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**AN INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL-BASED CHALLENGES FACING  
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE  
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR  
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA DISTRICT**

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NAIDOO**

## AN INVESTIGATION OF SCHOOL-BASED CHALLENGES FACING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI: A CASE STUDY OF FOUR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZOMBA DISTRICT

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study sought to investigate the challenges which schools are facing in implementing inclusive education in mainstream primary schools in Zomba district.

**Methodology:** Qualitative research method which employed a case study design was used. Thirty-four participants were involved in this study. These were purposely sampled. Data was collected through interviews, documents review and classroom lesson observations to provide methodological triangulation. Data was analyzed using thematic content analysis method inductively.

**Results:** The results of the study indicated that the implementation of inclusive education is facing a number of challenges such as ineffective orientation of head teachers and teachers to inclusive education, unavailability of teaching and learning materials for special needs learners in the mainstream schools, lack of special needs specialist teachers and lack of infrastructure suitable for the diverse special education needs learners.

**Unique contribution to theory and practice:** The study recommended, that the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology officers, that is the District Education Managers and the Primary Education Advisors involved in the implementation of inclusive education need to ensure that there is effective orientation training of the head-teachers teachers and teachers on inclusive education. The Ministry of education, Science and Technology should provide teaching and learning materials for the special education needs learners in the mainstream schools.

**Key words:** *challenges, schools, implementing, inclusive education, mainstream, primary schools, Zomba district.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background to the study**

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. However, as a way of acceding or complying with its signing to implement the world declarations, “Education for All”(Thailand, 1990) and “Salamanca Statement” (Spain, 1992) which emphasize the right for all individuals to access basic education and meeting the needs of children with special needs through introduction of inclusive education to which the Malawi as a country became a signatory in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 and Salamanca in Spain in 1994, 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. For effective implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools in Malawi. This study was thus set out to investigate the school-based challenges which schools are facing in implementing inclusive education in mainstream primary schools in Zomba district, in Malawi.

### **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, 2009). The main reason for the continuing low rate literacy rates in the country, despite the fact that the country acceded to the World Declaration on Education for all in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 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. Just recently, a few 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 (Irskaiia-Smirnova & 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 that inspired the undertaking of this study in order to investigate further the school based challenges facing the effective implementation of inclusive education in Zomba district in Malawi. The aim of this study therefore was to find out the challenges facing the implementation of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's inclusive education guidelines, known as the Malawi National Inclusive Education Strategy (2017-2021) so as to unearth the challenges impeding the effective implementation of the guidelines. 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 school based 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 school based challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the primary schools in Malawi?*

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

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

## **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, Science and Technology (MoEST) 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 (2013), 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 (2013), 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 (2013), 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 (2013), 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 2013 to provide guidelines for effective implementation of inclusive education in the education system of the country. According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2013), the success of inclusive education largely depends on support from different role players and stakeholders. According to the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, the key role players include but not limited to the following: Government of Malawi, through Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, non-government organizations (NGOs), Development Partners (DPs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), academia,

the corporate sector and local community. As this paper is concerned with investigating the school based factors affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education in the primary schools, only the expected role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in the provision of support services to schools to promote the implementation of inclusive education in the schools as espoused in the National Inclusive Education Strategy are discussed.

According to the National Strategy for Inclusive Education, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) shall take a leading role in managing, coordinating and regulating the implementation of inclusive education to ensure quality service delivery. For example, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy, (2013), 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 the national curriculum development centre in Malawi, for primary, secondary and primary school teacher training colleges in Malawi 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 is expected to address examination related issues to suit the circumstances of the diverse special educational need learners. The Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) is expected to provide examinations in different formats to respond to learner diversity. On the other hand, according to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2013), 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.



As this piece of research focused on investigating the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the mainstream schools of the country, 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 the challenges which schools are facing in implementing inclusive education according to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's 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 & 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 was conducted in four primary schools in Zomba district. Two of the primary schools were urban schools and the other two were rural schools. The district and the four schools were particularly chosen on the basis of convenience because of their easy accessibility to the researchers. 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 thus therefore also interested in finding out about the nature of inclusive education training being offered in the teacher training colleges.

Head-teachers of the 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 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 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 & Manion, 1986). The main document reviewed in the study was the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2013). This was studied to investigate the ‘intended’ way in which the inclusive education 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 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.

The other main source of data for the study was classroom observations. English, Mathematics and Bible Knowledge lessons were observed to investigate the challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education at classroom level.

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 in tables 5.1 to 5.5 below

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

<b>Head Teacher</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>School</b>
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

**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**

<b>Officer</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Special Needs and Inclusive Education Coordinator in the office of the District Education Manager1	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**

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

## RESULTS

Data analysis led to the following key themes: Ineffective orientation training on inclusive education by head teachers and mainstream teachers, 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, ineffective preparation and delivery of lessons that are inclusive of special needs learners by the teachers, lack of lesson activities that promote the teaching and learning of the special needs learners, lack of use of teaching and learning aids that promote the learning of special needs learners, unavailability of infrastructure suitable for learners with special needs, lack of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials and lack of inclusive national examination practices. These key findings are presented and discussed below:

### *Ineffective orientation training on inclusive education by head teachers and mainstream teachers*

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's 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 as well as if they consider their orientation as effective enough for them to implement inclusive education effectively. The study found that the Head 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 expected by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's 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 the?*



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 the availability of 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. 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 why she did not use any teaching aids in her lesson, teacher 10, the Mathematics teacher at school A, complained about lack of resources and said: *We can not only be depending on self-made teaching aids all the time. We also need standard teaching aids for example in Mathematics, we need resources like rulers and protractors.* Similarly, when asked as to why she did not use any teaching aids in her lesson, teacher 7, the Bible Knowledge teacher at school B had this to say: *I do not have the resources. The school does not have them.* But perhaps a more enlightening response on the issue of availability of teaching and learning resources at the school came from the Bible Knowledge teacher at school D who also did not use teaching aids that promote the participation of learners with different special educational needs. When asked why she did not use teaching aids in her lesson to promote the teaching and learning of learners with special education needs, she had this to say: *We lack even the basic teaching and learning materials for special educational needs 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, the Bible Knowledge teacher at 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. Table 7 below summarizes the status of the availability of teaching and learning materials for special needs education learners in the four study schools.

**Table 7: 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 7 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.

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 government 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.*

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 main challenge facing the effective 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 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 8 below.

**Table 8: 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 6.2 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 challenges facing the 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.

In addition to the lack of specialist teachers to support inclusive education is teachers' ineffective preparation and delivery of lessons that are inclusive of special needs learners. This is challenge is discussed in the following sub-sections:

*Ineffective preparation and delivery of lessons that are inclusive of special needs learners by the teachers*

Data has revealed that the ineffective inclusive education orientation for the teachers and the apparent lack of pre-service training of teachers in inclusive education has resulted in teachers being ineffective in planning or preparing and presenting lessons in a manner that is inclusive of learners with special education needs. For example, responding to whether she was able to prepare lessons that were inclusive of learners with special needs, teacher 10 at school A simply said; *No*. When probed further to explain why this was the case, she responded that:

*I have many pupils with different challenges. Nobody taught me what to do with them. We teachers share information about inclusive education here sometimes but it's just too little information to*



*help. I use the regular approach when planning a lesson. If I lie to you, I may be denying help that can come as a result of your research sir.*

Likewise, responding to whether she was able to plan lessons that were inclusive of learners with special educational needs, teacher 8, the English teacher at school D had this to say: *I have a learner with speech impairment. I do not know how to help this learner. I feel very bad that I am not good enough to help these special needs learner. Sometimes I feel she should not have come to this school as we cannot help her. I really need someone to teach me how to help learners with special needs.*

*Lack of lesson activities that promote the teaching and learning of the special needs learners*

Inclusive educational learning activities of a lesson are pivotal to the special educational needs learners' participation in the learning process. This study was therefore also interested in finding out the extent to which teachers in the four study schools engage learners in classroom activities that promote the participation of all learners including those with special educational needs. This study found that 8 out of the 12 teachers involved in the study are not able to include meaningful activities that promote the learning of the special educational needs learners. For example, when asked whether she was able to include activities that were inclusive of the special educational needs learners, teacher 2, a Bible Knowledge teacher at school B, said: *Honestly no as I have never received any training in inclusive education just as I said before.* Similarly, teacher 1 at school C had this to say on whether the teaching and learning activities in his lesson promoted the learning of learners with special education needs: *I have problems in imagining the right kind of activity that will work for the deaf and the dumb.* Similarly, teacher 4, a Mathematics teacher at school D had this to say about whether his learning activities were tailored in such way that would promote the learning of learners with special educational needs: *'I actually know that I am supposed to include activities that will help learners with special needs to learn. But how can I communicate with the learners that are deaf or dumb to include them in that activity and I do not even know the sign language'.*

This study has thus found that most of the teachers in the four study schools are not able to include in their lessons teaching and learning activities that promote the teaching and learning of the

special educational needs learners. This might be attributed to the teachers' ineffective inclusive education training both in-service orientation training to inclusive education and pre-service inclusive education training.

This finding concurs with Hodkinson and Vickerman (2007), who argue that for inclusion of special educational needs learners to be effective in the mainstream schools, the mainstream schools should be able to accommodate all the diverse special education needs learners within the mainstream settings by incorporating modifications of teaching activities, among other things, to ensure the involvement of all the learners with diverse special educational needs.

*Lack of use of teaching and learning aids in lessons for promoting the learning of the special needs learners*

Teaching and learning aids are the tools used by teachers in explaining and conveying a concept. They add meaning to the teacher's efforts to relay a message to learners. According to Pound (2008), teaching aids reduce teacher's abstract talking and allows meanings to be conveyed through the use of objects (teaching aids) that learners can see or observe. This study was therefore, also interested in finding out the extent to which teachers in the study schools in Zomba district promote the learning of children with different special education needs through using teaching aids to enhance the learning opportunities for the special educational need learners. The study found that most teachers in the four study schools do not use teaching aids to promote the learning of the learners with special educational needs. Data revealed that most teachers in the four study schools do not use the teaching aids that promote the learning of the special educational need learners because they are not sure which teaching aids would work for which special education needs learners. For example, teacher 5, a Bible Knowledge teacher at school D said that she does not use teaching aids that work for the special educational need learners: *No, honestly, I do not use the teaching aids to include learners with special educational needs. I do not know how to do that.* Similarly, teacher 12, the English teacher at school B, commenting on whether she used teaching aids to include learners with special educational needs in her lesson which I just observed, had this to say, *"I have a girl in my class, standard 7, who cannot speak. Honestly, I mostly do not include her in my lessons by using teaching aids.* The study therefore found that most teachers in the four

study did not use teaching aids that promoted the effective learning of the special education need learners. The study therefore sought to find out why the teachers did not use the teaching aids that promote the effective learning of special educational need learners. Data revealed that most teachers do not have adequate knowledge of the right kind of teaching and learning aids that promote the learning of specific special education need learners. For example, when asked as to why he did not use teaching aids that promote teaching learning of the special educational need learners, teacher 6, at school A had this to say; *“I am not a specialist teacher. I do not know what kind of a teaching aid I would you use to teach a visually impaired learner.”*

The study therefore has found that inclusive education is not being effectively implemented in the four study schools as teachers are not using teaching and learning aids that promote the learning of special education needs learners.

#### *Unavailability of infrastructure suitable for the learners with special needs*

According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology’s 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 has found that the schools involved in the study have very minimal infrastructure that is suitable for the learners with special educational needs learners. The findings on the availability of infrastructure for special needs learners in the four schools have been summarized in table 9 below

**Table 9: The availability status of the availability of the infrastructure that suitable for the learners with special educational 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 school factors contributing to the ineffective implementation of inclusive education in the schools of Zomba district.

#### *Lack of special needs textbooks and other special needs instructional materials*

According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's 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 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 fulfil 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.

#### *Lack of inclusive national examination practices*

According to the National Inclusive Education Strategy (2013), the Malawi National Examinations Board is expected to support the implementation of inclusive education in the country by ensuring that examination materials and practices do not disadvantage the special educational need learners. This study was therefore also interested in finding out whether examination practices in the mainstream schools effectively address the needs of the special educational needs learners. The study found that examination practices are not effectively addressing the needs of the diverse special educational needs learners. Data revealed that very little is done in the conduct of national examinations to address the needs of special needs learners. For example, in commenting on whether the national examination practices in Zomba district address the needs of the diverse special educational needs learners, the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Division Coordinator lamented the ineffectiveness of Malawi National Examination Board's 'special room' policy. According to the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Division Coordinator, a special room is a room in which special needs learners take their examinations at an examination center. Commenting on this policy, this is what she had to say:

*For an examination center to have a 'special room' (a room in which special educational needs learners take their examinations at an examination center), the policy requires that there should be at least five learners with special educational needs whose conditions necessitate a special room for an examination center to qualify to have a special room. This means that if there are less than five special educational needs learners at an examination center, no matter their condition, they will not be given the special room. Furthermore, what happens when these special needs learners are denied the special room so that they sit for their examinations in the regular examination room is that for every one hour of the examinations, a special need learner is allowed only 12 minutes extra to complete writing the examination paper. Unfortunately, this time is not fully utilized by the special educational need learners because when regular learners are told to stop writing, the special educational needs learners are distracted by the noise and hustle that follow as the regular candidates leave the examination room. I therefore feel that it is important that MANEB should consider the degree of the special need of learners to consider providing them with a special room other than just basing the provision of special room on the numbers of the special needs candidates.*

Commenting on the issue of the special room policy, the Examinations Logistics officer at the Malawi National Examinations Board admitted that that this policy is there: *Yes, that policy is there.... but it might not be working perfectly well. There is need of improvement here and there.*

The study has thus revealed that the Malawi National Examination Board' special room policy which requires that there should be at least five learners with special needs whose conditions necessitate a special room for an examination center to qualify to have a special room is a challenge facing the effective implementation of inclusive education. The study consequently recommends that Malawi National Examination Board needs to reexamine the 'special room' policy to address the needs of all the learners with special needs at a mainstream school regardless of their numbers.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the school-based challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the schools of Zomba district. In response to the main research question: *What are the school-based challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the schools of Zomba district?* the study found that the implementation of inclusive education in the schools of Zomba district is facing a number of school-based challenges. The main challenges facing the implementation of inclusive education in the four schools involved in the study are ineffective orientation training of the head teachers and teachers on inclusive education, unavailability of specialist teachers to provide specialist inclusive education support to the regular teachers in mainstream schools, unavailability of inclusive education teaching and learning material resources for suitable for the special education needs learners, unavailability of infrastructure that is suitable for the learners with diverse educational needs, lack of use of teaching and learning aids in lessons for promoting the teaching and learning of the special education needs learners, lack of lesson activities that promote the teaching and learning of the special needs learners and ineffective preparation and delivery of lessons that are inclusive of special needs learners by teachers. In view of these challenges and in order to overcome these challenges, this study proposes the following possible solutions; the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should make sure that the teaching and learning materials for inclusive education are available in the mainstream schools of the country, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology 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, 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 and the Malawi National Examination's Board(MANEB) consider preparing examinations which are responsible to address the needs of special education learners.



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