

The need for occupational therapy services in Zimbabwean urban mainstream schools in the context of inclusive education: A cross sectional descriptive study

Nyasha Beremauro, Tecla Mlambo
University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

Introduction: Inclusive education has been endorsed by the Zimbabwean Government and for it to be effective, Occupational Therapists (OTs) should work in mainstream schools to address special needs of pupils. Currently, there are no posts for OTs in mainstream schools.

Objectives: To determine problems encountered by pupils in school performance that can benefit from Occupational Therapy (OT) services. To determine if there are significant differences in the problems encountered by pupils in public and private schools.

Method: 32 teachers were randomly selected as study participants from four primary schools stratified by school type and grade. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS 22) and STATA 13.

Results: Majority of teachers were female (84.4%), mean age was 44.6 years (SD 9.8) and 19.5 years (SD 10.6) of teaching experience. Encountered problems were in emotional, gross motor, fine motor, visual perception, auditory language, vestibular sensation and tactile sensation reported by 70% of teachers. Two sample test of proportions showed that proportions of teachers encountering above listed problems were similar in private and public schools except few cases, private school teachers encountered pupils with difficulties in drawing, colouring, copying and cutting (fine motor) ($p = 0.0325$), and pupils who repeated directions to self (auditory language) ($p = 0.0221$).

Conclusion: Teachers from private and public schools encountered pupils with similar problems that can benefit from OT. Availability of OT services in these schools can support the inclusive education policy in Zimbabwe.