A Case Study of SNE Resource Center Practices in Zomba District, Malawi

Yoko Ishida
Hiroshima University, Japan

Dixie Maluwa-Banda
University of Malawi, Malawi

Anderson Chikumbutso Moyo
University of Malawi, Malawi

Chisomo Mgogo
University of Malawi, Malawi

Abstract

Most developed and developing countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Malawi, formulated the National Inclusive Education Strategy as a way of moving from the special education system to the newly introduced inclusive education system. A case study was conducted to understand how resource centers, which are the main instrument to promote inclusive education in Malawi, have been practicing the new policies. The results of the case study provide us with some implications of the importance of the support from a head teacher, teachers and community members for carrying out inclusive education activities effectively in a regular school. Data collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires also showed that there are some good examples of practices produced by specialist teachers and children with disabilities; these informative practices need be shared and examined to develop a model for better interpretation and implementation of policies at the school level by linking top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Introduction

According to the World Report on Disability (WHO 2011), estimates for the number of children (0–14 years) with disabilities range between 93 million and 150 million. Most of these children have been excluded from mainstream education opportunities. As of 2016, it is estimated that 61 million children of primary school age are out of school (UIS 2017). Nearly half of those children will never go to school. The major reasons for this may be associated with the disadvantages children are born with: poverty, gender, ethnicity, or life in a rural area or slum. One of the most neglected of these disadvantages is disability (UNESCO 2013). Not only do children with disability have lower school attendance, they face the risk of dropping out and are less likely to complete primary

education compared to nondisabled children.

In most developed and developing countries in the world, efforts for increasing such children's access to education or training have generally been made through separate special schools, such as schools for the blind. These institutions are attended only by a limited number of children and usually tend to isolate them from their families and communities (UNESCO 1988). Special education referred to the provision of education to children with disabilities that separates them from children without disabilities and the provision of special resources and materials, as well as teachers specially trained to teach children with disabilities (Kuroda et al. 2017).

Following the Salamanca Statement in 1994 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) in 2006, disability was increasingly understood as a human rights issue (WHO 2011). The concepts of special and integrated education gave way to inclusive education. Inclusive education and/or mainstreaming has become a key policy objective for the education of children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities (Lindsay 2007).

UNESCO Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education (2009) answers the question: "What is inclusive education?" as follows:

> Inclusive education is a process of strengthening the capacity of education system to reach out to all learners and can thus be understood as a key strategy to achieve EFA. As an overall principle, it should guide all education policies and practices, starting from the fact that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. The major impetus for inclusive education was given at the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, held in Salamanca, Spain, June 1994. More than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations considered the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, thereby enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special education needs (p.8).

The movement towards an inclusive approach to education has been embedded within the principles of human rights, promotion of social justice, provision of quality education, equality of opportunity, and right to a basic education for all (Kim 2012). Inclusive education has been regarded as the main policy imperative with respect to learners with special education needs and disabilities. A number of developed and developing countries have ratified the UN CRPD and have identified an urgent need to include children with SENs in regular school programs (Sharma et al. 2013).

The paradigm shift from a former segregated dual system to an inclusive education approach has had an enormous impact on education systems, schools, and all stakeholders involved in education internationally. An evolution from these segregated schools to more inclusive placement has dramatically changed the traditional role of teachers (Forlin 2013). In countries that are only recently embracing inclusion, many learners are receiving

free education for the first time—resulting in governments needing to provide education for large numbers of children, frequently without a strongly developed infrastructure and with a diversity of needs presented (Forlin 2013).

For example, in 13 Asian Pacific countries, special education and related service expertise and teacher education for inclusion are not yet in place to support teachers in working inclusively because of the lack of a well–thought-out policy, few resources, and limited understanding of inclusion (Sharma et al. 2012). Based on an empirical case study conducted in Cambodia by Kuroda, Kartika, and Kitamura, neither training nor experience in teaching children with disabilities has significantly influenced teacher perceptions of inclusive education in Cambodia, because the current cascade training system is ineffective in reaching out to all teachers, and the message of inclusive education is not transmitted to all teachers (Kuroda et al 2017).

In May 2015, the Incheon Declaration was adopted by around 1,600 participants from 160 countries, including over 120 ministries. The Education 2030 Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning was discussed, and its essential elements were agreed upon in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO 2015). The world has set a more ambitious universal education agenda for the 2015–2030 period, along with Goal 4 of "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development": "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO 2015).

The Education 2030 Framework states,

> Ensure equity and inclusion in and through education and address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparity, vulnerability and inequality in education access, participation, retention and completion and in learning outcomes. Inclusive education for all should be ensured by designing and implementing transformative public policies to respond to learners' diversity and needs, and to address the multiple forms of discrimination and of situations, including emergencies, which impede the fulfilment of the right to education (p.6)

Inclusion is a policy framework. It is a complex and contested concept, and its manifestations in practice are diverse. While some argue that only a proportion of these examples of inclusion in practice constitute "true" inclusion, others propose a broader approach (Lindsay 2003). For interpretation and implementation of the Education 2030 policy framework, including "inclusion" in practice in developing countries, it needs to be argued that while international aid has provided developing countries with analytical tools and practical knowledge about educational development, the top-down approach has not linked up with and complemented the initiatives on the ground. It is only now that focusing on inclusion and learning outcomes in terms of Education 2030 has led to this missing link between top-down and bottom-up approaches receiving attention in the dialogue between aid effectiveness and educational development (Yoshida & van del Walt

2017).

Because of the missing link between top-down and bottom-up approaches—in other words, the missing link between national policy and actual needs at the school level—in developing countries, there are some problem cases where both children with and without disabilities are merely placed together in the same classroom without efforts being made to ensure their learning, all in the name of inclusive education (Forlin 2012a).

Inclusive Education in Malawi

With the adoption of free primary education policy, the number of enrolled pupils in Malawi dramatically increased by 44.1% or 0.9 million, from 1.985 million in 1993–94 to 2.86 million in 1994–95 (MoEST 2011). Data for the number of out-of-school children are not available from UIS statistics. While the number of out-of-school adolescents was 284,742 persons in total (male 137,366 and female 147,376) in 2015, there have been more female out-of-school adolescents than males over the past nine years. Following the World Bank statistics, 7.7 million were aged 14 years or younger; therefore, around 4% of the cohort do not participate in education.

How to include children with disabilities and orphans in basic education has been a critical issue for addressing the problem of out-of-school children in Malawi. In primary education, there were 88,527 children with special learning needs in 2011. The HIV/AIDS prevalence has influenced educational development in Malawi; in 2011, orphans who lost one or both parents accounted for 11.0% of primary enrollment (MoEST 2011).

Malawi has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which protects the right of all children to education and the UN CRPD. The principles of these conventions are further codified within Malawian national laws and policies. The Disability Act (2012) defines inclusive education as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion from and within education."

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, (MoEST) Malawi, formulated the National Inclusive Education Strategy for the 2016–2020 period as a way of moving from the current special education system, where children with disabilities are excluded, to the newly introduced inclusive education system following the Salamanca Statement. The strategy has been expected to deliver and address educational needs among street children, excluded children, children with disabilities, etc.

A resource center (RC) for children with disabilities is the main instrument for inclusive education and has been established as a special education unit within some mainstream schools, where children with disabilities can receive specialized instruction and extra resources to support their learning. Children with disabilities are taught in a general class alongside children without disabilities and receive additional instruction outside of normal class hours. There is a special needs education (SNE) specialist teacher, with SNE teaching/learning materials provided.

There are 126 RCs in 130 out of Malawi's 447 educational zones. Special schools provide disability-specific instruction, primarily for the hearing and visually impaired; however, there are only six special schools in the country (Banks et al. 2015).

Purpose of the Study

In the field of disability and education, there are many studies based on empirical data from developed countries; however, very few are available from developing countries (Kuroda et al. 2017).

Therefore, a case study was conducted to understand how RCs have been interpreting the inclusive education policy and practicing inclusive education in Zomba District, where the University of Malawi is located, and to obtain implications for developing a sustainable model for quality inclusive education in Malawi. The research questions are as follows:

1) How is inclusive education policy interpreted and practiced at the school level?
2) How are SNE specialist teachers affecting teachers', pupils', and guardians' understanding and attitude toward inclusive education?
3) What are the contributing and/or inhibiting factors for inclusive education at the school level?

Data and Methods

Preliminary school visits to seven (7) mainstream primary schools in Zomba District, which kindly agreed to the visit and granted our request to interview the head teacher, were conducted by the authors from March 2 to 11, 2016. The outlines of the seven schools are shown in Table 1. Based on findings from the preliminary visits and considering the survey schedule and accessibility to schools, four of the seven schools were chosen as targets for the main data collection.

Table 1. Seven (7) Schools Covered by the Preliminary School Visits in Zomba District

School	Area	Level	RC?	Specialist Teacher?	Choose as target?
A	Urban	Primary	Yes	Yes	Yes
B	Urban	Primary	Yes	Yes	Yes
C	Urban	Primary	Yes	Yes	No
D	Urban	Primary	No	No	Yes
E	Rural	Primary	No	No	Yes
F	Rural	Primary	Yes	Yes	No
G	Rural	Primary	No	Yes	No

Source: Authors

Among the seven (7) schools, four (4) schools, A, B, C, and F have RCs, while five (5) schools, A, B, C, F, and G, have SNE specialist teachers. Additionally, three (3) schools, A, B, and F have RCs with SNE specialist teachers. Schools A to B are outlined as follows:

- Both Schools A and B are located in urban areas, School A in a residential area and School B in the downtown area.
- At School C, there are currently no pupils with disabilities; therefore, the RC is not open.
- School D is a missionary school in the urban area and does not have an RC or a specialist.
- School E is a Muslim school in the rural area and does not have an RC or a specialist.
- School F has a very small room used as an RC by the specialist; however, there are limited RC activities, with only a few pupils with disabilities in the school.
- A specialist teacher has been deployed to School G and has been expected to establish and operate an RC; however, because of lack of commitment and school support, there is no plan for when and how to start the RC at School G.

To understand how inclusive education policy is interpreted and implemented at school and to understand the functions and practices of RCs and specialist teachers, Schools A and B were chosen from urban schools as the targets of the main survey. Additionally, School D, also in the urban context, was chosen to make a comparison among schools with and without an RC with a specialist. Based on preliminary school visits, it was found that no RCs or specialists had been functioning at the rural schools. Both Schools F and G are located in isolated areas. Therefore, they were not chosen. Instead, School E was chosen as the target of the main survey, as it is located relatively close to downtown Zomba, allowing main data collection in a rural area without an RC or specialist.

To achieve the research objectives, both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches were employed for data collection and analysis in the main survey conducted from June 20 to 24, 2016. Information gathering through i) observation of RC activities,

Table 2. Summary of the Questionnaire Respondents (Teachers)

School	No. of Respondents (persons)			Total Years of Teaching (persons)		
	Female	Male	Total	0=< <10 years	10=< <20 years	20=< years
A	7	3	10	3	3	4
B	7	3	10	3	5	2
D	10	0	10	2	3	5
E	4	6	10	7	3	0
Total	28	12	40	15	14	11

Source: Authors

ii) interviews with SNE specialist teachers and head teachers, and iii) a questionnaire survey of teachers using a Likert scale, was conducted at the four (4) target schools. Some qualitative and quantitative analytical methods, including t-test and correlation analysis, were used for analyzing the collected data.

The Likert scale questionnaire was given to 40 teachers, 10 teachers from each of the four (4) target schools. Table 2 shows the summary of the questionnaire respondents.

In addition to questions on respondents' sex, age, total teaching years, teaching years at the school, teaching grade, number of pupils in the class, and number of pupils with disability in the class, the questionnaire had 12 Likert scale (From 5=Strongly Agree to 1=Totally Disagree) questions in four (4) sections:

Questionnaire:

1. About Yourself:
    1-1   I understand the objective and importance of inclusive education clearly.
    1-2   I can identify, instruct, and take care of them when there are any children with disabilities in my class.
    1-3   I was trained in how to identify, instruct, and take care of children with disabilities.

2. About Your School Situation:
    2-1   The specialist teachers of the RC give us necessary help for instructing children with disabilities in my class.
    2-2   The head teacher gives us technical advice about how to instruct children with disabilities.
    2-3   Our school teachers understand the importance of inclusive education in general.

3. About Pupils' Understanding and Achievement:
    3-1   Our pupils understand the importance of inclusive education in general.
    3-2   Our pupils have been affected positively by the RC and been more supportive of children with disabilities.
    3-3   There is no negative influence on our pupils' achievement by children with disabilities.

4. About Guardians/Community Support:
    4-1   Guardians of children with disabilities understand the importance of inclusive education.
    4-2   Pupils' guardians are supportive of inclusive education in general.
    4-3   Community members are supportive of special needs education in general.

Research Findings

The means of rating each question by school are shown in Table 3.

Among the four schools, the respondent teachers of School D have the longest mean of teaching years (17.40 years), while School E teachers have the shortest (9.20 years). In urban areas, teachers of Schools A, B, and D have longer teaching years than School E in rural areas. It might not be appropriate to make judgements based on the limited cases of the four schools; however, teachers might tend to stay longer in urban areas. This is because teaching in an isolated school involves various hardships, and it is difficult to stay for a long period.

The mean numbers of pupils with disabilities in the respondents' classes are 3.56 in School A, 3.20 in School B, 3.10 in School D, and 1.00 in School E. When we visited the schools, the head teacher of School E said that they had limited (or no) capacity to identify pupils with disabilities. This implies that there might be more pupils with disabilities who were not recognized by the teachers at School E. It is also possible that, in rural areas, a school is located far from the residential areas; therefore, it is difficult for pupils with disabilities to go to school.
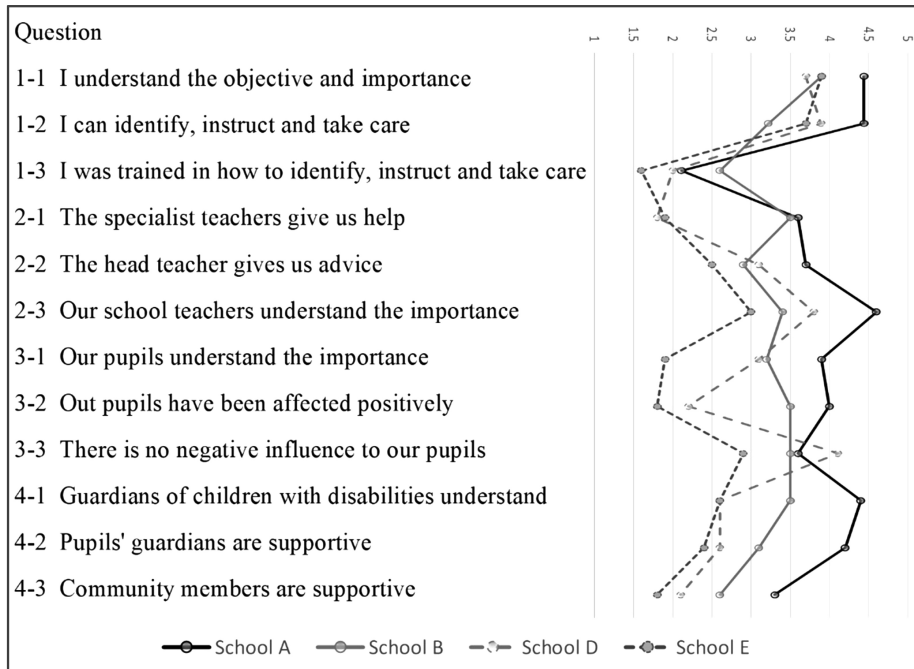
Table 3. Means of Numbers and Ratings of the Questionnaire by School

School		teaching years	No. of pupils with disabilities in a class	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3	3-1	3-2	3-3	4-1	4-2	4-3
A	Mean	16.60	3.56	4.44	4.44	2.11	3.60	3.70	4.60	3.90	4.00	3.60	4.40	4.20	3.30
	N	10	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
	SD	9.216	2.404	0.882	0.726	1.691	1.713	1.252	0.699	1.370	1.491	1.430	0.843	0.919	1.829
B	Mean	14.30	3.20	3.90	3.22	2.60	3.50	2.90	3.40	3.20	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.10	2.60
	N	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
	SD	7.528	1.135	1.287	1.922	1.265	1.354	1.663	1.578	1.619	1.509	1.650	1.581	1.663	1.578
D	Mean	17.40	3.10	3.70	3.89	2.00	1.80	3.10	3.80	3.10	2.20	4.11	2.60	2.60	2.10
	N	10	10	10	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10
	SD	7.058	1.101	1.567	1.269	1.414	1.476	1.853	1.619	1.663	1.751	1.364	1.578	1.430	1.449
E	Mean	9.20	1.00	3.90	3.70	1.60	1.90	2.50	3.00	1.90	1.80	2.90	2.60	2.40	1.80
	N	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
	SD	9.496	1.247	1.287	1.337	1.265	1.370	1.434	1.563	1.449	1.033	1.912	1.713	1.713	1.229
Total	Mean	14.38	2.69	3.97	3.81	2.08	2.70	3.05	3.70	3.03	2.88	3.51	3.28	3.08	2.45
	N	40	39	39	37	38	40	40	40	40	40	39	40	40	40
	SD	8.687	1.794	1.267	1.391	1.402	1.667	1.568	1.488	1.641	1.682	1.604	1.601	1.575	1.584

Source: Authors

Figure 1 shows the means of the four schools' ratings for the 12 questions in the form of a line graph.

Figure 1. Comparison of Means of the Four Schools' Ratings for the 12 Questions

Question
1-1 I understand the objective and importance
1-2 I can identify, instruct and take care
1-3 I was trained in how to identify, instruct and take care
2-1 The specialist teachers give us help
2-2 The head teacher gives us advice
2-3 Our school teachers understand the importance
3-1 Our pupils understand the importance
3-2 Out pupils have been affected positively
3-3 There is no negative influence to our pupils
4-1 Guardians of children with disabilities understand
4-2 Pupils' guardians are supportive
4-3 Community members are supportive

School A — School B — School D — School E

Source: Authors

In most of the 12 questions, School A has the highest mean scores, while School B has the highest score only for Question 1-3 (asking about training). The relatively low ratings of Question 1-3 among the four schools proves that only limited training in inclusive education has been provided to teachers. Schools A and B, both of which have an RC and specialist teacher, have similar mean scores as those for Question 2-1; the two specialist teachers' contributions are similarly well recognized by teachers. When comparing the two schools, School A shows higher mean scores than School B in Question 2-2, 2-3, 4-1, and 4-2, which implies that in School A, the head teacher, teachers, and guardians might be more supportive.

Discussion

According to the t-test results shown in Table 4, the differences of the means of Schools A and D and Schools A and E in Questions 2-1, 3-1, 3-2, 4-1, and 4-2 are significant at 5%.

It is possible that, by practicing an inclusive education policy at the school level, the specialist teacher can give useful help to teachers, improve pupils' understanding of inclusive education, and mobilize guardians of children with and without disabilities at School A, compared to School D and School E. There are no significant differences between Schools A and B. There are no significant differences among Schools B and D,

Table 4: Results of t-test of the Means of 12-Question Ratings of Schools A, B, D, and E

Question		Schools A-B	Schools A-D	Schools A-E	Schools B-D	Schools B-E	Schools D-E
1-1 I understand the objective and importance	difference	0.544	0.744	0.544	0.200	0.000	0.200
	t value	0.785	0.596	0.795	0.985	1.000	0.985
1-2 I can identify, instruct and take care	difference	1.222	0.556	0.744	-0.667	-0.478	0.189
	t value	0.256	0.828	0.647	0.736	0.874	0.991
1-3 I was trained in how to identify, instruct and take care	difference	0.469	0.111	0.511	0.600	1.000	0.400
	t value	0.874	0.998	0.859	0.791	0.401	0.926
2-1 The specialist teachers give us help	difference	0.100	1.800*	1.700	1.700	1.600	-0.100
	t value	0.999	0.048	0.068	0.068	0.093	0.999
2-2 The head teacher gives us advice	difference	0.800	0.600	1.200	-0.200	0.400	0.600
	t value	0.667	0.827	0.332	0.992	0.940	0.827
2-3 Our school teachers understand the importance	difference	1.200	0.800	1.600	0.400	0.400	0.800
	t value	0.249	0.593	0.073	0.921	0.921	0.593
3-1 Our pupils understand the importance	difference	0.700	0.800	2.000*	0.100	1.300	1.200
	t value	0.737	0.650	0.029	0.999	0.236	0.312
3-2 Out pupils have been affected positively	difference	0.500	1.800*	2.200*	1.300	1.700	0.400
	t value	0.871	0.045	0.010	0.215	0.063	0.929
3-3 There is no negative influence to our pupils	difference	0.100	-0.511	0.700	-0.611	0.600	1.211
	t value	0.999	0.900	0.766	0.842	0.838	0.371
4-1 Guardians of children with disabilities understand	difference	0.900	1.800*	1.800*	0.900	0.900	0.000
	t value	0.526	0.045	0.045	0.526	0.526	1.000
4-2 Pupils' guardians are supportive	difference	1.100	1.600	1.800*	0.500	0.700	0.200
	t value	0.350	0.087	0.044	0.870	0.711	0.990
4-3 Community members are supportive	difference	0.700	1.200	1.500	0.500	0.800	0.300
	t value	0.740	0.316	0.147	0.885	0.653	0.972

Source: Authors
*Note: * Significant at 5%*

Table 5. Correlation Coefficients Among Questions for Schools A and B (with RCs)

	teaching years	No. of pupils with disabilities in a class	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3	3-1	3-2	3-3	4-1	4-2	4-3
teaching years	1													
No. of pupils with disabilities in a class	-0.251	1												
1-1	-0.345	-0.134	1											
1-2	-0.229	-0.199	.803**	1										
1-3	-.575*	0.240	0.323	0.075	1									
2-1	-0.232	0.055	.489*	0.233	0.353	1								
2-2	-0.140	-0.219	.586**	.645**	0.054	.627**	1							
2-3	-0.271	-0.014	.777**	.707**	0.151	0.419	.634**	1						
3-1	0.106	-0.437	.613**	.590**	-0.165	0.395	.768**	.602**	1					
3-2	0.301	-0.368	0.298	0.345	0.071	0.136	0.369	0.186	.655**	1				
3-3	0.275	-.580**	0.184	.471*	-0.412	-0.071	0.369	0.183	.697**	.490*	1			
4-1	0.210	-0.215	0.311	0.437	-0.243	0.280	0.410	0.418	.732**	.479*	.679**	1		
4-2	0.295	-0.347	0.288	0.413	-0.375	0.267	.523*	.470*	.807**	.480*	.684**	.944**	1	
4-3	0.297	-.458*	0.320	0.178	-0.028	0.382	.546*	0.254	.691**	.746**	.464*	.492*	.579**	1

Source: Authors
*Note: ** Significant at 1% * Significant at 5%*

Table 6. Correlation Coefficients Among Questions for Schools D and E (without RCs)

	teaching years	No. of pupils with disabilities in a class	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3	3-1	3-2	3-3	4-1	4-2	4-3
teaching years	1													
No. of pupils with disabilities in a class	0.112	1												
1-1	−0.040	−0.115	1											
1-2	0.161	0.000	.704**	1										
1-3	−0.094	0.026	0.269	0.337	1									
2-1	−0.232	−0.093	0.282	−0.133	−0.129	1								
2-2	0.064	0.188	0.417	0.166	−0.268	0.379	1							
2-3	0.292	0.263	0.343	0.390	−0.342	0.336	.632**	1						
3-1	0.435	0.317	.505*	0.301	0.188	0.035	0.411	0.381	1					
3-2	−0.037	0.331	0.426	0.067	0.213	0.295	0.340	0.163	.636**	1				
3-3	.618**	0.360	0.364	0.365	−0.187	0.067	.507*	.708**	.636**	.479*	1			
4-1	0.044	0.259	.502*	0.174	−0.244	.445*	.628**	.721**	.581*	0.441	.594**	1		
4-2	0.063	0.098	0.440	0.080	−0.217	.604**	.729**	.619**	0.397	.508*	.492*	.768**	1	
4-3	0.110	0.205	0.366	0.033	−0.222	0.197	.604**	.484*	.573**	.678**	.502*	.589**	.740**	1

Source: Authors
*Note: ** Significant at 1% * Significant at 5%*

B and E, and D and E. Based on the questionnaire results of Question 2-1, the specialist teachers of School A and School B received almost the same ratings; however, the outcomes of their inclusive education are different. Support from the community might be one of the reasons for this, as School A is located in a residential area and School B in the downtown area, which is slightly far from the nearby community.

Tables 5 and 6 below give the correlation coefficients among the 12-question ratings of Schools A and B with RCs, and Schools D and E without RCs, respectively.

These two tables give us some evidence of the importance of the support from a head teacher, teachers and community members in order to carry out RC activities effectively. The tables show implications of how specialist teachers make efforts to promote inclusive education at school. Teachers' understanding and confidence and pupils' positive attitude show significant correlation with support from head teachers and communities. The correlation coefficients of School A and School B with RCs and specialist teachers are more significant than Schools D and E without RCs in terms of teachers' and pupils' understanding.

As for the correlation between the community and pupils' understanding and positive attitude, the combinations of Schools A and B and Schools D and E show quite similar results. From the limited data collected by this study, it is difficult to discuss the reasons for this; however, the fact that School D is a missionary school and School E is a Muslim school may have some influence on guardians' and communities' positive support.

It should also be noted that the number of pupils with disabilities in the class has a negative correlation with the views on inclusive education's influence on pupils and community support.

The major issues with current RCs and specialist teachers in Schools A and B in Zomba District are outlined as follows, based on observations and interviews:
- School A has a specialist teacher and teacher's assistant, while School B has only a specialist teacher.
- The specialist teachers have an RC room in their school, with some (limited) SNE teaching materials, most of which they create by themselves.
- They are trained in SNE and qualified as SNE specialists; however, there are no official programs to provide them with financial and/or technical support.
- There are limited SNE teaching/learning materials and/or classroom facilities and furniture.
- Their activities and responsibilities are as follows: identify pupils with disabilities in the school; help teachers teach those pupils in the regular classroom when possible; instruct pupils with disabilities in the segregated SNE class; advocate children's human rights and the importance of inclusive education in schools and communities; and teach children how to practice their own activities in the RCs.
- They currently take care of around 10 pupils with physical and/or mental disabilities, including some "albinos" with disabilities, whose ages range from 5 to 25 years old.
- Understanding and support from head teachers, teachers, pupils with and without disabilities, guardians, and community members is essential and needs be developed by specialist teachers.
- They are expected to provide technical support for nearby schools without RCs; however, this is difficult for them because of financial and technical reasons.

Conclusion

Based on the case study of Malawi, although the specialist teachers of Schools A and B face various problems, they are proud of their job and enjoy working with pupils with and without disabilities. They have tried to understand and practice inclusive education in their schools with limited resources, and they have also tried to improve the link between policy and practice at the school level. However, during the research period, we could not see any efforts from the policy side to strengthen the link between policy and school levels. There are no mutual interactions between top-down and bottom-up approaches or between the administration and schools, even when there are good RC examples.

In Zomba District, Malawi, RCs and specialist teachers with proper knowledge and skills and strong commitment contribute to the improvement in practicing inclusive education at the school level. Such good examples need to be noted and shared by the central and the local administrations and by the relevant stakeholders and properly examined to develop a sustainable model for making the linkage between top-down and bottom-up approaches functional.

Inclusion is a policy framework. The issue here is the interpretation and implementation of inclusion in practice. We need to ensure that there is a dual approach focusing on both the rights of children and the effectiveness of their education. There is a need to go beyond concerns about inputs and settings to a focus on experiences and outcomes and to attempt to identify causal relationships. We need rigorous research to inform policy and practice. In addition to descriptive case studies of examples of good practice, useful though they might be, we need careful analysis to examine whether good practice is an appropriate descriptor. Rigorous, substantial research projects demonstrating effectiveness will enhance the process of addressing children's rights (Lindsay 2003).

Acknowledgement

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