

PRIMARY TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS OF MALDIVES.

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Abstract: *This study explored the challenges faced by regular and SEN teachers in implementing inclusive education in government primary schools in Republic of Maldives. The instruments used in this mixed method research is a survey questionnaire and interviews. A survey questionnaire of three sections with an open-ended question on teachers' challenges were administered to randomly selected regular teachers (N=125) and SEN teachers (N=34). A semi-structured interview guide was used for regular teachers (N= 8) and SEN teachers (N=7). The data from the open-ended question was analyzed for categories and the interview transcripts were thematically analyzed and coded. The top five challenges of RTs in implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools of Maldives were lack of resources, class size, lack of time, lack of trained teachers and lack of knowledge. The top five challenges experienced by STs in implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools of Maldives were lack of resources, lack of trained teachers, teacher attitudes, lack of collaboration and lack of time. It is recommended for policy makers to provide necessary resources, bring changes to current policy of teacher allocation, provide general teachers with skills and knowledge through programs and conduct awareness programs to foster positive attitudes. It is proposed for policy makers to build partnerships with higher education institutions to develop innovative teacher education programs in preparing skilled teachers for implementing inclusive education in Republic of Maldives.*

Keywords: Barriers, Challenges, Inclusive Education

INTRODUCTION

In the past ten years, milestones were reached in providing education by Ministry of Education (MoE) of Republic of Maldives. A national policy on inclusive education was implemented by MoE in 2013 for all government schools to adopt inclusive education. Investigating the challenges of primary teachers in the early years of implementing inclusive education can be integral in providing inclusive education successfully in the future. This study investigated the primary teachers' challenges in implementing inclusive education in government schools in Republic of Maldives.

Inclusive education. Inclusive education is providing the opportunity to all children in a normal classroom environment. Inclusive education attempts to involve “the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion” (UNESCO

Bangkok, para 4). Booth and Ainscow (2011) defines inclusion as “increasing participation for all children and adults” (p.9). Efforts to provide all children free basic education were made globally by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention of Rights of Children (UN,1989), Education for all Initiative, Millennium

Development Goals (UNESCO, 2000) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2007) laid out specific rights of people with disabilities and their entitlement to fully participate in the society. Children with disabilities have the right to be included in the education system and therefore, inclusive education requires to be set up for children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the people with disabilities, Article 24

states and emphasizes that children with disability are not excluded from free and compulsory primary and secondary education or excluded from the general education system on the basis of their disability. Furthermore, 2 (b) of this Article states that state parties should ensure that “ persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live” (Rieser, 2008, p.2).

Inclusion as a process. Inclusive education is seen as a process (Mittler, 2007; Ainscow, 2005; Clough & Corbett, 2000). Inclusive education is participation of all children and young people (Clough & Corbett, 2000) and an educational approach open to learning (Corbett, 2001). Inclusive education also includes a process of reform and restructuring of the school (Mittler, 2000). As stated by (UNICEF, 2013) it is an on-going process which requires long term vision with the end goal of every child being fully included in child-friendly schools and general society. Mittler (n.d) also explained inclusion as a “long process, a road to travel rather than a destination” (p.12). Therefore, it is evident from research that inclusive education is a long term process.

Identification of special needs in Maldives. The Constitution of the Maldives protects the rights of persons with disabilities. According to Article 17 of the Constitution of the Maldives, everyone including those with mental or physical disability is entitled to the rights and freedom in the Constitution without discrimination of any kind (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2015). Article 17 also specifies that special assistance or protection to disadvantaged individuals or groups, or to groups requiring special social assistance, as provided in law shall not be deemed to be discrimination (Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, 2015).

Inclusive education in Maldives. Throughout history, Maldives had shown great importance to education. Early forms of education included informal education and non- formal education. By the end of 1990's, a class for speech and hearing impaired children was included in a mainstream primary school, in the capital city, Male'. However, inclusive education and integration did not happen until recent years, with an inclusive policy being implemented in 2013. Up to the date of this study, there are no special schools in the Maldives. All mainstream schools are now inclusive schools with some schools having integrated special classes for specific disabilities.

Primary Teachers. Primary teachers are certified and registered at MoE to teach grades 1-6. All primary teachers must have at least a diploma from Maldives National University (MNU) or other private colleges. Primary teachers are mostly prepared to teach all subjects to their students except Islam (religious studies), Dhivehi (local language and linguistics) and Quran. Some schools have one teacher assisting the primary teacher during the primary teacher contact hours. As teachers spend a lot of time with the students, it is vital for class teachers to be aware and be able to identify students with different disabilities to provide inclusive education. Class teachers are responsible for the progress in education for all pupils in the class. Savic (2007) stated that class teachers have to meet all diversity of children's individual needs. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes and beliefs are also critical to successful inclusion (Savic, 2007). Forlin (2004) stated that teachers are crucial in determining what happens in classrooms and the development of more inclusive classrooms requires teachers to cater for different students' learning needs through the modification or differentiation of the curriculum.

Teacher Beliefs. The beliefs and values of teachers are crucial in creating an effective learning environment for inclusion (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2010). Rouse (2007), stated that most mainstream teachers do not believe they have the skills and knowledge for inclusive education and “there is an army of ‘experts’ out there to deal with these students on a one-to one basis or in small more manageable groups”(pg. 12). Hardin and Hardin (2013) stated that many teachers teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms do not feel competent or confident in that role. Furthermore, general education teachers tend to believe that there are other people in the system who can better teach students with problems of academic or learning problems (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000).

Teacher Training. Savic (2007) states that teachers' competencies to adapt his/her teaching to children with special needs or children who experience learning difficulties and to help them develop both their academic and non-academic potential is quite important. Teachers have reported that they do not have sufficient skills to cater to students with special needs (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004). Individual teachers require a context within which the social and academic progress of all learners can be understood (Tsokova & Tarr, 2012). Forlin (2001), stated that the lack of knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers become the greatest barriers to the development of inclusion. The overall picture is that teachers

have many roles in such a rapidly changing field as teaching. Hence, it is essential for teachers to have necessary skills and knowledge to provide inclusive education, as each child is different and teachers must be able to identify and address their uniqueness in nature. “The ultimate goal is to make a wide range of differences ordinary in a general education classroom” (McLeskey & Waldron, 2013, p. 1).

Challenges for teachers. Teachers face many challenges in inclusive education. One of the biggest challenges of inclusive education is appropriately accommodating instructional needs of the diverse learners (Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Inclusion of students with different abilities can be quite challenging for a teacher as well as being a daunting prospect for teachers at any career stage (Hardin & Hardin, 2013). Rouse (2007), stated that inclusivity is difficult to be achieved for additional support needs for reasons such as inadequate preparation of teachers and lack of professional development. Therefore, teachers’ professional qualifications matter when focusing on inclusivity. A study by Lyon, Vaasen and Toomey, (1989), found that the majority of the respondents reported that the training programs teachers completed did not prepare them to provide effective instruction for diverse student population. Furthermore, to instill confidence and competence in teachers for inclusive schools, systematic and intensive training with research-based best practices are needed (Burststein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004).

OBJECTIVE

This study attempted to examine the challenges of primary teachers’ inclusion of students with special needs in primary grades one to five in 11 government schools in Maldives. It explored challenges faced by two groups of primary teachers: one group was regular teachers (RTs) and the second group was special education teachers (STs) in implementing inclusive education in Maldives.

METHOD

Participants

For this study all participants were randomly selected. For the survey questionnaire 159 teachers were selected from 125(78.6%) were regular teachers and 34 (21.4%) were SEN teachers. The sample consisted of 12 males (7.5%) and 147females (92.5%). Their ages ranged from 19 to 59 (M= 33.6 and SD = 7.3). From the regular primary teachers (RTs), 39.2% (n=49) had Diploma in teaching, (28.8% n=36) had degree in primary teaching, (28%; n= 35) had bachelor’s degrees, (2.4%; n=3) had masters degrees, (0.8%; n=1) had inclusive education

certificate and (0.8%; n=1) had primary teaching certificate. From the SEN teachers (STs), (58.8%; n=20) had diploma in teaching, (17.6%; n=6) had degree in primary teaching, (17.6%; n=6) had bachelor’s degrees and (5.9%; n=2) had inclusive education certificates. Furthermore, (89.3%; n=142) of the participants responded that they had experience in teaching students with special needs and (9.4%; n=15) stated they had no experience. However, all respondents were working in inclusive classes at the time this study. From both group of teachers, for the interview (N=15), RTs (N= 8) and STs (N=7) were randomly selected.

Instruments

The open-ended question in the survey questionnaire was used in the study. Section A of the survey questionnaire was constructed to collect various demographic information of the respondents and Section B comprised of closed-ended items on teacher factors, school factors and teacher attitudes on a Likert scale. Section C comprised of three opened-ended questions: (a) teachers’ understanding of inclusive education, (b) listing three supports for inclusive education and (c) listing three challenges in inclusive education. To enhance the validity of the survey questionnaire, it was checked by two supervisors of this study and by a teacher trainer of inclusive education of Maldives National University (MNU). In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out.

Data Analysis

After reading the responses to the question on teachers’ challenges in the open-ended survey questions, the researcher created relevant categories. The responses from open-ended survey questions of RTs (N=125), STs (N=34) and responses from interviews of RTs (N=8) and STs (N=7) were then coded following the steps stated by Tesch (1990). The coded responses between the RTs and STs were analyzed. The similarities and differences of the top five ranked categories of the two groups are described in this paper.

FINDINGS

A total of 332 responses from RTs and 95 responses from STs were obtained from the open-ended survey question and the interviews. From the interview questions and open-ended questions based on teacher challenges, the responses were categorized under themes and coded. The responses were collapsed and grouped into seven main categories and ranked in order of highest to lowest. Findings from the two groups are summarized according to top five challenges in Table 1 below.

Table 1- Challenges of RTs and STs in implementing inclusive education.

RANK	RT CHALLENGES	N	%	ST CHALLENGES	N	%
1	Lack of resources	91	27.4	Lack of resources	31	32.6
2	Class size	47	14.2	Lack of trained teachers	13	13.7
3	Lack of time	45	13.6	Teacher attitude	12	12.6
4	Lack of trained teachers	44	13.3	Lack of collaboration	10	10.5
5	Lack of knowledge	29	8.7	Lack of time	8	8.4

Regular Teachers (RTs)

From the 332 responses of RTs, the top five ranked challenges were found to be lack of resources, large class size, lack of time, lack of trained teachers and lack of knowledge.

Lack of resources. The main challenge stated by 91 RTs (27.4%) were lack of resources pertaining to teaching-learning materials and physical resources. Teachers seemed to try and manage with resources that were available. However, this was not feasible for different ability students always as stated by RT2 below.

We used to get the local resources available from the island and also we try to get community help. For some extent we get, but we don't get very much. We need more resources and different ways to cater for students.

Resources needed for differentiated teaching-learning for SEN students in inclusive classrooms to maintain their interest, was also found to be a concern.

Then we make the worksheet even, we prepare the worksheet for the students even but, that child, they don't like to do those kind of work. They need to do something else but we don't have anything. Like clay or blocks or something they need. (RT4)

Class size. The second challenge of RTs was found to be large class size. 47 RTs (14.2%) stated class size was a challenge in providing inclusive education.

Explaining that the class size was too big for a mainstream teacher to provide inclusive education without a teacher assistant, one teacher stated:

There are like 32 students in a class and only one teacher. We get like 35 minutes per period. So after giving the lesson, after explaining and everything –after ensuring that they are in their places, then going for those students it's not that easy. (RT6)

The challenge of mainstream teachers in providing individual attention to SEN students due to large class size was emphasized. Teachers stated there were too many students than they can provide attention to.

“One teacher when attending to 30 students and trying to give individual attention, it is quite difficult to give special attention to such a student” (RT3).

Lack of time. RTs found time as a challenge hindering their teaching process. 45 RTs (13.6%) stated lack of time as a challenge in implementing inclusive education.

RTs expressed having a SEN student in the mainstream class diverts them from their planned teaching process.

“Any student like that in a class means we have to give individual time for them. We are just taking time from our period especially for that child and the other children are lacking that time” (RT7).

Lack of trained teachers. 44 RTs (13.3%) stated lack of trained teachers as a challenge in inclusive education. The interviewees highlighted the lack of trained STs and teacher assistants in class as challenging when providing inclusive education in mainstream class.

One interviewee explained the inability to provide individual attention due to lack of teachers. She stated:

“There are students who need individual attention within the classroom also, within the inclusive environment. However, as they don't have enough teachers they are unable to provide, the school is unable to provide the assistance” (RT1).

When asked if there was a teacher assistant available in the school, RT stated:

“No one. Even last year I have requested so many times because in my class there were two students” (RT4).

Teachers were optimistic about having an assistant teacher.

“It would be so nice if we could have an assistant teacher in each class” (RT8).

Teachers also were uncertain with SEN students in class without the help of an assistant teacher.

“One of the challenge I face is lack of teachers. We need an assistant teacher in the class because anything may happen under any situation” (RT3).

Furthermore, in some schools, the RTs attending to SEN students were not trained teachers.

“The other thing is we have got very few teachers, very few. Only two teachers I would say. And those two teachers are not very well trained to cater for the special needs and that is one thing” (RT2).

Lack of knowledge. 29 RTs (8.7%) responded lack of knowledge as a challenge, when implementing inclusive education.

Teachers lacking knowledge about inclusive education resulted in teachers’ lack of confidence and ability for classroom management.

RTs also felt that they didn’t have enough knowledge on inclusive education.

“Teachers lacking knowledge about special needs or inclusivity, not having enough information about that” (RT5).

Teachers did not know how to attend to SEN students’ needs in the mainstream class.

“Sometimes we see that if any student is ...any hyperactive students are there in the class other students are also joining and we are unable to control them. We do not have such expertise and therefore it is very difficult” (RT7).

It is also found that the current policy of allocating teachers is limiting trained teachers for inclusive education.

“The current policy is counting the number of heads or number of students studying in the particular school and allocating teachers. There are not seeing the severity of the disability” (RT 1).

When asked how this can be a disadvantage for the school, the teacher stated that:

The disadvantage is they are allocating the teachers to the number of students, but when they count like that, not all the students are autistic, not all the students are physically impaired, not all the students are visually impaired. So two to three teachers cannot handle multiple disabilities [in the school] at one time. So that is the main problem. (RT1)

One teacher suggested how the policy makers can solve the issue of teacher allocation.

“So I think Ministry [MOE] needs to think about it and change some policies regarding the number of cases we have, not the number of heads” (RT2).

SEN teachers (STs)

A total of 95 responses from STs were analyzed from the open-ended question in the survey questionnaire. The top five ranked challenges of STs were found to be lack of resources, lack of trained teachers, teacher attitudes, lack of collaboration and lack of time.

Lack of resources. 31STs (32.6%) reported lack of resources as their biggest challenge.

STs shared how they cope with lack of teaching learning materials, stating that:

“Actually when we start also students’ level is identified, but in mainstream there’s no prepared materials or activities to the level of students who need extra assistance or have special needs, so based on our own experiences we prepare” (ST4).

Physical resources also was a challenge. Lack of classrooms and limited class room space affects the planned teaching activities.

Then there is lack of classrooms. We are also accommodating severe cases in the same classroom so sometimes other students’ attention is affected by the severe students because we have one room. Some students try to copy his behaviour even. So I would like a partition. We have requested for it. So far we haven’t got it yet. Some materials also we would like. (ST2)

Lack of trained teachers. 13STs (13.7%) stated lack of trained teachers as a challenge in implementing inclusive education. The interviewees highlighted the lack of trained STs and teacher assistants in class as challenging when providing inclusive education in mainstream class.

STs expressed the impact of not having enough teachers.

We need teachers to accompany the students in mainstream classes. I also want to go with other students not only one, so such can be done if other teachers are available. We find it hard to give individual attention even. So lack of teachers is one thing. (ST2)

“There are no trained teachers. One of the challenge is we don’t have [enough] SEN teachers. Only one teacher can go to mainstream class” (ST6).

Teacher attitudes. 12STs (12.6%) stated mainstream teachers’ attitude as a challenge for them.

For inclusive education to occur, mainstream teachers need to accept different ability students in their class.

“We still find it hard to face the challenges, like accepting. Teachers are not believing that students [SEN] should be in the class” (ST4).

“We have different children right? He will walk, he will talk, he will shout in the class. He will be very excited in some very different situations. That makes the teacher disturbed” (ST7).

Some teachers were unwilling to accept the different ability students although the school has made positive changes in curriculum.

"I can state that even though the syllabuses are constructed better now, teachers do not take challenges the way we did before" (ST4).

"Ask them to accept the students. Otherwise, it won't work here" (ST7).

Some RTs were described to be hesitant in accepting SEN students in their class.

Just like there are positive teachers there are still teachers who do not – who cannot- I don't know- who still have difficulty in accepting these students. Because here we have a program to cater to their strengths we send them to class [mainstream] but even then there are some who hesitate to bring them and cater to their needs. (ST3)

The attitude of school management was also found to be a theme in the interview responses.

"Just change the top management, their thinking- I don't mind the people. Change their thinking" (ST4).

Lack of collaboration. 10STs (10.5%) stated lack of collaboration of RTs being a challenge in implementing inclusive education.

Highlighting on the lack of collaboration from the mainstream teachers, a SEN teacher stated that:

I have noticed that you know, we used to make star charts and reinforcements, now they don't bring such variations. They just say students refuse to listen or they are not doing any work. But mainstream teachers do not try hard enough. Very recently we started remedial and honestly, only six classes were conducted. (ST4)

Lack of time. STs found lack of time hindering their teaching process. 8STs (8.4%) stated lack of time as a challenge when implementing inclusive education. Time restrictions seem to limit carrying out professional development programs by STs for inclusive education.

A SEN teacher stated a possible reason for this challenge.

"Maybe all teachers are busy and they are also studying part-time so they don't want to take any more workload" (ST4).

"Lack of time to conduct programs is a challenge we have" (ST2).

DISCUSSION

From the findings, both RTs and STs identified the main challenge is lack of resources. Lack of teaching- learning materials not only hinder the teaching process, it also prevents the student who need individual attention from engaging in

learning. A proper learning environment should be created for inclusion so that all children can learn well and achieve their potential (UNESCO, 2009). Schools should focus providing learner-centered teaching methods and develop learning materials (OECD, 2003), to cater to the needs of all children. For effective inclusion, these resources should be maintained in regular schools where students with disabilities are enrolled (OECD, 2003). Physical resources such as more classrooms, accessibility and technical items should be in schools for full inclusion to occur. However, lack of funding and budget constraints, administrative and policy level support pose challenges that can slow down this progress (CRS Vietnam, 2010).

Lack of trained teachers have a huge impact on both SEN units and mainstream classes. When there is no assistant teacher in the class, the mainstream teachers are uncertain of their role and often spend time in managing the class rather than carrying out the planned teaching activities. When trained teachers are available to attend to students and their unique learning needs individually, students put in more effort (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to make changes to the current policy of allocating teachers to the number of students. Policy makers should consider the severity and type of disability of students when allocating teachers for schools. A teacher assistant should be available in all schools to assist in the mainstream class. In making schools inclusive, it is common pattern for a assistant to work in the class with SEN students, within the general curriculum (OECD, 2003).

As teachers have stated lack of trained teachers or not having any assistant teacher in class, to manage and teach diverse students is a challenge. If a teacher assistant is present in class, the RTs will possibly have more time to continue with their planned activities. A common concern of teachers is managing students with disruptive behaviour in the class (Willis, 2007), and teachers have reported feeling frustrated and guilt when time is taken away from the majority of students when having to accommodate SEN students in class (Cassaday, 2011). The routine work of lesson planning, teaching, other extra and co-curricular activities and attend meetings consumes teachers daily hours. Additional time of regular teachers to complete paperwork and collaborate with SEN teachers is seen as unfair in comparison to time devoted to other students in class (Cassaday, 2011). However, establishing a good support system within the school and education system, the issue with time can be resolved. Strategic training, specialist support team and a teacher assistant in class is found to be the most beneficial support system for teachers to

successfully implement inclusive education (Willis, 2007).

A large class size can overload teachers and pose difficulties for them to attend to individual children's needs (Torombe, 2013). Studies show that this can contribute to teachers developing negative feelings and even being annoyed to have students with special needs in class (Torombe, 2013). A large class size is seen as a barrier to successful inclusion (Save the Children, 2002). A smaller class is always desired by many teachers, show a higher level of engagement and individualization (Zarghami & Schnellert, 2004), and intervene with students learning problems effectively (PSEA, n.d). However, a small class has not shown to be a significant factor in successful inclusion (Save the Children, 2002), and there is not enough evidence to prove that class size reduction has increased achievement of students with special needs (Zarghami & Schnellert, 2004).

Teachers equipped with the knowledge and skills to cater to diverse students help students to adapt to their environment and student performance (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015), leading to successful inclusion. Many teachers feel they are not prepared to teach diverse students effectively (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). Preparing the teachers with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to ensure a challenging learning and motivating classroom environment (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011), should be a commitment of all accountable parties (CRS Vietnam, 2010). To be an effective teacher in an inclusive classroom, teachers need to be up-to-date with type of disabilities, methodologies, technology and policy (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). This can be accomplished through ongoing professional development over time (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011), beginning from pre-service based teacher training and continuing through out in-service professional development (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). It is important to note that one teacher cannot have multiple specializations and therefore, several specializations are needed to support and cooperate with the school staff (UNESCO, 2009).

Teachers need to be well prepared to implement inclusive education at the pre-service level (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). General education teachers are responsible for students with and without disabilities. Teachers should require special education course before entering workforce (Mundia & Bradshaw, 2006), and professional development programs for in-service teachers (CRS Vietnam, 2010). Pre-service training will equip teachers with practical

experiences. Moreover, teachers need to have practical experience rather than theories before becoming classroom teachers. Prospective teachers need current skill and knowledge (Torombe, 2013), to cater to diverse learners.

Teacher collaboration enhances learning outcomes (CRS Vietnam, 2010). High level of collaboration contributes in building a conducive environment (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). Collaboration among whole staff contributes to successful inclusion as inclusion cannot happen in isolation (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). Many key stakeholders should work together to ensure teachers have the skill and support for diverse learners (CRS Vietnam, 2010), and work towards making inclusive education a reality (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). There are no incentives for regular teachers in implementing inclusive education. As a result, it can be difficult to motivate regular teachers on taking on additional work such as preparing materials, that comes along with inclusion (CRS Vietnam, 2010).

Awareness of inclusive education at school level and community level is needed to foster positive attitudes. Since the policy on inclusive education in Maldives is quite recent, it is important to involve educational authorities (CRS Vietnam, 2010), in this case the Ministry of Education. Awareness about the rights of child, their needs and aspiration (Save the Children, 2002) should be created in the society, so that society becomes more understanding and tolerant (UNESCO, 2009). Teachers need to be made aware of the extra input (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015). This can be achieved by intergrated pre-service, in-service teacher training programs to support students with disabilities in regular classrooms (CRS Vietnam, 2010).

A positive attitude towards inclusive education can be instilled from the top management of the schools. Teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders should maintain and emphasize positive attitudes towards inclusion (CRS Vietnam, 2010) or inclusion will never succeed. Teachers' attitudes have a crucial role in inclusive education (Maheshwari & Shapurkar, 2015) and is found to affect the inclusion process and its outcomes (Torombe, 2013). Negative attitudes can build up from the teachers' experiences of challenging students and changing attitudes can take time (UNESCO, 2009).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the regular primary teachers' and special education primary teachers' challenges in implementing inclusive education in government schools in Republic of Maldives. The main challenges which hinders successful implementation of inclusive education were

identified. Schools need trained teachers, teaching assistants and extra support for teachers. It is recommended that the policy makers take necessary measures to provide resources and make changes to current policy in teacher allocation and class size. Steps should be taken to support general teachers with skills and knowledge through professional development programs and conduct awareness programs to foster positive attitudes and teacher collaboration. Furthermore, it is proposed for policy makers to build partnerships with higher education institutions to develop innovative teacher education programs to ensure all teachers are equipped with skills, knowledge and experience to implement inclusive education.

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