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Research Article

The Inclusion of Physically Disabled ECD Learners in Mainstream Classes, a Glitch Aggravating Exclusion in Sengwe Cluster

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Abstract

Inclusive Education has recently become a pertinent issue as nations strive for sustainable education. Thence, this study delved on how the inclusion of physically disabled learners in Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings is aggravating exclusion in Sengwe Cluster. Glitches of how the inclusion of physically disabled learners in ECD settings affect vast stakeholders in ECD environments. Social Systems Theory by Niklas Luhmann formed the theoretical framework of this study. An ethnographic-qualitative research methodology merging a descriptive survey was adopted to critically analyse the problem in its natural settings. Five primary schools were sampled purposively to gain contextual knowledge on how the problem at hand was aggravating exclusion in ECD settings. Five physically disabled learners, ten ECD teachers and ten parents were sampled. Questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and observations were data collection instruments used. It emerged that, physically disabled ECD learners in inclusive schools were not equally benefitting from the education system as compared to their non-disabled peers. Limited parental involvement; unconducive education laws and policies, unstable school financial positions, negativism among other stakeholders and lack of multi-stakeholder collaboration were greatly affecting inclusive education in ECD environments. The study therefore recommends for effective parental involvement and multi-stakeholder collaboration, for the physically disabled ECD learners to equally benefit in inclusive schools like non-disabled peers.

Keywords

Inclusion, Exclusion, Physically Disabled, ECD Learners, Aggravates, Glitch

1. Introduction to the Study

The struggle for the rights of children with disabilities to equally benefit from education, in the same way their non-disabled peers are doing had a long history in the field of education globally. UNESCO recommends that children with special educational needs, need to be integrated in mainstream schools and classes for them to co-exist in their local communities [36]. United Nations General Assembly & UNESCO acknowledge that every human being has a right to education despite his / her physical or mental disability [36, 40]. UNESCO Article 23 on education concurs that 'UN illuminates that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child`s active participation in the community' [37]. This entails that, failure

for countries to offer proper educational provisions for the disabled persons is an infringement on their right to education. Article 2 of UNESCO supports that the principle of non-discrimination should be upheld by all UN member states and that all nations need to appreciate the disabled persons in their societies and protect them from any form of discrimination in all facets of human life [37].

The World Programme of Action Concerning the Disabled Persons (1983) under article 20 indicates that education for persons with disabilities should be done within the general school system. For this reason, equality and equity have recently become pertinent components of modern-day education world-wide. Globally, through UN world nations have unified efforts to embrace inclusive education from ECD level in order to develop ways of teaching which would benefit all learners proficiently [22, 23]. Inclusive education therefore strives to ensure that all ECD learners get equal opportunities to learn and equal treatment irrespective of their statuses and abilities.

The inclusion of physically disabled learners in mainstream classes is believed to be posing a myriad of glitches which are affecting the learners, educators, other stakeholders in ECD settings and the community at large [9, 14, 30]. Since the adoption of inclusive education in ECD settings, the inclusion of physically disabled learners in mainstream classes has persistently pose a number of glitches distracting endeavours to equitable learning opportunities for all learners thereby aggravating some form of exclusion among learners.

Having noted glitches exacerbating inequalities and inequitable learning opportunities for special needs learners in the education fraternity, Education for All (EFA) Goals were crafted and adopted by the UN, budding to level the learning field to benefit all children on the planet earth. Access to education in environments which are conducive for all diverse ECD learners in inclusive classes has the potential to proffer solutions to glitches being faced by the physically disabled learners. Morgado entails that a radical restructuring of schools, re-evaluation of the curriculum and changes in pedagogical approaches in schools are vital steps to ensure that special needs learners get best education, for holistic development [24].

Zimbabwe is among the countries which participated at the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education under the UN banner, which was held in Salamanca Spain. The Conference focused on modalities for making schools inclusive in order to accommodate and educate all learners regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other condition. The Dakar Conference [2000] was later held as a way of re-affirming the vision of inclusive education globally. The Zimbabwean government took the mandate to embrace inclusive education in its schools as guided by the UNCRC [1989]; Jomtein Conference on Education for All, [1990]; Salamanca Statement of Framework, [1994]; Dakar Framework of Action, [2000], World Summit

for Children, [2002], to ensure that all learners have access to education in their local communities.

A myriad of challenges are encountered in ECD settings as they strive to embrace inclusive education. Chimedza & Peters, Haug, Hymel & Katz concur that the implementation of inclusive education had not been easy thereby derailing eminent strides by UN member states to offer quality education for all [9, 17, 20]. Since a number of researchers acknowledge that even in developed countries, the implementation of inclusive education is still facing some hick-ups, it means that Zimbabwe as a developing nation might be facing more challenges through the inclusion of the physically disabled learners in ECD environments.

This study acknowledges that effectively implementing inclusive education from ECD level, can be capitalised for sustainable education which ensures equitable educational provisions in schools. For inclusive education to be instrumental in the lives of the physically disabled persons in communities, there is need for unified efforts among diverse stakeholders, working for a common goal. Imperatively, the researcher noted with concern that physically disabled learners in ECD settings are more vulnerable and are not effectively benefiting in mainstream classes. Benevolently, the researcher vied to unearth glitches brought in schools by the inclusion of the physically disabled ECD learners in mainstream classes and how such glitches are aggravating exclusion in ECD settings in Sengwe Cluster of Hurungwe District in Zimbabwe.

Problem Statement

Physically disabled ECD learners in their diversified categories had been enrolled in various inclusive schools. Despite these eminent strides to promote education for all, the inclusion of physically disabled ECD learners in mainstream classes continuously pose multitudinous glitches among various stakeholders, thereby exacerbating inequalities and inequitable learning opportunities. For this reason, a vast educational gap was evident, which triggered for forensic research, to promote sustainable inclusive education in ECD environments. It is against this background that the researcher delved on how the inclusion of physically disabled learners in mainstream classes aggravates exclusion in ECD settings in Sengwe Cluster and proffer possible solutions to these glitches.

Research questions

In the fervent to avail answers to the research problem, this study was guided by the main research question and sub-research questions below:

Main research question

How does the inclusion of the physically disabled ECD learners in mainstream classes aggravates exclusion?

Sub-research questions

1) What challenges are emanating from the inclusion of the physically disabled learners in mainstream classes in ECD environments?

2) How can challenges brought by the inclusion of physi-

cally challenged learners in ECD environments be addressed, for the sustainability of inclusive education?

2. Review of Related Literature

Social Systems Theory by Niklas Luhmann

The Social Systems Theory by Niklas Luhmann formed the theoretical framework for this study. The Social Systems Theory was developed between 1970 and 1997 and it explores on the impact of social systems, their structures, operations and interactions in a society. Social systems affect inclusive education programmes and the definition of inclusive education is derivated basing on three dimensions which outline why it is a phenomenon of concern in educational institutions [29, 19]. Three dimensions under which inclusive education can be defined according to Luhmann`s social systems theory are: (i) different levels of inclusion, (ii) different social communities where inclusion and exclusion can be practiced, and (iii) different degrees of inclusion and exclusion which exist in communities.

Luhmann views a society as a cluster made of heterogeneous social systems which construct meaning and explain on how these constructions affect inclusive education [22]. Qvortrup & Qvortrup, Liholm & Göransson, Lumann; Jamero concur that inclusion and exclusion philosophies are interwoven notions which explain functional differentiation of members of the society in diverse forms [30, 28, 22, 21]. Luhmann acknowledges that in societies, there are social systems where individuals belong; and these systems define and detect ways of life all individuals within social structures [22].

Qvorttrup & Ovortrup believe that human beings are born in families which shape their ways of life from birth. Within societies, the order of inclusion and exclusion follows the differentiation tenets of families and other social groups [30]. Within a community like a school, inclusion and exclusion philosophies take place in relation to the dictates of families supporting the institution. Bronfenbrenner, Felder, Lumann & UNESCO agree that in societies, there are socially inclusive and exclusive systems such as: schools, religion, politics, businesses, mining, culture and science [6, 15, 22, 37]. These social groupings either accept or discriminate individuals as fit or unfit to operate within their jurisdictions. Thence, within an inclusive ECD environments, the education system is liable to create different social sub-systems which might perpetuate exclusion.

When an ECD learner fails to benefit effectively from the education system due to physical disability, issues of systemic exclusion arise. Hymel & Katz, Jamero, & Mpofu concur that, system differentiation occur due to operational systems, environmental conditions or human attitudes leading to social and academic exclusion [20, 21, 26]. According to Luhmann, human beings have equality to rights and freedoms to operate in specific functional systems like schools, however, these are enjoyed differently by individuals due to environ-

mental settings which determine the criteria for inclusion and exclusion [22].

The place of inclusive education in ECD settings

Azorin & Ainscow, Felder & Hernández-Torrano et al believe that inclusive education recognises the rights of all children cutting across all boundaries of ethnicity, gender, ability, disability and developmental conditions [4, 15, 18]. By proficiently embracing inclusive education in ECD settings, it means that all diverse ECD learners including the physically disabled, become part of the school community. Gran, Hernández-Torrano et al, Jamero; & Shaeffer concur that inclusive education is a basic model where both the disabled and non-disabled learners are enrolled and educated within the same classroom and under the same instructional teacher [16, 18, 21, 32]. The inclusive education philosophy seeks to create an educational system which embraces all ECD learners in their diverse categories, the non-disabled and the disabled, thereby giving them the pliability to learn in the same environment.

Emmerich, Gran & Hilt claim that inclusive education recognises and accepts all humanity, responding to their unique needs and appreciating them as equally important stakeholders within the school system [14, 16, 19]. In reality, there is no an independent world where the physically disabled people live alone but they live in societies with other non-disabled people hence it is inclusive education which trains societies to accept and appreciate the physically disabled people.

International guidelines for inclusive education in ECD settings

The UN General Assembly adopted the standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for the persons with disabilities in 1993. These are standards reflecting a strong moral and political commitment by UN member states to take action and equalise opportunities for persons with disabilities [35]. In 2009, UNESCO published policy guidelines on inclusive education which act as provisional guideline framework for creating inclusive environments in educational institutions. Amin, Azorin & Ainscow, Burholder; & Dhlembeu concur that UNICEF crafted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was adopted by UN General Assembly on the 13th of December 2006 and came into force on the 3rd of May 2008 [4, 7, 2, 13]. This human rights treaty sought to promote the rights and wellbeing of all children across the globe, through equitable inclusive education across all educational environments.

UNESCO published the Framework for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education in [2015] and the Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education: A Framework for Action in [2018] as a way of providing guidance and support for UN member states to implement inclusive education in ECD settings and develop educational programmes to sustain this initiative. In 2019, three world bodies namely World Health Organisation (WHO), World Bank (WB) and United Nations International Children`s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

partnered to form the Global Network for Early Childhood Development (GNECD) to promote inclusive education initiatives in ECD environments and support countries in coming up with supporting policies and programmes. In this regard, GNECD calls for collaboration among governments, communities, civic societies and the private sector in strategising on how inclusive education learners can be amplified for sustainability in education.

Legal framework on inclusive education in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe participated in a number of international conferences which gave birth to inclusive education. As a result, it came up with various policies and legal frameworks on inclusive education. These legal frameworks were crafted as guided by international guidelines: UNCRC [1989], World Conference Education for All [1990] Jomtien, the Salamanca Statement [1994], Education for All Dakar Conference [2000] and the World Summit for Children [2002].

The major legal instrument which guides inclusive education in Zimbabwean ECD context is the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No 20] Act 2013. Chapter 4, Part 2, Section 56 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that every person has a right to be treated in a fair and non-discriminatory manner on the grounds of gender, sex, age, religion, class, language, economic or social status, or disability [10]. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, Chapter 4, Part 3, Section 83 Sub-Section 2; The Education Act of Zimbabwe, Section 4 [1]; UNICEF & WHO all provide guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education in ECD settings [10, 35, 36, 38, 41]. These provisions in place strive to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place, so that learners with physical or other disabilities realise their full potentials through inclusive education.

3. Research Methodology

Ethnographic - qualitative research coursing a descriptive survey design was employed as a research methodology in this study, which enabled the researcher to unearth issues on the inclusion of the physically disabled learners in ECD settings as they manifest in natural environments. Ethnography according to Creswell, gives researchers room to understand social issues affecting humanity in communities, while delving into reasons on why things are the way they are and construct meaning behind certain occurrences and behaviours by various people in a society [11].

A descriptive survey design is objective and helps the researcher(s) to develop an understanding of the outside world in its natural settings, independently from various research idiosyncratic notions. Creswell concurs that a descriptive survey gives the researcher the flexibility to look at human real-life experiences and describe a phenomenon of interest from the participants` perspectives through the use of objective research instruments [11]. To obtain original data and unearth human perceptions surrounding the phenomenon under study, the researcher used a descriptive survey where,

five out of ten schools in Sengwe Cluster were sampled. Five physically disabled ECD learners were interviewed, 10 ECD teachers completed questionnaires and ten parents participated in a focus group discussion making a total of twenty-five informants. Observations were also done in five selected schools. Thematic analysis was employed during data presentation, where emerging themes from the findings were used to generate meaning in relation to the phenomenon under study.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The inclusion of physically disabled learners in Zimbabwean ECD environments was envisaged as a solution to curb a myriad of challenges which were causing and perpetuating the exclusion of the physically disabled and bringing inequitable treatment in societies. Given below are responses from the consulted participants in Sengwe Cluster. Data were generated basing on a survey which was conducted in Sengwe Cluster ECD settings and parents from Sengwe community who were engaged.

Categories of physically disabled learners enrolled in inclusive ECD classes.

It emerged from this study that there are a number of physically disabled learners who are enrolled in ECD environments in Sengwe Cluster. The categories of such learners include those with: orthopaedic impairments, mobility impairments, neurological impairments and physical disabilities due to injury or illness. Some disabled ECD learners in the cluster had cerebral palsy, clubfeet and muscular dystrophy which affect their day-to-day learning activities. Anastasiadou; Majoko & Sturm agree that orthopaedic impairments include spina bifida, cerebral palsy, amputations and clubfoot [3, 23, 34].

ECD Teacher '3' indicated that, '*In Sengwe Cluster, there are lame ECD learners who are not physically fit to walk on their own, hence they make use of assistive devices. Some were born with such disabilities and for others it is as a result of illness or injuries. Some of the ECD learners are wheelchair users and others use walkers or canes for movements.*' Inclusive education intends to address the needs of learners with mobility impairments in schools [2, 19, 21, 39].

The researcher discovered that some ECD learners have sensory impairments, visual impairments and hearing impairments. Emmerich & Mpofu elude that, only physically disabled learners with mild and moderate cases can be enrolled in inclusive schools [14, 26]. Aasland, Booth, Hilt, Rawal & WHO support that some physical disabilities among humans are as a result of chronic health conditions, which include diabetes, asthma, cystic fibrosis and cancer [1, 5, 19, 31, 41]. ECD learners with the above named categories of physical disabilities were found in Sengwe Cluster.

Glitches faced by stakeholders in inclusive ECD environments.

Enrolling physically disabled learners in ECD settings in

Sengwe Cluster in mainstream classes under the banner of inclusive education is a move towards assisting such learners to co-existence in societies. Despite the benefits which come through the inclusion of the physically disabled learners in ECD settings, such efforts face multitudinous challenges which are defying the aim of inclusive education [25, 29]. Some challenges noted in Sengwe Cluster ECD settings are as follows:

Accessibility

It emerged in ECD environments in Sengwe Cluster that learners with mobility impairments face a number of glitches in their pursuit for education which start from home, extending to the school environment. Parent 'A' explained that, '*Sengwe area is hilly, mountainous and surrounded by a lot of rivers. Pathways to school are a major barrier for children with mobility impairments. The terrain is sloppy and a lot of gullies are found along the way, dominated by some sandy areas which disturbs wheelchair users and other ECD learners with mobility impairments.*' Parents 'D' and 'I' went on to say, '*During the rain season most ECD learners with mobility impairments do not go to school because of rivers which are usually flooded and the pathways they use will be muddy affecting their mobility*.' Parent 'C' concurred that, '*We don`t have tared roads linking our homes to school. Even for those learners who live by the road side, they also face challenges of using walkers or wheelchairs in dust roads which have gravel causing them to arrive late to school nearly on daily basis*.' Amin, Chimedza & Peters, Morgado, & Nilholm & Göransson posit that a number of schools are not easily accessible by physically disabled learners due to poor road network system linking homes and schools [2, 9, 24, 28]. Majoko, & UNICEF elucidate that ECD Centres in some rural parts of Zimbabwe are far spaced which force some learners to walk up to about 10 kilometres to the nearest centre [23, 38]. This was also the case in Sengwe Cluster which usually force a number of ECD learners with mobility impairments to drop out of school since they cannot access the nearest schools with ease.

Within ECD environments in Sengwe Cluster, accessibility to a number of areas where ECD learners need service is also a challenge. The physically disabled ECD learners and ECD teachers were in congruence that within the cluster, all centres did not have adequate physical infrastructural facilities which include ramps, accessible and user-friendly toilets and wide doorways on various rooms thereby posing physical challenges for mobility impaired learners to navigate the learning environment easily thereby aggravating exclusion. Luhmann in his Social Systems Theory explicates that there are social communities in societies where exclusion can be perpetuated either intentionally or unintentionally [22]. In the case of Sengwe Cluster, physically disabled ECD learners are enrolled in ECD environments but in terms of learning opportunities, they are excluded due to impermissive environments. Emmerich, Luhmann, & Qvortrup & Qvortrup believe that the disabled people have the right to education

but at times are enrolled where the school environment determines the criteria for exclusion unintentionally, thereby extending the vulnerability in inclusive school environments [14, 22, 30].

Lack of funding

Lack of funding for inclusive education programmes in ECD settings was another major scourge encountered in Sengwe Cluster. Due to harsh economic conditions which Zimbabwe is going through, there are no funds which are specifically reserved to support the physically disabled ECD learners in schools [23, 26]. Liholm & Göransson carried a study in selected Teachers` Colleges in Zimbabwe and elude that, '*We did not come across any institution that set aside funds to specifically support special needs students in their inclusive education programmes*' [28]. This shows that the situation might be more pathetic in rural settings like Sengwe Cluster. Majoko echoes that there is no financial support that ECD centres are getting from the Government of Zimbabwe to cater for the needs of the physically disabled ECD learners [23]. Lack of funding is critically affecting inclusive programmes, ECD teachers and learners in remote areas, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. Lack of funding led to inadequate resources to support the physically disabled ECD learners as the case in Sengwe Cluster.

Inadequate resources

Respondents were in agreement that the inclusion of physically disabled learners in inclusive ECD settings is affected by lack of adequate resources. Learner 'I' who is a wheelchair user and also has albinism delineated that, '*As physically disabled learners who have movement challenges, getting wheelchairs is a great challenge because they are expensive and my parents cannot afford to buy me regularly. As a learner with albinism, I require a lot of special lotions to manage my skin conditions. Getting all these items is a big challenge for my parents and I usually rely on donations from well-wishers.*' ECD Teachers '4', '7' and '10' indicated that ECD learners with albinism usually fail to get lotions they need like; ceramide creams, zinc oxide creams, broad-spectrum sunscreens, moisturising lotions and hydrating lotions because they are expensive. UNICEF, & WHO agree that learners with albinism require lotions to promote their skin health, protect their skins from sunburns and soothe skin irritations, combat skin dryness, improve skin elasticity and prevent skin cancer [38, 41].

Learners with visual impairment require lenses to improve their sight, others require enlarged printed texts while others need assistive electronic devices with supporting sounds. The respondents agree that hearing impaired ECD learners need assistive hearing devices such as hearing aids. Chimedza & Peters, Morgado, Morina, Rawal, & Sturm postulate that a number of resources needed by the physically disabled learners are expensive and some parents cannot manage to buy such resources for their children [9, 24, 25, 13, 34].

Stigma and discrimination

The study discovered that the physically disabled ECD

learners in Sengwe Cluster were facing stigma and discrimination. Stigma and discrimination were as a result of negative attitudes from the ECD teachers, other ECD learners, family members, religious groups and the community at large [41]. According to ECD learners 'II' and 'IV', '*We are subjected to labelling and stereotyping from our peers, some teachers and community members. This is demoralising and our self-confidence and self-worth are eroded when we are treated as less human as compared to other people. The discrimination is too much to bear especially what is done to our colleagues who are physically disabled and also have mental impairments*' ECD learner 'III' concurred that '*As physically disabled learners, we suffer from social isolation because we cannot make friends easily due to our disabilities thereby limiting our social interaction with peers.*' Amin; Hymel & Kartz, Majoko, Nyarambi & Ntuli, & WHO all agree that discriminating special needs learners leads to social isolation where the discriminated are excluded from play and social interaction which hinder the development of social skills [2, 20, 23, 29, 41].

It was discovered discriminating the physically disabled learners is contributing to increased anxiety and stress both for the learners and their families. Parents 'F' and 'G' seconded that, '*Our physically disabled learners are being discriminated and excluded in a number of school activities due to human factors or environmental factors. This is leading to mental disorders, depression and anxiety. Some learners are carried by colleagues to various places like computer labs where their wheelchairs cannot access due to steps on the door. This is dehumanising and it demoralise the learners and lower their self-confidence in whatever they do at a school.*' Discrimination in such cases hinder endeavours for holistic development of the physically disabled ECD learners through limited opportunities which delay or impede their development.

Lack of expertise

ECD teachers 1, 3 and 9 stated that, '*As ECD teachers, we require a lot of expertise to work with all physically disabled learners who are enrolled in inclusive ECD classes. As it stands now, we do not have quality skills expected of us due to training we received in Teachers Colleges. Though we are getting some knowledge due to experience we have in the field of education, we still fill the gap because at times we meet some cases which are complicated for to handle.*' According to Aasland & Flotten, Gran, Morgado, Nyarambi & Ntuli, & Sokal & Kartz, teachers meet learners with physical impairments of diverse nature in inclusive settings, which require them expertise to handle such learners in the teaching and learning environment [1, 16, 24, 29, 33]. Majoko agrees that from the background of their training, most teachers only got basic skills on inclusive and special needs education making them not competent enough to handle some complicated cases they meet in inclusive settings [23]. WHO reveals that teacher educators (lecturers) in Ireland lack confidence and expertise in implementing inclusive education in

teacher education programmes [41]. This entails that in inclusive ECD settings such teachers cannot be competent enough to offer quality inclusive education if they were trained by lecturers who were not self-confidence on content they were teaching.

Big classes

ECD teachers in Sengwe Cluster complained that the teacher-pupil ratio they were subjected to in inclusive classes was not conducive for them to do justice in assisting all diverse learners to develop to their fullest potentials. ECD Teacher 7 eludes that, '*We teach very big classes at ECD level, with some teachers teaching a class of 60 or more learners. The policy says at ECD level, a teacher should take a class of 20-25 but it`s not applicable because we are understaffed and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is not addressing the situation. We only work with what is available but honestly speaking, special needs learners who require more individualised attention are not learning anything meaningful.*' Jamero & WHO agree that ECD teachers in Africa are overwhelmed with duties of teaching, marking, supervision of other school duties delegated by school authorities, involvement in extra-curriculum activities and other duties [21, 41]. It was evident that ECD teachers in Sengwe Cluster manage large classes and this was affecting the physically disabled learners. Leave No Child Behind Zimbabwe Report (2020) concurs that other ECD teachers in Zimbabwe have overwhelming classes which at times go up to 80 learners or more per class. Considering that there is marking to be done, planning for the lessons, monitor learning activities, researching, profiling, co-curricular activities and record keeping among other duties, it was very difficult for ECD teachers to effectively assist physically disabled learners.

Inflexible curriculum

An inflexible ECD curriculum was noted as another glitch perpetuating the exclusion of the physically disabled learners in ECD settings. ECD teachers complained that the curriculum in use was not flexible and inclusive in nature which exclude a number of physically disabled learners. UNICEF highlights that lack of inclusivity by an inflexible ECD curriculum pose a number of scourges to ECD teachers [38]. According to the consulted informants, the ECD curriculum used is not really inclusive in the sense that all learners are subjected to same content and skills and the curriculum is controlled by robotic time-tables, despite having learners with diverse needs. Chimedza & Peters, Majoko, Nyarambi & Ntuli, & Sokal & Kartz indicate that the ECD curriculum in Zimbabwe is inflexible, where learning content is divided into learning areas and ECD teachers are expected to give learners specified number of written exercises per learning area per week which is used as a yard stick to measure the effectiveness of a teacher [9, 23, 29, 33]. This entails that ECD teachers may work to meet given expectations and not to assist learners.

How the inclusion of physically disabled learners is aggravating exclusion in ECD settings

The inclusion of physically disabled learners in Sengwe Cluster is facing some hindrances which aggravate some form of exclusion. The researcher discovered a number of areas where exclusion is aggravated in ECD setting which are elaborated below:

Lack of proper support

Physically disabled ECD learners were excluded in a number of activities which are done within the learning environment. ECD teachers indicated that, '*A number of parents of the physically disabled learners do not give their children all the necessary support such as stationery and levy payment. They give priority to their non-disabled children.*' Lack of proper support from parents make the disabled learners more vulnerable in schools thereby aggravating their exclusion [14, 19, 21, 31, 34].

Lack of trained support services also emerged to be a hindrance affecting the physically disabled learners in ECD settings, thereby extending their exclusion. Amin & Booth indicate that lack of trained staff negatively affects the participation of the physically disabled learners in schools which lead to their exclusion in a number of activities within the school set up and beyond [2, 5].

Over-protection

ECD teachers alluded that in some cases the physically disabled learners were over-protected by their parents, peers and some members of staff. Over-protection was seen as restrictive for the physically disabled ECD learners to fully develop due to lack of independence and autonomy. Chimedza & Peters, Devarakonda & Powlay, Dhlembeu, Nyarambi & Ntuli, Qvortrup & Qvortrup believe that where communities sympathise and over-protect the disabled, the disabled learners are deprived independence and autonomy to operate as responsible persons which aggravate exclusion in schools and societies [9, 12., 13, 29, 30]. Usually over-protecting the physically disabled ECD learners leads to the erosion of self-confidence, low self-esteem and inferiority among the disabled.

Legislative and policy gaps

The area of legislation and policies for inclusive education in ECD settings was found to be complex and sophisticated, thereby exacerbating the exclusion of physically disabled ECD learners in Sengwe Cluster. The respondents agreed that the area of legislation and policy availing and the reality on the ground continually include or exclude the physically disabled ECD learners. ECD Teacher 8 elucidated that, '*The education policy in Zimbabwe said that we should enrol special needs learners in ordinary schools. All the schools in this cluster were rendered to be inclusive and were mandated to enrol inclusive learners, failure to which we will be sued by the government for failing to oblige to its dictates. We are enrolling diverse inclusive learners in this cluster but honestly speaking, limited learning is taking place because none of the schools in the cluster is worthy for inclusive education programmes. There is vast shortage of resources in all areas rendering our schools improper for inclusive education pro-*

visions.' Inadequate legislation fails to protect the rights of the disabled learners enrolled in inclusive schools thereby exacerbating their exclusion in a number of areas within school systems [3, 15, 21, 22, 23, 28].

Strategies to reduce the social exclusion of the physically disabled ECD learners in mainstream classes

To reduce the social exclusion of the physically disabled ECD learners in inclusive settings, a number of strategies can be employed. Burkholder et al, & Dhlembeu allude that in inclusive schools, there is need to sufficiently avail inclusive physical infrastructural facilities. This must include adaptive and user-friendly physical environment, accessible resources, rooms, play areas, materials and adaptive furniture [7, 13].

Respondents argued that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has to empower teachers in inclusive ECD settings to be competent to handle the physically disabled learners in their classes. Booth, Sturm & Westwood concur that teachers teaching inclusive classes together with support staff need to receive regular training and workshops on disability awareness and keep them abreast of adaptive strategies in the current world of affairs in education [5, 34, 39].

The need to develop individualised support for the physically disabled ECD learners is also noted as a necessity in Sengwe Cluster. Hymel & Katz, Majoko, Qvortrup & Qvortrup, & Surm argue that inclusive schools should develop individualised support systems and personalised learning plans so as to meet the individualised needs of all the special needs learners [20, 23, 30, 34]. Parental involvement is key in developing individualised seamless support for the physically disabled ECD learners.

Assistive devices are needed to ensure that the physically disabled ECD learners are not socially excluded in school activities. Aasland & Fløtten, Bruner et al, & Morina elude that physically disabled learners need assistive devices such as cranes, walkers, wheelchairs, hearing aids, lenses and other electronic support devices to fully benefit in an inclusive education system [1, 8, 25]. Muchandiona & Manyumwa, & Nilholm & Göransson claim that individualised tutoring digital systems should be in place to support diverse ECD learners in schools [27, 28].

There is need for legislative and policy compliance to ensure that physically disabled learners are not excluded in active learning in ECD settings. Burklolder et al, & Devarakonda & Powlay agree that school systems should comply with inclusive education policies and legislation in order to support all diverse learners enrolled in inclusive settings [7, 12]. There is need to continuously review policies and laws, aligning them with current global education trends, so that the physically disabled ECD learners are not excluded in the learning process.

5. Conclusion

The physically disabled learners were seen to be facing a myriad of challenges in their endeavour to learn in inclusive

ECD settings which aggravates their exclusion in schools. Common glitches noted include dearth of adaptive resources (both physical infrastructural facilities and assistive devices), lack of expertise among educators, absence of government commitment to support inclusive education programmes in ECD settings, negative attitudes towards disability by peers and some members of staff, lack of funding, big ECD classes, in-adaptive curriculum and ambiguous legislation and policies which are not easy to comprehend. The study also noted that physically disabled learners are sometimes over protected which exacerbate their exclusion in other school activities. Physically disabled learners were found to be socially excluded from play and social interactions in inclusive ECD settings thereby lowering their self-esteem, creating negative self-image which result in increased anxiety and stress for both the learners and their families.

6. Recommendations

As mitigatory strategies to the predicament where physically disabled ECD learners are excluded in inclusive ECD environments, there is need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure that inclusive infrastructural facilities are in place, competent staff members are available in schools and personalised learning plans are developed and implemented. The ECD curriculum also need to be refined to be adaptive, there is need for disability awareness among stakeholders in ECD settings and the community at large for sustainable inclusive education. Assistive technology can be harnessed to offer digital support to the disabled learners and the government to gazette policies and legislations which support inclusive education in ECD environments. The Zimbabwean government to effectively budget for and fund inclusive education programmes and ECD teachers to have positive mindsets to assist the physically disabled learners without reservations. The Government of Zimbabwe to employ more trained ECD teachers so as to normalise the teacher-pupil ratio to 1: 20-25, for the physically disabled ECD learners to get individualised and specialised assistance they require in inclusive ECD settings.

Abbreviations

ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
GNECD	Global Network of Early Childhood Development
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation

Author Contributions

Cosmas Muchandiona is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Research Fields

Cosmas Muchandiona: Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Education, Inclusive Education in ECE / ECD Environments, Technology Advancement in ECE Settings, ECE Teacher Training and Curriculum Issues in ECD / ECE