Indigenization and empowerment activities in Zimbabwe. A critical examination of the challenges and successes in the inclusion of visually impaired people in Zimbabwean economic activities.

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Abstract

For time immemorial people with disabilities and those with visual impairments in particular have been marginalized in many aspects of life. Despite many conventions on human rights people with visual impairments are still excluded from participation in economic development activities. This is in particular to Zimbabwe when indigenization and empowerment (hupfumi kuvanhu) is the talk of the day. It is against this background that the researcher was compelled to critically examine the people with visual impairments to participate in economic development activities. The study was carried out in Masvingo Province. Using questionnaires data was collected from two university academic registrars, three teachers’ college principals, six university lecturers, six teachers’ colleges lecturers, five high school heads, five primary school heads, five high school teachers, five primary school teachers, five high school students and five primary school learners. The study revealed that the Zimbabwean education system lacked the capacity to fully equip people with visual impairments with transitional skills. It was established that there was lack of specialist manpower, material resources like assistive devices, restricted social and physical environment, lack of specific and mandatory legislation to mention some. Recommendations were made. The conclusion summarized the findings of the study.

Key words: visually impaired, vocational skills, empowerment and inclusive

Introduction

“Tinokumirawo rubatsiro, kurarama kwedu kunobva kwamuri hama dzangu”. (May you kindly help us our lives depend on you) is common hymn in Zimbabwean streets, public places and long distance buses. This is daily routine for people with visual impairment (PWVI). Thus it clearly shows that people with visual impairment are not economically empowered despite the indigenization and empowerment programmes the government is partaking. PWVI like any other people without disabilities have vast potential to contribute immensely towards the Zimbabwean economy provided there is equalization of opportunities in all aspects. It is against this background it was found necessary to find out more about the real situation on the ground as well as to determine what could be done to address the problem.
Background

People with visual impairment can actively participate in economic activities provided they are fully empowered and there is equalization of opportunities. Education is said to be an emancipatory tool for the empowerment of all as it opens the avenues to quality and rich life, Chakuchichi and Kapuya (2004). Despite Zimbabwe being rated among countries with high literacy rate coupled with the indigenization and empowerment policy (hupfumi kuvanhu) the deplorable lifestyle being experienced by people with visual impairment is a clear testimony of how people with visual impairments are being economically excluded. Thus it is against this background that the researcher set out to investigate successes and challenges of including PWVI in Zimbabwean economic activities.

As such the education system was interrogated to establish its capacity to empower PWVI transitional skills.

Statement of the problem

People with visual impairment face many barriers which hinder their full and meaningful participation in economic development activities.

Objectives of the study

• to determine the problems that contribute towards the exclusion of PWVI from participating in the economic development activities;
• to identify the capacity of the education system to equip PWVI with transitional skills;
• to determine the successes and challenges of including PWVI in economic development activities;
• to identify various skills training programmes and determine their accessibility to PWVI;
• to signpost the key strategies that could be used to enhance the inclusion of PWVI in economic activities;
• to highlight the various ways in which the human rights-based approach could be used to inform full participation of PWVI in economic activities.

Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:
• What are the successes and challenges of including PWVI in economic activities?
• Does the Zimbabwean education system have the capacity to equip PWVI with the necessary transitional skills which enable them to participate in economic development activities?
• Which training programmes can be established to equip PWVI with the necessary skills to participate in economic development activities?
• How can the human rights based approach be implemented to maximize the participation of PWVI in economic development activities?
• Which key strategies can be used to enhance inclusion of PWVI in economic development activities?

Significance of the study

• results of this study will facilitate empowerment of PWVI through effective skills training programmes which will equip skills to fully participate in economic activities;
• it is hoped that the results of the study will redirect the Zimbabwean education system to be inclusive;
• it is anticipated that the results of this study will inform policy on educational and indigenization and economic empowerment practices;
• the results of this study would impact positively on changing the negative attitudes of people towards PWVI.

Assumptions of the study

The study assumes that:
• PWVI fully participate in economic development activities;
• the Zimbabwean education system has the capacity to equip PWVI with transitional skills;
• there are skills training programmes to equip PWVI with economic development skills in place;
• PWVI are equally competent in participating in economic development activities.

Delimitations of the study

• the study is not intended to overshadow the successes already accomplished the positive effects of the indigenization and economic empowerment activities underway;
• the study does not attempt to predict future economic development activities patterns for the PWVI;
• the study does not try to impose future trends in educational practices.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of the study were:
• failure by the researcher to reach out many rural schools due to employment commitment;
• the researcher would have wished more time to thoroughly carryout the study but due to time allocated not

Review of Related Literature

Education is an emancipatory tool as it opens the avenues to the quality and rich life. To people with disabilities inclusive education in particular is ideal as it empowers them with effective skills for their full participation and involvement in all societal activities. Zimbabwe is rated amongst the top in Africa as far s literacy rate is concerned. To add to that it has made massive strides in the development of education since its independence in 1980. Despite all these achievements, the quality of life of people with visual impairment is still deplorable as evidenced by them begging and loitering in the streets. As such it is against this background that literature related to how education can enhance the participation of visually impaired people in economic development activities would be reviewed.

Vocational Preparation

Vocational training should be thought of as a strategy for increasing the student’s life opportunities (Badza and Chakuchichi, 2000). As such the preparation for work that visually impaired people receive during school years plays a direct and positive role in enabling them to adjust to adult life. The purpose of school based vocational training is that at the end of their schooling, youths with disabilities will be employable in either the formal or informal sector (Mutamiswa, Mapepa and Sixpence, 2004). To add to that, they should be able to participate to a larger extent in all economic development activities. In Zimbabwe people with visual impairment are prepared for work through vocational, technical, functional, social and adaptive skills
which they learn at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Education should be meant for life preparation and as such people with visual impairment should be conscientised, assisted and taught on work skills and more importantly on economic development skills. The education system through to tertiary level should be responsive and fulfill this role. This ensures that people with visual impairment are equipped with relevant skills to participate in economic development activities at all stages. In Zimbabwe, Murewa, Copota, Jiros Jiri (Kadoma) and Wadilove schools offer vocational skills in various areas such as cane work, weaving, basketry, chalk making to mention some. Most disturbing issue is that Zimbabwe has advocated for inclusive education and is not known is to what extend are children with visual impairments benefiting from the mainstream education in as far as vocational preparation is concerned.

Some countries introduce vocational and technical training skills at secondary level (UNESCO, 1988). Sweden offers a diversified skills training programme the visually impaired at Upper Secondary School level. Vocational training has a direct link with community and adulthood and as such it is pertinent to consider the appropriateness of the vocational curriculum to life after school. Thus an ecological inventory underpins the quest for relevance in vocational training curriculum (Badza and Chakuchichi, 2000). New teaching techniques according to Griffiths (1994) are providing a foundation for discovering and developing the adaptive and functional skills o important to the vocational choice process. Vocational training skills equip children with visual impairments with what are termedas “Employable Package”. These are very crucial for employment retention.

The disadvantage facing the visually impaired learner is the lack of information about work, and jobs that the sighted student acquires by observation. Thus there is need for general vocational education as well as the need for career education offered specifically for blind and visually impaired students. Career education in an expanded core curriculum will provide the visually impaired learner the opportunity to learn first-hand the work done by various professionals. It is therefore vital that curriculum planners visit and assess the activities in the community so that an appropriate vocational curriculum is designed. It is believed that if teachers are well trained vocational competency and assessment will be imparted well into students with visual impairment. These skills are very crucial as they are a link between the school and the community and meaningful adulthood. Education is said to be incomplete if it does not fulfill the aspect of successful work life.

Human Resources

According to Mavundukure and Thembani (2000), the term human resources refer to different levels of people who are used by special needs education systems to affect learning. These enable the special needs education system tom achieve its aims and objectives. However, due to inadequate funding, shortage of these professionals is always prevalent and seriously compromises service delivery. Regrettably, due to under-funding specialist teachers end up doing services of other professionals with limited success and services will be greatly compromised (Mapepa and Mutamiswa, 2004). Advances in teacher education have not necessarily kept pace with policy changes according to World Report on disability 2011. Nziramasanga Commission’s Finding of 1999 also supports this by pointing out that only the United College of Teacher Education is offering formal full time training and mostly for primary school teachers. Although other teacher training colleges have joined in they are doing it in an adhoc manner. Specialist teachers are also being trained at the Reformed
Church University, Zimbabwe Open University and University of Zimbabwe, but these will not be enough since Zimbabwe has advocated for inclusive education. This clearly shows that Zimbabwe has no enough manpower to cater for students with visual impairments. Thus it means students with visual impairments are not being equipped with the appropriate skills to participate in economic development activities.

Material Resources – Equipment, Books and Stationery

Special needs education really requires a variety of equipment if comprehensive service is to be delivered. According to Nziramasanga Commission’s findings of (1999) there is inadequate provision of equipment and materials for special needs education. This is as a result of lack of clarity in the Education Act of (1987) which is not specific and mandatory. Students with visual impairments require such assistive devices like Braille machines, computers with the relevant software, embossers and many others to enhance effective teaching and learning. Thus in the absence of these no meaningful teaching and learning takes place and that education will not empower them to participate fully in economic development activities. The World Report on Disability (2011) is also in support as it cites that limited or inappropriate resources are regarded as a significant barrier to ensuring quality service delivery.

The Environment-Physical and Social

A least restrictive environment is crucial in promoting effective teaching and learning of children with visual impairments. The environment has to be universally designed. A least restrictive environment promotes holistic development of a child with visual impairments. According to World Report on Disability (2011) physical access to school buildings is an essential prerequisite for educating children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are often categorized according to their health condition to determine their eligibility for special education and other support services but assigning labels in education system can have negative effects including lower self-esteem, stigmatization, peer rejection, lower expectations and limited opportunities (World Report on Disability, 2011). Negative attitudes are a major obstacle to the education of students with visual impairments. The society at large and the school community have misconceptions and perceptions about impairments. These have resulted in children with visual impairments achieving low or even dropping out of school. Students with visual impairment often become targets of violent acts including physical threats and abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and social isolation. All these negatively impacts on the teaching and learning process and thus in the end education does not fulfill its mandate of empowerment.

Funding

National budgets for education are often limited and families are frequently unable to afford the costs of education (World Report on Disability, 2011). Zindi (1997) observes lack of effective legislation and policies as inhibiting disbursement of funds for special needs education programmes. Peresuh (1994) also cites very low levels of funding as a common problem in third world countries. Although the government of Zimbabwe fund children with special needs through per capita grants, Basic Education Assistance Module, these are said not be
sufficient to run the special needs education programmes. As a result special needs education is left to survive as a parasite on the mainstream education budget thus negatively affecting its operations. As such assistance from bilateral and multilateral donors is called for.

**Legislation and Policy**

Lack of specific and mandatory legislation and policies tends to be a major obstacle in efforts to provide special needs education. The gaps in policy that are commonly encountered include lack of financial, social protection and support services for children with disabilities (World Report on Disability 2011). The Zimbabwean Education Act of 1987 has formed the basis for the increase of special needs education provisions (Dakwa 1985), although it has its own loopholes. Even though Zimbabwe is advocating for inclusive education the legislation and policies in place are not mandatory and specific. These have resulted in poor practices in as far as special needs education is concerned and thus not fulfilling the obligation of education.

**Curriculum**

The Zimbabwean curriculum is said not to be catering for children with special needs. It is fraught with various forms of bias which affect the various types of learners, according to Badza and Chakuchichi (2000). The curriculum is exam oriented and time framed thus not catering for diversity. Learners with visual impairment need to be exposed to the expanded core curriculum to enhance their functionality. The expanded core curriculum covers such aspects like compensatory or functional academic skills, orientation and mobility, independent living skills, recreation and leisure skills, career education, use of assistive technology, sensory efficiency skills and self-determination. Assessment procedures have to be compatible with learners with disabilities so that appropriate and effective service is given.

**Methodology**

The descriptive survey was found to be the most appropriate in this study. It seeks to bring out events they way they happened. This research method is most suitable in collecting data that concern mainly present conditions. More so it allows the use of such techniques as comparison, contrasting, measurement, classification and evaluation of collected data. The survey method mainly makes use of questionnaires, interviews and rating scales in the collection of data.

Charles (1986) indicates that the survey method is the best in carrying out an educational survey because it is cost effective and reflects a general idea of the problem among others. On the other hand the survey method imposes some limitations as it tests the theories put forward by the researcher. It also discourages divergent thinking on the part of respondents.

**Population**

- all university registrars
- head of primary and high schools
- university and college lecturers
- primary and high school teachers
- university, college, high and primary school students

The respondents were all from Masvingo Province.
Sample

The sample comprised:
- two (2) university registrars
- three (3) teachers’ college principals
- six (6) university lecturers
- six (6) teachers’ college lecturers
- five (5) high school heads
- five (5) primary school heads
- five (5) high school teachers
- five (5) primary school teachers
- six (6) teachers’ college students
- six (6) university students
- five (5) high school students
- five (5) primary school learners

All the above were from Masvingo Province. There are only three universities, three teachers’ colleges, one primary and one high school for the blind in Masvingo and as such purposeful sampling was used to choose these. For the other four high and primary schools random sampling was used.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires and informal discussions were used to collect data in this study.

Questionnaire

The researcher found the use of questionnaires most appropriate for the following:
- it cuts on travelling costs
- it could be completed by a test subject with or without supervision as information required is merely factual
- it gives the respondents enough time to think about their responses
- they are time saving
- responses are most likely to be genuine because of anonymity.

Questionnaire to University Academic Registrars

A questionnaire was designed and distributed to two university academic registrars. This questionnaire solicited information on the status of human, material and financial resources in relation to the education of students with visual impairment.

Questionnaire to Teachers’ College Principals

A questionnaire was designed for three teachers’ college principals. This questionnaire elicited information on the inclusivity of the curriculum offered as well as the status of human, financial and material resources.

Questionnaire to High and Primary School Heads

A questionnaire was designed for five high school heads. This questionnaire solicited information from high school heads on the inclusivity of the curriculum they offer, the status of human financial and material resources as well as statistics of learners with visual impairment.

Questionnaire to Heads of High and Primary Schools for the Blind

A questionnaire was designed for the heads of primary and high schools for the blind. This questionnaire solicited information on the appropriateness of the curriculum they are offering, problems encountered and possible solutions.

Questionnaire to University and Teachers’ College Lecturers

A questionnaire was designed which sought information on qualifications of lecturers as far as special needs education is concerned and their experience. Information on challenges encountered and possible solutions as far as teaching of the students with visual impairment is concerned.
Questionnaire to University, College, High and Primary School Students
A questionnaire was designed which solicited information on the relevance of the curriculum offered at the different levels, challenges faced and possible solutions.

Informal Discussions
Informal discussions were held with the various respondents after they had filled in the questionnaires. That created a platform for respondents to give their views on other aspects which were not covered by the questionnaire. The discussion was very beneficial as some pertinent issues were covered. These were recorded.

Procedure
The researcher sought permission from the Provincial Education Director Masvingo to carry out the study in special and ordinary primary and high schools. Permission to carry out the study in universities and teachers’ colleges was granted by the Ministry of Higher education. Communication was made with the universities, teachers’ colleges, Copota primary and high schools of the blind and appointments made in advance. Questionnaires for the other primary and high schools were distributed during a provincial heads’ meeting. Questionnaires for the totally blind were done in braille and they also responded in the same mode. To ensure validity of the questionnaires the researcher administered the documents to others who were not to be involved in the final sampling. This was done to test whether the questionnaires were accurately written and actually solicited for only information needed. There was 100% return rate as all mechanisms were put in place to guarantee this.

Data Presentation and Analysis
After all questionnaires were returned, information supplied was recorded using the tally system as it is precise and accurate. Frequency tables were drawn when data was further analysed from the tally system. These tables helped the researcher to find solutions to sub-problems and also showed the trend of responses. Using percentages to rate each response ensured enhanced statistical analysis of data. This method greatly assisted the researcher to give meaning to the data.

Results and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.1 State of Resources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Adequate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Inadequate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that 44% of the respondents did not have adequate resources. These were mainly in the universities, teachers’ colleges and the two special schools. The study revealed that they had to some certain extend some basic assistive devices like the Braille machines but they were not enough for the number of learners they have. 56% showed that resources were very inadequate especially in integrated settings. They virtually have nothing in terms of devices. The findings of the study strongly agree with Mavundukure and Thembani (2003) who observed that in developing countries there are problems of non-availability of equipment.
The Nziramasanga Commission Report (1999) reiterated the same sentiments as it expressed that some institutions had no proper equipment for use. They gave an example of computers. Thus the state of resources justifies why most parents prefer special schools to inclusive schools. The study results also revealed that the universities and the special schools had highly qualified personnel with some holding as high as masters degree in the special needs education area. In integrated settings it was quite different as some did not even have one staff member with at least a diploma. During informal discussions the researcher found out that in integrated high schools most teachers lacked training in special needs education as teachers’ college curriculum did not offer anything along those lines during the time they were trained.

Table 1.2 Source of Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils/Students</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research results revealed that 88% of the respondents were heavily relying on school fees from learners as the source of funds although the government paid per capita grant and BEAM to a very few students. This was expressed by integrated high and primary schools. Only 12% received the larger part of their funding from the government through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and per capita grant. These were the special schools. Although these are paid the respondents showed that it was not adequate to meet the needs of learners with visual impairments. The findings strongly agrees with Mavundukure and Thembanini (2000) as they express that in Zimbabwe special needs education is funded by the government through per capita grant. Special schools during informal discussions expressed that they were facing serious financial challenges as most non governmental organisations have withdrawn their funding. This has been worsened by the government’s inability to pay some of the grants it used to on top of the per capita grant. BEAM funds disbursement was said to be erratic which has resulted in some institutions like boarding special schools finding it difficult to operate. Thus findings contradicted the Nziramasanga Commission of 1999’s report which indicated that the government of Zimbabwe was paying $150.00 per child on top of the per capita grant by that time. The Commission also reported that there was no specific budget for special needs education operations and that could be the reason why funding to a larger extent is from learners as per the study’s results.

Table 1.3 Type of Curriculum used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the study revealed that 88% of the respondents followed the general curriculum which did not cater for the unique needs of learners with visual impairments. Only 12% that is the special schools followed an inclusive curriculum. These findings were in line with Badza and Chakuchichi (2000) who expressed that the existing curriculum had some biases towards people living with disabilities.

During the informal discussions with the learners with visual impairments they expressed that the curriculum was not empowering them much as it did not cater much for the expanded core curriculum aspect. They expressed that with the curriculum offered most learners with visual
impairments will not be able to participate fully in societal activities like economic development activities. The transitional skills relevant for their involvement and participation in mainstream life were very inadequate. The study revealed that most teachers were incompetent to offer such skills. The special schools indicated that they offer vocational and technical skills to their students like in the areas of agriculture, building, fashion and fabrics, food and nutrition, weaving and basketry, mobility and orientation, brailing skills to mention some were said to be offered in special schools.

The research findings contradicted the Chief Education Officer Circular No. 3 of 1989 which spelled out that the curriculum in special needs education should emphasize on appropriate skills which enhances functionality of the child with special needs.

<p>| Table 1.4 State of the Environment Factors |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study’s findings showed that 88% of the respondents cited negative attitude towards learners with visual impairments. During the informal discussion most respondents indicated that people without disabilities have negative attitude towards people with visual impairments. They perceived them useless, unproductive and dependent. Learners who are visually impaired expressed that they are subjected to various forms of abuse. To add to that in some cases learners with visual impairments are sexually abused by their sighted caregivers like boarding mothers of cooks. They also indicated that they are subjected to dehumanizing language and labels. This is strongly supported by the World Report on disability as revealed by the study carried out in Rwanda. The report cited that negative attitudes were reflected in the language used by teachers, school administrators, other children and even family members. Learners with visual impairment in the formal discussions revealed that they are stigmatized, isolated, segregated, looked down upon and ridiculed and as a result their self-esteem was lowered. The physical environment was also said not to be user friendly. It is said to have a lot of barriers which do not promote independence as far as mobility and orientation is concerned.

<p>| Table 1.5 Teacher Pupil Ratio |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legislation and Policy

The research findings showed that only 12% of the respondents adhere to the stipulated teacher: pupil ratio for learners with visual impairments. 88% indicated that they did not adhere to the policy. This is in agreement with the Secretary’s Policy Circular No. P3 of 1990 which spelt out that teacher pupil ratio for children with visual impairment is 1:10. This was mostly practiced in the special schools although in some cases the school heads indicated that in some cases it was higher than that. This violation indicated that Zimbabwe had no specific policy and legislation which is specific and mandatory which guides its special needs education practices.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the Zimbabwean education system to a larger extent does not fully empower learners with visual impairments to fully participate in economic development activities.
Development activities. It revealed that Zimbabwean education system is not inclusive that is it does not cater for the unique needs of learners with visual impairments. Lack of specialist manpower, assistive devices, mandatory and specific legislation was also some of the factors found out. The curriculum in practice has some inadequacies as it does not address the issue of the expanded core curriculum which is very crucial for the functionality and independency of learners with visual impairment. The negative social environment has been found out to be hindering factor in the total participation and involvement of learners with visual impairments. As such the Zimbabwean society has a mandate to emancipate people with visual impairments so that they fully participate in the economic development. People with visual impairments have the same rights just like all the other people and hence should be equipped with the relevant skills. Thus the concerted effort of all is called for to make education an emancipator tool for all.

Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusion and research findings the following recommendations are being made to positively facilitate the practice of education so that it empowers people with visual impairments to participate in economic development activities.

• an inclusive education system be adopted and fully practiced so that the diverse needs of various learners are catered for
• all teachers should be conversant with special needs education through in-service and pre-service training in the area
• the curriculum should expose students with visual impairments to the extended core curriculum
• awareness and sensitization campaigns to be mounted so as to conscientise all on the rights, capabilities and to demystify some perceptions, misconceptions and myths about disability. These can be done through workshops, seminars, radios, televisions, books, newspapers, magazines, political gatherings and church gatherings
• the government should enact legislation which is specific and mandatory. Policies should be adhered to and put into practice
• the government to set aside a special budget for provision of assistive technology, adaptation and modification of the environment.
Reference