Inclusivity of Public Sanitary Infrastructure Provision for Pupil with Physical Disabilities: A Case of Bindura Urban School Toilets

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Abstract

The study was set to assess the inclusivity of sanitary infrastructure in Bindura urban schools. This study was motivated by the enrolment of pupils with disabilities in their home regular schools. This was in response with the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Policy Minute no P36 of 1996 and other domestic and international inclusive policies. United Nations (UN) 22 standard rules emphasises on the equalization of opportunities for people with disabilities which includes accessibility to buildings and other community infrastructures, (United Nations, 2011;USIS, 1998). Most nations world-over, including Zimbabwe have domesticated these UN policies. Zimbabwe Ministry of Education Policy Minute No 36 of 1996 saw the enrolment of children with disabilities in their home schools. Whilst this had been a stride step towards the development of inclusivity of children with disabilities in regular schools, we wondered how inclusive the school toilets were for these children. In Bindura Urban, both Government and Non Governmental Organisations had been involved in the provision of public sanitary facilities. In spite of the Government policies on sanitary facilities that meet the needs of People With Disabilities (PWDs), it had been observed that some school toilets in Bindura Urban did not meet these requirements. We had not come across any studies that had been carried out to assess how widespread the level of non-compliance of Bindura Urban school toilets was towards legal instruments of inclusivities. Hence the following questions backed our study: Are Bindura urban school toilets inclusive of pupils with disabilities? What are the views of teachers pertaining to the inclusivity of school sanitary infrastructure to pupils with physical disabilities? Mixed methodology in the form of concurrent embedded strategy was used. Moreso, descriptive survey method was used to collect data. Data were collected using questionnaires and individual follow-up interviews. A sample of 62 teachers of children with disabilities in Bindura Urban schools was purposefully selected. Ten parents of children with disabilities were conveniently selected. The study concluded that although there were specific national legal instruments on equal participation of pupils with disabilities in the mainstream schools of Zimbabwe, most Bindura urban schools sanitary infrastructure were not complying with these policies. Most toilets in Bindura Urban primary and secondary schools were not appropriate for persons with physical disabilities such that they accessed them with difficulty or failed to access. We suggest that the local authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should put in place instruments that monitor accessibility of toilets in schools for pupils with disabilities.

Key words: sanitary infrastructure toilets, people with disabilities, accessibility, inclusivity
Introduction

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Policy Minute no P36 of 1996 has seen enrolment of children with disabilities in their home schools. The idea is to fulfill the demands of international and domestic policies on inclusivity. A number of conventions on equal participation for all have been adopted internationally. Article 28 of the UN Convention on Human Rights is about the rights of every person “to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families”. In response to the domestic and international policies, children with disabilities are being enrolled in the Zimbabwean mainstream schools. Whilst this is so, no comprehensive evaluation of the inclusivity of public school toilets to pupils with physical disabilities has been carried out.

In 2007, UNDP stated that equal access to sanitary facilities and safe and clean water was a basic right of all people. UNICEF (2008) and WHO (2009) submitted that inaccessibility of sanitation facilities and clean water negatively impacted on health, education and ability to work and participate in social activities. To this end, some central and local governments, working with other stakeholders, have committed themselves to reach those without access (Gill, 2009; Holmes, 2011; Ssekandi, 2013). In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operation formulated a Sector Development Plan for safe water supply and sanitation in 2011. In Africa, Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa (RSA) have taken major strides in including PWDs in sanitary infrastructure developments. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Disabled Act was enacted in 1992 and revised 2006. The Section 8:1 of the Act stipulates that no disabled person shall, on the ground of his/her disability alone, be denied: a) Admission into any premises to which members of the public are ordinarily admitted.

b) The provision of any service or amenity ordinarily provided to the public, unless the denial is motivated by a genuine concern for the safety of the People with Disabilities (PWDs). Section 22: 4 of the new Zimbabwe Constitution (2013) goes on to state that:

a) The State must take appropriate measures to ensure that buildings and amenities to which the public has access are accessible to persons with disabilities.

This means that, arms of the State such as government Ministries and organisations should comply with these laws on inclusivity.

This study was prompted by the need to know the extent of compliance with Government policies in the inclusion of PWDs in Bindura urban schools. Specific objective was to evaluate the extent of compliance with legal instruments of inclusivity of Bindura Urban school toilets. The objective was achieved by seeking views of teachers and parents regarding access of pupils with disabilities to the mainstream school toilets. The following were set as predictor variables:

- Availability of ramps at toilet entrance.
- Width of entrance.
- Inside space.
- Supporting rails in toilets.
- Low toilet seats.
- Low toilet water sinks (hand basins) just to mention a few.

The variables were measured on a continuous 5-point Likert-type scale in the questionnaire.

Theoretical framework

The theories that guided this study are the structural functionalism and the system theory (Durkheim 1964; Holmwood, 2007; Aurobindo, 1872–1950; Jung 1875–1961; Macy, 1991). The functional theory and system theory correlate in the belief of interconnectivity. The suggestion Durkheim (1964) in Turner (2001), of both theories is
that social systems are connected, no object or individual lives in isolation. The implications of these theories for this research were that, systems should complement each other, for example, when policies are enacted, implementers should do their part, thus, promote harmony and solidarity among groups or subsystems.

**Review of related literature**

Shapiro (1993) noted that societies discriminate people with disabilities through unfair and unequal treatment. These are built into institutional organisation, policies and practices at personal, environmental and structural levels. The implication is that people with impairments are disabled by institutional barriers. Haralambos and Holborn (1991) posited that, attitudinal barriers are constructed on environmental barriers and institutional discrimination is built on the macro-systems of society. These macro-systems can be deduced to be economics, education, health, social welfare. The exclusion of persons with disabilities in educational provision has led to the effect of reducing subsequent life in terms of being integrated in the mainstream. Discriminatory practices towards a certain group of people contradicts with the system theory (Carl Jung; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin) and the functional theory (Emile Durkheim) which emphasise the interconnectivity of sub-systems and the promotion of harmony, as well as solidarity, among groups. In urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe for instance, local authorities play a significant role in harmonising their residents and this is through effective provision of services.

The education of children in most African countries, including Zimbabwe, has been limited on acts of rejection and segregation (Mpofu, 2000; Peresuh, 2000). Heward and Canaught (2002) pointed out that if a society can be judged by the way it treats people who are different, our education system would not be judged favourably and this is the case in African countries. Mbula, Mulwa amd Kyalo (2014)’s study that was carried out in Kenya and Zimbabwe revealed that, inaccessible toilets and water facilities in these countries are major contributing factors for school dropouts among children with disabilities, especially girls. Chavuta, Itimuphirim, Chiwaya, Sikero and Alindiamao (2008) baseline survey in Malawi revealed that learners with disabilities drop out of school and repeat classes because those with physical disabilities fail to attend classes daily due to difficulties in walking to school and home. What these latter findings however seem to suggest is that learners with disabilities like those with physical disabilities fail to participate in school activities due to environmental challenges. Such problems result in high failure among students with disabilities and at most instances dropping out of school. One can deduce from Mbula et al. (2014)’s study and Chavuta et al. (2008)’s study that access to school infrastructure by most children with disabilities in some African countries including Zimbabwe is still a problem.

The new Zimbabwean Constitution (2013) specifically provides for disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination. What this means is that all the forms of disability have been included in the new Constitution by use of the term “disability” without an attempt to enumerate the forms of disabilities. This is largely commendable given the fact that persons with disabilities have endured untold discrimination on the basis of their disabilities in the Zimbabwean history. Discrimination against any person with any form of disability is now unconstitutional and this will go a long way in ensuring that persons with disabilities are fully and effectively included in all the sectors of Zimbabwe, the critical ones being education, health, employment and political participation as well as considering
them. Whilst Zimbabwe can be commended for adopting such a constitutional provision that gives priority to persons with disabilities in developments plans, one questions compliance of such legal provisions by local authorities.

Methodology

This study used mixed methodology and the type of mixed methodology was concurrent embedded strategy. Concurrent embedded strategy (CES) has a primary method that guides the project and secondary database that provides a supporting role in the procedure (Denzil and Lincoln, 2010). The primary method that guided this study was qualitative method and descriptive survey design was used to collect data. According to Polit, Beck, and Hungler (2001, p.180), descriptive methods are used when the researcher seeks to “describe, observe, and document a naturally occurring phenomenon which cannot readily be ascribed an objective value”. In other words, descriptive research deals with questions that look to explain what things are like and describe relationships but do not predict relationships between variables or the direction of the relationship. In this study, data were collected using questionnaires and individual follow-up interviews. A sample of 62 teachers of children with disabilities in Bindura Urban schools; 10 parents of children with disabilities were conveniently selected.

Findings

Demography of Teacher Respondents Based on Gender

Table 1: shows that toilets with ramps were few and it was found that those were toilets that belonged to one primary school in Bindura urban. The presented data also show that quite considerable schools in Bindura urban had narrow doors entrances, narrow corridors and no supporting rails. The implication of the latter was that pupils in wheelchairs enrolled in such schools had to crawl on their hands and knees as they disembarked from their wheelchairs so that they could access the toilet chambers.

Profile and Views of Parents of Children with Disabilities

Parents of pupils with disabilities participated in the study through interviews. The idea was to capture their views, experiences and feeling pertaining to their children’s access to public sanitary facilities.
The group of parents consisted of 7 females and 3 males. Only 2 people were employed. Two females were single, the rest were married. Nine out of ten parents interviewed had children who had congenital physical disabilities. Only one parent had a child with acquired disability, at grade 3. He/she fell during play and broke his spine. Thus, the parents interviewed had different backgrounds views, and perceptions of the world around them and their children with disabilities. Below are views of parents that were captured verbatim in ChiShona then translated to English are captured below:

- I was happy when my child was enrolled at our local school but latter I noted with concern that his accessing the school toilet was a nightmare. I ended up withdrawing my child from school.
- "The toilets are not easy to access for my daughter who is in a wheelchair. Thus I stay at school during school days so that I assist my daughter whenever she needs to go to toilet. I sit at a nearby distance where I am easily summoned by the teacher when our child needs to go to toilet".

The toilets are not easy for my daughter who is in wheelchair to access. Thus I stay at school during school days so that I assist my daughter whenever she needs to go to toilet. I sit at a nearby distance where I am easily summoned by the teacher when our child needs to go to toilet.

- Our children with disabilities learn under very difficult circumstances as most school toilets in Bindura are not accessible to children in wheelchairs. My child ended up crawling and the toilet floors and chambers will be dirty as they are used by the whole school. I noted that it did not make sense to keep my child in such hostile circumstances so I withdrew her from school.

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• Am pained by the fact that my child’s condition does not have a place in this world. All sanitary facilities exclude her.
• Toilets sit in the school are too high so he struggles to sit. We used to assist him when he was young but he is now a grown up boy.
• Sinks are too high too, so much as we may want to develop independent skill in the child, and the availed sanitary facilities make it so difficult.

Observations

Below are presentations of toilet photographs conveniently sampled in Bindura Urban.

Steps at school toilets door entrance

School toilet with barriers for entrance for pupils with disabilities
Consent was sought from Bindura Urban Municipality to carry out research and this included observation of public toilets which were captured in the form of photographs which are presented above.

**Accessibility of Bindura urban school toilets**

The findings revealed that most school toilets were inaccessible to pupils with disabilities. In fact, only one or two primary schools had accessible toilets and these were schools with Resource Units (RU). The percentage of teachers who endorsed that most toilets were inaccessible to children with disabilities was 70%.

This was despite the fact that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Officers Building (E.O – Building) who monitored the development of infrastructure in schools, yet it appeared they did not take cognisance of pupils with disabilities who were enrolled in these schools. The Policy Circular No 36 of 1996 mandated the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to enroll pupils with disabilities in their home schools. Thus, the Department of School Psychological Services and Special Needs Education saw to it that pupils with disabilities were enrolled in these regular schools. What this means is that the sanitary infrastructure where these children were enrolled was supposed to be accessible but the findings revealed that the toilets in these schools were not accessible to pupils with disabilities.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed a discrepancy between inclusive the demands of Zimbabwe inclusive policies and what is being practiced in Bindura urban schools. Inclusive education promotes the recognition of the need to work towards “schools for all and which include everybody celebrating the differences, supporting learning and responding to individual needs” (Ballard, 1999 p.12). This is to say that inclusivity is not all about enrolling a child with disabilities in his or her home school, it’s about developing education systems based upon a child-centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children, including those who have adverse disadvantages as well as impairments. According to Chimedza (2000), the merits of such schools were not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children, their establishment were a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes in creating welcoming...
communities and in bringing about a society which is inclusive.

Discriminatory situations that forced children with disabilities to withdraw are against the international and national laws on the education of children. The United Nations Charter on the Rights of a Child, (Article 28) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Children (Article 11) emphasise the right of a child to education. Section 3e of Article 11 of the African Charter implores African governments to “take measures in respect of gifted and disadvantaged children, to ensure equal access to education for all sections of the community” (1989, p8). Inaccessibility of sanitary infrastructure in schools can be said to be an exclusionary practice that forced pupils enrolled in these schools to drop or get withdrawn by parents.

The fundamental rights to Education for all are clearly articulated in the Zimbabwe Education Act (1987), revised in 1996 and 2006. The Education Act (2006) furthered the non-discriminatory policy by purporting that all students, regardless of race, religion, gender and creed, have access to basic primary education. These non-discrimination provisions expanded the right to education in Zimbabwe for all students, including students with disabilities (Mutepfah, Mpofu and Chataika, 2007). Moreo, the revised Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) emphasises the need to include children with disabilities in all key areas of development, which include education. Kabzem and Chimedza (2002) actually argue that education is a means to ensure that people can enjoy and defend their rights in society and contribute to the process of democratization and personalization both in society and in education. In other words, the findings revealed that schools in Bindura urban were thwarting the thrust to recognize children with disabilities as contributors to society since a lack of access to toilets was pushing them out of school. The provision of school toilets which was inaccessible to a certain group of pupils was a violation of the legal instruments of inclusivity.

In this regard, the Bindura urban local authority had not complied with the international and national legal instruments of inclusivity. This is because the local authority is the planning authority (Mulindwa, 2014), it decides whether to grant or refuse planning permission for building and development in an area. The local authorities have the power to approve or disapprove building of structures which are not inclusive. Bindura Municipality holds the responsibility to ensure that public amenities in its town are accessible to all and this includes school toilets where children with disabilities are now being enrolled. Ssekandi (2013) argued that a fundamental role of a democratic local authority is the representation of local communities, voicing local concerns and responding to local needs. These findings were in contradiction with the latter fundamental roles.

The researcher noted that, despite emphasis of inclusion of pupils with disabilities by the Zimbabwean government, old toilets in schools were not being rehabilitated. Of interest, the Disabled Persons Act was enacted in 1992, twenty three years ago and it stipulated that no disabled person shall, on the grounds of disability alone be denied admission into any premises to which members of the public are ordinarily admitted (section 8:1). Findings made in Bindura urban, however, contradicted with findings made in Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe where the local community had been noted to make adaptations and modifications of their school infrastructures so that they accommodated pupils with disabilities in their communities (LCDZT, 2014). The community in that area was not there to build infrastructure anew but to make necessary adaptations and modifications using local and durable material and had provided support with time and labour by gathering locally available raw materials such as river sand and pit sand for the construction of pathways and ramps to facilitate ease-of-access for pupils with disabilities enrolled at their schools (ibid).
Thus, according to these findings, Bindura local authority had directly and indirectly contradicted the national and international ethos of inclusivity.

The current Constitution of Zimbabwe emphasises that “the State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must recognize the rights of persons with physical or mental disabilities, in particular their right to be treated with respect and dignity” (Section 22:1, 2013, p.21). The above sections are legal instruments that were put in place to protect PWDs against discriminatory practices. In other words, PWDs’ rights and dignity have to be recognized by all institutions that represent the state such as local authorities. Urban and rural councils or municipalities in Zimbabwe are under the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. Together with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, they are arms of the government and are thus expected to implement laws and policies of the country in their governing jurisdictions.

Governance of local authorities should include taking cognisance of legal instruments of inclusivity. The research found that although most teachers in Bindura Urban were knowledgeable of ideal standards of inclusive toilets they looked up to the local authorities to take charge and condemn non-inclusive infrastructures during the planning stage.

A survey by WHO (2011) noted that most persons with disabilities were poor. This could be a result of lack of education or limited education which found them having challenges of getting gainful employment as well as discriminatory practices they experienced in life. Thus, pupils with disabilities who were dropping out school (as this study revealed), were prevented from entering job markets. This resulted in overburdening the state as it tried to absorb the costs of young persons with disabilities who remained in the residential care as well as supporting those who were not self-sufficient or unemployed through the Ministry of Social Welfare.

As it were, pupils with disabilities who had dropped out of school in Bindura urban schools had become a burden, not only to family members but to the government as well. As long as sanitary infrastructure in Bindura urban schools were difficult to access, the problem of dropping out of school would remain.

The situation of children with disabilities crawling in Bindura urban schools toilets exposed them to high risks of contamination, thus high chances of mortality rate among such children. A United Nations Report (2008) revealed that about two million people die every year due to diarrheal diseases and most of them are children less than 5 years of age. It has been noted that the school going age in Zimbabwe is now from 4 years of age, thus, due to inclusive policies of the country, children with disabilities are now found in schools at these tender ages where they are susceptible to ailments as they crawl in these school toilets because there are no ramps at the entrance, pathways are too narrow for wheelchairs, and there are no supporting rails in most school toilets in Bindura urban (see Table 1). High mortality rate experienced during this period usually had an effect on family as well an effect when this group reached a productive age. When an active group is no more, the country suffers economically, politically and otherwise (UNDP, 2007). One can argue that deprivation of a few individuals to sanitary facilities can be havoc to the whole country.

Basing on the findings of this research, the Bindura Local Authority’s lack of effort to push for the rehabilitation of old school toilets is contravening the legal instruments of inclusivity as well as the Millennium development goals, for example, goal number 7. The latter emphasises on reducing lack of access to safe water and basic sanitation among the population in a country. The findings revealed that inaccessibility to sanitary
facilities forced PWDs to confine themselves in homes and this had deprived them opportunities for civic interaction and awareness about mitigating against environmental hazards such as cholera outbreaks, typhoid and other societal challenges.

Conclusion

Although there are specific national legal instruments on equal participation pupils with disabilities in the mainstream schools of Zimbabwe, this research found out that, most Bindura urban schools sanitary infrastructure were not complying with these policies.

It was found out that most toilets in Bindura Urban primary and secondary schools were not appropriate for persons with physical disabilities. There were narrow doors and corridors, high chambers, squatting holes, high water basins, high flushing systems and no supporting rails for people using wheelchairs. Hence, pupils in wheelchairs crawled on hands and feet in the dirty school toilets.

The local authority, in collaboration with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should put in place instruments that monitor accessibility of toilets in schools for pupils with disabilities. For example, Education Officers building can work in partnership with the Bindura Municipality Building Inspectorate Sub-department monitor the development of inclusive toilets in schools.

References


Zimbabwe. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment No.20. ACT 2013

