

Inclusive Education for children with visual impairment in Zambia: A situational analysis

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1.0 Background and rationale of the study

- 1.1 The earliest forms of special education in Zambia began in the 1930s in the eastern province of present Zambia, Chipata district. During this period, the first persons with disabilities to be educated were the visually impaired followed by those with hearing impairments. The education of persons with disabilities was regarded as a responsibility of the missionaries and not parents and government.
- 1.2 In 1971, the education of people with disabilities became a responsibility of the Ministry of Education after a Presidential decree.
- 1.3 A teacher's Training College for Teachers of the Handicapped was established in 1971. The College began by training teachers at certificate level from within Zambia and neighbouring. This institution is now called Zambia Institute of Special Education (ZAMISE). The college still offers Certificate and Diploma in Special Education courses. To date, close to 450 (350 certificates and 100 diplomas) teachers have been trained as teachers for the visually impaired.

2.0 Current Situation

2.1 As has been indicated above, the current situation of educating children with visual impairments is being carried on in three modalities: residential school, residential unit in an ordinary class and inclusive school. The later is not very distinct.

2.2 In Zambia Kalabula and Mandyata (2003) investigated inclusive practices in schools of the Northern Province of Zambia. The data indicate that: the required educational materials were not provided or were inadequate in ordinary schools where pupils with special needs were being included. The data further indicated that there were no specialist teachers in most institutions to provide important advisory services that would assist the ordinary teachers with managing the learners with special needs who were being included in ordinary schools

3.0 The Scope of the study

The study was designed to cover the current status of inclusion for children with visual impairments, looking at learning, relationships, performance, acceptability and environment support among many others.

3.1 Aim and objectives of the study

The main goal of the study was to conduct a situational analysis of inclusive education for children with visual impairments in some selected schools in ten districts in Zambia in order to establish the extent to which the Inclusive Education Programme (INSPRO) system piloted by ESSP III experts in the Ministry of Education, is being sensitive, insensitive or responsive to the various needs brought about by visual impairment.

3.2 Specific objectives were to:

3.2.1 Determine the current status of inclusive education appreciation in schools in line with the national educational policy;

3.2.2 Identify inclusive education issues and concerns prevailing in and affecting staff and pupils in schools;

3.2.3 Establish the relative proportions of visually impaired pupils and teachers in relation to the sighted ones;

3.2.4 Determine the level and nature of participation of both parents and teachers in inclusive education decision-making;

- 3.2.5 Segregate the types of activities that visually impaired pupils participate in, and identification of constraints;
- 3.2.6 Determine the inclusion of visually impaired pupils in various schools;
- 3.2.7 Determine the extent of inclusion of visual impairment issues into curricula, institutional policies and guidelines;
- 3.2.8 Establish the extent to which the design of physical facilities (ie. schools and general infrastructure) meets the specialized needs of individuals with different disabilities;
- 3.2.9 Determine the performance levels of the pupils with visual impairments in these inclusive school;
- 3.2.10 Recommend appropriate interventions from the findings.

3.3 Study methodology

- 3.3.1 To generate the required information for this study, a total of sixty-seven (67) out of the projected one hundred (100) schools were selected from ten selected districts of the Republic of Zambia where inclusive education had been introduced for more than two years. These districts included: Senanga, Kawambwa, Kitwe, Kalulushi, Solwezi, Monze, Kasama, Mbala, Kapirimposhi, and Petauke. A combination of research tools was employed to generate the required data. Mainly, questionnaires to cover various stakeholders who included the head-teachers (Managers) of schools, District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS), Education Standard Officers (ESOs), visually impaired pupils, parents of visually impaired pupils, sighted pupils, and ordinary teachers were designed and used.
- 3.3.2 The population comprised of all pupils in one hundred (100) schools in the ten districts where inclusive education had been introduced by INSPRO and had been in practice for more than two years. The schools were selected by using simple random sampling techniques. From the one hundred schools in ten districts, a sample of ten (10) DEBS, ten (10) ESOs, one hundred and seventy-two (172) visually impaired children, one hundred and seventy-two (172) parents and guardians, one hundred and eighty-five (185) both specialist and non-specialist teachers, three hundred

(300) sighted pupils were randomly selected to participate in answering the questionnaires used in the study.

3.3.3 Data was first edited to check for completeness, accuracy and uniformity of the respondents' answers. The data was then analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Programme (SPSS). Percentages were used in presenting and describing data.

4.0 Presentation of results

Table 1

Number of visually impaired pupils included in ordinary schools and number of schools and ordinary pupils in the ten research districts.

District	Number of schools visited	No. of sp.tr s for VI pupils	No. of sp.tr trs For other SEN	Totally blind children	Partially sighted children	Total number sighted
Senanga	07	00	12	00	23	371
Kawambwa	03	00	11	00	10	180
Kasama	07	00	25	00	25	385
Mbala	06	01	13	01	16	360
Petauke	10	00	08	00	33	520
Kitwe	10	00	06	00	01	540
Kapiri mposhi	06	00	10	00	20	356
Solwezi	10	00	11	00	00	540
Monze	08	00	09	00	17	420
Kalulushi	08	00	11	00	27	460
Total	67	01	108	01	172	4132

Table 2

Selected questions for included visually impaired pupils (N. 172)

Question number	Yes	No
Q.4 Do you enjoy learning together with sighted pupils?	126 (73.4%)	46 (26.7%)
Q.6 Do your teachers avail you with learning resources such as Braille books, papers, writing frames, coloured pencils, etc?	09 (5.2%)	163 (94.8%)
Q.14 Do your sighted classmates help you with your work?	130 (75.6%)	42 (24.4%)
Q.19 Is inclusive education good for you?	120 (69.8%)	52 (30.2%)

Table 3

Selected questions for parents and guardians of pupils with visual impairments (N. 172)

Question number	Yes	No
Q.1 Are you happy that your visually impaired child is learning at a school within your community	165 (95.9%)	07 (4.1%)
Q.2 Are schools willing to enroll children with visual impairments?	160 (81.4%)	12 (18.6%)
Q.6 Do you visit the school to consult or offer some assistance regarding the education of your child?	104 (60.5%)	68 (39.5%)
Q.11 Are you happy with the academic performance of your child?	120 (69.8%)	52 (30.2%)
Q.15 Do you receive counseling services from qualified personnel?	49 (23.2%)	123 (76.8%)
Q.19 In general, is inclusive education good?	136 (79.0%)	36 (21.0%)

Table 4

Selected questions for both specialist and non-specialist teachers in inclusive schools where pupils with visual impairments are enrolled (N.185)

Question number	Yes	No
Q.1 Do you understand what inclusive education is all about?	176 (95.1%)	09 (4.9%)
Q.2 I Do you have any visually impaired pupils included in your class?	99 (53.5%)	86 (46.5%)
Q.2 ii Do you have any visually impaired pupils included in your school?	134 (72.4%)	51 (27.6%)
Q.4 Do parents and teachers participate in deciding about inclusive education?	105 (56.8%)	80 (43.2%)
Q.6 Do you plan for the education of visually impaired pupils with other professionals?	71 (38.4%)	114 (61.6%)
Q.15 Have you been trained to teach visually impaired pupils?	24 (13.0%)	161 (87.0%)

Table 5

Selected questions for sighted pupils (N.300)

Question number	Yes	No
Q. 4 Do you have any friends with visual impairment in your class?	220 (73.3%)	80 (26.7%)
Q.5 Would you want the pupils with visual impairments to continue learning with you?	230 (76.7%)	70 (32.3%)
Q.7 Do you allow pupils with visual impairments to assume leadership positions like being a class representative?	189 (63.0%)	131 (27.0%)
Q.12 Do pupils with visual impairments have learning resources?	51 (17%)	169 (83%)
Q.15 Should inclusive education be promoted in all schools in the country?	204 (68.0%)	96 (32.9%)
Q.8 Do you think pupils with visual impairments are happy to be in your school?	198 (66.0%)	102 (34.0%)

5.0 Summary of findings

In the sixty-seven (67) inclusive schools in ten (10) sampled districts, it has become evident through this study that:

- 5.1 There are very few totally blind pupils included in the ordinary schools, for example, only one totally blind pupil was found among the 172 VI pupils reached;
- 5.2 The specially trained teachers to teach children with visual impairments are not posted to ordinary schools. Out of the more than 450 teachers for visually impaired children trained at ZAMISE since its inception, no teacher for visually impaired was found in the 67 schools sampled in ten districts;
- 5.3 Most District Education Board Secretaries and Education Standards Officers are aware of the National Policy on inclusive education;
- 5.4 INSPRO schools are not practising inclusive education especially for totally blind pupils. The most interesting one was Kalulushi which was the pilot district. All VI children are sent to Ndola Lions Basic School for the Blind;
- 5.5 Partially sighted pupils included in ordinary schools have no support regarding learning resources;
- 5.6 Schools are more willing to enroll children with visual impairments;

- 5.7 The parents and guardians of children with visual impairments are happy to have their children included in ordinary schools; and,
- 5.8 DEBS and ESOs lack coordination in matters of monitoring and training teachers for visually impaired in inclusive schools.

6.0 Discussion

- 6.1 As can be seen from table 1, there is one (01) totally visually impaired pupil and sixteen (16) partially sighted pupils included in ordinary schools. There is only one (01) specially trained teacher for the visually impaired pupils whilst there are thirteen (13) specially trained teachers for the hearing impaired and mentally challenged children in Mbala district. In all, sixty-seven (67%) out of projected one hundred (100) inclusive schools were reached. One hundred and eight (108) specially trained teachers for other disabilities were reached. A total number of one hundred and seventy-two (172) partially sighted pupils were included in the sixty-seven schools reached in the projected ten (10) districts. (See table 1)
- 6.2 A very interesting pattern has arisen in this questionnaire. The finding gives an interesting picture where pupils with visual impairments have clearly indicated that they enjoy learning with their sighted counterparts (73.4%). Although the visually impaired pupils are happy to learn with sighted colleagues, there seems to be a gaping difference between being happy in these inclusive classes. Staggering (94.8%) pupils are not provided with the most needed learning resources. Evidence has shown that sighted pupils spend time helping visually impaired pupils included in ordinary classes (75.6%). The majority of visually impaired pupils testify that inclusive education is good for them. (See table 2)
- 6.3 The parents and guardians of pupils with visual impairments seem to have expressed positive sentiments about inclusive education (all above 60%). The most important questions from willingness of schools to enroll visually impaired children to whether inclusive education is a good system appear to be a very good indicator of the likely development of this delivery method. The only problem revealed is the lack of some service providers such as counselors (23.2%). (See table 3)
- 6.4 The results in this table have revealed again that the education providers have not been adequately prepared to cater for visually impaired pupils in inclusive schools. It has come to light that teachers who are handling these

pupils (53%) have not been. Only (24%) of the teachers teaching visually impaired pupils have been trained. (See table 4)

6.5 Yet another revelation has clearly been made in this table. Apart from the problem of learning resources provision, an impressive finding that sighted pupils would like the visually impaired pupils to continue learning with them (76.7%) and that inclusive education should be promoted in all schools in the country (68%) is a forward looking finding. (See table 5)

7.0 Conclusion

The government of the Republic of Zambia should take a lot of interest in the education of children with visual impairments. The state should heavily invest in this aspect if it expects to remove visually impaired people of its shoulders as a provider of livelihood means to the visually impaired in the country. Once properly educated the visually impaired are capable of managing their lives and making a very valuable contribution to the economy of the state.

8.0 Recommendations:

8.1 Based on the above findings, the following is recommended:

- 8.1.1 A peripatetic delivery service run by trained teachers to teach the VI children, funded and fully supported by the Government, should be established, with posts of responsibility, equivalent to those of Heads of Departments as already exist in schools.
- 8.1.2 A range of advanced short-courses specifically directed to the teaching methods and techniques appropriate to children with visual impairment and involving study in depth of their special educational needs should be provided for non-specialist teachers found in schools where VI pupils have been included and who have a professional commitment to teaching visually impaired pupils.
- 8.1.3 A network of parents of visually impaired pupils and teachers should be incorporated in the decision-making machinery to enable their full participation in the education of their children.
- 8.1.4 Permanent and well-coordinated research groups for the education of visually impaired children should be established to develop a data bank for practitioners in this area of special/inclusive education.

8.1.5 Committees comprising Education Standards Officers, Social Workers, Curriculum Developers, Examination Officers and Educational Planners should be established in each district to monitor progress and other related matters to visually impaired pupils.

8.2 Sight savers International

As an interested organization in the education of children with visual impairments, Sight Savers should be approached by the Ministry of Education and requested to sponsor national efforts to:

- 8.2.1 Carry out the actual head count of children with visual impairments on which to base support for pupils in inclusive schools;
- 8.2.2 Embark on a “Mobile Training College” where specialists in the field of education for pupils with visual impairments could train the non-specialist teachers on the spot;
- 8.2.3 Initiate low vision screening exercises which could simultaneously be done during the mobile training stints;
- 8.2.4 Finance the production and use of learning resources through production workshops through well co-coordinated special and inclusive education training teams.

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