80 u | Learners must be placed in homogeneous groups according to their ability |
| 51 | 44 | 0.06 | 2.53 u | 2.61 u | Learners with special needs must be taught separately |
| 52 | 45 | 0.02 | 3.25 u | 3.29 u | Placement tests should be used to place learners in special schools |
| 55 | 48 | 0.14 | 2.12 d | 2.29 d | Only teachers interested in inclusion need to attend regular workshops |
| 56 | 49 | 0.14 | 2.69 u | 2.89 u | Learners with visual impairments need teaching in special classes |
| 58 | 51 | 0.49 | 1.92 d | 2.57 u | Lower standards of education must be provided for learners who experience barriers |
| 59 | 52 | 0.10 | 3.42 u | 3.54 a | There should be different expectations for learners experiencing barriers |
| 60 | 53 | 0.27 | 2.45 u | 2.79 u | Learners with hearing impairments need teaching in separate classes |
| 64 | 56 | 0.43 | 2.07 d | 2.63 u | Apparatus should be placed out of learners' reach |
| 68 | 59 | 0.27 | 2.47 u | 2.82 u | It is impossible to be available for one-to-one teaching |
| 70 | 61 | 0.38 | 3.60 a | 4.00 a | The school should supply assistants to help with individual learners |
| 75 | 64 | 0.41 | 2.05 d | 2.46 u | Usage of special apparatus in class causes disturbance to other learners |
| 81 | 68 | 0.17 | 3.14 u | 3.35 u | Special schools should have special curricula |
| 89 | 74 | 0.36 | 3.17 u | 3.58 a | Special schools should focus on problems of the learner |
| 104 | 87 | 0.16 | 2.28 d | 2.44 d | It is impossible to modify curricula to accommodate learners experiencing barriers |
| 105 | 88 | -0.04 | 3.75 a | 3.71 a | Specially trained teachers must teach learners experiencing barriers |
| Mean | | 0.19 | 2.84 u | 3.07 u | In general opinions on barrier learners requiring special support services are unsure/ divided (The mean standardised difference over the construct items measures a general perception on the attitude construct of barrier learners requiring specialised support) |

Table 1 continued

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Legend Lickert rating scale</p> <p>1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = undecided 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree</p> <p>Acronyms legend</p> <p>u = undecided a = agree d = disagree</p> | <p>Legend for standardised differences</p> <p>Bold: Paired mean scores differ significantly <i>Italics bold:</i> Paired mean scores do not differ significantly</p> <p>Note: Std. Differences > 0.10 differ significantly from one another. Only items with the greatest significant differences and items which seem to agree strongly are indicated below</p> |
|--|--|

Items indicating similar cross-country perceptions (no significance) included the following:

Q52: Placement tests should be used to place learners in special schools (both countries undecided).

Q105: Specially trained teachers must teach barrier learners (both countries agree).

The strong agreement perception issues (although varying in extent of agreement) seem to indicate there is a plea for specialised support in mainstream schooling (Q12, Q70 and Q105). Concurrently, respondents' neutral/negative perceptions on other specialised support policy issues could express indecision from a South African perspective on how policy issues impact on IE implementation (IE implementation being new to SA) to dissatisfaction from a Swedish perspective.

Attitude-construct two: *Implementation of an IE policy*

Eight questionnaire items (Qs 26, 28, 36, 37, 42, 94, 98n and 102) contributed to explaining the implementation attitude-construct. Both countries expressed a general indifference towards IE implementation (overall mean scores of 2.7 and 2.8). The extent of indifference between the two countries was statistically significant on the following issues:

Q37: Inclusion works well in countries where it has been implemented (SWE undecided, SA almost agreed).

Q42: Teachers are prepared for inclusive classroom management (SWE disagreed, SA undecided).

Q102: Learners requiring high-intensity support must be accommodated in mainstream schools (both countries undecided, SA significantly more towards disagreement).

Unanimous indifference was indicated for

Q28: District-based professional support services are adequate.

A slightly more negative attitude seems to have been expressed by Swedish respondents who had functioned in an IE environment for longer and dealt with IE policy realities. South Africans' indecision could be interpreted as apprehension about outcomes yet to be experienced.

Although the respondents in both countries reflected a negative attitude to the implementation of an IE policy, their perceptions should be considered against different historical and economic backgrounds. South Africa remains a new role player in IE, and as such the respondents were unsure about the future implications of IE implementation. Their perceptions reflect a South African reality. For example, South Africa, as a developing country has more

learners with barriers to learning who have to be accommodated in the mainstream schools. Learners in South Africa are hampered by both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning, including factors such as socioeconomic status, home and school environments, health issues relating to HIV/AIDS and inadequate teacher training. The imbalance in the proportion of learners with barriers to learning in the two countries serves to illustrate the environmental differences between the countries. Swedish teachers function in a well-established IE system and IE policies are implemented in terms of different environmental realities.

Attitude-construct three: *Teacher support structures*

Twelve questionnaire items described the third attitude-construct. Both countries expressed general agreement on the importance of teacher support structures (SWE and SA overall rating means of 4.01 and 3.86). However, Sweden's extent of agreement was significantly stronger on the following questionnaire items:

- Q24: District support teams should provide professional support.
- Q27: School support teams are necessary to support teachers.
- Q57: I feel that schools should receive a separate budget special needs.
- Q93: There should be a compulsory special needs component in teacher training.

The countries were in agreement on the following:

- Q48: Barrier learners should be assessed in order to identify weaknesses.
- Q52: Placement tests should be used to place learners in special schools.
- Q96: Special schools should continue to exist.

he positive attitudes expressed towards specialised and professional support and services and training and organisational support, emphasise teachers' dependency on specialised services for effective IE implementation.

Attitude-construct four: *IE receptiveness is dependent on appropriate IE practices and policy knowledge*

Six questionnaire items (Qs 10, 15, 25, 43, 54 and 99) contributed towards explaining respondents receptiveness towards IE. Respondents generally reflected a reserved receptiveness with mean Swedish/South African agreement ratings of 3.42 and 3.50, respectively.

Although positive, significant differences in attitudes were expressed on the statements:

- Q25: Teachers in special schools are properly skilled in special needs (SWE significantly more in agreement than SA).
- Q43: My school's policy makes provision for IE (SWE undecided, SA agreed).
- Q99: The current ethos of my school considers barriers to learning (SWE undecided, SA agreed).

The two countries agreed on the following item:

- Q54: I am knowledgeable about assistive devices, eg hearing aids (both unsure).

Attitude-construct five: *Feasibility of IE*

Eight items (Qs 7, 39, 44n, 61, 62, 69, 73n and 101n) contributed towards explaining the feasibility attitude-construct. Respondents generally expressed reservations with SWE and SA mean scores of 3.05 and 2.88.

Significantly different perceptions were expressed on the following:

- Q44: Teachers need guidelines on IE implementation in my school (SA significantly more in agreement)

- Q101: An inclusive policy is not necessary in every school (SA significantly more in agreement)
- Q7: The South African School's Act prevents inclusion (both disagreed, SA significantly stronger).
- Q39: Inclusive practices demand little financial support (both disagreed, SA significantly more)
- Q61: Learners with physical disabilities must be seated near the door (both undecided, SWE undecided-, SA undecided+).
- Q62: Cooperative learning only applies to learners without impairments (both disagreed, SA significantly stronger).

The relatively decisive perceptions expressed on IE guidelines, policy, the Schools Act, accommodation of learner disabilities, finances and tutoring techniques (which all act as feasibility indicators) indicate that teachers have seriously considered the feasibility of IE. The degree difference in decisiveness between the countries could again be attributed to different educational and historical backgrounds.

Attitude-construct six: *IE in mainstream schools and the role of special schools*

Four items (Qs 12, 13, 85 and 99) helped to explain the last attitude-construct. A generally positive perception was reflected with SWE-SA mean rating scores of 3.92 and 3.85.

Clarification of the positive perception singled out the following:

- Q12: Mainstream schools must provide for learners with impairments (both agreed, SWE significantly stronger).
- Q85: Special schools should become resources centres for mainstream schools (both tended to agree SA significantly stronger).
- Q88: Special schools should provide professional support to neighbourhood schools (both agreed).

The backing of specialised support provided by special schools appears to be captured in the positive perceptions expressed.

Two limitations which transpired in the research pertains to the analysis strategy and are included as a concluding comment: The findings of the study are limited to the teachers and the schools involved in the research and therefore generalisation of research findings cannot be applied to the entities of the two countries *per se*. The translation of the questionnaire could also be regarded as a limitation of the research although great care was taken to ensure that questions conveyed the same meaning in both languages. Generalised conclusions could therefore not be made, but the researchers are of the opinion that this research has paved the way for further collaborative research.

Concluding discussion

In the discussion which follows, research findings on each attitude-construct are discussed and related to the existing body of knowledge on IE with the purpose of broadening insight and understanding of the driving forces in IE.

Analysis findings related to Specialised Support, construct one, indicated that respondents expressed a need for specialised support and perceived IE policy on specialised support to be restrictive or ineffective. From a South African perspective, the plea for support (which agrees with findings of Engelbrecht (2006:257)) is, to some extent, addressed by the principles set out in White Paper No 6. According to this, teachers from special schools who are experts in

dealing with aspects of barriers to learning and development, will in future assist in training mainstream teachers to plan and provide support to learners with barriers to learning in their classrooms. South African respondents' indecisiveness regarding specialised support could be ascribed to the fact that the notion of inclusive classrooms is relatively new to them.

Respondents in both countries furthermore reflected a negative attitude towards IE Policy Implementation, which represented construct two. Their perceptions should, however, be viewed against their different historical and economic backgrounds. South Africa is still a new role player in IE and therefore unsure about future implications of IE policy implementation. Engelbrecht expressed the same opinion on this matter (2006:256). Respondents' perceptions reflect the reality in South Africa. South Africa has proportionately more learners with barriers to learning who have to be accommodated in mainstream schools because intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning exist in the South African school system. Engelbrecht *et al.* (2006: 126-128) list several learning barriers, for example, language barriers associated with South African school policy on the language of teaching and learning. The imbalance in the proportion of learners with barriers to learning in the two countries illustrates the environmental differences between the two countries. Swedish teachers function in a well-established IE system with established support services and IE policies operating in a different economic reality. Jerlinder *et al.* (2010:47) and O'Brien (2007:2-4), for example, mention that Sweden, on the contrary, is currently experiencing a decrease in the number of learners admitted to special schools.

It could be inferred from the attitudes of respondents reported on construct three (Structures for Effective IE implementation) that mainstream teachers rely heavily on various support structures. Engelbrecht agrees with the statement within the South African context (2007:127). However, South African teachers are still to evaluate and experience the impact of the relatively new support structures as opposed to support services that have been operational within the Swedish education system for many years. The significantly more positive Swedish perception ratings confirm that Swedish teachers have experienced the benefits of readily available specialised support. Moen *et al.* (2007) confirm that Sweden has been exposed to an inclusive environment for many years.

Analysis results furthermore indicated that the respondents in both countries agreed equally that Special Schools (construct six) have a vital role to play in the education systems of their countries, and this response can be attributed to the fact that expertise of teachers is available at these schools. The South African education policy has made provision for providing this expertise by stipulating in White Paper 6 that in future, special schools will serve as training and resources centres for mainstream teachers.

Regarding IE Receptiveness (construct four), the positive respondent perception reported on the specialised knowledge base in special schools (Q25), as compared to a reserved respondent attitude expressed regarding their own knowledge base on IE (Q43, 54) seem to indicate to IE awareness, or cautious receptiveness, which can be linked to cultural differences. As previously mentioned, South Africa is still in the IE implementation phase and therefore more aware of policy and knowledge base issues — which is reflected in the positive responses — while Swedish respondents are more relaxed about IE policies since they have already dealt with these. School policies in South Africa have changed rapidly since 1994, (Engelbrecht, 2007:126) and everybody involved in education has to be informed about new and changing policies. South African respondents can therefore be regarded as the more receptive group.

The results clearly indicate that IE Feasibility (construct five) has received serious con-

sideration, albeit from different cultural and historical viewpoints. For example, South African teachers disagreed significantly more strongly with the statement that IE practices will demand little financial support. In a developing country with limited financial means, they are aware that sufficient money is seldom available for important educational matters. This could have serious implications for the success of IE in South Africa in addressing extrinsic barriers to learning such as poor socioeconomic living conditions and inadequate school facilities which will require financial support from the central and provincial governments. In Sweden funding to this end used to be more readily available as indicated by O'Brien (2007:6).

The teachers' acknowledgement that learners with impairments have to be accepted into mainstream schooling, and their decisive attitude towards assistance from special schools in accomplishing the objective, indicate that the Role of Special Schools in successful IE Implementation (construct six) is substantial and acknowledged by many. Jerlinder *et al.* (2006:52) also acknowledge the role of special schools. Prior to the introduction of the new policy on IE, the teachers and management of mainstream schools in South Africa often 'dumped' learners with barriers to learning in special schools regardless of how serious the barrier was or if it could have been addressed in a mainstream school. The new policies on IE thus require a change in attitude on the part of many teachers.

Based on Kuyini and Desai's (2007:110) statement that "successful inclusion hinges on developing and sustaining positive attitudes" and on the deductions derived in the study that identified IE issues that affect teachers' attitudes towards IE, a number of recommendations are made to improve and sustain healthy IE attitudes.

The researchers propose that when future recommendations on inclusive practice and pedagogy are made, the opinions of teachers should always be considered. For example, the contents of in-service IE teacher training should not solely depend on what administrators — who are not in the classroom — deem important. The opinions and input of teachers should be carefully considered because their thinking could be pivotal in the successful implementation of IE (Viadero, 2007:17). This also applies to pre-service teacher training. Jerlinder *et al.*, (2006:46) agree with this approach. Teaching staff at institutions of higher education should be well informed on the practical application of IE in real life classroom situation.

The analysis results on the individual questionnaire items of the IE policy implementation construct, construct two, indicated that the South African teachers perceived that their expertise was not sought when IE policies were planned and that they were not consulted when in-service teacher training on IE (the so-called screening, identification, assessment and support document) was compiled and introduced by the National Department of Education. Their morale and attitude should be fostered in this regard by providing updated specialised in-service training modules based on the teachers' needs and requests.

According to Gautem (2001:2), teachers have different expectations of in-service teacher training and different courses should therefore be offered to suit their expectations and needs. As far as Sweden is concerned, it should not be presumed that all teachers in Sweden have had the necessary professional training and development to implement IE policies. They should also receive updated in-service training in IE where applicable.

It should be noted by the authorities in both Sweden and South Africa that the majority of teachers are in favour of including learners with special needs in mainstream schooling. This supports the main objective of IE, namely that all people have equal rights. The principles of IE should be fostered in the education systems of the two countries so that Swedish teachers remain aware of the rights of all their learners and South African teachers embrace human

rights within their new democracy.

It is clear from questions 12, 70 and 105 that teachers are aware that they lack the necessary knowledge and support to address the needs of learners with special needs. In South Africa in particular, where IE has not been part of the pre-1994 school system, teachers often feel threatened and unsure about inclusive practices in their classrooms (see Q102). Teachers from both countries were undecided in this regard, with South Africa leaning significantly more towards disagreement with an inclusive school system. Literature attests to these findings (Jerlinder *et al.*, 2010:46). Although the reasons for the South African teachers' opinion were not investigated in this research project, the researchers are of the opinion that teachers' attitudes in this regard are enhanced by a lack of knowledge, training and eventually a lack of support services. Engelbrecht *et al.* (2006:127) came to the same conclusion. The specific needs of teachers with regard to IE in mainstream schools therefore need to be researched. Information should be obtained at national and district levels to establish a clear picture of teachers' needs and attitudes.

Analysis results of construct three indicated teachers' dependency on specialised services. Therefore, further investigation of the specialised needs of learners with barriers to learning is suggested by the authors. It is also advised that the survey should be repeated as learner demographics change and teachers in South Africa adapt to IE practices.

The researchers postulate that a proper survey of teachers' specific needs could be utilised to address reservations about the feasibility of IE. This notion is supported by the positive stance of Swedish and South African teachers on special schools providing professional support to mainstream schools and acting as resources centres for mainstream schools as indicated in the research findings.

The researchers are of the opinion that pre-schools or early-childhood care centres should stage regular discussions about IE which should lead to the implementation of IE practices in these schools.

It is recommended that IE be supported by the different health departments for early identification of learners who might not progress adequately once they enter the school system. Health departments could, for example, report on learners with visual and hearing impairments. Support for these learners could then be planned in advance and provided as soon as they start their school careers. Support teams that provide support to at-risk learners and district education offices that deal with barriers to learning could likewise be consulted at an early stage.

IE requires financial support which should be wisely invested. Pilot research should be conducted to ensure that money is spent well. Feedback on in-service teacher training should be collected to ensure that teachers' IE needs are addressed and appropriate to the classroom situation.

If research on the abovementioned areas is conducted within a longitudinal framework, IE practices can be monitored, benchmarked, improved and sustained in both South Africa and Sweden in the years to come.

The current research contributed to this vision by addressing the hypothesis stated in the research: attitude-constructs were identified and labelled according to aspects of IE which affect teacher attitudes. Negative perceptions indicated to areas and issues which hamper IE implementation and recommendations could be made to in this regard. Ongoing evaluation of teachers' attitudes (with refinement of the evaluation process) is foreseen as a means of monitoring progress towards a successful IE system in both South Africa and Sweden. This is critical to the success of inclusion in all schools because one of the principal predictors of the

success of including learners with barriers to learning in the mainstream classroom is a positive, motivated attitude of general teachers (Alghazo & Gaad, 2004:94).

Conclusion

A remarkable characteristic of attitude is that, unlike personality, it can change as a function of experience. Teachers' attitudes can be changed if they are provided with well-planned information and the necessary support structures. Theories of attitude have generally constructed attitudes out of clusters of beliefs, but attitudes could also be constructed from the perspective of human information processing. Information then becomes a root term for attitude theories (Foulger 2010:1). Foulger's statement about attitude and information could be adapted to apply to teachers and their attitudes to IE: 'If attitude[s] do reflect our [teachers'] experience of the world, it is reasonable to expect that it is from that experience, from the information we [they] have concerning an attitude object [IE], that we [they] construct attitudes (Foulger 2010:1).

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