

**PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND QUALITY
EDUCATION FOR ALL IN AFRICAN
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: CRITICAL
INSIGHTS FROM ZIMBABWE**

Farai Chikwature

National Language Institute
Midlands State University
chikwaturef@staff.msu.ac.zw

Mufaro Marandure

National Language Institute
Midlands State University
marandurem@staff.msu.ac.zw

Dudziro Nhengu

Gender Institute
Midlands State University
Gweru Zimbabwe
nhengud@staff.msu.ac.zw
+263778580642

Abstract

Promoting inclusive and quality education for all is crucial for achieving sustainable development. This study examined the implementation and challenges of inclusive education policies and practices for learners with disabilities within Zimbabwe's education system. Grounded in the Social Model of Disability theory, the

research explored various influences on the educational experiences of learners with disabilities. Zimbabwe has made significant strides in integrating learners with disabilities into mainstream education through policies such as the Education Amendment Act (2020) and strategic initiatives. These initiatives include establishing special needs education units in mainstream schools, specialised teacher training programs, and community awareness campaigns, resulting in increased enrolment and improved outcomes for learners with disabilities. However, several challenges persist, including inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of specialised teaching materials and resources, limited teacher training, societal stigmas against disabilities, funding constraints, and a lack of comprehensive data on learners with disabilities. Employing a thorough desk review, the study employed a systematic review of literature to gather secondary data from published academic papers, reports, online articles and related sources. The paper concluded with actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders to enhance the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of inclusive education practices.

Keywords: Inclusive education, disabilities, Social Model of Disability

Introduction

Access to inclusive and quality education is universally recognized as a fundamental right, as underscored by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). This goal envisions that by 2030, all learners will

have access to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education, alongside lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2015). Inclusive education is based on the principle that every individual, regardless of abilities, disabilities, socio-economic status, gender, or ethnicity, should have equal access to educational opportunities.

As defined by Ainscow (2005), inclusive education aims to remove barriers to learning by integrating all students, including those with disabilities, into mainstream educational settings. This concept extends beyond mere physical inclusion to encompass systemic adaptations that accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. According to Booth and Ainscow (2011), inclusive education involves creating a school culture that welcomes and values diversity, where teaching practices and curricula are adapted to meet the needs of every student.

Further defining inclusive education, Florian and Spratt (2013) describe it as an approach that seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students by addressing and removing systemic barriers that prevent full participation. This includes making necessary adjustments to teaching methods, materials, and school environments to ensure that all students, especially those with disabilities, can thrive in a regular classroom setting.

Slee (2011) emphasizes that inclusive education represents a shift away from exclusionary practices that historically marginalised learners with disabilities by placing them in specialized institutions or separate

classes. Instead, it focuses on developing educational environments that support and include all students, fostering their participation and learning in mainstream schools.

Zimbabwe, a signatory to various international agreements on education, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Incheon Declaration, has committed to promoting inclusive education. The country has established several inclusive education policies, including the Education Act, the National Disability Policy, and the Zimbabwe Disability Act (Chapter 17:01). These policies aim to enhance educational infrastructure, ensure barrier-free learning environments, and produce inclusive and gender-sensitive educational materials (Government of Zimbabwe, 2017).

Despite these policy commitments and advancements, the implementation of full inclusivity in Zimbabwe's education system encounters significant challenges. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, limited access to assistive technologies, and prevailing negative societal attitudes towards disability continue to impede progress (Singal, 2010). These barriers hinder equal access and opportunities for students with special educational needs. This study aims to investigate these challenges within the Zimbabwean context and propose strategies to overcome them, ultimately advancing inclusive and quality education throughout the nation's education system.

Problem statement

Despite global commitments to inclusive education, there are significant gaps in its implementation, particularly in developing regions such as Zimbabwe. Learners with disabilities face various obstacles in accessing quality education, including physical inaccessibility, inadequate teaching materials, and a lack of trained educators (UNESCO, 2017). These challenges are compounded by societal attitudes and stigma associated with disability, which often exacerbate these barriers and lead to the marginalization of these learners both in the classroom and in society at large (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

The challenges faced by learners with disabilities highlight significant disparities compared to their able-bodied peers. There is often a lack of comprehensive policies and frameworks specifically addressing the needs of learners with disabilities. While Zimbabwe has made some progress in developing inclusive education policies, the practical implementation of these policies remains inconsistent and fraught with difficulties (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This study aims to assess the current state of inclusive education in Zimbabwe, identify key obstacles to effective implementation, and propose actionable strategies to address these issues.

The main goal of this study is to explore and propose strategies for improving inclusive and quality education for all learners in Zimbabwe, with a specific focus on learners with disabilities. The specific objectives are to investigate the effectiveness of existing policies and

practices in promoting inclusive education, establish the role of teacher training and assistive technologies in enhancing inclusive education for learners with disabilities and evaluate the current state of inclusive education in Zimbabwe, identifying key gaps and challenges.

The study addresses three questions, deriving from the three objectives: What is the effectiveness of existing policies and practices in promoting inclusive education for learners with disabilities in Zimbabwe? How do teacher training and assistive technologies contribute to enhancing inclusive education for learners with disabilities? What are the key gaps and challenges in the current state of inclusive education in Zimbabwe?

The study significantly contributes to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education by providing a detailed analysis of the challenges and opportunities within Zimbabwe's education system. By identifying the barriers to effective implementation, the study offers valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and advocacy groups working towards inclusive education in Zimbabwe. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive approach that includes policy development, teacher training, and the integration of assistive technologies to create an inclusive learning environment (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The findings of this study can guide the development of more effective strategies to ensure that all learners in Zimbabwe, particularly those with disabilities, have access to quality education. This aligns with global

efforts to achieve SDG 4 and supports the broader goal of social inclusion and equity within Zimbabwe's educational system (UNESCO, 2015).

Background to the study

The framework for inclusive education globally is based on key international agreements that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) emphasizes protection against discrimination and the need for special care for children with disabilities. Similarly, the Salamanca Declaration (1994), advocates for equitable access to educational opportunities for all learners regardless of their abilities. This commitment is echoed in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), which promotes equal educational opportunities and lifelong learning. Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015) highlight the need for inclusive and equitable education by 2030, particularly in SDG 4.

Regionally, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Learner (ACRWC, 1999) emphasizes learners' responsibilities toward their communities, fostering inclusivity. The SADC Policy Framework (2015) also calls for inclusive learning environments, positioning schools as supportive centres for vulnerable students.

In Zimbabwe, national legislation reflects a commitment to inclusive education, with the Constitution ensuring free and compulsory basic education while prohibiting discrimination based on disability. Legislative frameworks, including the Education Act (1987) and the

Disabled Persons Act (1992), support this commitment. However, despite a strong legislative foundation, challenges in implementation persist, particularly in rural areas where infrastructure and resources are lacking (Ncube & Dube, 2016; Singal, 2010).

The success of inclusive education relies heavily on well-trained teachers. Specialized training programs are in place to equip educators with the skills to support learners with disabilities, yet limitations such as inadequate resources and narrow training scopes challenge their effectiveness (Mpofu, Brehm, & Mhaka, 2007). Community awareness campaigns are also crucial, with various initiatives aimed at educating the public about the importance of inclusion and combating negative perceptions of disability (Mufute, 2019). Despite these efforts, cultural beliefs and limited awareness in some areas present ongoing challenges to achieving true inclusivity in Zimbabwe's educational landscape (Dube, 2020).

Theoretical framework: Social model of disability

This study is anchored in the Social Model of Disability, which posits that disability is not an intrinsic attribute of the individual but a construct shaped by societal and environmental factors. According to this model, the limitations encountered by individuals with disabilities stem not from their impairments but from the barriers imposed by society. These barriers can be physical, such as inaccessible buildings or insufficient assistive technologies, or social, including discrimination and stigmatisation (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 2010).

The Social Model challenges the traditional medical model, which views disability primarily as a medical condition to be "fixed" through rehabilitation or medical intervention. Instead, the Social Model emphasizes the necessity for societal transformation, advocating for changes in social, physical, and institutional environments to address and eliminate exclusionary practices (Oliver, 1990; Thomas, 2007). It highlights that true inclusion requires a shift in societal attitudes, the removal of environmental obstacles, and the implementation of inclusive policies (Shakespeare, 2013).

A central tenet of the Social Model is that disability is a socially constructed disadvantage. This means that people with disabilities are marginalised due to societal structures that fail to accommodate their needs. The model calls for a re-evaluation of disability policies and underscores the importance of creating an enabling environment that fosters full participation for all individuals, regardless of ability (Goodley, 2017).

In the context of Zimbabwe's education system, the Social Model of Disability provides a critical framework for understanding and addressing the barriers to inclusive education. Zimbabwe, as a signatory to international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Incheon Declaration, is committed to advancing inclusive education. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, and limited access to assistive technologies persist (Singal, 2010).

The Social Model's emphasis on societal and environmental factors aligns with the need for comprehensive policy measures in Zimbabwe. This includes the provision of accessible infrastructure, development of inclusive education systems, and public awareness campaigns aimed at challenging negative stereotypes. By focusing on these broader social determinants, the model supports legislative reforms and systemic changes necessary to ensure equitable participation for individuals with disabilities in Zimbabwe's education system (WHO, 2011; CRPD, 2006).

The Social Model of Disability underscores the importance of addressing the structural barriers that hinder inclusion and advocates for a holistic approach to creating an educational environment that supports all learners. This theoretical framework is instrumental in shaping strategies to overcome the specific challenges faced in Zimbabwe, aligning with the broader goals of inclusive education and human rights (Charlton, 1998; Barton, 2001; Burchardt, 2004).

Literature review

The reviewed literature indicates that Zimbabwe's efforts to achieve inclusive education are significantly hampered by inadequate infrastructure, which poses a major barrier for learners with disabilities. Most schools lack critical accessible facilities, such as ramps, adapted classrooms, and necessary assistive devices (UNESCO, 2019; Mpofu, Maphosa & Chikoko, 2020); UNICEF, 2013; Chireshe, Chireshe & Mavunga, 2020). These

assistive devices are essential for facilitating inclusive education, and without them, students with disabilities are unable to access the educational opportunities necessary for their development and success. The Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) also emphasizes that only a small fraction of schools in Zimbabwe are equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support students with physical or sensory disabilities, including Braille machines and sign language interpreters. Findings by other researchers resonate with this finding, further emphasizing the fact that the issue of inadequate assistive devices for supporting the learning needs of student with disabilities are more pronounced in rural areas, where inadequate investment exacerbates the situation (Mpofu & Shumba, 2018; Mutasa & Nyoni, 2021; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

Research conducted by UNICEF (2013) and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2020) highlights that many school buildings lack essential accessibility features, such as widened doorways, appropriate sanitation facilities, and tactile pathways. This structural inadequacy not only hinders physical access but also significantly impacts the participation and academic success of learners with disabilities (Chireshe, 2013; Dube, 2019; Mavundukure & Nyoni, 2018; Ndlovu, 2020). Further studies also concur with the finding on the infrastructural gap in Zimbabwe, further indicating that without targeted investments in infrastructure, the objective of achieving inclusive education in Zimbabwe will remain elusive (UNESCO, 2021; Mpofu et al., 2020; African Union, 2021).

Researchers consistently advocate for government initiatives and international collaborations to prioritise infrastructural development in schools, especially in under-served regions, as a crucial step towards promoting equitable access to education for all learners (Sibanda, 2019; Dube, 2021; Global Partnership for Education, 2018; ZIMSEC, 2020; Moyo, 2022). This perspective is further echoed in global literature, which emphasizes the need for adequate infrastructure to support inclusive education systems (Ainscow, 2016; Florian & Rouse, 2016).

Reviewed literature also highlighted the low enrolment of students with disabilities in Zimbabwe, despite the existence of inclusive education policies in Zimbabwe. For example, the UNESCO Annual Education Statistics Report (2019) revealed that although more than 85,000 learners with disabilities were recorded in the education system, this figure represents only a small fraction of the total population of children with disabilities. Systemic barriers, such as entrenched stigma, financial difficulties, and inadequate infrastructure, significantly contribute to the low participation rates among these learners (Mpofu et al., 2020; Sibanda, 2019; Odom, Collet-Klingenberg, Rogers & Myers, 2013).

Chronic under-funding and a lack of awareness further intensify the challenges faced in achieving inclusive education. These issues include inadequate infrastructure, such as the absence of ramps, adapted classrooms, and essential assistive devices, which are necessary for accommodating learners with disabilities. Without sufficient financial support and broader public

understanding of the needs of these students, efforts to provide equitable access to education remain severely limited. Consequently, the lack of both resources and awareness perpetuates barriers that prevent learners with disabilities from fully participating in the educational system. Many learners with disabilities face widespread social exclusion, leading to their diminished presence in mainstream educational settings (Mpofu & Shumba, 2018). This issue of discrimination and exclusion goes beyond the issue of education, to embrace existing myths in our societies regarding the devalued rights of children with disabilities. This point is supported by other studies which lay bare the social stigma and isolation faced by children with disabilities (Chireshe, 2013; Dube, 2019). As a result of these negative myths and stigmatization, many families choose not to send children with disabilities to school owing to negative societal attitudes and a lack of accessible facilities. The role of societal attitudes in shaping educational access for students with disabilities is also further highlighted (Rousso, 2018; Tremain, 2019).

The economic dimension of inclusive education is another huge challenge that students with disabilities face with regards to their education rights. The Global Partnership for Education (2018) reports that the costs of specialized learning materials, transportation, and other educational supports often prove prohibitive for many families, particularly in rural areas where poverty and infrastructural deficits are more pronounced (Mavundukure & Nyoni, 2018; Mutasa & Nyoni, 2021; UNESCO, 2021).

While teacher and administrator preparedness is essential to the success of inclusive education, numerous studies that were reviewed to support this study indicate that inadequate training among teachers and education support staff remains a significant barrier. Many teachers report that they lack the skills and resources necessary to effectively teach learners with disabilities, with insufficient training in special education being a pervasive issue (Chireshe, 2013; Mpofu et al., 2020; Dube, 2019). Teachers often feel unprepared to accommodate diverse learning needs in the classroom, which hinders the implementation of inclusive education policies (Mpofu et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Similarly, research also shows that curriculum for teacher training programs in Zimbabwe often overlooks the specific requirements for educating learners with disabilities, leaving teachers ill-equipped to provide inclusive education (Mavundukure & Nyoni, 2018). This concern is supported by international literature, which recognizes the need for comprehensive teacher training in inclusive education (Florian, 2017; Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, 2017).

Reviewed literature also posits that school administrators are often under trained in leading inclusive education initiatives, impairing their ability to foster inclusive environments (UNICEF, 2013; UNESCO, 2021). Many administrators lack the leadership skills required to effectively support teachers in implementing inclusive practices, and this gap in leadership training further exacerbates the challenges faced by both teachers and learners (Mpofu & Shumba, 2018). Likewise, further research evidence echoes similar concerns, noting that

administrators often have limited exposure to inclusive education frameworks, an aspect that stalls progress toward inclusivity in schools (The Global Partnership for Education, 2018; Mutasa & Nyoni, 2021).

Reviewed literature additionally found that many schools fail to comply with existing policy guidelines, partly due to the absence of robust accountability mechanisms (Dube, 2019; GEM Report, 2021). This inconsistency in policy enforcement is often linked to the lack of clear monitoring frameworks, which results in uneven implementation across different regions and schools (Mpofu et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2021). A growing consensus among scholars indicates that without stronger accountability measures and widespread policy education, achieving inclusive education across Zimbabwe will remain a challenge (UNESCO, 2021; Mpofu & Shumba, 2018; Ainscow, 2016).

Assistive technologies play a vital role in enhancing learning opportunities for students with disabilities, although existing literature shows that their use in Zimbabwe remains limited. Many schools still lack essential assistive devices such as screen readers, hearing aids, and Braille machines, critical for supporting learners with visual and auditory impairments (UNESCO, 2021; Mpofu et al., 2020). The finding is supported by further scholars who note that shortage of technology severely restricts the ability of students with sensory disabilities to fully engage with the curriculum (Mpofu et al., 2020; Mavundukure & Nyoni, 2018). International literature underscores the importance of integrating assistive technology into educational systems

to support inclusive practices (Burgstahler, 2015; Al-Azawei et al., 2016).

Zimbabwe's education curriculum has not been adequately adapted to cater to the diverse needs of learners with disabilities (Chireshe, 2013). The Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) stresses that without a systematic approach to integrating assistive technology into classrooms; many students are left underserved. Many educators continue to rely on traditional teaching methods that do not incorporate inclusive pedagogies or the use of assistive technologies, thus limiting accessibility for students with disabilities (Mutasa & Nyoni, 2021). While some schools have made efforts to introduce inclusive learning technologies, these initiatives are often hampered by a lack of funding and technical expertise (Mpofu & Shumba, 2018). Without adequate financial support and technical training, the introduction of assistive technologies remains sporadic and ineffective. Further arguments also buttress the point that the absence of a well-structured policy framework for incorporating these technologies in schools exacerbates disparities in educational outcomes for learners with disabilities (Mpofu et al., 2020; Dube, 2019). Therefore, the successful integration of assistive technologies into Zimbabwe's educational system requires coordinated efforts involving curriculum reform, teacher training, and increased investment in technological infrastructure (UNESCO, 2021; GPE, 2018; Mpofu et al., 2020; Florian & Rouse, 2016).

Literature Gap

Despite existing research on inclusive education in Zimbabwe, significant gaps remain in the literature concerning the long-term effects of inclusive education policies on learners with disabilities. Although studies extensively address challenges related to policy implementation, infrastructure deficits, and teacher preparedness there is a notable scarcity of empirical data focused on the academic and social outcomes for learners with disabilities within inclusive settings. Furthermore, research exploring the influence of community engagement and leadership practices on improving inclusive education outcomes, particularly in rural and underserved regions, is limited. This oversight restricts a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the successful implementation and sustainability of inclusive education policies in Zimbabwean contexts, hence the need to investigating how community dynamics and school leadership can enhance the efficacy of inclusive practices. To bridge this gap, future research should focus on longitudinal studies that assess the impacts of inclusive education on the academic achievements and social integration of learners with disabilities over time. Additionally, investigations into effective community involvement and leadership strategies are essential for creating a more inclusive educational framework that can adapt to the needs of all learners, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. This holistic approach will contribute to a deeper understanding of how inclusive education can be effectively implemented and sustained

in Zimbabwe, promoting equity and quality in education for all. 3.0 Research methodology

Systematic literature review

A systematic literature review was conducted to synthesise existing research on inclusive education focusing on policies, practises and outcomes. The review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure rigor and transparency. A comprehensive search strategy for documents, reports and policies was employed utilising multiple databases including Google, PubMed and Scopus to identify relevant studies published in English. Inclusion criteria were all articles published after 2010.

The search strategy combined keywords and phrases related to inclusive education, disability, and education policy. Inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed articles, research studies, and policy documents that addressed inclusive education in primary, secondary, or tertiary settings. Studies were excluded if they focused solely on special education or did not provide empirical evidence. In the systematic literature review conducted on inclusive education, a total of 60 records were screened. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 40 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Following a thorough quality appraisal using the, 22 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review.

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form, capturing information on study design, sample size, population, interventions, outcomes, and

conclusions. Study quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT). Thematic analysis was employed to synthesize findings, identifying patterns and themes related to inclusive education policies, teacher training, resource allocation, and student outcomes. The review revealed key factors influencing inclusive education effectiveness, including policy implementation gaps, resource shortages, and teacher preparedness. The findings inform recommendations for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to enhance inclusive education.

Findings

The findings are organised around themes drawn from the research objectives, which include assessing school infrastructure and accessibility, analyzing the enrolment and participation of learners with disabilities, evaluating teacher preparedness for inclusive education, and exploring policy implementation alongside the use of assistive technologies and curriculum development.

Assessing school infrastructure and accessibility

Findings from the desk review revealed that Zimbabwe's pursuit of inclusive education is significantly hindered by insufficient infrastructure and inadequate assistive devices, which presents a fundamental barrier to learners with disabilities. Only 35% of schools meet essential accessibility standards, including ramps, wider doorways, and accessible sanitation facilities (Mutepfa et al., 2007; Chireshe, 2011). Additionally, a mere 27% offer critical assistive resources such as Braille materials or screen readers, which severely limit the inclusion of

students with visual impairment (Mutepfa et al., 2007; Mpofu et al., 2020). Without substantial investment in infrastructure, Zimbabwe's inclusive education aspirations will remain unrealized (UNESCO, 2021; Mpofu et al., 2020). For example, Kenya has incorporated cost-effective solutions for ensuring the achievement of inclusive education by installing ramps in all its school vicinities. The ramps make learning spaces more accessible for students, and this could serve as a model for Zimbabwe (Kiswahili, 2019). The findings showed that rural schools in particular, face infrastructural challenges, with many head teachers citing budgetary constraints as the primary barrier to improving infrastructure. These financial limitations reflect broader obstacles in low-income countries, where effective implementation of inclusive education policies is often hampered (UNICEF, 2013; Mpofu & Shumba, 2018).

In addition societal stigma was also highlighted as part of the persistent obstacles to effective inclusivity in education. Existing literature demonstrated that in many country contexts, learners with disabilities express frustration over the manner in which they are discriminated against, as well as the manner in which their needs are scoffed at, which adversely affect their academic performance. More attention is paid to the needs of students with no disability, and this promotes an ableism syndrome where students with disabilities are treated as abnormal human beings. The lack of assistive devices that enable students with disabilities to participate in school activities leave them isolated and excluded from learning, sporting and other school

activities, which is assign of discrimination and exclusion (Chireshe, 2013). As a result, this creates a distance between students with disability and their teachers, as well as with the whole school system, to an extent that students with disability fail to access their learning services and facilities. Owing to stigma, students with disability feel constrained to approach others for assistance.

Enrolment, participation and teacher preparedness

The majority of the reviewed literature concurred that despite the presence of inclusive education policies, the enrolment of learners with disabilities in Zimbabwe remains disproportionately low. Currently, only 4% of students in Zimbabwean schools have disabilities, even though it is estimated that around 13% of school-aged population comprises of students with disabilities (Mpofu & Shumba, 2012). Of those who are enrolled, approximately 60% report feeling excluded from classroom activities due to insufficient instructional support (Chireshe, 2013).

Lack of teacher preparedness was found to be a major challenge to inclusive education. Only 18% of teachers in Zimbabwe have received formal training in special needs education, and nearly half of those teachers feel that the training is inadequate (Sharma et al., 2009). This lack of preparedness impedes the effective implementation of inclusive practices. The study also revealed how teachers regularly express the need for ongoing professional development to stay updated on best practices in special needs education

(Mukhopadhyay & Molosiwa, 2014). Without continuous training and specialized resources, teachers are unable to fully engage students with disabilities; negatively impacting both enrollment and participation rates (Forlin & Sin, 2010).

In addition to this, the literature review findings also showed that parents of children with disabilities often feel alienated as a result of societal stigma and negative attitudes from school staff prevent full integration. This societal exclusion has been highlighted as a significant factor influencing the low participation rates of children with disabilities in education (Lazarus et al., 2015; Chireshe, 2013).

Policy implementation and government support

Under this objective, the analysed data showed that while Zimbabwe has developed a robust framework of inclusive education policies, actual implementation remains inconsistent. From the reviewed literature, 65% of school administrators reported awareness of national inclusive education policies, while only 30% actively implemented the said policies in their teaching practices (Loreman et al., 2013). This gap between policy awareness and practical application suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to achieve true inclusivity.

The findings also established another key barrier to effective implementation of inclusive education as the lack of financial and logistical support, particularly in rural areas. Despite Zimbabwe's commitment to international agreements such as the UN Convention on

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enforcement of inclusive education policies is weak. From the voices of policymakers in the reviewed literature, lack of resources frequently came up as a primary impediment, especially when it comes to infrastructure and training (Naicker & Engelbrecht, 2013; Mpofu et al., 2020). Scholars argue that without stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms, policy enforcement will remain sporadic, which hinders progress toward inclusive education (Dube, 2019; GEM Report, 2021). Greater government support, especially in terms of funding and resources for rural areas, is critical to overcoming these obstacles (Mpofu & Shumba, 2018; UNESCO, 2021).

Assistive technologies and curriculum development

Assistive technologies and flexible curricula were found to be essential for supporting learners with disabilities in Zimbabwe from the data analysis. However, fewer than 20% of schools are equipped with assistive devices such as Braille machines or sign language interpreters (Thakur, 2016). Moreover, only 25% of schools offer a curriculum that can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities (Thakur, 2016).

The rigid national curriculum was also often cited as a barrier to inclusivity in the literature that was reviewed for this study. From the reviewed literature, teachers and parents both expressed concerns that the current one-size-fits-all” approach does not cater to the individual needs of students with disabilities (Florian & Linklater, 2010). This sentiment highlights the necessity of adopting more flexible curricula that can accommodate

diverse learning needs. Evidence from the reviewed literature also demonstrated how parents of children with disabilities also report the high financial burden of acquiring assistive technologies, suggesting that government intervention is necessary to subsidize these essential resources (Sightsavers, 2021). Without structured policies and investment in assistive technologies, students with disabilities will continue to struggle to engage fully in the curriculum (Mpofu et al., 2020; GEM Report, 2021).

Conclusions

This study revealed several critical barriers hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe. One of the most significant challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure and accessibility, with only a small percentage of schools meeting basic accessibility standards. This shortfall limits the ability of learners with disabilities to fully participate in education and calls for increased investment in infrastructure to support inclusivity.

Enrolment and participation of learners with disabilities also remain disproportionately low. A key contributor to this issue is the lack of teacher preparedness, with many educators lacking the necessary training to support students with diverse needs. This gap emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development and training in special needs education to enhance both student engagement and academic outcomes.

The inconsistent implementation of inclusive education policies, despite their existence, further hinders progress.

Limited financial and logistical support, particularly in rural areas, exacerbates the problem. Strengthening policy enforcement and providing more robust government support are essential for improving inclusivity across the country.

Finally, the lack of assistive technologies and flexible curricula presents a significant challenge to the inclusivity of learners with disabilities. Addressing these gaps by investing in technology and developing adaptable curricula will be critical to ensuring that all learners, regardless of their disabilities, have equitable access to education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered as enablers to oil the wheels for quality inclusive education in Zimbabwe. The recommendations are targeted to various stakeholders.

Policy makers

- Develop and enforce inclusive education policies that prioritize the rights of children with disabilities, ensuring alignment with international standards such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).
- Allocate sufficient funds to special education programs and infrastructure improvements in schools, especially in under-served areas, to ensure equitable access for all students.
- Support initiatives that enhance teacher training in special needs education, ensuring that educators are

equipped with the necessary skills to implement inclusive teaching practices.

- Initiate campaigns to raise awareness about disabilities and the importance of inclusive education, targeting parents, communities, and local leaders to change negative perceptions.
- Develop programs to subsidize assistive technologies, such as Braille materials and communication devices, to enhance learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

Educators

- Implement teaching strategies that cater to diverse learning needs, allowing students to engage with the curriculum at their own pace. Differentiation can include varied instructional methods, materials, and assessments tailored to individual strengths and challenges.
- Create an inclusive and supportive classroom atmosphere where all students feel valued and respected. Use positive reinforcement and collaborative learning activities to encourage social interactions among students.
- Integrate assistive technologies and resources into the classroom to facilitate learning for students with disabilities. This may include using screen readers, audio books, or specialised software to enhance accessibility.
- Pursue ongoing training and professional development opportunities focused on inclusive education practices.

Community stakeholders

- Engage in awareness campaigns to educate the public about the importance of inclusive education and the rights of individuals with disabilities. This can help to combat stigma and promote acceptance within the community.
- Establish partnerships with schools to support inclusive practices. Community organisations can provide resources, training, and mentorship for teachers and support staff, helping to enhance the educational experience for students with disabilities.
- Invest in improving physical accessibility within community facilities and schools. This includes advocating for the installation of ramps, accessible restrooms, and adaptive learning resources to ensure that all students can access educational opportunities.
- Mobilize local businesses to contribute resources, funding, or sponsorships for inclusive education programs. This can include financial support for assistive technologies, learning materials, or community events promoting inclusivity.
- Encourage community members to volunteer in schools and support programs that facilitate inclusion. Volunteers can help with tutoring, mentorship, and organizing inclusive activities, fostering a sense of belonging for students with disabilities.
- Collaborate with local government and NGOs to ensure that policies promoting inclusive education are implemented effectively. Community stakeholders can advocate for resources and support

for schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities

References

- Ainscow, M. (2005). *Developing inclusive education systems: A review of international practice*. World Bank.
- Ainscow, M., Booth, T., & Dyson, A. (2006). *Improving schools, developing inclusion*. Routledge.
- Avramidis, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 17(2), 129-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250210129056>
- Barnes, C., Mercer, G., & Shakespeare, T. (2010). *Exploring disability: A sociological introduction*. Polity Press.
- Barton, L. (2001). Disability, politics and the social model. In J. Swain, S. Finkelstein, S. French, & M. Oliver (Eds.), *Disability studies: Past, present and future* (pp. 29-49). Whiting & Birch.
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2011). *The index for inclusion: A guide to school development led by inclusive values*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE).
- Burchardt, T. (2004). Being and becoming: Social exclusion and the onset of disability. In T. Burchardt & M. V. Boehmer (Eds.), *The future*

- of disability: Theory and practice (pp. 153-167).
Routledge.
- Charlton, J. I. (1998). Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment. University of California Press.
- Chimedza, R. (2009). The role of community awareness in promoting inclusive education. *Journal of Education for International Development*, 4(2), 1-14. Retrieved from JEID
- Chimedza, R., & Peters, S. (2001). Special needs education in Zimbabwe: Policy and practice. *International Journal of Special Education*, 16(2), 38-47. Retrieved from IJSE
- Chireshe, R. (2011). Inclusive education in Zimbabwe: What works and what does not. *Journal of Special Education*, 30(2), 1-10.
- Chireshe, R. (2013). Attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 60(2), 175-187.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage Publications.
- Dube, M. (2020). Community involvement in inclusive education: Challenges and prospects. *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research*, 32(1), 45-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2019.1651324>
- Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), 813-828. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.500086>
- Florian, L., & Linklater, H. (2010). Preparing teachers to

- work in inclusive classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), 1022-1031.
- Florian, L., & Spratt, J. (2013). Enacting inclusion: A framework for understanding inclusion in practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43(4), 555-569. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2013.841554>
- Forlin, C. (2010). Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and practices. In C. Forlin & M. C. J. (Eds.), *Teacher Education for Inclusion: Changing Paradigms and Practices* (pp. 1-15). Routledge.
- Forlin, C., & Sin, L. (2010). *Teacher education for inclusive education: International perspectives*. Routledge.
- Goodley, D. (2017). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction*. Sage Publications.
- Government of Zimbabwe. (2017). *National Disability Policy*. Government of Zimbabwe.
- Kiswahili, B. (2019). Low-cost solutions for accessibility in Kenyan schools. *African Journal of Disability Studies*, 8(3), 30-45.
- Lazarus, S., Desmond, C., & Gcabashe, S. (2015). Parent perspectives on inclusive education: A South African case study. *Disability & Society*, 30(7), 1135-1149.
- Loreman, T., McGhie-Richmond, D., Barber, J., & Lupart, J. (2017). *Inclusive education: Practical approaches to supporting diversity in the classroom*. Routledge.
- Mpofu, E. (2004). *Education and disability in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities*.

- African Journal of Disability Studies, 3(2), 112-126. Retrieved from AJDS
- Mpofu, E., Brehm, W., & Mhaka, N. (2007). Inclusive education in Zimbabwe: A critique of special schools and resource units. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 11(2), 145-160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110600774916>
- Mpofu, E., & Shumba, J. (2012). Barriers to education for children with disabilities in Zimbabwe: A study of primary schools. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 22(4), 237-245.
- Mukhopadhyay, S., & Molosiwa, M. (2014). Professional development for teachers in inclusive education. *Educational Review*, 66(1), 1-15.
- Mukhopadhyay, S., & Nenty, H. J. (2013). Teacher training and its impact on inclusive education in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(22), 1-10. Retrieved from JEP
- Naicker, S., & Engelbrecht, P. (2013). Policy implementation in inclusive education: A case study in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(3), 263-273.
- Ncube, T., & Dube, M. (2016). Accessibility challenges in rural schools in Zimbabwe: The case of Gokwe North. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 26(4), 233-241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207315611054>
- Odom, S. L., Collet-Klingenberg, L., Rogers, S. J., & Myers, B. J. (2013). "A Unified Framework for Identifying Evidence-Based Practices in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special

- Education." Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Oliver, M. (1990). The politics of disablement. Macmillan.
- Shakespeare, T. (2013). Disability rights and wrongs revisited. Routledge.
- Singal, N. (2010). Including children with disabilities in regular schools: A critical review of the literature. *Disability & Society*, 25(2), 165-179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687591003642007>
- Sightsavers. (2021). Advocating for assistive technologies: A guide for policymakers. Retrieved from Sight savers.
- Slee, R. (2011). The inclusive classroom: A critical perspective. In L. Florian & J. Spratt (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education* (pp. 85-95). SAGE Publications.
- Thakur, P. (2016). The role of assistive technology in inclusive education. *Journal of Technology and Education*, 8(2), 45-56.
- UNESCO. (2015). Education for Sustainable Development Goals: