



AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL CULTURES ON SPORTS PARTICIPATION BY DISABLED PUPILS IN MASVINGO URBAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the influence of local cultures or superstitions on pupils with physical disabilities' participation in sports and the Physical Education curriculum. The main purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which the invisible hand of culture impedes the implementation of the inclusive policy in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The data to address the research questions was collected by means of a descriptive survey and a literature review. More precisely, a questionnaire and a structured interview were the tools used in data collection. The sample consisted of thirty primary school pupils with disabilities, 20 primary school teachers and five school heads. The results of the study indicate that inclusive policy in respect of disabled pupils' participation in sport and the Physical Education (PE) curriculum is in the clutches of a group of local cultures which operate at community, institutional and personal levels. At community level, cultural myths and superstitions impede disabled pupils' participation in sport and the PE curriculum. These myths are expressed in the form of uncritical mindsets, out dated views and stereotypes about the dangers of involving disabled pupils in sport and PE activities. At the institutional or school levels, teacher cultures, sporting and academic traditions were discovered to be major barriers to disabled persons' involvement in sporting activities. The teachers view sports as competitive events in which a few talented pupils would naturally excel and through which pupils with disabilities are unlikely to do well. As a result, pupils with disabilities were discriminated against and denied access to sports on the basis of culturally based stereotypes. In addition, academic traditions in schools which stress on examinable aspects of the primary school curriculum were found to subvert the teaching of Physical Education in schools. As a result they did not strive to teach the subject in a creative and innovative way it was regarded as a low status subject. More specifically, teachers did not adapt equipment or rules to suit the therapeutic needs of pupils with disabilities. In view of the above, a significant number of pupils with

disabilities appear to have accepted their marginalization and participation in both sports and the Physical Education curriculum. Lastly, the cumulative effects of societal and institutional cultures were found to have detrimental effects on disabled pupils' self-esteem and assertiveness. Disabled pupils have internalized and developed a defeatist culture whereby they accepted their discrimination and marginalization without question. In light of the above findings, this study recommends the development of a policy framework and the setting up of a national committee that will review, coordinate and devise meaningful strategies for engaging disabled pupils in sports and the Physical Education curriculum across all educational levels.

Keywords: Local culture, Children with disabilities, Inclusive education policy, Participation in sports.

INTRODUCTION

For many children with disabilities, the chance to play in the playfield only comes when they enter school as they may be either overprotected or neglected in their homes. Most indigenous-traditionalist Zimbabweans view disability negatively and experience shame and blame if a child with a disability is born into their family (Chidyausiku, 2000; Mpofu *et al.*, 2007). Mpofu (2003) notes that the effect of these negative cultural beliefs is that many Zimbabweans will avoid direct personal contact with people with disabilities unless such people are family. Once they are in school, children with sensory, physical and other disabilities may not experience the thrill of sport or Physical Education because of visual, mental or locomotion limitations in addition to the negative cultural beliefs.

To compound this, Churches (1980) notes that sports are viewed as nothing more than leisure and many educators may fail to clearly define the importance of Physical Education and sports in terms of development of motor skills, communication and cooperation. This study sought to find out the extent to which Masvingo urban schools had adopted the inclusion policy in both sports and the Physical Education curriculum in general.

Background

At one period in history, the global practice to exclude from education anyone perceived to be different such as those with disabilities (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001) as they were judged to be either incapable of benefitting from such education as existed or to be potentially disturbing (Green and Engelbrecht, 2007). Subsequently, with the emergence of a 'charity discourse' missionaries and other philanthropists established separate special schools to offer care and certain forms of education. When the Zimbabwe government assumed responsibility for the education of children with disabilities at independence in 1980, they inherited this colonial legacy of separate special schools. However, the government was uncomfortable with this arrangement not only because of the very limited numbers that the schools catered for (Muzembe *et al.*, 2009) but also because the

institutions seemed to be part of an oppressive social system through which people with disabilities were excluded from participation in society (Barton, 1998).

Government responsibility then became the development of a policy of integrated provision for most children with special needs (Barton, 1998). This was at a time when the International Decade for People with Disabilities had just started and later the UN-sponsored World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (1990) declared that education should be accorded to all people. To achieve this end, UNESCO's Salamanca statement stated that children with special educational needs should have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy (UNESCO, 1994). The document, to which the Zimbabwe government is a signatory, maintains that learners with disabilities should be educated with their age peers, sharing educational experiences but following individual learning plans with the necessary support available. Zimbabwe is also a signatory to several inclusive education-related international charters, conventions and cooperation agreements such as the UNICEF (1989), the Standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (1990), the World Declaration on Education for All and the Education for All (1990) flagship on education and disability (2001).

Inclusive education of children with special educational needs in regular schools which is being pursued in Zimbabwe is informed by the philosophy of 'normalisation'. The basic tenets of this philosophy are that schools and communities are not complete unless all children are welcome in them and that inclusive education gives all children a chance to reach their peak. In this spirit, the government of Zimbabwe enacted the Disabled Persons Act (1992) which outlaws discrimination of people with disabilities. Although it does not specifically single out disability, the Education Act. (1986) also enshrines education as a right for all children irrespective of diversity of race, creed, gender and so on. Physical Education is one of the ten primary school subjects for which Mpfu *et al.* (2007) note that government has adopted 'growth with equity' as articulating the principle of inclusive education policy.

Growth with equity appears to be meant to ensure quality in education. According to Musengi *et al.* (2011), quality in education is relative, elusive and difficult to define but they condense indicators of quality provided by (Doherty, 1994) and Singh (2000) into internal efficiency and external efficiency of education. In this study the proxies of internal efficiency in Physical Education and sports include access, performance and a good school environment. Musengi *et al.* (2011) explain that access is the ability of the school to accommodate individual learning needs, while performance is the ability of the learners and teachers to attain high levels of achievement and good school environment refers to staff attributes, provision of adequate and appropriate teaching resources and inculcating in pupils cherished values. Proxies of external efficiency include matching what is taught in Physical Education and sports with the expectations of the world outside the school.

Statement of the Problem

The enactment of the [Disabled Persons Act \(1992\)](#) marked a turning point in the provision of educational services for disabled pupils in Zimbabwe. This Act formally entrenched the rights of disabled pupils to an inclusive education. However, realities on the ground seem to indicate that inclusive education for the disabled is far from being realized despite the existence of a legal framework for inclusion and an inclusive policy. In light of the above, this study sought to find out why primary schools in Masvingo urban were not implementing government policy on inclusion with specific reference to sports and the Physical Education curriculum.

It is in this legislative, policy and theoretical context that pupils with disabilities are supposed to be taught all subjects, including Physical Education, and participate in all activities, including sports, together with those without disabilities in ordinary schools. The questions below were regarded as constituting the main problem to be investigated.

Research Questions

The questions which guided this study are:

- a) Which local cultures contribute to the non-participation in sports by children with disabilities in inclusive education settings?
- b) To what extent do non-disabled peers and educators accept inclusive policy goals?
- c) How effectively are sports facilities in schools adapted to suit specific therapeutic needs of pupils with disabilities?

Conceptual Framework

Researches on public policy implementation have identified some of the factors that may boost or impede successful implementation of a policy across educational levels. One key factor which may either act as a resource or a constraint is the traditional African culture. Scholarly opinion is strongly divided with regard to the role of African culture in national development. Afro-centric scholars and nationalists such as [Diop \(1996\)](#); [Kaarsholm \(1991\)](#); [Mhlaba \(1991\)](#); [Asante and Abarry \(1996\)](#); [Nkrumah \(1996\)](#) view African culture and traditions as a major resource in supporting policy implementation. Other African scholars, the so-called Afro-skeptics, regard traditional African cultures as anachronistic, defeatist, lacking in innovativeness, backward looking and opportunistic ([Gecau, 1991](#); [Mazrui, 1996](#); [Kumar, 2006](#)). Similarly, [Crossman \(2004\)](#) claims that many academics in African universities view African culture with skepticism. These scholars view African culture as a barrier to social change and development.

Similarly, policy analysts have also identified other types of cultures or traditions at the micro or school level, which may affect implementation of educational policies. These cultures have been shown to subvert the implementation of change in schools. A group of four local cultures can be drawn from this literature, namely: organizational / institutional; leadership and administrative cultures; resource cultures; political/ legal cultures, and pupil cultures.

Organizational / Institutional Cultures

The micro-context may impose constraints on the implementation of change in schools. Posner (1995) claims that “---the school as a whole is now recognized as the organizational unit that significantly determines the extent to which a new curriculum flourishes or withers”. Other researchers have identified different sets of cultural factors within school settings which may inhibit or block curriculum change in schools. Posner (1995) identified the culture within the school and the culture of the community as possible influences in the adoption or adaptation of an innovation. The teaching cultures comprise of “...beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of doing things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years” (Hargreaves., 1996). In the same vein, Fullan (1991) saw the local school system or traditions as constituting situational constraints or opportunities for effective change. He singled out four organizational cultures which may influence the implementation of change namely: the school district; board and community characteristics; the principal, and the role of teachers. Jansen (1991) revealed that the implementation of the socialist oriented school curriculum failed in Zimbabwe because of, among other reasons, institutional resistance by ministry of education bureaucrats. In the context of this study, school cultures, teaching cultures and community cultures were investigated as possible constraints in implementing the sports and PE curriculum in urban schools.

Resource Cultures

Teacher effectiveness in schools is premised on a sound resource base. Research literature has revealed different types of resource essential to teaching and learning. In the context of sport and PE curriculum implementation, these resources would include knowledgeable personnel, specialized equipment material a recurrent budget and sufficient time. Huberman and Miles (1994) stress that a skilled and committed cadre of administrators and teachers is essential for the continued use of innovation. Such a group of committed individuals would assist new users, be they student or new teachers who arrive after the new curriculum gets underway, to develop mastery and commitment in using the innovation. Similarly, Kritek (1976) underscores the role of personnel with appropriate training and philosophy in supporting the implementation of change in schools.. The issue of commitment is central to the understanding of teachers’ responses to the inclusive policy. Without the support and guidance of experienced and committed teachers, the participation of disabled pupils in sports and PE may not occur. Kritek (1976) identifies the attributes of quality resources in support of change namely 1) resource materials that are relevant; adequate and readily available;

(2) reserve resources to offset unanticipated consequence, and

3) maintaining regular supplies of equipment and books to replace those lost through wear tear.

This study investigated the following aspects of resource cultures (1) availability of sports equipment for disabled students, knowledgeable staff to interpret the PE syllabus (2) budgetary provision for recurrent expenditure in PE in schools. The next section describes the methodology that was used to collect data to answer the research questions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cluster sampling was used to select five primary schools from the ten public primary schools in Masvingo town. Purposive sampling was then used to select three pupils with disabilities from each of the five schools, to give a total of 15 pupils with various disabilities. Pupils who had been identified by their teachers and school-heads as having sensory, physical, cognitive (mild mental retardation or learning difficulties) and health-related impairments (such as albinism, asthma and epilepsy) were selected, one each from a class. The pupils, who were aged from 6 to 14 years of age and were from grades one to seven, were engaged in structured face to face individual interviews in the mother language for easy communication (See table 1). The 10 to 15 minute face to face interviews initially established each pupil's attitude towards sports, changes made specifically for him or her and acceptance by non-disabled peers and teachers in sports activities. Focus then turned to identifying and explaining activities in which they thought they excelled or could not perform, from which pupils were excluded by teachers and peers and in which they took part separately or differently but with non-disabled peers.

Pupils with disabilities were then asked to nominate two of their best, non-disabled friends in order to come up with a snowball sample of 30 non-disabled peers. It was thought that these 'best friends' would have firsthand experience of the pupil with a disability and therefore, illustrate just how acceptable they were. These pupils were asked to provide biographical data such as age, gender and presence of a family member with a disability before responding to a six item Likert-scale type questionnaire on games and activities in which they would rather have or not have peers with a disability and factors that influenced acceptance of pupils with disability in sports (See. Table 2)

Teachers from whose classes a pupil with a disability had been selected were automatically part of the sample as they were thought to be knowledgeable about their own pupils. The 15 teachers were subjected to 15-minute structured interviews which sought to find out adaptations made for specific therapeutic goals and factors that determined success in participation of pupils with disabilities in sports. The data are analyzed and displayed in terms of a response list table (See table 3.

RESULTS

The data displayed in Table 1-3 were collected by means of a structure interview, questionnaire and structured interview respectively. The data is displayed and analyzed below

Table-1. Interview data from teachers on disabled pupils' participation in sports

“Straining this asthmatic child by doing athletics and other exercises would be risky as one would not know whether they had taken appropriate medication before the exercises”

“They might go into an attack for which I am not prepared”

“The pupil you mention fits[sic] and so cannot be expected to take part in sports as she might go into an attack at anytime”

“There is always the risk of getting injured during sports so why risk injuring pupils who already have limitations?” It is much safer and better for them to concentrate on academic activities”

““*There is danger that saliva (froth) from him during attacks may expose other children to risk.*”

“*Isu tinogara tichihwinha trophy kubhora, manje dandara rikapinzwa muteam tinodyiwa*” (Ours is a winning team, including a non-performer in it would result in losses).

“*You don’t expect someone without a leg to be on the school team, do you? Even children without disabilities who get injured are not selected for the school team.*”

“*In situations where we compete against other schools, we use merit to select only the best teams, so there is no room for those without the necessary skills*”.

“*Chinonetsa ndechekuti X anofamba zvakasiyana nesu, saka akanzi amhanye anosekwa nevanwe nekuti zvaanenge achiita zvinosetsa*” (The problem is X has a strange gait and so when he runs people find it funny and will laugh at him).

Analysis of Table 1 Data

The data displayed in table 1 captures some of the entrenched cultural beliefs about the displayed. Some of the stereotypes include beliefs that the disabled pupils may infect other children with diseases, that participating in sport by the disabled might provoke ridicule among spectators and that including disabled pupils might weaken sporting teams. The majority of children with disabilities do not appear to be accepted in sports activities by most non-disabled peers and most teachers. Many teachers pointed to the delicate nature of some disabilities and said that such pupils should not exert themselves like non-disabled peers. From the data displayed in Table 1, it is evident that restraining teachers cultures took three forms: firstly, through overprotection, secondly through fear of contracting the other’s condition, and thirdly, neglectful low expectations.

The low expectations were evident in that teachers and peers alike thought that pupils with disabilities might not be competent enough to participate in certain strenuous activities. In response to a follow-up question on why he thought a physically disabled boy was unacceptable as a teammate, one non-disabled pupil had this to say: “*Isu tinogara tichihwinha trophy kubhora, manje dandara rikapinzwa muteam tinodyiwa*” (Ours is a winning team, including a non-performer in it would result in losses). A school head asked: “*You don’t expect someone without a leg to be on the school team, do you? Even children without disabilities who get injured are not selected for the school team.*” A teacher who is responsible for organizing school sports activities echoed the same sentiments: “*In situations where we compete against other schools, we use merit to select only the best teams, so there is no room for those without the necessary skills*”. One non-disabled peer said: “*Chinonetsa ndechekuti X anofamba zvakasiyana nesu, saka akanzi amhanye anosekwa nevanwe nekuti zvaanenge achiita zvinosetsa*” (The problem is X has a strange gait and so when he runs people find it funny and will laugh at him). It would appear from these vignettes that pupils with visible, physical disabilities were viewed as unacceptable by both teachers and non-disabled peers in situations where competitive sports were involved. It was felt that such pupils should not be

involved in competitive sports activities as they would be subjected to ridicule by non-disabled peers. Concerns about the safety of such pupils in many contact sports activities were expressed. In preparing for competitive ball games and other athletic events, sports organizers and potential team-mates were emphatic that merit was the only criterion for participation. Two non-disabled peers who had disabled siblings and teachers who had just been trained were more amenable to the idea of pupils with disabilities taking part in sports.

Table-2. Comments of pupils with disabilities with regard to participation in sports

“Ndichizvipatisirei zvangu nezvinhu zvandinongowona kuti handizvigoni? Better kutoita zvevasvomhu kwandinokurira vanhu” (Why would I make a fool of myself by engaging in activities in which I know I will fail? I would rather concentrate on Mathematics where I know I will do better than a lot of my classmates).

“Zvaana high jump ne-long jump handizviiti nekuti ndingatokuvara. Ini ndinongogona zvekukuza vanenge vachiwuruka.” (I do not take part in jumps because I could get hurt. I just cheer for the jumpers) *“Pada, nhodo nechuti zvinondinakidza. Kumhanya hakundinakidzi nekuti ndinosiyiwa nevanhu vese nguva dzese.”* (I enjoy pada, nhodo and chuti (games). Athletics are not interesting because I am always last in these races). Another pupil said: *“Zvese zvatinoitiswa pano pachikoro zvinebasa. Zvimwe kungozvitadzawo”* (All activities we do at school are important. It is just that I am not able to do some of them well)

Analysis of Table 2 Data

The data in table 2 reflects the existence of a defeatist culture that has been inculcated among disabled pupils. This culture is expressed in self-pity and self-deprecating comments. Pupils with disabilities who were in higher grades, generally thought that sports were important, but not as important as other academic subjects that could later help them secure a livelihood. They were more concerned with trying to do well in subjects such as Mathematics. Most pupils with physical disabilities said that they were not competent enough to participate in sports activities where a lot of skill was required. One of them said: *“Ndichizvipatisirei zvangu nezvinhu zvandinongowona kuti handizvigoni? Better kutoita zvevasvomhu kwandinokurira vanhu”* (Why would I make a fool of myself by engaging in activities in which I know I will fail? I would rather concentrate on Mathematics where I know I will do better than a lot of my classmates). Another said: *“Zvaana high jump ne-long jump handizviiti nekuti ndingatokuvara. Ini ndinongogona zvekukuza vanenge vachiwuruka.”* (I do not take part in jumps because I could get hurt. I just cheer for the jumpers).

In the lower grades pupils with disabilities viewed Physical Education as being just as important as any other subject and more interesting than many other subjects. They however, pointed out that they were not able to do well in many of the activities which they considered too difficult for them. To sum up this section, the data displayed in table 2 indicates that a culture of hopelessness, self-depreciation and self-pity has been inculcated in pupils with disabilities' minds. This culture probably derived from the archaic and prevailing Shona cultural beliefs, has undermined the concept of self-belief and esteem among pupils with disabilities in Masvingo urban primary schools.

Table-3. Class teachers' views in respect of disabled pupils' involvement in sports

"Sports enable these children to take a break from the usual classroom routines so that they can enjoy and come back refreshed"

"When I engage the whole class in Physical Education, the activities are designed for motor development: some to exercise gross motor and others fine motor skills. This means that all pupils' needs will be equally catered for."

Analysis of Table 3 Data

Class-teachers and sports organizers said that they knew that sports are important for pupils with disabilities as they provided much needed leisure and were a welcome relief from the monotony of class-work. One teacher said: *"Sports enable these children to take a break from the usual classroom routines so that they can enjoy and come back refreshed."* The teachers observed that some of the disabilities that the children had did not allow them to take part in some sports and Physical Education activities.

Table-4. Adaptation of Sports and Physical Education

"Doesn't the use of sports for such purposes require the expertise of physiotherapists and others who are only found in hospitals? I am not trained to do that kind of thing."

"When I engage the whole class in Physical Education, the activities are designed for motor development: some to exercise gross motor and others fine motor skills. This means that all pupils' needs will be equally catered for."

Analysis of Table 4 Data

The data in table 4 indicates that resources in the form of knowledgeable teachers and adapted equipment for disabled pupils are in short supply in primary schools. All the teachers said that they did not know how to adapt sports equipment, facilities and games to suit specific disability-related limitations. Some of the teachers knew that they could adapt rules for such sports activities as track events to accommodate hearing impaired participants by signing to indicate 'on your marks, get set and go' while speaking simultaneously rather than blowing the whistle. None of the teachers knew anything about using sports activities to attain therapeutic goals for specific pupils with disabilities. One teacher queried: *"Doesn't the use of sports for such purposes require the expertise of physiotherapists and others who are only found in hospitals? I am not trained to do that kind of thing."* Another said: *"When I engage the whole class in Physical Education, the activities are designed for motor development: some to exercise gross motor and others fine motor skills. This means that all pupils' needs will be equally catered for."* From the foregoing, it is evident that teachers generally did not know what to teach and how to teach it. Some acknowledge not having specialist knowledge in Physical Education while others hope that the general activities that all children take part in will somehow meet the specific needs of their pupils with disabilities. Other important factors listed by teachers as contributing to the non-participation of pupils with disabilities was the unavailability of ordinary equipment as well as specialized equipment adapted

to match the needs of these pupils such as balls with bells for visually impaired learners and wheelchairs for physically disabled pupils who may want to take part in various wheelchair sports. Unavailability of indoor facilities and sunscreen lotion that would enable albinos to participate in games without risking sunburn was also cited as a contributing factor to the non-participation of these pupils. Inhalers were also said to be unavailable and therefore, inhibiting asthmatic pupils from fully participating in many sporting activities especially during cold days. Poorly prepared grounds were also listed as a hindrance in the participation of pupils with disabilities in sports.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigated the influence of cultural variables with regard to the implementation of sport and the Physical Education curriculum in selected urban primary schools in Zimbabwe. The results of the study indicate that the majority of children with disabilities are not involved in sporting activities due to the influence of three distinct cultural frames namely the dominant Zimbabwean cultural beliefs and myths concerning disabilities, school cultures or traditions and chronic resource shortages. Firstly, the results of the study indicate that both teachers and the disabled in Masvingo urban schools accept the stereotyping of the disabled as people incapable of engaging in sporting activities. Self deprecating comments by disabled pupils that it is shameful for them to engage in sport is indicative of the dominant influence of Zimbabwean cultural beliefs and practices in which Masvingo urban schools are situated. This finding is consistent with other findings reported by Mashiri (2000) and other cultural researchers. Similarly, (Chidyausiku, 2000; Mpofu *et al.*, 2007) have reported that most indigenous-traditionalist Zimbabweans view disability negatively and experience shame and blame if there is a person with a disability in their family. In this study, the teachers attitudes towards the disabled manifested culturally stereotypes took three forms namely overprotection, culturally-based fears and low expectations. Over-protection seemed to emanate from what Barton (1998) has called a Charity Model of disability in which people with disabilities are pitied and patronized as they are perceived as inferior and therefore, in need of society's assistance. Many teachers also pointed to the delicate nature of some disabilities as a reason why such pupils should not exert themselves like non-disabled peers and generally expressed concerns about the safety of such pupils in many contact sport activities. Kanhukamwe and Madondo (2000) do identify pupil safety as one of the most important needs that have to be met in Physical Education and sports. Fait and Dunn (1984) observe that concerns for pupil safety should not be an excuse for reducing pupils with disabilities to spectators of non-disabled pupils participating in Physical Education. Culturally-based fears of contracting health-related conditions such as epilepsy would also reduce pupils with disabilities to mere spectators of sports activities. Mpofu (2003) observation that because of negative cultural beliefs many Zimbabweans avoid direct personal contact with people with disabilities is supported by this finding.

Another barrier disabled students' participation in sports relates to low expectations by teachers. The low expectations were evident in that teachers and peers alike thought that pupils with

disabilities might not be competent enough to participate in certain strenuous activities. It would appear that teachers and non-disabled peers had low expectations of pupils with visible, physical disabilities which were viewed as particularly unacceptable in situations where competitive sports were involved. It was felt that such pupils should not be involved in competitive sports activities as they would be subjected to ridicule by non-disabled peers. In preparing for competitive ball games and other athletic events, sports organizers and potential team-mates were emphatic that merit was the only criterion for participation. Devlieger (1998) found that the Zimbabwean term used to describe a person with a disability, *chirema* (*cripple*), uses the prefix *chi-* for 'it' which indicates that people with a disability are perceived as having a thing-like quality which sets them apart from full humans. The morpheme '*-rema*' means being burden, failing or lacking competence.

Other misconceptions on disabled students' participation relates to the quality of education as articulated by Musengi *et al.* (2011) internal efficiency aspects of access and performance scheme. Musengi and associates' scheme stress that access to education is denied where there are overprotective concerns for safety. Similarly, pupil performance in these activities is unlikely to reach its peak because of lack of opportunity to practice as a result of stigmatization, ridicule and low expectations. It is therefore, possible to project that, as a direct result of this, participation in sports beyond the school setting is likely to be jeopardized. This means that the quality of sports participation is also compromised in terms of Musengi *et al.* (2011) external efficiency scheme. In this regard, the 'normalization goal' as an aspect of inclusive education would thus, appear to be negated as pupils with disabilities are denied a chance to participate and reach the peak in Physical Education activities and sport.

Secondly, the results of the study revealed that school cultures and traditions limited disabled pupils involvement in sports in a number of ways. On one hand, pupils with disabilities who were in higher grades, generally thought that sports were important, but not as important as academic subjects that could later help them secure a livelihood. They were more concerned with trying to do well in subjects such as Mathematics. The overemphasis on academic subjects is a key trait of the Zimbabwean education system reported in the literature (Jansen, 1991). On the other, most pupils with physical disabilities and their teachers had the misconception that sporting meant competing against other schools. As a result, they felt they were not competent enough to participate in sports activities where a lot of skill was required. In the lower grades pupils with disabilities viewed Physical Education as being just as important as any other subject and more interesting than many other subjects. They however, pointed out that they were not able to do well in many of the activities which they considered too difficult. Kane (1992) reveals that children with disabilities can be involved in many sporting disciplines if they are adapted to suit their unique needs.

In contrast, a few of the class-teachers and sports organizers knew that sports are important for pupils with disabilities as they provided much needed leisure and were a welcome relief from the monotony of desk-work in classrooms. These teachers observed that some of the disabilities that

the children had did not allow them to take part in some sports and Physical Education activities. These few constituted a small group that was knowledgeable and capable of interpreting the Physical Education curriculum correctly. As [Fait and Dunn \(1984\)](#) indicate, sports for children with disabilities go beyond skill training and development as there is need for therapeutic activities which enhance the child's physiological functioning.

Lastly, the results of the study indicate that non-participation in sports by pupils with disabilities might be influenced by teaching cultures within schools either because they are not accepted by non-disabled peers and teachers or because they perceive sports as unimportant or unmanageable may send the unintended messages. The Zimbabwean education system has been described as examination oriented. Consequently, non examinable activities and subjects are marginalized. Such a viewpoint may confirm to non-disabled pupils that pupils with disabilities are not good enough to participate in any sporting activities. Similarly, disabled students may get the message that they are not good enough to participate in sports therefore this may result in a self-fulfilling prophecy that in turn lowers their self-esteem. This finding is consistent with [Price \(1980\)](#) concept of opportunity to express. An opportunity to express refers to a visible way that being disabled is synonymous with being invalid and may induce negative attitudes among the disabled which may possibly lead them to begin withdraw from sporting activities and begin to play sick roles. [Dyken and Cohen \(1996\)](#) assert that sports develop self-esteem, social competence and adaptive behavior of children. [Guttmann \(1976\)](#) also asserts that sports for children with disabilities restore psychological equilibrium by countering feelings of inferiority. In addition to this sports serve as a catalyst for socialization with non-disabled peers. Through sports, children with disabilities are able to communicate with others and so develop friendships as others accept and acknowledge their efforts. Similarly, [Mussen \(1984\)](#) says children with disabilities have generally been found to be socially in-assertive, defiant, resentful, suspicious, destructive, impulsive and lacking self-control. In view of the above, involving the children with disabilities in various sporting disciplines may therefore, be expected to alleviate a lot of these ills while lack of access to sport for any reason is likely to aggravate these adjustment problems.

Further, all the teachers indicated that they did not know how to adapt sports equipment, facilities and games to suit specific disability-related limitations. The teachers generally did not know what to teach and how to teach it. Some acknowledged of not having specialist knowledge in Physical Education while others just hoped that the general activities that all children take part in will somehow meet the specific needs of their pupils with disabilities. Although all primary schoolteachers in Zimbabwe are required to teach Physical Education, very few major in this area during teacher training ([Nziramasanga, 1999](#)). The implication of the foregoing is that most teachers may not have sufficient depth to properly teach Physical Education to non-disabled pupils let alone facilitate adaptation of Physical Education lessons and sports activities for pupils with disabilities. To compound this, training to teach pupils with disabilities is largely a post-

qualification option and very few teachers proceed to specialize in this area so most teachers may also not have any basic principles of how to teach pupils with disabilities (Nziramanga, 1999).

In addition, among important factors listed by teachers as contributing to the non-participation of pupils with disabilities was the unavailability of ordinary equipment as well as specialized, disability-related equipment adapted to match the needs of these pupils. Poorly prepared grounds were also listed as a hindrance in the participation of pupils with disabilities in sports.

To sum up, the results of this study indicate that culture as articulated in traditional beliefs on disability, school and teacher practices act as major constraints in the implementation of inclusive educational policy in general but more specifically the involvement of students with disabilities in sports in Masvingo urban primary schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The major findings of this study are that the implementation of inclusive policy in Zimbabwe is severely curtailed by a combination of three powerful forces. First, the results of the study indicate that a clutch of unyielding local cultures or superstitions has induced a sense of lethargy among both the teachers and pupils with disabilities. This is manifested in the continued upholding of beliefs and mis-perceptions of disability as a contagious disease or a curse. Such beliefs continue to haunt both teachers and pupils with disabilities. As a result, the inclusive policy is nowhere near in getting implemented in Masvingo urban primary schools. Secondly, a culture of resource deficits, endemic to most rural schools in Zimbabwe was found to haunt Masvingo urban schools with regard to special equipment adapted to the needs of pupils with disabilities. Because of this, the participation of pupils with disabilities has become a pipe dream. Lastly, the results of the study reveal that teacher cultures or beliefs in respect of the role of sport as it applies to pupils with disabilities were a major barrier. Teachers assumed and misunderstood sports as leisure activities in which only a few talented pupils could excel and eventually earn a living. In this light, sports could not be expected to have a bearing on pupils with disabilities' ability to earn a living. Similarly, pupils with more pronounced disabilities and who had been in the school system for longer also thought sports were unimportant and therefore, were to be avoided. The results further indicate that most of the teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt equipment, activities and rules to suit pupils' disabilities. This finding corroborates Fullan (1991) studies which reported that the teaching profession lacks a technical culture whereby teachers update and refresh their knowledge and skills. In view of the above, this study recommends the following measures and interventions to facilitate the participation of pupils with disabilities in sport and to break the strange-hold of local cultures on the inclusive policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends to the Zimbabwean government, through the Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture interventions that may boost the success of the inclusive policy for children with disabilities in school sports and the Physical Education curriculum :

- Engaging and updating mainstream primary schoolteachers and non-disabled pupils in awareness campaigns focusing on the strengths and potentials of pupils with disabilities in various disciplines including Physical Education and sports;
- Involving mainstream primary schoolteachers in in-service Physical Education programmes and sports training workshops dealing with disability-related therapeutic interventions;
- Beginning counseling sessions for pupils with disabilities who are included in mainstream primary schools. Such sessions could focus on assertiveness training for the pupils to enable them to be more forthcoming in sports activities.

More significantly, schools should be encouraged to work closely with the government, parents and the donor community in trying to procure essential sports equipment for all pupils, including those with disabilities.

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