



The Education Amendment Bill of 2019 and Inclusive Education at Primary level: A case of Tsholotsho district; Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: The study sought to assess the extent to which the Education Amendment Bill (EAB) of 2019 is relevant and inclusive to primary school learners in the Mathe rural community in Tsholotsho, Zimbabwe. Through a qualitative research approach, the study gathered data on the subject under review. Findings revealed the challenges faced by the 2 schools in Mathe Village in implementing inclusive education. The study unravelled that the lack of information, lack of ICT material and the attitude of learners and teachers towards pregnant girls affects the effectiveness of the EAB in enhancing inclusive education. The study further established that there is a huge teacher- pupil ratio of 1:50 students, unavailability of electricity supply poverty and hunger has greatly influenced the inapplicability of the EAB in a rural setting. The study also pin points the unavailability of instructional materials and structures and poor teacher motivation as factors which have affected the inclusion of Children Living with Disabilities (CLWDs) in accessing education. The study goes further to point out possible solutions which include; provision of appropriate and relevant training to teachers, provision of relevant and appropriate infrastructure even to children living with disabilities, provision of enough funding for power supply, lowering teacher-pupil ratio and teaching loads, government to design a policy to enhance effective inclusion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sibanda (2018:1) states that, “the current global trend in the education of children with special needs is skewed toward the embracement of the philosophy of inclusion. This trend is premised on the assumption that inclusion is the only realistic means of achieving education for all”. As an empowerment tool, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized children can emerge from poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. The idea of an effective and inclusive education system is to address redundancies whilst ensuring the adaptability of learners to modern technologies and prepare students to be critical thinkers, problem-solvers, leaders, good communicators with team building and technological skills. Braskavasky and

Benavot (2006), state that primary education assists the learners in developing a foundation of what they must and be able to grasp within their level of education. This ensures that they strive to attain high standards and develop citizenship and basic values as they are engaged from both at home and school. However, Ehsaan and Shahid (2016) state that inclusive education is a global agenda which has influenced full participation of children with various abilities in all aspects of schooling. Stepanink (2018) argues that, its role is to transform schools into platforms of achievement of excellence and equality for all students.

In Zimbabwe, access to education has been voiced as a requisite and a legal right for all people since independence. Kanyongo (2005) states that, the

government made basic education accessible through policies of free education, compulsory education and upholding children's right to education. At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an education system that favoured mainly white people.

Kanyongo (2005:66) argues that, "prior to 1980, very few black children had access to education. Those who had access to education found themselves in schools that were poorly funded, with very few educational resources and a separate curriculum from that offered in all-white schools". Gomo (2003), further highlights that, the education for black students was provided mainly by missionaries rather than by the government. During the first decade of independence in Zimbabwe, the reforms in the education system promoted the principle of 'Education for all' (Nherera, 2000). Therefore, the introduction of frameworks such as the Education Amendment bill 2019 aim to complement the Sustainable Development Goals 4's agenda through promoting inclusive and compulsory primary education in both rural and urban areas.

The Education Amendment Bill of 2019 was introduced mainly to ensure that it complies with the provisions in the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20) of 2013, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Sibanda (2018) highlights that, education since the adoption of the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 has been formally recognised as a human right. Nevertheless, Nziramasanga *et al* (1999:18), cited in Mapuranga, (2015) postulate that, "inclusive education is not just a matter of charity or an oral obligation, rather it is a legal right and therefore an obligation of law, it is based on both national and international legal frames". The aim of the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Bill of 2019 is to ensure compulsory primary education, inclusion/continuation of pregnant girls to school, use of emerging technologies in education, inclusion of pupils despite nonpayment of school fees, the right of every child to be heard and the provision of infrastructure for CLWDs (Amendment Bill, 2019). The Education Act had various gaps and weaknesses that are later addressed by the 2019 Education amendment Bill in a bid to improve the quality of education with specific reference to children. The purpose of this study is to advance the discussion on what affects the effectiveness of the Education Amendment Bill of 2019 in enhancing inclusive education at primary level, assess the efficacy of the Bill in a rural setting and to examine the attitudes of children living with disabilities on the EAB.

2. Problem and its context

Due to socioeconomic challenges, many developing countries are experiencing a serious

challenge of lack of resources in implementing inclusive education. In effect, general lack of support and resources contributes significantly to the poor implementation of inclusive education in many of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa including Zimbabwe (Sibanda, 2018). According to the Cultural Survival International Group (2015), a difference in education access exists between minorities and other dominant groups in Tsholotsho. Murwira (2016) outlines that education access for children in Tsholotsho in Zimbabwe is very low, both among children and adults. The attainment of inclusive education in rural areas is decreasing concurrently and it presents a challenge, as children in rural areas are being excluded from learning opportunities due to poverty and lack of adequate resources for learning. In effect, general lack of support and resources by government has contributed significantly to the poor implementation of inclusive education in Zimbabwe (Bornman and Rose, 2010). Chimhenga (2016) identified limited resources in form of human, financial, infrastructural and material resources as the major challenge in implementing inclusive practices or policies in Zimbabwe's rural areas. Sibanda (2018) states that, even if the children can access the gadgets, learning of computer technologies may be affected by unavailability of power sources hence it becomes a barrier to access equal opportunities with children from the urban centers. Chimhenga (2016) identified limited resources in form of human, financial, infrastructural and material resources as the major challenge in implementing inclusive practices in Zimbabwe. However, schools located in the rural areas cannot afford purchasing of textbooks for the new curriculum hence these they suffer from discrimination and are denied the right to proper education by the government. This therefore questions the effectiveness of the education Amendment Bill 2019 on whether the implementation is inclusive of every child in the remote areas of the country as compared to urban learners or not.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative research approach. This research approach seeks to have a full understanding of a research problem from the perspective of a local population it seeks to involve. It plays a big role in getting information on people's opinions, values and behaviors of a population under study as compared to a quantitative approach that is numerical form such as statistics and percentages. Purposive sampling was used to select the study participants. The researcher targeted children of the 7th grade, 25 boys and 25 girls from Mathe primary school and Tshetshane Primary School which is also in the same ward. This was because grade 7 pupils explained better on the subject matter and gave detailed information. 4 children living with disabilities were purposefully interviewed from the 2 schools. Key

informant interviews were conducted to teachers who play a crucial role in accessing progress of the learners in the classroom. 10 teachers (4 male and 6 female) were interviewed. The District Schools Inspector was also interviewed to shade more light on the views of the education leadership in terms of achieving inclusive education. Purposeful sampling enabled the researcher to actively select the most productive elements from the research population to answer the questions. Data gathered from key informant interviews data was analyzed and categorized in different themes in accordance with the study's objectives and presented in a narrative form by the researcher.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

4.1 What Affects the Effectiveness Education Amendment Bill in Enhancing Inclusive Education?

4.1.1 Lack of Information

Poor dissemination of information was voiced as one critical component affecting the effectiveness of the education amendment bill. Lack of information on the existence of the bill and on what entails inclusive education by teachers, students and DSI has hampered effective implementation of inclusive education in the schools under study. This was observed as the researcher noted that the respondents had less knowledge on the Amendment Bill of 2019. All the learners failed to articulate what they understood by the term inclusive education and the Amendment Bill. There were surprised it even existed. The learners gave responses such as:

“We have never heard of this before”
(Student)

Teachers from the 2 schools were not aware of the existence of the 2019 Education Amendment Bill. The teachers were further asked if they had received any form of training in enhancing inclusive education they responded that none of them had any information or training. They responded:

“We were not given any training on the Amendment Bill or how we are supposed to implement.” (Mathe Primary Teacher)

The researcher interviewed one visually-impaired girl from Mathe Primary school who had a difficult time in understanding the term inclusive education and the Amendment Bill of 2019. This was the response.

“We are not sure of what inclusive education is. This is my first time I’m hearing of this...”
(Student)

From the above responses, the study found out that, people from the rural areas are not well informed on current issues happening in the country. This assertion is supported by Gatawa (1997) who outlines that lack of appropriate dissemination strategy can cripple on change and innovation. He attributes poor dissemination to poor funding and lack of research on the part of the Education policy makers. The above observation by the researcher is also supported by Bornman and Rose, (2010) who point out that general lack of information and support contributes significantly to the poor implementation of inclusive education in many of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

4.1.2 Lack of ICT Learning Material

Unavailability of ICT learning material was voiced as one of the major factors affecting the effectiveness of the education amendment bill. Learners, teachers and the DSI highlighted on the need of availability of ICT material. The Learners were asked on the practicality of ICT materials one of them responded that:

“We only have one computer that is old the rest do not function well, and we experience power outages thus there is no need for ICT” (Student)

The research established that, teachers agreed with learners in that their schools have no capacity to undertake ICT learning. The teachers themselves have no capacity to teach on ICT as they too have not received adequate training on the latest technologies. The teachers themselves pointed out that they too have no ICT gadgets such as laptops, iPads besides their phones. The teachers eluded that:

“These children are already behind in terms of ICT because of unavailability of the latest technologies such as laptops, iPads and even the use of the internet. Learning has become more of research than the usual teacher to child interaction in the classroom”. (Male teacher Tshetshane).

“The area has poor network challenges therefore the use of the internet is also a challenge thus it affects learners on the implementation of ICT.” (Tsholotsho DSI).

However, the above findings indicate that, most of the teachers lack current, curricula and relevant ICT materials and textbooks. The research noted that there is high shortage of teaching and learning materials

which affect the process of learning and reduce the quality of education in that area. The lack of computers, textbooks, and teaching materials has detrimental effects on the attainment of inclusive education because the quality of education is compromised

Nevertheless, these findings concur with Bornman and Rose, (2010) who points out that general lack of resources inevitably contributes significantly to the poor implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, little has been developed for use by teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in schools which has affected the implementation of the education amendment bill.

4.1.3 Attitudes of Learners and Teachers on Pregnant Girls

The study observed that learners and teachers attitude towards pregnant girls was also another key factor affecting the education amendment bill in attaining inclusive education. The learners at both schools were asked how they interact with pregnant girls in their classes. The following responses were derived.

“What would my friends think if I am seen close to a pregnant student? I don’t want to lose my friends because of someone who willingly chose to get pregnant”. (Female Student)

“If seen with a pregnant girl by other students, you are subjected to laughter which makes one lose confidence and self-esteem. Even the pregnant girls end up not coming to school because they are afraid of being laughed at.” (Female Student)

Although the teachers and the DSI did not condone the practice of being pregnant while at school, their reactions and actions towards the affected students are favorable. The quotations below are illustrative:

“Since we stay with pregnant or mothering students at home, why must we exclude them from school? The law of consistency naturally forces me to be in favor of their education” (Male Teacher)

“Despite the fact that being pregnant whilst at school is unacceptable, I am of the view that the affected girls should be given a lifeline to continue with their education which will overshadow their past mistakes” (Tsholotsho DSI).

The research established that social influence has an adverse effect mainly on student’s attitudes towards pregnant girls who attend school. Students view the practice of

tolerant of pregnant and mothering students in mainstream schools as unacceptable and being seen close to them as humiliating. However, Smith Battle, (2013) states that, pregnant and mothering students have suffered teasing and bullying tendencies in the hands of other students. The above responses from teachers and the DSI generally exhibit favorable actions towards the education of pregnant students in schools. This can be a result of compliance to the policy which affords the right to education even to pregnant and mothering students in school. Consequently, from the above analysis, the research established that, though the teachers and the DSI are aware of inclusion of pregnant girls to accessing education, these pregnant girls drop out of school due to social discrimination by their peers which is triggered by loss of self-esteem and worth. These findings are in line with Ncube and Mudau (2016) who observe that, stigma and discriminatory tendencies displayed by students is an indication of unfavorable perceptions and attitudes towards pregnant and mothering students which has led pregnant students to dropping out of school. Therefore, the attitude of learners towards pregnant girls attending school has affected the effectiveness of the amendment bill in enhancing inclusive education.

4.2 The Efficacy of the Bill in a Rural Setting

4.2.1 Huge Teacher- Pupil Ratio

The study established that, teachers from both primary schools cited the huge teacher- pupil ratio phenomenon as one major factor to why the Education Amendment Bill seemed not to be efficient in their area of operation. All teachers and the DSI bemoaned the high teacher-pupil ratios which are dominant in most primary schools in Mathe Village. The respondents shared that:

“The number of students is so huge compared to the available infrastructure and roughly every primary school here has an average 1:45 teacher to pupil ratios with some bulging to 1:50. This goes against the quality of education standards” (Mathe Teacher)

“My class has 48 students including 4 who are disabled and most of the times I fail to give attention to some students because of their large number which is really hard to manage”. (Tshetshane Teacher)

“The high pupil-teacher ratio at Tshetshane Primary school is as a result of the limited

number of classrooms available. The school only has 15 classrooms with a population of more than 700 children” (DSI)

However, from the above responses, the teachers interviewed bemoaned the high teacher-pupil ratio in their schools in which they cited it gave them several challenges. These include failure to give proper attention to all students and time management. Thus, it can also be noted that the government’s failure to construct more classrooms in rural areas has seriously hampered the progress of quality education from being achieved in Mathe Village. However, these findings concur with Thwala (2015) who found out that in Swaziland, large class size hindered the practice of inclusion as teachers could not cope with diverse needs of the learners in need of individual attention. Cheshire (2014) also states that, for effective inclusive education to occur in mainstream schools of Zimbabwe, a larger teacher-pupil ratio of up to 1 to 25 is desirable. Howarth (1987) believes that large classes negatively impact on the implementation of inclusive education due to difficulties related to attending to individual needs, class management dynamics and marking load. Since the curriculum is often examination-oriented, teachers teach in order to cover the syllabus and have no time for individual attention. Therefore, there is no doubt that the teacher to pupil ratio in rural areas, widely affected by unavailability of adequate infrastructure to house the learners has greatly affected the efficacy of the bill in the rural setting.

4.2.2 Unavailability of Power Supply

The study established that, learners from both Mathe and Tshetshane Primary school and the DSI lamented over the issues of power supplies in their schools which affects the learning and accessibility of ICT. The respondents voiced that;

“There is no power-supply since transformers that supply electricity are currently not working so it is difficult to use computers” (Sudent).

“ICT learning without source of power is impossible, the government has for so long been silent on the establishment of electricity and therefore issues of inclusive education for children in our area is just a dream” (Tsholotsho DSI).

From the above responses, the study established that, the Mathe situation of power supplies is limiting the implementation of the ICT learning and the process with children lagging in the curriculum. The above responses concur with Mandina (2013) who articulates that, budgetary constraints in Zimbabwe on the part of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary

education and the school authorities themselves on rural electrification creates limitations in the implementation of various ICT program in schools which however affects inclusiveness compared to the urban learners. Therefore, unavailability of electricity in rural areas inevitably excludes rural learners from ICT as compared to the urban learners hence making the education amendment bill not to be compatible in a rural set up.

4.1.3 Hunger and Poverty

Hunger and poverty were also highlighted as key factors affecting the rural learners and affecting the agenda of inclusive education by the Education Amendment Bill. All school children interviewed highlighted hunger and poverty as the cause of absenteeism. Due to national food insecurity and household food insecurity, the study established that children in Mathe Village are being affected by hunger due to the lack of food which is mostly a home case scenario. Some respondents argued that

“We sometimes miss school due to the lack of food at home...” (Student, Tshetshane Primary)

“We walk very long distances to school on empty stomachs, when we arrive at school we will be very tired. It is very difficult to even participate in class on an empty stomach...” (Student, Mathe Primary)

“It is better to stay at home and work on people’s farms sometimes rather than going to school at least we get food to eat.” (Student, Mathe Primary)

From the above responses, it is clear that, poverty and hunger leads to children absconding school. These responses concur with Browne (1992), who states that, poverty is a deprivation of one’s health and survival and denial of education opportunities for a creative and productive life. Also, The Sunday News, 2015 reported that over 6 000 pupils in the Matabeleland region have dropped out of school due to hunger. Therefore, this is the problem the learners at Mathe and Tshetshane Primary school face during their learning journey; hence issues of inclusive education and attainment of quality education may not be achieved without dealing with poverty.

4.3 Experiences of Children Living with Disabilities (CLWD) and the Inclusive Education Amendment Bill

4.3.1 Unavailability of Instructional Materials and Structures

Access to inclusive education by CLWD is influenced by the unavailability of instructional materials and structures. The students the teachers and

the DSI interviewed agreed that the higher costs of materials and equipment like crutches, wheelchairs, braille, spectacles, Perkins cubes for arithmetic used by CLWDs deterred access to education. The teachers complained that it is becoming very difficult for them to teach the children because the school does not have adequate materials and equipment's to cater for all the children and their different conditions. The learners with disabilities also cited the unavailability of structures such as ramps within the school yard, user friendly rooms of convenience for both boys and girls. The respondents voiced that:

“We end up ordering the children to sleep and play all day since we don't have the teaching equipment, especially the braille for the blind.” (Teacher, Mathe Primary).

“It is difficult to move around the school yard using my wheelchair as the school yard is full of sand which is not user-friendly for me to interact with friends” (CLWD, Mathe Primary).

“Going to school is difficult for me as my grandmother carries me on her back to school every day sometimes she complains of backache due to old age” (CLWD, Tshetshane Primary).

“There is very little the schools or district can offer to enhance the education of Children living with disabilities as there are no rehabilitation centers in the district to cater for them. In this regard going to school becomes difficult. Therefore, failure to provide material aids, structures and appliances to facilitate teaching and learning of children with disabilities totally hinders their access to education.” (DSI).

From the above responses, the study established that where schools are within a walking distance, for children with disabilities the infrastructure in the schools is often inaccessible. Many mainstream schools that were build way before the Disabled Persons Act (1992 revised 2001) lacked ramps and wide doors for children using wheelchairs, rails for students who are blind and sound proof class rooms for children who have hearing impairment for example. Lack of access to sanitary and ablution facilities was another major barrier to inclusive education particularly in rural areas. Mafa (2012) established that in Zimbabwe, buildings in most schools were not accessible to children with disabilities particularly those in wheelchairs. These structural barriers complicated the process of implementing inclusive education and the situation was made worse where cultural barriers and negative

attitudes toward disability still dominated the education environment.

4.3.2 Poor Teacher Motivation

Children living with disabilities voiced that poor teacher motivation was one of the factors which affected their inclusiveness in accessing education compared to their peers. One of the respondents who is visually impaired lamented on how the teachers fail to attend to children with disabilities due to poor motivation. Most respondents highlighted that traditionally children with special needs were segregated and they were not given equal opportunities to access education. The teachers also highlighted that they are being paid low salaries and also poor standard of living has become their way of life. Some respondents voiced that:

“We are not treated in the same way with other children. Teachers give more attention to other children” (CLWD)

“We get very low salaries and the profession has been relegated as an occupation of last resort” (Mathe Teacher)

“We teach in accordance to how much we are paid. At the moment our salaries are too low and teaching children with disabilities requires much attention and skill which we cant provide at the moment” (Tshetshane Teacher).

“The government has not lived up to its expectation of providing an increased budget allocation towards the education sector and this has negatively impacted on the implementation on inclusive education in our district”. (Tsholotsho DSI)

However, the research established that, most of the teachers, when conducting lessons do not take the special learners seriously. Less attention is awarded to them as they are considered as second-class learners. . In this regard all the teachers interviewed agreed that teacher motivation was low because of the frustration because of low salaries. The above findings concur with Sailor and Roger (2005) who supports that poor professional development of teachers is a hindrance to inclusion. The above sentiments are also shared by Eleweke and Rhodda (2000) who attribute poor motivation to teacher poor remuneration. Therefore, poor teacher motivation is robbing CLWD who require special attention to quality education which however makes the implementation of the Education Amendment Bill to be a dream in the pipeline, an impossible phenomenon in enhancing inclusion.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

- Provision of appropriate and relevant training to teachers. This will promote acquisition of relevant skills that will equip the teacher with relevant content, objectives and methods. Also this will arm the teacher with appropriate teaching skills that can reduce stigmatization especially to CLWDs.
- Provision of relevant and appropriate infrastructure even to CLWDs. The government, the school and the community should collaborate to source funds through income generating projects to provide relevant infrastructure that promotes a conducive learning and teaching environment for all learners.
- A solar powered ICT programme should be implemented by the Ministry of Energy to assist rural schools as compared to urban schools to use computers and relevant power requiring learning materials. This will go a long way in improving computer literacy in both urban and primary schools
- Lowering teacher-pupil ratio and teaching loads promotes effective teacher-pupil interaction and accommodates a variety of appropriate teaching strategies.
- Government should design policies that are inclusive to every learner and non-discriminatory based on geographical setup.
- A special class should be opened to cater for students who are slow to grasp knowledge and who require more attention than the rest.
- Government to consider teachers poor living standards resulting from low income as this influences teaching behavior and interest triggered by poor motivation
- Disability is not inability, community should be educated to avoid discrimination, through awareness campaigns aiming to eradicate stigmatization
- Promote the implementation of school feeding programs which will eradicate absenteeism caused by hunger and poverty.

6. CONCLUSION

It is essential for policy makers to design policies taking into consideration that learners have different needs and to consider the availability of essential services in some areas before policy implementation. These also include the socio-economic status of certain communities as evidenced by the Mathe community. Educational policies are universal regardless of the socio-economic status of different communities therefore this study is an eye opener of trying to sensitize policy makers to make relevant policies that take into consideration the different socio-economic status of communities to achieve

inclusiveness. Therefore, the quest for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 which aims to ensure equal opportunities to education and lifetime perspective will only be achieved if all people irrespective of ethnicity, language, sex, race, political affiliation, religion, disability, migrants, have equal access to equitable, inclusive and life time learning opportunities.

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