

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON SIX PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN GLEN VIEW/MUFAKOSE EDUCATION DISTRICT OF ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A global concern for inclusive education has been demonstrated by the different international conferences held over the past decades to address issues of equality and equity in education. Some governments have come up with laws and policies that support the implementation of inclusive education. Inclusivity entails that learners with disabilities learn together with non-disabled learners. It is important that there are checks and balances on the extent to which inclusive education is being implemented and how different groups are being catered for in schools. The paper focuses on challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities within the context of inclusive education in Glen View/Mufakose district in Harare. The study used the mixed methodology and the case study and the descriptive survey designs. Six primary schools were purposively sampled. Thirty teachers were randomly sampled and twenty learners with learning disabilities were opportunistically selected. The study used questionnaires, face-to-face interviews and observations to collect data. The study came up with the conclusions that: teachers lacked training in the handling of learners with learning disabilities; learners with learning disabilities were being wrongly labeled; the use of ability grouping had disadvantaged learners with learning disabilities; class sizes and lack of supportive devices impeded on the development of learners with learning disabilities. The study recommends that there has to be capacity building for teachers if the implementation of inclusive education is to be successful. It also recommends that communities have to mobilize resources to support the implementation of inclusive education. Lastly the Schools Psychological Services Department has to play a visible role in schools.

**Key words:** Inclusive Education, Learners, Learning Disabilities, Mental Disability, Primary School

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The issue of rights and democracy have impacted on the need to reform education policies in many countries. To take care of these two, there have been reforms and changes in education curricula worldwide. One of the tools that have been used to promote change and reforms is education. For such reforms and changes to be effective, they had to start with education itself. In that regard education is perceived as a panacea to the promotion of justice, equality and equity. It is within this context that governments have come up with educational policies that are intended to promote equality and equity within schools and the community at large. In that

regard, schools have been used to reflect the values, goals and aspirations of the nation. Such aspirations and values are epitomised by the policies which are enacted. These policies are derived from the political philosophies and ideologies of the classes and groups that are in power. There are different factors that have contributed to inequalities in education and society as a whole. These include poverty, lack of accessibility, and discrimination on the basis of class, race, gender and disability. Some of the most disadvantaged people are those with different forms of disabilities. These include people with physical disabilities, mental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, the blind, people with hearing impairments and those living with albinism among others. There is evidence to the effect that some have been discriminated on the basis of these different forms of disabilities. At some stage in history, children with severe learning disabilities were not considered for educational placement, but were kept mainly in asylums. Such practices promoted separation and exclusion of children from the society in which they were expected to function.

Like many other countries, Zimbabwe had to show its commitment to Education for All (EFA) by enacting laws and policies that promoted inclusive education. Such laws included the 1987 Education Act, and the Revised Education Act of 1996. While the Acts did not specifically refer to the provision of inclusive education, the stipulation that every child in Zimbabwe should have the right to education implied that education in Zimbabwe had to be inclusive in nature. The different international conferences on inclusive education demonstrate a global concern for inclusive education. Such concerns have put inclusive education on the global agenda. Inclusive education is expected to embrace diversity within the education system and society. The major challenges in education today go beyond issues of accessibility and availability. They include the need to improve the quality of education and the development of relevant skills. The challenge is on education providers to come up with high-quality equitable education which caters for all learners.

As noted above, the issue of making education inclusive has been on the international agenda for many years. Such concerns were demonstrated by international conferences and conventions such as the Dakar Framework for Action of 2000, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), declarations on Education for All (EFA) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Dakar Framework for Action of 2000 was a commitment by governments to the provision and achievement of education for all (EFA). It also demonstrated a commitment by different governments to previous declarations on education for all and conventions on the rights of the child. As stated by UNESCO (1994) education systems must be inclusive, actively seeking out children who are not enrolled and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of learners. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places emphasis on the need to reach out people with disabilities as part of the national development programme. Society cannot afford to ignore an important constituent such as people with disabilities in their education plan. The World Bank (2016) estimates that between 110 million and 190 million experience some form of disability globally. They remain the most vulnerable because they have to compete for attention, resources, acceptance and space and recognition within their environment. Even in cases where there are efforts to accommodate children with disabilities in the mainstream school system, facilities within schools have remained a challenge. Children with disabilities end up excluded from acquiring relevant skills. The focus on inclusive education has to go beyond rhetoric. It has to aim at improving a number

of areas. These include improvement of access, the need to address issues of equity and quality and making the school curriculum relevance to the needs of the learner and society. At the same time, the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teachers have to be developed through capacity-building programmes.

Within the context of EFA, inclusive education was meant to curb these challenges through inclusion which would prepare learners for life. However these practices have their own challenges particularly on the learner. Schools need to provide adequate and suitable learning-teaching materials to cater for learners with learning disabilities. Apart from lack of specialised trained teachers, qualified school administrators and suitable infrastructure, most learners with severe learning disabilities seem not to be accorded quality tuition.

Mpofu (2004) notes that concerns about inequalities and disparities in education have also been demonstrated in other countries such as the Republic of South Africa. This led to the government of the Republic of South Africa to set up committees which included the National Committee on Education Support Services soon after attaining democracy in 1994. The reports by the committees provided the Department of Education (2002) with policy guidelines on inclusive education. All these guidelines were meant to meet the main goal of building an inclusive education system. However, despite the policy guidelines and the declaration of education as a right, the provision of inclusive education in many countries has been affected by many factors. Such factors included inadequate resources, attitudes of families, communities and teachers, lack of accessibility, poverty, lack of information and high teacher ratio in public schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Efforts by governments and international agencies in terms of providing policy frameworks and legislation to guide the implementation of inclusive education demonstrate that inclusive education has become critical in our efforts to provide education for all. The implementation of inclusive education has faced many challenges. This study makes an effort to find out challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities as regards the implementation of inclusive education at primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study aims to find answers to the question: What are the challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities in primary schools?

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to examine challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities in primary schools. There are different policies that have been put in place to promote inclusive education in Zimbabwe. These have included an integrated approach to teaching and learning of learners with disabilities and special needs. It is important that we match the will power demonstrated in the launch of inclusive Education for all with practice.

### **Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To establish how learners with learning disability are identified in primary schools.
- To examine strategies used to assist learners with learning disabilities.

- To identify the nature of inclusion in the selected primary schools.
- To identify the state of resources that support inclusion of learners in primary schools.

### **Research Questions**

To find answers to the main research problem, the study came up with the following research questions:

- How are learners with learning disabilities identified in primary schools?
- What strategies are used to assist learners with learning disabilities in primary schools?
- What is the level of inclusion in the selected primary schools?
- To what extent do resources and facilities in primary schools support the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities?

### **Significance of the study**

The study provides an assessment on the extent to which the education system has been inclusive with regards to learners with learning disabilities. This will provide valuable information to different stakeholders such as teachers, parents and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The study may also contribute to influencing the development of strategies on how to make education in primary school inclusive. It is also hoped that the study will broaden our understanding of inclusive education as it focuses on the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities, thereby contributing ideas to the inclusive education discourse. It also provides an opportunity to uncover challenges that are faced by primary schools in their efforts to implement inclusive education. Inclusive education remains a topical issue and as such, the study may contribute to new perceptions in the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools.

### **Assumption of the study**

The study is premised on the following assumptions:

- That there are challenges that have negatively impacted on the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities in the mainstream classes.
- Teachers' negative attitudes may affect the teaching and learning of children with learning disabilities.

### **Delimitations of the study**

The study focused on six primary schools in Glen View/Mufakose Education District in Harare. From these schools a sample of thirty teachers was purposively selected. These were qualified teachers and holders of either Certificates of Education, Diplomas in Education or Degrees in Special Education. The study was limited to an assessment of the implementation of inclusive education of learners with learning disabilities. It focused on the selection process, support services, resources and facilities in schools and the attitudes of teachers.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was conducted in a short time and had to focus on six purposively selected primary schools. The researcher was aware of the limitations of the data collection methods used in the

study. So both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to improve on the validity and reliability of the study. Some of the questionnaires were not returned and the researcher had to organize for interviews to complement the questionnaire as a data collection instrument.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Conceptual/Theoretical Framework: Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education as a philosophy brings in the ideology of moving away from the practice of separating and segregation of children with disabilities from the mainstream school. The philosophy of inclusion is premised on the understanding that society has the responsibility to make individuals function within their society. This comes about through training and acquisition of skills that are relevant to the individual and society's needs. Rather than segregating children with special needs in separate classes and schools, the ideology of inclusive education is about adjusting school environments to meet the needs of all learners. The educational system is now responsible for including a large diversity of learners and for providing appropriate education for everyone. Inclusion in education is characterized by the requirement to place learners with disabilities in a general education classroom; there have to be resources and facilities that support learning; the school has to be accessible to all who require education; the school has to be within the learner's local environment; the placement should be of benefit to the learner; the teachers have to be well trained to handle learners with different disabilities; and there should be full participation and involvement of the community in the education of their children. Some of the major issues that relate to inclusion are placement of learners in natural general education settings and teaching and learning occurring within the same environment with learners who do not have disabilities. In other words, the implementation of inclusive education in schools is characterized by identifying barriers that negatively impact on children with learning disabilities accessing education, elimination of factors that hinder involvement and participation of learners with disabilities, and provision of resources to support teaching and learning of learners with disabilities.

### **Mental disability and Learning disabilities**

There has been confusion between the terms mental disability and learning disability in some instances. Mental disability refers to substantial limitation in present function (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1997). They note that children with mental disabilities have sub-average intellectual functioning with related limitations in two or more of the following; applicable adaptive skill areas, communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self direction, health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work. This definition gives insight into possible needs of the child in real day-to-day life experiences and situations. It stresses interaction among three major dimensions in the child's life. These are the child's capabilities, the environment in which the child functions and the need for varying levels of support. The intermittent, limited, extensive and persuasive levels of support depend on an individual and may be high or low intensity on provision. There are more similarities than differences between children with mental disability and those without. First and foremost, children with mental disability are children first just like any other children. The children with mental disability are human beings and have many things in common with most children.

Mental disabilities and learning disabilities do not necessarily mean the same thing. Helpguide.org notes that children with learning disabilities see, hear, and understand things differently. Such problems affect their reading, writing, reasoning and speaking. The signs and symptoms differ from age group to age group. These are preschool age, ages 5-9 and ages 10-13. In the preschool age group, the common signs and symptoms include problems with pronouncing words, failure to follow learning routines, challenges learning alphabet, shapes and numbers, and challenges in the controlling of motor skills. In other age groups the challenges that are common in children with learning disabilities include problems with reading comprehension, lack in organizational skills, and poor handwriting and poor development of Mathematics skills. Other general problems that are associated with children with learning disabilities include low attention span, poor coordination, and problems with following directions. The problems may be characterized by impetuous behaviour.

Children with mental disability have problems in information processing. Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) cited four areas related to cognition in which children are likely to have challenges. These are attention, memory, language and academic achievement. The children with attention problem have difficulty in attending, and maintaining attention. Children with mental disabilities have difficulties in realizing learning strategies. They have problems in recalling as they have short memory. Language problem is evidenced in children with mental disabilities. Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) further observed that children with learning disabilities tended to be rejected by their peers and had lower self concept. The cues are at times misrepresented and children with disabilities may end up segregated. Such segregation may lower their self-esteem which in turn hinders their participation in class. Teachers in regular classes may not accommodate inconsistencies in behaviour and some demands and expectations may be overwhelming on the part of both the teacher and the learner. The focus of education programmes varies according to the degree of learner's disability or how much the learner requires support services as it was noted that the lesser the degree of disability, the more the teacher emphasizes academic skills, and the greater the degree of disability, the more stress there is on self help, community living and vocational skills (Hallahan and Kauffman, 1997).

On the other hand, there are equally divergent views when it comes to defining the term learning disabilities. At times there have been inconsistencies in the definition of the term learning disabilities. The differences in definition and comprehension of the term learning disabilities have come about as a result of the different fields that are now using the term. The paper considers three definitions that could help in explaining the term learning disabilities. First the paper considers the definition by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) (2015) which gives their official definition of learning disabilities as the presence of disorders that have a bearing on the acquisition, organization, retention and understanding of information and these affect learning. There are major elements of the LDAC's conceptualization of the term learning disabilities which include areas of development that are affected and the forms of interventions that can assist the children with learning disabilities. The areas that may be affected include oral language, reading, written language and mathematics. The forms of interventions include specific skill instruction, accommodations, compensatory strategies and self-advocacy skills (LDAC, 2015). The definition is important in that it helps us to identify areas that indicate the presence of learning disabilities in learners when they come to school at the same time proposing interventions that teachers and parents can use to help children with learning disabilities acquire and develop self-advocacy skills. In the United Kingdom the terms learning

disabilities and learning difficulties are at times used interchangeably. Valuing People (2001) identity at least three factors that characterize learning disabilities as:

- A learner with learning disabilities has significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information;
- A learner with learning disabilities has reduced ability to cope independently; and
- A learner with learning disabilities may have an impairment that started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on the development of the individual.

Like in the first definition, the above refers to challenges the child has to cope with in everyday routines. The third definition examined by the paper is as summarized by Hardman, Drew and Egan (1999) who refer to learning disabilities “as a general umbrella term that includes a variety of specific problems of both an academic and a behavioral nature”(p.175). The definition by Hardman et al makes reference to academic performance and the behaviour of the learners in relation to what is expected of them. While the reference to academic performance is important as we conceptualize the term learning disabilities we risk the danger of confusing it with mental disability and intellectual disability. Despite the confusion that may arise, the sustainable argument is that inclusivity has to recognize the existence of these different groups in society.

The philosophy of inclusion calls for teachers to know more about education of the disabled including children with severe intellectual disability. Teachers should possess as well as acquire knowledge and skills to help learners with severe intellectual disability develop cognitively, socially, emotionally and physically. According to Mpofu (2004) learners with severe intellectual disability should learn the same content with other learners but with minor modifications. Curriculum content should not be altered but methods and activities as well as models of instructions should be changed to suit the demands of the special learners. In these cases, Individualized Education Plans (IEP) should be prepared for each child with severe learning disabilities. Teachers should give more emphasis on functional life skills designed to help students learn to work, do domestic activities or leisure skills needed for independent living. If possible the ordinary regular teacher should try to change the classroom environment to suit the needs of these particular learners. Learners with severe learning disabilities require individual attention and their work should be presented in small teachable units. On the other hand, such learners should have to be taught functional academics which focus on activities like reading, writing and basic mathematics.

Inclusive education has a number of benefits. Learners with learning disabilities benefit from sharing with learners who do not have learning disabilities. It is also argued that interaction between different groups increases social acceptance. Inclusive education promotes team work among teachers, at the same time recognizes the individual rights of learners. It promotes interaction among learners contributes towards the eradication of stigmas and segregation. Inclusion develops relationships and creativity that would not be possible in segregated situations.

However the implementation of inclusive education has been characterized by a number of challenges in most developing countries. Gwala (2006) conducted a study on Challenges facing

the implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. The study concluded that the major challenges were lack of knowledge and experience on the part of the teacher, uncertainty of roles as demonstrated by teachers, inadequacy in skills in teaching learners with disabilities, negative attitudes by teachers, and the dependency on referring learners with disabilities to specialists outside the school set-up even in cases that could be dealt with within the inclusive set up. A study by Silwamba (2005) on inclusive education in Zambia highlighted factors which hindered the full implementation of inclusive education in schools. These factors included economic conditions in Zambia at the time of the study, lack of human and material resources to support implementation of inclusive education, limited support of inclusive education by teachers, and the reliance on donor aid for the implementation of educational reform programmes. The two studies demonstrated the common challenges that impacted negatively on the implementation of inclusive education. What stand out in the two studies are the problems of resources and negative attitudes exhibited by teachers. Silwamba (2005) adds another dimension that negatively affects the implementation of programmes in developing countries, thus the dependence on donor agencies. Such donor agencies unfortunately have their own agendas and in most cases the aid comes with strings attached. From the two studies cited above, it can be observed that the implementation of inclusive education in school has been characterized by problems that require a holistic approach in order to provide equal educational opportunities.

Other factors that have promoted the exclusion of learners with learning disabilities include low level of schooling when compared with learners with non-disabilities, unsuitable facilities in schools, lack of understanding of learners with special needs by teachers and the community and stigmatization and prejudice in everyday life.

### **Research methodology**

The study used the mixed methodology. It had the advantages of using qualitative methods and quantitative methods of collecting and analyzing data. There were research questions that required qualitative methods of collecting data and others that required quantitative methods of generating data. The study was guided by two research designs. Six primary schools that offer inclusive education were selected and therefore became cases to be studied and the case study design was employed. In order to get responses from respondents the descriptive survey was used.

### **Population and sample**

According to information at the Glen View/Mufakose Education District there were thirty one primary schools in the district. A sample of six primary schools was conveniently selected. Once in the selected schools a sample of thirty teachers was randomly selected. The number of learners that participated was determined by the number of learners with learning disabilities found in each school. The learner respondents were opportunistically sampled. Twenty learners with learning disabilities were sampled.

### **Data Collection Instruments**



Data was collected through the use structured questionnaires, open-ended questionnaires and interviews. The open-ended questionnaires and semi structured interview guides were used to gather information from respondents. Questionnaires were used because the subjects are always free to answer and disclose anything in the absence of the researcher. Furthermore, questionnaires provided respondents with enough time to answer questions. Questionnaires were easy to administer and as they were distributed to a small sample that was easy to manage. The use of different methods of data collection provided for data triangulation in the study.

### **Analysis of Data**

Due to the nature of the data collected, presentation was done in tabular form. The number of respondents who would have responded to each variable was given with its percentage. The data was qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. It was analyzed based on themes that emerged from the responses and research questions.

### **Findings**

The study focused on the challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities in the selected primary schools. This was done as a way of establishing the extent to which education had been inclusive within the context of the selected group. The findings that underpin the challenges faced by learners with learning disabilities in primary schools are presented under the following themes:

- Characteristics of the respondents;
- Identification and distribution of learners with learning disabilities;
- Behaviour of learners with learning disabilities;
- Class sizes and teachers' attitudes; and
- Resources and facilities to support learning.

### **Characteristics of respondents**

Out of the total sample of thirty teachers, 70% of the respondents were females and only 30% were males. This shows that the teaching profession is skewed in favour of females in the six selected primary schools. Gender equality is a goal that has been accepted by governments and international organisations, and the global patterns of inequality show that men are not interested in teaching in primary schools (UN, 2002). Another major characteristic was age. The results show that 10% of the teachers were in the 20-25years, 15% were in the 26-30 years age group, 60% were in the 31-45 years age group, and 15% were 46 years and above. Age and experience are important when dealing with learners with learning disabilities. The teachers had Diplomas in Education and Degrees in Education. Such qualifications made it easier for respondents to read and interpret questionnaires. According to the teachers' responses on qualification, only 6% had a degree in special education. The majority of the teachers, 65% held a diploma in education. 14% of the teachers had Bachelor of Education degree, while 15% had the Certificate in Education. This shows that some of the teachers did not have qualifications in special education.

## Identification and Distribution of Learners with Learning Disabilities

The teachers were asked to explain how they identified children with learning disabilities in their classes. The teachers gave different strategies they used to identify and diagnose learners with learning disabilities. The commonly used strategies included identifying learners who had the following: difficulty with reading and writing, problems with learning new skills, difficulty with learning and grasping mathematics concepts, poor coordination, poor organisation and impulsive behaviour. Another strategy used by some of the teachers was getting feedback from the previous grade teacher. While all the strategies noted by the teachers assist in the identification of learners with learning disabilities, they fall short when it comes to distinguishing slow learners, late developers and learners that require remediation from learners with learning disabilities. The lack of distinction became pronounced during class observations, as it was noticeable that some of the learners categorised as learners with disabilities were late developers and remedial cases. What was also common in the classes was grouping of learners according to ability. In most of the cases, learners with learning disabilities were referred to as the teacher's group. At the same time, there appeared to be lack of a clear evaluation procedure in the schools as the strategies employed tended to differ from teacher to teacher and school to school. While there is the Schools Psychological Services department in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, its role in the identification of learners with learning disabilities at school level was not clearly pronounced. Such evaluation has to be done by a trained psychologist. Evaluation of learners with learning disabilities has to consider input from parents and guardians, medical findings that can assist in the education and development of the learner, and relevant information to determine the nature of special education and services required (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2010).

On the same note, ability grouping as indicated by some of the teachers impacted negatively on the whole concept of inclusive education. It may lead to labelling of learners with learning disabilities. At the same time, it can promote segregation and exclusion within the classroom set-up, which negate the philosophy of inclusivity. Labelling may contribute to stigmatization of learners with disabilities. As noted by Wheelock (1992) ability grouping can be harmful to learners in many ways which include the following: the criteria used to group learners is at times subjective, learners end up taking up labels from teachers, peers and those labels that they create in their own minds, and ability grouping creates different expectations.

The process of selecting learners with learning disabilities remains a contested area. Assessment is a critical component in our attempt to make education inclusive. Such assessment as noted by Hardman, Drew and Egan (1999) has to be guided by the following questions: What are the reasons to fully investigate the abilities of the learner? Why do we suspect the learner to have disabilities? What are the characteristics of the disabilities and what interventions are appropriate? Lastly there is need to check on how we can plan for the future of the learner. In an attempt to find answers to the above questions, it is important that the assessor involves the parents or guardians of the learner. As the assessor attempts to find answers to these questions, he/she has to be guided by the need to examine the following areas about the learner: the learner's intelligence; the learner's adaptive skills; and the learner's academic achievement. It has been noted that the assessment methods for learners with learning disabilities are very much

the same as those with other children with special needs and as such the assessor needs specialist training, otherwise learners may end up being wrongly labelled.

### **Behaviour of Learners with Learning Disabilities.**

It was evident that most respondents (100%) agreed that the children with learning disabilities are hyper-active. They have attention deficits and at the same time they cannot follow instructions which are simple. Also the results imply that they lack confidence and creative thinking skills. These learners have poor fine motor skills and are very slow in grasping concepts. So as a result their performance is poor. The teachers also noted that learners with learning disabilities have reading deficits (dyslexia), mathematics deficits (dyscalculia), and written expression deficit and handwriting difficulties (dysgraphia) among other forms of deficits. Most of learners who have learning disabilities experience developmental milestones in speaking, talking and walking which causes psychological disorders. Hallahan and Kauffman (1997) cited four areas related to cognition in which children are likely to have challenges. These are attention, memory, language and academic achievement. The children with attention problem have difficulties in realizing learning strategies. They have problems in recalling as they have short memory.

### **Size of class and teachers' attitudes**

The classes observed in the schools visited had more than forty five learners each. That represented high class sizes. 84% of the teachers indicated that their performance was negatively affected by the large classes that they had, while 16% of the teachers attributed low performance to other factors. They argued that the large classes affected the teachers' concentration on learners with learning disabilities. The teachers said most learners were left behind since they were labelled as dull. Teachers noted that children with learning disabilities needed more time and the teacher should have one-on-one correspondents with the learners. They also noted that the large classes did not promote Individual Education Programmes (IEP) that focus on developing specific skills in learners with specific learning needs. It was also noted that when classes are large, learners with learning disabilities tended to suffer as they were in some cases ignored.

The findings show that only 3% of the teachers interviewed thought that the inclusion of learners with learning disabilities in a regular classroom setting lessens their challenges. While 97% of the teachers thought that children with learning disabilities could not learn well in a regular classroom setting, hence they needed special education in separate special classes. Some of the reasons advanced by the teachers were their lack of proper training in the handling of learners with special needs. This might be a point worth taking note of as teachers with special education qualification are still insufficient to make an impact in the country. Teachers trained for the regular school find it difficult to teach children with learning disabilities. These regular school teachers may not consider or value the teaching of self help skills to learners with learning disabilities which in turn should lead them to acceptance, independence and functionality in their lives. Most teachers revealed that the inclusion of children with learning disabilities in a regular classroom setting may not lessen their challenges unless the

class is made manageable and also enough training is given to accommodate such children. Such working conditions impacted negatively on the attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education.

### **Resources and Facilities to support Learning**

One of the areas that were noted during the study was lack of learner support services in the schools visited. Special needs education demands individualised development programmes for learners with learning disabilities. The shortage of supportive facilities and resources made it difficult for teachers to embark on individualised skills development programmes for learners with learning disabilities. The nature of facilities used to assist learning is very much determined by the nature of the learning disability. Some of these include taped textbooks, tape recorder, adaptive testing procedures, and career and personal counselling. In mathematics, the use of manipulative objects can help the learner to grasp and develop basic concepts. The development of concepts and skills can be enhanced by the use of commercial programmes of instruction, computer technology and electronic technology. While some teachers indicated that they did not have computers in their schools, for the schools that had computers none used computer assisted instruction (CAI) in the teaching of Mathematics in their classes.

In reading and writing the use of relevant computer software has been found to be helpful to assist learners with reading and writing challenges. Such software includes developmental reading instruction programmes and specific skills-oriented reading instruction. All the schools did not have such software. In an inclusive class the use of a variety of methods of instruction becomes much more paramount. The utilization of devices such as videos, audio and voice-to-text devices helps learners with learning disabilities in their reading and writing.

### **Conclusions**

The paper came up with the following conclusions and recommendations:

- The visited schools did not have clear criteria to identify learners with learning disabilities. The criteria used differed from teacher to teacher and from school to school.
- Most teachers lacked training in the handling of learners with learning disabilities. As such learners were at times wrongly labelled. Teachers tended to lack clarity on learners with learning disabilities and remedial cases.
- The role of the Schools Psychological Services Department was not evidently visible in the selected schools.
- Some teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education.
- The inclusion of learners with learning disabilities was characterised by segregation and exclusion within the class set up, as most classes had learners grouped according to ability.
- Schools did not have specific strategies or programmes that catered for learners with learning disabilities.
- Class sizes and lack of supportive devices were an impediment to the development of learners with learning disabilities.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the above conclusions the paper came up with the following recommendations:

- Staff development programmes and capacity building in practicing teachers will help them become better assessors of learners with learning disabilities.
- The Schools Psychological Services Department has to make itself visible for the successful implementation of inclusive education in schools.
- For inclusive education to be implemented successfully in schools, it has to be a requirement that trainee teachers receive training in special needs education.
- Communities have to mobilize resources to support inclusive education in schools.
- The teacher-learner ratio should be improved for learners to have individualized skills development programmes.

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