

**Exploring Implementation of National Special Needs Education Policy Guidelines in
Private Secondary Schools**

Gift Mbewe
University of Malawi
Malawi

Elizabeth Kamchedzera
University of Malawi
Malawi

Esthery Dembo Kunkwenzu
University of Malawi
Malawi

Abstract

The implementation of the National Special Needs Education Policy Guidelines in Malawi began in 2009. There is limited literature on how the guidelines are implemented in secondary schools, particularly in private secondary schools of Malawi. Therefore, the study aimed at exploring the implementation of the guidelines in private secondary schools. The study used a phenomenological design and qualitative methodology. Data were generated through a triangulation of methods including semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. The data generated were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that there was a lack of thorough knowledge of the guidelines, resources for implementing the guidelines in private secondary schools were not available, and support for learners with special education needs was not sufficient. The results of this study indicate that communication with key school stakeholders is key for the effective implementation of the National Special Needs Education Policy Guidelines.

Keywords: inclusive education, private secondary schools and policy, special needs education

Education is a human right for all people. To realise this right, Malawi has made a number of significant efforts. The National Special Needs Education Policy Guidelines (NSNEPG) have been formulated to guide the implementation of inclusive education (IE) at all levels of education. The government formulated the NSNEPG in 2009, which are aimed at regulating provision of education to learners with special education needs (SEN). This action by the government indicates that it values special needs education (SNE). Before the development of NSNEPG, Malawi had the National Special Needs Education Policy (NSEP) which was introduced in 2007. The NSEP provided a framework for SNE in Malawi (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007).

The NSNEPG were developed to support the implementation of the NSEP (MoE, 2009). This is in tandem with global trends that advocate for implementation of inclusive education (IE). International legal frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement concerning SNE advocacy for IE (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The NSNEPG are meant to guide all stakeholders providing SNE (MoE, 2009).

The NSNEPG have six objectives. The first objective is to provide appropriate quality education and/or vocational training to all learners with SEN. Secondly, the NSNEPG are aimed at ensuring equitable access to education for all learners with SEN at all educational levels. Thirdly, the policy guidelines aim at providing education facilities with necessary provisions to support the education of learners with SEN. Another objective is to ensure that all education institutions create and provide supportive learning environments. Furthermore, the NSNEPG aim to increase provision of SNE services by all education stakeholders. In addition, the NSNEPG seek to improve co-ordination and networking among SNE stakeholders. The last objective is to provide standards and ethical practices to be adhered to in the provision of SNE services in Malawi (MoE, 2009).

In order to effectively guide the stakeholders of SNE, the NSNEPG have spelled out four major needs of learners with SEN. Learners with SEN need a conducive learning environment (the classroom should be well maintained, ventilated, effectively maintained and well equipped). The second need is modified teaching, learning and assessment resources. The content and ways of teaching must accommodate the needs of each learner. Another need of learners with SEN is specialised assistive devices such as hearing aids, wheel chairs, and others. The last need spelled out in the NSNEPG is regular medical check-ups (MoE, 2009).

The NSNEPG have three priority areas. The first priority area is referred to as access and equity. The policy under that section states that the MoE shall promote easy access to education at all levels for learners with SEN, eliminate the imbalances between learners with SEN and those without, put in place systems for early identification assessment and placement of individuals requiring SNE, bring awareness to the public about individuals with disabilities and their right to education and ensure that learners with SEN receive adequate care and support services. The objectives and strategies are outlined in the policy (MoE, 2009).

The second priority area is quality and relevance. It is stated that the Ministry of Education shall establish and maintain agreed minimum standards for the provision of quality education for learners with SEN and ensure that the national curriculum responds to the needs of learners with SEN. The third priority area is about governance and management. It is stipulated that the MoE shall ensure that SNE has a proper governance and management structure (MoE, 2009). The policy guidelines also contain implementation arrangements. They describe roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders such as teachers, MoE, and the Private School

Association. The policy guidelines have stipulated the roles of various stakeholders in provision of education of learners with SNE. The Ministry has been charged with the roles of providing policy guidance to all stakeholders on SNE, encouraging public and private institutions to establish libraries with instructional materials, SNE supervision and inspection, and developing tools for identifying learners with SNE. The Private Schools Association, which is a body that represents private schools in Malawi, has been given the role of complementing the government in provision of SNE (MoE, 2009).

Historical Background of SNE in Malawi

SNE in Malawi was started in the 1950s by faith-based organisations. They offered to help learners with visual and hearing impairments (Mwale et al., 2010). Mkandawire et al. (2016) noted that the government did not assume responsibility of educating children with SEN. Instead, religious organisations shouldered the responsibility. Research indicates that SNE was started by the Scottish and South African Evangelical Missionaries in Kasungu and Nsanje. It was in 1968 when SNE began at Montfort campus (Chavuta et al., 2008). Montfort College, which is found in Chirazulu district, performs the role of training learners with SEN and specialist teachers from Malawi and other Southern Africa Development Community countries (Mwale et al., 2010). Later on, the government began to assist the faith-based organisations with grants (Mwale et al., 2010).

Success in SNE Provision due to Policy Development

The efforts in promoting SNE through policy development appear to have borne some fruits. There are some success stories. Enrolment for learners with SEN has increased. Resource rooms have been opened in regular schools (Mwale et al., 2010). The MoE also issued a directive that all of its institutions should have structures that are disability friendly (Mkandawire et al., 2016).

Another success is that Malawi has specific government structures looking into disability issues. Malawi has a Ministry of Gender, Youth, Disability and Welfare, and under this Ministry, there is a Department of Disability which looks into the issues of disability. Special education modules have been introduced in teacher training institutions of higher learning (Mkandawire et al., 2016). Further success has been the opening of the SNE Directorate in the MoE (Mwale et al., 2010).

Background of Inclusive Education

According to UNESCO (2009), IE is a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. It is a key strategy to achieving “Education for All Goals” which were adopted in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. It is based on the fact that education is a human right and it is a foundation for a just and equal society. The major support for IE was given at the World Conference on SNE in Salamanca, Spain 1994. More than 300 participants, representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations, attended the conference (UNESCO, 1994). They considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of IE, thereby enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with SEN (UNESCO, 1994).

The Salamanca conference concluded that SNE cannot advance in isolation, but rather by reforming the ordinary schools. IE is seen as an effort of preventing discriminatory attitudes, forming a welcoming society, creating an inclusive society and achieving education for all. It is also believed that IE is cost effective as it does not require construction of new schools accommodating learners with various special needs (UNESCO, 1994). The World Education

Forum which took place in Dakar in 2000 was held to review the progress made on IE. The forum declared that education must consider the needs of the poor and disadvantaged including working children, nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children, young people, adults affected by conflicts, HIV, hunger and poor health and those with disabilities and special learning needs (UNESCO, 2009). IE is a move towards trying to address the diverse needs of children. It involves changing the content, strategies, and structures. It is based on the conviction that education of all children is the responsibility of the regular education system (UNESCO, 2009).

One of many goals of SNE is to give students a chance to participate in the least restrictive environment so that they receive as much education as possible with students without disabilities (Mark et al., 2012, as cited in Mkandaire et al., 2016, p.13). When learners with SEN are given the required support in an inclusive setting, they are able to develop a more positive concept (Schmidt, & Cagran, 2008, as cited in Chavuta et al., 2008, p.17).

Inclusion is important as it encourages the school to review its structures, approaches to teaching, pupil grouping and use of support to enable the school to meet the diverse learning needs of all its pupils. It is regarded as political struggle against exclusive attitudes (Farrell, 2003).

This study focused on the implementation of NSNEPG in private secondary schools of Malawi. It was meant to guide the government and all stakeholders on how to include learners with SEN in education interventions. The guidelines have been made to promote inclusion of learners with SEN as a way towards attaining a more inclusive society, bearing in mind their existence in the schools. The rationale of the policy guidelines is to provide procedure on how government and other stakeholders can effectively mainstream learners with disabilities (MoE, 2009).

Statement of the Problem

Malawi has attempted to develop adequate policies and the legal environment for promoting and upholding the rights of people with SNE. Some of these policies include the National Special Needs Education Policy and the National Policy on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities among others. Although Malawi has relatively good policies on IE, most of the contents have not been fully implemented (Mkandawire et al., 2016). The education of those with SNE has not significantly improved since the policies were formulated. In addition, there is a critical shortage of literature on SNE (Munthali et al., 2013; Mkandawire et al., 2016). Previous studies (Ishida et al., 2017; Kamchedzera, 2010; Mwale et al, 2010) have been conducted to assess the implementation of SNE policies in public schools. The studies conducted in the public secondary schools have clearly highlighted that implementation of SNE and IE is a challenge in Malawi. The gap in literature from private schools represents a form of lack of inclusivity as private schools in Malawi have a different governing system from that of public schools. The results from public schools cannot adequately address SNE issues in private schools. Currently, it is not very clear what private schools are doing with respect to following government SNE policies. Similarly, there is little known about how private secondary schools implement the NSNEPG.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how private secondary schools in Zomba district (Malawi) implement the NSNEPG that advocate for IE.

Main Research Question

How do private secondary schools implement the NSNEPG?

Specific Research Questions

1. What do the teachers in private secondary schools know about NSNEPG?
2. What resources do private secondary schools use for the effective implementation of the NSNEPG?
3. How do private schools support learners with SEN?
4. What factors affect the implementation of NSNEPG in private secondary schools?

Significance of the Study

This study has attempted to contribute to the body of knowledge on SNE by filling the gap in literature on policy and practice regarding the implementation of NSNEPG in private secondary schools. This study further shows how private secondary schools in Malawi implement the NSNEPG.

Secondly, this study is significant because it provides information on the implementation of policies of SNE in the private sector. Specifically, this study has potential to inform policy makers and implementers on the necessary improvements that are required to support the implementation of NSNEPG in private secondary schools in the country.

Literature Review

This study reviewed both local and international related literature on SNE and IE which helped to identify research gaps that this study was attempting to explore.

International Standards and Frameworks that Advocate for IE and SNE Policies

NSNEPG is a response to international standards and frameworks. It is a strategy that Malawi has formulated to fulfil its international obligations. The NSNEPG cannot be fully understood without first reviewing the international standards. The international standards and frameworks lay a strong foundation for NSNEPG and other SNE policies. One of the significant standards that Malawi has committed itself to is the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on SNE (UNESCO, 1994), which seeks to promote access to education for all learners with SEN. Principles were adopted reaffirming what was found in various legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1994). Furthermore, other national instruments that promote education for all learners are the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) and Malawi Development Growth Strategy (MDGS) (Itimu & Kopetz, 2008).

Knowledge of Special Needs Education and related Policies

International findings on knowledge concerning SNE related policy slightly vary. A study done in Namibia revealed that some teachers lacked knowledge about inclusive education policy. This situation had been attributed to lack of training by the Ministry of Education on policy issues. Furthermore, the study revealed that some teachers had not even read the policy on inclusive education. This situation has led teachers to implement the policy in their own way. For instance, they made the learners with SEN sit in front so that they are able to see the chalkboard and enlarged letters for those who are short sighted (Hausika, 2017). Mantey (2014) affirms the Namibian findings in his study done in Ghana. The study established that teachers in the schools studied had limited or no knowledge of the Act for people with disabilities. Some

did not know the details of the Act. Another study done in Tanzania by Pima (2012) observed that of the six teachers who were interviewed, only one knew the National Policy on Disability. The presence of one teacher out of six who were knowledgeable about the policy indicated some limitations in the implementation process. In the study by Pima (2012), it was pointed out that when policy stakeholders have not directly interacted with the policy statements themselves, the result is confusion and gaps in understanding of the phenomenon.

In Malawi, Mwale et al. (2010) found out that many teachers in Malawi were ignorant of the SNE policies. In the study by Mwale et al. (2010), it was further discovered that Primary Education Advisers and District Education Managers were exceptional as they demonstrated that they knew the policy by stating its strategies. This study was conducted in public primary schools in Malawi. This study left out the voices of secondary school teachers in private secondary schools.

Despite widespread lack of knowledge of SNE related policies, a study in Kenya by Muhombe et al., (2015), revealed a different scenario. It was found that a majority of the participants were aware of the SNE policy and believed that it was being implemented. Only 27.27% of the teachers who took part in the study indicated that they were not aware of the SNE policy framework. The authors observed that the policy is still in its early stage of implementation, with many of its contents yet to be implemented. From the literature reviewed, it shows that policy awareness is an issue in some countries in Africa including Malawi. However, the studies conducted did not include private schools.

Suitable Resources for Implementing SNE Policies

Farrell (2003) outlined suitable resources for learners with SEN as follows: adaptive equipment, aids to learning and braille, journals and other publications and play games. Learners with SEN also need technologies to facilitate access and participation in the general classroom (Smith & Tyler, 2011). Learners with SEN also need hearing aids, sign language, picture boards, audio and other visual devices. These are important since children with SEN learn through hearing and touching. The other resource is mobility equipment such as wheelchairs. They help the child to move independently in his or her environment (Kirk et al., 2009, as cited in Pima, 2012, p. 20).

Apart from the resources outlined above, policy implementation needs human resources. Hausika (2017) had argued that the largest challenge to policy implementation is lack of training of teachers. Ukpepi and Opuwari (2019) argued that teachers are implementers of curriculum at any level of education. Hence there is a need for adequate staff to teach in an inclusive class. Furthermore, to meet the education needs of children with SEN, there is need for a special education teacher. Teachers need the support of special needs teachers to assist them in providing equal opportunities to students with SEN. Teachers of learners with SEN also need time for planning (Swarup, 2006).

Despite the significance of resources outlined above, it has been observed that inclusive schools in developing countries lack resources (Mariga et al., 2014). A study in Namibia revealed that schools lacked physical and human resources to implement inclusive education policy effectively (Hausika, 2017). Similarly, a study done in Zambia revealed that there was a lack of adequate resources for implementing the inclusion policy. Schools in the study lacked specialised support staff such as education psychologists, sign interpreters and braille experts. This situation was due to the lack of adequate funding for schools (Ngulube, 2016). A study done in Nigeria revealed that most teachers were not qualified and were not committed to

achieving the goals of inclusive education (Ukpepi and Opuwari, 2019). Studies conducted in Malawi public schools by Banks and Zuurmond (2015) and Chataika et al. (2017) found out that schools were ill-equipped to meet the needs of the learners with disabilities.

Support for Learners with SEN

The NSNEPG advocate for support for learners with SEN (MoE, 2009). Learners with SEN need support for them to reach their potential academically. In an inclusive class, teachers employ a number of strategies that enhance learning for all learners and provide specific support to those learners who experience barriers to learning (Walton et al., 2009).

Maathuis (2016) argues that in order to support learners with SNE, the teaching methods to be used should be those ones that encourage students to think and express their opinions. In an inclusive class, children learn through discovery and working together. Therefore, teachers also need to adjust the standard curriculum to the learning needs of the learners with SEN. Furthermore, learners with SEN need a clean environment. Maathuis (2016) further contends that the families and community should render similar support to learners with SNE.

According to Mariga et al., (2014), learners with SEN can also be supported by teachers through identifying the challenges the child experiences in learning and then drawing up a plan on how to overcome those difficulties. This is known as an Individual Education Plan (IEP). All students with SEN should therefore have an IEP started. The IEP should contain the strategies that have proved useful in helping the child to cope at school (Mariga et al., 2014). When teaching the learners with SEN, teachers should make their communication clear. They should be clearly seen by all pupils and stand closer to learners with SEN. This is necessary so that the learners with SEN can hear and see the teacher. The teacher should also project his/hervoice and repeat important messages (Mariga et al., 2014).

Studies indicate that support for learners with SEN is not enough in independent schools. For example, a study in South African private schools showed that support was not enough (Walton et al., 2009). A learner or a visitor who uses a wheelchair may find it difficult to access the independent schools of South Africa. Less than half of the Independent Schools of South Africa (ISASA) are accessible to learners who use a wheelchair (Walton et al., 2009). Findings from South Africa are similar to a Kenyan study conducted by Ileri et al. (2020). The schools studied were reported to have inaccessible buildings. There were physical barriers such as lack of ramps and wide doors; and this was making learning difficult and unsafe for learners with SEN. This was attributed to lack of regular monitoring and evaluation of school physical resources. Similar findings were found in Ghana by Mantey (2014). The study revealed that the buildings of the schools studied were inaccessible to those who use mobility devices. Learners needed personal assistance to get around the school. There were no specific toilets for children with disabilities in all the schools visited.

Challenges Faced when Implementing IE and its Related Policies

A number of studies indicate that the implementation of IE faces challenges. The challenges point at teachers not receiving any training on SNE. For example, in a study in Zimbabwe which sought to find the perceptions of teachers towards inclusion, it was discovered that teachers lacked competence on how to handle learners with disabilities. Teachers had complained that they had never been trained on how to handle pupils with different disabilities (Kurebwa, 2014).

Chavuta et al. (2008) conducted a baseline study in Malawi which showed that there was a lack of skills on the part of teachers as they were failing to provide adequate and relevant support to learners with disabilities. Lack of training was cited as a major challenge as it makes it difficult for the teachers to identify SEN and to teach in an inclusive manner.

Another challenge affecting the implementation of the SNE policies is lack of resources. The schools reported in most of the literature do not have enough specialised teaching and learning materials such as braille and resource rooms (Banks and Zuurmond, 2015; Chavuta et al., 2008; Munthali, 2011; Mwale, 2010; Udoba, 2014). Udoba (2014) observed that lack of resources is associated with budgetary constraints allocated to schools. A study conducted in the USA found that the average cost for educating a child with disability is 1.9 times the cost for educating a child without disabilities (Stubbs, 2008). The cost could be even higher in developing countries where it is even more difficult to reach all children in need of education regardless of disability. National budgets in developing countries, like Malawi, are often limited and families cannot always afford the cost of education (Stubbs, 2008).

In summary, studies conducted in public secondary schools have highlighted that implementation of IE is a challenge. However, studies to investigate the implementation of National Special Needs Education Policy in private schools in Malawi are limited. In light of the literature reviewed, it was necessary to do a study to understand how private schools implement the policy guidelines that advocate for IE.

This study was guided by the task model of policy implementation by Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002). According to Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002), there are a number of tasks under implementation that can be done once a policy has been adopted. The six strategic tasks are policy legitimisation, constituency building, resource accumulation, organisation design and modification, mobilising resources and monitoring progress and impact (Crosby, 1996). This theoretical framework was used to guide data collection as well as the analytical framework of the study.

Study Design and Methodology

The study used phenomenology as its study design and a qualitative methodology to explore the implementation of the NSNEPG. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group (Creswell, 1994).

This study aimed at understanding the human lived experience of the teachers in private secondary schools (Lester, 1999). Lester (1999) contends that the aim of phenomenology is to identify phenomena and how they are perceived by the actors in a situation. The study involved detailed examination of the participants' life in the world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Smith and Osborn further indicate that phenomenology is concerned with personal perception of an event and an object. The goal of this study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers in private schools based on the research questions (Streubert & Carpenter, 2003).

Qualitative research methodology studies the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This research design was ideal for the study since it aimed at understanding human lived experience of the teaching in private secondary schools (Lester, 1999). As such, this study followed private secondary school teachers in their work place and asked them to explain their everyday life in implementing

NSNEPG. According to Myers (2009), qualitative research is designed to assist researchers understand people and their social and cultural context.

Sampling

This study used a non-probability sampling method called purposive sampling (Kothari, 2004). Purposive sampling is selecting participants of a study based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the research questions (Yin, 2011). Through purposive sampling, four private schools, four Head teachers and sixteen teachers were identified. The schools were selected purposively because they had learners with SEN and therefore, they were valuable sources of relevant and rich information about implementation of the NSNEPG. The headteachers of the schools were therefore automatically included in the sample. The teachers who took part in this qualitative study were those who could provide the necessary information because they had learners with SNE in their classes. Table 1 shows details of the study sample:

Table 1: Sample of this Study

Name of school	Head Teachers pseudonyms	Teachers pseudonyms
A	HT1	(i) Mr Mtedza (ii) Mr Chimanga (iii) Mr Mbewu (iv) Mr Mbatata
B	HT2	(i) Mrs Makaka (ii) Mr Nandolo (iii) Mrs Bowa (iv) Mr Kapinga
C	HT3	(i) Mr Mapira (ii) Mr Mabilinganya (iii) Mr Sapanga (iv) Mr Eng
D	HT4	(i) Mr Mango (ii) Mr Tomato (iii) Mr Masuku (iv) Mr Kamba

Data Generation Methods

The first data generation method was document analysis. Document analysis is the study of human recorded communications such as books and websites (Babbier, 2010). Document analysis in this study was important because it provided background information and contextualised this research (Bowen, 2009). The documents that were analysed in this study were the international standards on SNE and the NSNEPG.

The second data generation method was semi-structured face to face interviews. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide made up of open-ended questions (Brikci & Green, 2007). The study interviewed sixteen teachers and four head teachers individually. Semi-structured face to face interviews were used in the study because it is a quick method to collect rich data directly from the participant. An interviewer can probe deeper into the situation. One does not only adhere to the detailed interview guide. Furthermore, semi-structured interview gives the interviewer an opportunity to rephrase or elaborate the question (Kajornboon, 2004).

The study used observation to triangulate the interview data. Observation helped in seeing how the study participants actually behave in class with learners with SNE. The data generated was used to verify information provided during the face-to-face interviews Hancock et al., 2007; (Kajornboon, 2004). This study observed teachers in the classrooms and the school environment. Twelve lesson observations were conducted in each of the four schools that participated in the study. At this time, it was felt that saturation was reached and no new data

was being generated. The strength of the observation method is that subjective bias is eliminated. The information generated is not complicated by either past behaviour or future attitudes, it gives first-hand information and it is independent of the respondent's willingness to respond (Burgess, 1982).

Ethical Considerations

As a researcher, there was an obligation to respect the rights, needs and values of the study participants (Cresswell, 2003). They were assured of their right to participate freely (Brikci & Green, 2007). Participants were not forced to participate in the study. They first signed an informed consent to participate in the study. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the participants have not been used in this study. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the study participants (Brikci and Green, 2007)

Data Analysis

Data was analysed thematically. The data analysis was guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study in relation to previous related literature. Data analysis proceeded through six phases: familiarisation with the data, coding, codes sorted into potential themes, constructing themes, naming themes, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented based on the five themes which emerged from the analysis of data from the four specific research questions, namely: knowledge of policy, resources for effective implementation of the NSNEPG, support given to learners with SEN and factors affecting the implementation of the NSNEPG.

Knowledge of the Policy

The findings of the study revealed that the nine teachers from private secondary schools who took part in this study lacked knowledge of the NSNEPG. Mr Mtedza gave the following response when asked if he was aware of the policy:

I have never heard about this policy; this is my first time to hear about it (Mr Mtedza).

For the teachers who admitted that they had knowledge of the NSNEPG, it was found out that they did not know the details of the NSNEPG. Teachers and head teachers, who had heard about the policy, heard it through TV, radio, friends and workshops about SNE, and not about the specifics of NSNEPG. All the four private secondary schools that took part in this study did not have the policy document in their school.

The findings of this study concur with the finding of another study conducted in public primary schools by Mwale et al. (2010). It was found that teachers did not have knowledge of SNE policies. The study also found that although some teachers were aware of the policies, they were unable to state the policy contents. Lack of knowledge of the policy indicates that the policy cannot fulfil task two of constituency building of the theory by Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002). The effectiveness of a policy depends on how it is disseminated and understood by its stakeholders (Ntombera, 2006, as cited in Pima, 2012, p.16). In order to implement a policy, people need to understand the content (including definitions and key terms) of the policy. If people do not understand the contents of a policy, implementation becomes a challenge. This was found to be true with other education policies in Malawi such as repetition, pregnancy and

teacher-ratio policies (Wolf et al., 1999). For the NSNEPG to be known by their stakeholders there is a need to fulfil task number two of policy implementation developed by Blinkerhoff and Crosby (2002). The task involves constituency building.

Resources for Effective Implementation of the NSNEPG

The private secondary schools studied lacked special resources required for the implementation of the NSNEPG. This was reported by all the sixteen teachers. Mr Sapanga had this to say:

We do not have resources. This is a private school. There is shortage of resources. We just improvise (Mr Sapanga).

All the four schools lacked assistive devices which is one of the needs of learners with SEN (MoE, 2009). The books were not modified in any way: they had a regular font size of twelve. It was observed in school B that the learners with albinism placed their books close to their eyes when reading. Furthermore, none of the four private schools visited had resource rooms. In addition to that, the four schools did not have sporting grounds in a condition supportive for learners with SEN.

Apart from the special resources for learners with SEN, there is also a shortage of general resources such as books. For the teachers who teach literature, it is a great challenge. This makes it difficult for learners who may need to have the book in their hands to understand.

The findings on resources by this study do not come as a surprise. The findings are consistent with a study in public schools of Malawi. It was found out that lack of resources for learners with SEN is a major challenge affecting implementation of SEN policies (Mwale et al., 2010).

Observations confirmed what emerged out of the interviews. Both classroom and school observation showed that the schools did not possess any special resource specifically for learners with SEN. Blackboards being used in the four private schools studied were not disability friendly. They were faint and unclean such that those with visual difficulties found it difficult to see what was written on the chalk board. The library did not have visual impairment friendly books and those that correspond to the secondary school curriculum.

The unavailability of resources for implementing is working against the task model of policy implementation by Crosby (1996) which was used in this study. The third strategic task of the model is resources accumulation. This involves securing funds. To implement a new policy, human, technical and financial resources must be set aside (Crosby, 1996). The theory of Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002) recognises the need for resources for successful implementation of a policy.

Support Given to Learners with SEN

The four private secondary schools were providing support to learners with SEN in the following ways: offering extra teaching, changing sitting plan and modifying assessment. Mrs Makaka had this to say:

If I know that a student has a problem, I allow him or her to sit in front where he can see. This occurs when the learners with SEN have been identified (Mrs Makaka).

Lesson observations revealed that all 12 teachers who were observed used the question-and-answer method and lecture method. Hayes and Bulat (2017) argued that teachers should use multiple strategies to present content to learners with SEN. These strategies include case studies, role play, group work and peer learning.

The evidence from the school observation showed that little support is being provided to the learners with SEN in the four schools studied. The school buildings, beginning from the administration, classrooms, library, laboratory and toilets, had no ramps for easy mobility by learners with physical impairments. The toilets in all the four schools studied were inaccessible for learners with physical impairment.

Another study in Malawi also indicates that there is lack of suitable resources to support learners with SEN. In a study conducted by Chavuta et al. (2008), it was revealed that schools lacked friendly infrastructure such as classrooms and sanitation facilities. It was reported that most schools had steps and were without ramps to ease the mobility of learners with SEN to and from the classrooms.

The findings of this study are consistent with several other studies from outside Malawi which indicate that support for learners with SEN is not enough in private schools. For example, a study done in South African private schools showed that support was not enough (Walton et al., 2009). This is an issue of concern as it affects access and quality of education for learners with SNE.

Findings of this study in this section suggest that the four private schools in this study have not fulfilled task number four of the theoretical framework guiding this study. Task number four of Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002) indicates that the implementation of any new policy is more likely to cause changes in the implementing organisation. The private secondary schools in this study did not make the required changes for the implementation of the NSNEPG.

Factors Affecting the Implementation of the NSNEPG

The study has found that the following factors are affecting the implementation of NSNEPG in the four private schools: lack of resources, failure to identify learners with SEN, lack of coordination between teachers and parents, lack of commitment from school directors and teachers, frequent changing of teachers, increased work load and lack of monitoring of the NSNEPG.

Conclusion

The study results show that nine of the sixteen teachers in this study in the four private secondary schools lacked knowledge of the NSNEPG. Seven teachers indicated that they “had heard” about the NSNEPG. However, these teachers heard about the NSNEPG through unofficial means such as media and friends. Although they had heard about the NSNEPG, it emerged that the teachers did not know the contents of the NSNEPG in detail. Yet it is stipulated in the policy that the MoE should provide policy guidance to all stakeholders. This finding represents a serious communication problem “when policy hits the ground”. The lack of adequate knowledge of the NSNEPG by teachers is a serious barrier to promotion of IE and to implementation of SNE.

The findings of this study from the four private schools shed light on how private schools are performing in terms of implementing government policies on special needs. The findings reveal that the private schools are not following government policies on SNE.

The study findings reveal that the four schools in the study have not fulfilled the tasks model of implementing a policy as developed by Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002), which was the analytical framework of the study. According to the tasks model, to implement a policy, there is need for gathering support for a new policy and accumulation of resources, the organisation implementing the policy has to be modified, putting the policy into action and monitoring progress and impact. However, the findings reveal that there was little support for the NSNEPG, the four schools did not have resources for implementing the NSNEPG. Furthermore, the schools did not modify their practices and environment. Consequently, the NSNEPG was not put into full implementation.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make the following recommendations:

Firstly, the government should sensitise private school stakeholders (including Headteachers, teachers and learners) about the NSNEPG in order to increase knowledge of the policy. School based in-service training can be utilised for this under the guidance of education experts to support schools. Other means of sensitisation can include use of media through jingles and radio programmes.

Secondly, the government must monitor the implementation of the policy especially in privately run schools. Routine inspection of schools must include finding out how schools are doing in relation to national policies on SNE.

Thirdly, private schools themselves should take a leading role in supporting learners with SEN. They should be able to buy some of the materials needed to effectively assist learners with SEN.

Lastly, the government should include private schools in its SNE programs. When the government organises special needs workshops, private schools should be fully involved.

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Corresponding author: Gift Mbewe

Email: giftmbewe56@gmail.com