

## Implementation Practices of the Inclusive Education Policy in Sport: A Case of Four Secondary Schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to explore the implementation practices of the inclusive education policy in sport in four secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. The study adopted a qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm and a case study design. Face-to-face in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documents analysis were used to collect data from four headmasters, four sports masters, four team trainers, four team captains, two learners with disabilities and a district education officer. Findings revealed that there was need for knowledge and skills in inclusive practices in sport among teachers in regular schools. The researchers concluded that teachers in regular schools were not equipped to teach sport to learners with special needs. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education was not doing much in preparing teachers to effectively include learners with disabilities in regular school sport. Recommendations based on the research are provided.*

### Introduction

This study examined implementation practices of the inclusive education policy in sport in four secondary schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe. It was important to undertake such a study because sport is part of the school curriculum in Zimbabwe; yet, the inclusion of children with disabilities in sport remains a myth. It was also crucial to do such a study, as there is evidence that, despite the enactments of policies on inclusion in Zimbabwe, implementation has been slow (Saskatchewan Learning Special Education Unit, 2001). In line with the global trends regarding people with disabilities, Zimbabwe came up with a policy to ensure that the inclusion of previously marginalised pupils in sport was accomplished. The policy advocates that, children with disabilities learn together with those without disabilities in their respective localities and that they be provided with materials to enhance their learning. However, though the policy has been easy to craft, major challenges remain. It is within this context that the researchers wanted to examine the implementation practices of the inclusive education policy in sport in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe, as a member of the United Nations (UN), has agreed to recognise the rights of people with disabilities through declarations passed by the United Nations Human Rights. The motive is to improve the quality of the lives of people living with

disabilities through being included (United Nations, 2002). The Salamanca Statement of Action (1994) re-emphasized the right of education of every individual as mentioned in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All the said declarations aim at policy enactment to promote inclusive education to make schools be accessible to serve all children, especially those challenged by disability. Thus, it points out that ordinary schools should accommodate all children irrespective of their physical, social, emotional, linguistic or other disabilities (Chireshe, 2011).

Furthermore, Zimbabwe as a signatory to those inclusive educations related charters and conventions were mandated to initiate and support inclusive programs for people with disabilities. Strides have been made by drafting legislation, though it was not comprehensive and specific to inclusion of people with disabilities particularly in sport. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment No, 20, Act of 2013 does not say much on the issue of inclusion especially in sport. It merely spells out that the state and all institutions of government at any level must, within the limits of the resources available, assist persons with physical or mental disabilities to achieve their full potential and to minimise the disadvantages they suffer.

In Zimbabwe, every school is expected to have sport as part of its curriculum. However, research has shown that while schools accommodate learners

from different backgrounds in terms of the inclusive policy, very few, if any, have clearly planned how they can make school sport be inclusive in order to accommodate the diverse kinds of learners they have enrolled (Samkange, 2013). It is the researchers' contention that sport has not been made fully inclusive nor has enough provisions been made for the participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream sport. The researchers assert that sport for children with disabilities in mainstream schools is not yet perceived as an integral part of an inclusive pedagogy and it is therefore not sufficiently utilised to enhance sustainable inclusive environments.

Sport and education are closely related though indications are that sport for learners with disabilities is not well designed in schools. This is well articulated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNESCO, 2005). Musengi, Mudyahoto and Chireshe (2010) conducted a study in Zimbabwe and found that low expectations for sport were evident for learners with disabilities in schools; it also revealed that provisions were not being made for inclusive sport in mainstream schools. Research studies in Zimbabwe by Ncube and Hlatywayo (2014), on the provisions of Special Education in Zimbabwe: realities issues and challenges found that 70% of children with disabilities and other special educational needs were still being denied their rights to education. This situation is in direct conflict with the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (1989), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), World Declaration for Education for All (1990), The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000).

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to examine school implementation practices regarding the inclusive education policy in sport. The inclusive education policy in sport is informed by some international and regional conventions to which Zimbabwe is a signatory. The policy was designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide range of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet the learning objectives in an educational program.

However, before designing such a policy it seems Zimbabwe did not take into account the required

facilities/equipment and human resources before including children with disabilities in sport. Thus, the study sought to answer the following research question: What are the school implementation practices of the inclusive education policy in sport?

### **Method**

The study adopted a qualitative approach using the interpretive paradigm and a case study design, to give the researcher the chance to visit respondents in their natural settings as well as gather information on their experiences. Respondents are selected from individuals who have the most experience and understanding of the subject under study. Face-to-face in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document analysis were used to collect data.

### *Participants*

The participants were four headmasters, four sports masters, four team captains, two children with disabilities, and a district education officer. All the participants were purposively selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience and understanding on the issue under study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique, where the researcher uses his/her own judgement basing on the participants' in-depth knowledge of the subject under study (Corley, 2006). Headmasters, sportsmasters, team captains and the district education officer were chosen on the strength of their respective positions and knowledge on what is taking place in sport at their schools. Children with disabilities were solely chosen for being the directly affected by the policy.

### *Procedure*

Individual interviews and focus group discussions with headmasters, sports masters, team captains, children with disabilities, and the district education officer were held at school premises. Headmasters and the district education officer were interviewed at their respective offices. Permission to interview and audiotape the interviews was sought from the participants and granted prior to conducting the interviews. Responses were later transcribed and put into meaningful themes. An observation checklist was made in order to determine the prevalent

practices in the implementation of the inclusive education policy in sport. School documents such as sport minute books inventories on purchased sports materials and co-curricular record books were analysed.

## Results

Based on the interviews, the following were the key dimensions from the theme that sought to establish the implementation practices of the inclusive education policy in sport. Some of the responses by sports masters on whether they included children with disabilities in mainstream sport included the following:

- *We do not have any special equipment/resources to assist them in sport*
- *Those with mild challenges may join any sporting discipline of their choice*
- *Those with disabilities may choose to or not to play in any sport or they may play on their own to reduce injury risks.*

The statements were not really detailing the teaching approaches that were used to include a diversity of children with disabilities in sporting activities in regular schools, but were rather general statements, which indicate that sports masters did not seem to understand how to implement the inclusive policy in sport. When headmasters were interviewed on the implementation of the inclusive education policy in sport, the following were some of the responses:

Head 1 said:

*We have heard about the policy being said by word of mouth, nothing in the form of workshops or circulars got to us. This, in a way, makes us non-functional in as far as including children with disabilities in sport at this school is concerned. We are so much afraid to include them since some have medical histories that prevent them from taking part in some activities.*

Head 2, in agreement said:

*...some students have been instructed by medical consultants not to take part in physical*

*activities because of heart/lung conditions deteriorating over time. So such a situation, coupled with our ignorance to handle them, leave us with no option but to exclude them from such activities*

Head 3 also indicated:

*... Our greatest challenge is that of our failure to have a good background and sufficient knowledge on how to handle learners with disabilities in sport or outside sport. We could have been using some of the approaches to include these children, but then our teaching staff has very little background if any on approaches to include children with disabilities in mainstream sport. Of course, we have children with disabilities in the school, but the human capital is the biggest challenge. We need to have staff that are well trained and have the knowledge on involving the two groups in sport. Otherwise, we end up with a situation where those without disabilities through injuries push learners with disabilities out of sports.*

This information suggests unavailability of trained teachers to include learners with disabilities in sport. However, the fact that schools were supposed to implement the policy, suggests there was need for government to initiate the process through training teachers on how to include children with disabilities in sport. The statements by headmasters indicate that there was no one in their school systems with the knowledge and ability to give directions to teaching approaches for inclusivity to take place. Under the circumstances, headmasters indicated the need for teachers to undergo in-service training. Noted was the fact that headmasters also lacked knowledge on teaching approaches that recognised the diversity of students with disabilities taking part in sport together with those without disabilities. When headmasters were probed further to find out if they were using any teaching strategies to include learners with disabilities in regular sport, their answers were on the negative, indicating that nothing was being done; hence, most children with disabilities did whatever they wanted during sport time. Another head indicated that they only catered for those with mild disabilities who did not disturb the rhythm of games.

Some focus group discussions also confirmed unavailability of well-structured programmes indicating how schools should practice the implementation of the inclusive education policy in sport in mainstream schools. There is non-commitment on the part of government as evidenced by the haphazard practices that seemed to be prevail in schools. However, some of the participants indicated that although sports masters and trainers were aware that there were certain teaching approaches, which enhance participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream sport, they did not have the resources to combine the two groups together. For example, a focus group participant responded by saying:

*I am aware that for one to teach children with disabilities to take part in sporting activities effectively one should group such children according to their levels of disabilities and then give tasks accordingly. This is as far as my theory is concerned; I have no practical experience to do this.... our approach to including children with disabilities was rather random as we let such children take part in those sporting activities they are able to and which they have interest in. Hence, we have no official approaches to use as our children have different forms of disabilities.*

Another participant said:

*The numbers of children living with disabilities in the school is so insignificant, such that it is very difficult to come up with a formula on how to include them in sport among learners without disabilities in sport. Learners have different challenges and some of our grounds are not suitable to involve children with disabilities in sport. Personally, I have no idea of making them participate and I am even afraid that these children might be injured in the process.*

A participant in focus group for teacher trainers noted:

*There were never workshops held in respect of the practices in the implementation of the said policy neither were there workshops on approaches to use. Therefore, this is a big*

*problem because we are merely told to include them in sport without any directions given. Maybe school heads should be educated first so that they know what strategies/practices to use when including children with disabilities in regular school sport, and then they would in turn educate us.*

Another participant echoed:

*The information that school heads get could then be cascaded down to every teacher. In the event teachers in the schools becoming aware, individual teachers may then assist each other to strategize on the practices, they can use to include learners with diverse disabilities in various sporting disciplines in the schools.*

A teacher in the study also lamented:

*If there are such organised teaching approaches to teach sport to children with disabilities, I am ignorant of them. All I know is that each teacher uses any approach they are comfortable with. Is that what you mean?*

## Discussion

The current scenario suggests that there should be clear methods to use when including learners with disabilities in regular sport and some kind of support services in one way or the other to enable them to take part in mainstream sport. These supports can range from the provision of simple assistive technological devices (World Health Organization, 2015) to more complex instructional program modifications (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Assistive technological devices can help meet the physical, sensory, or communication needs of the children to enhance their participation in sports activities. Examples include mobility devices such as wheelchairs, picture-based instructions for cognitive disabilities, or artificial limbs for physical disabilities (World Health Organization, 2015). Instructional program modifications include exercise sessions of longer duration, greater frequency, and lower intensity than those for students without disabilities (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). According to Murphy and Carbone, providing these supports can minimize the risks of illness or injury for children with

disabilities thereby promoting their participation in sporting activities.

Unfortunately, participants in this study, contrary to what is taking place on the ground, headmasters, district education officer (DEO) sports masters and team trainers indicated that there were no clear methods or support services in schools to enable children with disabilities to take part in mainstream sport, thus making the participation of children with disabilities very low. Headmasters indicated that the Government had virtually not prepared for the implementation of the policy in sport. Some participants also echoed that there were no support services for learners living with disabilities to take part in sport along with their peers in the mainstream. A research study in Australia by King, Law, Rosenbaum, Kertoy and Young (2003) established that, the most frequently identified barriers to active participation of children with disabilities in sport and physical recreation, is limited support services from governments. This therefore, means teachers need to be empowered in terms of skills, resources and knowledge. Alexander (2001) stated that most teachers were concerned that they may not meet the needs of children living with disabilities because of lack of training and due to lack of proper facilities for learners with disabilities to use in regular schools. Haskell (2000) and Unianu (2011) also confirm that enrolling children with disabilities in mainstream schools requires teachers with the knowledge and skills for teaching both children with and without disabilities in an inclusive setting.

In a way, this calls for the Government to train and retrain teachers, DEOs and head teachers of schools for the effective practices of the inclusive education policy in sport. Back, DeGeest, Hirst and Marie (2009) posit that sending staff for training, retraining or workshops assist in understanding issues at hand. It also came out that the training, and retraining of staff is a vital tool for the successful practices in inclusive education policy in sport and the sourcing of required materials (Department of Education, 2001). It also emerged that apart from lack of training and knowledge, teachers did not include learners with disabilities in sporting teams as they focused more on competitive sport, which neglects those with disabilities (Schmitt & Priestly, 2011). It also came out from the researcher's observations, that children with disabilities were excluding themselves from sporting activities due to inferiority complex, lack of equipment, poor sport,

grounds and rules of the games that favour those without disabilities. Reports from the Slovak Republic and Czechoslovakia indicate that children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools did not get significant help in as far as inclusive sport is concerned due to lack of facilities, equipment and expertise from teachers (Thematic Reporting on Inclusive Education, 2012).

On practices in the implementation of the inclusive education policy in sport in mainstream schools, sports master respondents indicated little knowledge on teaching approaches that could be used in implementing the inclusive education policy in sport in mainstream schools. Headmasters mentioned that they had no ideas on the practices to implement the policy, the information from headmasters indicated that there was no one in the school systems with the knowledge and ability to give directions to teaching approaches that promote inclusivity in sport (Department of Education, 2001). Non-commitment on the part of Government seemed to have a link on the haphazard practices that prevailed in schools (Moyo, Khewu & Bayaga, 2014) However, some sports masters as well as team trainers were aware of certain teaching approaches, which enhance participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream sport, but they did not have the expertise or resources to combine the two groups together.

It also emerged that school practices when including children with disabilities in regular sport can only succeed when teachers are guided by a clear policy framework (European Commission, 2013). The University of Namibia (2012) points out that in order to have effective practices in inclusive education in sport, there is need for the establishment of effective guidelines and support mechanisms to ensure meaningful inclusion takes place. On the contrary, headmasters pointed out that they depended on haphazard information shared in staff development meetings as well as circulars.

On the practices, which are used for children with disabilities to be involved in sport in the mainstream, the generality of children with disabilities were not involved in regular school sporting activities due to varied reasons. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) was virtually not doing anything in as far as making sure that learners with disabilities were involved in sport in the mainstream schools. A common finding in most African countries was that inclusive education in

sport is perceived as irrelevant and there is no follow-up in terms of policies (African Countries Synthesis Report, 2011). UNESCO (2006) lamented that inclusive policy approaches in Zimbabwe were ad hoc and not adequately co-ordinated thus, inclusive sport was a loose phenomenon, unrelated to what was on the ground.

Professional development of teachers was cited as a strategy that was regarded by headmasters, sport masters, team trainers, captains and DEOs as a major approach, which should be employed by Universities, Teachers' Colleges and the MoPSE to empower teachers in including children with disabilities to take part in mainstream sport. Participants suggested that training of all stakeholders would enhance professional development of all concerned parties. Professional development has been identified as an essential approach towards the improvement of teacher quality (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas. 2008). Interestingly, schoolteachers in Zimbabwe have recently been found to support more professional development for school personnel, which will help them to meet the needs of diverse students, including students with disabilities (Chitiyo, Hughes, Changara, Chitiyo & Montgomery 2016). Thus, it behoves researchers and policy makers to identify strategies that can enhance both preservice training and in-service professional development of school personnel to build the capacity of schools to successfully implement the country's inclusive education policy in sport.

Besides the training of teachers, including research and experiments on how best to implement the inclusive education policy in sport, involving children with disabilities in mainstream sport was deemed a necessary intervention strategy by all participants in this study. Concerns were also raised on the sensitisation of stakeholders as an intervention strategy, where it emerged that as long as stakeholders did not know the implications of having learners with and without disabilities doing sport together, successful implementation would not be achieved. Apart from training and re-training of teachers, it was suggested as crucial to work closely with those parents of children with disabilities so that they also educate their children on the importance of taking part in sport in the mainstream. Media should also come in, mainly to educate and conscientise the public and convince all stakeholders to accept the

involvement of children with disability in regular sporting activities.

Although sport inclusion did not seem to be taken seriously in Zimbabwe, new ideas on inclusive sport were already being implemented in many countries with Zimbabwe lagging behind in this respect. Billingsley (2004) state that, including teachers in the mainstream sport for learners with disabilities is necessary to all students' growth and achievement; thus, teachers need to acquire knowledge and skills in specific areas of inclusive sport in mainstream schools.

It also emerged that the identification of needs, of children with disabilities by teachers is an important aspect in coming up with a comprehensive inclusive framework in regular schools for them to be effective in the teaching of learners with special education needs in mainstream sport. Other suggestions focused on time, funding and training. Fraser, Kennedy, Reld & Mckinney (2007) acknowledged that the importance of in-service training in inclusive education policy in sport is increasingly taking place in countries throughout the world. It was also suggested that the inclusive education policy framework in sport should be clear about funding so that headmasters and other education officials could plan.

The strategy of workshops and cascading the information was taken to be the best, considering that all teachers were being required to teach sport to both children with and without disabilities in the mainstream. On the cascading of information, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2009) argues that although the cascade model is a well-used approach in both developed and developing countries, it has a dilution effect, as information does not get to the intended beneficiaries in its original form. Hence, the best way would be to train all teachers in one or two sessions so that they gain these skills within a reasonable shot space of time.

Partnership with schools abroad that have interest and knowledge in inclusive sport should be encouraged. Schools need access to exchange programmes so that those countries without adequate resources and skills on practices could have an appreciation of ways of doing things and assist if they can. A comprehensive theoretical framework in the context of inclusive sport in regular schools should take into account all issues that would lead to successful inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream sport.

## Conclusion

It emerged from this study that, children with disabilities were not included in sporting activities in mainstream schools, with the exception of mild cases who did not disturb rhythms of games. There were no circulars, no clear policy guidelines or follow-up mechanisms put in place by the MoPSE to make teachers aware of the practice demands of the policy and how it should be implemented. Due to policy inadequacy, lack of knowledge and resources, all participants in the study were ignorant of the practices required for the implementation of the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream sport. The results revealed that children with disabilities were mostly left to do as they pleased during sporting activities, as teachers pointed out that they were afraid of taking responsibility when a child with a disability was injured. On the intervention, strategies that could be taken to address these issues, many teachers, headmasters, and the DEO pointed to the issue of training and retraining of teachers. If the inclusive education policy framework in sport is to succeed, respondents argued for the development of appropriate structures within schools as well as relevant structures. Respondents went further to propose the need to design a policy that has information on how specific forms of disabilities should be included in sporting programmes in mainstream sport.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings, it is recommended that the Government, through the ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, should ensure that children with disabilities are included in regular sporting activities as a way of boosting their confidence. Teachers should be trained on how to include children with disabilities in sport. There is need to engage teachers, headmasters, and DEOs in in-service professional development for them to be able to work with both children with and without disabilities in regular sport. It is equally important for the MoPSE to come up with a comprehensive framework on which all stakeholders would work on towards the implementation of the inclusive education in mainstream sport. The MoPSE's framework should take into account class sizes, how to include children with disabilities in sport, games

to be played, infrastructure, and rules to be adopted in various games. Given the importance of professional development of teachers in the area of teaching sport to children with disabilities, future research should explore appropriate professional development approaches that will facilitate the successful implementation of inclusive education policy in sport in Zimbabwe.

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