

Viable Workshops for Inclusive Classes: the intake of South African Teachers

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Abstract: South African education system has been perceived to have deteriorated down to lower rates in the world. While there might be various factors in play, such as teacher workloads, continuously revised curriculum policies for instance, there seems to be challenges regarding effective implementation of inclusive education in classrooms. With above phenomenon notwithstanding, one wonders how teachers are supported for inclusive class (IE) that benefits both ordinary learners (OLs) and learners with barriers (LEBLs) who are in mainstream schools (MSs). Although the main study engaged qualitative approach and case study design for data collection, questionnaires were also used to small purposefully selected respondents of 5 principals and 15 teachers. This article reports on part of data analysed through SPSS which revealed that: majority of principals and teachers were not proficient enough with IE policy document, they did not receive sufficient training on IE policy and that teachers are overloaded. Authors of this article advocate for teacher informed workshops that can be explored whose focus is to address inclusive classroom needs as experienced by teachers.

Keywords: Support, barriers, awareness, commitment, teaching and learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the past three decades, there has been apprehension for growing commitment to education for children with barriers to learning in regular education setting worldwide (Bhatnagar and Das, 2014). This global commitment came as a result of an agreement on inclusive education which was adopted as a strategy for addressing learning needs of vulnerable and marginalised learners in a worlds' conference at Salamanca in Spain (UNESCO, 1994). While there might be various definitions of inclusion, the basic premise of inclusive education is to "include, accommodate and support all learners regardless of their cultural background, race, gender or disability" (Mentz & Barret, 2011; Buka & Molepo, 2016).

To demonstrate a pledge and commitment on inclusive principles as stated by UNESCO; In 2001, the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) published legislative framework known as Education White Paper 6 - Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system which is herein under referred as Education White Paper 6 [EWP6] (DBE, 2001). Even though EWP6 existed more than 18 years ago, there seems to be challenges that impede the smooth and effective implementation of IE in schools, especially in the rural schools of South Africa (Buka & Molepo, 2015).

South Africa's inclusive education policy is expected to redress apartheid's brutally segregated education system which deprived LEBLs the right to learn in their familiar environments. Inclusive education intends to accommodate all children with disabilities in appropriate schooling at local or neighbourhood mainstream schools (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016). It can be argued that even though the South African government seems to be committed to implement IE principles regarding policy making, teachers were not conversant with the IE principles or contents of Education White Paper 6. In addition to the above, teachers seem to have attitudinal challenges on the inclusion of LEBLs as well as on educational reforms including IE. Buka and Molepo (2015) are also of the view that teachers had negative attitudes towards LEBLs,

thus making it difficult to implement IE in their very classrooms. All this shows teachers' deficiency and lack of skills pertaining to IE implementation which can affect delivery of quality education for all.

The quality of educational support depends not only on the policy that a country adopts or commits to but also on the way in which teaching and learner support is organised in class. Mahlo (2017) posits that most LEBLs were excluded from learning processes as they were grouped together and forgotten while in the same class with ordinary learners. In view of the above assertions one can argue that teachers were not initially trained to provide for educational needs of LEBLs in inclusive classes. It can be observed that there is an urgent demand for teacher support to equip teachers to cater for educational needs of all learners in inclusive classes. Although it can be assumed that teachers have been attending IE workshops for the past 16 years, viability of such workshops is questionable as negative attitudes and lack of skills still prevail in ICs. Despite commitment of district based support teams (DBST) in organizing workshops for teachers, the quality and relevance of such workshops seems inadequate to teachers (Heeralal & Jama, 2014; Mahlo, 2017).

There seems to be controversy about South African education system as it is engulfed with crisis which is characterised by protests that erupt into violent actions, crime, arson and different forms of abuse directed to teachers and learners. Research indicates that school violence, teacher burn-out, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy in public schools are among several factors that are problematic to South African education system (Hay & Beyers, 2011; Buka and Molepo, 2015). In such education turmoil it can be difficult to achieve quality education as teaching and learning culture is challenged. Whilst the phenomenon can be dire for ordinary learners (OLs) in schools speculation is on how much more learners experiencing barriers to learning (LEBLs) suffer the consequences, knowing that they are in need of additional support. Research reveals that teachers started to attend IE workshops from 2001 on EWP6 policy, yet viability of the content is questionable (Heeralal & Jama, 2014; Mahlo, 2017). It can be ascertained that, viable workshops regarding expertise to support LEBLs is proportional to involvement of its designers with reality. This implies that content of workshops for teachers needs to be from teachers themselves in order to deal with inclusive classroom realities.

In inclusive classes (ICs) teachers are expected to meet educational needs of both OLs and LEBLs in one lesson being delivered. Learners therefore expect to receive support from their teachers in ICs. Learner support is declared as a necessary component of successful inclusive education practices as the needs of LEBLs are beyond the basic services available in typical general education classes (Donohue & Bornman, 2014)). Plethora of studies indicate that there is a serious concern about the standard of curriculum delivery in inclusive classes as there is evidence that many LEBLs are marginalised and put in a corner in ICs (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016; Engelbrecht, et al, 2015). This implies that even though LEBLs are accommodated in mainstream schools, their presence is not necessarily relative to acquiring learning that will make them achieve academically as their peers do.

The inability of teachers to implement IE in their classes appears to be characterised by many factors, besides the inferiority resulting from in-service training programmes (Engelbrecht, et al, 2015). Some teacher organisations indicate that there is an outcry of teacher workload due to Peter Morkel Model where teachers are allocated to schools based on learner enrolment (NAPTOSA, 2007; SADTU, 2015). However, The Peter Morkel Model can be regarded to contribute to unstable mobility of teachers (redeployment) which might impact negatively on provision of quality teaching and learning. Authors maintain that redeployment can be literally conceptualized as irregular and frequent movement of teachers from one school to another, as learner enrolment changes each year (NAPTOSA, 2007; SADTU, 2015; Buka & Molepo, 2015). One of the negative impacts of redeployment can be regarded as teacher overload, which can have a detrimental impact to learning especially that of LEBLs. Furthermore, teachers seem to lack skills to adapt Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) with its pace trackers in their classes to meet the needs for both OLs and LEBLs (Jama, 2019). Although it is imperative to modify curriculum for individualised adapted programmes (IAPs) in ICs, trackers make it difficult for teachers to implement inclusive policies. As authors, we also argue that LEBLs need extra support or assistance to reach their full educational potential when compared to ordinary learners in the same class and appropriate workshops are needed to support teachers. Research indicates that South African teachers in most mainstream schools receive minimum or no support for improving their skills in handling inclusive classes (Buka & Molepo, 2015; Jama, 2014).

Since LEBLs need additional support from teachers, time factor remains a challenge while also school time table in general is not designed for IAPs (Engelbrecht, et al, 2015). Mahlo and Hugo, (2013) assert that LEBLs require additional support when compared to ordinary learners, which can hardly be possible in a school with few and overloaded teachers.

In addition to the above assertion, negative teacher attitudes towards LEBLs is among the most disturbing phenomena in the implementation of IE in inclusive classes especially in mainstream schools (Kozleski, Artiles and Waitoller, 2014). Hodgson and Khumalo (2016: 10) concur with the above authors by further stating that the situation of LEBLs in mainstream schools is far from hopeless as some teachers even call them ‘lunatics’.

REALITY IN INCLUSIVE CLASSES

Inclusive classes can be assumed as central places where IE and EWP6 principles are to be implemented; however, research indicates that principals and teachers were not proficient enough in supporting LEBLs (Heeralal & Jama, 2014; Buka & Molepo, 2016). It is recorded that teachers seem to be lacking knowledge on how they can provide support to LEBLs, and in many instances they end up ignoring them even though they are in class (Donohue and Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, et al, 2015). In support to the above Buka and Molepo (2015) maintain that teachers grapple to teach both LEBLs and OLs while confronted with so many challenges including time constraints, inability to adapt curriculum and their focus ends up being biased to OLs.

Exclusion and marginalisation of LEBLs in inclusive classes seem to be persistent. Donohue and Bornman (2014) posit that condition of LEBLs in classroom setting is a continuation of exclusion and marginalisation. A study by Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel and Tlale (2015: 6) also confirms that LEBLs remain “on the periphery of the classroom activities” where they were continuously marginalised. Minimal learner support impacts negatively on learner academic progression. Exclusion has far reaching consequences on LEBLs as they are deprived their right of being full participants and beneficiaries of learning activities in the class. In addition to the above phenomenon the current assessment education policy does not allow a learner to be in the same phase for more than 4 years (DBE, 2015). In the true sense it can be argued that such learner progression does not necessarily mean learning skills have been acquired. This implies that even though classes in mainstream schools are characterised with variety of learning abilities, teachers find it difficult to provide necessary support which can enable learning for LEBLs to reach full potential.

While teachers need active parent participation (APP) for balanced learner support, Buka and Molepo (2016) argue that parents of LEBLs were inactive in ICs in disadvantaged rural communities. One of the significances of APP is to assure teacher support and enhance positive teacher attitudes towards learners with barriers. For effective inclusive classes teachers need to conceptualise theoretical frameworks underlying IE policies. Without profound understanding of underlying philosophical background of IE, ICs cannot be easily realised. The ideal inclusive classes can be viewed as places that embody and support learning for a diverse range of learners, where “deficit views of difference and determinist views about ability are rejected “(Engelbrecht, et al, 2015: 1; Kozleski, Artiles and Waitoller, 2014). The kind of workshops needs to be informed by the requirements of teachers as experienced in class.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were: to examine conceptual understanding principals and teachers have regarding inclusive education in general and EWP6 in particular; to find out how they see to it that inclusive education is implemented in their schools.

2. METHODOLOGY

Though the main study used qualitative research approach, this article reports on a small part of data collected through quantitative research mode. The purpose was not for generalising but to triangulate and supplement the findings of the main study.

Population of the study

The population of the main study included principals who are supposedly responsible to ensure that educational reforms are carried out in schools and teachers who are the actual implementers of educational policies.

Sampling

From conveniently selected research sites 5 principals (3 males and 2 females) and 15 teachers (12 females and 3 males) were randomly selected as respondents in this small scale study. Data were collected through questionnaires in a small size and data analysis followed SPSS with descriptive graphs based on participants’ responses. Permission and consent were obtained from education authorities and participating respondents.

3. RESULTS

This study revealed that implementation of IE has been hampered by various factors including: lack of IE understanding by teachers, high-teacher workload and no viable workshops to empower teachers for ICs.

- **Teachers' Ignorance on IE principles**

This article reveals that majority (80%) of principals did not have efficient understanding of what IE entails (see Figure 1) while 89 % of teachers showed ignorance on IE and EWP6 principles. Principals who gave satisfactorily answers on questions based on IE understanding made only 20% while for teachers it was 11%. This implies that teachers in MSs had inadequate skills to give appropriate support for all learners in ICs. Buka and Molepo (2015) confirmed that most principals were found ignorant about content of IE policy.

- **High-teacher workload**

Data reveal that 80% of principals indicated that teachers were overloaded while the remaining 20% were indifferent. Majority (90%) of teachers indicated that they were overloaded, teaching many subjects. Only 10% of teachers seem to be committed to support learners in ICs. High workload can be regarded as one of the factors that impede implementation of IE in ICs. Fuchs (2009) concurs with the above finding as he posits that high teacher work load is a barrier to effective inclusion.

- **Ineffective IE workshops**

Large number of principals (68%) indicated that workshops conducted were ineffective for classroom situation while those who were not sure surmounted to 32%. Teachers who perceived training received as ineffective were 89% when compared to 11% who indicated that they benefited from the workshops. This means that workshops were available but seemingly they did not give teachers competent skills for ICs. This finding is supported by Buka and Molepo (2015) who concur with Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) in indicating that on various occasions, such workshops were often symbolic and convenient for, or significant for the organizers, that is district-based support teams not teachers they were presented to. In support to the above Engelbrecht, et al (2015) indicates that failure in workshops provided could be attributed to their short duration (1 day), irrelevance to each teacher's class situations and lack of visits to guide in the classroom.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Even though a central standpoint of EWP6 is that inclusive education amounts to recognising and respecting learner diversity; acknowledging that all learners can learn and need support; and capacitating teachers to enable them to address a wide range of learning needs by 'focusing on teaching and learning actions that will benefit all students who experience barriers to learning' (Engelbrecht, et al, 2015: 2). On the contrary it seems that teachers in mainstream schools were not proficient in providing for educational needs of all learners in ICs. Many factors including frequently changing curriculums, initial teacher education, high-workload and systemic expectations on teachers can be hindering IE implementation.

Implementation of IE seems to be theoretical in many MSs. Among things hindering practical implementation of IE in ICs is prescriptive CAPS assessment policy which states that a specific number of tasks need to be completed on a set period of time without considering different learner paces. The above phenomenon is exacerbated by systemic changes like a policy that is just advocated which states that a learner cannot be in a phase for more than four years. The implication is that learners are being progressed to next grades without acquiring needed knowledge and learning.

Moreover, this study reveals that principals as well as teachers did not have clear understanding of IE except for the few teachers who were studying it out of personal interests. There is an outcry from teachers that they are not provided with sufficient assistance in the form of practical and theoretical training in the 'curriculum differentiation' which is essential in ICs (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016: 9). A study conducted by Buka and Molepo (2015) also indicate that most principals were found to be ignorant of the content of inclusive education, although they claimed it was one of the guiding policies in their schools. This finding also confirms the views held by Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013); Buka and Molepo (2016) who point out that most teachers in the system were initially trained for either mainstream or special education and not for an inclusive classroom environment. There have been some workshops conducted on IE but seemingly they were not providing teachers with skill and confidence on how to carry out support in ICs, hence they were deemed ineffective.

Apparently, workshops should be frequently conducted to equip teachers on IE with the purpose of addressing problems facing ICs not with intentions of making reports. Buka and Molepo (2015) observed that in rural schools teachers received minimal support from district-based support teams providing inappropriate programs which were negatively perceived by teachers.

This kind of training therefore leaves teachers with a problem of not knowing how to cater for ordinary learners and LEBLs in their teaching as a result this ends up perpetuating marginalisation and exclusion of the later as they do not acquire learning as their peers do. Buka and Molepo (2015) confirm that among other factors that impede IE implementation work load and inadequate training workshops for principals and parents of LEBL cannot be left out.

Findings of this study affirm that IE was not implemented in the participating mainstream schools as both principals and teachers did not have adequate understanding of EWP6 principles. One of the reasons was because not all principals were capacitated or familiar with the policy and programs of IE in schools with respect to implementation in the Eastern Cape (Buka & Molepo, 2015). For many of the principals, EWP6 was perceived simply as a policy document that has not yet truly come into effect in terms of its implementation (Lampen, 2014; Heeralal & Jama, 2014; Buka & Molepo, 2015). All respondents (principals and teachers) confirmed in percentages (see figures 1 and 2) that they had no idea on how to cater in their teaching for both ordinary and LEBLs in the same class. It seems as if this poses a problem to LEBLs who are already in inclusive classrooms.

Teacher workload has also been indicated as a challenging factor in implementing inclusive education. Teachers seem to find it difficult to cope with many subjects that they have to teach and in other cases they were never trained for. This is mainly due to redeployment where teachers are moved from schools due to learner enrolment. The remaining teachers end up having to divide subjects amongst themselves with the intention of ensuring that there is no subject that is not taught, without considering specialisations. Engelbrecht and Green (2007) confirm the above challenge as they posit that teachers in South Africa currently have to cope with a workload that has increased significantly over the last couple of years and that this might lead to work overload.

Teacher Informed workshops

To address the problem of marginalisation and exclusion of LEBL in ICs, workshops prepared for mainstream teachers should be purpose driven, not just carried out for conveniences and reports of DBST. The more effective IE implementation method used in Latin American countries has been classroom-based programmes into which trainee teachers learn by coming into contact with real-life situations (Valliant, 2011).

This article proposes teacher- informed workshops which are founded on classroom-based programmes used in Latin America as is indicated above. Content of workshops conducted by Department of Basic Education (DBE) normally follows top-down approach. In this approach service providers from DBE assume to know what is needed by teachers and then base the content of the workshop on such assumption. We intend to introduce bottom-up approach where teachers present the challenges they encounter in ICs to school based support team (SBST) and district based support team (DBST). Thereafter, DBST tailor workshop content with intentions to solve real ICs problems. Its advantage is on that even follow- up workshops will be informed by teachers' reports on what they are experiencing in class; in that way real situations are addressed.

This kind of workshops is recommended with the purpose of addressing the ineffectiveness of workshops and seminars carried out on IE by DBSTs which leave teachers with a problem of connecting what they have been taught with what is actually taking place in class. It also involves healthy partnership and relationship of three components of learning in inclusive classes namely DBST, principals and teachers. It is a new approach on conducting workshops which might address real-situation challenges.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

There should be workshops for all principals and teachers conducted by DBSTs to ensure that there is a clear understanding in schools about EWP6 and IE consecutively.

- Personnel familiar with IE should be employed and workshops be presented to district staff in particular to ensure DBSTs are established and equipped to help mainstream teachers.

- Healthy relationship between principals and DBSTs need to be established.
- Programmes to focus on encouraging meaningful collaboration that will work for ICs and learners need to be created. This can be helpful in building rapport that allows each member to freely express personal views on IE and reality in the work place.
- Assessment Procedure to cater for different learner paces, and provide how LEBLs can be supported before recording of marks is expected.

6. CONCLUSION

The main problem that seems to be at hand now is what is actually happening in inclusive classes more especially to LEBLs who are already in MSs, bearing in mind that IE was developed to address their learning needs and ensure that they are no longer marginalised. Department of Basic Education needs to liaise with school based stakeholders in the education sector in order for IE to materialise in schools and to avoid the past repeating itself where LEBLs ended up dropping out of school as their needs were not met by the education system of the time.

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APPENDIX - A

RESULTS PRESENTED AS GRAPHS:

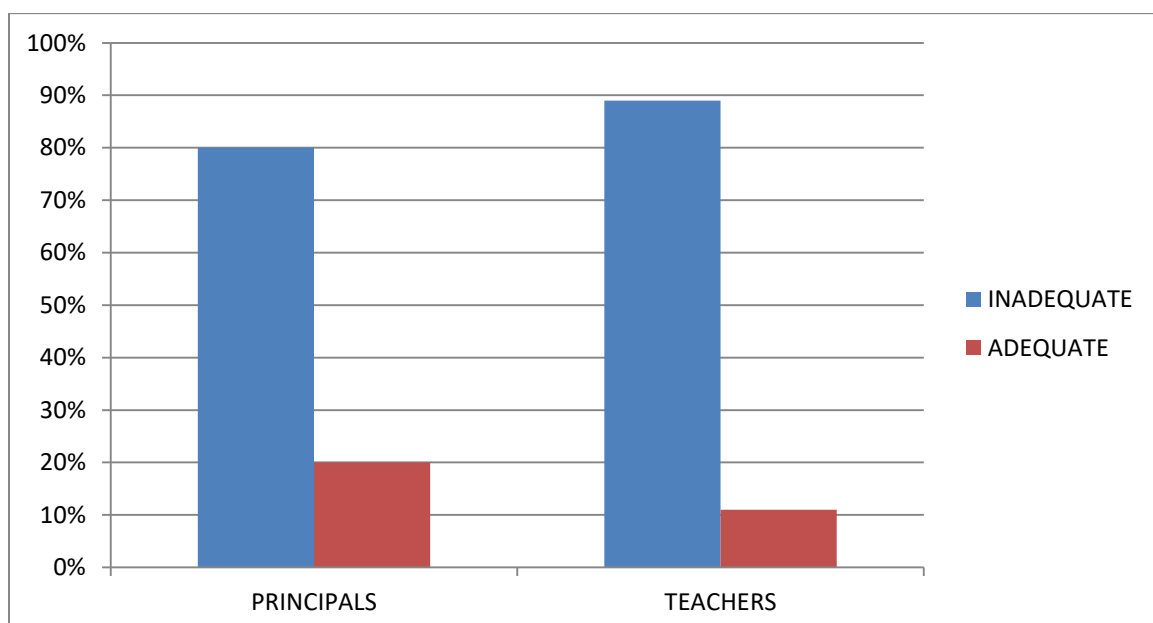


Figure 1: Teachers' Ignorance about IE

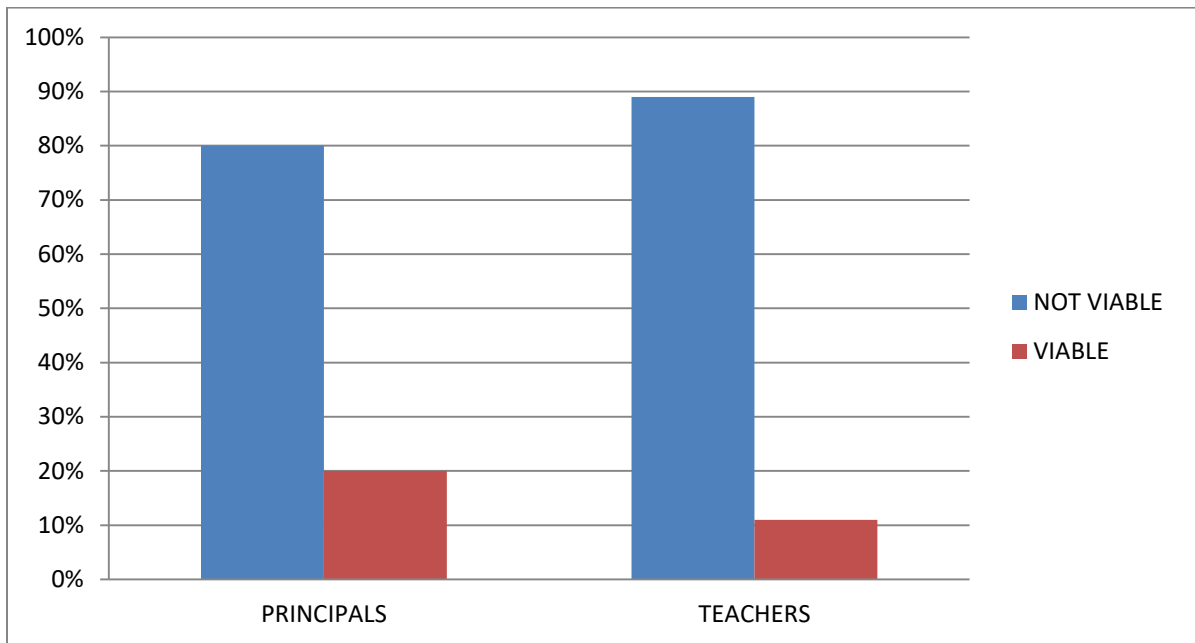


Figure 2: Lack of viable workshops for inclusive classes

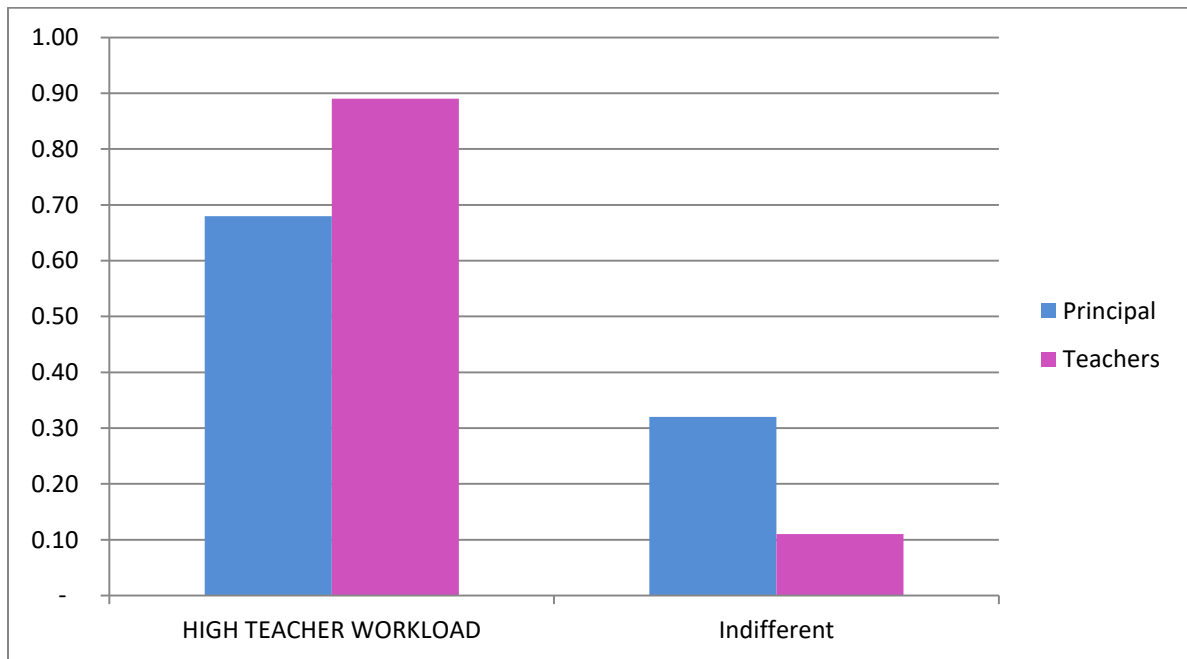


Figure 3: High teacher workload