Learner- and Teacher- Based Positive Factors Amidst Constraints in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Malawi's Secondary Schools

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Malawi has adopted a policy on inclusive education (IE) in an attempt to respond to disability-related inequalities in education and conform to international standards and frameworks (ISFs) on IE. Learners with disabilities are therefore included in the mainstream education institutions. However, there are challenges in its implementation at all levels of education in Malawi. The purpose of this paper therefore was to explore whether there are positive learner- and teacher- based factors that can be utilised to enhance the effective delivery of IE in Malawi's inclusive secondary schools. Located within the interpretative paradigm, the study adopted qualitative methodology to address the issues at hand. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the teachers and learners with disabilities. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The findings revealed that there are positive learner- and teacher- based positive factors despite amidst challenges in the implementation of IE in Malawi's secondary schools which can be utilized to enhance its effective delivery. The paper therefore argues that IE could be progressively realized in Malawi if policy efforts can build on such factors. It then recommends that the Ministry of Education should develop the strengths of teachers and learners through systems of rewards and recognition. Furthermore, teachers should be fully supported through IE training and formulation of responsive conditions of service, and have access to appropriate career paths so that they can be retained in the schools.

Keywords: Malawi, secondary schools, disability, international standards and frameworks (ISFs), inclusive education (IE), learner- and teacher- based positive factors

Introduction

Malawi has subscribed to a number of international standards and frameworks (ISFs), such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994), the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (United Nations [UN], 2006), among others. The country has followed up its signatures to such ISFs by passing policies, particularly the National Special Needs Education Policy (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MoEVT], 2007), which underlines inclusive education (IE) at all levels of education and in 2012, Disability Act was enacted which also reinforces the right to IE for people with disabilities among other issues. The Salamanca Statement and Framework well captures the essence of IE as:

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Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (UNESCO, 1994, para. 2, p. ix)

More recently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (UN, 2006) stipulates that “The educational system must not exclude persons with disabilities” (Article 24[2]). This means that an IE system must facilitate equal access to its services. As stipulated in these ISFs, the tenets of IE are non-discrimination, participation, and valuing diversity. Thus, no learner should be discriminated in the education system; all learners should be given equal opportunity to participate in all the activities in the schools and it is important to accept differences among the people. For instance, Mittler (2000) pointed out that IE is based on “A value system that welcomes and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language of origin, social background, level of educational achievement or disability” (p. 10).

The examination of IE studies at the global level has underlined a global trend to implement relevant ISFs that advocate for IE noting the challenges encountered in resource-poor countries, such as Malawi as well as the gaps between policy intentions and practices (Kamchedzera, 2010). Such challenges include lack and inadequacy of special teaching and learning materials, trained teachers in special needs education, specialist teachers support, and irresponsive physical environment as well as infrastructure (Government of Malawi/United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2012; Kamchedzera, 2010; Chavuta, 2006; Soko, 2006; UNESCO, 2006; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Such challenges impede, among other factors, the successful implementation of policy on IE. The gaps include inability to address the shortage of resources and the continuing lack of parity between primary and secondary school implementation of IE. This paper therefore aims to investigate whether there are positive learner- and teacher- based positive factors which can be utilized to enhance the effective delivery of policy on IE in Malawi’s inclusive secondary schools. Firstly, it provides the background context, the current body of knowledge on the issue at hand, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Secondly, it describes the study’s research design and methodology. Third, the paper presents and discusses the findings of the study. The findings revealed that there are positive learner- and teacher- based positive factors despite amidst challenges in the implementation of IE policy in Malawi’s secondary schools which can be utilized to enhance the effective delivery of IE policy. The paper concludes that IE could be progressively realized in Malawi if policy efforts can build on such factors.

Background Context

As is the global trend for countries, Malawi has attempted to comply with ISFs on IE to enact policies and a major law towards IE. In this sense, Wright’s (2010) observation that IE is “established as part of the global agenda” might be correct. As a resource-poor country, Malawi is ranked 174 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2013). The literacy levels among people with disabilities are below average in a population that has significant section that is illiterate. The literacy rate in Malawi is 74.8% (FindTheData, 2014) compared to people with disabilities although data on the same is sparse. The enrolment rate in secondary school is 346,604 compared to 4,298 among the students with disabilities (Educational Management Information Systems [EMIS], 2014). Table 1 summarizes the number of students with disabilities in secondary schools by type of disability as presented by EMIS in those years.

As shown in Table 1, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities accessing

secondary schools in Malawi with visual impairment being the most common disability in the secondary schools followed by hearing impairment. However, in 2011 and 2012, the number of students with disabilities accessing secondary schools decreased and no explanation was provided. However, in 2013/2014, there were more students with learning disability but there was no information as to who constituted those with learning disability. This is a challenge which needs to be addressed, because it poses a problem when it comes to services to be provided to the students under that category.

Table 1

The Number of Learners With Disabilities in Secondary Schools by Type of Disability

Year	Number of students with disabilities	Type of disability			
		Visual impairment (%)	Hearing impairment (%)	Learning disability (%)	Physical impairment (%)
2004	2462	53.3	26.2	-	20.5
2005	2711	52.3	24.2	-	20.6
2006	3645	65.5	20.3	-	14.2
2007	4680	52.7	18.3	19.6	9.4
2008	5414	58.1	9.3	19	13.6
2011	3853	49.9	20.3	30.1	9.9
2012	2911	45.8	20.7	18.8	14.7
2013/2014	103042	20.7	124.6	42.2	8.5

Note. It was difficult to get data for the years 2009 and 2010. For the years 2013 and 2014, the figures were combined and no explanation was given. This has made it difficult to compare the figures in the years 2009 and 2010 and also to analyse the figures in the years 2013 and 2014 to the last two years.

The Structure of the Education System in Malawi

The education system in Malawi is divided into these main sub-sectors, which are early childhood development and adult literacy, primary school education, secondary school education, and tertiary education. The formal education system in Malawi follows an 8-4-4 structure. This means that a student is expected to spend eight years at primary, four years at secondary, and four years at tertiary level. Students with disabilities are included in the mainstream education institutions. As of 2014, there were 1,733,020 students in 951 schools (EMIS, 2015, p. 66) and out of that, 4,298 were students with disabilities (p. 77).

Significance of the Paper

Despite Malawi's international commitment to realize the right to IE for students with disabilities, their education in Malawi's inclusive secondary schools has not been given due attention. Theory-wise, this paper therefore contributes to a number of insights. While recognizing the challenges associated with the implementation of IE globally and, more specifically, in the economic developing countries, the evidence in this paper suggests that it is possible to improve the delivery of IE in resource-poor countries, such as Malawi. Among other factors, this can be achieved by taking into consideration the positive learner- and teachers- based factors that can be used to promote the effective delivery of IE in Malawi's inclusive secondary schools. The paper will further inform policy-makers, curriculum developers, and practice in the country, so that learners with disabilities can reach their full potential in education.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework for the Paper

This study on which this paper is based adopted Ball's (1994) policy trajectory model as a conceptual and

analytical framework in order to unveil the fact that there are positive teacher- and learner- based positive factors amidst constraints in the implementation of IE policy in Malawi's secondary schools, which can be utilized to enhance the effective delivery of IE. There are three contexts in this model, such as contexts of influence, text production, and practice.

Context of Influence

The context of influence is where policy is initiated and discourses are constructed (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992). The participants in the context of influence include "powerful elites" (Hatchner, 1994, p. 9). According to Ball (1994), this is policy as a discourse. In the context of the study, the "power elites" represented the participants holding the key positions in Ministry of Education, ministry responsible for persons with disability and the elderly, Malawi Council for the Handicapped, Montfort schools for the deaf, blind, and learning difficulties, and UNESCO. These are the key people who were involved in the formulation of policy on inclusion. In the context of influence, the interested parties in and around political bodies, government, and legislative processes struggle to influence the definition as well as social intentions of education. Ball (1994) observed that real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies are noteworthy in the sense that they cannot be ignored because the actors have different beliefs, interests, and values among other factors that can influence the formulation of policies. Levine, Birdsall, Ibrahim, and Dayal (2003, p. 2) contended that education reforms are often a battlefield of ideologies. In this sense, the nature of this context may be idealistic or unresponsive. The formulation of education policies, therefore, needs to be deliberately intended, so that it can respond to actual and potential realities. In other words, the policies should respond to the context of practice.

Context of Text Production

The context of text production is where policy texts are produced for use (Bowe et al., 1992). It is also important to recognize that the policies (texts) themselves "are not necessarily clear or closed or completed" (Ball, 1994, p. 16). They are represented and interpreted in various ways by different actors and interests (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1994, p. 17). For example, in this case, teachers, head teachers, and other staff in the schools will interpret the policy on IE in different ways reflecting their understanding and experiences among others. It is noteworthy that the study did not focus on the production of school textbooks, handouts, teachers' guides, etc. as part of text production because Ball's model used focused on policy text production.

Context of Practice

The context of practice is where policy is re-interpreted, re-created, applied, or ignored by practitioners (Bowe et al., 1992). Ball (1994) reiterated that this is where policy is enacted. In the context of the school, these practitioners are teachers, head teachers, and other staff entrusted with the implementation of policy into practice. Such practitioners do not confront policy texts as naïve readers because they also have vested interests in the meaning of policy. Bowe et al. (1992) have underlined that practitioners at school level interpret the policy in relation to their own understanding, experiences, histories, desires, values, purposes, means, and preferred way of working. In addition, drawing on sociological theories of sense-making, Coburn (2007) noted that research has indicated that teachers come to understand new policy ideas through the lens of their pre-existing knowledge as well as practices, often interpreting, adapting, or transforming policy messages. This is a reason why interpretation of the policy is a matter of struggle (Peters, 2003). Such variations and mismatches between the contexts have been well-observed in the literature. Hence, the literature and studies

about the context of text production have noted the growing adoption of broad definitions of IE (UNESCO, 2001; 2002), which have influenced the implementation of IE. Such broad definitions of IE are noted to have been adopted in South Africa (Department of Education [DoE], 2001) and Malawi (Chavuta, 2006; Mukhula, 2006; Soko, 2006) though many have also stressed huge gaps in this context (i.e., UNESCO, 2001; 2002).

In the context of practice, the discrepancies between the objectives and standards set in the context of influence are even greater than those observed in the context of text production. As observed by Coburn (2007), research drawing on sociological theories of sense-making provides evidence that local interpretation shapes the direction of policy implementation. It suggests that local actors in schools actively construct their understanding of policies by interpreting them through the lens of their pre-existing beliefs and practices. The way they construct such understandings shapes their decisions and actions as they enact policy in their schools and classrooms (Spillane, 2005). Furthermore, Tutt (2007) underlined difficulties in the implementation of IE especially if there are large classes where the students with disabilities are included. With regard to pedagogy, Florian and Rouse (2001) have observed variations in the effectiveness of strategies used among teachers who were skilled in whole-class teaching and able to offer a choice of tasks and different expectations for different students. Many still consider IE as an inappropriate strategy for learners with severe/profound disabilities (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Tutt, 2007). Lomofsky and Green (2001) and Eleweke and Rodda (2002) have found that the initial teacher training programme that did not incorporate issues of disability and IE was a major cause of failure to implement IE at classroom context in the countries of the South (economically developing countries). Furthermore, Praveena's (2008) study revealed that insufficient funding was one of the challenges impeding the progress of IE in South African secondary schools. Peters' (2004b) study highlighted furthermore challenges such as contradictory policies and lack of guidelines on the implementation of IE.

Method

Research Questions

The main research question for the study on which this paper is based was "What is the policy-to-practice context for inclusion of pupils with disabilities in Malawi's secondary schools?" The more specific questions were:

1. To what extent have the ISFs influenced the policy of inclusion and practice in Malawi's secondary schools?
2. How do schools implement the policy regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools?
3. What are the experiences of teachers and students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools?
4. What are the views of teachers tasked with the implementation of inclusion policy into practice at school level and the views of pupils with disabilities?
5. What are the barriers to learning and participation faced by students with disabilities and strategies that would help Malawi to enable students with disabilities reach their full potential in inclusive secondary schools?

For the additional question which guided this paper was: What are the positive learner- and teachers-based factors that can be utilized to enhance the effective delivery of IE in Malawi's inclusive secondary schools? The assumption in asking these questions was that there might be positive teacher- and learner-based positive factors which can be utilized to enhance the effective delivery of IE in Malawi's secondary schools.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Newby, 2010; Morse, 2010). A mixed-methods approach includes both quantitative and qualitative features in the design, data collection, and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2002). This is so because research issues in education are usually so complex that the insights of both approaches are needed if we are to gain a good understanding (Newby, 2010). A mixed-methods approach allowed the researcher to gain a broader perspective and deeper understanding of the contexts of influence, text production, and practice and interactions within them that could not be obtained through a single-method of research (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004). In support of this design, Newby (2010) stated that the approach was developed “to resolve research problems that were insoluble by either of the other two approaches by themselves” (p. 91). Nevertheless, the quantitative methodology was only used descriptively to find out the frequencies of a wider sample of teachers’ opinions and views on inclusion.

A mixed-methods approach further allowed triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and added breadth, depth, and rigour to the research study. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data collection in order to enhance the rigour of the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Robson, 2000; Punch, 2006). Newby (2010, p. 122) stated that triangulation is a process of increasing reliability (“the degree to which a measure of a concept is stable”) (Bryman, 2008, p. 698) and validity (in qualitative research, validity is “the extent to which the phenomenon under study is being accurately reflected, as perceived by the studied population” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003, p. 285). Silverman (2001) contended, “No research method stands on its own” (p. 22). Gillman (2008) contended that using multiple kinds of data allows the researcher to balance the strengths and weaknesses of each of them. However, triangulation has its critics. Blaikie (1991) asserted that it is not appropriate to combine methods based on different theoretical positions (as cited in Robson, 2000, p. 371). In this study, it was appropriate to combine different methods based on broadly same interpretative position because the nature of the study required an in-depth analysis of multiple perspectives.

Quantitative inquiry gives emphasis to the representativeness of the population under study so as to allow for generalisations (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Cohen et al., 2000; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003). In this study, it was not possible to make generalisations because of the nature of the study as it was a small-scale research, however, one might argue that the sample was sufficiently diverse to allow consideration of transfer of findings to other situations. Nevertheless, the quantitative survey provided descriptive statistics for the study in the sense that the frequencies on the wider sample of teachers’ views on inclusion were calculated.

Qualitative methodology was employed in order to gain an insight into the views and experiences of the participants with regard to policy-to-practice context. Another reason was that a qualitative approach gave the study an opportunity to interpret the way the participants constructed meanings given to and interpretations of the policy-to-practice contexts. Flutter and Rudduck (2004, p. 2) contended that in order to discover new directions for improving schools, the classroom itself must be taken as a starting point to explore teaching and learning through the eyes of teachers and learners who are closely involved. This is so because “It is only the testimony of pupils and teachers themselves that can provide essential, first-hand evidence” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 2). They further pointed out that the researcher is able to find out more about teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of and their experiences in classrooms and schools. The things that teachers and learners consider to be important and that make a difference to learners’ opportunities for successful learning are identified.

However, Flutter and Rudduck (2004) observed that although these perceptions might not provide admissible evidence in a court of law, such evidence is an important resource in the context of an investigation whose aim is to improve teaching and learning. This study joined other scholars, such as Lewis and Norwich (2005), Cullingford (2005), Allan (2005), among others, who involved the voices of teachers and pupils with disabilities in their studies and this provided insights about their perceptions and experiences of IE.

Sampling Strategy, Sample Size, and Research Sites

The size of the sample depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population studied (Cohen et al., 2003). The study, thus, adopted purposive sampling of the participants and research sites. Purposive sampling entails “sampling in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in mind” (Punch, 2006, p. 187). The researcher selected the participants and research sites which would provide sufficient and quality data related to the investigated issues of policy-to-practice contexts and the experiences of teachers and students in inclusive schools. In support of this, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) stated that many qualitative researchers use purposive sampling method rather than random sampling method, because they want to find out groups, settings, and individuals where the processes being investigated may occur. Merriam (2002) and Kemper, Stringfield, and Teddle (2003) added that since qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is crucial to select a sample from which the most can be learnt.

The original sample size for the study was 221 (200 teachers, 10 pupils with disabilities, and 11 elites). The sample size was reduced to 154 participants (139 teachers, four pupils with disabilities, and 11 elites), because some teachers did not return their questionnaires. The number of pupils with disabilities was reduced, because the researcher wanted to have detailed and in-depth interviews and classroom observations with them.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Context of influence. In the context of influence, the sample was carefully selected. Thus, 11 elites who had been involved in the formulation of Malawi's inclusion policy in different capacities were purposively sampled. Table 2 indicates the elites who were interviewed and how they are represented in this paper.

Table 2

The Interviewed Elites

Elite	Description of the participant:
E1	Deputy Director, Directorate of Special Needs Education, Ministry of Education
E2	Chief Disability Awareness Officer, Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability, Elderly and Social Welfare
E3	Deputy Director, Montfort Centre for Learning Difficulties
E4	Deputy Director, Montfort School for the Deaf
E5	Deputy Director, Montfort School for the Blind
E6	Programme officer for Education and Deputy Executive Secretary, UNESCO-Malawi
E7	Director of Education Planning, MOEVT
E8	Executive Director, Malawi Council for the Handicapped
E9	Deputy Director, Special Needs Education Department
E10	Senior Education Methods Advisor, Northern Education Division Office
E11	Senior Education Methods Advisor, Ministry of Education, South West Education Division

The qualitative data collection methods and instrument in the context of influence included interview which aimed at answering the research questions 1, 2, and 5. On one hand, the following are some of the advantages of interview as identified by Creswell (2008) and Newby (2010): (a) can clarify misunderstanding;

(b) data are rich and deep; (c) allows questions to explore issues; and (d) provides useful information when you can directly observe the participant. On the other hand, interview as a method of data collection has limitations as identified by Creswell (2008) and Newby (2010). One of the disadvantages is that it is time-consuming. This was mitigated by selecting a sizeable sample of participants that provided the desired evidence and the use of semi-structured interview schedule. Semi-structured interviews with elites allowed the study to explore the policy-to-practice contexts and experiences more openly and in detail (Esterberg, 2002).

Context of text production. The examined texts were relevant legislation, policy documents, ISFs, and the national and international relevant literature. Rose and Grosvenor (2001) pointed out that educational researchers work with documents which are concerned with educational settings. However, Yin (2003a) argued that documents must be utilized carefully and should not be accepted as literal recordings, for instance, of events that occurred. Heeding this warning from Yin (2003a; 2003b), this study examined international and national documents. As “No document is innocent,” it was realized that documents do not simply reflect social reality. They also construct it (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001, p. 51). The research question was “To what extent have the ISFs influenced the policy of inclusion and practice in Malawi’s secondary schools?”

The documentary/texts review allowed the researcher to compare what was articulated in them with what was actually happening in practice as stated by teachers and the students with disabilities and observed by the researcher. However, school books and teachers’ guides as texts were not examined as these were beyond the scope of that study. Documentary review corroborates information from other sources (Yin, 2003b), such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires. Merriam (2002) added that the strength of documents as a source of data is that they are already available for use.

Context of practice. In the context of practice, the sample included 139 teachers and four students with disabilities (one with hearing impairment, one with visual impairment, one with physical challenges and uses wheel chair, and one with intellectual disability) from 17 inclusive secondary schools. The key factors considered were nature of schools, geographical location, and type of students’ disabilities. The range of schools sampled included general government secondary schools, government secondary aided schools, and a private secondary school in urban, urban-rural (peri-urban), and rural settings in the southern, central, and northern regions of Malawi. Amongst them, the schools were boys and girls’ secondary schools and two girls’ secondary schools. The schools consisted of forms 1-4 with students in the age range of 11-13, 14-16, 17-19, and 20-22 years.

The quantitative data collection method in the context of practice included questionnaire. The study used self-completion questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Robson, 2000) in order to get larger and more representative sample of teachers’ views on inclusion and experiences. Questionnaires benefited the study in the sense that they allowed large samples to be reached without much effort (Esterberg, 2002). The questionnaire allowed the participants to respond to the research questions 1-5. Thus, 139 teachers responded to the questionnaires. Overall, the questionnaire had both closed- and open- ended questions. The closed-ended questions were easily quantified and indicated participants’ views/opinions on inclusion. They offered the participants a set of answers from which they had to choose (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 245; Neuman, 2006, p. 287). However, the drawback was that they did not provide data in areas unforeseen by the researcher (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 245). This was mitigated by the integration of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to state answers in their own way and in their own words (Pfeifer, 2000, as cited in Sarantakos, 2005, p. 245; Neuman, 2006, p. 287). However, the drawback was that such questions provided large amounts of data which needed extensive time and effort to type all the responses from their hand-written

forms. After that, the researcher grouped together all the responses to a particular question ready for analysis.

The second data collection method in the context of practice was observation. The research question was “How do schools (teachers) implement the policy regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools?” Four teacher-student non-participative observations took place, one in each of the sampled four secondary schools using a simple classroom observation schedule to take detailed field notes (classroom activities) against a timeline. The interactions and activities in the classrooms were observed. A checklist was also completed which provided background information of the classroom context. This allowed the researcher to stand back from the observations and retain some objectivity (Robson, 2000). This small sample allowed more detailed observations and provided an in-depth analysis of the issues at hand. Dyson (2002) identified a relative lack of observational evidence in the existing literature on inclusive schools. As indicated by Merriam (2002), the advantage of observation is that data from observation represent a first-hand encounter with the phenomena of interest instead of a second-hand account obtained from the questionnaire. However, Sarantakos (2005) observed that the effects of the observer’s presence can never be erased and there might be observer bias. Giving prior notice and spending time to build trust and familiarity mitigated the adverse effects of the researcher’s presence.

The third data collection method in this context was interview. The observed four students were interviewed using semi-structured schedule to explore their lived experiences as students with disabilities in inclusive secondary schools. Interviewing students with disabilities was ideal because there is alleged exclusion within disability studies of the “personal experiences” of living with disabilities (Thomas, 1999). Thomas (1999) asserted that the experiences of individuals do not only tell us about the particular (the micro-environment) in which individuals live out their lives but also about the general (the macro-environment) which make up the broader social context of these lives. Sheehy, Nind, Rix, and Simmons (2005) asserted that it is important to explore the views of child-participants in inclusive settings. Table 3 shows the observed and interviewed students with disabilities.

Table 3

The Interviewed Four Students With Disabilities

Secondary school	Student	Student’s type of disability
A	S1	Hearing impairment
B	S2	Learning disability
C	S3	Visual impairment
D	S4	Physical impairment

Pilot Study

Prior to data collection, the research instruments, such as questionnaire, interview schedule, and observation schedule, were duly piloted. The aim of the pilot study was to ensure the clarity of the instruments and how much time was needed for these instruments.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is said to be one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2008, p. 554). It emphasizes what is said rather than on how it is said (Bryman, 2008). Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). In other words, it refers to the “extraction of key themes

in one's data" (Bryman, 2008, p. 700). The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) a step by step guide composed of six phases. Phase 1 required familiarization with the data and this meant reading through the data. The responses from different participants to a particular question were then grouped together, headed by the text of the question. The meanings and patterns/themes were noted. In Phase 2, the initial codes were generated from the data which allowed the organization of data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). In Phase 3, the different codes were sorted out into potential themes (consistent ideas which emerged) and all the relevant coded data extracts were collated within the identified themes. In Phase 4, the identified themes were reviewed and refined wherever possible and some themes which could go together were collapsed. Thus, the identified distinct broad and relevant themes embraced all similar themes. In Phase 5, the themes were named and defined. Finally, Phase 6 represented the reporting. The final stage of data analysis was the thick description, interpretation, and discussion of the findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 2006).

Documentary data analysis proceeded through careful evaluation as suggested by Rose and Grosvenor (2001). The aims of the documentary (policy texts) examination and analysis were four-fold. These were to identify the nature and purpose for the produced texts; the text production process; whether the texts include the tenets/principles of inclusion such as non-discrimination, participation, and valuing diversity; and the constraints and contradictions or "spaces" that such texts carry (Bowe et al., 1992). The dimensions used to structure the analysis of the documents therefore emerged from the above-mentioned aims. This was so because the idea was to follow on elites' recollections of the drive to adopt inclusion policy, how it was produced into text, whether the policy texts are in harmony with the tenets of inclusion, and the constraints and contradictions or "spaces" that such texts carry (Bowe et al., 1992). This strategy allowed the researcher to have an insight into the whole process of text production.

With regard to classroom observation data analysis, each set of observation field notes were examined in much the same way as described for the interview data.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17.0 was used to analyze quantitative data (questionnaire data). Each coded variable was entered into an SPSS spreadsheet separately. The frequency and percentage tables and bar charts were generated to present the data because these are more quickly and easily understood by a variety of audiences (Langdridge, 2002, p. 403).

Issues of Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Construct validity. Construct validity relates to "Our theoretical knowledge of the concept we are wanting to measure" (Muijs, 2004, p. 68). Yin (2003a) identified ways of ensuring construct validity in a study and these are utilization of multiple sources of evidence and establishment of a chain of evidence and this was the data collection phases. In the study, evidence was obtained from the elites using semi-structured interviews, documentary review, teachers using questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews with pupils with disabilities.

Reliability. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007), reliability in quantitative research is "a synonym for dependability, consistence, and replicability over time, over instruments, and over groups of respondents" (p. 146). In other words, if the same methods are used with the same sample, then the results should be the same (Cohen et al., 2007). A thorough pre-testing of the research instruments on a similar sample minimized the threats to reliability (Cohen et al., 2007). It was important that each participant understood the

questions in the same way and responses coded without the possibility of uncertainty (Cohen et al., 2007). Threats to reliability at the stage of data analysis were mitigated by carrying out systematic data analysis (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003).

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was achieved through prolonged engagement (“that is sufficient time to build trust and understand the culture of the context” (Aubrey, David, Godfrey, & Thompson, 2000, p. 57) among other factors. The field work took three months and two weeks and this enabled the researcher to build trust with the participants and comprehend the culture of the context. As a result, the participants were able to provide the required information.

Ethical issues. With regard to ethical considerations, the issues of informed consent, access and acceptance, confidentiality and anonymity, and avoidance of deception/betrayal were taken into account with reference to British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) and the literature. The limitation of the study was that it was a small scale study and therefore the generalization of the findings was guarded.

Findings and Discussion

The presentation of the findings and discussion are structured according to Ball's policy trajectory model.

Context of Influence

The evidence from the responses of the elites¹ in the context of influence provides insights regarding the contexts of influence, text production, and practice regarding Malawi's attempt to implement IE policy in its secondary schools. The findings indicate that the ISFs have also been an influence on the formulation of policy on inclusion in Malawi and this has triggered an increase of access to inclusive secondary schools to students with disabilities among other factors. For instance, E5 stated, “I will put it as partly international standards under education for all which have made us realize that we cannot leave out people with disabilities. Hence, our trying to say let us talk about special needs in secondary education.” E1 gave an example of UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Persons With Disabilities and “As a global village, we have to go along with the rest.” Similarly, the teachers indicated that the ISFs had been influential. The findings indicate that 133 teachers out of 139 teachers responded to the question as to what extent on Malawi's policy on IE. Thus, of the 133 who responded, 33.1% indicated that ISFs had been influential, and 8.4% indicated very influential. However, 42.9% indicated that ISFs had not been very influential and 3.8% indicated not at all influential. On the other hand, 12% indicated that they did not know whether ISFs had been influential on Malawi's policy on IE. Although the data showed the teachers' mixed opinions about influence, the finding that ISFs influenced policy on IE is consistent with UNESCO (2001), Winter (2006), and Ainscow (2005), who noted that the idea of inclusion has become central to the education policies of many countries.

In addition, there has been good will of policy-makers and good understanding of the current policy-to-practice context. There was no one among these elites who disagreed with the importance of IE. In the light of the evidence, it can be noted that although there is some pragmatism with regard to the workability of inclusion in Malawi's context of influence, there is little contestation as to the desirability of IE. The pragmatism expressed by some elites, with regard to the capacity to implement inclusion, for example, suggests that the acceptance of ISFs and IE in Malawi has not been merely “robotic activity” (Ball, 1994). Instead, it has been based on genuine goodwill supported by the moral force of inclusion argument as indicated by E5 above.

¹ Key informants from the ministry, parastatal organisation, UN, and schools for learners with special needs.

The point that there is goodwill for IE in the context of influence is supported by further clear findings from the responses of the elites. The elites generally agreed that there had been a certain attitudinal change (E1, E5, and E11) in that according to E5, "Pupils with disabilities were no longer viewed as incapable of participating in their learning process and the development of their society." This entails the realization that "disability is not inability" because given an opportunity, people with disabilities can also contribute to the economic development of the country. Although the goodwill may abide in the context of influence, such good intentions are heavily constrained by resources and competing priorities, which often outweigh the need to implement IE as it should be delivered. It is in this sense that IE becomes contestable in Malawi's context of influence.

The findings about the context of text production from the elites in the context of influence suggest that though generally in line with ISFs, policies contained glaring gaps that would adversely impact on the delivery of IE in the context of practice. These included inability to address lack and inadequacy of special teaching and learning materials in the secondary schools and the continuing discrepancy in the distribution of such materials between primary and secondary schools. Such perceived gaps in the policy prompted some participants to argue that the policy on IE was not fully in line with ISFs. This apparent contradiction with the overall goodwill for inclusion in the context of influence can be explained by the elites' perceived dissatisfaction with goals of inclusion as expressed in ISFs. Thus, in addition to noticing that there were insufficiently trained personnel for the implementation of IE policy, some of the elites underlined that "The policy texts did not adequately deal with issue of unfriendly/inaccessible school environments."

The findings about the context of practice from the elites' responses revealed a general goodwill on part of most teachers and students to have inclusion policy implemented. In this regard, the elites could mention advantages of IE policy as achieved in Malawi. Interestingly and encouragingly, these examples were the same or similar to those often expressed to be the outcomes of inclusion, including that IE makes economic sense for the potential of the learner and her or his contribution to the well-being of society. E9 elaborated, "Benefits are diverse: society at large is going to benefit because once you have completed your education, you contribute towards the development of the nation."

Context of Text Production

A reflection of ISFs in the context of text production lacks secondary school responsiveness.

The requirement of ISFs that policies should be responsive to the needs of people with disabilities is well-reflected in Malawi's context of policy text production for IE. Since 2002, Malawi has increasingly adopted IE policy. More than any policy about IE in Malawi, the National Special Needs Education Policy (MoEVT, 2007) recognizes the principles of inclusion, such as non-discrimination, participation, and valuing diversity, and raises the issues of equal access to education, equity, quality and relevance, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It is cognizant of policy implementation challenges and accordingly attempts to provide guidelines for accessible, quality, and relevant education for students with disability. In line with the requirements of IE, it requires that its implementation should be participatory to involve schools, communities, practitioners, and policy-makers (MoEVT, 2007). In this sense, this policy recognizes the importance of the interfaces between the contexts of influence, text production, and practice.

However, the National Special Needs Education Policy does not address the imbalance in the delivery of IE in primary and secondary schools. Although the policy is meant to influence the context of practice, it

assumes that the MoEVT can satisfactorily respond to IE in the context of practice in secondary schools. By so doing, the National Special Needs Education Policy fails to take into account practice-generated solutions and strategies. Its insistence that its implementation has to involve communities and schools falls short of giving sufficient autonomy to school committees, parents, and teacher associations to come up with innovative ways to deal with school-specific challenges. Furthermore, it does not emphasize on the need to utilize the teacher and learner positive factors for the effective delivery of IE.

Ball's point that there are usually mismatches between the context of text production and that of practices was verified by the study. For instance, the National Special Needs Education Policy (Section 1.2.2) highlighted the needs of learners with special needs education that will enable them successfully to enroll and participate in IE. These include conducive learning environment; modified infrastructure; advocacy; modified teaching, learning, and assessment resources; qualified specialist teachers; trained teachers; specialized assistive devices; adequate resource centres; and regular medical check-up. However, evidence from the teachers' questionnaire, classroom observations, and interviews indicated lack and inadequacy of such needs. It is noteworthy that although it would have been helpful to explore how school texts are produced and adapted to take account of disability, this study did not go that far but that can be considered for further research.

Context of Practice

Despite the constraints in the implementation of IE in Malawi, this paper stresses the need to build on positive learner- and teacher- based factors to realize IE at the school and classroom levels.

The findings confirmed the earlier findings that specialist support, IE-based training, and adequate teaching and learning materials are essential for realization of IE in mainstream schools (i.e., Kamchedzera, 2010; Winter, 2006; MacBeath, Galton, Steward, MacBeath, & Page, 2006; Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Peters, 2003). In Malawi, teachers suggested support during teaching time that included the provision of teaching and learning materials/resources; support from special needs education teachers; training and orientation in special needs education; and use of sign language and interpreting services.

Despite such constraints, there are three strengths on which Malawi can build more effectively to implement IE policy in the context of practice. Firstly, the evidence has shown that there are inadequacies in the skills gained from general teacher training, support from specialist teachers, and a determination to deliver IE. Classroom observations indicated that teachers' skills acquired from general training, such as the ability to vary teacher talk tasks, led to oral discussions and debate at whole class, group, pair, and one-to-one level, and this helped the realization of the principle of valuing diversity in order to suit the needs of learners with disabilities. In this way, the teachers made adjustments to implement IE, drawing on generalist skills gained from their pre-service training.

Secondly, despite a general frustration in the delivery of IE at the classroom level, there is much determination to realize the goals and values of inclusion, because the mainstream teachers tried to include the students with disabilities in the teaching and learning process by using a variety of teaching approaches like group work, questions and answers, and group discussions. One school added debate which led to the full participation of a student with visual impairment. However, the dilemmas of teachers appeared to be caused by capacity-related shortcomings for effective delivery of IE. For example, the teachers in the mainstream schools lacked training in special needs education and knowledge of alternative communication systems of instructions, such as sign language and Braille. There was a dilemma regarding how to deliver a lesson in classrooms where

there were learners with various disabilities, for although visual impairment was the most common form of disability, there was great diversity in learning needs. The evidence from the teachers' questionnaire revealed teachers' lack of training in special needs education, with a majority holding only general training in educational theory, pedagogy, and methods. Teachers linked workload burdens with their perceived low capacities to deliver IE. The teachers underlined that "Pupils with special needs need more attention and adjustments to teaching, and this account for much of the workload for teachers."

Despite such causes for frustration, the determination by teachers to implement IE was encouraging. The attributes of teachers in valuing diversity, not wanting to discriminate amongst learners, and their professional approach to their duties determined the positive experiences of both teachers and learners. Teachers' teaching competence and their appreciation of learners' good performance were thus given as examples of positive experiences by the learners. The evidence from the learners' interviews indicated that they appeared to link positive experiences with effective learning. For example, the teachers perceived learners' feeling of being included, enjoyment of mixing and learning with others, socialization and interaction, and academic performance contribute to positive experiences of learners with disabilities. "They mix socially which make them feel they are also people."

Thirdly, as with the elites, there was no contestation of the goals and values of inclusion among the teachers. Teachers agreed with the values and principles of inclusion, such as non-discrimination, participation, and celebrating diversity. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the teachers agreed with the rationale that education systems should be designed and education programmes implemented in response to the wide diversity of pupils' learning needs as required by ISFs. This reflects earlier studies on IE by Peters (2003; 2004a), Boys (2005), and MacBeath et al. (2006) in English schools that teachers supported beliefs in human rights and the moral imperative not to discriminate on the basis of disability. This underlines the moral force of inclusion as a social value in both the contexts of influence and practice in Malawi.

Fourthly, the implementation of Malawi's IE policy in secondary schools could build on the positive experiences of learners with disabilities. Some of the positive attributes of learners, such as hard-working spirit, eagerness to learn, diligence, among others, as reported by the teachers in the context of practice could be regarded as mitigating the difficulties encountered.

Finally, the implementation of Malawi's IE policy in secondary schools could build on provision of support from other learners. For instance, the teachers reported peer support for the learners with disabilities, "The able bodied pupils assist the disabled pupils when doing class work." Similarly, learners with disabilities themselves reported support with classroom work, mobility, and personal needs. For example, S1 responded, "They try to help us with school work." S2 stated, "They help me to practice other problems like solving mathematics and I have discussions with them." S3 responded, "When they copy their notes, they make sure that we have also copied the notes before we get out of the class." S4 responded, "They wash my clothes. They take me to bath and to the classes and they help me move around." The finding corroborates Eleweke and Rodda's (2002) findings in the countries of the South where learners with disabilities appreciated the support from other learners.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, this paper underlines that although there are many constraints in the implementation of IE in Malawi's secondary schools, there is potential progressively to realize IE if policy efforts sought to build on

positive learner- and teacher- based factors towards IE. The paper therefore recommends that:

1. The Ministry of Education should enhance the capacity of teachers, because they are already willing to work with the learners with disabilities and capitalize on the willingness of the other learners to support their peers with disabilities in inclusive schools;
2. The Ministry of Education should build on the strength of teachers and learners through systems of rewards and recognition;
3. Teachers have to be supported fully through in-service training in IE and establishment of their career paths in order for them to effectively implement IE and be retained in the schools.

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