

Positive Developments in Special Education in Zambia and Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Formal special education in many southern African countries can be traced back to the early Christian missionary activities in the region. Like elsewhere in the world, the development of special education in this region has been marked with both challenges and accomplishments. The challenges and barriers to the development of special education in the region have been well documented. In fact, they have been so well documented that they have eclipsed whatever achievements the African countries have made thereby creating a negative portrayal of the state of special education in the region. However, in spite of the challenges some African countries have registered many positive developments in the areas of legislation, funding, teacher preparation, inclusive education, and attitudes towards disabilities, among others. The purpose of this discussion was therefore, to highlight the achievements made by Zambia and Zimbabwe and encourage the African countries to continue building on the accomplishments.

Key words: Special education; Zambia; Zimbabwe; development; achievement; Africa

Positive Developments in Special Education in Zambia and Zimbabwe

Introduction

Zambia and Zimbabwe are two contiguous landlocked countries located in Southern Africa. The population of Zambia is 15.5 million (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017) and that of Zimbabwe is 13.06 million (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2014). About 45 percent of the Zambian population is below the age of 15 years (Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education, 2015) while about 47 percent of Zimbabwe's population is below 18 years (UNICEF, 2013). If we go by the World Health Organization's (2011) estimate that about 10 percent of the population of most countries have disabilities, Zambia and Zimbabwe would each have about 1.5 million people with disabilities. The high number of school-age population and that of people with disabilities imply a continued need to expand education services, including special education, and providing adequate resources to meet the educational needs of people with disabilities in both countries.

At the regional level, Zambia and Zimbabwe are members of the Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC). SADC endeavors to achieve economic well-being, improvement in standards of living and quality of life, freedom and social justice, and peace and security for the people of Southern Africa. This shared vision for the Southern African region is anchored on the common values, principles, and the historical and cultural affinities that exist among the people of Southern Africa (SADC, 2010). On the other hand, the economic hardships that Southern African countries face are undeniable. Researchers have repeatedly lamented the sluggish development of special education in this region where the services are desperately needed (e.g., Kamchedzera, 2008; Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2011).

Some researchers have identified the many challenges that affect the development of special education in the region (Adoyo & Odeny, 2015; Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2007; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). These challenges include limited funding, poor infrastructure, lack of specific special education legislation, and shortage of qualified special education personnel, among others. There is no doubt that special education is still underdeveloped in most African countries. Despite the challenges, Zambia and Zimbabwe are striving to improve special education services and have more recently embraced special education initiatives and policies that focus on educating students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

In spite of the tardy response to the needs of so many children with special needs on the continent, several notable gains have been made over the past few years, but have seldom been highlighted. No matter how small the gains may appear, these researchers believe that they need to be recognized for stirring special education momentum in the right direction. These researchers also believe that the positive developments deserve to be highlighted as this may inspire practitioners, researchers, policy makers, advocates, families, and countries to build on these achievements and continue to develop sustainable educational programmes for children with special needs. Using examples from Zimbabwe and Zambia, these researchers highlight some of the achievements in the area of special education in the region.

Brief Description of Special Education in Zambia and Zimbabwe

In Zambia, the provision of special education has been in existence for over 100 years, with missionaries leading the first efforts to educate students with disabilities (Chitiyo, Odongo, Itimu-Phiri, Muwana & Lipemba, 2015). Prior to the missionaries' arrival in Zambia, children with disabilities did not have access to education. The missionaries led the initial effort to educate students with disabilities, focusing mainly on the education of students who had visual and hearing

impairments (Lifumbo, 2016). Consequently, the first school for students with visual impairments opened in 1955 (Katwishi, 1995). After the Ministry of General Education began administering special education in Zambia in 1977, a number of special schools and institutions were built. Additionally, in response to the international shift toward inclusive education, a number of special units and special classrooms were established within general education schools. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of children with disabilities were placed in general education settings (Kasonde-Ng'andu & Moberg, 2001).

Despite having an articulated policy on special education since 1977, Zambia's implementation of special education services has been gradual and difficult (Kalabula, 1993). Like most developing nations, Zambia is experiencing challenges in addressing and delivering educational needs and services (Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2007). Specific challenges that have been identified as major obstacles in the provision of special education services include a lack of government support, cultural influences, limited resources, and poverty. Despite these challenges, Zambia is taking conscious steps in the provision of special education services (Eunice, Nyanga, & Orodho, 2015; Muwana & Ostrosky, 2014). To this effect, Zambia has seen a gradual increase in the number of special education schools and consequently a rise in the number of students receiving special education services.

According to the *Ministry of Education Statistical Bulletin* (Ministry of Education, 2009a), the total number of students with disabilities for the years 2004, 2005, and 2009 indicated an increasing trend in Zambia (i.e., from 76,144 in 2004 to 162,790 in 2009). Services for students with disabilities are provided in four types of settings: (a) special education schools (n = 85) where only students with disabilities are educated with no opportunities to interact with typically developing peers, (b) special education units (n = 260), attached to general education schools where students with disabilities are educated separately but have opportunities to interact with typically developing peers during arrival/departure and recess time, (c) special education classrooms (n = 232), within general education

schools where students with disabilities are educated separately but have opportunities to interact with typically developing peers during arrival/departure and recess time, as well as during teacher planned activities that foster interaction among students with and without disabilities, and (d) inclusive classrooms (number not available), where children with and without disabilities are educated in the same classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Typically, students with more severe disabilities are placed in special education schools and special education units where they spend most of their time with a special education teacher. Students with mild disabilities typically are placed in special education and inclusive classrooms (A. S. Chanda, personal communication, March 7, 2011).

The Ministry of General Education in Zambia recognizes five categories of disability. These categories and the number of students served include: (a) intellectual disability ($n = 59,591$), (b) hearing impairment ($n = 38,267$), (c) visual impairment ($n = 32,094$), (d) physical impairment ($n = 23,054$), and (e) emotional (behavioural) disorders ($n = 10,784$) (Ministry of Education, 2009b). Data indicating the number of students by disability category served within each special education placement are non-existent.

As noted, the quality of special education is adversely impacted by the lack of resources and other challenges. Thus, the quality of special education services may not be comparable to developed nations. However, Eunice, Nyanga, and Orodho (2015) noted that “UNESCO and others in the international community have acclaimed Zambia’s efforts to reach out to ‘children with special needs’” (p. 42).

Similarly, in Zimbabwe special education is still emerging. Its evolution started back in the early 1920s with Christian missionaries developing institutions where they provided functional skills to individuals with sensory and/or physical disabilities. To date, the country promotes special and inclusive education. While some students with disabilities are educated in the general education classrooms, some are educated in different settings on a continuum including resource rooms, self-

contained special education classrooms in regular schools, and special schools (Mutepfa, Mpofu & Chataika, 2007).

While it is challenging to find precise data about the actual number of children with disabilities receiving special education in Zimbabwe, estimates suggest that there were 14,115 students with intellectual disabilities, 50,000 students with learning disabilities, 1,634 students with hearing impairment, and 2,635 students with blindness or visual impairment in 2004 (Education Management Information Systems, 2004). Data on the other recognized types of disabilities, including language disorders and emotional and behavioural disturbance, are not available. Without the actual prevalence rate of disabilities in the country, it is difficult to establish the percentage of children with disabilities receiving special education.

However, in spite of the lack of reliable data, estimates suggested that only 30 percent of children with disabilities had access to special education two decades ago (Chakanyuka, Chung & Stevenson, 2009; Ncube & Hlatywayo, 2014). While this situation may have improved, the economic crises that affected the country for the past two decades dim such a possibility, making it safe to argue that a majority of children with disabilities in the country may not be receiving special education services. For those that have access to school, the quality of education they receive is compromised by lack of qualified teachers, limited material resources, lack of funding, and lack of special education legislation (Chakanyuka, Chung & Stevenson, 2009; Chireshe, 2011; Chitiyo, Hughes, Changara, Chitiyo, & Montgomery, 2017; Mnkandla & Mataruse, 2002).

Legislation

Zambia has made notable strides, with regard to special education legislation, beginning with the Ministry of General Education assuming responsibility for educating students with disabilities. Specifically, three policies have provided the foundation of current practices in special education and

inclusive education in Zambia: The *Education Reform Document* (Ministry of Education, 1977), *Focus on Learning* (Ministry of Education, 1992), and *Educating Our Future* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The 1977 *Educational Reform Document* outlined recommendations for special education and specified the need for integration and adaptation of the general education curriculum to meet identified and specified individual needs of students. Furthermore, the reform document outlined the need for adequate funding in order for special education to be more meaningful and beneficial. The second major educational document, *Focus on Learning* (Ministry of Education, 1992), emanated from the declaration of education for all children at the World Conference on Education for All (1990). The conference stressed the importance of access to educational opportunities. Thus, in the 1992 policy document, the Zambian government reiterated that “every person—child, youth, and adult—shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs” (Ministry of Education, 1992, Article 1). Notably, the 1992 policy stressed the mobilization of resources for the education of all, including children with disabilities.

The third major educational policy, *Educating Our Future* (Ministry of Education, 1996), focused on formal education. Recurring themes in the document included educational flexibility, responsiveness to educational needs, and enhancement of quality of education for all children. In relation to students with disabilities, the policy emphasized equality of educational opportunity, provision of good quality education, and improvement and strengthening of the supervision and management of special education across the country (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Educating Our Future* (Ministry of Education, 1996), adopted after the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), marked an important advancement in special education in Zambia. This policy endorsed the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education settings and set the stage for inclusive education in Zambia.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe, which is the supreme law of the country, makes education a right for all children (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). The constitution also makes it mandatory for the state and all institutions and agencies of government to develop programmes for the welfare of people with disabilities. Even though not comprehensive enough and not specific to the provision of special education, it is noteworthy that the constitution acknowledges the needs of individuals with disabilities. Apart from the constitution, laws and policies have been enacted over the years that guarantee certain provisions for individuals with disabilities. For example, the Disabled Persons Act of 1992 guarantees children with disabilities access to public premises, services, amenities, and employment, the 1987 Policy of Integration (Education Secretary, 1990) makes provision for and guides schools in placement of children with disabilities in different educational environments including special classes, resource rooms, and special schools, while the Chief Education Officer (1989) guarantees access to the general education curriculum for every child including children with disabilities (Chitiyo, 2009). These positive legislative developments have earned Zimbabwe recognition as one of “the most disability-accessible countries in Africa” (Devlieger, 1998, p. 26).

Inclusive Education

The Zambian Government and the Ministry of General Education’s stance on inclusion has been influenced by the Salamanca Statement and Framework (UNESCO, 1994) to which Zambia ascribes. As a result, the Zambian government has adopted a policy (i.e., *Educating Our Future*) that stipulates equal opportunities, nondiscrimination, social justice, protection of basic human rights, and participation of students with disabilities in the mainstream activities of school and society. The Ministry of General Education has increasingly placed emphasis on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the education system. Additionally, the Zambian government continues to review all

legislation relating to persons with disabilities and endorses relevant international conventions in order to facilitate efficient and effective service delivery (Mung'omba, 2008).

With specific reference to Zambia, Simui, Waliuya, Namitwe and Munsanje (2009) defined inclusive education as a “continuous process of increasing access, participation, and achievement for all learners in general education settings, with emphasis on those at risk of marginalization and exclusion” (p. 9). According to these authors inclusive education not only applies to children with disabilities but also includes other groups of vulnerable children, such as homeless children, children with HIV/AIDS, and orphans (Muwana & Ostrosky, 2014). Consequently, the Ministry of General Education has actively participated in managing the HIV/AIDS pandemic at all levels of education. In collaboration with various partners and Ministry of Health, the Ministry of General Education has instituted counseling and testing programmes for individuals that are HIV/AIDS positive. Furthermore, the Ministry of General Education has incorporated HIV/AIDS content into the curriculum across all levels of education (i.e., primary and secondary school). In the same vein, special education content for teacher preparation at the University of Zambia has included courses that strengthen student teachers' counseling skills to enable them to effectively assist students with disabilities and students affected by HIV/AIDS upon entering the teaching field (University of Zambia, 2008-2009).

Zimbabwe demonstrated its commitment to inclusive education by the signing of the 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education and other related international agreements related to inclusive education (Charema, 2010; Chireshe, 2013). In Zimbabwe inclusion is defined as the elimination of barriers that may hinder students' participation in school, community, and work settings (Mutepfa, Mpofu, & Chataika, 2007). This is a positive stance, which could have positive educational implications for children with disabilities in terms of accessing the curriculum. Furthermore, while the country promotes educating students with disabilities in the

general education classroom, a continuum of placements that are designed to ensure that the students receive an appropriate education are in place. The placements include the use of resource rooms within the regular school where students with disabilities receive supplemental specialized instruction, self-contained special education classrooms in regular schools, and special schools where students with severe disabilities receive a functional curriculum.

According to Mutepfa et al. (2007), the inclusive education policy in Zimbabwe is designed to ensure that all student, including students with disabilities, have access to the national curriculum at the national levels. For this reason, different levels of support are provided to students, depending on their individual needs, across the continuum of placements stated earlier. While many children especially those with severe disabilities, still drop out of school at a higher rate compared to their peers without disabilities, this approach has helped to provide many children with disabilities with access to the national curriculum.

By ratifying the Salamanca Statement and endorsing its fundamental principles, both Zambia and Zimbabwe indicated their commitment to equalization of opportunity for all students premised on the understanding that “human differences are normal and that learning must be adapted to the needs of the child, rather than the child fitted to the process” (Center for Studies in Inclusive Education, 2016, para. 9). These authors consider this to be a positive development because it reaffirms educational rights for marginalized children, such as children with disabilities and those who are vulnerable and at risk, in a way that may hold governments accountable for the children’s education. Government level initiatives like these are crucial at advancing special and inclusive education, especially where negative perceptions or attitudes towards disabilities still exist (Chimhenga & Musarurwa, 2011; Choruma, 2007; Miyoba, 2014). Perhaps such efforts could explain recently reported positive attitudes towards disability in both countries (Chitiyo, et al., 2017; Muwana & Ostrosky, 2014).

Attitudes Towards Disability/Inclusion

In recent years, there has been a shift in the way special education (and inclusion) is perceived in Zambia. This shift in outlook may be attributed to the educational policy documents (i.e., *The Education Reform Document* (Ministry of Education, 1977), *Focus on Learning* (Ministry of Education, 1992), and *Educating Our Future* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Muwana and Ostrosky (2014) examined the attitudes of Zambian pre-service teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Overall, the Zambian pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, citing that inclusion promotes an understanding and acceptance of individual differences between students with and without special needs. Additionally, the majority of pre-service teachers who participated in the study noted that students with special needs have a basic right to be educated in the general education classroom, and that inclusion promotes self-esteem among students with special needs. Given the results of Muwana and Ostrosky's (2014) study, one can presume that attitudes toward disability among Zambian school personnel and the Zambian public may be positive.

In Zimbabwe, research on attitudes towards disability or on inclusive education has yielded mixed results. Some studies have reported negative attitudes (e.g., Barnart & Kabzems, 1992; Mandina, 2012) while others have reported positive attitudes (e.g., Mielke, Adamolekun, Ball & Mundanda 1997). However, more recently, Chitiyo, et al. (2017) found that a majority of the 204 schoolteachers who participated in their study supported educating children with disabilities together with their peers without disabilities. While it is worrisome that negative attitudes have been reported, that positive attitudes have also been reported is a welcome development especially in a society where traditional beliefs still shape people's perceptions about disability.

Special Education Teacher Preparation

The preparation of special education teachers in Zambia is embedded in the 1996 *Educating Our Future* document with the belief that the quality and effectiveness of an education system depends heavily on the quality of its teachers. Teachers are perceived as key determinants of the successful implementation of the education system's goals. As such, the educational and personal well-being of children in schools is believed to hinge on teachers' competence, commitment, and resourcefulness. Thus, the Zambian Ministry of General Education has placed paramount importance on recruiting competent teachers and sustaining a high-quality teaching. The Ministry of General Education is committed to recruiting suitable candidates, providing quality professional education, and providing in-service professional development. To this effect, the Ministry of General Education in collaboration with the University of Zambia established national standards for teacher preparation programmes, including special education teacher preparation (Longe & Chiputa, 2003). Furthermore, the Ministry of General Education has created more opportunities for special education pre-service and in-service teacher training, steadily increasing the number of special education teachers over the years (see Chitiyo, et al., 2015).

The official training of special education teachers in Zimbabwe was started in 1983 when the government first introduced such training at the United College of Education (UCE) in Bulawayo. Training at the UCE was designed for in-service general education teachers who wanted to train as special education teachers in the following areas: hearing impairment, visual impairment, mental retardation, and learning disabilities (Musindo, 2013). At least a decade later, the government introduced undergraduate and graduate degrees in special education at the University of Zimbabwe and Great Zimbabwe University with the latter offering cross-categorical training encompassing a variety of disabilities including intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities, emotional and behavioural disorders, physical disabilities, health-related disabilities, learning disabilities, multiple disabilities,

and giftedness (Chitiyo, et al., 2015). Given the persistent shortage of special education personnel, these governmental efforts towards the training of special education teachers are a very timely and positive development.

Related Services

Related services in Zambia are offered independent of the Ministry of General Education, mainly through the Ministry of Health. For instance, a concerned parent may request an assessment of his or her child through the Ministry of Health. The assessment team may include a psychologist, audiologist, and an ophthalmologist, all of whom are based in the Ministry of Health. Alternatively, related services may be obtained privately, at the parents' request and expense.

In Zimbabwe, efforts have been made to provide certain related services that students with disabilities may require in addition to the special education services they will be receiving. Even though available on a limited basis, school psychological and counseling services are provided to children with disabilities through the Ministry of Education's Schools Psychological Services unit (Mutepfa, Mpofu, & Chataika, 2007). Other related services such as speech or physical therapy are also provided but at the parents' expense.

Summary and Recommendations

Without doubt, Zambia and Zimbabwe have made positive headway in some areas of special education. Starting in the early 1900s, both countries acknowledged the existence of students with special needs and sought ways to include them in their education systems. To date, both countries have laws and policies that promote the education of children with disabilities. Even though these laws may not be specific to special education, they are a step in the right direction. At the least, they help to protect the educational rights of children with disabilities by spelling out their entitlement to it.

However, going forward the countries should consider enacting special education specific laws instead of policies, as policies do not have the same legal authority as laws (Chitiyo, 2009; Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). The special education specific laws should address issues such as eligibility, identification and assessment, types of special education and related services, who provides the services, where the services are provided, funding for the services, and accessibility of the services, among others. Having specific legislation will enable parents to hold the government and service providers accountable to ensure that children with disabilities receive an appropriate education.

Apart from laws and policies, there is evidence from both countries that attitudes towards children with disabilities and their inclusion in the general education systems are shifting towards being more positive. Given how deeply these countries are rooted in traditional beliefs, this shift in attitudes is a good development because attitudes, among both families and professionals, influence the provision of services for children with disabilities (Kalyanpur & Gowramma, 2007). The shift in attitudes may be attributed to the level of awareness about disability in both countries—more people getting educated and learning more about disabilities—as education has been previously found to promote positive attitudes towards disability (Parasulam, 2006; Yazbeck, McVilly & Parmenter, 2004). Indeed, both countries have seen significant increases in their literacy rates over the years. The countries are encouraged to continue investing in education and specifically target promoting more awareness of disability issues to counteract traditional beliefs that tend to fan negative attitudes towards people with disabilities.

Both Zambia and Zimbabwe have made positive steps by introducing special education teacher preparation programmes at local colleges. Lack of qualified special education personnel has been identified as one of the factors impeding the development of special education in this region (Chitiyo, et al., 2015; Hughes, Chitiyo, Itimu-Phiri & Montgomery, 2016; Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture, Namibia, 2004). Therefore, there is need to develop more special education teacher preparation programmes. In addition to more special education teacher preparation programmes, the governments

can also offer in-service professional development programmes that will equip in-service general education teachers with the requisite skills to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings, since both countries have embraced inclusion. Professional development of teachers has been cited elsewhere as being effective at addressing the shortage of qualified special education teachers (Mandina, 2012; Parasulam, 2006; Yazbeck, McVilly, & Parmenter, 2004). In terms of pre-service teachers, the governments can enhance their training on inclusive education by introducing special education courses as part of their required core-classes. Malawi provides a good example of this approach. In Malawi, all pre-service teachers are required to take at least one special education course as part of their pre-service training (Chitiyo, et al., 2015). Since both Zambia and Zimbabwe have embraced inclusion, it may be helpful for the countries to adopt the Malawian policy in order to boost the countries' capacity to provide inclusive education to all students, including students with exceptional needs.

Finally, it is encouraging to note that both Zambia and Zimbabwe continue to ratify innovative global special education commitments while making adjustments to suit their unique contexts. For example, by including children orphaned by HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable groups as children needing special education services, the countries will ensure that more vulnerable children in the region have access to special education services. Currently, Zambia and Zimbabwe are among the countries most affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with many school-age children having lost either or both of their parents. This creates unique circumstances for the children making them good candidates for special education. These unique circumstances also signal the need for more special education research in the region as decisions for the improvement of special education services need to be rooted in research.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to highlight the current achievements in the area of special education in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Extant research has repeatedly identified challenges, barriers, and

threats and lamented the sluggish development of special education in the region. However, in spite of the many challenges and barriers, different African countries have also registered positive developments. Unfortunately, these positive developments have been eclipsed by the reports on the underdevelopment of special education in the region. Positive developments have been made in the areas of legislation, funding, teacher preparation, inclusive education, and attitudes towards disabilities, among others. We therefore, wanted to highlight these achievements and encourage the countries to continue to build on the accomplishments. We strongly believe that success builds on success, and as such, it is necessary to acknowledge successful efforts towards the education of the many children with disabilities on the African continent in spite of the numerous challenges, obstacles, and threats that continue to be reported repeatedly.

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