

The Impact of Inclusive Education on Teachers' Mental Health: Insights from Samoa

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education (IE) aims to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, can learn together in the same environment. While this approach promotes equity and inclusivity, it also presents significant challenges for educators, particularly in developing countries like Samoa. This study employed a phenomenological approach to examine teachers' views on how teaching in an inclusive education classroom impact their well-being and mental health. Fifteen Samoan primary teachers from three schools were interviewed through focus group discussions of their experiences of IE. Findings indicated that increased workload, limited training, lack of support, inadequate resources contributed to teacher stress and burn out within the inclusive classroom. The findings have significant implications for teacher training. These insights underscore the need for targeted professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills and resources necessary to effectively manage inclusive classrooms.

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Teacher Mental Health, Samoa Education System, Educational Inclusion, Teacher Well-being.

Introduction

Inclusive education (IE) is a global movement aimed at ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities have access to quality education within the same learning environment [1]. The concept is rooted in the principles of equity, diversity, and social justice, emphasizing the importance of providing equal opportunities for all learners [2]. In Samoa, the implementation of IE policies has been met with both enthusiasm and resistance [3]. While the goal of inclusivity is widely supported, the practical challenges of integrating students with diverse needs into mainstream classrooms have significant implications for teachers' well-being and mental health.

Problem Statement

The impact of IE on teacher well-being and mental health has not been extensively studied, despite being a critical factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education policies. This paper aims to explore how IE affects teachers well-being in

Samoa drawing on my PhD thesis, "Stakeholders' Perspectives on the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy in Samoa: A Cultural Fit." By focusing on the experiences of teachers, this study seeks to identify the specific challenges they face and propose strategies to support their well-being. While the paper draws on data gathered in the past decade, it also highlights progress made in IE in Samoa since the past decade.

Literature Review

Inclusive education which seeks to integrate students with diverse needs into mainstream classrooms, is a significant global movement aimed at ensuring equity, diversity, and social justice in education. While the benefits of IE for student are well documented, its impact on teacher well-being and mental health has gained increasing attention. This literature review examines recent research on the relationship between IE and teacher well-being, highlighting key findings and identifying areas for future exploration.

Inclusive Education Defined

Inclusive education refers to an educational approach that aims to integrate all students regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This approach

advocates for the inclusion of student regardless of disability and diverse backgrounds in mainstream classrooms, to ensure they receive equal educational opportunities to participate in all aspects of school life [4]. The underlying principle in IE is the right to quality education for every child [5]. It also emphasizes the need for schools to accommodate and adapt to the diverse needs of all students, providing necessary support and removing barriers to learning and participation.

Benefits and Challenges of Inclusive Education

Research on IE globally has highlighted both benefits and challenges. Studies have shown that IE can lead to improved academic outcomes and social integration for students with disabilities [6]. However, teachers often report increased stress and burnout due to the additional demands placed on them [7,8].

Challenges in IE

Teachers in IE classrooms often encounter several challenges that can affect their well-being. One of the significant/primary challenges is lack of adequate training and preparations. Many teachers report feeling unprepared meeting the diverse needs of their students which can lead to increase stress and anxiety [9,10]. Additionally, the need for individualized lesson plans and adapted teaching methods can be time-consuming and overwhelming [9]. Another significant challenge is the insufficient support and resources available to teachers. Without adequate support from teacher aides, special education professionals, and administrative staff, teachers may feel isolated and unsupported in their efforts to create an inclusive environment. This lack of support can contribute to feelings of burnt out and frustration [6].

Impact on Teachers' Mental Health

The challenges associated with teaching in inclusive classrooms can have a profound impact on teachers' mental health. Studies have shown that teachers in inclusive settings often experience higher levels of stress and burnout compared to their counterparts in non-inclusive classrooms [6,11]. Teacher well-being is a critical factor in the successful implementation of IE. The challenges associated with IE can significantly impact teachers' mental health and job satisfaction. Increased workload (due to the need to develop individual lesson plans and adapt teaching methods to accommodate diverse students' needs [9], lack of adequate training, and insufficient support are some of the key issues that contribute to stress and burnout among teachers [9,11].

The constant pressure to meet the needs of all students, combined with insufficient resources and support, can lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and burn out [6,11] decreasing job satisfaction [9]. The value of support teachers received from experts in inclusive education cannot be overemphasized. For example, Honkasilta & Koutsoklenis [8], note that lack of support from teacher aides, special education professional, and administrative staff can leave teachers feeling isolated and unsupported, exacerbating stress and frustration. Similarly, support in terms of training and teacher preparation is essential. For example, research shows that many teachers feel unprepared to manage the demands of inclusive

education due to inadequate training [7]. Moreover, the emotional toll of managing diverse classroom dynamics can also affect teacher's mental health. Teachers may feel overwhelmed by the need to address behavioral issues, facilitate social interactions, and ensure that all students feel included and valued [12]. This emotional burden can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

Job Satisfaction and Professional Fulfillment

Despite the challenges, some studies have found that teaching in inclusive classrooms can also have positive effects on teachers' job satisfaction and professional fulfillment. Teachers who feel competent and supported in their roles are more likely to feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction from their work [9]. Additionally, the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of students with disabilities can be a source of motivation and pride for teachers. However, the overall impact on job satisfaction is often mixed with some teachers reporting high levels of satisfaction while others experience significant stress and burnout. The key factors influencing job satisfaction include the level of training and support provided, the availability of resources, and the overall school climate [11].

While global studies show benefits and challenges teaching in IE, in addition to how IE impact on teacher well-being, no study has been undertaken in Samoa in this respect. This paper documents teachers' perceptions on how teaching in an inclusive classroom affect their well-being and mental health.

The research objective for this research was to identify the beliefs, experiences and practices of teachers regarding IE in Samoa. In order to achieve the research objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards IE?
2. What are teachers' views about their experiences and preparation for IE?
 - (i) How do teachers describe their experiences of teaching in inclusive classrooms?
 - (ii) What are teachers' practices in inclusive classrooms?

Theoretical Framework

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory by Stevan Hobfoll [13], is used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting teachers' well-being in IE settings. This framework provides valuable insights into how resource depletion, coping strategies, perceived competence, and contextual factors interact to influence teachers' stress, burnout, and overall mental health.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory argues that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect their resources. Resources can include personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem, skills), objects (e.g., tools, equipment), conditions (e.g., job security, social support), and energies (e.g., time, effort). Stress occurs when there is a threat to these resources, actual loss of resources, or a lack of resource gain following significant resource

investment). In the context of IE, teachers may feel that their resources (time, energy, support) are depleted due to the additional demands of teaching students' with special needs. In relation to training, without sufficient training, teachers might perceive a threat to their competence and self-efficacy, essential personal resources for effective teaching. Furthermore, the continuous demand to balance the needs of all students, especially without adequate support, can lead to resource loss (mental and physical energy), resulting in stress and burnout. Teachers who feel they are constantly losing resources without adequate replenishment may experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, affecting their overall well-being. Hence, by understanding these dynamics, interventions can be designed to enhance resource availability for teachers, such as providing professional development, increasing classroom support, and ensuring a supportive school environment.

Research Methodology

Phenomenological Design

The study employed a phenomenological oriented research design to generate qualitative data by exploring teachers' perceptions concerning the concept of IE and the challenges in the implementation and practice of IE policy in Samoa. It sought to understand how participants in this setting view the notion of inclusion and what their beliefs were regarding the phenomenon of IE.

Phenomenology is a philosophy founded by the German philosopher Edmond Husserl in the early twentieth century. It is a qualitative research approach which seeks to explore lived experiences and which endeavours to illuminate meanings of displayed behaviour and events as construed by research participants. This approach involves the researcher identifying the essence of human experiences, as described by participants themselves. The aim is to capture as closely as possible the way in which the phenomenon is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place. This means that to study a particular phenomenon, a situation is sought in which individuals have first-hand experiences that they can describe as they occurred in their life. The point is that in order to understand the participants' behaviour the researcher needs to view the phenomenon from the lens of the participant. Studies have utilised the phenomenological research approach to investigate experiences of participants for instance, Borbasi employed the method to capture the experiences of nurses. In the present study, the experiences of the Samoan teachers were targeted therefore using the phenomenological approach was deemed to be more appropriate to achieve this purpose.

Participants

Fifteen Samoan primary teachers from three schools who had been involved in IE initiatives since 2005 were involved in focus group discussions. There was 1 male and the rest were females. Twelve teachers were from 2 urban schools and 3 from a rural school. Five of the 15 teachers had completed a formal training program in special education while the rest had participated in some IE professional development training. These were teachers

who had children with identified special needs in their classrooms and school principals selected them to be part of this study. There was a range of teacher variables in terms of teaching experience, age, qualifications and position held (Refer Table 1).

Table 1: Characteristics of teachers involved in the study.

Age	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60
	2	7	4	2
Years of Teaching Experience	1–10	11–20	21–30	31–40
	2	7	4	2
Position	Teacher	Senior Teacher	Principal	
	11	2	2	
Qualification	General Education	Special Education		
	11	4		

Data Collection - Focus Group Interviews

The main method of data collection was focus group interviews and involves active participation of participants and gives the researcher greater flexibility in terms of refining questions (e.g., the researcher was able to improve on subsequent questions from questions asked earlier). The focus group methodology is a qualitative data collection method which involves an informal small group discussion which centres on a specific topic. The researcher as a moderator poses question and keep the discussion focused inviting / encouraging participant involvement. Focus group method has a naturalistic feature and very similar to everyday conversation. The naturalistic relaxed nature of the focus group methodology, makes this an appropriate methodology to collect data from teachers in this study. The focus group interviews were established in the manner of dialoguing 'talanoa' – which is often used in the Pacific islands. All focus group interviews took place at schools where the teachers work and each focus group interview lasting at least 2 hours.

Table 2: Organisation of participants for focus group interviews.

Focus Group	No	Gender		Special needs of children included in regular classrooms
		F	M	
Teachers School A (Urban)	6	6	-	down syndrome, slow learners (learning difficulties), hearing impaired/deaf, physical disability
Teachers School B (Urban)	6	6	-	physical disability, slow learners
Teachers School C (Rural)	3	2	1	physical disability, slow learner, hearing impaired

The following abbreviations identified in table 3 indicate the informant source

Table 3: Abbreviation for the three focus groups.

Abbreviation	Informant Source
FSA	Focus Group School A
FSB	Focus Group School B
FSC	Focus Group School C

Data Analysis

The interpretive grounded theory methodological approach suggested by Miles and Huberman was utilised to analyse this data. The answers to the questions were transcribed into written text for analysis. Given the phenomenological, interpretive nature of this study, the following method of analysis was used to analyse the narratives. After the initial data collection from focus groups, the initial data analysis was undertaken. Interviews were transcribed, read through a number of times and copies of data were printed. These were given back (personally delivered by the researcher) to participants for their feedback and for them to add any to provide any other information considered important. Next, after two weeks, the researcher collected the feedback transcripts. Returned data transcripts were then coded (after being translated into English). The codes were aggregated into patterns (categories) and into themes (e.g., teacher emotions and responses).

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of IE on teachers' mental health and well-being. The data was obtained from discussions based on the 3 teacher focus groups. This section presents findings based on analysis of teachers' perceptions on the impact of IE on their' mental health and well-being. One of the primary findings from this study is that inclusive education significantly impacts teachers' well-being and mental health. Teachers reported on aspects of IE that affected their stress levels, feelings and emotions. These include; increased workload, lack of training, inadequate resources and limited support. Additionally, findings also highlighted motivators to teach in IE classrooms.

Teacher Emotions

When describing their feelings concerning teaching children with special needs/disability, there was discordant findings some teachers were acceptable and others were not so acceptable of the idea and this seemed to be related to their emotional well-being. Some of the major challenges were related to the increased workload, lack of training, inadequate resources and limited support leading to a seemingly high stress levels.

Increased Workload

A number of factors that are linked teachers' increased workload seemed to affect them psychologically as will be noted under workload theme. As seen in the comment below, the teacher's use of the word "dreaded" indicates a strong sense of fear and anxiety about the implementation of IE. This emotional response can negatively impact their mental health, leading to increased stress and a sense of being overwhelmed:

I dreaded it when they said that each child will go to their own school for child's easy access to education. I dreaded it because I know it is not easy, it is difficult. What I am hoping now is that there is a special class and a special teacher for these children in own special classroom and not to mix them with these other children. (FSB)

Extra Preparation

Teachers reported that the demands of inclusive education

significantly increased their workload, leading to higher stress levels:

They just said that schools will be inclusive. That means children with disabilities will be included in Govt School. So many thoughts came to mind, like if these children are disabled and will be taught together with these children [the so called normal ones] it will be difficult plus there will be lots of preparation for the teacher when they are included. (FSB)

Time Factor

The difficulty in managing such a diverse classroom can take an emotional toll on teachers. Constantly juggling the needs of different students and feeling unable to provide adequate support can lead to a feelings of guilt, frustration and helplessness, impacting their mental health:

There are three students with special needs in my class...it is very difficult [teaching in the regular class plus special needs children] especially if there are three special needs children as well. ...there is hardly any time to spend with those students who need my help remember this is a weak class. Most of the time I would try to allocate to all students. (FSA). I have had no training in this area. However, the only thing I dread is the amount of time that will be spent in preparation for this child (FSB).

Learning Delay

Some participants felt that due to the high number of students plus students with special needs, the teacher would decide to forgo or postpone the teaching of the student with special needs to the following day, for she had to deal with the needs of the more able ones first. The phrase 'Leave that child to be taught tomorrow...' reflects a sense of resignation and helplessness. The emotional toll of not being able to meet the needs of all students can contribute to negative mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Teachers may feel torn between their desire to support all students and the practical limitations they face:

The other barrier is if there are too many children already in my class plus these children [special needs] then it will slow down the running of the program. These children will work slow and will slow down the work of other children. If there are many children with good minds plus these children, I will not have an opportunity to be with the child and then I would say "Leave that child to be taught tomorrow and teach [only] these children. (*"ia tuu ia lena tamaititi sei a'oa'o taeao ae fai nai tamaiti ia*) (FSA).

Time Constraints and Teacher Ineffectiveness

Teachers face the challenge of balancing the pace of instruction. Providing adequate support to students with special needs without compromising the learning pace for others is difficult. This pressure to keep up with the curriculum while ensuring all students' needs are met can lead to stress and a sense of inadequacy:

The other barrier is if there are too many children already in my class plus these children [special needs] then it will

slow down the running of the program. *These children work slow and will slow down the work of other children.* If there are many children with good minds plus these children, I will not have an opportunity to be with the child with disability (FSA).

The teacher expresses frustration with the perceived negative impact of IE on the learning pace of other students. This feeling of exasperation seemed to prompt the teacher to label the general classroom a ‘dumping ground’ for parents to place their children with special needs so that they could go about their own business. This frustration can lead to increased stress and a sense of dissatisfaction with their teaching environment.

So these problematic ones who are called special needs dragged the learning of the strong ones and slow down their learning. That is my own view regarding this issue of inclusive education. But the teaching is still ongoing whether I have taken a special needs paper (training). The other thing is the program is good [sarcasm] because these poor students are dumped on us and parents will go about their own business and do what they want and we stay here with the students the whole day (FSC).

Training and Preparation

Teachers can have many experiences that help them teach in the classroom. In much of the literature, training and professional development is deemed important for preparing teachers to work effectively in the inclusive classroom. Experience in this context deals with any training the teachers may have had as preparation to teach within the inclusive classroom. More than half of the teachers viewed their lack of training as impacting upon the way they supported the students in the classroom. The way in which teachers described their practices in the IE classroom indicated that they lacked the requisite skills to deal with students with special needs.

Insufficient Training and Stress

The comment “Not good if the children are brought into school and we have had no training” as noted below highlights the significant gap in training that teachers experience. The lack of adequate preparation for handling special needs students can lead to feelings of incompetence and inadequacy, contributing to increased stress and anxiety:

Not good if the children are brought into school and we have had no training. It would be good to have more training on sign language etc. so we will be able to teach these children. Because if these children are brought into my class I may end up doing something drastic to the child or something. This is because I don’t understand his characteristics due to lack of training (FSB).

Limited knowledge and Indifferent Attitude

Teachers’ limited knowledge seem to have created an indifferent attitude towards children with special needs. For example, teachers appeared unconcerned whether the student with special needs was engaging appropriately in activities.

I have a student with special needs who was at the special schools... her special need is more on the physical side... Issue is that when she is lazy then I leave her to do what she wants (FSA).

One teacher voiced his concern over his lack of knowledge in handling the student with special needs and accordingly placed the student with a group of average learners but was unconcerned about what happened:

I don’t have a deaf child and I don’t know how to sign. There is a mentally challenged child in my class ... I place him in the group with average learners so if he learns anything [or] not well that is up to him because I don’t want to force him or speak to him in a forceful manner cos I note that when I speak to him in a forceful manner his makeup seems to change [laughs] ... in case I ended up spanking him and cause him harm [shared laughter] (FSC).

The teacher recognizes a change in the child's behavior when addressed forcefully, which implies an understanding of the child's sensitivity. However, the laughter suggests a coping mechanism to deal with the discomfort and stress of managing challenging behaviors. This can reflect underlying anxiety and fear of not handling the situation appropriately.

Additionally, the next statement demonstrates that some teachers consciously did not concern themselves with students with disabilities:

Yes there are children that other teachers ignore like sick children who are called disabled who are in the class are deaf (*leaga taliga*). Some teachers mainly ignore those who are mainly sick and weak (*tamaiti tele ina mama'i ma vaivai*) and tend to focus on good children (FSB4).

Limited Knowledge Frustration

The feeling of frustration was illustrated in some teachers’ voices who admitted to using corporal punishment on the child when there was a display of unfavourable behaviour in class. One teacher explained that she got angry when the child disrupted the class with his behaviour:

For these disabled in our class it is very hard I am speaking the truth, Last year I had this child (Down’s-syndrome) who has now passed away. I just did not know what to do with him. The principal said “all you have to do is to make him quiet (“faafilemu”) or make him settle [calm] down.” I hit him with a broom other times when he swears (FSA).

... It is just his behaviour ... he would lie down when he feels like it or would put his head in the desk with feet sticking out, his behaviour is very strange. Sometimes I would smack him because I am angry because he disrupts other children (FSA).

Teachers seemingly lack of concern for children in IE classroom

seem to have stemmed from lack of training and knowledge in IE. What is concerning is that the same challenge was highlighted by teachers in a recent research by Tufue, Kolone-Collins and Ah Hoy-Wright (2023) which examined teachers perceptions about their IE preparedness. Findings indicated teachers not confident enough to teach in an IE classroom.

Resources/Facilities

Teaching resources, as well as facilities, were perceived by participants to impact on inclusive education initiatives. Technical resources for carrying out teaching and learning in the classroom were considered as inadequate which was then linked to the teacher's feelings of annoyance. The inadequacy of facilities was often commented upon:

...it is very hard cos we do it manually for there are no machines, no printer... If the teacher has three classes (multigrade) one has to group (due to differing abilities within each level itself)... there are no machines everything is manually done and the teachers sacrifice their time. The work is ok and is manageable but I just want to have this frustration out cos once it is out then one feels relieved.... because not only there are not enough teachers cos there is only one teacher to more than one class multi-grade, children are difficult, the children who are strong are educated together with the slow ones (FSC).

Support

Specialist Teachers' Support

Teachers with expertise were also viewed by several participants as a valuable resource and model for IE but it was noted there were insufficient numbers of teachers with such experience. In particular, there was a need for experienced teachers of the hearing and visually impaired:

Now the school committee is involved by supporting principals, teachers in things needed for the development of the school. There is a need to have people with the expertise in sign language and brailing to come in to assist teachers who don't have the skills in these areas (FCM).

Some teachers felt that it is not easy to teach in an IE classroom- 'the teacher had to be vigilant in caring for these students for the safety of other students in the classroom'. This vigilance adds a significant amount of stress to teachers' daily responsibilities. Constantly having to monitor and manage the classroom to ensure safety can lead to mental and physical exhaustion, contributing to burnout:

What I am hoping now is that there is a special class and a special teacher for these children in their own special classroom and not to mix them with these other children. If I am not vigilant in my room, when they are included the children will end up pushing his wheelchair off the room. That is what I dread. So I think, include them in village schools but separate their own classroom (FSB).

This issue about lack of expert knowledge in IE was also

highlighted in Tufue, et al., (2023) study. Findings of their study highlighted the great need to recruit experts in sign language, braille and other pertinent areas in IE to support teachers within the training institution. This 2023 research clearly indicated that not much progress has occurred with respect to training and preparing teachers in IE in Samoa over the past decade. This has severe implications on teaching and learning for students with special educational needs in Samoa.

Family Support and Teacher Isolation

Without active parental involvement, teachers may feel isolated in their efforts to educate and support students. This sense of isolation can lead to emotional exhaustion and affect their mental health negatively:

If parent and teachers do not work together then it becomes a barrier. In terms of homework and bringing them to school (FSB).

Despite some teachers showing a feeling of dissonance toward inclusive education, there are those who express a positive attitude towards it and are motivated to support children within the IE classroom.

Positive Beliefs and Motivators

With regards to the appropriate educational placement for the students with special needs, some believed that students with, and without physical and intellectual disability, should be taught together within the same classroom:

To me that is what is called discrimination if we try and segregate these people. In school they should emphasize not to isolate this child [with a special need] from other children in their class. (FSA)

Teachers, who demonstrated a positive attitude towards including these students, took the human's right's position claiming that it was the right of every child to be educated together with peers:

I really appreciate this concept of inclusive education. I should not be saying these children [with special needs] should be segregated and placed into special schools. To me they should be brought into where the normal children are... To me whether lame, blind or whatever, if I were called a teacher then a teacher for all persons. It should never be said that so and so be here [general school] and so and so be there [special school]. Because if these children with special needs are to be separated, its like we point fingers at these children (FSA).

The teachers can now teach these children within the same classroom other than segregating them. When you look at 'Education for All' it means education for all children. The crippled/ lame mix together with the non-disabled... I don't know about others but to me I would be very happy to have a child like such in my class (FSC).

Teacher Motivation Reciprocal Appreciation

Teachers who indicated positive attitude towards IE indicated their motives for supporting IE. Some teachers were driven by the idea of a returned blessing for themselves and own children from helping other children.

The positive attitude of some these teachers was related to them envisaging these students as their own children and they noted they didn't want their own children to be discriminated against or mistreated by another teacher (i.e., these teachers believed that if they treated these students well, their own children may receive the same treatment from someone else):

I carry out my work and in the back of my mind are my children, meaning my motivation is driven by the thought that my work will be reflected through my own children. There is a saying that "The fruit of your work for other people's children will come back via your own children" (FSA).

Motivated Adaptability

One of the teachers adopted a positive perspective by viewing teaching in an inclusive classroom as a challenge and motivation. She felt that claiming incapability would diminish her teaching competency. This teacher views teaching in an inclusive classroom as an opportunity to grow and improve, rather than seeing it as a limitation. Accordingly, she approached the issue head on:

The child with Down's syndrome that I had the first time I saw him it was like a burden to me because I did not know what to do with this type of child. Then I said to myself it will really diminish my capability as a teacher if I can't handle this child. It was a challenge for me... This feeling of deep love/compassion for him came upon me and I said to myself, just imagine that this is my own child, I cannot bear to think that the teacher or whoever at school would shove or push him about. So I decided to take him on (FSA).

Responsibility Enhancement

There was also the view by one teacher about her changed attitude due to actually implementing inclusive practices which can be referred to as responsibility enhancement. It signifies a teacher's shift in perspective, where they fully accept and take on the responsibility of implementing inclusive practices. This teacher actually accept the child as her responsibility and the practising of inclusion says this:

This saying runs true "You will never know how to do something unless you attempt it." (*E lemafai ona e iloa se mea pe a e le tago iai e fai*). Now that we have attempted it, we find it not so challenging to handle this type of student. Even though we don't know how to use sign language to handle these students but each teacher is trying her best to teach these students. To me these students should be included in all primary schools in Samoa. And there should not be any discrimination amongst students or even parents (FSA).

Empathetic Acceptance

One participant also noted parents' appreciation of teachers' work as being motivational:

This is a God given job and I don't segregate children. These children who are weak, who came without any knowledge have improved a lot. There was one child who used to attend one day a week, but ever since he came into my class he has never missed a school. What inspires me are positive responses from parents who came and thank me (FSA).

Discussion

This section will discuss findings of the impact of IE on teachers' well-being and mental health. Findings from this study resonate with global research, showing that teachers' world wide face similar challenges in inclusive education settings. Teachers in this study reported that increased workload, lack of teacher training, limited support, inadequate resources contributed to their stress levels.

Workload

Findings emphasized that increased workload place teachers under stress. For example the additional support to be given for students with special needs in addition to teachers' workload is viewed as burdensome. This heightened responsibility often led to longer working hours and increased pressure to meet diverse student needs, which negatively affected teachers' mental health. This finding aligns well with the global literature, that increased workload is one of the contributing factors to teacher stress and burnout [9,11].

Lack of Support

Moreover, teachers highlighted lack of adequate support from significant others as a significant stressor. This view also aligns with the literature [8] that lack of support from teacher aides, special education professional, and administrative staff can leave teachers feeling isolated and unsupported, leading to high level of stress and frustration. Similarly, Hernandez-Saca, Kramarczuk Voulgarides, and Etscheidt [7], indicated that insufficient training and support [9,11] are common sources of stress for teachers in inclusive settings. This comparison underscores the need for comprehensive professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills and knowledge required for inclusive education.

Teacher training on IE

The issue concerning lack of training was also highlighted as a cause for teacher's disillusionment working in IE. Many teachers felt unprepared to handle the complexities of an inclusive classroom, leading to feelings of anxiety and burnout- they viewed their lack of knowledge stemming from limited training as a constraint. Furthermore, this limited knowledge seemed to affect teachers' relationship with students reflecting in their lack of concern for children in IE classrooms. All these negative and stressful emotions can be attributed to lack of training and knowledge in IE. These findings align well with the literature [9,11] that teachers feeling of stress and burn out is attributed to lack of knowledge.

What is concerning is that the same issue pertaining to training was highlighted by teachers in a recent research [3]. Findings in this 2023 study, indicated teachers not confident enough to teach in an IE classroom. So what does this say about teacher training in IE in Samoa? The 2023 study clearly indicated that for more than a decade IE has not progressed much in terms of training for teachers in IE which is very concerning. Furthermore, Tufue-Dolgoy's [3] study, recommended upgrading the diploma in Special Education (the only Special education program that was offered at the time to Samoan teachers) to a bachelor's degree in IE. This was considered as an incentive for teachers in Samoa. Unfortunately, even after ten years, this still has not materialised. In fact, discussions about establishing a Bachelor in Inclusive Education (within the Faculty of Education) began in 2018. However, despite having all the courses and paper work ready, the program has not yet been implemented. This delay seems to suggest a lack of commitment to IE at the management level. It is essential for decision makers within the training institution in Samoa to recognize the importance of IE if they are to ensure quality education for all learners.

Insufficient Resources

Findings also indicated inadequate resources as another cause of teacher stress. The issue of inadequate resources is also supported by the literature which indicates that insufficient resources and support, can lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and burn out [6,11] decreasing job satisfaction [9]. The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [13] maintains that teachers who feel they are constantly losing resources without adequate replenishment may experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, affecting their overall well-being. Despite these challenges, there were still some teachers who found joy and satisfaction in successfully supporting students with special needs. These teachers were motivated by several factors as noted in the next section.

Motivators for IE

The concept of responsibility enhancement was evident in the findings. This concept signifies a teacher's shift in perspective, where s/he fully accepts and takes on the responsibility of implementing inclusive practices. This theme reflects the teachers' commitment to inclusion, recognising the importance of their role in ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, are supported and integrated into the classroom environment. It highlights a proactive and positive attitude toward embracing the challenges and rewards of inclusive education. Additionally, the notion of motivated adaptability which is the ability to adapt positively in the face of challenges is an interesting phenomenon according to some participants. For example, some teachers view challenges of teaching in an inclusive classroom as an opportunity to grow and improve, rather than seeing it as a limitation. It reflects a proactive and resilient mindset by the teachers as they used the experiences to enhance their teaching skills and efficacy. This is an idea that can clearly promote IE hence there is a need for strategies to empower teachers so they will be able to retain this type of motivation.

Strategies for Improvement

To support teachers' and mitigate the challenges associated with inclusive education, several strategies are worthy consideration:

1. **Professional Development:** There is a need to provide ongoing trainings that emphasize differentiated instruction, classroom managements, and strategies for supporting students with special needs can help teachers' feel more confident and prepared.
2. **Collaborative support:** Build a collaborative environment where teachers can share resources, strategies, and experiences to reduce feelings of isolation and stress. Peer support groups and mentorship programs can offer emotional and practical support, fostering a sense of community among teachers.
3. **Resource Allocations:** Ensure that schools have adequate resources, including teaching assistants, specialized equipment, and access to professional services, to ease teachers' burden and for the successful implementation of IE.
4. **Administrative Support:** It is essential to provide clear policies, maintain manageable class sizes, and offer emotional support as this can enhance teachers' well-being. Moreover, administrators should actively listen to teachers' concerns and provide necessary resources.
5. **Self-care and Well-being Programs:** Encourage teachers to prioritize self-care and offer well-being programs to help manage stress and prevent burnout. Schools can organize workshops on stress management, mindfulness, and work-life balance to support teachers' mental health.

Conclusion

Inclusive education presents both challenges and opportunities for teacher's well-being in Samoa. While the increased workload and stress levels can negatively impact mental health, rewards of supporting diverse learners can enhance job satisfaction. This study highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to support teachers, ensuring they can provide high quality education while maintaining their mental health and job satisfaction. By implementing targeted strategies to support teachers, schools can create a more sustainable and positive environment for both educators and students.

Perceived Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the design that was used due to generalisability. Generalisability according to Denzin and Lincoln refers to "the degree to which the findings are applicable to other populations or samples". The sample in this study cannot be taken as representative of the larger Samoan population. Further research with a broader population and diverse data collection methods is recommended to deepen understanding on the impact of IE on teachers' well-being and mental health.

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