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ASSESSING SOCIAL CHALLENGES TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES: A CASE STUDY OF KUMALA COMMUNITY-BASED CHILD CARE CENTRES (CBCCs) IN BUNDA DISTRICT, MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the social challenges affecting inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in Kumala Community Based Child Care Centers in Bunda, Malawi. The study was guided by principles of disability, with the aim of understanding how social and structural factors influence access, participation, and learning outcomes for children with physical disabilities. This study adopted a qualitative research design and utilized in depth interviews and document analysis to collect data from caregivers, parents, and children with physical disabilities. A total of 13 respondents participated in the study, representing a 100% response rate. The findings revealed that inclusive education significantly promotes the right to education for children with physical disabilities. Participation in inclusive CBCCs was found to enhance childrens academic engagement, social interaction, confidence, and sense of belonging. Teachers demonstrated supportive attitudes and applied inclusive teaching practices, such as adapting learning materials and providing individualized support, which contributed positively to childrens learning experiences. Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified several challenges that hinder effective implementation of inclusive education. These included inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training in inclusive education, insufficient learning materials and assistive devices, and persistent negative community attitudes toward disability. These challenges limited full participation and sustainability of inlusive education practices in CBCCs. Based on

findindings, the study recommends improving physical infrastructure in CBCCs, strengthening continuous teacher training, enhancing collaboration among teachers, caregivers, parents and communities, and increasing the provision of learning materials and assistive devices. The study concludes that while inclusive education in Kumala CBCCs has made positive progress, addressing existing social and structural barriers is essential to ensure equitable, accessible, and sustainable education for children with physical disabilities.

KEYWORDS: Inclusive education, physical disabilities, social challenges, CBCCs, Bunda District.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education aims to make sure that all children, regardless of their physical abilities, have access to good education in a supportive environment. However, students with physical disabilities in Kumala Child Based Community Centers in Bunda face numerous social challenges that hinder their full participation in learning. These challenges differ from inadequate infrastructure and learning materials to social stigma and a lack of teacher training in inclusive education.

This research seeks to assess the social barriers affecting the inclusion of students with physical disabilities in Kumala CBCCs. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, such as inaccessible classrooms and sanitation facilities, limited availability of assistive devices, a lack of trained teachers in special needs education, and deep-rooted social attitudes that contribute to discrimination and exclusion. Additionally, economic problems and policy gasps further worsen these challenges, making it difficult for students with physical disabilities to receive the support they need to thrive academically and socially.

By examining these issues, the research aims to provide a full understanding of the obstacles preventing the full achievement of inclusive education in Kumala CBCCs. It will also inquire the impact of these challenges on students' academic performance, self- esteem, and overall well-being. Furthermore, the report will assess existing interventions and policies in place, identifying gaps that need to be addressed.

Malawi has made significant steps in promoting inclusive education strategy (2017-2021) and the disabilities Act of 2012. These frameworks emphasize the right of children with disabilities to access quality education without discrimination. Peer interactions also present a challenge, as children with disabilities often experience social isolation due to lack of

awareness and sensitization among their classmates. This exclusion can negatively impact their self-esteem, motivation, and overall learning experience.

Despite these difficulties, various stakeholder's, including the government, non-governmental organization (NGOs), and community leaders are working to address these challenges through advocacy, teacher training programs, and infrastructure improvements. However, more efforts are needed to bridge the existing gaps and ensure that inclusive education is fully realized in CBCCs across Malawi.

The findings from this assessment will be used to formulate practical recommendations aimed at improving inclusive education in Kumala CBCCs. These recommendations will focus on enhancing accessibility, strengthening teacher capacity, strengthening teachers' capacity, promoting community awareness, and ensuring the effective implementation of inclusive education policies. By addressing these challenges, this report seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and fair education system for all children, regardless of their physical abilities.

Table 1: Variables of the Study.

Variable Type	Variables	Description
Independent Variable	Social Challenges	Factors such as teacher attitudes and practices, caregivers and parental support, peer interaction, and community attitudes that influence inclusive education.
Dependent Variable	Inclusive Education	Participation, access, and learning experience of children with physical disabilities in Humala CBCCs.

The study focused on several key social factors, namely teacher attitudes and practices, caregiver and parental involvement, peer relationships, and community perceptions towards children with physical disabilities. These factors were selected because they play a critical role in determining whether inclusive education is effectively implemented at the CBCC level. The study focused on several key social factors, namely teacher attitudes and practices, caregiver and parental involvement, peer relationships, and community perceptions towards children with physical disabilities. These factors were selected because they play a critical role in determining whether inclusive education is effectively implemented at the CBCC level.

Teacher practices refer to the ability of caregivers to adapt teaching methods to meet diverse learning needs. Caregiver and parental involvement relates to the support provided to children both at home and at the CBCC. Community attitudes reflect societal perceptions that may either promote inclusion or reinforce stigma.

This section presents the objectives and rationale of the study and provides a foundation for understanding the relevance of inclusive education in early childhood settings. The background of the study outlines the broader context of inclusive education in Malawi, while the problem statement highlights the existing gaps in the implementation of inclusive education at CBCC level. The objectives and research questions guided the study in systematically examining the social challenges affecting inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in Kumala.

Background of the Study

Inclusive education means that all children, including those with physical disabilities, should have the chance to learn in the same schools and classrooms as others. This idea is supported by international agreements like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and Sustainable Development goal 4, which focus on quality education for all. In Malawi, the government has introduced policies such as the National Inclusive Education Strategy and the disability Act to promote education for children with disabilities. However, many challenges remain, especially in rural areas like Kumala, Bunda. Community-Based Childcare Centers (CBCCs) provide early education to young children before they enter primary school. These centers are important, but they often do not have resources to support children with physical disabilities. Many CBCCs lack proper facilities, such as wheelchair ramps, accessible toilets, and special learning materials. Without these, children with disabilities struggle to participate fully in learning activities.

Another challenge is that many teachers in CBSSs do not have training in special needs education. This makes it hard for them to properly support children with disabilities. Also, some families and community members believe that children with disabilities cannot learn, which discourages parents from sending them to school.

Money is also a problem; many families with children who have disabilities struggle to afford assistive devices, like wheelchairs or special learning tools. At the same time, the government does not provide enough funds to support inclusive education in CBCCs, making it difficult to improve facilities and provide the necessary materials.

Studies conducted in Malawi and other developing countries have shown that children with disabilities are among the most marginalized in education. A study by Kholowa and Rose (2007) on early childhood education in Malawi highlighted that while CBCCs provide essential educational services; they are often underfunded and lack inclusive teaching strategies. Similarly, a 2020 UNICEF report on inclusive education in sub-Saharan Africa emphasized that negative societal attitudes toward disability contribute to the exclusion of children with disability from early learning programs.

This background study helps to understand the main challenges that children with physical disabilities face in Kumala CBCCs. It shows why more support is needed to make schools more accessible and welcoming for these children. By addressing these issues, it will be easier to create a better learning environment for all children, no matter their physical condition.

Historical Background

Inclusive education emerged from global efforts to promote equal access to education for all children regardless of disability. Over time, education systems have shifted from segregated models to inclusive approaches that emphasize participation, equity, and social integration. In Malawi, inclusive education has been integrated into national education policies with the aim of ensuring that children with disabilities are included in mainstream learning environments, including Community-Based Child Care Centres. CBCCs were established to provide early childhood education and care, particularly in rural communities, and they serve as an important foundation for later formal education.

Despite these policy developments, the implementation of inclusive education at CBCC level has faced challenges, particularly in rural areas. Children with physical disabilities often encounter social barriers that affect their participation and learning. These challenges highlight the need for empirical studies that focus on the social dimensions of inclusive education within CBCCs.

General Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the social challenges to inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in Kumala Community-Based Child Care Centres in Bunda District.

Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the social challenges affecting inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in Kumala CBCCs.
2. To assess the influence of teacher practices on inclusive education for children with physical disabilities.
3. To explore the role of caregivers and parents in supporting inclusive education.
4. To identify strategies for improving inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in CBCCs.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The study was guided by the Social Model of Disability, which views disability as a result of social and environmental barriers rather than individual impairments. According to this model, exclusion of children with physical disabilities occurs due to negative attitudes, inaccessible environments, and lack of support systems. The model emphasizes the need to address social barriers in order to promote inclusion.

Previous studies indicate that inclusive education enhances social interaction, self-esteem, and learning outcomes for children with disabilities when supportive environments are provided. However, research also shows that negative attitudes, inadequate training of teachers, and lack of resources hinder effective inclusion, particularly in early childhood settings.

Literature further shows that caregiver and parental involvement play an important role in reinforcing inclusive education. Support from parents and caregivers contributes to children confidence, attendance, and participation in learning activities. In contrast, limited involvement and lack of awareness about disability related needs negatively affect children's learning experiences.

Community attitudes towards disability have also been identified as significant social challenges. Negative perceptions and stigma contribute to exclusion and discrimination against children with physical disabilities, particularly in rural settings. These attitudes often influence how children are treated by peers and community members, thereby affecting their sense of belonging in inclusive learning environments.

Overall, it just highlights that while inclusive education has positive outcomes, social challenges continue to hinder its effective implementation. These findings informed the focus

of the present study and justified the need to assess social challenges to inclusive education for children with physical disabilities in Kumala CBCCs.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design using a case study approach. This design was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth understanding of social challenges affecting inclusive education in a specific context. The study focused on Kumala CBCCs in Bunda District.

Study Population

The study population comprised children with physical disabilities enrolled in Kumala CBCCs, their parents or guardians, and caregivers. These groups were selected because of their direct involvement in inclusive education practices at CBCC level.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using in-depth interviews and document review. Interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives on inclusive education. Document review was used to supplement interview data.

4.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis. Themes were generated based on recurring patterns related to social challenges, teacher practices, caregiver support, and community attitudes.

4.2 Response Rate

A total of 13 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 3 caregivers, 5 parents/guardians, and 5 children with physical disabilities. All participants who were approached took part in the study, representing a 100% response rate, which strengthened the reliability and completeness of the findings.

4.3 Demographic Information

The demographic information provides background characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. Understanding these characteristics is important because factors like

gender and age can influence experiences, perceptions, and particularly for children with physical disabilities in early childhood learning environments.

4.3.1 Gender of Respondents

The gender of the respondents was included in this study to examine whether gender differences among children, parents and caregivers may influence experiences, perceptions, and participation in inclusive education for children with physical disabilities.

Table 1. Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	6	46.2
Female	7	53.8
Total	13	100

The table shows that female respondents slightly outnumbered male respondents, accounting for 53.8% of the total respondents, while males constituted 46.2%. This distribution reflects the reality within CBCC settings where women are more likely to be involved as caregivers and parents, particularly in matters related to childcare and early education. The balanced representation of both genders suggests that the findings of the study capture diverse perspectives, strengthening the credibility of the results regarding inclusive education practices and challenges.

4.3.2 Age of children with physical disabilities

The age of children with physical disabilities was included in this study because age influences learning ability, level of independence, social interaction, and participation in inclusive education.

Table 2. Age of children with physical disabilities.

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10-15	3	60
16-20	2	40
Total	5	100

The table shows that the majority of children with physical disabilities were aged between 10 and 13 years, while a smaller proportion were between 14 and 17 years. This distribution indicates that most of the children were in childhood to early adolescence, a stage where academic expectations, social awareness, and peer interaction increase. The presence of children suggests delayed school progression, which is common among children with disabilities due to barriers such as limited access to inclusive education schools and mobility challenges.

Age of parents of children with disabilities

The age of parents was included in the study to understand the maturity, caregiving experience, and decision-making capacity of those responsible for supporting children with physical disabilities. Parental age can influence attitude toward disability, level of involvement in education, and ability to advocate for inclusive education.

Table. 3 Age of parents of children with physical disabilities.

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage%
30 - 40	3	60
41- 50	2	40
Total	5	100

The findings indicate that most parents were aged 34 and 41 years, while others were between 42 and 50 years. This suggests that the parents involved in the study were mature adults likely to have significant caregiving experience and responsibility. Their age range reflects active parenting years, during which decisions related to education, healthcare, and social inclusion are critical.

Age of caregivers

The age of caregivers was included because caregivers play a direct role in implementing inclusive education practices within CBCCs. Age may influence teaching experience, patience, physical ability to support children with disabilities, and openness to inclusive education approaches.

Table 4. Age of caregivers

Age Range	Frequency	Percentages%
20-30	1	33.3
31-40	2	66.7
Total	3	100

The table shows that most caregivers were aged between 34 and 40 years, with a smaller number aged between 28 and 33 years. This suggests that the caregivers had a reasonable level of maturity and experience in childcare and early childhood education. The presence between physical capacity and professional experience, which is important for supporting children with physical disabilities effectively in inclusive CBCC environments.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The study recommends that CBCCs should strengthen teacher training on inclusive education to improve their capacity to support children with physical disabilities. Caregivers and parents should be actively involved in supporting inclusive education through regular communication with CBCC staff. Community sensitisation programmes should be implemented to reduce stigma and negative attitudes towards disability. In addition, government and non-governmental organisations should support CBCCs with appropriate learning materials and accessible infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that inclusive education at Kumala CBCCs plays a significant role in promoting equitable access to learning for children with physical disabilities. The findings showed that inclusive education provides children with essential opportunities to participate in learning, interact socially, and develop academically. However, despite these benefits, the study found that several challenges persist, including inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training, insufficient learning materials, and negative community attitudes toward disability. The study further concluded that successful implementation of inclusive education requires supportive teaching practices, adapted learning environments, and active community involvement. Strengthening teacher capacity and improving accessibility were also found to be critical in enhancing inclusive learning experiences. Based on the findings, the study concludes that inclusive education remains essential for promoting children's rights and ensuring that learners with physical disabilities receive quality, equitable, and meaningful education. Overall, a collaborative effort among teachers, caregivers, the community, and policymakers is needed to enhance and sustain inclusive practices.

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