

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this research was to explore teachers' perceptions of inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream primary schools in Fiji. Teachers' perceptions are crucial as it determines how students with special needs are perceived and where they are placed to be educated. It also reveals the underlying reasons which could be used in making valid and effective decision for the future of inclusive education.

In addressing the research phenomena this study subsumed to qualitative approach for data collection via semi-structured interviews. This study was conducted in four different mainstream primary schools in Nausori District Fiji, which were practicing inclusion to some extent. A total of eight teachers, two from each school were selected as the participants for this study. The head teachers of respective schools assisted in identifying potential teachers as participants for this research study, maintaining low biasness.

This study found that teachers are knowledgeable and have deeper understanding of inclusive education. All eight teachers were supporting inclusive education and were in favour of inclusion of students with special needs. However, majority of them had reservations due to limited resources and specialists teachers or other personnel's. The study found that teachers that were in favour elucidated the benefits of inclusive education as; better educational outcomes of all students, social development, better peer sharing and collaboration, allowed teachers to upgrade their qualification and increased collaboration amongst them, and it is seen as cost- effective.

In contrary, those teachers with reservations and ambivalent perceptions revealed; lack of specialised teachers' and other resources personnel, negative perceptions of the teachers including to extra workload and students low academic achievements, schools: 1) inaccessible; 2) result oriented: and 3) protecting their image to be the best school. Finally, the finding also revealed that teachers encounter students with diverse cultural backgrounds hence, different cultural beliefs becomes barrier to inclusion. Teachers are vital players in the implementation and practices of inclusiveness therefore their perceptions needs to be supportive. This brings the concerned authorities especially the Ministry of Education and other government departments to provide all relevant resources and training to ensure that they have positive perceptions for sustainable inclusive education.

Key Words: Inclusion, Inclusive Education, Students with Special Needs, Participants.