Managers' challenges on implementing inclusive education: Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges

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Abstract

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges attract a diverse population of students with different backgrounds in terms of culture, social norms, language, disabilities, race, and family structures. All such students have the right to equal access to education. However, there is still limited access and support to students with disabilities in TVET colleges. This paper explores challenges faced by the management of TVET colleges concerning the implementation of inclusive education, specifically for students with disabilities. A case study design within a qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. Two TVET colleges were conveniently selected with ten participants being purposively sampled. Data was collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. Findings revealed that the management of TVET colleges experience challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, funding, lecturer-training, and shortage of staff to support students with disabilities. It was recommended that TVET colleges establish Disability Service Units and recruit trained lecturers or they must train current lecturers to facilitate the learning process of disabled students.

Keywords: accessibility, disabilities , implementation , inclusivity ; rights

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1. Introduction

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are institutions that fall under the umbrella of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). They admit learners with the minimum of a Grade 9 pass for National Vocational Certificate (NCV) programmes, Engineering National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (Nated) programmes, and learners with Grade 12 for post-matric programmes (DHET, 2016). The TVET sector attracts a diverse population of students including those with disabilities, socio-cultural and linguistic differences, contrasting economic backgrounds and family structures, including various genders, races and ethnicities (Bryant, Bryant, & Smith, 2016). In South Africa, the inclusive education concept was introduced during the post-apartheid era after many years of racial discriminatory practices (Dalton & Lyner-Cleophas, 2019).

In 2001, the *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education,* was developed which clearly defined the process of inclusive education by advocating the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream schools, as well as recommending the changing of Special Schools into full service schools and resource centres. However, it focused on children in the primary and secondary schools and was silent about post-school education and training. In 2013, the *White Paper for Post School Education and Training* was developed and approved by the Cabinet (DHET, 2013) which promoted a post-school system that recognised the right to access an educational institution regardless of, among others, race, age, and disability. It addresses the post-school sector that includes HEIs and TVET Colleges. The *White Paper on Rights of People with Disabilities* (2015) reveals that most youths between the ages of 20-24 were not attending any tertiary education institution (Department of Social Development, 2015). Consequently, all the relevant legislative frameworks in South Africa emphasised the importance for the inclusion of disability in the SA education system.

Although it is a legislative mandate to accommodate students with disabilities in all the institutions of higher learning, research shows that there are still some barriers in fulfilling this transformation agenda (Mosia & Pasha, 2017). This study explores the challenges experienced by management on the implementation of inclusive education in TVET colleges. Since there is a paucity of research on the inclusion of students with disabilities in TVET colleges, the authors have dissected the limitations regarding the implementation of inclusive education in TVET Colleges. Accordingly, one area to investigate is whether TVET managers have extensive and relevant knowledge about inclusive education, and to what extent are they informed of their mandate to address issues of inclusion and universal access in HEIs. Hence, this paper, in addition to exploring the challenges, recommends best practice strategies for the effective implementation of inclusive education at TVET Colleges.

2. Method

2.1 Approach

A case study design within a qualitative research approach was adopted for the study. The qualitative approach was suitable since the researchers were interested in the depth of human experience including all the personal and subjective peculiarities that are characteristic of individual experiences and meanings associated with the phenomenon under study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2015). Further, the qualitative approach was appropriate since it analyses feelings, attitudes, perceptions and views, because this study's aim was to provide in-depth insight into the managers' challenges on the implementation of inclusive education.

2.2 Sampling

Two colleges were conveniently selected as research sites. Considering that one of the authors once worked at one of the chosen TVET college sites, caution was exercised not to compromise the quality of the study. Access to these colleges was smooth; hence, the use of the convenient sampling method to identify the TVET colleges for the collection of data. Also, purposive sampling was utilised as a technique to select the participants. Since the aim of this paper was to explore the challenges of managers on the implementation of inclusive education in TVET colleges, college principals, deputy principals (academic services), and campus managers were purposely sampled, as it was assumed that they had rich information and were willing to provide the necessary information. Additionally, they supervised staff who were dealing with students with disabilities. Also, the study purposively identified lecturers (as participants) who were teaching students with disabilities for them to provide more information on the challenges of implementing inclusive education. Table 1 (below) indicates that this study selected ten (10) participants.

Table 1: Number of participants used in the study

Participants	College A	College B
College Principals	1	1
Deputy Principals (Academic Services)	1	1
Campus Managers	1	1
Lecturers	2	2
	5	5
Total	= 10	

2.3 Data collection instruments

Data was collected from two TVET colleges using individual face-to-face interviews, observations and document analysis. Three data collection instruments were used. Semi-structured interviews were used; probes and follow-up questions were also used where the questions and answers were not clear. The data collection tool was trustworthy since questions asked from the participants were relevant to the aim of the study that required managers' challenges on implementation of inclusive education. Two main questions were asked from the interviews; What challenges are the managers facing in implementing inclusive education? How do managers plan to overcome them? Probing and follow up questions followed when answers were not clear.

2.4 Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the study for eliciting in-depth information pertaining to TVET managers' challenges concerning the implementation of inclusive education. The authors arranged appointments with the participants regarding the structuring of a time-table to conduct interviews. The authors and participants were in possession of an interview schedule which indicated that each session will be of 45-60 minutes duration. An audio-recorder was used to record interview sessions, after which all recorded data was transcribed.

2.5 Observations

Only after permission was sought from the relevant authorities, was an observation of the physical infrastructure of the research sites conducted; this included observation during lectures. Observations were noted in writing.

2.6 Document analysis

To complement the interview data, documents were analysed. These included minutes of meetings, reports, strategic planning documents, and policies.

2.7 Data analysis

Data was presented, interpreted and analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method to unpack participants' responses of their personal experiences concerning inclusive education at TVETs (Smith, 2011). As such, IPA provides an insider's interpretation of the topic and uses individual cases as the basis for explaining broader social issues (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Following each interview, we listened to the recordings and then analysed the transcripts to identify the themes and sub-themes that link to each other. Some of the participants' responses were written verbatim such that thick descriptions were used to analyse data.

2.8 Ethical considerations

Mertens (1998) contends that ethical guidelines in research are required to guard against any possible dilemmas. Permission was sought from the two TVET colleges in the Eastern Cape Province. Additionally, the study adhered to the ethical consideration of protecting the participants from physical and mental harm. Written voluntary consent to record the interviews was sought from the participants to whom the purpose and relevant details of the study were adequately explained. The consent form was signed before the commencement of interviews, and the aspect of confidentiality was addressed which included the use of codes and the password-secure electronic storage of information. Participants were identified by codes: College Principal (CP), Deputy Principal (DP), Campus Manager (CM), and Lecturer (L).

3. Findings

As indicated earlier on, coding was used to protect the identities of the two colleges and the participants, as indicated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Coding of participants

College A	College B
College Principal-CPA	CPB
Deputy Principal-DPA	DPB
Campus Manager-CMA	CMB
Lecturer 1-LA1	LB1

This paper presented findings that emerged from the responses of the participants. Findings are categorised into themes: infrastructure, lack of training for lecturers, funding, and staffing.

3.1 Infrastructure

The issue of infrastructure was mentioned several times by participants as a challenge that is regarded as the root cause of colleges not being fully ready to implement inclusive education or to admit students with disabilities. At College A, it was observed that the high reception counters were not accessible for a person who uses a wheelchair, there are stairs and no lifts or wheelchair ramps in one of the buildings where lectures are conducted, and door handles were not user-friendly for disabled people.

In College B, it was observed that some buildings are "ancient" and have many long staircases and old lifts. In addition, stairways did not have contrasting stripes to accommodate partially-sighted people. However, there was a gate for wheelchair-users leading to a ramp that led to the lecture halls. At both colleges' lecture halls, the desks were of the same size, not suitable for accommodating persons using wheelchairs. In front of the buildings there were parking bays that had signage for people with disabilities. One of the participants indicated that they were not admitting blind students because their infrastructure was not yet adapted to accommodate them. When a blind student applies for admission, he/she would be referred to the organisations they are working with. Both colleges did not have transport vehicles that were geared for easy entry and exit for disabled students. The participants confirmed that they did not have disabled students who needed transport. Moreover, on perusal of the colleges' documents, there was no plan for adapting the infrastructure to accommodate an Inclusive Teaching and Learning environment. The plan tabled the improvement of the general infrastructure but was not specific in terms of priorities and time-frames. Below are some responses that were recorded from the participants regarding the aspect of infrastructure:

> CPA: *Our infrastructure is not accessible; of course, there are two campuses that have lifts, but it is difficult to be vocal and say we are ready to admit students with disabilities, especially those in the severe categories.*

> CPB: *Yes, the infrastructure is a big challenge, but it does not mean we cannot admit students with disabilities because it is a human right.*

> DPA: *We are still very behind on infrastructure - even the principal's office is not user-friendly. It is upstairs and there is no ramp, only stairs. In another campus, the path to the computer lab is very steep, and no student in a wheelchair can access it.*

> DPB: *There is not much that we have done to improve infrastructure. We only respond to the needs that we identify. For example, when there is a need of a ramp, it will be build it.*

> CMB: *We cannot admit blind students because we do not have computers that can do braille work, and there is no budget for that. When there are no funds, it becomes difficult to purchase such items.*

> LA1: *Our lecture venues are not disability-friendly; there are stairs only. In some buildings we have no ramps. Even in buildings that have lifts, maintenance is poor.*

> LA2: *We still have a long journey to go when it comes to infrastructure. Buildings are all not accessible to disabled persons. I feel the college is not yet ready.*

3.2 Lack of training for lecturers

Most participants were unanimous that generally lecturers lacked the necessary skills and knowledge in dealing with students who had disabilities, thus the urgency for training. It is evident from document analysis, observations and interviews that relevant qualifications, experience and training of lecturers on inclusive education is not prioritised. Since lecturers deal directly with students in the lecture rooms, it is imperative for them to possess the necessary tools to deal with students with disabilities. Regrettably, lecturers indicated that they did not receive the necessary support from their senior management regarding further training. The following responses substantiate this:

LA2: *I never received any training or attended any workshop related to inclusive education here at the college. The only time I attended an inclusive education workshop was when I was teaching at a secondary school; I am using that experience, though it is not enough because I find it difficult to identify a student who has an "invisible" disability.*

CMA: *For me, what these lecturers are doing is enough because some of them do not even have a qualification to be lecturers; they are coming from industry and have no teaching qualifications.*

CMB: *Our lecturers manage to identify some students who reveal symptoms of having special needs and refer them to counsellors.*

CPA: *Policies are there to guide DPs for implementation, but the trend with colleges across the spectrum is that there are senior managers who sit in positions but do not have competencies to perform their functions. Moreover, the Department confuses us; it has taken over the function of training and development, including the budget. The college coordinates and the Department approves, then it acts depending on what is its priority.*

CPB: *We have not yet started the training of lecturers - that part is still a big challenge for us.*

LA1: *I had a student who could not write. I did not know how to help the student so the student de-registered for the trimester.*

LBI: *We are not trained to deal with these situations. I just refer the students with challenges to the counsellor.*

DPA: *I am aware that coordination of training for lecturers is the responsibility of Academic Services and Human Resource. I understand it is still a gap and needs to be prioritised.*

DPB: *It is my function to coordinate the training, but it could be better if the call comes from the Department because some managers display resistance; they are more concerned about their functions but forget that some functions overlap.*

These above responses confirm the lack of training for lecturers as indicated in the minutes of the Academic Board from College A. Moreover, there was no item that addressed the issue of lecturers' training in terms of inclusive education. In College B, the Inclusive Teaching and Learning plan was silent about the professional development of lecturers.

3.3 Funding

The study progressed to elicit data relevant to the funding of students with disabilities. The responses from the participants of both colleges were very similar. Both College Principals (CPA and CPB) indicated the lack of funding as a critical factor that impeded the implementation of inclusive

education. They indicated that colleges were governed by the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and they did not have autonomy like universities. Colleges were treated like schools based on their history of being under the Department of Education for quite a long time (RSA, DoE, 2012). There was no funding for support, and the only funding that they received from DHET was for the needs of the students that they submitted reports for. For example, if they submitted reports for ten students that they admitted, DHET would give them a specific amount relative to ten students.

There was no funding to purchase adaptive technological equipment or to improve the infrastructure. Also, they are not allowed to implement what DHET did not specify in the budget. Moreover, Campus Managers indicated that they depended on the Administration Centre when it came to funding, while lecturers indicated that they were not informed about funding matters. Below are responses that were garnered on the issue of funding:

CPI: *Funding is ring-fenced by the Department. Colleges are instructed on what to do.*

CP2: *As colleges, we must do what we are told to do, but we still don't have money to improve the situation.*

CPA: *As colleges, we do not have an autonomy like universities, although we have been fighting for it.*

CPB: *All fifty colleges in South Africa have no autonomy. They rely on DHET. All policies including finance have the DHET logo, not the college name.*

DPA: *Even if the college needs to be innovative, but if it is not part of DHET's priority, it is ignored.*

CPA: *It becomes difficult when the college does not have financial muscle.*

CMA: *As a Campus Manager I submit my needs for the campus, but I am always told that there are no funds. Our budget is centrally-based at the Administration Centre.*

LA2: *I know nothing about college finances.*

LBI: *Issues of finance are regarded as not being important for lecturers.*

3.4 Staffing

The participants mentioned the continual shortage of staff as being an obstruction to supporting students with disabilities. In College A, there is a Student Counsellor who was assisting with challenges of inclusive education at the Administration Centre. In other campuses there were Career Guidance Officers who were providing counselling services. In addition, there was an official who was deployed by Higher Health for a period of three years to provide disability services to students. In College B, there was a Disability Coordinator who was responsible for inclusive education and disability services for all campuses. The following responses demonstrate staffing anomalies:

 CMA: *To me the Career Guidance Officers do not serve the purpose for disability matters. They are responsible to provide counselling to the general student population. If there is no official specifically responsible to support students with disabilities in the campus, such students are still going to suffer.*

CMB: *A qualified person who can deal with students who have disabilities is a dire need.*

DPA: *The fact that there is only a Student Counsellor who is located at the Administration Centre, does not serve the purpose. The official who deals with inclusive education or supporting students with disabilities must be in the campuses and be visible to such students.*

CPA: *We do not have a stand-alone unit because there is no designated personnel; however, we have a person from the Higher Health who assists with disability services.*

CPB: We have established the unit and have one person, but I know other colleges do not have units because they do not have funds to employ staff.

LB2: *To me if there is no person responsible to support students with disabilities in the campus; it means students will suffer as it is difficult to identify those who have "hidden" disabilities.*

LA1: *I am so fortunate because in my class there are no students with disabilities, so the issue of shortage of staff does not affect me.*

4. Discussion

Findings reveal that the challenge of inadequate and inaccessible infrastructure was concerning because this acted as a barrier to students with disabilities with regards to the possibility of enrolling with the institution. This key finding is in line with the study that was conducted by Nkalane (2018) that was based on Inclusive Assessment Practices in Vocational Education in one of the TVET Colleges in South Africa which established that TVET colleges were recapitalised through massive Government investment to improve their infrastructure, introduce a more relevant curriculum, retrain lecturers, and assist college students financially to access learning programmes. The infrastructure that was observed by the researchers was not disability-friendly. Further, the documents that were analysed during this study had no clear indication of future revamping plans or putting in place disability-friendly infrastructure. This confirms the findings established by other studies on students with disabilities in HEIs that indicated that physical access into institutions was a challenge (Mutanga, 2017; Tugli, Zungu, Goon, & Anyanwu, 2013). Additionally, Buthelezi (2014) conducted a study on the challenges faced by students with disabilities at a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal and found that students with physical disabilities experienced accessibility constraints to reach the library, lecture halls, and parking spaces.

This paper recommends that management should ensure that the buildings are accessible-friendly to all people, especially the disabled. Accordingly, lecture rooms and laboratories should be adapted or restructured such that they accommodate a diversity of students. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that the day-to-day running of the college takes place within an infrastructure where buildings and fixtures are user-friendly to all (Balkrishen, 2016). This is in line with the Social Model of Disability that views disability centrally as a social construct created by an ability-orientated environment (Chiwandire, 2019). Donohue and Bonman (2014) suggest that funding should be increased so that colleges execute infrastructural changes that are urgently needed. On the positive side, the study found that at least there were plans for TVET colleges to modify labs to accommodate students with disabilities - labs with computers that have adaptive technology to accommodate students who have visual impairments, as well as for those who have multiple disabilities. This was not specifically indicated in the Strategic Planning document and the minutes of meetings (2019) of the two TVET colleges. It would have been encouraging if these plans were detailed with specific time-

frames and projects to accommodate inclusive education; not just on paper but to be implemented practically and expeditiously.

Also emanating from the findings was the lack of training for lecturers on inclusivity. This was a grave concern as lecturers are directly involved with students daily. It is very much evident that lecturers' attitudes towards inclusion might become more positive if, along with training, they were to receive the appropriate service support from the management for them to deal with students with disabilities. This notion corresponds with that of Dalton, Lyner-Cleophas, Fergusson and McKenzie (2019) who state that stereotypical attitudes and problems of accessibility have made the implementation of inclusive education to be elusive. Further, a study conducted in Cameroon reveals that inclusive education is best managed when qualified teachers and related service personnel are available (Mngo & Mngo, 2018). The training that is offered to lecturers is one of the important factors that can enhance the quality of education that is provided to students (Carew, Deluca, Groce, & Kett, 2019). The current study established that the lack of training for lecturers had a negative impact on the possible admission of students with disabilities in TVET colleges; for instance, limited programmes were offered to students with disabilities; but well-trained and qualified lecturers will expand the width of programmes.

The revelation that some lecturers did not have a relevant teaching qualification is similar to the study conducted by Nkalane (2018) who found that some lecturers did not have professional qualifications in education but were experts in the banking sector. The current study established that it was very difficult for lecturers without a teaching qualification to effectively teach students with disabilities and apply innovative teaching strategies that could accommodate all students. We argue that if disability can be perceived as a social model phenomenon, perspectives of management around disability will change and they will see the need for the professional development of lecturers. In addition, Nkalane (2018) observed in her study that lecturers cannot support students holistically because they do not have the required skills to teach students with learning difficulties and disabilities. When lecturers are not trained in inclusive education or in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), they will find it difficult to plan and develop assessments that accommodate all students (Greyling, 2009). Hence, this will lead to them developing a resistance to change towards inclusive assessments. The professional training of lecturers to implement and design inclusive assessments is a prerequisite which can be possible through re-training (Ntombela, 2011).

The lack of a coordinated and collaborative involvement of management and DHET to facilitate the provision of professional development courses for lecturers has been identified as a major barrier for the full inclusion of students with disabilities (Chiwandire, 2019). The absence of training programmes for special education professionals in tertiary institutions has resulted in limited access for students with disabilities (Mngo et al., 2018). A perusal of the documents of the colleges, did not produce evidence of a plan for the professional development of lecturers in inclusive education; hence, this was seen as a weakness in human resource management.

Management seemed to understand the constitutional obligation of implementing inclusive education; however, the challenge is the lack of funding. The dependence on DHET is a barrier for the implementation of inclusivity because in the findings it was established that the new organogram for TVET Colleges is silent about Disability/Special Needs and Counselling Services. Infrastructure improvements, purchase and installation of adapted technology and software in the libraries and labs, provision of assistive devices, and employment of disability support officials, all need funding. As a result, TVETs are not ready to properly implement effective inclusive education. It is evident that

management at TVET Colleges needs to follow the correct route as mandated by the *Constitution* (1996). However, the fact that they rely on DHET is a challenge because they feel that they as colleges are treated like schools, especially in terms of funding. Moreover, the Councils in colleges are not planning any fundraising projects; they feel that they are just there for pure governance matters (Balkrishen, 2016). The college staff has to engage in fundraising on their own. Council members in colleges are different from the Council members at the universities who have an interest in fundraising. An analysis of the Strategic Planning document, established the lack of initiatives in fundraising and resource mobilisation, as a weakness. This chronic lack of funding is a challenge in many colleges – this hinders the normal level of their development of the colleges which is exacerbated by bureaucratic legislation.

Special Needs in Education (SNE) falls under the banner of Student Support Services (2018), but an examination of the colleges' records (including Strategic Planning) revealed gaps, especially in establishing posts for Disability Services and/or Special Needs and Counselling Services. Further, even if lecturers were able to identify students who have learning challenges, they cannot pursue this as there is no unit responsible for facilitating the support of students with disabilities. This emphasises the need for the establishment of a unit to facilitate inclusivity in colleges, otherwise admission and access for some categories of disabilities will be limited - something that is unconstitutional. College management need to agitate vigorously for the installation of a fully-fledged unit which caters for all levels of disability; for example, a braille transcription section is a dire necessity.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the challenges on the implementation of inclusive education in TVET colleges. It can be concluded that TVET colleges are still faced by a myriad of challenges that hinder them from implementing the Inclusive Education policy developed by DHET, but progress can only be realised if barriers to policy implementation are eradicated.

6. Recommendations

Considering the findings, it is recommended, firstly, that it is imperative that TVET college management develop effective and innovative college plans to eliminate the obstacles that limit the inclusion of students with disabilities. Secondly, collaborative support structures should be formed consisting of all stakeholders including the Disability Sector, Government and HEIs, with the aim of establishing Disability Services Units for inclusivity. Lastly, each campus should have a Student Access Coordinator who will assist with screening and identification, and then, if necessary, refer students for further assessment and support.

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