International Journal of Education and Social Science; Vol. 7 No. 2; March 2020
ISSN 2410-5171 (Online), 2415-1246 (Print)
Published by Research Institute for Progression of Knowledge

Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs of Inclusion on Curacao

Joseph Sencibaugh, Ph.D.
Webster University
470 East Lockwood Ave., Saint Louis, MO 63119
United States of America

Angela Michelle Sencibaugh, Ed.D.
Valley Park School District
One Main Street, Valley Park, MO 63088
United States of America

Jennifer Bond, M.A.E.
Ferguson-Florissant School District
300 St Jean Street, Florissant, MO 63031
United States of America

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs of general and special education teachers towards the inclusion of students with special education needs. The study investigated the correlation between both groups of teachers' attitudes. A total of 83 teachers from the public-school system on the island of Curacao participated in the study. The questionnaire, My Thinking about Inclusion Scale, was used (Stoiber, K. C., M. Gettinger, and D. Goetz. 1998). The 28-item MTAI Total Scale had an internal consistency of .94 and was comprised of three belief subscales: Core Perspective, Expected Outcomes and Classroom Practices. The results revealed that general education and special education teachers both held similar views of inclusion, which were positive. Both groups believed the implementation of inclusive service delivery models would likely succeed if properly vetted with support from stakeholders even though programmatic changes would be challenging due to an entrenched system of educating students with special education needs in separate schools.

Keywords: Curacao, inclusive education, special education needs, teachers' attitudes and beliefs

The education practice of inclusion is placing students with mild and somewhat severe disabilities into regular classrooms and making provisions for pulling them out to receive services as needed (Arends, 2015). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with special education needs became the focus of extensive research over the past two decades since the concept of inclusion was developed (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Kalyva, E., Gojkovic and Tsakiris, 2007; Jobe & Rust, 1996). The major reason for this change in research interest could perhaps be traced to more contemporary approaches to education, which claim that in order to gain valuable insight into the practice as well as the dynamics of the inclusive classroom, there is perhaps no better method than to evaluate the attitudes of those who form an important part of that dynamic system; namely, the teachers (Kalyva et al, 2007; Rose, 2001). Teachers have a critical role in implementing inclusive education and a positive change in their attitudes and beliefs could lead to a greater likelihood of students with special education needs being included in general education classrooms (Ainscow 2007; Galovic, Brojčin and Glumbić, 2014, Rose and Howley 2007). Indeed, teachers' attitudes have been found to affect the process and the outcome of inclusion to a great extent (Avramidis, Bayless and Burden, 2000; Kalyva et al, 2007; Richards, 1999).

Peck (1993) argued that to advance an understanding of the issues associated with implementing inclusive practices, we must conceptualize research in terms of how and what influences practice. Beliefs comprise one factor that figures importantly in educators' decision making about inclusion (Stoiber, Goettinger, and Goetz (1998).

A study by Galovic, Brojčin and Glumbić, (2014) revealed the following:

> Teachers, who have pathognomonic beliefs, consider that disability is a pathological trait of a student. They relatively rarely interact with students with disabilities, believing that only experts in the field of special education should be involved in their teaching. At the other end of the spectrum are teachers who believe that all students, including those with disabilities, benefit from the learning and instructional opportunities. These teachers spend more time interacting with their students and use diverse teaching strategies. (p. 1263)

Teachers with negative attitudes towards inclusive education rarely use teaching strategies known to be successful in such an educational environment (Bender, Vail, and Scott, 1995; Galovic, Brojčin and Glumbić, 2014); therefore, students with special education needs are less successful in classes taught by the teachers who have more negative attitudes towards inclusion (Ellins and Porter, 2005). The teachers' attitudes are significant, even in the case of students with special education needs being accepted by their typically developing peers in regular classes (Galovic, Brojčin and Glumbić, 2014).

Inclusion is an international concept in education and has been studied extensively in several European countries, the United States, Asia and the Middle East, yet there is limited research on teachers' attitudes and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with special education needs on the Lesser Antilles, specifically the Leeward Antilles, which includes the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao.

Curacao is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and has an island government, which includes the Commissioner of Education, who regulates the financing of education and the Minister of Education is responsible for curriculum content and the qualifications of teachers. School boards are responsible for the operation of schools. Significant challenges are faced by teachers and students on Curacao, and the following is a brief summary of challenges based on the research gathered by Jones (1997):

> *Language Factor*
>
> Three are four languages spoken in Curacao: Papiamentu (a mixture of Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and African languages), Dutch, English and Spanish. Papiamentu is spoken primarily by most people on the island and is taught in early primary grades until a firm language base is established. Approximately, 83% of the islanders speak Papiamentu, 9% speak Dutch, 4% speak English and 4% speak Spanish.
>
> *Layers of Government*
>
> The Minister of Education is responsible for curriculum content and the qualifications of teachers. Curacao has an island government, which includes the Commissioner of Education, who regulates the financing of education. School boards are responsible for the operation of schools. Approximately, 80 percent of the schools on Curacao are private and the other 20 percent are public. All schools are funded by the government and parents are given a choice in which school their children will attend.
>
> *Scarcity of Resources*
>
> As compared to other salaries in Curacao, teachers' salaries are high, but they are low compared to teachers' salaries in Europe. Principals in general school get approximately $60 per year per child to purchase materials. In secondary schools principals receive approximately $100 per child per year. The principal also get approximately $100 per year per classroom for all maintenance costs, including electricity and water. Textbooks are often 30-40 years old.
>
> *Positive Attitudes*
>
> Plans to merge separate vocational programs will eliminate rigid tracking of students. Students already spend extensive time in vocational practice as opposed to seat time study. Educators don't use low funding as excuses; they maintain a positive attitude toward learning, which is instilled in students. Students show respect toward their teachers and one another (p. 80-81).

Literature Review

Approximately 7 million children and youth with disabilities from three through age 21 received special education services during the 2017–2018 school year in the United States, which represented approximately 14 percent of the total number of students enrolled in public schools from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The number of students with disabilities being educated 80 percent or more in general classrooms has risen to 63 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This represents almost a 40 percent increase since the early 1980s. The increase is attributed the Regular Education Initiative, which was formally introduced by the Assistant Secretary of Education at that time, Madeleine C. Will in 1986 and emphasized the need for the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The initiative called for general educators to become more responsible for the education of students who have special needs in school. Teachers must think of students with disabilities as "our students" (Harris, Kaff, Anderson & Knackendoffel, 2007) and must maximize access to meaningful instruction for all students in the general education classroom (Anderson, 2010). This movement toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom was a shift in perspectives for many general education teachers, who had always considered the special education teacher as the primary educator in providing educational services for students with disabilities.

A review of the literature reveals that teachers internationally have positive and negative attitudes and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. According to Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) primary teachers from one region in Northern Greece possessed positive attitudes toward the general concept of conclusion but held variable views on the difficulty of accommodating different types of disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Teachers who had been actively involved in teaching pupils special education held significant more positive attitudes than their counterparts with little or no such experience.

Another study conducted by Kong Chi-Sing (1999) assessed the regular secondary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Hong Kong and identified those possible factors affecting their attitudes. Results showed unfavorable attitudes towards inclusion and pointed out that the type of disability a student had, the degree of severity of disability of a student, the relevant knowledge and training a teacher had already had, and the availability of personnel and material supports to assist inclusion implementation were all relevant and influential factors affecting teachers' attitudes. More favorable attitudes were found towards including students with a physical or mild disability, and teachers' acceptance towards inclusion would be enhanced if there were more training.

Kalyva et al (2007) investigated the attitudes of Serbian teachers towards the inclusion of children with special education needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. Results of the study found that Serbian teachers held overall slightly negative attitudes towards the inclusion of children with SEN, with teachers with experience in teaching children with SEN holding more positive attitudes towards inclusion in comparison to teachers without such experience. No differences were observed in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion according to their years of teaching experience.

Another study from the Northern District of Israel examined the effects of school organizational and educational climate, and a teacher's sense of efficacy, on general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs. Results of the study indicated that self-efficacy was the single most important factor affecting attitudes. School climate included six factors: supportive leadership; teachers' autonomy; prestige of the teaching profession; renovations; teachers' collaboration; and workload. Examination of the intercorrelations among these factors and with attitudes revealed that those teachers who perceived their school as having supportive leadership, encouraged renovations and collaboration but did not threaten teachers' autonomy, tended to express more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Weizel and Dror, 2006).

A study in Turkey investigated the opinions of general education teachers working in public general schools regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities into their classrooms and their willingness also to include students with more severe learning disabilities. An analysis of the data indicated that teachers possessed slightly negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms. In addition, the results revealed 35 percent of the teachers who responded to the survey were willing to include students with severe learning difficulties into their classrooms. However, most of the teachers were open to learning new skills in order to better accommodate students with disabilities by attending in-service education programs and then using those new skills while working with students with disabilities (Rakap and Kaczmarek, 2010).

In 1977, Italy adopted a national policy on inclusion, whereby separate schools for students with disabilities were virtually eliminated in favor of neighborhood schools and general education classrooms. A survey was administered to teachers in Northern and Central Italy on their attitudes of inclusion. Results indicated that teachers in Italy strongly supported the concept of inclusion. However, Italian teachers responded far less positively on practical items addressing their satisfaction with time, training, personnel assistance, and resources provided for inclusion efforts (Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs, and Mastropieri, 1998).

A study compared the attitudes of teachers toward integration of students with disabilities in Haïti and the United States. Teachers in Haiti and the United States were asked to complete a background questionnaire and the *Opinions Relative to the Integration of Students with Disabilities Scale* (Antonak & Larrivee, 1995). Results showed that teachers in both countries had similar attitudes toward the integration of students with disabilities. Years of experience was individually correlated with attitudes, but it was not a significant predictor when other variables were included in a multiple regression. Three variables predicted attitudes toward integration of students with disabilities. Teachers' attitudes explained the largest variance, followed by advanced degree, and range of effective accommodation of different categories of disabilities (Dupoux, Wolman and Estrada, 2005).

Lastly, Anderson (2011) discovered a great number of international studies which correlated the training and the resulting confidence and abilities of general educators to teach students with disabilities with their attitudes and perceptions of inclusion. Anderson (2010) presented the following three statements from past studies:

1. Loreman, Earle, Sharma and Forlin (2005) state, "One area which has been identified as being vital to the continued development and success of inclusive educational practices is preservice teacher education."
2. "Beginning teachers need not only the skills and knowledge base to be successful in inclusive environments, but also need to develop positive attitudes and sentiments towards their work in this area in order to ensure an inclusive future in their classrooms" (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000; Avramidis and Norwick, 2002; Loreman, et.al., 2005).
3. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) make the point that teachers must have the confidence and the competence to adapt, modify and teach students with disabilities since these students are being educated in general classrooms at a greater rate than ever before. "Unfortunately, many teachers who are currently teaching in such classrooms have not been prepared to meet the challenges they face on a daily basis." (p. 55)

As demonstrated from previous research studies, the attitudes and perceptions of teachers regarding inclusion are mixed. There is an underlying theme that teachers tend to support idea of inclusion but feel inadequately trained to teach students with disabilities. They believe that students with disabilities have a right to be educated in general education classrooms and should not be discriminated against because of their exceptional or special learning needs. A common thesis among the research is that successful inclusion requires schools to provide proper training, support, resources and collaboration for the faculty, which leads to more positive attitudes of teachers.

Rationale

The purpose for this study was to acquire a better understanding of teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education on Curacao. Inclusion has occupied the center of attention in education in many countries for the past few decades, and it is the same on Curacao. The public school system on Curacao provides separate facilities when educating students who have been identified with a documented exceptionality. Students with special education needs are taught in self-contained schools while non-disabled students are taught in regular education schools.

Although most researchers and educators agree that inclusion is necessary for equal educational opportunities and social participation of students with disabilities, there are debates about the most effective and appropriate services for these students and how teachers should deliver these services. Specifically, the rationale for this study was to acquire a better understanding of special education teachers' and general education teachers' beliefs of inclusion in the public schools on the island of Curacao with the possibility of considering other service delivery models as a means for educating and integrating students with special education needs. Educational beliefs on practice are necessary to study when considering how they impact a systems change as a result of the empirical evidence gathered from a research study. There are three research questions addressed in this study:

1) How do the beliefs of general education and special education teachers differ with regards to inclusion?
2) How do years of teaching experience affect general education teachers' beliefs related to inclusion?
3) How does certification in special education affect special education teachers' beliefs related to inclusion?

Hypothesis

The results of several research studies on inclusion are mixed. Previous studies on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education predominantly suggest that teachers support the concept of inclusion (Scruggs and Mastropieri 1996; Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden 2000b; Avramidis and Kalyva 2007; Galović, D., Brojčin, B., & Glumbić, N., 2014; Gyimah, Sugden, and Pearson 2009; Blecker and Boakes 2010; Ahsan, Sharma, and Deppeler 2012). Whereas, the recent review of international research in this field (De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert, 2011) report that educators hold neutral, or even slightly negative, attitudes towards inclusive education. Some investigations in developing countries reveal that teachers have clearly negative attitudes towards inclusive education (Agbenyega 2007; Galović, D., Brojčin, B., & Glumbić, N., 2014; Kuyini and Mangope 2011).

Based on a review of numerous studies on teachers' attitudes on inclusion, it was expected, for this study, that all teachers in Curacao, regardless of teaching general or special education, would likely possess a neutral or negative view of integrating students with special education needs in general education classrooms. A comparison between general education and special education teachers would also reveal that general education teachers would be more open to inclusive classrooms as compared to special education teachers, who work in separate schools, and would likely possess a negative attitude regarding inclusion.

In addition, previous research tends to support the idea that teachers, who are older with more years of teaching experience in the classroom, are more supportive of working with students with special education needs.

Methodology

Participant Population

A total of 83 teachers participated in the study. Directors from the Ministry of Education identified twelve public schools as sites for the research to be conducted. The schools were selected based on the socioeconomic diversity of the local communities. Participants involved in the study were public school teachers currently teaching in either general or special education schools on Curacao. The sample consisted of 43 general education teachers from seven schools and 40 special education teachers from five schools.

Figure 1 provides a summary of demographic data for the teachers participating in the study.

Measures

The questionnaire used for this study is titled, *My Thinking about Inclusion Scale* (MTAI), and was devised by Stoiber, Goettinger, and Goetz (1998). It consists of a 28-item scale, divided in three parts. The first part, *core perspectives,* which consists of 12 items, assess teachers' agreement with the claim that children with disabilities are entitled to education together with their typically developing peers in inclusive classrooms. The core perspectives category is perhaps best reflected in the belief that children with disabilities have the right to be educated in classrooms with typically developing children and that inclusion is considered "best practices" for educating all children (Berryman & Berryman, 1981; Eiserman et al., 1995). The core perspectives category is grounded in research documenting the importance of a positive perspective toward integration of children with disabilities on successful implementation of inclusion (Hanline, 1985; Moeller & Ishii-Jordan, 1996; Odom &McEvoy, 1990). In addition, this belief category attempted to tap beliefs toward inclusion practices for all children--those with and without disabilities, and was not conceptualized to reflect differences in beliefs as a function of differences in a child's disability (Stoiber et al, 1998). The second category, *expected outcomes of inclusion,* which consists of 11 items, is most closely associated with the construct of expectations from the child with special education needs and according to Stoiber et al. (1998) significantly influences teaching practices. Belief expectations and expected outcomes both reflect what one believes will happen or result from a situation or event (Moeller & Ishii-Jordan, 1996; Stoiber & Houghton, 1993). Previous research examining parents' and educators' expectations has shown that expectations are, in fact, linked to behaviors (Stoiber et al, 1998). The last category, *classroom practices*, which consists of 5 items, examines how inclusion influences classroom dynamics and general teaching practices.

Researchers have shown that beliefs determine the ways teachers structure their classroom environments, respond to children, or adapt instructional approaches and materials (Anders & Evans, 1994; Borko, Davinroy, Flory, & Hiebert, 1994). The classroom practices category also stems from discussions in the literature on adaptations, barriers, facilitators, and other environmental indicators related to day-to-day functioning in inclusive environments. The dimension of classroom practices attempts to capture beliefs related to how inclusion works in the "typical day" of inclusive educators (Stoiber et al, 1998).

Participants rated their agreement with statements using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Accept; 2 = Agree; 3 = Undecided/Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Reject). In addition, 14 of the 28 questions apply reverse coding. The responses were subsequently totaled to generate a composite score for each domain with lower scores indicating positive attitudes.

Stoiber et al. (1998) revealed in a previous research study that the subscale intercorrelations were moderate (r = .50 for core perspective-classroom practices, r = .55 for expected outcomes-classroom practices, and r = .75 for expected outcomes-core perspectives). They also reported that the internal consistency of the MTAI scale was high (.91) and provided the following alphas for core perspective (.80), for expected outcomes (.85) and for classroom practices (.64).

Table 2 displays the 28-item scale by comparing the mean scores for general and special education teachers on Curacao.

Additional demographic data were gathered for the project. The participants provided information on gender, age, years of teaching service, and whether the individual held certification in the field of special education.

Procedure

The primary investigator of the study first met with each of the principals of the participating schools and described the context of the study along with the procedure for administering the questionnaire and demographic survey. The principals were given an option of either distributing a packet to the teachers, which included a letter describing the study, the MTAI questionnaire, demographic survey and consent form or having the primary investigator attend a faculty meeting and describe the study and the contents of the packet. The primary researcher along with the co-authors of the paper visited all participating schools and held information conversations with participants to gather anecdotal information on inclusion. Teachers, who remained anonymous and voluntarily participated in the study, returned their completed questionnaire, survey and consent form to the primary researcher. Teachers on Curacao are multi-lingual, and the information provided in the packets were translated in two of the primary languages spoken on the island: Papiamentu and Dutch.

Results

Teachers' responses were used to validate the MTAI survey and examine the factors affecting general education and special education teachers' beliefs of inclusion and analyze any patterns related to their beliefs. The data revealed that both, general and special education teachers, possessed positive beliefs of inclusion. As shown from the results of the MTAI, both groups of teachers thought very positive of inclusion with reference to Core Perspectives and Expected Outcomes and thought extremely positive toward Classroom Practices. The means and standard deviations for subscales and the whole test are identified in Table 3.

Measure Validation

The three subscales of the MTAI were examined for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability analysis for the MTAI revealed the following alphas in the current study: Core Perspective, .92; Expected Outcomes, .68; and Classroom Practices, .97 and Total Beliefs, .94, which were considered very high. In addition, the intercorrelations among the three subscales between general teachers and special education teachers were examined. Subscale intercorrelations were highly correlated (r = .80 for Total Test, r = .60 for Core Perspectives, r = .75 for Expected Outcomes, and r = .92 for Classroom Practices). The internal consistency in this study revealed that all subscales were lower when compared to Stoiber's original research conducted in the validation of the MTAI. In addressing the research question regarding the differences between general education and special education teachers' beliefs on inclusion, analyses were conducted using the summary scores each subscale and the Total Scale of the MTAI (28 items).

General education teachers had similar or equal views of inclusion as compared to special education teachers on the Total Scale, $t(54) = -.25$, $p = .80$, Core Perspectives, $t(22) = .02$, $p = .99$, Expected Outcomes, $t(20) = .03$, $p = .98$, and Classroom Practices, $t(8) = -.47$, $p = .65$. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) show significant associations between general education teachers and inclusion beliefs on the Total Scale, $F = 11.14$, Core Perspectives, $F = 11.4$, Expected Outcomes, $F = 2.14$, and Classroom Practices, $F = 24.22$, all $ps < .05$. Further analysis of the data was conducted using a MANCOVA. When the covariate (years of teaching experience) was controlled as the dependent variable for general teachers, the effect of years of teaching experience on attitudes towards inclusion was significant, $F(27, 17) = 6.50$, $p < 0.001$, $n^2 = .38$. Univariate ANOVAS also suggested this effect was significant in subscales and in the total test, which are revealed in Table 4. A MANCOVA was also conducted on special education teachers with reference to their years of teaching experience. The effect of years of teaching experience on their attitudes towards inclusion was also significant, $F(27, 12) = 4.06$, $p < 0.001$, $n^2 = .34$. Univariate ANOVAS also suggested this effect was significant in subscales and in the total test, which are revealed in Table 5. A further analysis of data was completed to determine if certification in special education lead to different attitudes or beliefs regarding inclusion, which is revealed in Table 6. When the covariate of special education certification was controlled, the effect was significant, $F(27, 8) = 4.87$, $p < 0.001$, $n^2 = .44$.

Special education teachers without special education certification were more likely to support the concept of inclusion when examining all factors assessed.

Results

The primary purpose of the study was to determine if general and special education teachers differed in their views on the concept of inclusion and whether or not an inclusive service delivery model would be supported by educators on the island of Curacao. Data from the MTAI revealed that it demonstrated strong internal reliability, which was similar to other studies that used the survey. The findings refuted the hypothesis that teachers in Curacao would likely hold neutral or negative views of including students with special education needs in general education classrooms, which contradicts the results of similar studies completed internationally (Gagi, 1998; Hrnjica, 1997; Kalyva, E., Gojkovic, D., & Tsakiris, V., 2007; and Pejovic, 1989).

In examining the subscales of the MTAI, both general and special education teachers expressed positive attitudes toward classroom practices, which could likely be explained by the fact the Ministry of Education educates students with special educational learning needs in separate schools and the idea of inclusion was novel. Based on anecdotal evidence acquired through informal discussions with both general and special education teachers, many were familiar with the concept of inclusion but had limited experience in observing the process for implementation or recognizing different service delivery models. Many teachers didn't understand how students with special educational learning needs could receive an appropriate education in a regular general education classroom from a general teacher, who has no formal training in special education, but they were open to integrating students with special education needs in regular education classrooms.

Teachers on Curacao held slightly positive attitudes and beliefs regarding core perspectives, which assess the belief that students with special education needs have a right to be educated in classrooms with non-disabled students. This subscale also considers inclusion "best practices" for educating all children. According to Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), teachers fail to accept the concept of total inclusion even if they possess positive attitudes towards inclusion (Kalyva, Gojkovic and Tsakiris, 2007).

With regards to expected outcomes of inclusion, teachers in Curacao, again, held slightly positive views. Expected outcomes targets the construct of how well the child will succeed if educated in an inclusive setting. The teachers most likely supported inclusion because they were familiar with the concept of inclusion but didn't know what to expect (Ayramidis et al., 2000). Their limited exposure to inclusive classrooms didn't seem to limit their greater awareness or acceptance of inclusion.

The results for classroom practices were the most surprising. According to Stoiber, Gettinger and Goetz (1998), the dimension of classroom practices attempts to capture beliefs related to how inclusion works in the "typical day' of inclusive educators. Both groups of teachers, general and special education, were extremely positive in thinking about how inclusion impacts the classroom environment and instructional practices.

As previously discussed both groups of teachers often made positive statements and seemed open-minded to educating students with special education needs in regular classrooms and believed the inclusive classroom would benefit all students regardless of the effort it would require to implement best practices. Researchers have shown that beliefs determine the ways teachers structure their classroom environments, respond to children or adapt instructional approaches and materials (Anders and Evans, 1994; Borko, Davinroy, Flory and Hiebert, 1994, and Stoiber, Gettinger and Goetz, 1998).

Discussion

The reform to eliminate tracking or separating students with special education needs in Curacao over the past decade may not have negatively impacted teachers' perceptions or attitudes toward inclusion as originally believed. The findings revealed that teachers with more experience in working with students with special education needs held more positive views about inclusion and were more willing to be accommodating and use preferred methods for promoting inclusive education while eliminating barriers. This may be attributed to differences in teachers' interpretation of the concept inclusion when surveying their beliefs and attitudes since many teachers were familiar with the context of the term being implemented in other countries in Europe and the United States. In addition, through informal discussions with general education teachers; anecdotal evidence revealed they were open to educating students with disabilities in their classrooms if given proper training, support and resources, and additional discussions with special education teachers also reflected positive beliefs of successfully integrating students with special education needs if the Ministry of Education carefully piloted implementation at selected elementary schools while providing necessary training on collaboration and cooperative teaching.

An ancillary purpose of this study was to compare the attitudes and beliefs of general and special education teachers regarding their views on inclusion and determine if it would be feasible to initiate the implementation of inclusive classrooms on a small scale at the elementary level. Teachers on the island of Curacao are receptive to implementing inclusion and would prefer to pilot inclusive classrooms in selected elementary schools after receiving proper training on various delivery models that promote principles of differentiated instruction and universal design for learning. They also expressed a strong interest in learning about cooperative teaching models and how general education and special education teachers could work collaboratively in delivering instruction and managing student behavior.

Even though the results of study are useful in determining programmatic changes for the future, there are limitations to the study. First of all, a total of 83 certified teachers, 43 elementary and 40 special education, working in public schools participated in the study. This represents approximately 20% of all elementary teachers and 50% of all special education employed by the Ministry of Education. Also, this study only surveyed general education teachers at the elementary level not at the middle or secondary level. Therefore, the sample is not representative of the whole population. Secondly, as noted in Stoiber, Gettinger and Goetz's (1998) research and reflected in this study, the quantitative perspective of the study was valuable in affirming assumptions on different attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion, this method did not examine further the reasoning behind the participants views. Thirdly, this study is not longitudinal, which makes it challenging to identify trends regarding the attitudes and beliefs of inclusion using the same measure (Kalyva, Gojkovic and Tsakiris, 2007). Lastly, there are significant implications in implementing inclusive service delivery models without seeking input or surveying additional stakeholders such as parents and paraprofessionals. For example, do the attitudes of parents of children of special education needs vary depending on the severity of the disability? Do parents of children at the elementary, middle or secondary level differ in their views of whether or not students with special education needs should receive their primary education in the general education classroom? What role do paraprofessionals perceive as their responsibility when educating students with special education needs in regular classrooms? Future studies should examine these potential questions to determine whether or not stakeholders are supportive of inclusion in their attitudes and beliefs. More information is needed on how others perceive inclusion before moving forward and making and changes to the current service delivery models.

References

Anderson, M. J. (2010). *Students with disabilities in general education settings: General education teacher preparation* (Doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University).

Arends, R. I. (2015). *Learning to teach*. McGraw Hill: New York, NY

Ainscow, M. (2007). Taking an inclusive turn. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs 7*(1), 3–73. doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2007.00075.x

Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., & Burden, R. (2000). A survey into mainstream teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school in one local authority, *Educational Psychology,* 20 (2), 191–211. doi.org/10.1080/713663717

Avramidis, E., & Kalyva, E. (2007). The influence of teaching experience and professional development on Greek teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *22*(4), 367–389. doi.org/10.1080/08856250701649989

Avramidis, E. & Norwich, B. (2002). Mainstream teachers' attitudes towards inclusion/integration: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 1–19. doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056

Bender, W. N., C. O. Vail, and K. Scott. (1995). Teachers' attitudes toward increased mainstreaming: Implementing effective instruction for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 28*(2): 87–94. doi.org/10.1177/002221949502800203

Cornoldi, C., Terreni, A., Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1998). Teacher attitudes in Italy after twenty years of inclusion. *Remedial and Special Education, 19*(6), 350–356. doi.org/10.1177/074193259801900605

Dupoux, E., Wolman, C., & Estrada, E. (2005). Teachers' attitudes toward integration of students with disabilities in Haiti and the United States. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 52*(1), 43–58. doi.org/10.1080/10349120500071894

Elhoweris, H., & Alsheikh, N. (2004). *Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion*. Online Submission.

Ellins, J., and J. Porter. 2005. Departmental differences in attitudes to special educational needs in the secondary school. *British Journal of Special Education, 32*(4): 188–195. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8578.2005.00396.x

Galović, D., Brojčin, B., & Glumbić, N. (2014). The attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Vojvodina. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 18*(12), 1262–1282. doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2014.886307

Harris, C.R., Kaff, M.S., Anderson, M.J., & Knackendoffel, E.A. (2007). Designing flexible instruction. *Principal Leadership,* 7(9), 31–35.

Jobe, D., & Rust, J. O. (1996). Teacher attitudes toward inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms, *Education, 117*(1), 148–154.

Jones, F.F. (1997). From Curacao: Papiamentu at home, Dutch at school. *Educational Leadership, 54(*5), p. 80–81

Jordan, A., L. Lindsay, and P. J. Stanovich. (1997). Classroom teachers' instructional interactions with students who are exceptional, at risk and typically achieving. *Remedial and Special Education, 18*(2): 82–93. doi.org/10.1177/074193259701800202

Kalyva, E., Gojkovic, D., & Tsakiris, V. (2007). Serbian teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *International Journal of Special Education, 22*(3), 31–36.

Kong Chi-Sing, D. (1999). *Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Hong Kong (Pokfulam, Hong Kong)).

Loreman, T., Sharma, U., Forlin, C., & Earle, C. (2005). Pre-service teachers' attitude and concerns regarding inclusive education. In *ISEC 2005-Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress. International Special Education Conference. Inclusion: Celebrating Diversity? (The University of Strathclyde 01/08/2005 to 04/08/2005)* (pp. 1–37). The University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.

Rakap, S., & Kaczmarek, L. (2010). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in Turkey. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 25*(1), 59–75. doi.org/10.1080/08856250903450848

Richards, I. C. (1999). Inclusive schools for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, *Support for Learning, 14*(3), 99–103. doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.00112

Rose, R., and M. Howley. (2007). *The Practical Guide to Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Primary Classrooms*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Stanovich, P. J., & Jordan, A. (2002). Preparing general educators to teach in inclusive classrooms: Some food for thought. *The Teacher Educator, 37*(3), 173–185. doi.org/10.1080/08878730209555292

Stoiber, K. C., Goettinger, M., & Goetz, D. (1998). Exploring factors influencing parents' and early childhood practitioners' beliefs about inclusion, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(1), 107–124.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. (2019, May 30). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Database*. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc

Weisel, A., & Dror, O. (2006). School climate, sense of efficacy and Israeli teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, *1*(2), 157–174. doi.org/10.1177/1746197906064677

Table 1

Teacher Demographic Data

	General Education Teachers	Special Education Teachers
Number of Participants Completing the Survey	43	40
Mean Age of Participants	39.8	45.7
Mean Years of Teaching Experience for Participants	13.9	16.5
Gender of Participants	42 Females, 1 Male	38 Females, 2 Males
Number of Participants Holding Teaching Certification in Special Education	4	9

Table 2

My Thinking about Inclusion Scale (Total Scale; alpha, .9369) *Core Perspectives (12 items; alpha .9209)*	*ELEM* $\bar{x}$	*SPED* $\bar{x}$
1. Students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students.	3.35	2.83
2. Inclusion is NOT a desirable practice for educating most typically developing students. (R)	3.00	3.15
3. It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains a mix of children with exceptional education needs and children with average abilities. (R)	2.35	2.85
4. Children with exceptional education needs should be given every opportunity to function in an integrated classroom.	2.63	2.55
5. Inclusion can be beneficial for parents of children with exceptional education needs.	2.63	2.00
6. Parents of children with exceptional needs prefer to have their child placed in an inclusive classroom setting.	2.28	3.03
7. Most special education teachers lack an appropriate knowledge base to educate typically developing students effectively. (R)	3.42	3.10

8. The individual needs of children with disabilities CANNOT be addressed adequately by a regular education teacher. (R)	2.19	2.78
9. We must learn more about the effects of inclusive classrooms before inclusive classrooms take place on a large scale basis. (R)	1.37	1.78
10. The best way to begin educating children in inclusive settings is just to do it.	3.40	2.68
11. Most children with exceptional needs are well behaved in integrated education classrooms.	3.33	3.08
12. It is feasible to teach children with average abilities and exceptional needs in the same classroom.	2.93	3.18
Expected Outcomes (11 items; alpha, .6826)	*ELEM* $\bar{x}$	*SPED* $\bar{x}$
13. Inclusion is socially advantageous for children with special needs.	2.33	2.18
14. Children with special needs will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a special, separate classroom than in an integrated classroom. (R)	2.37	2.58
15. Children with exceptional needs are likely to be isolated by typically developing students in inclusive classrooms. (R)	2.86	2.63
16. The presence of children with exceptional education needs promotes acceptance of individual differences on the part of typically developing students.	2.30	2.50
17. Inclusion promotes social independence among children with special needs.	2.53	2.43
18. Inclusion promotes self-esteem among children with special needs.	2.28	2.33
19. Children with exceptional needs are likely to exhibit more challenging behaviors in an integrated classroom setting. (R)	2.40	2.48
20. Children with special needs in inclusive classrooms develop a better self-concept than in a self-contained classroom.	2.84	2.55
21. The challenge of a regular education classroom promotes academic growth among children with exceptional education needs.	2.98	2.88
22. Isolation in a special class does NOT have a negative effect on the social and emotional development of students prior to middle school. (R)	2.74	2.88
23. Typically developing students in inclusive classrooms are more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors learned from children with special needs. (R)	2.72	2.85

Classroom Practices (12 items; alpha, .9734)	*ELEM* $\bar{x}$	*SPED* $\bar{x}$
24. Children with exceptional needs monopolize teachers' time. (R)	1.49	1.53
25. The behaviors of students with special needs require significantly more teacher-directed attention than those of typically developing children. (R)	1.47	1.58
26. Parents of children with exceptional education needs require more supportive services from teachers than parents of typically developing children. (R)	1.63	1.93
27. Parents of children with exceptional needs present no greater challenge for a classroom teacher than do parents of a regular education student.	3.33	3.28
28. A good approach to managing inclusive classrooms is to have a special education teacher be responsible for instructing the children with special needs. (R)	1.40	2.15

R = Reverse Scoring
Rated on a 5-point scale where 1 = Strongly Accept and 5 = Strongly Reject

Table 3

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Scores for Core Perspectives, Expected Outcomes, Classroom Practices, and Total MTAI Scale

	GEN ED Teachers M (SD)	SPED Teachers M (SD)	All Teachers
Beliefs			
Core Perspectives [a]	33.05 (.64)	32.98 (.50)	33.00 (.49)
Expected Outcomes [b]	28.35 (.26)	28.25 (.23)	28.27 (.23)
Classroom Practices [c]	9.30 (.82)	10.45 (.71)	9.86 (.75)
Total Test [d]	70.70 (.63)	71.68 (.48)	71.12 (.53)

a = score range 12 – 60, b = score range 11 – 55, c = score range 5 – 25, and d = score range 28 – 140 (with the highest score being more negative)

Table 4

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of General Teachers' Scores for Core Perspectives, Expected Outcomes, Classroom Practices Regarding Inclusion Based on Years of Teaching Experience

	Less Than 10 Years M (SD)	10 or More Years M (SD)	F	n^2
Beliefs				
Core Perspectives [a]	32.06 (.64)	33.76 (0.45)	5.49	.32
Expected Outcomes [b]	24.61 (.26)	29.08 (0.94)	3.05	.18
Classroom Practices [c]	8.72 (.82)	9.72 (1.05)	10.5	.62
Total Test [d]	70.60 (.63)	72.56 (0.48)	6.50	.38

a = score range 12 – 60, b = score range 11 – 55, c = score range 5 – 25, and d = score range 28 – 140 (with the highest score being more negative)

Table 5

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Special Education Teachers' Scores for Core Perspectives, Expected Outcomes, Classroom Practices Regarding Inclusion Based on Years of Experience

	Less Than 10 Years M (SD)	10 or More Years M (SD)	F	n^2
Beliefs				
Core Perspectives [a]	34.15 (1.32)	32.19 (1.34)	3.26	.27
Expected Outcomes [b]	29.31(1.13)	26.69 (1.29)	1.14	.10
Classroom Practices [c]	10.77 (1.41)	9.88 (1.30)	11.77	.62
Total Test [d]	74.23 (1.28)	69.61 (1.36)	4.06	.98

a = score range 12 – 60, b = score range 11 – 55, c = score range 5 – 25, and d = score range 28 – 140 (with the highest score being more negative)

Table 6

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Special Education Teachers' Scores for Core Perspectives, Expected Outcomes, Classroom Practices Regarding Inclusion Based on Holding Certification in Special Education

	Certification in Special Education			
	Yes M (SD)	No M (SD)	F	n^2
Beliefs				
Core Perspectives [a]	30.11 (1.49)	33.67 (1.32)	1.62	.21
Expected Outcomes [b]	25.11(1.32)	29.03 (1.21)	14.65	.34
Classroom Practices [c]	8.66 (1.34)	10.63 (1.32)	3.06	.61
Total Test [d]	63.88 (1.42)	73.33 (1.30)	2.60	.44

a = score range 12 – 60, b = score range 11 – 55, c = score range 5 – 25, and d = score range 28 – 140 (with the highest score being more negative)