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Inclusive Physical Education: Fijian Teachers' Opinions on Incorporating Students with Special Needs and/or Disabilities into The Physical Education Field

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Abstract: This study investigates the perspectives of secondary school physical education teachers in the Western division regarding the feasibility of incorporating children with disabilities into physical education sessions. It also investigated the obstacles that educators encounter when attempting to integrate learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into Physical Education. The sample for this research consisted of 100 physical education (PE) teachers from the western region of Fiji, with a particular emphasis on Ba, Tavua, Lautoka, and Nadi. The research employed a self-constructed questionnaire that consisted of 20 items on a Likert scale and was subsequently validated by experts. The findings revealed a diverse array of sentiments regarding inclusion. In terms of their ability to instruct learners with disabilities and their belief in the beneficial impact of integration in sports-related disciplines, numerous instructors were optimistic; however, they simultaneously recognised significant obstacles. Schools demonstrated modest agreement regarding their provision of resources and assistance in accordance with an all-encompassing assessment; however, additional guidance may be considered necessary by all parties. Teachers were concerned about the individualisation of activities and the necessity of maintaining safety, despite their conviction that integrating learners with special education requirements met the needs of all children.

Fijian physical education instructors advocate for the incorporation of individuals with disabilities in the classroom. This emphasises the importance of improved training, increased resources, and appropriate support in order to effectively integrate special needs students into Physical Education classes. These regions would facilitate a more conducive physical education environment that is inclusive of all students, regardless of their background. In the interest of all other children, the following is a comprehensive conclusion.

Keywords: Physical Education, Disabilities, Inclusion, Special needs

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching Physical Education (PE) to all students faces various difficulties not found in the regular classroom. The latter is about involving physical activities, utilizing special venues and equipment, and grouping students during these tasks. However, these problems can be intensified by the presence of learners who are disadvantaged, according to Bailey and Robertson (2000), referring to them as children “who have a learning difficulty (Special Educational Needs- that requires special educational provision to be made for them”. This was as per the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) of 2001. The problem is about including students with special needs or disabilities in Physical Education (PE) classes, and all students, regardless of their abilities, should have the same chances when studying and participating in PE. One's attitude and perception towards physical education will determine his/her eagerness towards living a healthy and active lifestyle (Ali *et al.*, 2022)

Positive attitudes involve maintaining a positive mindset towards a circumstance, whereas negative attitudes involve adopting a negative mindset towards a situation. Individuals are unable to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise on a subject that they have

negative views towards. Individuals typically find it easier to showcase their expertise and talents when they possess optimistic attitudes. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and actively improve attitudes during the educational process to effectively adjust and strengthen a person's behaviours when needed. Individuals do not develop attitudes; rather, they are generated (Prasanna *et al.*, M, 2020)

According to Giangreco *et al.* (1993), teaching in an inclusive setting may increase awareness about the needs of these gifted children by children free from disabilities. According to Robertson (2000), inclusive curriculum improves the instructional capabilities of all students. Oliver (1996) stated that the concept of “integrated education” in the past meant that children with disabilities were put into the ordinary classroom while being taught differently from other children, considering special needs children abnormal and in need of correction. More on socialisation and inclusion in society are now emphasized in the present-day inclusive education mainstreaming policy for such learners.

As echoed by Miles (2000), it was all about “attending school” in the past compared to “being part of school” under inclusive education. That is why the teacher plays a central position in being an inclusivity

manager and inclusion facilitator within the environment.

Inclusive Physical Education (PE) incorporates students with special needs and disabilities into mainstream PE classes. It has special significance in Fiji, particularly in the Western Division. Therefore, comprehension of educators' views about this issue is essential to enhancing the classroom milieu for all learners. Studies in Fiji have analysed the extent to which disabled students are included in ordinary schools. It was observed by Kumar and Sharma (2018) that numerous educators are willing to incorporate disabled students; they, however, believe that educators lack enough skills and equipment to do so. They are of the opinion that for the successful implementation of inclusive education, more assistance resources and enhanced policies are necessary.

It is from the research and policies that including students with special needs in Physical Education (PE) is a two-edged sword- a problem and a solution. As a rule, most Fiji teachers like incorporating them but claim to be lacking the necessary skills to manage them. (Kumar and Sharma, 2018) assert, therefore, that these people require further education and materials to care for these young ones properly. Similarly, it stipulates that the authorities should provide more assistance to the tutors.

The UK government has implemented various inclusion policies in education for the last 25 years. The Warnock Report of 1978 initiated this when it recommended that children with Special Educational Needs be incorporated into mainstream schools. The inclusion of students with SEN in normal school settings has thus gained more emphasis through subsequent policies like the national curriculum (1999), the SEN and Disability Act (2001), and general educational practices (2001).

According to Norwich (1994), teachers' views on including special-needs students in regular classrooms significantly influence the latter's educational experiences. For Sternberg (1993) and Green (2002), understanding teachers' regular beliefs about their classrooms is important in helping SEN students perform under regular conditions.

Several studies mention that the hardest group for teachers to place in inclusive environments across different disciplines is students with emotional and behavioural disabilities (EBD). This fact has been established by Clough and Lindsay (1991). Furthermore, Shanker (1995) asserts that the aspect of full inclusion of youngsters suffering from EBDs often remains a puzzle for most teachers who handle them. In addition, Diamond (1994) noted, and so did Heflin and Bullock (1999), that teachers were concerned that integrating

such students might have a negative impact on other SEN learners in the classroom.

According to Guetzloe (1994) and Shanker (1995), support staff are important in helping teachers manage children with emotional and behavioural disorders. Furthermore, D'Alonzo, Giordano, and Van Leeuwen (1997) maintain that teachers doubt the merits of inclusive education and anticipate logistical issues whereby all learners are incorporated into regular schools.

According to Jarvis and French (1990) and Rizzo and Vispoel (1991), positive teacher attitudes play a central role in ensuring the inclusion of disabled children in Physical Education (PE) classes. To measure physical education instructors' attitudes toward teaching kids who have disabilities, research derived concepts from the theory of reasoned action developed by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). The latter two studies extended this work by examining PE teachers' general feelings about having kids (with disabilities) taking part together with others within PE class - Hodge, Murata and Kozub (2002) as Aloia *et al.* (1980) and Kuester (2000), found that female educators generally tend to have a more favourable attitude towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) compared to their male counterparts. However, Rizzo and Wright (1987) demonstrated that there is no discernible distinction between males and females in this regard, whereas Duchane and French (1998) noted that teachers of both genders assess pupils with special educational needs in a similar manner. Rizzo and Vispoel (1991) noted that physical education instructors in the United States preferred educating children who face educational challenges rather than those who face physical challenges.

Although teachers' attitudes have been sufficiently studied before now, more research is needed on how they react to PE inclusion. Avramidis and Norwich (2002), as well as Heikanaro-Johansson & Vogler (1996), have requested further studies on the kind of preparation that educators receive and other school-related variables that affect how instructors view students included in their general teaching practices, e.g., policies, resources, support as well as organisational structures. In this line of thought, the current research tackles these aspects whilst discussing how educators perceive this concept.

Physical education is crucial for the comprehensive development of a child. Furthermore, it plays a substantial role in the development of one's character. Perception is a crucial cognitive attribute of a human being that enables us to become acquainted with our surroundings. Without accurate perceptions, individuals will be unable to comprehend the constant realities that surround them. Evidently, children with lower proficiency levels display reluctance to engage in

sports activities, and their home environment does not foster regular participation in physical activities. (Ali, M. F., & Prasanna, B. K. 2021)

PE class should/must be attended by all students regardless of their abilities. To enhance inclusive practices, it is better to know how teachers feel. This is significant within the Fiji education system because it will promote social consciousness and equality through student involvement in Physical Education classes who, regardless of their disabilities, can enjoy PE. The research focussed on how PE teachers in Fiji see the inclusion of learners with special needs or disabilities in their classes. Furthermore, it investigated PE teachers' viewpoints regarding inclusive education and how these views influence their implementation of inclusive approaches in their physical education classes. Moreover, it highlighted PE teachers' difficulties while including students with disabilities or special needs in their lessons.

METHODOLOGY

To examine what Fijian teachers think of adding students having disabilities or any sort of special needs to Physical Education (PE) lessons, Fijian teachers will be involved in quantitative research design. This kind of design lies upon applying a Likert scale questionnaire to collect data from PE educators. Attention will be paid to understanding educators' attitudes, perceptions, as well as practices concerning inclusive PE.

Study Location

The research has been done in Ba, Tavua, Lautoka, and Nadi in the Western Division of Fiji. These regions were identified since I live in the Western side of Fiji, and I have more flexibility in meeting and interviewing PE teachers from the West. because I have a tight work schedule, going out of the West would be a

tranquil task for me. It would have required a lot of time and funds to interview PE teachers from various parts of Fiji.

Participants

The research involved 100 physical education teachers (66 males and 34 females) from Secondary schools located in the Western Division. The participants were selected randomly from the list of physical education teachers provided by the Ministry of Education.

Data Collection Instrument

The research tool for gathering information is a Likert-type questionnaire that consists of twenty statements on inclusion in Physical Education. Individuals were expected to evaluate every statement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This tool was created from various sources, including previous studies, Ajzen & Fishbein (1980), as well as a work by Hodge *et al.* (2002), among others, on inclusive physical education practices.

Data Analysis Methods

Analysis of teacher's attitudes and perceptions has been conducted using **descriptive statistics** on questionnaire responses. For each statement, measures such as median, mode, and mean will be computed, and a graph will be drawn with its analysis.

Inferential Statistics: Differences in attitudes have been analysed using inferential statistical methods, including t-tests and ANOVA based on gender, i.e. male and female, and years of experience, which ranged from 1-5 years, 6- 10 years, 11-15 years, and 16+ years.

RESULTS

Table 1. Independent T-Test Result Comparing the Perception of Teachers Comparing Different Gender

Variable		N	Mean	SD	f	P
Inclusion	Male	66	2.5500	0.83176	2.832	0.112
	Female	34	4.3667	0.46332		
Implementation	Male	66	2.7167	0.81110	5.515	0.032
	Female	34	4.4000	0.40000		
difficulties	Male	66	3.2667	0.88352	2.645	0.123
	Female	34	4.7000	0.32863		

The t-test result shows that there is no significant difference in the means of male and female teachers when comparing the inclusion of learners with special needs or disabilities in their classes. However, the females have a higher mean compared to the males. Moreover, there is a significant difference when comparing male and female teachers' viewpoints on

inclusive education and how these views influence their implementation of inclusive approaches in their physical education classes. Furthermore, there is no significant difference between the p-value of 0.123 and the f-value of 2.645 when comparing male and female teachers for difficulties doing PE, including students with disabilities or special needs, in their lessons.

Table 2: ANOVA Results Comparing the Perception of Teachers from Different Experiences in Teaching with Different Variables of Inclusive Physical Education

Variable		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Inclusion	Between Groups	12.780	3.035	3.325	0.041
	Within Groups		0.913		
Implementation	Between Groups	7.713	2.571	3.088	0.032
	Within Groups		0.833		
Difficulties	Between Groups	8.349	2.783	4.331	0.023
	Within Groups		0.643		

The results show that there are significant differences when comparing the inclusion of learners with special needs or disabilities in their classes with teachers of different experiences. The null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

When comparing PE teachers' viewpoints in Fiji regarding inclusive education and how these views influence their implementation of inclusive approaches in their physical education classes. There is a significant difference with the p-value of 0.032, which is significant at 0.05. teachers with different years of teaching experience differ in their perception of the implementation of teaching inclusive children.

The p-value of 0.023 and the f-value of 4.33.1 show a significant difference in the perception of teachers with different teaching years of experience with difficulties PE teachers encounter while including students with disabilities or special needs in their lessons.

Table 3: Shows the Results of How Confident Teachers are in Teaching Students with Disabilities

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
11	17	22	39	11

Analysis- To ensure an effective inclusive education, it is important that we have confidence when teaching students suffering from physical and emotional disabilities. (Kudlacek *et al.*, 2002) Of the 100 teachers who participated, about 49 % of them confirmed that they could handle such cases comfortably, which means they generally hold favourable opinions about their students' abilities even if not all are ready.

Table 4: Results Showing Views of Teachers on How Trained They are For Conducting Physical Education for Inclusive Children

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
16%	22%	28%	28%	6%

Analysis- A clear need for enhanced training programs is indicated by the fact that only 6% of teachers strongly agreed, and 16 per cent strongly disagreed that enough training was given to the teachers to handle children with disabilities.

Table 5: Shows The Frequency Analysis of How Hard the Teachers Find to Modify PE Activities to Suit Learners Who are Differently Abled.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
5%	22%	25%	22%	27%

49 % of the teachers felt that it was hard for the teachers to modify games to include all the students in the class. whereas 25 per cent stayed natural.

The results indicate that the teachers need more training to be creative with modified games.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis, we discovered a few key insights. Many teachers are typically confident that they can teach an inclusive PE class even though they recognize the importance of extra training. School administrations and fellow staff help in inclusive PE, but it is not enough. More needs to be offered and done. The disabled pupil's skills in both physical and social terms are likely to be improved by inclusive PE. The demand for improved policies on inclusive PE and comprehensive training programs at Fijian schools is very loud. Overall results suggest that PE teachers are inclined towards inclusive physical education in the Western Division of Fiji. Nevertheless, inclusive PE requires more resources, training, and policy development to be completely supported and implemented. The analysis indicates the teachers tend to agree and strongly agree on many questions which may be interpreted as evidence of their generally positive attitudes to PE in regular class. There is possible evidence available that can be utilized in comparing the agreement by instructors from various locations. To illustrate, it has been indicated in the prior research that

resources and training for educators have profound effects on their self-assurance and capability to carry out all-rounded education methods (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Hodge *et al.*, 2002). These findings signal deficiencies and strengths in the confidence levels of physical education teachers concerning inclusive physical education and where they require more training or resourcing.

Physical education teachers are encouraged to be adequately equipped for the integration of students with disabilities and special educational needs in their lessons. Several factors influence the success of inclusive classes, such as the academic readiness of physical education teachers, the availability of support services for students with disabilities, and the provision of support for physical educators (Sherrill, 2004). The attitude of physical educators towards teaching students with disabilities and special educational needs is a crucial factor in successful inclusion. This attitude is believed to greatly influence the actions of physical educators when teaching students with disabilities in regular classes (Folsom-Meek & Rizzo, 2002). Physical educators' attitudes significantly impact the participation of students with disabilities and special educational needs in conventional physical education classes (Sherrill, 2004, p. 225).

One additional objective of this study was to investigate the impact of gender on attitudes. The absence of notable gender disparities aligns with certain studies (Hodge *et al.*, 2002) while contradicting others (McGrath., 2019) that observed women exhibiting more favourable attitudes. These studies attribute this discrepancy to societal norms that expect women to assume caregiving roles. In their study, Schmidt-Gotz *et al.* (1994) observed that female respondents displayed a slight inclination towards a more favourable attitude, although the differences were not statistically significant. Nevertheless, the findings of two Greek research (Vaporidi *et al.*, 2005) indicate that female physical educators exhibit a greater inclination to incorporate children with impairments and special educational needs into their classes compared to their male counterparts. According to Hannah and Pliner (1983), it is premature to conclude that female instructors have more positive opinions about women and children with disabilities and special educational needs compared to male teachers.

CONCLUSION

In this study, it was closely studied as to how PE teachers in Western Fiji see the inclusion of learners with special needs or disabilities in their classes, what are the viewpoints of PE teachers in Fiji when it comes to inclusive education, and how these views influence their implementation of inclusive approaches in their physical education classes. It also zoomed on PE teachers' issues and difficulties while including students with disabilities or special needs in their lessons. Although this would necessitate furthering support, resources, and training,

some felt that fully realizing it is rather impossible. When reflecting on inclusion, they thought about the extent of participation for children with special educational needs (SEN) and if it is detrimental or supportive for the whole class and the child himself/herself. The reason Physical Education (PE) is unique from other subjects is the requirement for certain types of support and occurrence in different physical settings. From the results, it was more difficult to get assistance from well-trained personnel in PE than in other subjects, thereby making PE a risky activity, especially when it comes to children with special educational needs. Most teachers are confident they can teach inclusive physical education (PE). However, there remains a large gap between their confidence and the provision of adequate door-step training and professional growth opportunities. There is a shortage of either administrative support or any classified resource in a significant number of schools. While it's considered beneficial to all students in most cases, teachers still have worries regarding this regard, mainly on how students with disability will cope as well as affect other learners. In Fijian schools, there is significant advocacy for improved PE participation that could enhance the support of inclusive PE; notwithstanding the positivity towards the practice among instructors, critical aspects require enhancement, such as training, resources, and policy development.

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