

Special and Inclusive Education in Southern Africa

Argnue Chitiyo and Chaidamoyo Goodson Dzenga

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Abstract

Children with special education needs possess unique learning characteristics which may inhibit their effective learning in mainstream, general education classes. Special education practices are therefore designed to address the educational needs of students with disabilities through various strategies including thorough assessments of students' characteristics, individualized curriculum planning, and provision of essential services and resources to maximize learning. Although there is extensive research on special education in developed countries like the United States of America, literature on its development and practice in Southern African countries is somewhat scattered and inconclusive. This study reviewed special education policy, special education teacher professional development, and challenges to successful special education practice in five Southern African countries: Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, and Namibia. An understanding of special education policy development and challenges is imperative to develop a more successful practice.

Keywords:

disability, professional development, Southern Africa, special education

The population of children with disabilities has increased significantly during the past decade. According to the latest World Health Organization (WHO) world report on disability, the population of children aged 0-14 years with moderate to severe disabilities was approximately 5.1% of the global population in 2011 (WHO, 2011). The same population in low and middle-income African countries alone was 6.4% of total African population (WHO, 2011). In Africa, less than 10% of children with disabilities are enrolled in primary education, and only about 13% receive some form of education in some countries (WHO, 2019). These statistics show the intensity with which education for students with disabilities should be regarded. Traditionally, children with disabilities have often been marginalized from a lot of activities including academic and community. Following the 1990 World Conference on Education for All and the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Development goal on quality education (Wodon, 2014), the discussion on achieving the educational needs for all children was made a top political agenda globally, resulting in a lot of countries creating or modifying policies to address access to basic education. Access to basic education was deemed a fundamental right enshrined in a lot of international statutes including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and World

Declaration on Education for All (Mariga et al., 2014). However, regardless of education being deemed a basic right, it does not imply inclusion. In order to ensure that children with disabilities have access to quality education, additional statutes advocating their education were created, and these include the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled People, and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs (Mariga et al., 2014). The Dakar Framework for Action explicitly states that the right to education is not achieved unless national education systems are fully inclusive, meaning "actively seeking out children who are not enrolled and responding flexibly to the circumstances and needs of all learners" (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, p. 16).

Special and inclusive education have been in existence for decades and are used to address the educational needs of students with disabilities (Smith, 2004). In special education, curriculum and academic programs are systematically planned and designed to cater to the specific needs of individual students in ways that increase their educational outcomes just like those of their typical peers (Hornby, 2015). Ideally, such students' educational needs may not be sufficiently met in mainstream classes since some of the curriculum and reading materials are not specifically adapted to match

their unique needs. An increasingly popular approach to special education involves inclusion, which is a model involving partial or full integration of students with special needs and those without disabilities (Zigmond, 1995). In the United States the government instituted the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990 to help provide quality education to children with disabilities (Frieden, 2004). The IDEA consists of six pillars guiding the provision of education to students with disabilities: The individualized education program (IEP), free appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), appropriate evaluation, parent and teacher participation, and procedural safeguards. The IEP specifies a child's academic and functional performance levels, as well as the services, accommodations, and modifications to be made for the student based on their individual needs. Due to its fundamental function as a planning tool and a map for services and interventions for students with disabilities, the IEP is considered the cornerstone of IDEA and an essential tool to help students achieve their educational goals more effectively. Although research into special education practice is extensive in the USA, its development and efficacy in Africa is still in its infancy.

Advantages of Special Education

Special education practices accrue several benefits for both students and teachers. Firstly, instructional methods are tailored to match the precise needs of individual students, thereby increasing their chances of success (Dragoo, 2017). Prior to modifying curricula, teachers assess the individual students' characteristics and current levels of academic and functional performances. This process helps to identify a student's areas of strengths and weaknesses and therefore design curriculum in ways that are consistent with addressing the student's exact needs. In the United States this process is achieved through IEPs. When formulating IEPs, a panel of stakeholders to a child's education meets regularly to discuss, design, and review the student's academic and functional performance. The panel of stakeholders typically include the students' teachers, parents, psychologists, or other designated advocates for the child such as services personnel. The coalition of individuals with different expert areas ensures that the student is getting the best educational services in the most suitable environment, and with access to the best resources (Dragoo, 2017).

Through the use of individualized education ap-

proaches, special education also helps teachers to identify individual students' learning styles (Landrum & McDuffie, 2010). Most developmental disabilities often affect an individual's ability to listen, speak, read, write, reason, or engage in social skills. Consequently, these conditions can affect an individual's characteristic or preferred methods of understanding, acquiring, processing, storing or recalling information (Wilson, 2012). During the learning assessments, teachers trained in special education are capable of identifying the learning styles that maximize an individual student's ability to learn, and therefore design teaching approaches that work best for children with special needs. One commonly used approach in this regard is differentiated instruction, whereby teachers assess individual students' intellectual skills, strengths, and weaknesses and provide the necessary supports without making the tasks too easy for the students (Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers capitalize on the individual students' characteristics by designing instruction in ways that support students' strengths and eliminate weaknesses.

Furthermore, special education facilitates matching of students with qualified educators who understand their disabilities (Gilmour & Henry, 2018). Special education teachers are typically trained in various assessments and techniques for identifying students with special needs and understanding the best teaching practices ideal for certain disabilities (Gilmour & Henry, 2018). Furthermore, special education teachers possess certain characteristics that are considered particularly important for students with disabilities. In a study to examine positive traits of teachers of children with special needs, Korn and colleagues (2010) identified kindness, honesty, humor, fairness, and love as the five most highly rated traits of special education teachers. The study indicated that teachers used these traits to "motivate others, foster other positive traits, maximize student progress, avoid negative outcomes, and meet the individual needs of students" (p. 2). These characteristics, combined with other specialized skills that teachers possess, enables more effective learning and improved outcomes for students with special needs.

Special education also enables teachers and administrators to identify special resources and services needed for students to achieve their learning goals (Klinger & Bianco, 2020). One key aspect of the IEP in special education is the pooling of essential resources and services to address the needs of individual students. Specialized supports and services provide students with the

necessary tools they need to achieve high quality instruction. The Department of Education specifies three key strategies for implementing specialized supports and services for students, which are: (a) coordination and integration of supports within the general education setting, (b) supplementing and aligning activities across all settings that reinforce student learning and increase independence, and (c) creating a wide continuum of supports that promote success across multiple life domains (Department of Education, 2020). When put together, these supports help students to easily reach their goals more efficiently and effectively.

Given the benefits of special education services, it is imperative for schools to develop the facilities that enhance their provision. Although there is a lot of research on development and use of special education in western countries like the U.S., research regarding its development, efficacy, and challenges in Africa is somewhat scattered and inconclusive. The purpose of this review is to assess the current trends in special education policy, teacher professional development, and barriers to successful special education practice in five Southern African countries: Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia.

Special Education Policy in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia

Research on special needs education (SNE) policy and practice across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is large. According to the literature reviewed in this study, most countries seem to have well defined policies guiding special education practice. The common feature across the countries is their ratification of international education conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, World Declaration on Education for All, United Nations Convention on the Right of Children with Disabilities and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (Wodon, 2014). Prior to the adoption of the UN conventions, most governments played a minimal role in special education provision, with most of the education services being offered through donor, charity, and non-governmental organizations (Chitiyo et al., 2015). On a country-by-country basis, governments in the respective countries instituted additional acts and policies to make access to education easy for all children. In Malawi, the government adopted policies that were connected to provision of

education, including Policy and Investment Framework of 1991, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy of 2002, Education for All Action Plan of 2005, and the National Education Sector Plan of 2006 (Munthali, 2011). The Ministry of Education through the Department of Special Needs developed an Inclusive Education Advocacy Program (IEAP) whose three main aims were to (a) increase access to schooling for young people with disabilities; (b) improve quality of SNE in regular schools; and (c) assess and counsel young people with disabilities (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2005). The Ministry also instituted three district-based activities in the neediest areas of the country using the following tools: (a) Interactive community sensitization workshops on the rights of people with disabilities, (b) Village-based disability assessment health clinics, and (c) Teacher training on inclusive education approaches (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2005). Through these programs, several teachers were trained in inclusive education techniques, community leaders in many districts sensitized on disability rights, advocacy groups (e.g., parent-teacher associations, school management committees) trained on how to create disability infrastructures in their schools and communities, and several potential special needs students were able to access assessment services through specially arranged village-based disability health clinics (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2005).

In Botswana, the government instituted the National Policy on Education (1997), which was further revised in 1994 to accommodate more explicit provisions for special education (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007). The policy was also centered on transitioning Botswana from an agriculturally based to an industrial-driven economy. At that time, access to education was deemed a fundamental right, and government expanded its investment in education development, including expansion of special education (Hopkin, 2004). Other policies that were linked to special education development include National Policy on the Care of People with Disabilities of 1996 and the Dakar Framework for Education of 2000 (Dart, 2007).

In Zambia, the Ministry of General Education is responsible for the formulation, implementation, and administration of government policy on primary, secondary, and higher education and teacher training (Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2011). In 1982, the Zambian government instituted Zambia's Campaign to Reach Disabled Children (ZCRDC; 1982-1986), whose aims were

raising public consciousness of the special needs of children with disabilities, establishing comprehensive registers for children with disabilities, and lay foundations for nation-wide health and education provision for children with disabilities (Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2011). The government also instituted the Educating our Future in 1996 as its prominent policy guiding education practice (Zambia Ministry of Education, 1996). The policy stipulated three specific goals on education for pupils with special educational needs, which are (a) ensuring equality of educational opportunities for children with special needs; (b) providing education of particularly good quality to pupils with special needs; and (c) Improving and strengthening the supervision and management of special education across the country. In order to achieve these goals, the government set up eight core strategies to facilitate the implementation and administration of its goals (Malungo et al., 2018). However, despite a large effort by the government and other institutions, the population of schools devoted to special education remains significantly low in Zambia. In 1995, there were 31 special education institutions consisting of 28 primary schools, one secondary school, and two tertiary level schools (Government of Zambia, 2019). By 2014, number of special education schools had increased to 50 nationwide, which is insufficient compared to the demand for them (Shafuda & De, 2020). The schools are mostly concentrated in urban areas. Because of the scarcity, most students with special needs are unable to access the schools due to long distances (Serpell & Jere-Folotiya, 2011).

Zimbabwe does not have specific legislation for special education. The Education Act of 1987 (latest revised 2001) is the key law guiding education practice (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019). The law does not specify any goals regarding special education practice. Instead, it describes the provision of education services in general. Implications about special education are assumed from the Act's general statement regarding compulsory primary education for every school-going age child, children's fundamental right to education, entitlement to enrolment at the nearest schools, and accessing the education at lowest possible cost (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019). Although the Education Act is not clear about special education, there are other government policies that are somewhat tied to special education, but none explicitly state provision of special education services. The policies include Disabled Persons Act of 1996 and Education Secretary's Policy Circular

of 1990 (Mutepe et al., 2007). The Disabled Persons Act establishes a National Disability Board, part of whose functions is to formulate policies and measures to achieve equal opportunities for people with disabilities by ensuring that they have access to education (Virendrakumar et al., 2019). Although government set up the policies, there are no specifications in the policies that commit government to providing access to education. The government partially funds, but does not fully subsidize the education sector, which negates the efforts as tuition is fairly expensive to mostly rural and urbanized households (Mutepe et al., 2007).

In Namibia, special education is offered in various formats including special schools, integration/mainstreaming, partial inclusion, and full inclusion (Chitiyo et al., 2016). Namibia is among top five countries with the highest percentage expenditure on education (United States Agency for International Development, 2008). It also has a wide range of policy frameworks supporting the development and administration of special education (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2013). The Education Act of 2001 has specific sections explicitly addressing special education practices (Government of Namibia, 2020). The act establishes that a school board for special schools and schools providing special education do the following: (1) consist of at least one person with expertise in special education as a member of the school board, (2) establish a committee to advise the school board on the provision of special education in the school, and (3) include representative of either a sponsoring body for the school, organizations of persons with disabilities, organizations of parents of learners with disabilities, or a person with a disability. The ministry of education also has a Sector Policy on Inclusive Education whose aim is to ensure that all learners are educated in the least-restrictive education settings and in schools in their neighborhoods to the fullest extent possible (Namibia Ministry of Education, 2013). The policy specifies eight key strategies and their outcomes addressing all important elements of access to special education services. Although Namibia has a very comprehensive special and inclusive education frameworks, the number of special needs schools is very small in relation to the population in need for them. As of 2016, Namibia had 11 listed schools of special needs nationwide (Namibia Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, 2016).

Special Education Teacher Preparation

A persistent shortage in teachers trained in SNE is one of the leading reasons why students with disabilities do not access the education they need (United Nations, 2015). According to the United Nations (2015), Sub-Saharan Africa has the worst teacher shortages, needing about 17 million teachers in total in order to achieve the millennium development goal on universal primary and secondary education by 2030. The biggest shortage lies in the area of SNE. As highlighted earlier, Zimbabwe does not have specific legislation guiding special education practice, nor the training of teachers in SNE. The lack of teachers specially trained in SNE has, for a long time, resulted in more students being placed in general as opposed to inclusive or specialized programs (Mutepfa et al., 2007). However, some policies or institutions for SNE encourage the training of teachers in SNE (Chitiyo et al., 2019). For example, the Zimbabwe School Psychological Services and Special Education provides in-service training to schoolteachers teaching students with special needs (Mutepfa et al., 2007). Some of their activities in this regard include capacity development for mainstream teachers to prepare them for understanding and addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities and facilitating access to specialized resources for teacher training (Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2020). Also, the National Disability Board has one of its listed functions as provision of skilled staff for the successful implementation of measures to enhance the welfare and rehabilitation of people with disabilities (Disabled Persons Act, 2001). Part of this entails training of personnel providing disability care services, including special needs education. Hence, since the inception of the Zimbabwe National Disability Board in 2002, the number of special education teacher training institutions and programs in Zimbabwe increased significantly. These include the University of Zimbabwe and its 18 associate colleges (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Although there are no specific figures, the number of teachers specially trained in SNE has increased significantly during the past decade.

In Zambia, the first special education teacher training program was introduced in 1993 and was affiliated with The University of Zambia (Chitiyo & Muwana, 2018). The program specialized in teacher education skills in visual or hearing impairments, learning difficulties, and early childhood education for children with

special educational needs. In 1996, the government, in consultation with international donors, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning (e.g., University of Zambia) set a motion to revamp the entire education sector and expand special education teacher training through its *Educating Our Future* policy of 1996 (Government of Zambia, 1996). The policy specifications regarding teacher training emphasized the importance of a quality and effective education systems centered on well-trained teachers. The policy specifies other aspects of teacher training that were considered to be paramount for a successful education for students with disabilities (See *Educating our Future*, 1996). In 2008, the Zambian government in partnership with other organizations (e.g., Directorates of Education, Specialized Services, and Distance Education; Zambia Institute of Special Education) launched the Teacher Training Support Program whose aim was to improve pre-service and in-service teacher training (McCall & McCall, 2015). By 2018, the Zambia Institute of Special Education (ZAMISE) had trained over 500 special education teachers. However, the teacher to student ratio in special education schools in Zambia remains very high. As of December 2014, the ratio stood at 1:80 (McCall & McCall, 2015). This indicates a dire need for more teacher training in Zambia.

In Botswana, teachers are required to complete a 3-year diploma course at a primary college of education in order to teach in a primary school, or at a secondary college of education in order to teach in a junior secondary school (Abosi, 2000). The Department of Teacher Education Training specifies requirements for time allocations between content and pedagogy for various subject related qualifications (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007). For instance, science and math teacher educators are required to complete at least 55% of the total course duration on content and 45 % on pedagogy. Additionally, teachers are required to complete at least 4 months in teaching practice under the supervision of experienced teachers (TIMSS, 2015). Following the revision of its National Policy on Education in 1994, the government made it a requirement for all teachers to have some aspects of special education training during their pre-service and in-service training (BFTU, 2007). It also required that all associated staff such as classroom assistants undergo similar training in aspects of special education in which they are involved. In order to put this into action, the government authorized the inclusion of special education

elements in teacher college curriculums throughout the country (Abosi, 2000). The policy also made a requirement for the establishment of intervention teams in schools allowing general and special education teachers to collaborate in order to address the learning needs of students with disabilities. In 1999, the first Bachelor of Education degree in Special Education was initiated in the country. At the University of Botswana, the first three programs in special education included (a) a 2-year in-service diploma program in special education for teachers, (b) a 4-year pre-service degree program in special education for undergraduates, and (c) a 3-year in-service program in special education for holders of a Diploma or its equivalent from the University of Botswana or one of the colleges of education in Botswana. Despite numerous efforts directed towards SNE teacher training, recent research still shows deficits in teacher training and special education teachers' preparedness to address educational needs of students with disabilities (Habulezi et al., 2016; Mangope et al., 2018; Mukhopadhyay, 2009; Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012).

In Malawi, it is not clear when exactly special needs teacher preparation started, but the provision of SNE started in 1950 courtesy of the Scottish and South African Evangelical Missionaries in Kasungu and Nsanje districts (Hughes et al., 2016). In 1968, the first formal school for SNE was started at Montfort Special Needs Education College in Chiradzulu district courtesy of the Catholic church (Itimu & Kopetz, 2008). Until the late 90s, Montfort Special Needs Education College was the largest SNE teacher training institution in the country, graduating special educators specializing in educational supports for students with hearing and visual impairments. To date, Malawi has two public universities offering SNE teacher programs (i.e., University of Malawi and Mzuzu University) and a few private colleges including Catholic University of Malawi and Malawi Adventist University. Since there has not been a bigger capacity to develop specialty programs in SNE, Malawian Ministry of Education mandated that all general education training programs include at least a single special education course or module. A study assessing SNE teacher professional development needs in Malawi (Chitiyo et al., 2016) discovered that of eight colleges investigated, only two offered programs in special education (Montfort College and Catholic University). The rest of the colleges only offered a course or module as part of their general teacher education programs.

The Namibian Education Policy has clear speci-

cations regarding procedures for training special education teachers. Through Sector Policy on Inclusive Education, Namibian ministry of education oversees SNE professional development (Ministry of Education, 2013). The ministry regulates the implementation of strategies to recruit best candidates into the teaching profession and supplies scholarships to candidates through the Namibia Student Financial Assistance Fund. The ministry also regulates the procedures for setting entry requirements for candidates into SNE teacher training. The government requires all teachers to take courses in inclusive education as part of their in-service training. The ministry also runs a Continuous Professional Development Program specifically aimed at addressing teacher professional needs. In 2013, the Namibian Ministry of Education facilitated an educational needs assessment, which indicated an acute shortage in specially trained teachers in this field (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Furthermore, the Namibian Ministry of Education facilitates multiple national teacher training workshops with various stakeholders annually. The aims of such workshops include integration of principles of inclusive education into the curricula of teacher education programs across Namibia. The ministry of Education also specifies pedagogical and theoretical elements to include in the teacher training curricular, and these include practical classroom modifications, curriculum adaptation and differentiation, classroom management, use of assistive technology and devices, environmental preparation, and nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation related to disability. According to a study assessing special education teacher needs (Chitiyo et al., 2016), teachers listed the following as their priority professional development areas: discipline, organization of teaching, learning strategies, behavior management, and instructional methods.

Additional professional development needs indicated by teachers included more training in special education areas including ability to modify curriculum and instruction to match unique needs of students with disabilities, training in skills on sensory disabilities (i.e. hearing & visual impairments), need for equipment to work with students with sensory impairments, disability friendly infrastructure (e.g. wheelchairs, accessible desks, ramps, and other basic amenities), and assistive technology (e.g. computers, projectors, laptops, radios, tape recorders, etc.).

Challenges Associated with Implementation of Special Education

Despite the progress that has been made across countries, there remains some challenges associated with achieving inclusive education. Firstly, most governments experience budgetary constraints inhibiting the allocation of sufficient funds towards education in general. According to data presented by Mastercard Foundation (Zubairi & Rose, 2019), although government expenditure on education in the region increased in recent years, governments in Sub-Saharan Africa in general spend far less in dollar amounts on primary and secondary education compared to anywhere else in the world. Part of this problem is attributed to poorly performing economies, which results in tensions in resources allocation towards all competing sectors of the economy (African Development Bank, 2018). Majority of Southern African countries, including Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia have experienced economic decline during the past decade, thereby further worsening the situation (African Development Bank, 2018). These countries have very low subsidization of education. High costs of tuition therefore deter some parents from sending their children to school (African Union, 2014).

Traditional beliefs associated with disability in most African countries have for long perpetuated negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. According to a study of nuanced cultural beliefs about causes of disabilities in Namibia, Haihambo and Lightfoot (2010) found that many Namibians believed in supernatural causes of disability such as witchcraft, sinful family relationships or practices, punishment from God, curses from ancestors or bad omen, and bad luck. As a result of these beliefs, people with disabilities were often excluded from social activities both at family and community level. A similar study found similar challenges in Zimbabwe (Mukushi et al., 2019). Caregivers interviewed on the causes of disability believed that supernatural forces were behind certain disabilities. As a result, some people avoid interacting closely with individuals or family members of individuals with disabilities. This societal stigma keeps some families from sending their children with disabilities to school. Furthermore, some traditional school practices based on societal stereotypes about disability would either separate or completely exclude children with disabilities from mainstream classes.

The lack of specially trained teachers in SNE is an

impediment to the education of children. Several countries in the region have experienced acute shortages in trained teachers. In a study to assess professional development needs among special education teachers in Southern Africa, teachers expressed lack of necessary training as an impediment to their ability to teach students with SNE. For example, teachers from Malawi and Namibia expressed a need for more training on instructional supports for students with sensory disabilities such as deafness, blindness, and hard-of-hearing (Chitiyo et al., 2018). Teachers from Zimbabwe indicated a need for more professional development in identifying and assessments of learning disabilities

Implementation of special education policies was highlighted as one of the main challenges across countries. Issues related to implementation that showed up included societal attitudes towards people with disabilities, parental involvement, lack of specialist disability knowledge, practical skills, and resources. According to a rapid assessment of teachers and societal beliefs about children with disabilities in Namibia, some participants expressed negative perceptions about disability, for example that disability is a curse, or something associated with witchcraft, and that it ought to be hidden away. Some teachers and school principals perceived disability from a medical standpoint and how it ought to be addressed from such. Some school principals expressed the lack of appropriate skills or training for inclusive education. Some teachers also expressed negative perceptions about students with disabilities, stating how students with disabilities caused them stress and frustration, and that they would prefer not to teach them.

In Zimbabwe, major obstacles that emerged from literature included lack of resources, inaccessibility of schools, structural barriers, and lack of political will (Sibanda, 2018). Regarding resources constraints, Zimbabwe has been severely disadvantaged largely as a result of the two decade long economic decay. During the past two decades, Zimbabwe's economy shrunk by more than 70%, and during the same time, government expenditure on economic services, including education were severely cut. The imposition of economic sanctions on Zimbabwe further worsened the situation as Zimbabwe was no longer able to access loan facilities from the world financial institutions like the world bank and IMF. As a result, the education sector deteriorated persistently, teachers' working conditions worsened, resulting in perennial industrial actions and exodus by teachers to other professions. During the same period,

Zimbabwe also experienced a political crisis which crippled a lot of state functions, including education. Government's attitude towards teachers' working conditions and education in general was not forthcoming. This is evidenced by a lack of clear policy regarding special education several years post-independence. Government's expenditure towards education went down significantly at the expense of other sectors prioritized by the government. Insufficient investment in education is in contrast to other countries in the region which have clear policies and laws regarding special education and higher priority for education in general (e.g., Botswana and Namibia). Furthermore, research also shows that teachers in most schools lacked the necessary assistive devices for teaching students with SNE. According to a research exploring teachers' special and inclusive needs in Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe (Chitiyo et al., 2018), teachers expressed the need for assistive devices needed to educate students with hearing and vision impairments.

Conclusion

The review of special and inclusive education policy and practice in Southern African countries showed some variability in approach across countries. Most countries have clear legislation on special or inclusive education, whilst others do not have clear legislation. The adoption of many conventions on education set a path for most countries to start putting more effort in developing special and inclusive education policies. In particular, countries have set milestones to achieve the United Nations (2015) millennium development goal on equality to education. Although most countries have clear policies on special and inclusive education, the region generally continues to show low outcomes in educational attainment including school enrollment and completion among students with disabilities; an indication of a policy-to-practice gap. There is a need for countries to improve on the implementation of policies if positive gains in target outcomes are to be achieved. Teacher training in SNE appeared to be an acute problem in most countries as well. Although some countries indicated the availability of teacher education programs, evidence from county assessments indicated that most SNE teachers lacked some important skills necessary for them to educate students with disabilities effectively. A continued effort to train teachers in the indicated professional need areas is imperative to achieve more successful outcomes in special education.

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About the Author

Argnue Chitiyo

Argnue Chitiyo, BCBA, is an Assistant Professor of Applied Behavior Analysis at Ball State University and holds a Ph.D. in Applied Behavior Analysis from Tennessee Technological University. His areas of research interests include research methods for evidence-based practices for students with autism and emotional disorders as well as special education practice in Sub-Saharan Africa. Prior to joining Ball State University, Argnue was a High School teacher in Zimbabwe.

Chaidamoyo Goodson Dzenga

Chaidamoyo Goodson Dzenga (BCBA) is currently a PhD student in Applied Behavior Analysis at Tennessee Technological University. He holds a master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis from the same university. Mr. Dzenga has a strong desire for marginalized populations to have equitable access to basic education and employment. He believes in inclusive education so that students with disabilities acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for successful integration in the general public. Special education plays a crucial role towards the promotion of social justice for children with disabilities. Mr. Dzenga's commitment to special education is, therefore, a direct affirmation of his commitment to social justice.