

Title

**ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TAILORING VOCATIONAL SKILLS ON
IMPROVING THE LIVELIHOODS OF YOUTH IN MTANDILE COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates how modified teaching approaches affect learning for children with disabilities at SOS Primary School in Area 22, Lilongwe Malawi. Inclusive education remains a key priority in Malawi; however children with disabilities continues to face significant barriers to effective learning within exclusive classrooms. The study aimed to assess the types of modified teaching approaches used by teachers, examine their influence on learner's academic performance and classroom performance.

This research study was a qualitative case study and the data was collected from teachers and learners using interviews and observations and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The sample size consisted of 15 persons, the researcher gathered 12 respondents making a response rate of 80%. The finding showed that the teachers improvise when teaching to make the learning environment more inclusive.

Keywords: Children, Education, Social Work, Community, Livelihood

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in the development of every child and is widely recognized as a fundamental human right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines inclusive education as an approach that introduces diversity and promotes equal participation for all learners, regardless of their physical, intellectual, sensory, or developmental differences (UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive education is not about making children with disabilities into mainstream schools it involves changes that includes modifying teaching strategies, learning environments, and classroom

attitudes to meet the needs of all learners.

Globally, and particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, there has been growing advocacy to create inclusive education systems. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) calls for inclusive and quality education for all and emphasizes the need to leave no child behind, including those with disabilities. In response, many governments have adopted policies aimed at removing barriers to learning and participation.

In Malawi, inclusive education is slowly being implemented through policies such as the Education Act of 2013 and the *National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) 2017–2021*. However, there exists a significant gap between policy intentions and actual implementation in schools. Many teachers, especially in public primary schools, continue to rely on traditional methods that do not accommodate the learning needs of children with disabilities (Tomlinson, 2017). For instance, in most classrooms, children with visual or hearing impairments struggle to follow lessons due to the lack of sign language interpreters, braille materials, or visual aids. Others with learning disabilities are often seen as slow or lazy, thereby further isolating them from meaningful participation.

Modified teaching approaches that mainly need to be targeted in Malawi schools are the likes of; sign language teaching, braille reading and writing materials, one on one learning for better understanding and good and productive learning for the learners with disabilities. Analyzing how these modified teaching approaches are affecting the learning progress for learners with disabilities and how it is helping them.

At SOS Primary School in Area 22, Lilongwe, as well as many schools in Malawi have attempted to introduce inclusive teaching methods. These include the use of visual learning aids,

individualized attention for learners with special needs, and the engagement of support staff. Teachers have expressed that while they are committed to helping all learners, they often feel unmotivated by the lack of resources and professional training in inclusive education.

This study seeks to evaluate the impact of modified teaching approaches on the learning experiences of children with disabilities at SOS Primary School, and how they have affected learning outcomes. By assessing the effectiveness of these strategies, the study aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and adaptive educational practices.

Background of the Study

The concept of inclusive education is rooted in the idea that every child has the right to a quality education in an environment that supports their learning needs. Children with disabilities in Malawi, as in many parts of the world, were often excluded from formal education or placed in special schools. While special schools still exist and serve a purpose, there has been a change towards including learners with disabilities into regular schools, in line with international commitments such as the *UNCRPD (2006)* and *UNESCO's Salamanca Statement (1994)*.

In Malawi, efforts have been made to implant inclusive education into the national education framework. The Education Act of 2013 makes it clear that no child should be denied the right to education on the basis of disability. Additionally, the *National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) 2017–2021* outlines strategic objectives such as improving teacher capacity, creating accessible learning environments, and ensuring availability of teaching and learning resources. Despite these initiatives, implementation remains weak. There is often

a disconnect between policy and what happens in the classroom.

Cultural attitudes and myths about disability remain a barrier. In some communities, children with disabilities are hidden at home or believed to be incapable of learning. Teachers have reported cases where children with learning difficulties were withdrawn by their parents due to fear of embarrassment or shame.

Problem statement

The Malawi government aims at accommodating all learners and those with disabilities. There has been different measures done to help accommodate children with disabilities in schools. Adaptation of teaching approaches (*Education Act, 2013*). Inclusive education aims to ensure equal learning opportunities, however the effectiveness of the policy is interfered by inadequate teaching methodologies. The implementation is interfered due to lack of resources, lack of trained personnel and low funding to sponsor the need implementations.

Children with disabilities in SOS Primary School often experience lower academic achievement, and social exclusion compared to their peers without disabilities. This is partly due to the lack of tailored teaching methods that address their individual learning needs. While modified teaching approaches have been recommended, their implementation and effectiveness in this specific context remain not properly researched. Without evidence-based adjustments, these students may continue to face limited access to quality education. This situation is largely contributed by the lack of appropriate instructional materials and resources tailored to their specific learning needs. Although modified teaching approaches have been recommended to support inclusive learning, their effective

use is constrained by the shortages of specialized materials and insufficient resource allocation. As a result, teachers are unable to fully adapt to lessons to accommodate learners with different disabilities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main objectives

- To evaluate the effectiveness of modified teaching methods in supporting children with disabilities.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the barriers when implementing the modified teaching methods.
- To identify the challenges faced by teachers and the learners with disabilities.
- To assess how the modified teaching methods are supported and implemented in an exclusive classroom.
- To assess the current teaching methods; availability of braille and sign language teachings.

Research Questions

- What barriers are encountered in the implementation of modified teaching methods in the classroom?
- What challenges do teachers and learners with disabilities face during the teaching and learning process?
- How are modified teaching methods supported and implemented in an exclusive classroom setting?
- What teaching methods are currently

being used, and to what extent are Braille and sign language instruction available and utilized?

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it will contribute to the growth of literature mass on inclusive education. The findings can help school administrators, policy makers and stakeholders on how to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities. And this can promote social inclusion and equity (*World Bank, 2018*).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of terms

- **Children with disabilities**

Are those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interactions with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others. (*UN, 2006*).

- **Inclusive education**

Is an educational philosophy advocating for the integration of all learners, regardless of ability, into mainstream classrooms with appropriate support (*UNESCO, 2009*).

- **Disability**

A long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment that hinders full participation in society (*WHO, 2011*).

- **Modified teaching methods**

Is the instructional strategies adapted to meet the diverse learning needs of children

with disabilities, including differentiated instruction, assistive technologies, and individualized education plans.

Theoretical Framework

Social Model of Disability (*Oliver, 1990*) this theory argues that disability is not solely an individual medical issue but is shaped by societal barriers. It supports the idea that teaching approaches need to be modified to remove systematic barriers to education. This model shifts the focus from the child's impairments to the barriers within the educational system that limit learning.

Social model of disability differentiates between a disability and impairment. The theory defines a disability as a disadvantage or restriction caused by society's failure to accept or accommodate people with impairments. It defines impairment as a physical, mental or sensory condition a person has. It says that a disability is not about the impairments but about how society is organized, including schools, teaching methods and resources.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (*Rose & Meyer, 2002*): UDL emphasises on creating flexible learning environments that accommodate diverse learners by providing multiple means of engagement, representation and expression.

It was developed by Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) and it was based on the idea that curricula should be flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles, needs and abilities. UDL is relevant to my research because lessons are accessible regardless of learning styles or different abilities, and teaching tools, materials and methods are inclusive in design.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design & Methodology

A research design is defined as a framework of research methods and techniques that are chosen by the researcher to combine various components of research of research in a reasonably sound manner so that the research problem is well handled (*Jonathan Will, 2002*). The project design helps the researcher to plan ahead and figure out the study and also assume the possible outcomes from the determined information.

The research design was a Case study design; it involves in-depth, detailed examination of the current research. This design is used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the case and research.

The research methodology was Qualitative methodology; it involves collecting and analysing non- numerical data, like text, images, observations to gain more context about whatever is on to be researched.

This research was a qualitative case study, it required an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of the learners with disabilities and their teachers.

Research Setting

This research was conducted in Lilongwe, area 22 at SOS primary school.

Target Population

Target population refers to the total group of individuals from which the sample might be drawn from, that a researcher aims to study understand, or describe. It is the population to which the research findings are intended to apply. The target population for this research needs to comprise of; teachers (both special needs and general teachers), learners with disabilities and other learners, and the school administrators.

By engaging a group of stakeholders the study was aimed to gain different perspectives and views on how modified teaching approaches has impacted learning for children with disabilities.

Sampling Techniques

Sampling refers to a systematic selection of representative cases from the larger population (Brinkler, 2006). This research will be in non-probability sampling; in this type of sampling participants are selected based on convenience and availability. The sampling technique that was used was purposive sampling technique it was used to select participants who have specific knowledge or experience that was useful to the research. Non-probability purposive sampling technique with ensure that those with experience and knowledge towards the research are selected and those that have experience and are affected by the modified teaching are directly involved in this research.

The research included teachers with experience with children with disabilities, the children with disabilities, the school staff who are involved in special needs programs, and other learners too.

Sample Size

Sample size is the number of participants selected from a larger population to participate in the research study. This research had 15 participants, these participants helped me gain knowledge towards my research.

Research Instrument

Research instruments are tools that or techniques that are used to collect data in a research study. These instruments vary

depending on the nature of the research, the type of data needed and the methodology employed. Therefore, this research used interview guide as data collection tool. A systematic list of questions called an interview guide is made to assist researchers in conducting in-depth interviews that will contain open ended questions. It is a structured data collection method that will help out during the research process.

Pilot Study

Pilot study is a study conducted before the actual study. The pilot study was done to encourage clarity, effectiveness of research tools and also in a mini feasibility study to the research. It helped minimize errors and also improved data quality for the full study.

The pilot study is relevant because it allows scientists to be able to conduct an exploratory analysis before committing the main study or experiment (Hart, Bayden, Armstrong *et al.* 2004).

Data Analysis

The data that was collected using the interviews and observations was analysed using thematic analysis; this is a data analysis method that identifies, interprets and analyses patterns and characteristics in qualitative data. It is also defined as a qualitative research method used for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within the collected data.

Thematic analysis helped the researcher to understand the experiences or behaviours of the participants by organizing the data into common themes that align in some patterns. (A theme is an idea or concept that appears in the data, and relates to the research objectives and questions).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The study targeted a sample size of 15 of which included students with disabilities, teachers and administrators. From the 15 targeted; 12 participants attended to the interview guide presenting an 80% response rate.

Demographic Information

Demographic information refers to the statistical data about humans describing groups by characteristics. The demographic information of this research consists of the gender of respondents, age of respondents, class level, type of disability, and the teacher's education level.

Gender of Respondents

Gender is an important demographic information because boys and girls may experience learning differently especially in inclusive setting. Understanding gender distribution among learners with disabilities helps determine whether teaching approaches are benefiting all genders equally.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	7	70%
Female	3	30%
Total	10	100%

The findings show that the majority of the students are male by 70% and females by 30%. The teacher respondents, were 2 females only that covered a gender response rate of 100%, and 0% for male teachers.

Age of Respondents

Age helps understand the developmental differences among learners, which important when evaluating how modified teaching approaches support learning

Age of Respondents (Years)	Frequency
9-11	5
12-14	2
15-17	3
Total	10

From the age range of 9-11 years are supposed to be in middle primary and 12-14 in upper primary. But in cases of learners with disabilities most students are delayed by several classes so the teacher can properly assess their personal needs, so the age and grading system may vary from regular students. Many of the respondents are in the age ranges of 9-11 with 50%, 12-14 with 20% and 15-17 with 30%.

Class Level

The grade level shows how the teaching approaches influence performance with each level, shows how the teaching adaptations work better in what level of grade and how effective is it.

Class level (standard)	Frequency
1-2 (lower primary)	0
3-5 (middle primary)	5
6-8 (upper primary)	5
Total	10

The middle primary showing results of 50% being the same as the upper primary with also 50%. The results show that the lower primary 0%, these results are showing same frequency between the middle and upper primary.

Type of Disability

This demographic information is important because modified teaching approaches are designed to target a specific special need. Understanding the type of disability helps connect each learners individual needs with the teaching methods used.

Type of disability (students)	Frequency
Visual impairment	1
Hearing impairment	2
Physical disability	6
Learning disability	1
Total	10

The majority of students at SOS Primary School have physical disability with 60%, following up with learners with hearing impairment with 20% and then visual impairment with 10%.

Teachers Education Level

The level of education of teachers is an important variable because it directly influences their knowledge, competence and confidence in applying modified or inclusive teaching approaches. Teachers with higher education or specialized training are more likely to understand different types of disabilities.

Education level	Frequency
Certificate	0
Diploma	1
Degree	1
Master's degree	0
Degree (ed. Special needs)	0
Total	2

The results showed that the teachers have a certification of diploma and degree with

both a frequency of 50%. None of the teachers have a special needs certification, which is an essential factor to inclusive education.

Presentation of Findings

• Barriers to the implementation of the modified teaching methods.

The effect of the lack of resources when implementing modified teaching approaches at SOS Primary School does not have adequate materials to support their learners with disabilities. The school lacks materials of braille, sign language interpreters and adaptive chairs. And without these materials, learners who are deaf, blind or partially sighted cannot fully participate in lessons, leading to low academic performance and reduced engagement.

“Resources helps to simplify some concepts and teaching, lack of these resources makes teaching and learning difficult,”

The absence of appropriate instructional materials such as braille and sign language support significantly restricts the participation of learners with sensory impairments in mainstream classroom.

The world report on disability (2011), states that the provision of assistive devices and accessible formats is often the first step to participation, and their absence constitutes a denial of the right to education.

• Administrative barriers that make implementation difficult

School administration faces challenges such as limited funding, poor planning, and inadequate prioritization of inclusive education. These barriers affect the school's ability to introduce assistive technologies or teacher training programs.

“The administration enrolls too many learners per class this makes implementation of these methods difficult”

Administrative bottlenecks often delay implementation of inclusive practices (Mpofu & Chimhenga, 2013).

Limitation of workload as implementing modified teaching approaches Teachers often have large class sizes and many responsibilities, and this makes it difficult for the teachers to offer individualized attention or adapt lessons to suit learners with disabilities. Mukhopadhyay (2014), says research shows that teacher overload negatively affects inclusive teaching.

- **Barriers faced to modified teaching approaches**

Learners experience many obstacles such as inaccessible learning materials, lack of specialized teaching methods, stigma, and physical challenges. These barriers limit participation and academic progress.

“Inadequate resources most methods require the use of resources; it inadequately makes teaching difficult,”

- **Influence of the lack of special needs teacher training**

Most teachers have limited training in handling diverse disabilities, which affects their confidence and competence, without training in braille, sign languages; teachers struggle to implement modified teaching approaches effectively.

“Some modified teaching methods requires expertise, lack of special teacher training makes it difficult for them teachers to be of help to the learners with disabilities.”

Research shows teacher preparation is the strongest predictor of successful inclusive education (Sharma & Sokal, 2016). Without training it results to guesswork, and trial and

error methods.

CONCLUSION

The research study concludes that the school itself makes effort to include their learners with disabilities, the effectiveness of modified teaching approaches remains limited due to the shortage of resources; lack of training, and systematic barriers like the absence of braille and sign language service and this disadvantages the learners that need these resources and materials. Inclusive education is partially functional, it exists in policy but is slightly struggling in practice. The learners with disabilities experience academic difficulties, emotional challenges, and social barriers, which all together weaken their ability to benefit fully from modified teaching approaches. Effective inclusive teaching requires coordinated improvements in materials, teacher preparation, administrative support and the attitudes of their peers in classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher thereby recommends that:

- Teachers should undergo continuous professional development in special needs education, focusing on braille literacy, basic sign language, and multisensory teaching techniques.
- The school should introduce disability awareness sessions and peer support programs to promote empathy, cooperation, and inclusive social behavior among learners.
- The education office should establish regular monitoring systems to assess progress in implementing inclusive teaching approaches and provide ongoing guidance.
- The school should develop a long term inclusive education

sustainability plan to ensure continuity of resources, training and monitoring the implementation.

- The school administration should develop an internal inclusive education framework outlining policies, roles, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability structures. And consider a budget to be focused on disability related resources only.
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