


Chapter 6

Catering for Learner Diversity: Teacher Perceptions and Practices of Inclusion in Primary Classrooms in Mauritius

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ABSTRACT

The chapter situates the discussion on learners' diversity at the primary classroom level in the context of the nine year continuous basic education (NYCBE), the educational reform which is geared to address the diversity and inclusion of Mauritian learners in the schooling setup. Learners' diversity in the Mauritian context can be due to their cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. With this demographic and varied profile of learners, teachers are faced with multiple and complex issues that may challenge many of their educational practices and assumptions. A qualitative research methodology was adopted to understand primary school teachers' perceptions of diversity. An in-depth interview with eight teachers was conducted to have insight into how they addressed diversity and what support and mechanism are in place to assist them in addressing the needs of learners. Findings point to the need for teacher preparedness and collaboration among stakeholders in establishing an inclusive school environment.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, countries around the globe have worked extensively to ensure that all their citizens have the right to educational opportunities. Mauritius, a multi-cultural small island developing state located in the southwest Indian Ocean is no exception and the government invests heavily in the education of its people as it recognises education as a means to social and economic progress. As a matter of fact, free compulsory schooling is accessible to all children aged 5 to 16 years in the Republic of Mauritius. According to the Education Amendment Act 44 of 2004:

Every child who has attained such age as may be prescribed for admission to a primary school shall attend a primary school. It shall be compulsory for every child to attend school up to the end of the academic year in the course of which he attains the age of 16. (NCF, 2015, p. 3)

The government's commitment to promoting 'Education for All' is also noticeable in the number of educational reforms introduced in the country, the latest being the Nine Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE -2015-2016) to ensure that no child is left behind. One of the key principles on which the new curriculum, that is, the NYCBE hinges itself, is to firstly, "provide learning opportunities and experiences for every learner according to her/ his needs, interests, and potential" and secondly to "foster understanding and appreciation of the learners' natural, cultural and social environment" (NCF 2015: 5) It is noted that the government in Mauritius is committed to catering for the different levels of academic readiness and diverse abilities, needs, interests, and learning styles of the learners. To this effect, the NCF (2015-2016) advocates an inclusive curriculum that is dynamic, flexible, and adaptable to the different needs of children and schools. Additionally, for the successful realisation of its objective of catering for diversity, the National Curriculum Framework in Mauritius promotes needs-based learning support and appropriate remedial measures at all levels of the educational cycle, that is, primary and lower secondary. It is further observed that the Ministry of Education in Mauritius has initiated a number of educational programmes to cater for diversity at the Primary school level. The early Support Programme has been set up to identify learning gaps in literacy and numeracy and remedial measures are taken as soon as learning difficulties are identified. Support teachers have been recruited and trained to cater for learning difficulties at an early age. The Holistic Education Programme is also implemented at Primary School level to build a future generation of innovative leaders by promoting a more balanced education and bring forth equality of learning possibilities for all pupils. The main objective of the Holistic Education Programme remains the holistic development of the child. In addition to the range of educational

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