

An investigation of the influence of stakeholder factors affecting the success of the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi primary schools: A case study of four primary schools in Zomba district

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Abstract: *Malawi has focused on providing special educational services, especially for children with visual and hearing impairments in specialized schools. Children with relatively minor learning difficulties, such as slow learners, that is children who are slow in grasping concepts and who require a bit of time before they can understand things have not been provided with special academic support. This study was therefore conducted to determine the influence of stakeholder factors in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream primary schools affecting the success of the implementation of inclusive education. Four mainstream primary schools and thirty-four participants were involved in this study. The results of the study indicated that the implementation of inclusive education is facing a number of stakeholder factors which act as barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream primary schools in the studied schools. These factors include, inadequate funding from the Ministry of Education for effective implementation of inclusive education, lack of specialist teachers to support general education teachers in the mainstream schools, lack of provision of infrastructure suitable for learners with different special needs in the mainstream schools and lack of provision of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials in the mainstream schools by the national education curriculum development centre in Malawi, the Malawi Institute of Education and fifthly, lack of provision of orientation training on inclusive education to school head teachers (principals) and mainstream teachers by the Ministry of Education. The study has thus made recommendations on how to improve the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream primary schools in the country.*

Keywords: Inclusive education; special needs learners; physical disabilities; hearing impairments; speech impairments; visual impairments; specialist teachers; regular teachers; mainstream schools

Introduction

For a long time, Malawi has focused on providing special educational services, especially for children with visual and hearing impairments in specialized schools. Children with relatively minor learning difficulties, such as slow learners, that is children who are slow in grasping



concepts and who require a bit of time before they can understand things have not been provided with special academic support.

As a way of improving the provision of inclusive education in the mainstream schools of the country, as well as a way of complying to the world declarations on promotion of inclusive education, especially, “Education for All”(Thailand, 1990) and “Salamanca Statement” (Spain, 1992), the Malawi government through the Ministry of Education and the Malawi Institute of Education in the country developed the ‘ Malawi National Strategy for Inclusive Education’ which would provide guidelines to mainstream schools and other education stakeholders to guide them in effective implementation of inclusive education.

It is against this background of the development of the ‘Malawi National Strategy for Inclusive Education’ that this study was set out to investigate the influence of the factors of stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream primary schools affecting the success of the implementation of inclusive education, from the perspectives of key stakeholders in the provision of inclusive education in the mainstream schools of the country, namely; Ministries of Education, Health, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) for mainstream schools to implement inclusive education that successfully meet the needs of special needs learners.

Research problem

Since Malawi acceded to the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and the Salamanca Statement in Spain in 1992, research has however revealed that the literacy rate for the country still remains regrettably low (World Bank, Malawi Data Profile, 2015). The main reason for the continuing low rate literacy rates in the country is that for a long time, the country has focused on provision of special educational services for learners with visual and hearing impairments in specialized schools.

Since 2008, some teachers for children with learning difficulties that is children who are slow in grasping concepts and who require a bit of time before they can understand things have been trained at Catholic University of Malawi. In addition, policies have been made to design school buildings that will ease mobility and be comfortable for children with special educational needs, increase government subvention towards special needs education, and increase teacher training for special teachers (Nthalika, 2009).

Despite the country’s efforts to implement the World Declaration on Education for All, through establishment of policies that will facilitate the provision of educational opportunities and chances of success to all learners of varying needs in the country, the current educational situation is still far from addressing the needs of every child. Research is showing that currently, the design of the Malawi education system only allows children of varying needs to be integrated with normal children and compete at the same level with the same learning conditions.



Integration involves bringing the needs of children with special needs, including physical and social needs in line with the system of education, which on the whole, remains unchanged and is not adapted for them. On the other hand, inclusion means reforming the schools and planning school facilities and the curriculum, including the teaching, learning and assessment methods to meet the wants and needs of all children without exception (Irskaia-Smirnova and Loshakova, 2008). The consequences of having an educational situation in the country which is far from addressing the needs of every child are serious and have life-long implications for the country such as school dropout, and low literacy rates which, in the long run, translates into socio-economic disadvantage for those children who were not effectively included in the education system. Therefore, the country cannot realize the world goal to provide access to basic education to all individuals without addressing the needs of all children with varying physical, social, psychological and educational needs.

A study conducted in some selected schools in the northern region to assess challenges faced by teachers when teaching children with special needs found out that general education teachers (regular teachers) have difficulties assisting children with special needs because the teachers are not well informed of children's special needs, hence it is difficult for the teachers to help the children succeed.

Nthalika (2009) argues that in Malawi, a change from integration of children with special needs to full inclusion can only be achieved if the following can be done; firstly, the instruction in the general classroom is modified to address specific learner needs. Secondly, the general education teachers are informed about special educational needs common in Malawi schools and if the assessment at the end of the school term is modified for individuals including those who cannot take regular tests.

It is against this background of the apparent challenges which teachers are facing in teaching children with special needs as revealed by the study in some selected schools in the northern region of Malawi that inspired the undertaking of this study in order to investigate further the stakeholder factors which affect the success of implementation of inclusive education in Zomba district in Malawi.

Many researchers focus only on school-based factors that affect the implementation of inclusive education and make recommendations for improving the implementation of inclusive education basing only on the explored school-based factors related challenges affecting the implementation of inclusive education. This approach often results in the common goals of inclusive education not being achieved. It is for this reason that this study was conceived in order to establish the stakeholder factors which act as challenges in the successful implementation of the Ministry of Education's inclusive education policy, the Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017) so as to unearth the challenges impeding the effective implementation of the policy.

The findings of the study may possibly be utilized by policy makers, especially the Ministry of Education, Head-teachers and teachers for them to come up with possible interventions to



mitigate or minimize the challenges facing the implementation of the inclusive education guidelines, the National Inclusive Education Strategy in Zomba district and the country at large.

Research questions

One main research question and three sub-questions were asked to guide the study as follows:

1. What are stakeholder factors that affect successful implementation of inclusive education in the primary schools in Malawi?

The sub-questions that supported the main question are as follows:

1. What differences are apparent between the Malawi government's inclusive education implementation guidelines, the National Strategy for Inclusive education and the actual inclusive education implementation practices in the primary schools in Malawi?
2. How can the implementation of inclusive education be improved in the mainstream primary schools in Malawi?

Theory and Literature review

This study was informed by illuminative evaluation. Illuminative evaluation was developed by Parlett and Hamilton in 1976. The approach aims at an intensive study of an education innovatory programme or project in terms of how it is operating; how it is influenced by the various school situations in which it is being implemented; what those directly implementing it consider as its advantages and disadvantages and its challenges in implementing it.

Illuminative evaluation focuses attention on describing the way an education programme is being implemented in practice at school level and it matches or compares the way the education programme is being implemented at school level against what was intended by the government as the approach for implementing the programme or intervention as recorded in the government's policy documents. Illuminative evaluation uses two concepts: 'the Instructional system' and 'the Learning milieu'. Its first concept, the 'instructional system', refers to what has been planned and written up in government's documents to guide the implementation of inclusive education at school level. In this study, the instructional system refers to the National Inclusive Education Strategy which provide guidelines on the way the teachers can effectively implement inclusive education in the mainstream schools.

What is also noteworthy though is the argument made by Parlett and Hamilton (1976) that an education programme undergoes modification in the process of being implemented in a complex and naturally existing context of the school. In this case, elements of the educational programme, such as the inclusive education policy can be emphasized or de-emphasized, expanded or reduced as participants in the implementation process such as head-teachers,



teachers, Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB), the Ministry of Education interpret and reinterpret the instructional system in the course of implementation. Thus, the educational programme's objectives may be changed.

The fact that the educational programme is transformed in the process of being implemented in a complex existing school context necessitates the need for an evaluator also to study the context in which an educational programme, in this case, the inclusive education implementation guidelines, the National Inclusive Education Strategy is being implemented. Parlett and Hamilton (1976) refer to the context in which the education programme is being implemented as the "learning milieu". Thus, the second concept, the learning milieu in this study refers to what head-teachers and teachers actually do in implementing an education programme, in this case, the inclusive education implementation guidelines, the National Inclusive Education Strategy.

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the concept of 'Inclusive Education' is relatively new in Malawi. This is evidenced by the fact that most inclusive education projects and activities in Malawi only focus on learners with disabilities. In the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the term "inclusive education" has been defined as a process of reforming the education system, cultures, policies and practices to address and respond to diverse needs of all learners.

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), there are several factors that either exclude learners from and/or within the education system. These include: inaccessible school infrastructure; including classrooms, sanitation facilities, water points, playgrounds and fences around the schools, negative attitudes towards learners with special needs and cultural beliefs, lack of counseling and psychosocial support services for learners with special needs at school and community levels, teachers' lack of experience, skills and knowledge to teach learners with special needs, for example, teachers lack of skills and knowledge of use of sign language and skills of handling curriculum differentiation. According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the other factors that either exclude learners from and/or within the education system include stigma and discrimination which lead to stereotypes of learners with special needs in schools, lack of appropriate assistive devices, lack of learning support/teaching assistants, lack of early identification, assessment and intervention services for learners with special needs and lack of inadequate teaching-learning specialized materials.

It is against this background of apparent exclusion of some learners in the Malawi education system that Ministry of Education, Science and Technology developed the National Strategy for Inclusive Education in 2017 to provide guidelines for effective implementation of inclusive education in the education system of the country. According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the success of inclusive education largely depends on support from different stakeholders. According to El-Gohary, et.al (2006), a stakeholder is an individual or an organization that either is affected by or affect the deliverables or outputs of a specific organization.



According to El-Gohary, et.al (2006), there are two types of stakeholders. These are internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders are those directly involved in an organisation's decision making process, for example, owners and employees of the organization. On the other hand, external stakeholders are those who are not directly involved in an organisation's decision-making process but they are either affected by or affect the deliverables or outputs of a specific organization. There are stakeholders in education undertakings, including inclusive education, just as there are stakeholders in other endeavours.

According to the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, the key stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools include but not limited to the following: Government of Malawi, through Ministry of Education, non-government organizations (NGOs), Development Partners (DPs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), academia, the corporate sector and local community.

According to the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, the Ministry of Education shall take a leading role in managing, coordinating and regulating the implementation of inclusive education to ensure quality delivery of inclusive education. For example, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the district education offices are expected to ensure that the district education plans, programmes and budgets are inclusive; strengthen the capacity of district education management and supervisory teams on inclusive education; collect data on inclusive education in the district, ensure that school infrastructure and facilities are accessible to all learners of varying needs, coordinate assessment and referral activities for learners with special needs and coordinating collaboration between special schools and mainstream schools.

Similarly, the Malawi Institute of Education, which is the national curriculum development centre in Malawi, for primary, secondary and primary school teacher training colleges is expected to ensure that the national curricula at all educational levels are responsive to the needs of diverse special educational needs learners. Similarly, the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB), is expected to address examination related issues to suit the circumstances of the diverse special educational need learners. The organization is expected to provide examinations in different formats to respond to learner diversity.

On the other hand, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), the mainstream schools have a key responsibility for the actual implementation of inclusive education. Their roles include enrolling and teaching learners with diverse needs, identifying learners with diverse needs, documenting and keeping records of learners with diverse needs, providing appropriate care and support to learners with diverse needs, making assessment referrals for learners with diverse special needs where necessary, collaborating with local communities on inclusive education issues and creating enabling environments for diverse learners. In terms of the roles of external stakeholders, such as non-government organizations (NGOs), Development Partners (DPs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), academia, the corporate sector and local community are expected to provide various support services for effective implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools.



For example, the Ministry of Health is expected to conduct regular school clinics to identify children with health problems and disabilities, provide appropriate assistive devices to learners with disabilities, conduct trainings to teachers and parents in different areas of disability, provide guidance and counseling services to learners with special needs, provide rehabilitation services, provide screening and referral services and provide medical services to children with diverse needs. In terms of the Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, disabled people's organizations and faith-based organizations, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), these organisations are expected to support schools in implementing inclusive education through assisting government in resource mobilization, mobilizing and educating communities on inclusive education.

On the other hand, development partners according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017) are expected to provide technical, material and financial support to support the implementation inclusive education in mainstream schools and creating a forum where different partners in inclusive education can share experiences in the implementation of inclusive education. In terms of the role of parents and the community, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), parents and communities are expected to support mainstream schools in the implementation of inclusive education through assisting with the identification of children with diverse special educational needs, and encouraging all children to go to and remain in school till completion. On the other hand, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), political, traditional and religious leaders are expected to support mainstream schools in the implementation of inclusive education through enforcing by-laws aimed at promoting inclusive education and sensitizing parents on the importance of inclusive education.

As this piece of research focused on investigating the factors affecting the success of the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi primary schools the review of literature also delved into a brief review of international and regional practices of inclusive education, especially for United States of America, Asia, Australia and South Africa in order to understand what other international education systems consider to be the strategies for effective implementation of inclusive education as well as to learn lessons on the challenges which other education systems of other countries have encountered in implementing inclusive education and how they have dealt with the challenges. Such lessons can be utilized to improve the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi.

According to Hodkinson and Vickerman (2007), United States model of inclusion is rooted in the philosophy of educating children with special educational needs alongside their non-disabled peers. The American approach to inclusive education is that a child with special educational needs should have the opportunity to be educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible while also being entitled to the same activities and programmes any other non-disabled person.



Similarly, Australia advocates ‘full inclusion’ of all children with special educational needs (Hodkinson and Vickerman (2007). The country’s approach to inclusive education is that all children with special educational needs should be educated in mainstream schools alongside their non- disabled peers. Just like America, the Australian model of inclusion is that schools should be able to accommodate all children’s needs within mainstream settings, incorporating the modification of buildings, the curriculum, and learning and teaching activities.

The challenge of the United States of America and Australia’s approaches to inclusive education however, according to Lindsay (2004) and Carpenter (2006) is that this approach is too simplified in that it usually downplays the need for sufficient and necessary specialized teaching skills and human financial resources required to achieve this approach to inclusive education. This oversight therefore, results in lack of a detailed analysis of the processes required to achieve inclusion for children with special educational needs within these inclusive settings.

Similarly, the Asian countries of Nepal, Korea, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, China, Indonesia, Israel and Thailand have more or less similar approach to inclusive education just like America and Australia. Nepal’s approach to inclusive education for example is to have children with mild to moderate disabilities into mainstream primary education with the target of making special educational provision an integral component of primary education.

Similarly, Philippines approach to the provision of inclusive education is to integrate learners with special educational needs into school system and eventually into the community. Israel’s approach to inclusive education is that it uses both specialist schools as well as mainstream schools to provide access to education to children with special educational needs. According to Avissar (2003), children with special educational needs are sent to specialized schools with few of these being integrated into the main stream schools. Similarly, South African approach to inclusive education is that of integrating children with special educational needs in the mainstream schools alongside their non- disabled peers (Plessis, Conley and Plessis (2007).

Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate stakeholder factors affecting the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy which was designed to achieve the 1994 Salamanca Declaration on Better Education for All through inclusive education, to which Malawi as a country is a signatory.

The researchers felt that the aim of this research was consistent with those of the qualitative research approach. Thus, a qualitative research design, Illuminative evaluation was therefore used to guide the collection of data in this study. The study used a case study research design within the illuminative evaluation qualitative research paradigm. In a case study, a single case is studied in depth, which could be an individual, a group, an institution, a program or a concept (Creswell,2009; Polit and Beck, 2008). A case study design has a potential to enable



the study of things in detail and explain why certain things happen (Creswell, 2009). With case studies, it is possible to gain a unique perspective of a single individual or group (Denscombe, 2003). This study used multiple cases in order to create opportunities for within-case and across-case approaches of data analysis to be done (Creswell, 2009).

The study involved internal and external stakeholders in the implementation of inclusive education. Internal stakeholders included Head-teachers of four primary schools and one teacher for English, one teacher for Mathematics and one teacher for Bible-Knowledge at each of the four schools were the key participants of this study. Head-teachers are key role players in ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of educational policies at school level. Head-teachers are the chief supervisors of the implementation of education policies at school level. These were therefore involved as the key participants in the study. Teachers are the frontline practitioners involved in the implementation of inclusive education at classroom level.

In this study, teachers were chosen according to the three subject clusters in the primary schools of the country. These are languages, sciences and humanities. One subject was chosen from each of these clusters to represent the subject cluster. Teachers of English, Mathematics and Bible Knowledge were involved in the study. The district and the four schools were particularly chosen on the basis of convenience because of their easy accessibility to the researchers. Two of the schools involved in the study were urban and the other two were rural. The study also involved the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and its related departments and offices responsible for running education in the country as key stakeholders stipulated in the National Inclusive education strategy to support the implementation of inclusive education in the schools. In addition to the four schools involved in the study, one primary Teacher Training College (TTC) was also involved in the study.

According to the National Inclusive Educational Strategy, teacher training colleges are expected to support the effective implementation of inclusive education through the provision of quality pre-service inclusive education training to the student teachers. The effectiveness of the teachers in the implementation of inclusive education from these teacher training colleges depends on the quality of the pre-service inclusive education training offered in the training colleges. This study was therefore also interested in finding out about the nature of inclusive education training being offered in the teacher training colleges.

In this study three methods of collecting data were used. These are data document review, face to face interviews and classroom lesson observations. The three methods complemented each other to provide methodological triangulation in the study (Creswell, 2009; Cohen and Manion, 1986). The main document reviewed in the study was the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017). This was studied to investigate the 'intended' way in which the inclusive education strategy is expected to be implemented in the schools.

The other documents studied were teachers' schemes of work, lesson plans and notes. These were scrutinized and analyzed, to understand practice of inclusive education by teachers.



Interviews were also used to obtain further information from the head teachers, teachers and various Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's departments and office's officers, officers from Ministry of Health, Civil society organizations (CSOs) and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, disabled people's organizations faith-based organizations, political, traditional and religious leaders.

The results of the study were analyzed using the thematic content analysis method (Stake, 1995). The biographical data of the participants involved in the study are summarized below:

Biographical data of internal stakeholders involved in the study. The biographical data of the internal stakeholders involved in the study are summarized in tables 1 to 6 below.

Table 1 Characteristics of the head teachers at the four study schools.

Head Teacher	Gender	Age	Qualification	Teaching Experience	School
1	M	50	MSCE	25 years	A
2	M	49	MSCE	12 years	B
3	F	54	MSCE	30 years	C
4	F	51	MSCE	27 years	D

Table 2 Characteristics of the teachers

Teacher	Gender	Age	Teaching class	Academic qualification	Teaching experience	Teaching subject	School
1	Female	28	5	MSCE	7 years	English	C
2	Female	41	7	Diploma		Bible knowledge	B
3	Male	35	7	MSCE	3 years	Bible knowledge	A
4	Male	52	7	MSCE	19 years	Bible knowledge	C
5	Female	56	7	MSCE	31 years	Bible knowledge	D
6	Male	48		MSCE	17 years	English	A
7	Female	45	5	MSCE	17 years	English	D
8	Female	28	4	MSCE	3 years	Mathematics	D
9	Male	38	4	MSCE	19 years	English	A
10	Female	47	4	MSCE	12 years	Mathematics	A
11	Male		4	MSCE	25 years	Mathematics	C
12	Female	29	5	MSCE	1 year	English	B

Table 3 Characteristics of the lecturers

Lecturer	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience	Subject
1	M	48 years	Bachelor's Degree in Education	7 years	Mathematics
2	M	53 years	Bachelor's Degree in Biblical Studies	15 years	Religious Education

3	F	56	Bachelor's Degree in Education	15 years	English
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Table 4 Characteristics of the District Education Managers

District Education Manager	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience
1	Male	58 years	Bachelor's Degree in Education	7 years
2	Male	56 years	Diploma in Education	6 months

Table 5 Characteristics of the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinators in the offices of the rural and urban District Education Managers

Officer	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience
Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinator in the office of the District Education Manager 1	M	45	Diploma in Community Development	4 y ears
Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinator in the office of the District Education Manager 2	M	45	Diploma in Special Needs Education	13 years

Table 6 Characteristics of the Coordinating Primary Education Advisors

Coordinating Primary Education Advisor in the office of the District Education Manager	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience
1	Female	55 years	Diploma in theology	10 years
2	Female	56 years	Malawi School Certificate of Education	9 years

Biographical data of external stakeholders involved in the study. The biographical data of the external stakeholders involved in the study is summarized below.

Characteristics of the Social Welfare Officer from the Ministry of Gender, Disabilities and Social Welfare

The Social Welfare Officer from the Ministry of Gender, Disabilities and Social Welfare was male and 43 years old. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science. He has served in his capacity as the Social Welfare Officer for 19 years.

Characteristics of the Officers from the Ministry of Health

The study involved five health workers from the District Health Office. Four of them were male and one was female. Their ages ranged from 28 to 53. Their qualifications ranged from Diploma to a Master's Degree. The demographic data of these officers from the Ministry of Health have been summarized in table 7 below.

Table 7 Characteristics of the Officers from the Ministry of Health

Title or rank of the medical officer	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience
Clinical Coordinator	M	53 years	Master's Degree	23 years
Chief Orthamic Clinical Officer	M	49 years	Diploma	5 years
Physiotherapist	M	50 years	Diploma	25 years
Rehabilitation Technician	M	39 years	Diploma	19 years
Nurse in-Charge and the School Health and Nutrition Coordinator	F	28 years	Bachelor's Degree	3 years

Characteristics of the officers from the civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

The study engaged three Non-Governmental organizations. These are Save the Children, Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO) and the Catholic Education Commission for Zomba (CECZ). The study involved four officers from these organizations: two officers from Save the Children, one officer from Youth Net and Counseling (YONECO) and one officer from Catholic Education Commission for Zomba. Their ages ranged from 26 to 59. Their qualifications ranged from Diploma to a Bachelor's Degree. Their work experience ranged from 3 to 10 years. The demographic data of these participants has been summarized in table 8 below.

Table 8 Characteristics of the officers from Non-Governmental Organisations

Organization	Officer	Sex	Age	Qualification	Experience
Save the Children	Literacy Boost Officer	F	59	Diploma in Education	3 years
Save the Children	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Coordinator	M	45	Bachelor of Education	3 years
Youth Net and Counseling	Community Mobilization officer	M	39	Diploma in Agriculture	10 years
Zomba Catholic Commission for Education	the Program Officer for Inclusive Education and Acting Education Coordinator	M	26	Bachelor of Social Welfare	4 years

Findings and discussion

The main research question asked in the study was: “What are the stakeholder factors acting as barriers to successful implementation of inclusive education in Zomba district?”, Data analysis led to the following key themes: lack of provision of orientation training on inclusive education to head teachers and mainstream teachers by the Ministry of Education, Unavailability of teaching and learning resources in schools for special education needs learners, lack of specialist teachers to support inclusive education implementation in the mainstream schools, unavailability of infrastructure suitable for the learners with special education needs in the mainstream schools, lack of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials in the schools, lack of inclusive national examination practices, inadequate funding to schools for implementing inclusive education activities, lack of effective inclusive education supervision by District Education Managers and Primary Education Advisors (PEAs), lack of coordination among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in providing support services to mainstream schools for effective implementation of inclusive education and lack of support from communities for effective implementation of inclusive education. These findings are presented and discussed in detail below:

Lack of provision of orientation training on inclusive education to head teachers and mainstream teachers by the Ministry of Education

The Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy which is a policy document guiding the implementation of inclusive education in the primary schools in Malawi, recommends the orientation of the head teachers and teachers as prerequisite for the effective implementation of inclusive education in the schools. This study was therefore interested in finding out if the head teachers in the four study schools as supervisors of inclusive education implementation at school level as well as the mainstream teachers had received any orientation on inclusive education from the Ministry of Education as well as if they consider their orientation as effective enough for them to implement inclusive education effectively.

The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of provision of orientation training to the head-teachers and mainstream teachers on inclusive education. The study found that the head-teachers and teachers in the four study schools did not receive any in-service inclusive education orientation training to enable them to effectively discharge supervisory roles and provide professional support to teachers as stipulated in the Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy. For example, the head teacher at school A, commenting on whether they received any orientation training on inclusive education had this to say:

We have not received any orientation training on inclusive education so that we can be better advisors of our teachers in schools. My teachers, for instance don't know sign language and I don't know it too. What advice can I give them in this case then?



Thus, the study has found that the Head Teachers in the four study schools in Zomba district did not receive inclusive education orientation and this is highly likely to compromise their effectiveness in guiding their teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in their respective schools. In addition to the head teachers being ineffectively oriented on inclusive education, data also revealed that none of the head teachers involved in the study had pre-service training in inclusive education. This is likely affecting the quality of the guidance which the head teachers can give to their teachers on how they can effectively implement inclusive education.

Again, just like the head teachers involved in the study, the study also revealed that teachers too, did not have any inclusive education orientation training. According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy, teacher orientation has to be a priority in preparing teachers for the effective implementation of inclusive education. Teacher training in inclusive education is critical to their ability to deal with classroom dynamics in cases of learner diversity. This study therefore sought to find out if the teachers in the four study schools were oriented on inclusive education and the nature of the quality of their orientation. This study found that the majority of the teachers were not oriented on inclusive education and for those who were oriented, the orientation was not effective enough to enable them to effectively implement inclusive education. Data revealed that 3 out of the 12 teachers interviewed in this study did not receive any orientation training in inclusive education. For example, responding to whether she was oriented on inclusive education, teacher 10, a Mathematics teacher at school A, had this to say:

I did not receive any inclusive education orientation and I am not sure what it really is.

Similarly, teacher 4, a Bible Knowledge teacher at school D, responding to whether she had received any inclusive education training, she said:

Not yet. Likewise, commenting on the quality of his orientation, teacher 11 at school C said: The training I received was too short. I do not think that I really know much about inclusive education. The study has thus found that the majority of the teachers in the four study schools were not oriented on inclusive education. The lack of effective orientation training in inclusive education of teachers may contribute to the teachers not being able to implement inclusive education effectively.

This finding concurs with Passe (2006), who argued that the effective implementation of school innovation is affected by poor preparation of teachers. Passe (2006) further alludes to the fact that teachers cannot implement an innovation project without the basic skills they need in order to do so. The study has indicated that the ineffective orientation of the head teachers and teachers is affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education in Zomba district.

Unavailability of teaching and learning resources in schools for special education needs learners

An effective use of teaching and learning aids to achieve lesson inclusivity depends not only on the teacher's effective orientation but also on the availability of these resources. This study was therefore also interested in finding out about as to whether the Ministry of Education had provided schools with teaching and learning resources that promote the learning of special needs learners in the four study schools. The study found that inclusive education implementation in the four study schools of Zomba district is facing an acute teaching and learning resource challenge.

The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of availability of teaching and learning resources for special education needs learners for the implementation of inclusive education in the four mainstream schools involved in this study. Data revealed that the schools lack teaching and learning resources for special education needs learners in the four study schools in Zomba. For example, when asked as to whether she has teaching and learning resources for teaching learners with special needs, teacher 10, the Mathematics teacher at school A, complained about lack of resources and said:

We lack even the basic teaching and learning materials for special educational need learners here. Inclusive education is being forced upon us without suitable resources for special needs education learners in the schools. Can it work sir? Okay, imagine sir, I have a learner who cannot hear. I cannot use the sign language to communicate with her. What teaching aid can I use to include her fully in my lesson and how can I do that without sign language? I do not think I really know how to use a teaching aid in a class with the deaf and the dumb or the blind'.

This study has thus found that teachers' practice in the implementation of inclusive education in the four study schools is being affected by lack of teaching and learning resources for inclusive education and teachers' lack of knowledge of how to use those resources effectively in cases where there are some available. For example, teacher 5, of school D, alluded to the fact that even if the teaching and learning materials can be physically available, she will still not be able to use them because she still lacks the required knowledge on how to use the teaching and learning materials effectively for learners with special education needs. Similarly, commenting on the availability of the teaching and learning materials for the implementation of inclusive education, the head teacher at school A complained that;

We are expected to do a good job of teaching learners with special educational needs and yet the government has not shown real commitment by providing us with the resources we need.

Similarly, when asked to comment on the availability of teaching and learning materials for the implementation of inclusive education, the head teacher at school C had this to say:



There is no way we can work without tools. We will wait until the Ministry of Education provides these materials. This school has the biggest number of special needs learners in this area, but yet there are no teaching and learning materials for the teaching of the special needs learners here.

Table 9 below summarizes the status of the availability of teaching and learning materials for special needs education learners in the four study schools.

Table 9 The status of the availability of the teaching and learning materials for inclusive education in the four study schools in Zomba district

School	Teaching and learning materials for inclusive education	Number	Condition (good/poor/very poor/adequate for the teaching and learning of the special educational needs learners)
A	1. Teachers' guide in Braille	0	
	2. Students' textbooks in Braille	0	
	3. Pictures raised diagrams	0	
	4. Assistive devices for students with varied education needs	0	
B	1. Teachers' guide in braille	0	
	2. Students' textbooks in Braille	0	
	3. Pictures raised diagrams	0	
	4. Assistive devices for students with varied education needs	0	
C	1. Teachers' guide in Braille	0	
	2. Students' textbooks in Braille	0	
	3. Raised diagrams	0	
	4. Assistive devices for students with varied education needs	0	
D	1. Teachers' guide in braille	0	
	2. Students' textbooks in Braille	0	
	3. Raised diagrams	0	
	4. Assistive devices for students with varied education needs	0	

Table 9 above shows that all the four schools involved in this study did not have any of the four categories of teaching and learning materials for special needs learners.

The study has thus found that all the four study schools did not have teaching and learning materials for the effective implementation of inclusive education. The study therefore

concludes that unavailability of teaching and learning materials for special needs education learners is one the stakeholder factors acting as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusive education in the four study schools.

Lack of specialist teachers to support inclusive education implementation in the mainstream schools

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is expected to deploy qualified specialist teachers for special needs education in all schools to provide guidance and professional support to the regular or general education teachers. This study, therefore, sought to find out about the status of the availability of qualified specialist teachers to support the regular teachers in the implementation of inclusive education, and number of general (regular) education teachers handling learners with different special education needs and whether they were trained or not to handle learners with different special education needs.

The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of availability of qualified specialist teachers to support the regular teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in the four mainstream schools involved in this study. The study found that there are a lot of special educational needs learners belonging to different needs categories who did not have specialist teachers to support them in the four study schools. The finding on the various categories of the special educational needs learners vis-à-vis the specialist teachers available in the four study schools has been presented in table 10 below.

Table 10 Status of the availability of specialist teachers in the four studied schools.

School	Type of learner special education needs	Number of specialist teachers available	Number of general education teachers handling learners with special education needs and oriented on inclusive education	Number of general education teachers handling learners with special education needs but not oriented on special education needs
A	Hearing impairment; visual impairment; Learning difficulties	1	3	28
B	Low vision; Hearing impairment; Dumb; Learning difficulties.	0	0	22
C	Physically challenged; Hearing impairment; Short sight	0	0	16
D	Hearing impairment; Dumb; Reading disabilities	1	3	29



The table above shows that all the four study schools have a challenge in terms of specialist teachers as well as regular teachers who have been oriented to the teaching of inclusive education to handle learners with varied special education needs. Data has revealed that all the four study schools are acutely short of specialist teachers in relation to the various categories of the special education needs learners in the four study schools. For example, schools A and D have only one specialist teacher available at each school to provide support to the 31 and 32 regular teachers respectively. Data revealed further that School D also serves as a resource center for special needs education in Zomba urban but it is being managed by only one specialist teacher who is also single handedly providing inclusive education professional support services to 17 schools in Zomba urban.

When probed to comment on the issue of lack of specialist teachers in Zomba urban, the specialist teacher at school D, one of the schools which also serves as a resource center in Zomba urban bemoaned the situation as follows:

I am the only specialist teacher here at this school. Besides, I am also the only itinerant teacher in the entire Zomba urban. That means I have to help individual regular teachers in resolving various issues they face when handling special education needs learners in 17 schools of Zomba urban using a bicycle.

Table 10 above has further revealed that Schools B and C do not have even a single specialist teacher to provide support to the regular teachers in the implementation of inclusive education. When asked to comment on the lack of specialist teachers at the school, the head teacher at school A had this to say: The Ministry of Education is not helping us. How can we teach special needs education learners without training and without support of the specialist teachers? This is impossible. There is no inclusive education in Malawi yet. Similarly, when asked to comment on the issue of availability of specialist teachers to provide professional support to the regular teachers in the implementation of inclusive education, the head teacher at school C had this to say:

Teachers meet a lot of problems here. We just look at some of the special needs learners moving around the school because we have no specialist teachers to help us handle them. There is one student born in 1991 and is always in standard 7. We do not really know how we can help her. Teachers have abandoned special needs learners because there are no resources and they have no useful skills to handle special needs learners. At one point, G12, the Japanese organization that supports inclusive education in schools supported teachers that made special effort in inclusive education. But this stopped. There has not been sustainability of projects that support inclusive education.

The study has thus found that lack of specialist teachers to provide professional support to the regular teachers in the implementation of inclusive education is one of the main stakeholder factors acting as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusive education in the studied schools in Zomba district. This contradicts the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's National Inclusive Education Strategy which stipulates that the Ministry of



Education, Science and Technology will deploy specialist teachers in the schools of Malawi to provide professional support to the regular teachers for effective implementation of inclusive education in classroom situations.

This finding concurs with Lindsay (2004) and Carpenter (2006), who argue that sufficient specialized skills are necessary for effective implementation of inclusive education. This finding further concurs with Muchangi (2010) and Sabola (2007) who argued that when education innovations are conceptualized, the Ministries of Education of countries do not first of all ensure that the factors that affect the effective implementation of the innovation are minimized before the innovation is put into practice in the classrooms of schools. For example, according to Muchangi (2010), the Ministries of Education of countries do not first of all ensure that qualified teachers are available prior to introducing an innovation.

Unavailability of infrastructure suitable for the learners with special education needs in the mainstream schools

According to the Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology have a role of ensuring that schools in the country have the infrastructure that is suitable for the learners with special educational needs. This includes the availability of ramps and special needs learners' user-friendly toilets to allow learners using wheel chairs to access the mainstream schools and the classrooms. This study therefore was interested in finding out the extent to which the four study schools in Zomba district have infrastructure that is suitable for the learners with special educational needs.

The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of availability of infrastructure suitable for learners with special education needs for the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools involved in this study. The study has found that the schools involved in the study have very minimal infrastructure that is suitable for the learners with special educational needs learners as summarized in tables 11 and 12 below.

Table 11 The statistics of learners with various special needs in the four study schools

School	Learners with Hearing impairments and their specific issues	Learners with Physical Disabilities and their specific issues	Learners with visual impairments and their specific issues	Learners with Learning difficulties and their specific issues	Learners with Speech Impairment	Learners with other various kinds of special needs
A	Hearing difficulties - 6 Deaf - 1	Lameness in the leg - 1	Short sight - 8 Long sight - 3	Reading disability - 3 Slow learners - 53	Dumbness - 1	Mentally unstable - 1
B	Hearing difficulties		Low vision - 5	Slow learners - 62 Hyperactive - 1	Incoherent utterances -	Epileptic - 1

	- 8				1	Deaf and dumb - 1 Terminal illness - 1
C	Hearig difficulties - 16	Lameness in the leg - 1	Low vision - 6	Reading disability - 6 Slow learners - 343		
D	Hearing difficulties - 6	Lameness in the leg - 1	Low vision - 25	Slow learners - 59		

Table 12 The status of the availability of infrastructure that is suitable for learners with special needs

School	Infrastructure	Number
A	1.Total number of ramps (paths for the physically challenged) around the school	8
	2.Spacious toilets for learners with physical disabilities	0
	3. Total number of classrooms at the school	19
	4.Clsrooms with ramps	8
B	1.Total number of ramps (paths for the physically challenged)	4
	2.Spacious toilets for those with disabilities	2
	3. Total number of classrooms at the school	12
	4.Clsrooms with ramps	3
C	1.Total number of ramps at the school (paths for the physically challenged)	16
	2.Spacious toilets for those with disabilities	0
	3. Total number of classrooms at the school	16
	4.Clsrooms with ramps	16
D	1.Total number of ramps (paths for the physically challenged)	6
	2.Spacious toilets for those with disabilities	0
	3.Total number of classrooms at the school	16
	4.Clsrooms with ramps	6

The study has thus found that most of the schools involved in the study do not have the infrastructure that is suitable for learners with special education needs. Data has revealed that most of the schools involved in the study do not have adequate ramps around the schools to provide easy access to classrooms and other school facilities by learners with physical disabilities. For example, out of the four schools involved in the study, only one school, school C, has ramps on all the classrooms. Similarly, data has also revealed that most of the schools involved in the study do not have user friendly toilets for the special needs learners that use wheelchairs. For example, out of the four schools involved in the study, only one school, school B, has toilets suitable for use by the special educational need learners using wheelchairs. The study has thus found that lack of infrastructure to accommodate inclusive

education learners is one of the main challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education.

This finding concurs with Hodkinson and Vickerman (2007) argument that inclusion in education must incorporate the modification of buildings, among other things, to accommodate learners with diverse special educational needs. To the contrary, data of this study has revealed that the schools in the study have not yet been modified in response to this requirement. Therefore, lack of infrastructure suitable for learners with diverse special education needs is of the main stakeholder factors affecting the successful implementation of inclusive education in the schools of Zomba district.

Lack of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials in the schools

According to the Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy, the national primary, secondary and primary teacher education national curriculum development center, the Malawi Institute of Education is expected to develop special needs education textbooks and other instructional materials. The study therefore was also interested in finding out if the Malawi Institute of Education is developing and providing special needs textbooks and other instructional materials for implementation of inclusive education in the primary schools in Zomba district. The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of provision of special needs textbooks for the implementation of inclusive education in the schools involved in this study. The study found that the Malawi Institute of Education is currently not yet developing special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials for implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools of the country. For example, when asked to comment on the extent to which the Malawi Institute of Education is fulfilling its role producing and providing special needs textbooks and other instructional materials for effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools in the country, the Malawi Institute of Education's special needs curriculum specialist responded that:

Yes, this is an important part of our work. But the development of special needs textbooks and other instructional materials is facing huge financial challenges to the extent that we are not able to fulfill our roles.

The Special Need and Inclusive Education Division Coordinator confirmed lack of special needs textbooks in the schools. She commented that:

If you move around the schools in this division, you are not going to find large print materials for those learners with low vision and yet this is one big problem affecting a majority of the special educational needs learners. We have just received now large print text books for standard 4 (grade 4) which may not even suffice for all the schools in Zomba district.



The study has thus found that the implantation of inclusive education in Zomba district is being ineffectively implemented because of lack of special needs textbooks and other instructional materials as the national curriculum development center in Malawi, the Malawi Institute of Education is currently not able to produce the special needs textbooks and instructional materials because of financial challenges. Data of this study has also revealed that the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi is ineffective because of lack of inclusive national examination practices. This finding is discussed next in detail in the subsection below.

Inadequate funding to schools for implementing inclusive education activities

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017-21), the Ministry of Education is expected to increase funding to schools to enable them implement inclusive education effectively. Sufficient funding is needed for purchasing of teaching and learning materials for special needs children. This study was therefore also interested in finding out about the sufficiency of funding for implementing inclusive education activities in the primary schools involved in this study. The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of funding for the implementation of inclusive education in the schools involved in this study. The study found that inclusive education implementation activities in Zomba district are facing critical insufficient financial support from the Ministry of Education to the schools. Data revealed that inclusive education activities implementation is not being financially prioritized by the education authorities. For example, when asked to comment on the sufficiency of financial allocation for implementation of inclusive education for the mainstream schools of the district, the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinator in the of the office the District Education Manager for Zomba urban complained that,

It is very unfortunate that we the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinators are not part of the budgeting and yet we are the ones doing the hardest part of the work. We always have good plans but we do not implement them due to lack of funds.

This study has thus found that inclusive education implementation in Zomba district is facing a critical financial support challenge. This contradicts the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017) which stipulates that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will provide sufficient funds for effective implementation of inclusive education activities in the schools of the country.

Lack of support from the communities for the effective implementation of inclusive education in schools

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017), communities are supposed to provide various kinds of support to the main stream schools for effective implementation of inclusive education. This study was therefore also interested in finding out if communities are providing any support to the schools for the effective implementation of inclusive education in



the four studied schools. The study found that there is a mismatch between the instructional system and the learning milieu of inclusive education in the four studied schools in the area of support from the communities in the implementation of inclusive education in the schools. The study found that the communities are not providing any support to the schools for effective implementation of inclusive education in the four studied schools. For example, when asked to comment on the nature of support provided by the community to the schools for effective implementation of inclusive education, teacher 11 of school C, complained that,

Apart from the issue of the feeding programme which brought parents together to discuss how the programme can be implemented effectively, the parents do not support the school much on the issue of the education of learners with special needs. We do not have any kind of support yet.

Similarly, teacher 12, of school B, who took the unprecedented step to meet a parent of a special educational need learner concurred with teacher 11 of school C and complained that,

There is no forum for parents and teachers to discuss issues affecting special needs learners. There has never been any meeting here that I know of. But this is a big challenge really because there is a lot we could be able to learn about these learners from their parents and perhaps advise them on what kind of support the special education needs children may need from their guardians in their homes depending on the learner's challenges. When we meet parents during PTAs (parent and teacher's associations) it is only general issues that dominate in our meetings, nothing about special needs learners is discussed, and because of this, one day, I was compelled to call a parent who has hearing impairment, to tell me how they communicate with their child. I wanted to learn from the parent on how best the child can be handled by teachers at school. It is quite unfortunate that there is not much collaboration between the parents and the teachers to share ideas on how learners with special needs can be better handled.

This study has therefore found that lack of support from the communities to the schools to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education in the schools is another main stakeholder factors affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the stakeholder factors acting as barriers to successful implementation of inclusive education in Zomba district in Malawi. The study found that there are a number of stakeholder factors that act as barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream primary schools in Zomba district in Malawi. These factors are; (1) lack of provision of orientation training on inclusive education to head teachers and mainstream teachers by the Ministry of Education. (2) unavailability of teaching and learning resources in schools for special education needs learners. (3) lack of specialist teachers to



support inclusive education implementation in the mainstream schools. (4) unavailability of infrastructure suitable for the learners with special education needs in the mainstream schools. (5) lack of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials in the schools. (6) lack of inclusive national examination practices. (7) inadequate funding to schools for implementing inclusive education activities, lack of effective inclusive education supervision by District Education Managers and Primary Education Advisors (PEAs). (8) lack of coordination among Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in providing support services to mainstream schools for effective implementation of inclusive education and (9) lack of support from communities for effective implementation of inclusive education.

In view of these stakeholder factors which act as barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream primary schools, this study proposes the following as some of the possible solutions. Firstly, the Ministry of Education should make sure that the teaching and learning materials for inclusive education are available in the mainstream schools of the country. Secondly, the Ministry of Education should consider establishing school-based continuing professional development in inclusive education to the regular mainstream schools' teachers to improve their pedagogical content knowledge of inclusive education and thirdly, the Malawi Institute of Education should consider providing text books as well as teachers' guide in Braille for special education needs learners in primary schools of the country.

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