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**Teacher Educators' and Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes, Knowledge and Understanding on Special Education and Inclusive Education in the Solomon Islands.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Special Education at the  
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By

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## ABSTRACT

Since the merging of special education and regular mainstream education into a unified system now known as inclusive education, this concept has kept many educators divided. However, it appears that inclusive education has now become the preferred option where children with special needs are given equal opportunity to learn with their peers in inclusive classrooms and an environment where they can freely interact with one another.

While the seed of inclusive education had been sown and effectively implemented in most developed countries, it has yet to sprout in the Solomon Islands. It has been suggested that the success of inclusive education depends very much on teachers and their attitudes. Because of that, teachers need adequate training in inclusive education so that they can effectively implement inclusion in their classroom, thus highlighting pre-service training of teachers as an essential factor which may enhance inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.

This study was based on an interpretive research paradigm. A qualitative research approach methodology was used. Teacher educators and pre-service teachers from a teacher training college were identified to be the focus of this study. It aimed to investigate their attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education and to find out if the current training is making adequate provision for these two approaches to occur. The primary source of data collection was the use of semi-structured interviews, done through face to face interview followed by a focus group interview. Interview questions were developed for both teacher educators and pre-service teachers. The focus group interview involved all participants.

According to the literature, school organisation, leadership, pre-service training and staff development together with policy and funding are just some factors that can contribute to the success of inclusive education. The results suggested that teacher educators and pre-service teachers appeared to have limited knowledge and understanding on what constitutes special education and inclusive practices. There was also a lack of sound policy at the government level that would pave the way for inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. This situation had created a gap between inclusive education policy and practices in the country. Because of lack of policy at

the nation level, it had also affected the way other institutions like the School of Education perceived inclusive education. This was evident in that, the notion of educating children with special needs in an inclusive classroom and environment was never introduced to pre-service teachers in the course of their pre-service training at the School of Education (SOE). That was the hallmark of this study.

This study suggests that firstly, it is very important for teachers to understand the importance of teaching children with special needs in an inclusive environment. Secondly, this notion of teaching children with special needs in inclusive classroom should be introduced into the curriculum of pre-service training for beginning teachers. Thirdly, all stake holders need to have a change of mindset to create a positive attitude to special education and inclusive practices.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1.0 Introduction

This research project focused mainly on teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' attitudes, knowledge and understanding about special and inclusive education in Solomon Islands. The concept of education for children with special needs in an inclusive environment has surfaced recently in Solomon Islands. This study was carried out in Honiara and involved teacher educators and pre-service teachers who are currently undergoing their pre-service training at the School of Education. This school is part of the seven schools within the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education.

### 1.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' attitudes, knowledge and understanding of special and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. The focus was to find out about what teacher educators and pre-service teachers know and feel about special and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands in order to see if some form of transformation is appropriate or indeed desirable. Because any changes will be determined by the Ministry of Education policies and by the programs offered by the School of Education (SOE) it seems clear that there are three major stakeholders in this study, namely the pre-services teachers, the Ministry of Education through its policies, and the School of Education through its programs and courses.

### 1.2 Study Background

My interest in this study grew out of my own experience as a teacher educator involved in the training of pre-service teachers at the School of Education. While this study was initially targeting pre-service teachers, my perceptions changed to include teacher educators as well, as I progressed through my studies. While the SOE is heavily involved in the training of pre-service teachers, I began to question

the pre-service training program and courses that are being offered at the SOE. I pondered whether the courses were equipping pre-service teachers with adequate skills and knowledge that would help them to meet the challenge of inclusive education at the completion of their training at the SOE.

While the concept of inclusive education has been a reality in many countries for quite some time, it has only recently surfaced in the Solomon Islands. Education in the Solomon Islands was mandated by the Education Act of 1982, which states that the Ministry of Education shall ensure that education be provided to all citizens of the country. The Solomon Islands, through its Ministry of Education, has a vision that all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and gain knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and their environment. Through education, the government would like to see a united and progressive society in which all can live in peace and harmony with fair and equitable opportunities for a better life (National Education Plan, 2004).

The Solomon Islands Government, being a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has a responsibility to the children of the nation. This international law was ratified in 1995. The implication is that the government should be providing education for all children. Such a notion is evident in the Solomon Islands Education Strategic Plan (2004-2006), which states that one of its outcomes is to “provide equitable access to services regardless of sex, ethnicity, ability or disability, location, economic status or age” and that “education must be made available to all regardless of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background of citizens” (p. 4). In particular, basic education must be accessible to and accessed by all school-aged children in the Solomon Islands (Education Strategic Plan, 2004-2006). In light of these strategic plans it is acknowledged that the government recognizes the right and need of every person in society to be educated through the services provided and assumes an acceptance that all students can learn regardless of the nature, degree and complexity of their abilities or disabilities.

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2002), less than 10 per cent of children and youth with disabilities have access to any form of education. The low figures clearly indicate that most children with disabilities do not have access to schools and education. This report is consistent with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) report (2003) which estimated that 113 million primary school age children are not attending school. Of those who do enroll in primary school, a large number of them drop out before even completing their primary education. There is little evidence to suggest that the situation in the Solomon Islands is any different. According to the Solomon Islands National Disability Report (2005), there is evidence that many school-aged children with special needs are not gaining equal access and opportunity to schools and most children in that report have indicated their desire to be educated in schools.

While the concept of educating children with special needs in an inclusive classroom is still very new to most teachers in the Solomon Islands, the findings from the National Disability Report (2005) strongly suggest the need and urgency for its implementation in schools. That is, the current education system must endeavour to have frameworks in place that would support and enhance special and inclusive education in the country. At the moment, the Red Cross Special Development Centre and the Disability Centre are the only two institutions that are providing education for children with special needs. They still remain as 'special schools' for children with disabilities.

Up to the present, there has been no teacher support or teacher training to cater for children with special needs in the Solomon Islands. However, the Education Strategic Plan (2004-2006) aims to address the situation. Formal special education training at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, through the School of Education is still in the early stage of development. It is envisaged that the curriculum and programs developed will equip pre-service teachers with skills and knowledge in the area of special education as well as empowering them to become effective special educators in inclusive classrooms.

While the stand of the Solomon Islands Government, through the Ministry of Education is to establish formal special education training at the School of Education, the Education Strategic Plan (2000-2004) was quite limited on how it will sustain the delivery of special education in the country, in the long run. There was lack of clear guidelines on various aspects of special education that needed attention from the government. For example, there was no clear direction on the following aspects on how schools will work towards special education; staff development training on special education for teachers who are already teaching in schools and

above all, funding that would cater for special education. However, despite these limitations, it must be acknowledged that at least the Solomon Islands Government through its Ministry of Education saw the importance of special education and is now paving way for it through the establishment of the special education training at the School of Education.

The Solomon Islands is unique in that many schools are situated in isolated villages on many of the nine main islands that make up the nation. It is hoped that pre-service teachers returning to these islands and villages will take with them the knowledge, skills and practical ideas with resource materials which will help them in their classrooms. They can also be able to encourage children with special needs to attend their local schools. Moreover, through special and inclusive education, children with special needs will have the opportunity to become active members of their school and community, thus enhancing their self-esteem and social skills and equipping them to become active participants in the future of Solomon Islands.

It is intended that the findings from this research project will contribute to the work of the Ministry of Education in developing frameworks and policies, and the School of Education (SOE) at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) in developing programs and courses on special and inclusive education that would be incorporated into the training of pre-service and in-service teachers. In so doing, the drive to push for inclusive education in the country would be a more effective one.

This brief introduction to the Solomon Islands and its government's position in relation to special education indicates that although there are policies in place, there is still a long way to go in working towards a unified education system. Developments in the last three decades have provided the impetus for the merging of the regular mainstream education and special education into a unified system. The belief that all teachers are responsible for all students' unique learning needs has far reaching implications. The next chapter will address some of the issues.

### **1.3 Importance of the Study**

This research is important because it will offer insightful perspectives on educators and pre-service teachers regarding their attitudes, knowledge and understanding about special and inclusive education. It will provide further information on how pre-service teachers view their current training at the School of Education in relation to special education and inclusive practices. The information gathered from this study has the potential to benefit the School of Education in planning their courses and programs so that special and inclusive education can be incorporated into their courses. It will also have a potential benefit for the Solomon Islands when the Ministry of Education reviews the current education system and policies, so that provisions can be made specifically for special and inclusive education.

### **1.4 Key Research Questions**

The key research questions that I will address are as follows:

- a) What do pre-service teachers and educators know about special and inclusive education?
- b) Is the current pre-service training making adequate provision for special education and inclusive education?
- c) What policy is there to indicate stakeholders' current thinking around inclusive education?
- d) How could information gathered from this research be used to assist in addressing the situation?

In order to answer these key questions, this study will use an interview schedule to collect data. (Refer to Appendix 8 & 9 for the interview questions, p. 94 and 95).

## **1.5 Thesis Overview**

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter one has introduced the aim of this research, the background details of the research questions and the overall coverage of this thesis. Chapter two presents a review of literature in relation to special and inclusive education. Chapter three provides the research methodologies used in this study and the theoretical framework which guided this study. Chapter four presents the results of the study. Chapter five discusses the findings from this research. Key themes derived from the research questions were analyzed in detail. Limitations of this study were also being discussed. Chapter six presents the conclusions on the result of the study with recommendations and implications for future research on inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Literature Review

### 2.0 Introduction

Numerous debates have surfaced in many developed countries regarding where children with special needs should be educated and the manner in which this education is provided. Special education refers to a range of educational and social services provided by the school systems and other educational institutions for those with disabilities who are within a specified age bracket, depending on a country's legislation. For instance, in New Zealand the bracket is between ages five and twenty-one. Special education has an intriguing and impressive history, but at the centre are schools and societies and their respective agendas that relate to disabilities. The most compelling element of special education is the child who requires appropriate programs and methods depending on their individual needs (Smith, Polloway, Patton & Dowdy, 2004).

This literature review will focus on the merging of special education and regular mainstream education into a unified system known as inclusive education. This trend towards inclusion of all children into the regular classroom is a reflection of a paradigm in education regarding how people think about and view education of children with special needs. While inclusive education is deemed as a much more accepted concept in contemporary education settings, it has been suggested that its success lies with attitudes that general educators, special educators and other stakeholders hold towards the concept (Avnamidis & Norwick, 2002; Carrington, 1999; Smith et al., 2004). The discussion will focus on some factors that are essential if inclusion is to be successful and will conclude with a brief summary of the importance of inclusive education.

### 2.1 Historical Background to Special Education

The historical development of special education spans many decades and affects a number of countries. For example, in America the first school children with deafness was established in 1817, while the school for the blind in 1832. In as early as 1965, the location of special education for those with mental or sensory disabilities

was always in a specialized institution. From these developments, children with special needs were often taught in special schools and classes which were formed especially for them (Smith et al. 2004). These children had their own special educator who used instructions that were modified or particularized to suit the children that they would be teaching depending on the child's special need (Smith et al., 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005). According to Smith et al. (2004), children with special needs include those with identified disabilities, those who are classified as gifted and talented and those who are at risk of developing problems. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) further defined disabilities as those who required special education and related services because they showed one of several specific conditions that resulted in their need. For example, those with health impairments, those who are classified as mentally disabled and those with learning difficulties. Despite these definitions, the fact still remains that disability categories are composed of different types of children thus making it quite impossible to draw simple conclusions about them (Smith et al., 2004).

With the passing of time, a growing number of parents and educators began to advocate that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, be integrated into the mainstream of regular education. According to Smith and colleagues (2004) this advocacy for change began to take place in the mid-1970s. Mainstreaming is the accommodation of children with special needs in a regular education setting. This integration of children with special needs into regular education came about because those advocates believed that it was time to stop developing criteria for those who do or do not belong in the mainstream and place more focus on increasing the capabilities of the regular education system to meet the unique needs of all students (Stainback, Stainback & Forest, 1989).

There are a number of reasons why advocates believe that all children should be educated together. One of the reasons frequently cited is the benefit to the students. It has been found that children learning together in an integrated setting have been able to learn, understand, respect and value one another despite their individual differences, while at the same time being able to interact, communicate, work together and assist one another regardless of their strengths and weaknesses (Stainback et al., 1989). This notion has also been supported by more recent writers

and researchers (Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2005; Foreman, 2005; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005).

Another significant development that has contributed to the push for inclusive education has been the changes in the social and cultural values held towards children with special needs. Changes to cultural values, coupled with a human rights push for social justice, led to educational and legislative reforms to accommodate and promote inclusive education. For example, the civil rights movement in America in the 1960s and the passing of the legislation PL 94-142 in 1975 literally opened the doors of public schools and general education classrooms to students with disabilities and other specific special needs. In New Zealand, these changes came about after the passing of the National Education Act in 1989 and the Human Rights Act in 1993 and were further strengthened by the recent introduction of the Special Education 2000 Framework (Macfarlane, 2003).

Apart from the legislation mentioned above, the Salamanca Statement of 1993 also had an immense influence on the successful push for inclusive education, as it is known in 2008. The Salamanca Statement proclaimed that every child has a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. The statement went on to acknowledge the uniqueness of every child and suggests that education systems should be designed and educational programs implemented to take into account the wide diversity of every child in the classrooms (Lindsay, 2003).

On account of the range of influential factors, the merging of special education and regular education into a unified education system began to emerge. Stainback and Stainback (1996) observed that such an inclusive education system is one that must strive to promote belonging, individualization and options for all students; one that fosters cooperative professional developments and focuses on the child. This merging of special and regular education evolved and became the preferred option (Hoover & Patton, 1997). Inclusive education involves regular schools and classrooms genuinely adapting and changing to meet the needs of all children as well as celebrating and valuing the differences (Loreman et al., 2005, p. 15). Another view proposed by Meijer, Pijil and Hagarty (1997) is that inclusive education stands for an education system that includes a large diversity of children and which differentiates education for this diversity. The interpretation of these two

views on inclusive education meant that schools should respect the rights of all children including those with special needs to enrol and receive education, and to ensure that these children are treated with respect. This would also include being able to have access to a fair share of available special education resources and not to be directly or indirectly discriminated against.

Moreover, schools should be paying attention to reducing all barriers to learning whilst at the same time pursuing a philosophy of providing education for all children including those with special needs. It is incumbent on schools to recognize and respond to the diversity of their population and be prepared to accommodate children's different learning styles and rates of learning. According to Macfarlane (2006), schools should ensure equality of educational opportunity through appropriate curriculum, school organization, use of resources and partnership with their communities. However, the central contention of inclusive education is that students with special needs are entitled to be educated and that their education should take place in regular settings (Macfarlane, 2007).

## **2.2 Theories in Special Education**

A theory is a set of abstract ideas or propositions used to guide practical decision making (Macfarlane, 2006). With regard to special education, several theories have surfaced in attempts to explain how special education should be implemented in schools. These theories surfaced as a result of people trying to explain and make meaning of how a child is learning. However, this literature review will discuss the two main theories namely the social medical theory and the ecological theory.

According to Macfarlane (2003, 2006), in the past, teaching people who fail to learn and those with other various special needs has been based on the social medical theory. The social medical theory is probably the oldest and most familiar in special education. It is based on the view that all learning problems and deviant behaviours within a child are a result of organic disorder, disease or impairment. Causes for this failure to learn are said to be located within the individual, a site often referred to as a psychodynamic origin.

On the other hand, there is a more recent train of thought that is expressed in the ecological theory. This theory is influenced by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), and has continued to receive considerable attention. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory suggests that interaction with others and the environment is a key to development. Bronfenbrenner's theory identifies complex layers of the environment, each having an effect on a child's development. Until recently, this theory has been named 'bio-ecological system theory' to emphasise that children's own biology is a primary environment that fuels their development. The interaction between factors in the children's maturing biology, their environment, immediate family or community environment and the societal landscape can lead, direct and affect the child's development. Changes or conflicts occurring in any one layer can have a ripple effect throughout the other layers (Addison, 1992)

In essence, this bio-ecological theory is based on the belief that a child's learning, behaviour and development are determined by the interaction of that child with the environment. This interaction is a two-way process. Moreover, it advocates the involvements of families in any intervention measures and changes to curriculum development. This theory is very different to the medical theory because it takes a more holistic approach to dealing with children with special needs.

### **2.3 Shifting Paradigms in Education**

According to Stainback et al. (1989) and Moore, Macfarlane, Anderson, Brown, Timperley, Thomson & Glynn (1999), in the past educators always assumed a "functional limitations" approach to services provided for those with disabilities and other special needs. This "functional limitation" belongs in a paradigm related to the social medical theory that places the problem on the children when they are facing difficulties in learning or adapting to general education classrooms. From that perspective, the role of the educator is to remediate these children's functional deficits where possible by providing them with skills to be able to succeed in a regular educational environment and school set-ups. In short, this functional limitations approach proposed that children with special needs are expected to fit into the existing educational environment.

However, this paradigm is slowly being challenged by a new paradigm. This emerging paradigm, based on an ecological theory, posits that the primary problems facing people with disabilities are external rather than internal (Moore et al., 1999). The implication of this new paradigm is that educators working within it have to alter their beliefs, adapt to and improve the educational organization and foster environments to meet the needs of all children. According to Udvari-Solnar (1995), such adaptation is a necessary pre-condition for successful inclusion of all students in regular education. This notion was also supported by others such as Smith and colleagues (2004); Stainback and Stainback (1996); and Villa and Thousand (2005). In essence, educators and institutions need to alter their beliefs, and adapt the environment to meet the needs of all children in an inclusive setting. While that would seem to be a preferred option, it is still perceived that inclusive practice is not taking place as it should, due to a number of factors. Attitude is one of those factors (Carrington, 1999; Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005). Apart from attitudes, there are important elements that can also contribute to the development of inclusive education. These elements can be deemed as important attributes to inclusive education, because without these attributes, inclusive education cannot happen in schools and classrooms.

#### **2.4 Attitudes**

According to Vaughan and Hogg (2002), attitudes are basic and pervasive aspects of human life, helping human beings to be able to analyse and react to events, make decisions and make sense of their relationships with other people. Loreman et al. (2005) further attest that attitudes are thoughts, feelings and actions that human beings have about other people and things they encounter in their daily lives and can guide them in deciding whether or not they like or dislike someone or something. Thus with regard to inclusive education, it can be said that people's attitudes towards that concept can be positive or negative depending on what they value and believe in. From that perspective, it can be said that the success of inclusive education and practices depends very much on the teachers' perceptions and attitudes, the schools', the parents and government's support services (Carrington, 1999; Loreman et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2004).

**2.4.1 Teachers' attitudes to inclusive education.** Over the years, research had been conducted on general and special educators regarding their attitudes to inclusion. One of the best known research studies was conducted in America by Mastropien and Scruggg (1996). Their research started in 1971 and went on for the next 25 years. This research was on general educators' and special educators' attitudes to inclusive education. With regards to general educators and their attitudes to inclusion, Mastropien and Scruggs (1996) found that while two-thirds of general classroom educators in their study supported the concept, they were not willing to teach students with special needs in their classrooms. Teachers' negative attitudes to inclusion were also reported by Jangira and Scrinivasan (1991) from their study in India on attitudes of educators and teachers towards education of disabled children.

However, other studies have indicated that some school staff, such as administrators and advisers, expressed more positive attitudes to inclusion than those closer to the classroom context, the classroom teachers. Head teachers have been found to hold the most positive attitudes towards inclusion, followed by special education teachers, with general teacher educators having the most negative attitudes (Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1989; Norwich, 1994).

Similar findings of general teachers having negative attitude to inclusive education were also reported by Forlin (1995) in his research on general teachers and special education teachers' attitudes to inclusive education in Australia. Forlin's research found that special education teachers were more accepting of children with special needs than educators from the regular mainstream classrooms and concluded that they have a more positive attitude to inclusion than their mainstream counterparts. Research results further revealed that special educators tended to have a more positive attitude to children with special needs and inclusion because of the fact that they had adequate training in the field. Furthermore, their continuous interaction with children with special needs had also helped them to be more accepting and receptive to these children, as compared to general educators with no training and experience of working with children with special needs.

These findings from Mastropien and Scruggs (1996), Jangira and Scrinivasan (1991) and Forlin (1995) led to the question of why it is that general teacher educators tend to have reservation and negative attitudes to inclusive education.

Findings from Mastropien and Scruggs (1996) and Forlin (1995) revealed that teachers' negative attitude to inclusive education was due to the fact that there was not enough time for them (teachers) to accommodate and cater for the needs of children with disabilities in an inclusive setting. Their attitudes were also influenced by the fact that they felt they worked with no training, no resources and inadequate funding to cater for inclusion. Furthermore, many teachers lacked confidence in their ability to cater for children with diverse needs, coupled with a lack of specific knowledge and skills to handle children with special needs as compared to their counterparts with training in special education.

**2.4.2 Parents' attitudes to inclusive education.** Parents' attitudes to inclusive education are also very important if inclusion is to be effectively implemented in schools. According to findings, parents often have mixed reactions to inclusive education. For example, several studies reported that parents were supportive of inclusive practices and were satisfied with the benefit and effect it had on their children (Bennett, Deluca & Burns, 1997; Lowenbraun, Madge & Afleck, 1989). However, other findings reported less support. For example, Fox and Yesseldyke (1997) and Leyser and Kirk (2004) found that parents of children with learning disabilities were reluctant to have their children reintegrated into a general classroom for reading, and parents of students with mild to moderate cognitive impairments expressed their concerns about their child's progress under inclusion. It was concluded from these studies that parents' negative attitudes towards inclusion stemmed from the fears and skepticism that parents have towards disability. Parents of children with educational issues and needs who opposed inclusion were concerned that children with special needs may not be receiving adequate attention in the way that they would in special education settings. Moreover, parents were worried that many general education teachers lack skills and adequate training to teach and work with their children. Lastly, parents also argued that most regular classrooms seemed to focus too much on academic oriented curriculum, rather than skills for basic living.

However, despite such negativity, parental support and positive attitudes to inclusion were also mentioned in the literature. Parents wanted their children to be treated like all the other students and to participate in all aspects of learning in inclusive settings (Villa & Thousand, 2005). Furthermore, regardless of parental

negative attitudes and choices in inclusion, schools still have the legal obligation to ensure that children and young people with special needs have the opportunity to be educated with their peers to a maximum extent (Villa & Thousand, 2005).

## **2.5 Important Attributes to Inclusive Education**

While the attitudes of teachers and parents are important for the development of inclusive education in schools and classroom, there are also other attributes that are just as important and can contribute to the success of inclusive education.

**2.5.1 Pre-service training and professional development.** Pre-service training and professional development in inclusive education are very important if inclusive practices are to be implemented successfully in schools (Mastropien & Scruggs, 1996; Forlin, 1995). Most of these studies found that general teachers often have negative attitudes to inclusive education because of their lack of training, knowledge and skills with working with children with special needs. These studies suggested that all teachers need to be trained on special education and inclusive practices. That means institutions offering pre-service training programs need to consider this and ensure that they make provision for special education and inclusive practices in their training programs.

### **Pre-service training**

Teacher education programs must be geared towards preparing teachers in order to help them meet the challenge of inclusion when they go to teach in regular classrooms (Smith et al., 2004). The same emphasis on the importance of pre-service training was also provided by Bennett, Deluca and Burns (1997), Loreman et al. (2005) and Foreman (2005). Moore and his colleagues (1999) further reiterated that the key to the success of inclusive education can be found only in teachers because they are the ones who would be implementing the concept. Their attitudes and teaching strategies can largely determine the eventual outcome of inclusive practices in the classrooms.

Hodkinson (2005) further suggests that effective implementation of inclusive education depends very much on how individual teachers define it and whether they have received the necessary training to instill a belief that they can deliver inclusive practices in their classroom. Hodkinson's (2005) study conducted in England, on final year pre-service teachers to determine their knowledge and understanding of inclusion, concluded that while the majority of the pre-service teachers do understand that inclusive education is a complex and multi-faceted concept, their understanding of the implementation of inclusionary practices within the applied education setting was limited. Hodkinson (2005) reinforced the importance of pre-service training where relevant programs are tailored for pre-service teachers. The programs and curriculum should ensure that pre-service teachers are equipped with skills and knowledge on inclusive education so that they can better carry out inclusive practices in their classrooms. Moreover, pre-service teachers need more practical sessions in the classroom after their training. In essence, the importance of pre-service training was considered paramount.

### **Professional Development – In-service training**

On-going professional development for teachers who are already teaching in schools is also very important. Teachers need continuous expansion of their existing knowledge on special education and inclusive practices. Moreover, their on-going professional development will equip them with new skills and knowledge that will enable them to increase their students' achievement in schools (Fraser et al., 2005). The importance of the need for teachers to have support and training in order to contribute to the effective implementation of inclusive practices in schools have been considered in this section.

**2.5.2 Beliefs and understanding on inclusive education.** Inclusive education can effectively take place in schools and training institutions only if it is being supported by the policies of the schools and institutions who will utilize it in practice. Schools and institutions should ensure that their policies reflect beliefs and values that support and relate to inclusive education.

## **Mission statements**

A mission statement is very important because it reflects the values and tones of the schools and institutions. Therefore, if inclusive education is to be implemented successfully, the schools and institution's mission statement and philosophy must have inclusive values and beliefs (Fraser, Moltzen & Ryba, 2005). Fraser et al. (2005) further assert that a school's philosophy should reflect values that would promote acceptance of diversity, collaboration and equity that will result in practices that would best minimize learning barriers to the learning of all students. Such a notion was also supported by Webber (1997), who asserted that appreciating students' diversity is important if inclusive practices are to be implemented successfully in schools. Thus, it would be more appropriate to have a mission statement that appreciates students' diversity, reflects genuine concern and commitment for inclusive practices and equitable education for all students (Special Education, 2000).

## **Policy and funding**

A positive attitude from stakeholders is also very important if inclusion is to be implemented successfully in schools. This means that governments, schools and training institutions need to work together in formulating policies that will support inclusive education in a country. A policy is a very important document because it contains guidelines and measures that have to be put in place in order to enhance the development of a goal. In the case of inclusive education, there has to be a strong policy in place at the government, school and training institution levels that will guide the implementation of inclusive education whilst at the same time fulfilling the national goals of education (Fraser et al., 2005). For example, in New Zealand, the National Education Act of 1989 and the Human Rights Act of 1993 clearly spell out that all New Zealanders between five and nineteen years of age are entitled to primary and secondary education and children with special educational needs and have the same right to enroll and be educated at the state schools in the same way as other students (Mitchell, 1999). Because of this goal, Special Education 2000 Policy was formulated and put in place to govern all special education programs in New Zealand (Davies & Pragnell, 1999). From this national policy, schools are also expected to develop their own school policy that will further affirm the expectations

of the goals of the Education Act of 1989 and the Special Education 2000 Framework on inclusive education.

Apart from sound policies, funding is also very important because schools and institutions need funding to implement the expectations of the policy statement. The importance of funding inclusive education was emphasized by Fraser et al. (2005), who stated that goals of inclusive practices in schools can be achieved if there is adequate funding from the government. The funding should help secure resources, facilities, teacher aides and other necessities that will support and enhance inclusive education. In New Zealand, funding of special education and inclusion had been stated very clearly in the Special Education 2000 Framework. This fund, known as the Special Educational Grant, is totally separate from the national education grant which the government normally gives out to schools.

**2.5.3 School and classroom organization.** Inclusive education can also be successfully implemented in schools only when the schools and classroom are organized and prepared for it. This would mean, adapting their environment to accommodate inclusion. This should be reflected in the following manner.

Schools should be organized in their daily planning to ensure that their curriculum programs and the environment that they provide are conducive to inclusive education (Webber, 1997; Smith et al., 2004). ). The significance of school organization was also supported by Thorburn, (1997) and Loreman et al. (2005). Such an environment should be reflected in the kinds of facilities and resources that the school has in place, for example, having school buildings and classrooms accessible to all children and ensuring that resources are in place in these buildings to help teachers and support staff carry out their jobs effectively (Thorburn, 1997).

Pugach and Wargner (2001) further mentioned the notion of having a school-wide curriculum that is supportive of inclusive education in that it focuses on what students are learning and how the curriculum can be accessible to all students. The essence is that the curriculum to be implemented must be tailored to meet the needs of all students in the school (Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Foreman, 2005). Moreover, schools should be paying attention to students' curricular needs, focusing on what students are learning and how the curriculum can be accessible to students with special needs (Webber, 1997).

Classroom organization is also very important if inclusive education is to be effectively implemented. The classrooms should be organized to meet the needs of every student whilst at the same time provide a safe environment for inclusive education to occur (Smith et al., 2004; Thorburn, 1997; Fraser et al., 2005). Webber (1997) suggests that if the learning environment is organized positively, children will be able to learn effectively. Classroom organization refers to the importance of making provision for children's seating arrangements, classroom designs and organization and the amount of space available in the classroom where children can be free to move around. This notion of schools and classrooms organizing and adapting to foster inclusion, is the approach emphasised by the ecological theory.

Moreover, teachers should be using inclusive education programs and teaching strategies that would foster inclusion in their classrooms. Such teaching strategies would include cooperative learning and peer tutoring. Cooperative learning as a teaching strategy has been found to be very helpful especially when having children to work and learn together in small groups. Children with special needs benefited a lot from such a teaching strategy especially in an inclusive classroom, according to Fraser et al, (2005), Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, (1994), Slavin, (1990) and Smith et al. (2004) Such benefit includes students developing interpersonal skills, communication skills with high self esteem and high academic achievements.

**2.5.4 Home, school and community link.** Inclusive practices can also effectively take place in schools and classrooms only when there is a strong link and relationship between schools, parents and the community. This means having a system in place where schools and teachers can spend time with parents and the community and involve them in school based activities that would strengthen that collaboration and partnership. One way to achieve this is through effective communication links with parents and the community, and encouraging parents and community to actively participate in activities, as proposed by Fraser et al. (2005). This link could be further strengthened through having regular meetings and communication with parents and the surrounding community through newsletters and other forms of information. The information about the school and its expectation of parents and community should be short, clear and simple for parents and the community to easily understand (Villa & Thousand, 2005).

The importance of establishing a ‘sense of community and social acceptance’ culture in the school, where teachers accept the child and parent and welcome their contribution to school activities, is also another important factor that could enhance the development of inclusive practices in schools. Through such positive attitudes, the child and parents will feel that they belonged and are valued. Schools should always open their doors to parents and the community, even to the extent of using school resources to enhance parents’ learning. Moreover, schools can also utilize parents’ skills to promote and enhance school activities that would support inclusion (Macfarlane, 2006). In essence, there has to be a strong home, school and community link to ensure that barriers hindering the link are broken down, and this is emphasized by Macfarlane (2006).

**2.5.5 Leadership.** Inclusive education and practices can also be effectively implemented only when governments, schools and training institutions have good leaders to lead and guide them, leaders who have effective communication links with their staff and believe in inclusive practices. Good leaders also recognize the importance of preparing staff and students so that effective inclusive practices can be maintained (Smith et al., 2004). Such a leader also acknowledges that collaborative team work effort is important for successful inclusion. This would mean collaborating with other stakeholders and other personnel to fulfil inclusion and inclusive practices in the school. Moreover, success of inclusive practices depends on leaders who have vision to push forward inclusion and be able to identify areas of success as well as areas of problems that need to be addressed immediately (Macfarlane, 2006). Whilst identifying those areas that need attention, a good leader through working with others will always work on finding ways to address the problems in an appropriate manner (Durrant & Holden, 2006). Lastly, inclusive education and practices can be effective in schools only when the leader who is always the school’s principal, has beliefs and values on inclusive education and is knowledgeable on inclusive practices (Fraser et al., 2005).

## **2.6 Criticisms against inclusive education**

Inclusive education has gained momentum, with a growing number of scholarly articles reporting its success in classrooms (Johnson, 1994; Leister, Koonce & Nisbet, 1993; Loreman et al, 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2005). However, it has also come under considerable criticism by others who claimed that inclusion is a 'one size fits all' approach and that it is better to have separate education for children with special needs because full inclusion can deprive many students with disabilities of an appropriate education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995). Other criticism levelled against inclusive education, according to Lipsky (1996), includes notions such as inclusion not having a positive outcome for non-disabled children, children with special educational needs needing specialized services that can be provided only out of regular classroom, and teachers being unprepared to teach in an inclusive education classroom.

Despite these criticisms, advocates of inclusion strongly believe that all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities should be given the opportunity to be educated in the regular classroom (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Stainback & Stainback, 1996). They consider it the right of every child to be included in all aspects of school life alongside their non-disabled peers, thus reiterating the push for a unified and coordinated inclusive system. Furthermore, schools have a moral and legal obligation to provide education for all (Villa & Thousand, 2005). It can be said that criticisms are healthy because in a way these are reflections of how different people and groups view inclusion and leads to healthy debate. The result is that despite all these criticisms, inclusive education programs are rapidly developing and being implemented with success in many countries (Meijer et al., 1997).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Without doubt, this merging of special education and regular education into a unified inclusive system demands careful attention from all stakeholders. Governments, schools, teachers, parents and community must work together in order to foster and enhance the development of inclusive education. Developing positive attitude towards the concept is essential. Such attitudes should be reflected through policies, adaptation of school and classroom environments and teaching strategies. Furthermore, staff development and pre-service training is also important

if inclusive education is to be implemented successfully. Sound leadership from those with vision provides an additional thrust (Fraser et al., 2004; Loreman et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2005). Despite criticisms levelled against it, the intentions to best serve the needs of all children present a strong counter argument.

There may be various reasons as to why children that needed special education in an inclusive environment are not happening in the Solomon Islands. This small study focused on three teacher educators and eight pre-service teachers in training at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands to find out their attitudes, knowledge and understanding in relation to the two concepts, and to establish if in their view, the current pre-service training is equipping teachers with skills and knowledge on special education and inclusive practices. The methods which this study employed to gather information which will be used to answer those questions will be the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### 3.0 Introduction

It is vital that educators are research literate because of the impact of research can have on today's education and society. By being knowledgeable about research, educators will be able to evaluate published material and conduct well designed research studies on their own or with others (Macfarlane, 2007). Drawing from this, as well as similar observations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2004; Bell, 2005), it can be said that the place of research in education is very important.

This chapter discusses the importance of education research, particularly in the context of the Solomon Islands education system. A qualitative approach was used to guide this study. Data collection was done through the use of interview schedules. The notion of ethics, validity and reliability in research was also discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the whole process in which this study was carried out.

#### 3.1 Nature of Educational Research

Research can be defined as the seeking of information through a methodical process to add to one's own body of knowledge and potentially to that of others, by discovering non-trivial facts and insights (Bogdan, & Biklen, 1992). Drew (1993) attests that research is conducted to solve problems and to expand knowledge. In essence, Drew describes research as a systematic way of asking questions, a systematic method of inquiry, or a pathway which researchers can use to gain more knowledge. It should be done in a logical empirical manner.

Research in education should be on-going, especially when researching educational issues that teachers and students often have in their schools, classrooms and within the wider educational community. It is through research that educators can review and utilize existing knowledge on the issues of concern, investigate existing situations or problems and explore solutions (Burns, 2000). Furthermore, through research, educators can explore and analyse issues of concern more constructively. After thorough research, some kind of framework can be put in to address the situation. Lastly, through research educators can also explain emerging

knowledge phenomena and these in turn may generate new knowledge (Booth, 2006).

### **3.2 Purpose of this Study**

This study sets out to investigate teacher educators and pre-service teachers and their attitudes, knowledge and understanding in relation to special and inclusive education. Participants were interviewed on how they perceived and understood these two concepts and their confidence in their current pre-service training at the School of Education. The details of the semi-structured interview questions can be located in Appendix 8 & 9. p. 94-95.

The key questions that were used to guide this study were

- a) What do pre-service teachers and teacher educators know about special and inclusive education?
- b) Is the current pre-service training making adequate provision for special and inclusive education?
- c) What policy is there to indicate stakeholders' current thinking around inclusive education?
- d) How could information gathered from this research be useful to assist in transforming the present situation?

**3.2.1 Outline of the Setting.** The research was conducted at the School of Education (SOE) in Solomon Islands. This school is one of the seven schools within the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE), and the only teacher training institution in the country. Located in Honiara, on Panatina Campus, the School of Education was mandated by the Education Act of 1981 to train teachers who would then go out to teach in schools in and around the country. Currently, the School of Education (SOE) provides pre-service and in-service training for teachers. The school offers four strands of programs. They are: Certificate in Early Childhood, Certificate in Primary teaching, Diploma in Secondary Teaching and Advance standing Diploma in Education. This study focused mainly on pre-service teachers who are currently in their second year of doing a certificate in primary teaching and teacher educators that are involved in the training of these pre-service teachers.

The decision to conduct the research at the School of Education and focus the study on the second year pre-service teachers and teacher educators stemmed from two reasons. Firstly, I am an employee of the institution. Staff development was part of the institution's program whereby members taking study leave are encouraged to carry out research into areas that interest them. It is envisaged that the outcome of this study will benefit the institution in terms of its progress and development. Secondly, it is anticipated that findings from this study will contribute to the development of the institution with regards to the training of pre-service teachers on special education and inclusive practices.

**3.2.2 Selection of respondents.** According to Patton (1990), selection of respondents to participate in any study must be purposeful to ensure that information gathered are relevant and would help in answering the key questions of the study. That is very important. This study involved eight pre-service teachers who are doing their second year in primary teaching and three teacher educators that are involved in the training of these pre-service teachers. The decision to involve eight pre-service teachers and three teacher educators was taken due to the following reasons. Firstly, the eight pre-service teachers are about to complete their study. They have undergone lengthy training already in relation to classroom teaching and practices and education in general. Because of that, these students are also in a better position than the first year pre-service students to answer my questions regarding their knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education. Secondly, the involvement of the three teacher educators was necessary especially when asking them questions relating to SOE and its stand on special and inclusive education. Moreover, their responses will be triangulated with that of the pre-service teachers in relation to the training so far at SOE. However, above all, this group of participants were selected because I wanted to get the information that would enable me to answer my key research questions.

### **3.3 Research Methodology**

In any research study, it is important that the researcher is knowledgeable about the different research methodologies and how these methodologies can be applied in the course of the study. There are two main research methodologies namely the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. These research methodologies have their own features. Good researchers should know the differences between them and be able to use them on their respective contexts. For example, the quantitative approach is often more structured and controlled. Research is often based on observations that are converted into discreet units which can be compared to other units using statistical analysis. While there may be modification and variations in this general picture of quantitative research, statistical analysis is the hallmark of this approach (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2004; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The qualitative approach on the other hand, is research based on examining people's words, actions and narrative in a descriptive way which would closely represent the situations as experienced and expressed by the participants. Data collected through that process have often been termed 'soft' because they are rich in description of people, places and conversation that cannot be easily handled by statistical analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

**3.3.1 Research paradigm.** There are also research paradigms in which the quantitative and qualitative approaches can be best worked within. Paradigms are positions through which reality is viewed, a set of assumptions about what knowledge is and how it can be researched. It is like a lens through which the researcher views the world. What one researcher sees out in the world can be objectively based on his / her view, values, biases and assumptions, compared to another researcher seeing the same thing, but using a different paradigm that can interpret that view in a different way. There are quite a few paradigms that can be used to shape a researchers understanding of educational research. However the two main ones are the 'Positivist' and 'Interpretive' paradigms.

Within the positivist paradigm, positivists would always want to base their findings on hypotheses and experiments and quantitative data. With that notion, the approach that works well within this paradigm is the quantitative research. In contrast, is the interpretive paradigm where research analysis is focused on trying to understand the meaning events have for persons, and the individual and their world is seen as co-constituted (Patton, 1990). Findings are always based on human

experiences and stories that cannot be measured, counted or controlled (O’Leary, 2004; Cohen et al., 2004). The approach that works best within this paradigm is that of qualitative research.

The main methodological approach adopted in this study is the qualitative one. Qualitative research is often used by researchers in the field of social science and education in particular. Such notion relates well to the nature of study which seeks to investigate teacher educators’ and pre-service teachers’ attitudes, knowledge and understanding about special and inclusive education because participants will be expressing their thoughts and perceptions regarding how they perceive these two concepts in relation to their current training at the SOE.

### **3.4 Research Methods**

When doing any research study, there are various research methods that can be used to collect the data. These methods range from the use of a survey, to doing observation, to written questionnaire and the use of an interview schedule depending on the nature of the study.

**3.4.1 Interview.** The research method that this study used to collect data was the interview method. According to O’Leary (2004), the interview is defined as “a method of data collection that involves researchers asking basically open ended questions” (p. 162), while Bishop (1997) describes interviews as “the development of collaborative storytelling by means of sequential, semi structured, in depth interviews as conversation, conducted in a dialogic reflective manner that facilitates on-going collaborative analysis and construction of meaning / explanations about the lived experiences of the research participants” (p. 29). In the light of Bishop’s (1997) definition on the nature of this study, the interview can be seen as an in-depth conversation with participants regarding how they feel and what they know about special and inclusive education. In essence, Bishop (1997) and O’Leary’s (2004) definitions emphasised that the interview is a data collection method that is usually conducted face to face between the interviewer and the participant.

Interviews may vary in structured formality and there are several forms ranging from free to fixed. There are *unstructured interviews* which focus on reproducing the world of the person being interviewed, and do not use pre-determined questions; *semi-structured interviews* which are based on the use of an interview guide and *structured interviews*, where questions are already pre-worded and delivered in pre-established order (O'Leary, 2004).

Interviews can be done on a one to one basis or in a group. A one to one interview is always done face to face with the respondent, thus allowing the researchers to control the process, whilst also allowing the interviewee the freedom to express their thoughts. Group interviews, on the other hand occur when interviewing more than one person at a time. In this situation an interviewer acts more as a moderator or facilitator to the focus group. The sessions may be tape recorded as it can be quite difficult to take notes during such sessions (Cohen et al., 2004, O'Leary, 2004).

As with other methods of data collection, the interview has strengths and weaknesses. Its greatest strength lies in its ability to collect data through verbal conversation and interaction with individuals and groups. Furthermore, the interviewer can repeat and explain questions if they are not fully understood by the respondent, thus allowing for greater flexibility. Another strength is that it allows for greater in depth interviewing through the use of open-ended questions, thus gaining in depth information that is otherwise not attainable by other methods. Moreover, the face to face interaction with the respondent does assist in the establishment of rapport and can lead to a higher level of motivation among the respondents (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000; O'Leary, 2004).

Despite its strengths, one of the biggest barriers to gathering credible data using interviews is the participants. People are complex and unique and researchers will rely completely on the respondent's honest answers. However, it is likely that people want to be liked, maintain a sense of dignity and would want to protect some level of privacy as well. If respondents felt that they are being judged through the interview, offended or made ashamed, then gathering credible data will not be achieved because respondents may at their will withhold information (O'Leary, 2004).

For this study a semi-structured interview using a face to face encounter followed by a focus group interview, was chosen as the manner through which data would be collected. A semi-structured interview guide was formulated where open ended questions were prepared, to be asked of the participants in these two different groups. This method of interview had an advantage because it also allowed the interviewer to probe more into issues whilst interviewing and taking notes of body language and facial expression of participants as the topic is being developed.

During the course of the face to face interview and the focus group interview, all sessions were tape recorded. Notes were also taken down. Tape recording and note taking during the sessions were important because they helped during the analysis of the data and identification of main themes that emerged from the interviews. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data.

The face to face semi-structured interview and the focus group interview were chosen because of their appropriateness in the nature of this study, as participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their attitudes, knowledge and understanding towards special and inclusive education. Secondly, these methods were chosen because of the limited time frame. I may not have been able to get another chance to interview these teacher educators and pre-service teachers. Lastly, these methods were chosen because it was thought they would allow me to manage the study easily. These two chosen methods were employed in the following manner:

- a) Regarding the face to face semi-structured interview, an interview guide with a set of open-ended questions was prepared and used. Participants were interviewed using questions which were prepared for them.
- b) With regards to the focus group interview, a set of open-ended questions was also developed. This focus group was supposed to include all participants that were involved in this study. However, due to reasons that are beyond my control, only the pre-service teachers turned up for the interview. The focus group interview was held after the face to face with these participants. The purpose of this focus group interview was to give all the participants further opportunity to be able to share their views with one another on the importance of inclusive education. It was also anticipated that some issues

which did not emerge during the face to face interview would emerge during this focus group interview. My role would be to facilitate the discussion.

### **3.5 Quality of Research**

According to Cohen et al. (2004) the quality of any research is very important. That would mean having frame work in place within the study to ensure quality. The quality of any study can be determined by the sampling strategy that the study used and the how the study addresses the issue of validity and reliability in relation to the method that was used to collect data..

**3.5.1 Sampling.** The sampling strategy which a study uses is a factor which can greatly contribute to the quality of the study. There are two main methods of sampling, namely random sampling and purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2004). This study used random sampling. Random sampling is appropriate in situations where the chances of members of the wider population being selected for the sample are known and every member had an equal chance of being included or excluded in the sample. Random sampling was decided on because I had been exposed to the SOE and the students through my work as a teacher educator. It was anticipated that the sampling would give a good representation of the total number of the second year students who were about to complete their studies. The teacher educators who were involved in their training were also interviewed. There was no prescribed criterion for the participants although it was anticipated that there would be a fair representation of gender. With time limitation, it was essential that I utilize the available samples to get the data that I needed to collect.

**3.5.2 Validity and reliability in research.** The notions of validity and reliability in any research are important. Validity in any study is a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure (Cohen et al., 2004). It refers to the strength of the research in relation to the instrument used to gather data. In this study, this means that the use of interview should measures what it went out to measure. Reliability on the other hand is a measure for consistency over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen et al., 2004).

Patton (2002) stated that validity and reliability are two factors which qualitative researchers should be concerned about when designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. In essence, qualitative research demands that any data collected through that approach should be valid and reliable. While this study used interviews to gather data, it is assumed that quality data must be achieved in the end, in order to produce a report that is valid and reliable. However, Cannel and Kahn (1957) argued that achieving validity and reliability in interviews can sometimes be a problem because it is not limited to a narrow range of data, but is wide spread. Despite Cannel and Kahn's argument, Cohen et al. (2005) emphasised that one way of validating interview measures, is to compare the interview measure with another measure that has already been shown, proven and known to be valid, a comparison known as 'convergent validity'. Furthermore, in order to achieve a quality interview, one has to try and minimize the amount of bias that occurs as possible. The source of bias in research often comes from the characteristics of the interviewer, the respondent and also from the substantive content of questions that the interviewer often uses. The researcher should always be mindful about these sources of biasness in order to achieve a fruitful outcome (Cohen et al., 2005; O'Leary, 2004).

The notion of validity in interviewing can be addressed through researchers taking back their report to their respondents and recording their respondents' reaction to the report, while reliability can be addressed through what the researchers' record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched.

In this study, the issue of validity and reliability was addressed through descriptive analysis of the data gathered from the pre-service teachers and triangulating their responses with responses gathered from their teacher educators. This was done to ensure that data collected from the pre-service teachers are reliable and consistent with that of their teacher educators. Moreover, for validity and reliability purposes, all interviews done during the face to face interview and focus group discussion done in neutral locations and were later transcribed. All teacher educators and pre-service teachers were given the chance to view the transcripts of their interview to confirm their statements, whilst at the same time being able to add more to what they have say. Apart from that, I also always made sure that at the end

of each interview, I summarized the outcome of the interview verbally with the participants just to make sure that what was recorded was indeed what participants meant to say.

**3.5.3 Ethics in research.** In any research project an essential aspect to be considered is the ethics of the procedures and process of the collection of data. That is, the researcher should ensure that ethical procedures of carrying out a research study are being followed. With regards to this study, ethical conduct was also taken into account. The issues of access to participants, participants' right to decline to participate and the right to withdraw were taken into account to fulfil my role as an ethical researcher. The ethical procedure that I used in this study was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Waikato for approval before I was able to carry out this study.

In order to gain access to the participants and location of the study, I wrote a letter to the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) and the School of Education (SOE) to inform them about my intention because this study would involve their teacher educators and pre-service teachers and be held on their premises (Refer to Appendix 3 & 4, p. 86-89). I also wrote to the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers inviting them to participate in this study while at the same time explaining to them the nature of this study. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to indicate their participation in this study (Refer to Appendix 7, p. 93).

While this study had taken measures to ensure that ethical procedures are adhered to, it does acknowledge that there are some specific ethical issues that may pose a challenge to this study. These include the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. In the Solomon Islands, where everybody lives in a close knit society, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity can be a great challenge. However, this study tried as much as possible to ensure that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained at all times. For example, regarding the issue of confidentiality, this was done through verbally informing the participants in the beginning before all face to face interviews and focus group interview on the importance of maintaining confidentiality. That would mean requesting them to understand that all discussions and activities carried out for the study must be respected and kept within our circle only. With regards to anonymity, participants were assured that their identities would

not be explicitly revealed in the final stage of the thesis or at any time during the process of data interpretation, transcription or analysis. In doing so, their identification would be coded to protect them.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In summary, it can be said that research is a constant way of searching to build one's knowledge on the physical and social phenomena in the world. There are research paradigm that governs the way in which research can be done, mainly the positivist and the interpretive paradigm. This study proceeded within the interpretative paradigm. The choice of research paradigm depends much on individual's interest, his or her values, and beliefs, funding capacities, time and other personal reasons. This study being qualitative in nature, used the interview method to collect data. Interviewing was done face-to-face. This was followed by a focus group interview. Data that were collected were analysed using a thematic analysis approach, in order to produce the results of this study and this will be the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter sought to present the findings of this study on attitudes, knowledge and understanding of teacher educators and pre-service teachers towards special education and inclusive education. The intention of these research activities was to identify themes that would establish information with regards to key indicators of this study. These key indicators are (1) attitudes, knowledge and understanding of pre-service teachers and teacher educators to special and inclusive education, and (2) to determine if the pre-service training is making adequate provision in terms of special education and inclusive education.

In order to answer the key questions, findings of this study will be presented according to the interview questions that have been used to collect the data. These interview questions will then be discussed under the following themes, attitudes knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education; provision for special and inclusive education in current pre-service training; inclusion of children with special needs at school; important attributes to inclusive education, and policy on inclusive education. In short, findings of this study have been analyzed according to these themes. The presentations of the results under these themes were as follows:

#### 4.1 Attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education

The notion of participant's background and their attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education was the focus of this theme.

**4.1.1 Background and qualifications of participants.** For the purpose of this research, pre-service teachers were asked to briefly introduce themselves and to explain their background. Of the eight pre-service teachers that participated, seven had completed year 11 at the high schools before coming to the college to do their certificate in primary teaching. Only one participant went on to complete year 12

before coming to the college. The following are two examples of how respondents have answered this question:

I did my form one in year 2000 and completed my fifth form in 2005. I had a year break before coming here to college to do my training in primary teaching. So far I really enjoyed my study and stay here at the college. (P7/F)

I did my primary education at St. Nicholas and then continued on to my secondary education at King George. After completing my year twelve, I applied and was accepted to this college to do this Certificate in Teaching (Primary). (P3/M)

That same question was also asked of the three teacher educators that were involved in the training of the pre-service teachers. The responses revealed that all three of them had been working at the college for some time. Two had master's qualifications while one had a post graduate qualification. Overall, eleven participants participated in this research project and out of the eleven participants, there were five males and six females.

**4.1.2 Participants' knowledge and understanding on the concepts of special and inclusive education.** This theme is on attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education. Because of this, it was necessary to find out how much knowledge and understanding participants had on the concepts. Therefore, pre-service participants were asked to define the two concepts, special education and inclusive education according to their current understanding. Responses were broken down into two categories, special education and inclusive education.

Regarding special education, all eight participants felt that it had some relation to education and teaching of children with special needs. Below are three examples of responses from pre-service teachers.

Special education is a kind of education relevant to children and those with special needs (P3/M)

Special education is related to educating those with special needs and other physical disabilities (P6/M)

It is about educating children with disabilities and other special needs (P8/M)

The three teacher educators were also asked to define these two concepts, special education and inclusive education. The following comments were their responses:

Special education would be education that caters for those children with special needs in our society. (P3/L).

Special education could be seen from one perspective. The curriculum for children with special needs got to be different from the one written for normal children. On the other hand, special education is meeting the needs of pupils or those whom their thinking or ways of doing things is a bit slower than the normal expectation. (P2/L)

In summary, teacher educators interpret special education as education that caters for those children with special needs where these children needed an appropriate curriculum that would meet their needs.

Regarding inclusive education, all eight pre-service participants responded that the concept was quite new to them. The thoughts of the participants are summed up in these extracts:

I don't know. I have never come across that concept during the course of my training here at this college. (P1/F)

I really don't know, nor understand this concept. Never come across it during my training here at the college (P4/F)

Inclusive education is a new term and concept to me. I have no knowledge whatsoever on that concept. (P8/M)

The three teacher educators were also asked the same question, regarding their understanding of inclusive education. The following responses were typical of these staff members:

Inclusive education is an approach that had just cropped up more recently whereby it places more emphasis on inclusion of children with special needs into the mainstream regular classroom. (P1/L)

Inclusive education is an approach whereby children with special needs should be included in all aspects of development in the society. That would also involve including them into our school system and letting them into our classrooms. At the moment, there is no provision for children with special needs in our current school and education system. (P2/L)

Inclusive education would be education that serves to meet the needs of every child in the regular classroom despite their abilities or disabilities, background, talent, etc. (P3/L)

In summary, it appears that the concept of inclusive education was new to the pre-service teachers, while teacher educators seem to have some knowledge and understanding on the concept.

**4.1.3 Perceptions and attitudes to inclusive education.** Pre-service teachers were then asked how they perceived and felt towards inclusive education should the concept be introduced into the current school system. When the question was put to them, there were varied of responses. However, a response in support of inclusive education was dominant, as these excerpts illustrate:

I can see that inclusive education is a good concept and I believe it is high time that our schools should become inclusive because we have many children with special needs living amongst us in our communities that are accessing education (P6/M).

The concept of inclusive is very important. As pre-service teachers, we would appreciate the introduction of this concept into our schools in order to help those children out there who are missing out on education (FGD).

The teacher educators that participated in this study were also asked their views regarding how they perceived inclusive education. This is how they summed up their feelings:

I would like to see our schools becoming truly inclusive and I support that very much (P1/L).

It is high time our schools start becoming inclusive and I want to see it happening soon in our schools because nowadays, most children with special needs have come out and want to go to school. (P2/L).

Apart from these positive responses from pre-service teachers and teacher educators, one participant felt otherwise and expressed himself in this way:

I feel that it is not yet appropriate to introduce this concept of inclusion because currently teacher educators are not well equipped with skills and knowledge on inclusion. More so, I would like to see that students with special needs go to their special schools first so that they can be prepared before coming into regular classrooms with their helper (P3/M).

In summary, it can be said that while most pre-service teachers and teacher educators have positive attitudes and perceptions towards inclusive education, one participant felt otherwise and is of the opinion that it is still premature to introduce the concept at this stage because teacher educators lack knowledge and skills on inclusive education and practices.

## **4.2 Provision for special and inclusive education in current pre-service training program**

This theme addresses the provisions made for special and inclusive education in the current pre-service training program.

**4.2.1 Confidence in current training in relation to special and inclusive education.** The eight pre-service participants were asked if their current training at the School of Education (SOE) equips them with skills and knowledge on the two concepts (a) special education and (b) inclusive education. The question asked if they could plan their lesson and activities so as to accommodate children with special needs, whether they could use teaching strategies such as cooperative learning that would include special needs children in learning activities within the classroom and whether they know how to write Individual Educational Plans for special needs students.

This question was also broken down into two parts: skills and knowledge on special education, and skills and knowledge on inclusive education.

In their responses in relation to skills and knowledge on special education, all participants revealed that they were not taught any skills that would help them teach children with special needs. With regards to knowledge on special education, all participants responded that very limited knowledge and general information on special education was covered in their course. The reply from this respondent demonstrated her knowledge:

I learned nothing on skills. Only limited knowledge and general information on special education was covered with us. (P4/F)

In relation to responses on skills and knowledge on inclusive education, all respondents said that they have not gained any skills and knowledge on inclusive education during the course of their training at the School of Education (SOE) because inclusive education as a concept was never introduced or taught to them. To them, this concept was very new and unheard of. Below are two of the responses that aptly sum up the feelings of the participants:

Since I have learned nothing on inclusive education during my training here at SOE, I can say that I have not gained any skills nor knowledge about this concept (P3/M).

I have no idea on what inclusive education is all about. My training here at SOE is very limited on inclusive education. (P7/F)

The overall responses from the pre-service participants revealed that their current training at the SOE is limited, on special education and non-existent on inclusive education. In order to verify responses from pre-service teachers regarding their training on special and inclusive education, the teacher educators were asked whether these two concepts were covered in the courses that they offer to pre-service students. Responses from two of the teacher educators were as follows:

In the social studies department, we train our teachers for general education only. We never touch on special education. Neither do we train our pre-service teachers to plan lessons and activities that would cater for special needs children. I think that is the area lacking in our curriculum (P1/L).

NO! currently, we only offer general education to the pre-service teachers based on the demand of the 'normal' general population. At the moment, only very little is covered in terms of basic knowledge on what is special education. (P2/L).

In essence, responses from teacher educators regarding courses offered at the SOE indicated that pre-service training at SOE does not have special and inclusive education in as one of its components.

**4.2.2 Confidence in teaching children with special needs in the future in an inclusive classroom.** Pre-service teachers were then asked how confident they would be if they had to teach a child with special needs in an inclusive classroom. Their responses were straight forward as the following comments indicate.

I don't know but I think I will not be that confident. (P1/F)

I don't think so. I know I will not be that confident. Although I may have some knowledge on special education, I don't have the skill to teach children with special needs in an inclusive classroom. (P3/M)

In summary, the above responses basically meant that these pre-service teachers were not confident to teach a child with special needs in an inclusive classroom.

### **4.3. Inclusion of Children with Special needs at School**

This theme examines the notion inclusion of children with special needs in schools within Solomon Islands.

**4.3.1 Attendance of children with special needs at schools.** These pre-service teachers that participated in the study have already done some teaching practicum in schools. They were asked whether or not they had encountered children with special needs in any classrooms. Some responses are as follows:

My experience so far was that I have not taught anyone with special needs in my classroom but we do have a few of them in our village who for some reason are not attending school. (P1/F)

I don't think many children with special needs are attending schools because I have not seen any in the classrooms that I have taught in. However, we have quite a few of them in our village. (P2/F)

Overall, out of the eight participants that were interviewed, seven of them had indicated that they have not taught any children with special needs in their classroom, although these children are present in the villages. Only one participant indicated that he had come across a few children with special needs in the school that he had been teaching in. The response is as follows:

With my experience so far, I only noticed a few children with special needs attending schools, especially those with visual and hearing impairments but not in my classroom. However, we do have others in the village that were not going to school (P3/M)

This one response is very important because all along most responses have been the opposite of this. This response indicates that some children with special needs are already attending schools, especially those with visual and hearing impairments.

**4.3.2 Children with special needs not attending schools.** A subsequent question was then asked to the participants in relation to why they thought children with special needs were not attending schools. They were asked to provide some reasons why they thought these children are not attending schools when there are lots of them in the villages. Some of the responses to the question are:

Reason being that maybe parents are not allowing them to go to school (P1/F)

Parents often think that their children with special needs do not need to go to school because they won't learn anything. Secondly, maybe

teachers and other students at schools will not accept and welcome these children with special needs into their classroom. (P2/F)

There is a general tendency that parents of children with special needs would not allow these children to go to school. Secondly, it comes down to our cultural understanding and perception to those with special needs. In this society there is a lot of negative cultural attitude towards those with special needs. (P3/M).

Other normal children at school will tend to tease this group of children, thus causing them to shy away from school. On the other hand schools and classroom are not welcoming to this group of children in terms of their design, programs and facilities. (P5/F)

One teacher educator who participated also commented, that one of the main reasons why children with special needs are not going to school is because of the cultural perception that the people often have towards those with disabilities. His comment clearly illustrates this point:

Culturally, those with obvious physical disabilities are seen as a form of curse upon the person and family. Maybe they have made the traditional gods and ancestors unhappy that resulted back that way on them as a form of punishment. This negative cultural misunderstanding goes on with the child. In the end nobody will want to have anything to do with that child for fear that the curse will befall upon them as well (P2/L).

This response in relation to why children with special needs are not attending schools was the indication of the feelings of four pre-service participants and one teacher educator. They responded on it from their experiences.

#### **4.4 Important Attributes to Inclusive Education**

This theme focused on attributes that are essential which schools and classrooms and could do to foster inclusive education.

**4.4.1 Responsibility towards children with special needs in schools and classrooms.** Some children with special needs are not going to school. Participants were asked about how the schools and classroom can address the situation. This particular question was again broken down into two parts, (a) schools and (b) classrooms.

In response to how schools would address the situation, some typical replies are as follows:

It is high time that schools start to establish a positive relationship with parents and educate communities on how to always have a positive relationship and attitudes towards those with special needs (P1/F)

Schools should do more in encouraging parents of special needs children so that they can feel free to bring their children to school (P2/F)

Other responses included comments such as:

The need to review the current education system so that schools can plan and prepare for inclusive education (P3/M)

It would be best that schools interact more often with the community (P6/M).

Apart from those responses, one participant mentioned that schools could also address the situation through educating the village communities on the rights of children with special needs to attend school.

Schools need to educate the communities on the rights of children with special needs. (P6/M)

In summary, pre-service teachers thought that a schools' responsibility to children with special needs can be through establishing positive relationship and interacting more with parents and the community, encouraging parents of children with special needs to bring their children to school, reviewing the current education system to plan for inclusive education, and carrying out special education awareness talk in the community.

Teacher educators involved in the training of these pre-service teachers responded to the question on how to address the responsibility the schools and teachers had to children with special needs, in the following ways:

I think one of the most popular things that schools could do is to establish a proper coordinating mechanism with various stake-holders. Such settings should also ensure that there is a strong link with communities and their education authorities so that their teachers know what role they play when facilitating inclusion in their schools. Right now there is a system in place but I don't think it is adequate. As such, it will not help in any way to facilitate inclusion (P1/L).

Schools must provide facilities and amenities that would cater for the needs of all children including those with special needs. Currently in Solomon Islands, I don't witness any schools that provide these kinds of services (P2/L).

One educator also made reference as to why he thinks schools are not making provision for children with special needs. His comment was:

This country does not have the money to build and fund facilities and services for those with special needs in the country, and there is a lack of general knowledge and information on this area. The knowledge is that there is this group of people with special needs (P2/L).

In summary, teacher educators thought that schools work towards establishing strong links with the community and providing facilities for those with special needs. With regards to what classrooms can do to address the situation, the responses were in general very similar:

I must make my classroom more interesting through organization and planning of my lessons. (P1/F)

Classroom teachers should be welcoming to students with special needs (P2/F)

Classrooms need to be organized and teachers providing more support for children with special need (P3/M)

In essence pre-service teachers thought that classrooms can help children with special needs through teachers organizing their classes and planning meaningful activities that will benefit these students.

**4.4.2 Success of inclusive education in schools.** The notion of inclusive education was revisited in the focus group interview. This focus group involved the eight pre-service teachers that were involved in this study. During the focus group interview, a question was posed to participants on what they thought schools could do to ensure that inclusive education would be successful if introduced to schools in Solomon Islands. The following are some of the responses that participants in the focus group presented:

Schools, teachers and parents should work together to support the introduction of the concept through whatever help they can offer (FGD).

Schools should ensure that the introduction of this concept shouldn't be limited to primary education only, it should also move on to secondary education (FGD).

The education system of this country needs to be reviewed to cater for special education and inclusive education before it can be introduced into schools (FGD).

There has to be a strong link between teachers, schools and the current 'special school' that we now have in the country like the Red Cross and the Disability Support Centre (FGD),

Training of pre-services teachers is important so that they can be able to teach all students including those with special needs in an inclusive classroom (FGD).

As mention already to you in the interview, schools should plan and organize themselves in order to cater for the concepts should they be introduced (FGD).

Schools need to interact more with parents and community to address the situation through awareness programs we well as advocating the importance of special education (FGD).

School principals should be in the front line to support teachers in implementing the concepts in the schools (FGD).

In summary, the opinions expressed during the focus group discussion highlighted a lot of things which participants felt schools could do to push inclusive education forward. These included schools working together with parents, the need to review the current education system, schools and teachers establishing a strong link with the current special schools in the country, the importance of pre-service training and the needs for schools to carry out more awareness programs on special and inclusive education to villages and communities.

**4.4.3 Leadership.** In the course of the focus group discussion, one pre-service participant also mentioned that school principals should be supporting teachers and taking a leading role in introducing inclusive education to schools. With regards to that response, a question was asked about the role of school principals and the way participants would like to see that role. One response to that question was:

Principals are the main figures in any schools. They administer the schools and ensure that the school programs are running smoothly (FGD).

This response highlighted leadership as a way forward if inclusive education is to be introduced into schools. The notion of leadership was also brought up by one educator who strongly felt that leadership at all level is required in order to push inclusive education forward in the country.

It is my wish that our leaders both at national government and here at SOE see it as a priority where more emphasis and focus should be placed on the urgency of the need to push the implementation of the concept forward. (P2/L)

In summary, it was generally felt that leadership within schools, government and training institution like the SOE was very important. Those at the head of these structures should be taking the lead in ensuring that the importance of inclusive education be recognized within all these different levels of education and government.

#### **4.5 Policies on Special and Inclusive Education**

The importance of having sound policies in place that would enhance the development of special and inclusive education was the focus of this theme.

**4.5.1 Education and policies on special and inclusive education.** Regarding education and policies on special and inclusive education, one of the teacher educators involved in this study was a senior teacher educator at the School of Education. Therefore it was appropriate to find out about the SOE's stand on the issue. The question was asked if SOE has any provision in their policy that would address the delivery of special and inclusive education in their programs and courses. The response was:

This school does not have any policy. At this point of time, we are only operating on bases that would fulfil the goal of our mission statement (P3/L).

Basically, the response is that there is no policy at the SOE that governs their courses and programs except for the mission statement. Moreover, there is nothing to guide them on special education and inclusion. Because of that, these concepts were not included in the courses offered to pre-service teachers.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In summary, the main objective in this chapter was to present the results of this study that was conducted with teacher educators and pre-service teachers. The focus of this study was on their perception, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education in order to establish the progress of special and inclusive education in Solomon Islands. Inherent in the term 'progress' is the knowledge and skills that pre-service and teacher educators have in relation to inclusive and special education, and how the acquisition of more knowledge and skills may be accessed. It seems clear from the responses, that inclusive education is a relatively unknown concept in the Solomon Islands.

Quite clearly, the seeds of a rapid growing global movement for inclusive education have not yet sprouted in Solomon Islands, where exclusion appears to be acceptable, knowledge and skills of educators appears to be minimal, and the provision of adequate and appropriate teacher training appears desirable. Discussion on how these issues might be addressed will be the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings in terms of the research questions set out in chapter three (3.2). Research questions in this study were related to (a) what teacher educators and pre-service teachers knew about special education and inclusive education. Of interest to the researcher was whether the current pre-service training making was adequate provision for special and inclusive education. It was also necessary to know what policy there was in place that might indicate current thinking around inclusive education, and how the information gathered from this research could be useful to transform the situation in terms of special and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.

Special education has been a noticeable part of the education landscape for the last three decades in many parts of the world. It is a concept that recognizes the need to educate children with special needs. However, their education has, in the past, tended to be limited and restricted in areas such as ‘special schools’. It was not until more recently, that the concept of inclusive education surfaced. Children with special needs are no longer required to learn in restricted areas, but are expected to be included in an inclusive classroom and be taught alongside their peers. This unified education system can be very challenging and calls for considerable attention from all educators. It has been suggested that only when educators are knowledgeable about inclusion and inclusive practices, can they also be able to employ it with comfort and confidence in their classrooms (Loreman et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2004).

From the findings of this study, a number of key elements emanated. Each of these elements will now be discussed singularly, followed by a broader consideration when they are looked at collectively. These key elements will still be discussed under the same themes identified earlier on in the chapter.

## **5.1 Attitudes, Knowledge and Understanding on Special and Inclusive Education**

The discussion on the findings regarding the background of the participants and their attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education was done under this theme.

**5.1.1 Background and qualification of participants.** This study found that out of the eight pre-service teachers that participated, seven of them managed to complete their year 11 secondary educations while one went on to complete year 12. Therefore, it can be said that there was not a big difference in terms of the levels at which they attained their secondary education. With regards to the three teacher educators involved in this study, it was found that they have been in the teaching profession for some time with all three having post-graduate qualifications. This difference in education background and experiences between pre-service teachers and the teacher educators is noticeable from the way in which they responded to the interview questions. Pre-service teachers' responses were quite limited compared to the teacher educators' in terms of their knowledge and experience on educational issues like special and inclusive education.

**5.1.2 Participants' knowledge and understanding of special and inclusive education.** This study revealed that pre-service teachers and teacher educators had limited knowledge and understanding of aspects of special education. The question posed to them was: "Tell me what you know about special education". Participants knew that special education relates to a kind of education for children with special needs. The lack of definitions in this response "Special education is a kind of education relevant to children and those with special needs" (P3/M) indicates limited exposure to the term.

The response reflects a lack of in-depth knowledge on elements that relate to special education. Most of their responses were brief, implying that they did not have a broad enough knowledge base for any real elaboration of their thinking.

According to Smith et al. (2004), special education involves the teaching of children with special needs on their own and in their special classroom, whereby special educators use instructions that are modified or particularized to suit those students' needs. Those with special need includes those with learning difficulties, specific disabilities whether it be physical or developmental, gifted and talented, only to mention a few.

These elements of special education were not mentioned in the responses of the participants. Such responses also posed a notion that maybe these participants also had limited knowledge on what is a special need, because it is evident from their responses that they are only referring to those with disabilities. That would come to mean those with physical, intellectual and other forms of developmental disabilities.

With regards to their knowledge and understanding on inclusive education, pre-service teachers responded that the concept was very new to them. Statements such "I don't know. I never heard of that concept before" (P1/F), and "Inclusive education is a new term and concept to me" (P3/M, suggests that pre-service teachers are largely unaware of what inclusive education is all about. It is a new and abstract concept for most of them.

On the other hand, teacher educators who participated in the study seem to have a fair knowledge of what inclusive education is all about. The following two examples typify their thinking:

Inclusive education is an approach that has just cropped up more recently whereby it places more emphasis on inclusion of children with special needs into regular mainstream classroom (P1/L).

Inclusive education is an approach whereby children with special needs should be included in all aspects of development in the society. That would also mean including them into our school system and letting them into our classrooms. At the moment, there is no provision for children with special needs in our current schools and education system (P2/L)

Such responses may be due to the fact that these teacher educators already had a broad experience in education as compared to the pre-service teachers who are young and have just completed their secondary education before coming to do their pre-service training.

According to Stainback and Stainback, (1996), Smith et al. (2004) and Loreman et al. (2005), inclusive education is the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classrooms to be taught alongside their peers. However, in achieving these, schools need to alter their beliefs and adapt their schools and classroom environment so that it can accommodate the needs of everyone especially, when diversity is now becoming prevalent in every school (Smith et al., 2004).

While that gives a clear understanding of inclusive education, it can be said from the results of this study that pre-service teachers lacked knowledge and understanding of inclusive education while their teacher educators seem to have some knowledge and understanding of the concept. However, it can be argued that while teachers educators appears to have some knowledge on inclusive education, this knowledge and understanding is very questionable because it seemed from the responses that P1/L responded very briefly compared to P2/L, whose response seem to make more meaning in relation to the concept of inclusive education as asserted by the literature. It is interesting that while the teacher educators had knowledge of inclusive education, they had not shared it with their students.

**5.1.3 Perceptions and attitudes to inclusive education.** This study found that there is a mixture of feelings in how participants perceived and felt towards inclusive education should it be introduced into the current Solomon Islands education system. It was revealed that almost all pre-service teachers and teacher educators have a much more positive attitude towards inclusive education as can be seen from these two examples of responses:

The concept of inclusive education is very important. As pre-service teachers, we would appreciate the introduction of this concept into our schools, in order to help those children out there who are missing out on education (FGD).

I would like to see our schools becoming truly inclusive and I support that very much (P1/L).

Despite this positive support for inclusive education from pre-service teachers and teacher educators, this study also found that there are a few participants who are not in support of inclusive education, as can be seen from the following response:

I feel that it is not yet appropriate to introduce this concept because currently teacher educators are not well equipped with skills and knowledge on inclusion. More so, I would like to see that students with

special needs go first to their special school so that they can be prepared before coming into regular classroom with their helper (P3/M).

From this study, it can be said that although there is limited indication of a negative perception and attitude to inclusive education, most pre-service teachers and teacher educators seemed to be positive towards the concept. However, once again this is interesting because of the fact that pre-service teachers have no knowledge and understanding on the concept as revealed at the beginning of the study.

According to Vaughan and Hogg (2002) and Loreman et al. (2005), perception and attitudes can affect the way people perceive others. Therefore, it is important that people have a positive outlook to situations in order for them to make informed decisions when relating to others, especially to those with special needs and in relation to inclusive education. In this study, although there is some resentment to inclusive education, there is a general feeling of a positive attitude. It may be due to the fact that those who are in support of inclusive education have now come to realize that children and those with special needs do have a place in the society despite their disabilities.

This mixture of feelings towards inclusive education as revealed from this study is consistent with the fact that inclusive education is a concept that has divided most educators today (Loreman et al., 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2005). There are educators and parents who believe that children with special needs should be included in the regular classroom because of the positive impact that inclusion has on those children in terms of their learning and interaction with their peers (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1996; Thousand & Villa, 2005), and those that felt otherwise and still maintain that grouping students with disabilities together will allow for more efficient instruction for these children and less disruption of the general education classroom (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kauffman, 1993).

## **5.2 Provision for Special and Inclusive Education in Current Pre-service Training Program**

The notion of provision for special and inclusive education in the current pre-service training program was the focus of discussion under this theme.

**5.2.1 Confidence in current training in relation to special and inclusive education.** With regards to training in relation to special and inclusive education, this study found that the pre-service training at the SOE covered only limited knowledge on special education but nothing on skills that would enable teachers to teach children with special needs, as summed up by the following response:

I learned nothing on skills. Only limited knowledge and general information on special education was covered with us (P4/F).

On the notion of inclusive education, this study found that pre-service teachers lacked knowledge, skills and understanding on this concept because the concept was never introduced to them in the course of their training, as summed up by the following response:

I have no idea on what inclusive education is all about. My training here at SOE is very limited on inclusive education (P7/F).

This revelation suggests that pre-service teachers admitted their lack of confidence in their current training at SOE on special and inclusive education. This suggestion was confirmed when teacher educators involved in this study revealed that the courses offered at SOE lacked components on special and inclusive education. Two teacher educators summarized this view on course components by saying:

Currently, we only offer general education to pre-service teachers based on the demand of the 'normal' general population (P2/L).

In social studies department, we train our pre-service for general education only. We never touched on special or inclusive education. Neither do we train our teachers to plan lessons and activities that would cater for special needs children in an inclusive setting. I think this is lacking in our curriculum (P1/L).

With these findings, it can be said that the courses currently offered to pre-service teachers need more attention from the SOE's academic management. Pre-service teachers need to be adequately trained so that they acquire skills and knowledge that would help them in their classroom teaching and practices, especially on special education and inclusive practices. This is the importance of training

teachers which was noted and supported by Bennett et al. (1997), Loreman et al. (2005) and Smith et al. (2004).

Loreman et al. (2005) contend that teachers need to be taught skills that would enable them to modify curricula for children with diverse abilities in an inclusive classroom. Such a notion was supported by Smith et al. (2004), who also made reference on the importance of teacher training programs. That is, teacher training programs must be focused towards helping pre-service teachers in gaining knowledge and skills that would help them to be able to teach children with diverse abilities in an inclusive setting. Moreover, such training will also help a lot in empowering teachers so that negative attitudes from teachers towards inclusion can also be eliminated in the early stages of putting it into practice (Bennett et al., 1997). Hodkinson (2005), however, argued that training of teachers on inclusive education will depend very much on how each individual teacher perceives and defines it. Despite that contention, it was stressed that training of teachers on inclusion and inclusive practices is necessary because that is the key for the success of inclusive education in schools (Bennett et al., 1997; Foreman, 2005; Loreman et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2004). In essence, if inclusive education is to succeed, pre-service teachers, educators and other personnel working alongside children with special needs must be adequately trained.

**5.2.2 Confidence in teaching children with special needs in the future in an inclusive classroom.** This study found that pre-service teachers lack adequate training on special and inclusive education. Because of this lack of training, pre-service teachers lacked confidence in teaching children with special needs in their future classrooms especially if it had to take place in an inclusive setting. “I will not be that confident to teach a child with special needs because I do not have necessary skills and knowledge that would have helped me to do so” (P7/F), stated one of the pre-service teachers.

However, despite this lack of confidence in teaching children with special needs in an inclusive environment, it was found that most pre-service teachers still hold a strong positive attitude towards special education and inclusive practices.

Findings from this study are consistent with what Mastropien and Scruggs (1995) found. According to their study carried out in the United States over a period of 25 years, Mastropien and Scruggs found that while teacher educators appreciate the inclusion of children with special needs into regular classrooms, most still have a negative attitude towards teaching these children. One of their main reasons was that they do not have the time, training and skills that would enable them to teach these children. As a result, many teachers lack confidence in their ability to teach and cater for children with diverse needs in regular classroom. These same reasons to do with lack of training and skills also emerged from this study. While the results presented thus far have some relation to answering the question of what pre-service teachers and teacher educators know about special and inclusive education, other related elements also emanated from the study and these shall now be discussed.

### **5.3 Inclusion of Children with Special Needs at Schools**

Discussion on the notion of inclusion of children with special needs in Solomon Islands was the focus of this theme. This theme sets to discussion that although there are lots of children with special needs are living within the villages in Solomon Islands, most of them are not going to school. Reasons pertaining to why that has not been happening have been presented in the results (4.3.1).

**5.3.1 Attendance of children with special needs at school.** This study also discovered that children with special needs are not attending school. This revelation emerged from the responses of pre-service teachers. While all pre-service teachers had done some practicum in the classroom, most had not encountered any children with special needs in their classroom. It was stated that many of these children were staying back in the villages, as this pre-service teacher reported:

My experience so far, I have not taught anyone with special needs in my classroom, but we do have a lot of them in the village who for various reasons are not going to school (P1/F).

The revelation of children with special needs not going to school and staying back in the villages is consistent with the Solomon Islands National Disability Report (2005). This report also revealed that a lot of children with special needs are not attending school because the existing schools in the Solomon Islands cannot accommodate them in terms of the services and facilities that schools provide.

However, another respondent revealed that there were a few children with special needs in schools already, but not directly in his classroom. He had noted the type of disability as he reported:

I noticed a few children with special needs attending schools, especially those with visual and hearing impairments, but not in my classroom (P3/M).

This revelation is worthy to note because it may mean children with special needs have already made their ways informally into the regular classroom. Such information can only be verified through a thorough research, thus calling for responsible authority like the Ministry of Education to carry out research into this area.

Due to this revelation that students with special needs are not attending schools, it was necessary to find out why this was happening. Respondents in this study revealed that there are several reasons why they think children with special needs are not attending schools. These are based on their experiences. Reasons range from cultural misconception on children born with deformities and disabilities to parents' perception of their child with special needs. However, the two main ones that were mentioned often during the study were cultural misconceptions on disability followed by negative parental attitudes. Other reasons include the fear that teachers and other children would not welcome these children and that other children would tease them.

This cultural misconception was explained by one participant in the following manner:

Culturally those with obvious physical disabilities are seen as a form of curse upon the person and the family. Maybe they have made the cultural gods and ancestors unhappy that resulted back that way on them as a form of punishment. This negative cultural misunderstanding goes with the disabled child. In the end nobody will want to have anything to do with the child for fear that the curse will befall upon them as well (P2/L).

Such responses only relate to this notion that there is still a strong belief in the metaphysical causation of physical disability in Solomon Islands' culture. This is because people are still very much attached to their traditional beliefs so that when something of such a nature happened amongst them and in their villages, people will try their best to come up with explanations relating to the phenomenon. Such cultural belief from the Solomon Islands cannot be isolated. Studies done in Tanzania by Kisasji (1993) and in India by Dalal and Pande (1999) have also make mention of such cultural beliefs relating to causation of disability. This belief continues to haunt the disabled person as well as causing him or her to be perceived differently by members of the society and community.

Respondents of this study also revealed that parents are not allowing their children with special needs to go to schools. This often stems from the fear and negative attitudes that parents have about their children. For example, they fear that their child might be teased and abused by other children with at school. Moreover, parents also felt such a child is incapable of learning anything even if sent to school, and lastly other children will not welcome them into the classroom.

This knowledge suggests that while teacher attitude is important in relation to inclusive education, so too is parental attitude. These findings are compatible with others that shows that while some parents are satisfied with the benefit and positive effect that inclusive education had on their children (Bennett et al., 1997; Lowenbraun et al., 1989), others reported less support because they are worried that teachers lack skills and training to work with their children (Elkins et al., 2003). Attitudes of Solomon Islands parents seem to run with the latter train of thoughts.

While that is still the kind of common attitude shared by many Solomon Islands parents, more recent literature revealed how supportive parents are to inclusive education (Villa & Thousand, 2005) and how they wanted their children to be treated as other 'normal' children participating in all aspects of learning in an inclusive setting. Moreover, even parents of children not diagnosed with special educational needs are also very supportive towards inclusive education because of the benefits it has for their children, especially through the increase of supportive teaching resources which teachers can use to teach everybody in the classroom. This growing support for inclusive practices in schools is an indication that western societies have come to accept the inclusion of those with special needs in all aspects

of development in the society. However, this kind of support is yet to be achieved in the Solomon Islands.

This implies that Solomon Islands as a country and society needs to start working towards developing a change of mindset and beliefs in relation to how it perceives those with special needs. Being born with physical deformity and other forms of special needs is not a result of supernatural powers. The society should come to acknowledge that being born with physical deformities and other special needs are frequently very difficult to explain in causal terms. Therefore, instead of being critical and negative towards these people, the society (parents, teachers, government, institutions and other stakeholders) needs to be supportive and helpful to these people through whatever means they can offer. However, this change of mindset can only be achieved through more awareness teaching on special education and the importance of inclusion for those with special needs in the society.

#### **5.4 Important Attributes to Inclusive Education**

This theme discussed some elements and practices that are important to the development of inclusive education.

**5.4.1 Responsibility towards children with special needs in schools and classrooms.** The revelation of children with special needs not going to school calls for more attention from stakeholders, schools and teachers to respond to these students. Findings from this study revealed that a number of children with special needs were not attending school because schools and classroom could not accommodate and meet their needs. The demand placed on school personnel was described in this term:

Schools must provide curriculum, facilities and amenities that would cater for the needs of all children including those with special needs. Currently, in Solomon Islands, I have not witnessed any schools that provide these kinds of services (P2/L).

It must be noted that schools in Solomon Islands have been designed to suit the general population without taking into consideration those with special needs. For example, there is no evidence of ramp and other facilities to cater for those with special needs in all regular schools as highlighted by the respondent (P2/L).

According to literature, schools play an important role in ensuring that inclusion and inclusive practice are the rule rather than the exception. That should include schools organizing and planning their daily curricular programs and adapting the school environment to cater for inclusive practices as stated by Webber (1997), Moore et al. (1999) and Smith et al. (2004). Teachers required knowledge to enable them to be adapting programs and using teaching strategies that would foster inclusion in their classrooms as proposed by Smith et al. (2004), Thorburn, (1997) and Fraser et al. (2004). It has been proposed that the use of teaching strategies like cooperative learning and peer tutoring has had a profound effect on special needs children in an inclusive setting and have contributed much to high academic achievement for these children (Fraser et al., 2004; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1994; Slavin, 1990).

**5.4.2 Success of inclusive education in schools.** A focus group made up of the participants was an important part of this study. Findings from the group interview revealed that the participants agreed with the inclusive education philosophy, but that most felt that its timing in terms of being introduced into the Solomon Islands schools was premature because the current education system does not allow that to happen. Participants thought that schools were not yet ready for inclusive education, adding that the lack of trained teachers able to teach children with special needs presented a problem. These revelations support the notion of the importance of preparing the school environment for inclusive education (Loreman et al., 2005; Smith et al. 2004, Stainback & Stainback, 1996; Thorburn, 1997; Villa & Thousand, 2005).

The implication of this revelation is that, because inclusive education is still a relatively new concept in Solomon Islands, there is a need to work towards introducing the concept into the schools. It is suggested that this transition requires long term planning. Currently there is nothing in place to cater for children with special needs with many in this group missing out on formal education. This situation of exclusion was highlighted when a participant stated:

Schools need to become inclusive because we should not overlook the fact that there are children with special needs amongst us in our communities who want to go to school and currently there is no provision for them in our education system (P6/M).

The focus group also questioned the establishment of the ‘special schools’ like the Red Cross Special Development Centre and the Disability Support Centre for the Blind. Currently in Solomon Islands, these are the only two schools that have appeared to be providing some form of education for those children with special needs. It was generally felt that the establishment of these schools was not encouraging. The group felt that if inclusive education was to be introduced into the Solomon Islands, something must be done now to address the situation regarding the status of these two schools in relation to the regular mainstream schools in the country. The overall response on the acceptance of these ‘special schools’ to meet the needs of children certain disabilities was noted:

There has to be a strong link between teachers and schools and the current special schools that we now have in the country like the Red Cross and the Disability Support centre (FGD)

While that sentiment was brought up during the group discussion, this study acknowledges the presence of these two ‘special schools’ and their goals in meeting the requirements of those with special needs in the country. It is not the intention of this study to meddle in their operations, goals and objectives. However, it must be stressed that these two ‘special schools’ are located in Honiara, which implies that only children with special needs living in Honiara will have access to and benefit from them. The majority of the Solomon Islands population that resides in rural areas will not have a chance to access these schools and therefore working and planning forward for inclusive education is necessary.

According to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report (2003) one of the greatest problems threatening the world today is the growing number of persons who are being excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities. This is the reality of the biggest challenge which education as an entity needs to address. In relation to that notion, the Solomon Islands as a country is no exception. The Solomon Islands National Disability Report (2005) reported evidence of school-aged children with disabilities and other special needs being deprived of access to education and participation in schools. The ones who were directly affected were the ones residing in the rural areas where facilities, transportation and communication services are quite difficult for them to access. Such a situation only justifies and reiterates the importance of inclusive education as

an avenue in which all children with special needs in the country can participate equally in education without being left out.

**5.4.3 School collaborating more with parents.** Responses from the focus group discussion also indicated that schools need to collaborate more with parents and communities so that all parties could be aware of the inclusive philosophy. Making parents and communities aware of this concept will support and strengthen its success in schools. This notion links well with suggestions made by Fraser et al. (2005), Smith et al. (2004) and Loreman et al. (2005) that inclusive education needs to be ‘rooted well’ in the minds of parents and communities in order for it to be successful. This can be achieved only through positive collaboration between communities and schools. Furthermore, such collaboration can foster a good relationship between parents, communities, schools and children with special needs regarding education in schools.

Such a revelation thus places more pressure and expectation on schools in the Solomon Islands to be in the front line and be vocal in carrying out awareness programs on the importance of special and inclusive education. The outcome would ensure that villagers and communities understand the rights of all children including those with disability and other special needs to participate equally in education. Moreover, through such awareness programs, villagers will also come to understand the emphasis on the rights of every child to education as stipulated under the United Nation Convention on the Right of all Children to education. This suggestion implies that schools have a big role to play in the dissemination of information on inclusive education.

**5.4.4 Leadership.** Many responses pointed to the fact that the success of inclusive education and practices depends very much on the kind of leadership in schools. Responses in this study relate to the notion that schools’ principals could support teachers when working towards introducing inclusive education in schools. This response indicates the responsibility of leadership within schools as this participant stated:

Principals are the main figures in any school. On that note they should be the ones to ensure that inclusive education is to be implemented successfully as all other programs of the schools (P3/M)

Sound leadership in schools, should be demonstrated at all levels ranging from the Government departments down to institutions such as the SOE. It should then be demonstrated in schools because schools will only practice what is mandated to them from the Government level through its Ministry of Education. This study has identified a need in the current education system to acknowledge this importance of sound leadership at all levels. It can be said that while current leaders show they have vision in education, their vision appears to fall short of ensuring that all children have equal access and opportunity to education. It could be said that this lack of sound leadership in relation to support for inclusive education is due to the fact that leaders at all levels lack knowledge and understanding on the philosophy of inclusive education. This in turn affects the way in which they make decisions on educational matters that are contrary to the inclusive philosophy.

This call for sound leadership supports what literature said on the importance of sound leadership in relation to inclusive education (Smith et al., 2004). Should leaders believe in inclusive education, there is a better chance that these leaders will promote and support inclusive philosophies and practices in schools. As Macfarlane (2006) asserts, sound inclusive practices depend very much on leaders with vision who are able to identify and address problems in an appropriate manner, and leaders who can work well with others (Durrangat & Holden, 2006). In relation to this literature, it can be said that sound leadership in relation to inclusive education is still one of the biggest challenge for leaders in the Solomon Islands.

## **5.5 Policy on Special and Inclusive Education**

The emphasis on the importance of having sound policies on special and inclusive education was the focus of discussion under this theme.

**5.5.1 Education and policies on special and inclusive education.** It is very important that policy framework on special and inclusive education be in place to guide its delivery, as emphasized by Fraser et al. (2005). Results from this study revealed that this is an area which still needs further development. Although the government of the Solomon Islands has policies on providing basic education for all children (The Education Strategic Plan, 2004 – 2006), these policies are too broad and limited in the area of special and inclusive education.

This lack of clear policy on special and inclusive education has also affected the way in which education is to be delivered to the children of the nation and how institutions operate. For example, this study found that while the SOE was mandated by the Education Act of 1982 to provide training for teachers, the school is currently operating on bases that fulfilled its mission statement. This was revealed by one of the teacher educators who commented:

This school does not have any policy on special and inclusive education. At this point of time, we are only operating on bases that fulfil the goal of our mission statement (P3/L).

In relation to this practice of having a lack of policy, this present study also found that the mission statement is vague and does not mandate any provision on special and inclusive education, but places importance on training teachers for general education. This is reflected in the programs and courses that they offer, which resulted in pre-service teachers lacking training in this area of special and inclusive education.

This lack of appropriate policies at government level and within the SOE, coupled with the limitation of SOE's mission statement in relation to special and inclusive education, suggests that more attention is needed in this area. Only when sound policies on special and inclusive education are in place is there is a chance that the situation can be addressed accordingly by responsible stakeholders. Moreover, having mission statements that reflect positive beliefs and values towards special and inclusive education is equally important, as emphasized by Mitchell (1999) and Fraser et al. (2005).

This study also revealed there was lack of funding from the government to support special and inclusive education. Evidence of this lack of funding can be seen in schools lacking resources and other facilities that would support inclusive education. This notion of funding was mentioned by one participant when responding to the suggestion that funding is one of the main reasons why schools lack resources and facilities that would support inclusive education:

This country does not have money to build and fund facilities and services for those with special needs in the country (P2/L)

While this may seem to be the reality of the situation in the Solomon Islands, this situation falls short of the notion that special education and inclusive programs require funding to implement and sustain their development and effectiveness in schools (Davies & Pragnell, 1999; Fraser et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2004). For example, in New Zealand there is separate funding for special education as mandated in the Special Education 2000 Framework, stating that all schools will be given grants to help them facilitate their special education programs (Mitchell, 1999).

However, this is not the case in the Solomon Islands where the National Educational Plan, 2004 – 2006 focuses mainly on basic education for all children. Indirectly, this may suggest that special and inclusive education is not an area of priority for the government, and therefore the government is not prepared at this point to fund them. It seems that a change of mindset needs to occur at the highest level, that of the government, to begin to address the situation.

This lack of policies and funding implies that, at the government level, policies must begin to be geared towards making provision for special and inclusive education. Similarly at a teacher training institution level, policies must be in place that would guide them to develop and introduce special and inclusive education courses in their teacher training programs. Moreover, in order to ensure that special education and inclusive practices are in place in schools, there is a need for adequate funding. It is important that the national government through the Ministry of Education come up with measures that include funding that would serve to drive special and inclusive education forward.

In summary, the discussion on the findings of this study mentioned aspects that are important and can help bring inclusive education forward in the Solomon Islands. These aspects range from stakeholders, teachers and parents having positive attitudes to inclusive education, importance of staff development and pre-service training, to the importance of having beliefs and understanding on inclusive education. Other aspects include schools and classrooms organization, schools collaborating more with parents, to the importance of sound leadership and having policies that would pave the way for inclusive education. While inclusive education was a by-product of the principles on the right of all persons to education, it can be argued that its practicality in the Solomon Islands is still questionable. This study can only suggest that the national government needs to organize their priorities and make

choices on how they can address inclusive education in relation to their capabilities to operate as a government especially when finance is the determining factor.

## **5.6 Linking Research Findings to Key Questions**

Whilst this was the discussion on the findings of this study, it is now appropriate to establish if these findings answer the four key questions that this study set out to investigate.

**5.6.1 Teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' knowledge on special and inclusive education.** In relation to the key question about teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' knowledge on special and inclusive education it can be stated from the findings of this study that pre-service teachers who participated in this study lacked adequate knowledge on special and inclusive education. This lack of knowledge and understanding is a result of the fact that special and inclusive education was never included as part of their training. Despite their lack of knowledge and understanding on these two concepts, it was found that pre-service teachers had a very positive outlook and attitudes towards inclusive education, as indicated from their responses in the study. Teacher educators on the other hand, seem to have a fair knowledge on the essence of special and inclusive education whilst at the same time having a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

**5.6.2 Is the current pre-service training making adequate provision in terms of special and inclusive education?** This study found that the current pre-service training is limited and does not make provision for special education and inclusive education. The study revealed that the pre-service training courses focused mainly on general education that would meet the demand of the current general population. This lack of knowledge and understanding is a result of the fact that special and inclusive education was never included as part of their training. Because of this lack of training, pre-service teachers also lacked knowledge, skills and confidence in their ability to teach children with special needs in an inclusive classroom. Despite this lack of confidence in their current training and their inability to teach children with special needs in future, it was found that pre-service teachers had a very positive outlook and attitudes towards inclusive education as indicated from their responses in the study.

### **5.6.3 What policy is there in place that might indicate current thinking around special and inclusive education?**

In relation to this question, this study found that whilst there are national educational policies in place at the government level towards education, these policies lack specific guidelines that would support inclusive education. Indirectly, this is an indication that current thinking and planning in education still fall short of addressing this notion of inclusive education.

The School of Education (SOE), being the only teacher training institution in the country, also lacked a policy that would guide them on special and inclusive education outcomes. As revealed from this study, the SOE only offers courses and programs that fulfil their mission statement. However, this mission statement does not make any provision for special and inclusive education. This absence is then reflected in the courses and programs that SOE offers in its pre-service training program.

### **5.6.4 Consideration of how information gathered from this study could be useful to transforming the situation in terms of inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.**

Educational research is very important. One of the fundamental aims of research is to gather information on an issue and see if this information can be useful to transform the situation (Cohen et al., 2004). This study was on teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' perception, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education. It was envisaged that information gathered from this research would contribute to the improvement of the current pre-service training of teachers at the School of Education.

Furthermore, information gathered from this study should prove useful because it may assist the Ministry of Education to see the importance of training in special and inclusive education. In acknowledging this importance, it is hoped that the government can also assist the SOE through formulating sound policies that support special education and inclusive practices in the country as well as making a commitment to set funds aside that would help to fund the delivery of education to children with special needs, but in inclusive environment.

Whilst this study focused on teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education and the kind of pre-service training that SOE provides to pre-service teachers, there were other important issues that emanated from the study. This study uncovered issues ranging from the schools' inability to facilitate inclusive education because of their current designs, to children with special needs not going to school because of the society's misconception and negative parental attitude towards those with disabilities, to the importance of sound leadership as a way forward if inclusive education is to become successful in schools. It is important that all the issues indicated by this study are taken into account by the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders, so that strategies can be put in place to address the situation. More research is also needed.

### **5.7 Limitation of the study**

This was a small study with some inherent limitations. A significant limitation is that the fieldwork had to be carried out during the one month in the Solomon Islands; the length of time I returned to the Solomon Islands while on my sabbatical leave. Other limitations include participants not keeping up with the interview schedules, as was experienced during the time of the focus group interview. The use of 'pidgin' instead of English during the interviews was also a limitation because most participants lacked confidence to converse in English. This meant translating and transcribing the interviews into English without losing the meaning of what each participant was saying. This was the most difficult part of this study. Finally, my inexperience as a researcher was a factor. This was the first time I had ever done a research study of this nature. However, it must be stressed that these limitations did not affect my enthusiasm for this and any further opportunities that might come my way in the future.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

The results and findings of this study re-iterate the importance of pre-service training of special and inclusive education. This study found that teachers need adequate knowledge, skills and understanding on these two concepts before they can effectively teach children with special needs in schools. The SOE, being the only teacher training provider in the country, needs to review its current curriculum so that special and inclusive education can also become a part of their programs and courses. Lastly, the national government through the Ministry of Education should have policies and mechanisms in place that would support the development of inclusive education. Whilst inclusive education has been tried, and proven successful in most developed countries, its development in the Solomon Islands is still fragile. As the Solomon Islands is a developing country, its government can only do its best to address the practicalities of inclusive education in its effort to keep abreast with special education developments.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion, Recommendations and Implications

#### 6.0 Introduction

This chapter now discusses the conclusions from the findings of this study. Thereafter, recommendations will be made in relation to how the Ministry of Education and the SOE can address this notion of special and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. Implications for the future for special and inclusive education will also be discussed. The chapter will end with a brief summary of the overall results.

#### 6.1 Summary

This study was based on the attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education of three teacher educators and eight pre-service teachers. The aim was to ascertain if the current pre-service training program at the SOE equipped pre-service teachers with adequate skills and knowledge on the two concepts of special and inclusive education, so that when pre-service teachers complete their training they can meet inclusive challenges in their schools and classrooms. The following conclusions have been drawn from this study.

- (1) Pre-service teachers lack adequate knowledge and understanding on the significance of special education and inclusive education as compared to their teacher educators, because these two concepts were never taught to them in the course of their training. Consequently, pre-service teachers indicated that they are not confident to teach children with special needs in inclusive classroom. However, despite that, teacher educators and pre-service teachers had a very positive attitude towards inclusive education and have acknowledged the importance of children with special needs gaining access to education.
- (2) This study concluded that whilst educators and pre-service teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education, the reality of it is still far beyond the horizon given the fact that schools in the Solomon Islands are not yet ready to adapt to meet the demand of special and inclusive education.

Parental and societal negative attitudes towards children with special needs present a significant challenge to be overcome.

- (3) The Ministry of Education in Honiara lacks specific policy on special education and more importantly, inclusive education. Current policies focus mainly on basic education for all children by year 2015. This lack of policy on special and inclusive education is evident in the nature of the current education system when children with special needs cannot be accommodated in schools. This lack of policy that would guide current thinking towards inclusive education had also trickled down in the education system in that there was no provision for inclusive education in the current school system. This lack of policy on special and inclusive education was also reflected in the SOE when these two concepts were not included to be part of the curriculum for their pre-service teacher training program.
- (4) This study concluded that although the Solomon Islands has leaders who are committed and dedicated to ensuring that *all* children have access to education, these leaders have yet to realize that the education of children with special needs in an inclusive environment are just as important.

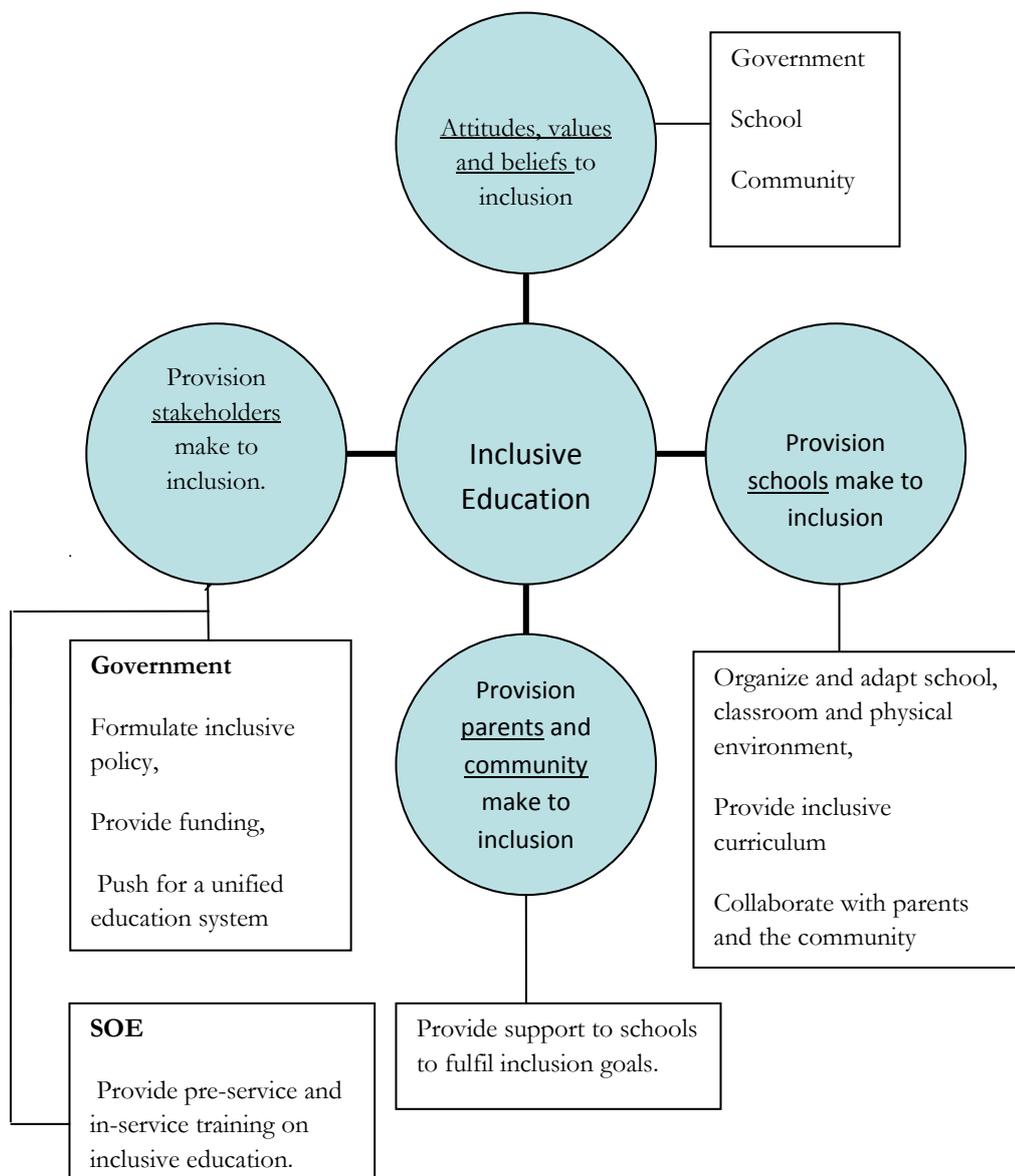
With regards to the above conclusions, it can be said that the success of special education and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands depends very much on the support from the Ministry of Education through reviewing the current education system and its stand on special education and inclusive practices. The SOE is required to review their courses and make provision for special and inclusive education in their current training programs for all pre-service teachers.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are suggested:

Firstly, there has to be a strong link between the Ministry of Education, the School of Education, and other stakeholders such as teachers and the community, so that each stakeholder can facilitate inclusiveness and inclusive education in their own way. For example, the Ministry of Education needs to formulate policies that will enhance and support inclusive education in the country, and the SOE concentrate on the training of pre-service teachers where inclusive education is of priority in the

programs and courses that the SOE offers. Teachers and the community need to be tolerant and understanding towards those with special needs. This approach should be reflected in fostering more positive attitudes towards children with special needs and their right to access equal opportunity to education. This recommendation of all stakeholders working together to facilitate inclusive education in the Solomon Islands can be summed up by Figure 1 (below), the Model of Inclusive Education for the Solomon Islands.



**Figure 1: Model of Inclusion to facilitate inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.**

The model of inclusion is a set of interconnecting parts that make up the whole. It can develop from the top down; or vice-versa. Clearly, attitudes, values and beliefs must be at the heart of decision-makers in the government, the community and ultimately the schools. Key stakeholders must formulate policies that push for a unified education system and provide pre-service and in-service training on inclusive education. Other entities in the community must offer support to schools in order to implement the policies. Collaboration with parents and community are an important arm of the implementation process. Ultimately, it is the schools and teachers in the schools that bear the responsibility.

Secondly, the School of Education would also need to review its current courses. It would be appropriate to include special and inclusive education concepts in the curriculum of their pre-service training programs. It would be of advantage to all pre-service teachers to include special education and inclusive practices across all programs, namely the Certificate in Early Childhood; Certificate in Primary teaching, Diploma in Teaching (Secondary) and the Advance Standing Diploma.

The following are suggested main topics that could be covered in a paper on Special Education:

Topic 1: What is Special Education?

Topic 2: Different types of Disabilities

Topic 3: Inclusive Education and its value to the individual and the  
community

Topic 4: Teaching Strategies for Inclusive Practices in the classroom

Topic 5: The Importance of Home, School and Community Links.

### **6.3 Implications for the Future**

This research was a small study to investigate teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' perceptions, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education. It would be useful to undertake further research on special and inclusive education, but with the focus on teachers who are active in the day-to-day operations of the schools. Findings from such research could be useful to compare with the findings of this study. It could document the teachers' experiences in the classroom; their attitudes and feelings towards their inclusive teacher roles; and assist in gaining knowledge of what they would require to do an even better job teaching their future Solomon Islander citizens.

### **6.4 Reflections' on this Study**

This research project has culminated in the construction of a Model of Inclusion that may be considered for the Solomon Islands education system (Fig 1). It has been established that in many countries, misunderstanding of inclusion is common, even among experienced educators; likewise with special education. Questions persist: What is inclusive education and the importance of this concept to the Solomon Islands? Why is it necessary to include those with special needs into inclusive classrooms in our country? This model is intended to help educators in the Solomon Islands to build a foundation of understanding from which to develop a realistic set of provisions for inclusive education.

My scholarship with the New Zealand education system has expanded my perspectives on inclusive education. This study in its own right has furthered that expansion by reviewing the literature and interpreting various data, and discussing a broad range of implications. There is a considerable amount of work in front of me at home in the Solomon Islands and it is to there that my aspirations will be directed.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1 Ethical Procedures of the Study**

#### **1.1 Ethical Procedures of this study**

The following are ethical procedures that were used to guide this study. It was also the same ethical procedures that were submitted to the Human Research Ethic Committee of the University of Waikato, explaining to them how this study will address ethical issues. Upon considering these ethical procedures, the committee then approved my application. The following ethical procedures were considered and put in place.

##### **Ethical Issues.**

The following procedures will be adopted to ensure ethical conduct of my research project.

##### **a) Access to participants.**

The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, through its School of Education, is the only teacher trainee institution in the country. Therefore, if I want to use trainee teachers in my research project, as a matter of respect and courtesy I have to seek a written permission from these institutions to let them know about my intention whilst at the same time seeking their approval to interview their trainees. This request for permission will be in a form of a general letter in order to protect the identity of the trainee teachers who are going to participate.

##### **b) Informed consent.**

I will be selecting trainee teachers to participate in the research. However, I must ensure that selected participants are fully informed about the purpose and the procedure of the study and that they understand the nature of the research and its possible impact on them. They will also be asked to sign a consent form before they could participate in the research project.

**c) Confidentiality.**

Research participants will be assured that any data they provide will remain anonymous and will not be disclosed for any purpose other than for academic use only. Moreover, information shared by the participants will be kept confidential at all times and could only be accessed by me and my supervisors. The interview venue is to be kept confidential and will be located somewhere where there is neutral territory. In the Solomon Islands where everybody lives in a close knit society, maintaining confidentiality is a great challenge. However, I will verbally inform the participants in the beginning before the interview and focused group sessions about this challenge and will kindly ask them to respect that notion of confidentiality. That would mean, begging them for their indulgence to ensure that all the discussions and activities carried out for the research must be kept within our circle only.

**d) Potential harm to participants.**

At all times I must ensure that participants in my research project understand the nature and the consequences of their participation and where possible, they should not be subjected to any physical, psychological, emotional or cultural harm. The School of Education is a small community where everybody knows each other. I must ensure that my participants are not placed in situations where they will be harassed by curious non-research participants. That is because such encounters can be traumatic for the participants and can affect their physical, mental and emotional health. That is the last thing I want to see happening to my research participants, because that could also affect my research, especially when participants will be opting to prematurely withdraw their participation in the project because of fear that they may be harassed by non participants.

**e) Participants right to decline to participant and right to withdraw.**

I will ensure that participants in my research project are fully aware of their rights to withdraw from the research without fear of any consequences. Should such situation arise, I will fully respect the participants' right to withdraw. It will also be made known to participants that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time up to seven days after they confirm the accuracy of their interview transcript.

#### **f) Arrangements for participants to receive information**

Participants who have been selected to participate in the research project will receive relevant information about the nature of the proposed project, whilst at the same time agreeing to participate by signing the letter of consent to take part in the research. Furthermore, research participants will be advised that at the end of my study, a copy of the thesis will be made available at the School of Education for them to view.

#### **g) Use of the information**

All data collected from the project will be used purely and solely for the purposes of my research. If I wish to use some of the data collected for other purposes like public presentation through media and journals or for use in any of the School of Education's publications, I will need to seek further consent from the participants.

#### **h) Conflict of interest**

All information gathered from the research project will not be used for assessment of the participants' performances, but will be used solely for academic purposes of completing my research project. Furthermore, it is expected that my status as a lecturer at the SOE, now returning as a research student, will not create any conflict of interest between myself, the SOE and the trainee teachers who will be participating in the project. I will explain it clearly to the student participants that I am a student doing my research. They should not see me as a lecturer and that their participation will not be assessed in any way. I will also assure the participants that information gathered through their participants will not be passed on to their current lecturers in any situations.

#### **i) Procedure for resolution of disputes**

It is essential that the participants be informed to contact my supervisors if they have concerns about how my research is conducted. The School of Education is located in Honiara where there is easy access to email facilities where participants can use to contact my supervisors. My supervisors can be contacted in New Zealand through their postal address or email addresses which would also be included in my letter of invitation to each participant.

#### **j) Other ethical concerns relevant to the research.**

*Privacy:* I will ensure that all times during the research process, my interview questions remain focused on the research and that the participants are not made to feel that their privacy has been invaded or their time being improperly used. Moreover, all steps will be taken to protect each participant's identity and human dignity.

*Anonymity:* Maintaining anonymity for participants can be very challenging in Solomon Islands, since everybody live in closely knit communities know each other very well. However, for my research every step will be taken to ensure that any sample of the teachers' voices gathered will be anonymously analysed for academic purposes only. The interview data will be analysed using identification codes to ensure anonymity and will not be attributed to any specific participant. At the end of the research after I have submitted my research report all raw interview data that I have kept will be finally destroyed. Only the transcripts will be kept for record purposes and will be securely stored indefinitely in accordance with the University's current regulation. I will also assure the participating trainee teachers that their identities will not be revealed in the final research report or at anytime during the process of data interpretation, transcription or analysis. More importantly, my research project will conform to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations, which provides guidelines for governing any research activity.

#### **k) Cultural and Social consideration**

The Solomon Islands is made up of people with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, thus the cultural background of the participants will be considered with care during the course of the research. That includes accepting the cultural protocols within the SOE community, especially on the accepted procedures of female (in my case) interviewing a male participant.

Dean's Office  
School of Education  
Te Kura Toi Tangata  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

MEMORANDUM

**To:** Janine Simi  
**From:** Dr Rosemary De Luca  
For School of Education Research Ethics Committee  
**Date:** 15 June 2007  
**Subject:** Research Ethics Approval

---

Thank you for advising the Committee of the proposed addition of three further interviews for the purpose of triangulating the data, and that you will follow the same ethical procedures outlined in the initial proposal.

I am pleased to advise that you have ethical approval for this request.

The Committee wishes you all the best with your research.

Dr Rosemary De Luca  
Chairperson  
For School of Education Research Ethics Committee

5 / 39 Wellington Street

East Hamilton, 2001

Hamilton

New Zealand

8<sup>th</sup> May 2007

The Director

Solomon Islands College of Higher Education

P.O. Box R113, Ranandi Post Office

Honiara, Solomon Islands

Dear Sir

**Subject: Permission to do Research Project at SICHE.**

I am a current student at the University of Waikato. As part of the Masters of Special Education program, it is expected that I carry out a research project as a requirement in order to attain that qualification. I am writing to request your kind permission if I could undertake my research project at the School of Education. The research project will focus on teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' attitudes, knowledge and understanding to special and inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. The research will be conducted using semi-structured interview and focus group interviews with three selected teacher educators and eight pre-service teachers at the School of Education who are currently in their second year of Primary Certificate Program. The interview will centre on the research question: *How do teacher educators and pre-service teachers perceive and understand the concepts of special and inclusive education.* The interview process will involve face-to-face interview/conversation and a focus group interview discussion at a venue yet to be confirmed at the School of

Education starting in June 2007. Interviews will be done in English or pinyin and will be tape recorded and transcribed there after. Each interview session is expected to last at least an hour. The same also applies to the focus group sessions. I acknowledge that June/July would be a very busy time for your schools, however, I do hope that you will consider allowing your School of Education to be part of this research project and to grant approval for me to work at the school. It must be noted that while this research project will take place at SOE involving trainee teachers as participants, I must assure you now that all measures will be taken to ensure that anonymity of participants and information gathered will be protected at all times.

However, should you have any queries regarding the nature of this research project, do not hesitate to contact me through the above address or email;js211@waikato.ac.nz. Further questions about the project can be obtained from my supervisors, Dr. Angus Macfarlane and Dr. Rosemary De Luca on the following address:

School of Education, University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. New Zealand

Email addresses – Dr. Angus Macfarlane – macfarlane@waikato.ac.nz

Dr. Rosemary De Luca - deluca@waikato.ac.nz

May I thank you for your assistance in granting me the permission to conduct my research project at the School of Education. I would really appreciate your help if you can please respond back to me as soon as possible or before **May 31st 2007**.

Yours sincerely,

Janine Simi

5/39 Wellington Street

East Hamilton

HAMILTON, NZ

8<sup>th</sup> May 2007

The Dean

School of Education

Panatina Campus

P.O. Box R113

Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Dear Madame

**Subject: Permission to do Research Project at SOE**

I am a current student at the University of Waikato. As part of the Masters of Special Education program, it is expected that I carry out a research project as a requirement in order to attain that qualification. I am writing to request your kind permission if I could undertake my research project at the School of Education. The research project will focus on teacher educators and pre-service teachers' attitudes, knowledge and understanding to special and inclusive education in Solomon Islands. The research will be conducted using semi-structured interview and focus group interviews with eight selected trainee teachers at the School of Education who are currently in their second year of Primary Certificate Program. The interview will centre on the research question: *How do teacher educators and pre-service teachers perceive and understand the concepts of special and inclusive education.* The interview process will involve face-to-face interview/conversation at a venue yet to be confirmed at the School of Education starting in June 2007. The same also applies to the focus group interview.

The interviews will be done in English or pinyin and will be tape recorded and transcribed thereafter. Each interview session and focus group interview discussion is expected to last at least an hour. I acknowledge that June/July would be a very busy time at your school. However, I do hope that you will consider allowing your School of Education to be part of this research project and to grant approval for me to work with trainee teachers at the school. It must be noted that while this research project will take place at the SOE involving eight pre-service teachers and three teacher educators as participants, I must assure you now that all measures will be taken to ensure that anonymity of participants and information gathered will be protected at all times.

If you have any queries regarding the nature of this research project, do not hesitate to contact me through the above address or email:js211@waikato.ac.nz. Further questions about the project can be obtained from my supervisors, Dr. Angus Macfarlane and Dr. Rosemary De Luca on the following address:

School of Education, University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. New Zealand

Email addresses - Angus Macfarlane – macfarlane@waikato.ac.nz

Rosemary De Luca - deluca@waikato.ac.nz

May I thank you for your assistance in granting me the permission to conduct my research project at the School of Education. I would really appreciate your help if you can please respond back to me as soon as possible or before **May 31st 2007**.

Yours sincerely,

Janine Simi



School of Education

Solomon Islands College of Higher Education

Panatina Campus, PO Box R113

Honiara, Solomon Islands

Phone: (677) 30502 /30111/30112

---

17 May, 2007

Janine Simi

5/39 Wellington Street

East Hamilton, Hamilton, NZ

Dear Janine,

Subject: Permission to do Research Project at SOE

Thank you for your letter seeking permission to do your Research Project at the School of Education.

Permission is granted for you to carry out your Research Project with the focus group you have intended to use.

For your information the focus group you have selected, second year Certificate in Teaching Primary are currently out in the schools on School base. After School base they go for their end of Semester break (15 June – 15 July). Straight after their break they will go for Teaching Experience II (26 July – 31 August and then return to SoE for Semester 4, for lectures as of 24 September to November 16.

I wish you all the best in your research and look forward to supporting you in whatever way the School could do

Yours sincerely,

Susanne Maezama

Head of School

cc: Assistant Head of School – Administration

Assistant Head of School – Academic

5 / 39 Wellington Street, East  
Hamilton,

Hamilton, New Zealand

6th March 2007

Dear.....

I am a student at the University of Waikato. This year I am completing a Masters of Special Education qualification at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am writing to request if you would agree to participate in a research project that I am intending to carry out in Honiara, Solomon Islands, at the School of Education (SICHE). However, I must clarify from the beginning, that I have been a lecturer at SOE and now currently on study leave. The proposed research project that I am working on is done purely for academic purposes only. This means that all information gathered from the research project will not be used for your assessments and performances in any way. Moreover the information collected will not be passed on to your current lecturers in any form.

The main focus of the research will be to investigate teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' perception on the notion of inclusive education and educating children with special needs in an inclusive setting. The research will be conducted using semi-structured interviews as well as a focus group interview and discussion after the individual interviews. An interview guide will be developed based on the research question: *What is your understanding on special and inclusive education*, rather than having a fixed interview schedule. This is being done to give you greater flexibility to express your views on the research question and the issues surrounding it.

The interview will be done on one face-to-face interview/conversation at a venue yet to be confirmed at the SOE starting in June 2007. The individual interview and the focus group interview will be conducted in English or Solomon Islands pijin and will be taped recorded and transcribed soon after. Each interview session is expected to last approximately an hour. The same also applies for the focus group interview session. You will be given the opportunity to sight the transcribed

transcript to check its accuracy and to make any suggestions and alterations. You are also free to make suggestions that would contribute to this research topic. That can be done during our focus group discussion.

You can be assured that your identity will be kept confidential at all times throughout the research project. Your right to anonymity and privacy will be respected however cannot be guaranteed. Each transcript will either be returned to you or disposed of appropriately. Any information shared will be solely used for academic purposes, unless your permission is sought for other uses. Please note that even if you agree to take part, you can withdraw your consent anytime up to seven days after you confirm the accuracy of your interview script. It is anticipated that the outcome of the study will guide future research into the development of inclusive education framework and practices in the country.

I know that you have a busy schedule. However I do hope that you will consider being part of this research project. If you have any queries regarding this research project, do not hesitate to contact me through the above address or email: [js211@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:js211@waikato.ac.nz) or you can always contact me through the following telephone number – (07) 856 9647. If you still have pressing questions about the nature of this research, you can always contact my supervisors, Dr. Angus Macfarlane and Dr. Rosemary De Luca through the following email addresses - Angus Macfarlane – [macfarlane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:macfarlane@waikato.ac.nz) and Rosemary De Luca - [deluca@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:deluca@waikato.ac.nz). Otherwise they could also be contacted on the following address:

School of Education, University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. New Zealand.

May I thank you in advance for your assistance in consenting to participate in this research project. Please sign the attached consent form and return it back to me as soon as possible or before the 31st of May 2007.

Yours Sincerely

Janine Simi

**Appendix 7                      Informed Consent Form**

Please read the following passage below. Make sure that you understand what it means before you sign the form.

- \* I have read and fully understand the information about this study.
- \* I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary.
- \* I understand that even if I initially agree to take part in this research project, I can withdraw my consent at anytime up to seven days after the confirmation of the accuracy of the interview transcript.

I (*please print your name*)\_\_\_\_\_ have read the above information and agree to participate in this research and to have to have my interview tape-recorded.

Signed\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 8                      Semi-structured Interview Guide for Pre-service Teachers**

**Topic : Investigating teacher educators and pre-service teachers attitudes, knowledge and understanding on special and inclusive education in Solomon Islands.**

These questions should guide the semi-structured interview sessions which will be conducted in English or Solomon Islands pijin. All interview sessions will be tape recorded.

Tell me about yourself and how far you have gone through your studies.

Tell me what you know about these two concepts – special education and inclusive education. (Define them in your own words)

Has your training at SOE equipped you with skills and knowledge on special and inclusive education?

	Skills	Knowledge
Special Education		
Inclusive Education		

How confident are you to teach a child with special needs in an inclusive classroom ? Give reasons to support your answer.

From your experience, are children with special needs attending our current mainstream classroom? Give reasons in relation to your answer.

Give me some suggestions on ways in which schools and classroom can better address the situation.

**Focus Group Interview Questions – All Participants**

What could schools do to support inclusive education?

Do you believe that regular schools should become inclusive to cater for those with special needs?

## **Appendix 9                      Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Teacher Educators**

Tell me a bit about yourself and your status here at SOE.

1. Tell me what you know about these two concepts
  - Special education
  - Inclusive education
2. What could schools do to support inclusive education?
3. Do you believe that inclusive education should now become part of our mainstream education system?
4. Does the current training that SOE offers to pre-service teachers include special and inclusive education? Discuss your answers.

### **Interview Guide – Senior Teacher Educator**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and what you know about these two concepts
  - Special education
  - Inclusive education
2. From your opinion, does the Solomon Islands current education system have measures in place to support their development in schools? Discuss
3. Does the School of Education have any policies in place that would support the implementation of special and inclusive education in the programs that SOE is now offering to pre-service students? Discuss