Challenges in Implementation of Inclusive Education in Malawi: A Case Study of Montfort Special Needs Education College and Selected Primary Schools in Blantyre

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Abstract

There has been an increasing interest of educating children with disabilities in mainstream schools over the last two decades. Research indicates that children with disabilities function better in life when they attend same learning environments with their normal peers than being educated in segregated special schools primarily because they face same social, cultural, political and economic challenges. Educating children in segregated special units diminishes children's social skills that are necessary for societal adaptation.

The present study explored the challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi. The study was constructed within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The theory maintains that children grow, develop and learn in a complex environment that impacts them negatively and positively. An exploratory qualitative case study research design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to pick on the study sites as well as the research participants. Montfort Special Needs Education College and a few selected primary schools formed the cases for the study. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion were used to collect data and results analyzed using themes with a clear focus on the research questions.

The findings of the study indicated that teacher training is one of the main intervention measures used by Montfort SNE College in promoting inclusive education learning environments. Teachers are the most important personnel in the implementation and transforming educational policies. Other interventional measures done by Montfort SNE College include: research on inclusive education, and awareness creating. The challenges identified included; inadequate trained teachers, cultural beliefs and lack of political goodwill in investing in inclusive education.

DEDICATION

It is a great honor for me to dedicate this thesis to the entire Chimwaza family, especially to Madalitso who mean so much in my life. I love you more than you would ever know!!

Frankly speaking this thesis would not have been possible without your continuous support and encouragement, thank you. God bless you all.

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ABBREVIATION

CRC: Convention on the Rights of a Child

CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

FEDOMA: Federation of Disabled People Organizations in Malawi

LD: Learning Difficulties

LWF: Lutheran World Federation

MDGS: Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

MoGCDS: Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare

NPEOPWD: National Policy on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

PWD: Persons with Disabilities

SNE: Special Needs Education

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Challenges in Implementation of Inclusive Education in Malawi: A Case Study of Montfort Special Needs Education College and Selected Primary Schools

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study to the reader. The researcher has systematically given a general overview of the research topic, explained the central concepts underlying the study and problematized the issue of inclusive education that needs concerted efforts from all sides of the society if it has to be successful and sustainable. The central themes addressed in this introductory chapter include; background of the study, research questions, brief history of Montfort Special Needs Education (SNE) College, disability related policies and legislative frameworks and researcher's assumptions of the study. To wrap up this section, the structure of the dissertation is given.

1.1 Background of the study

There has been an increasing interest in inclusive education over the last two decades. During this period, researchers that have done considerable amount of research on children with disabilities and their successful functioning in the society have promoted integration of these children who would traditionally be placed in special schools (Rayner 2007). The logic behind this assertion could be like any other normal person, individuals with disabilities are influenced by similar social, economic, political and other challenges in the society they need to cope up with.

However, recent research has indicated that this approach is a huge barrier to developing a comprehensive inclusion school system (Rayner 2007). Pijl and Meijer (1991) cited in Rayner (2007) point out that the existence of well-established special schools has over time created a 'two track' school system resulting in policy problems in harmonizing the two tracks together into a sustainable single-track system. Against this background, there is substantial evidence that a number of countries particularly in the western world have successfully implemented inclusive education. Rayner (2007) has demonstrated that several countries have had a dramatic shift to a single-track system where neighboring regular/mainstream schools have been lauded as suitable placement for children with disabilities. These countries have realized the need to expand the scope of the mainstream schools to give them an enhanced responsibility of accommodating a greater diversity of children. In this sense, inclusivity in

reference to children with disabilities refers to the understanding that promotes the education of all children in regular schools regardless of the characteristics. The logic of inclusive education is therefore the disappearance of segregated special schools and the creation of a single comprehensive system to accommodate a wide range of children.

Pijl et al. (1997) demonstrate that there have been concerted efforts in the Western countries to develop a widely accepted system of special programmes where expertise has been specially trained to educate children with disabilities in the best way possible through unusual, special instruction. This tendency makes those schools appear like separate segregated units where children do not get to interact with typically developing children in mainstream schools. This greatly impacts them as they leave these special schools with diminished social skills necessary for societal adaptation. Gradually, the understanding of educating children with disabilities has changed. It is widely accepted that understanding, expertise needed as well as facilities required that make life for these children easier remain important to their education (Pijl et al. 1997). What is being challenged is the segregation of the children in special schools where they don't integrate with other children in the mainstream schools.

The discourse of inclusive education is derived from the social disability model. The emergence of sociological perspective in looking at disabilities has been instrumental in the interpretation of special education. It has led to the deconstruction of disability as 'normative' and instead positioned it as being 'socially-constructed.' Tomlinsen (1982) cited in Rayner (2007) argue that learning difficulties are socially constructed and are deeply embedded in the value systems, beliefs and interests of those practicing in the field and suggests that in order to problematize the current special education, there is need to challenge the assumptions on disability and segregated education for children with disabilities.

The key to inclusive education is a transformative approach. The transformation of regular schools system is needed so that mainstream schools are given an enhanced capacity to reach out to all learners in a continuous and sustainable manner that becomes an ongoing process. Inclusion in this sense means that children with disabilities need an opportunity to be educated together with peers in the same education environments. Pijl et al. (1997: 1) thus defines inclusive education as "an education system that includes a large diversity of learners and which differentiates education for this diversity." Inclusive education has faced many challenges that seem to bring down the efforts to making it achieved by governments

worldwide as a means to enhance accessibility to quality education to all citizens. Appropriate interventions that can help children with disabilities in developing countries to access equal education have been quite a challenge as this has been dominated by their isolation and exclusion (Mariga, et al. 2014). Some of the factors include; less conducive and enabling policy environment and very little commitment in initiating change through research, lack of resources and poverty (Peters 2003). Hence, learners with disabilities are left with very little or no support to continue advancing their unique capabilities in such challenging learning environments. These empirical evidences have been the points of reference for most countries when developing policies to ensure learners have equal access to education.

A number of international instruments provide good legal and structural frameworks that could help provision for children with disabilities. These instruments include; the World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien (1990); the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994). The instruments have indicated strong and collective international commitment that stimulates individual countries worldwide to improve education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and hence calls for inclusive education (Mariga et al. 2014). In response to increased international understanding and in an effort to implement these international treaties, quite a number of African states, in the sub-Saharan region have stepped up their efforts aimed at promoting inclusive education (Mariga et al. 2014). According to UNICEF's data, it is estimated that close to 90% of children with disabilities may be excluded from the mainstream school system (The atlas alliance, Annual magazine 2013-2014: 9). This number is an estimate of the sub-Saharan region as a whole. However, there could be some countries doing better and others much worse. For instance, there is no reliable statistics of children with disabilities in Malawi. Woie cited in the atlas alliance, Annual magazine (2013-2014: 13) points out that "Nobody knows how many deaf and blind children there are in Malawi". A baseline study done by a team of researchers from Montfort College of Special Needs Education and Mzuzu University indicates that the government of Malawi has developed a policy called "Policy Investment Framework (PIF- 2001) whose aim is 'to specify the country's commitment to quality education for all and reduction of inequalities in schools' (Chavuta 2008: 13).

The coming of the missionaries to Malawi led to the introduction of formal education in 1875. From that time until independence, mission schools were the major providers of education (Kadzamira et al. 2002). According to Hauya (1993), special needs education was not part of the curriculum that focused much on reading, writing and counting. In his comment, one of

the Catholic Brothers suggested the introduction of special needs education by the Roman Catholic Fathers of Immaculate Conception who introduced Mary-view School for the Deaf or hearing impairment and a training college for specialist teachers in special needs education at Montfort campus in 1968 - a holistic approach of the Church to address every area of the whole human being (Makoko & Chimutu 2007). Two decades later, a new special needs education program on learners with learning difficulties was established by the Ministry of Education (Chavuta et al. 2008).

In 2006, the government developed a National Policy on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (NPEOPWD). This policy demands for recognition of individuals with disabilities to be integrated into all government policy spheres, and equal participation of such people in all developmental activities (Malawi Government 2006). However, there is no mentioning of education for learners with disabilities in this document. In 1996, the Ministry of Education begun to build a more inclusive education system by introducing the Learning Difficulties Programme whose aim was to train teachers to become specialist in special education and thereafter handle learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.

However, Malawi still has much to do in order to realize the agenda of inclusive education in mainstream schools. Based on this background, the researcher is motivated to carefully examine the problems that have and continue to hinder the implementation of inclusive education as a means of improving access to education for children with disabilities. Therefore, in as much as Montfort College is trying to implement inclusive education, it is important to find out what the college is doing to promote inclusive education.

Weak policy structures as well as inadequate resources could be hindering countries like Malawi to implement inclusive education. Although Malawi Government developed Policy Investment Framework (PIF) to address quality education for all, research has shown that the country has no substantive policy on the provision of inclusive education (Kadzamira et al. 2001). Bowe et al (1992) argue that strong policy initiatives are necessary for implementing a course of action. Research has indicated that if we are committed to enhancing the life of children with disabilities, then inclusive education in the mainstream schools is the way to go. Inclusive education seems to be newly introduced in the education cycle, hence, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and other concerned stakeholders are seriously advocating for inclusive environment for learners with and without disabilities in their quest to increase access to equal education to all. This background formed the rationale for this

study as there are a lot of challenges that have hindered the implementation of inclusive education as a means of improving access to equal education for learners with disabilities.

1.2 Research questions

The following are the research questions of the study:

a) What intervention measures has Montfort SNE College put in place with regard to inclusive education to improve access to inclusive education for children with disabilities?

b) What factors hinder implementation of inclusive education as a means to improve access to education for children with disabilities?

c) What role do parents, teachers, community and peers play in implementing inclusive education for children with disabilities?

1.2.1 Definitions of inclusive education and disability

➢ **Inclusive Education** refers to a wide range of strategies, activities and processes that seek to make a reality of the universal right to quality, relevant and appropriate education (Stubbs 2008).

Inclusive education is related to enhancing human rights and dignity especially of learners with disabilities who seem to be regarded as the vulnerable (Salvolaine et al. 2006). Inclusion in this study does not comprise all these dynamics. The researcher has narrowed down to a specific group of individuals (those with disabilities) that are left out of the mainstream schools and put in a 'box' called special schools where they are deemed to receive specialized kind of instruction. Inclusion implies the collective process of bringing together all children so that they can learn and develop together.

It is important that every child regardless of the circumstances have fair chances in life–equal opportunities to education, social and cultural life. The concept of inclusion only surfaces when there is a general feeling that some groups of individuals are not fully integrated with the mainstream – they are excluded basically in regard to access to social services, life opportunities and in resource allocation. Inclusion and exclusion are mutually interrelated. Inclusive education means learning environments are restructured to accommodate diversity, that is, children with varying needs,

capabilities and styles of learning. Inclusive practices aim at helping individuals to recognize and appreciate their uniqueness abilities (Mitchell 2004). Schools' sensitivity to differentiating children's varying needs is critical in this respect. Barriers within learning environments need to be minimized in order to accommodate a diversity of learners. In principle inclusive education aims at giving children equal opportunities to co-exist and learning together is same educational environments based on the values of non-discrimination. Inclusive education therefore implies practices and strategies aimed at varied needs of learners in supportive environments. Valuing diversity and providing appropriate and timely support is critical in inclusive educational practices (Mitchell 2004).

➤ **Disability:** According to Colin and Shelia (2001), there is no single commonly-accepted, straightforward definition of disability. However, they classify disability according to three perspectives as follows; the medical, social and legal models. Despite these perspectives the researcher picks and defines one model which seems to combine all the three models in the discussion. The discussion uses the definition as per the World Health Organization 1948 (WHO) as:

> A disease, disorder or injury produces an impairment causing a chance to ordinary functioning. Impairment refers to failure at the level of organs or systems of the body. This means loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.

In this case, disability comes because of loss or reduction of ability to perform an activity in the manner considered normal for a human being (ibid). For the sake of this discourse, disability is looked at in the following angles; visual impairment (functional limitation of the eye or the vision), hearing impairment (a problem or damage to parts of the ear), physical impairment (challenges on a person's physical functioning or mobility) and learning difficulties (a number of learning problems).

Furthermore, WHO (1948) describes the relationship between disability, impairment and handicap. More so, a handicap is also described as a social disadvantage stemming from an impairment or disability which tends to limit or retard a fulfilment of a normal role which a normal human being is capable of carrying out.

1.3 Brief history of Montfort SNE College

Montfort Special Needs Education College is a college which trains specialist teachers for learners with special needs in Malawi. It is situated approximately 45 km from Limbe/Blantyre City (Makoko & Chimutu, 2007). The college was opened by the Catholic Church through Brothers of Mary Immaculate Conception in 1968, barely four years after the country got independence from the colonial government, as a pre-school and a primary school for learners with special needs (Chavuta et al. 2008). The new African government at that time had many development issues of which starting a special needs school could not have been one of its priorities. The Catholics saw the need for such a school. It was only later that the government began to take some initiatives to where things are now.

Originally, its main focus was on teaching learners with hearing impairment. In this case, hearing impairment means a problem in hearing because of damage to parts of the ear. Later, it started admitting learners who are visually impaired (people with loss of vision/blind). After some time, a department to teach learners with learning difficulties (difficulties in getting knowledge and skills to the normal level as expected, due to body disorder) was also introduced. That is/was why the college was referred to as a special school for learners with education needs.

In the beginning, the school had specialist teachers who were white Catholic Brothers and were trained in Europe. Upon seeing that there was an increased demand for more specialist teachers as the number of learners being admitted into the school was increasing, a training department was introduced. This marked the beginning of training indigenous (African) specialist teachers.

The government of Malawi and The Roman Catholic Church entered into a working partnership. The Catholics provide the infrastructure and run some programmes while the government funds the institution and controls the training and recruitment of the teachers. The Roman Catholic Church acts like the proprietor. The government of Malawi funds the college as well as paying the salaries for the lecturers and the upkeep for the trainee teachers. Furthermore, the government posts trainee teachers to various special primary and secondary schools upon completion of the training.

1.4 Disability related policies and legislative frameworks

1.4.1 International context

In **Section 211(2) of the Constitution**, the state is bound by international agreements entered into before the commencement of the constitution and after. These international agreements or covenants form part of the laws of the Republic if so provided by an act of Parliament unless otherwise provided. In line with this provision, Malawi is a signatory to a number of international instruments which it has signed and ratified. Below are some of the legal frameworks and policies which relate to children with disabilities and their rights to education.

1.4.1.1 International Instruments

At an international level there are a number of conventions that Malawi has signed and ratified to promote the rights of Persons with Disabilities PWDs e.g. the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which Malawi signed and ratified in 2007. The signing and ratification of this convention implies that Malawi has obligations to report to the United Nations on the status of persons with Disabilities. The other international instruments are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, and its two covenants of 1966. The Convention on the Rights of a Child, 1989 (CRC)and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) are the major instruments that provide for the rights of children with disability at the international level and they have been domesticated in most legislation in Malawi including in the Disability Act.

➢ **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

This legal instrument was adopted in 1990 of which Malawi ratified on 21/01/1991. The convention is a comprehensive legal and policy framework for respect, protection, promotion and fulfillment of the rights of the child, especially Article 23 states that children with disabilities have the right to special care, education and training, whereas Article 28 states that every child has the right to education regardless of his or her status, i.e. disability, etc. Again, the convention gives Malawi an obligation to provide free and compulsory primary education, accessibility to secondary school education to every child and the same to the higher education level (Kamchedzera et al. 2005).

➢ **The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

The Convention was adopted on 13/12/2006 and advocates for the recognition and promotion of education of persons with disabilities. Malawi is among the signatory countries whose obligation is to report to UN on status of persons with disabilities. The convention also advocates and lobbies for inclusive education and promotion of awareness and implementation of CRPD, especially Article 24 (Munthali 2011).

Malawi, therefore, has an adequate policy and legal environment for promoting and upholding the rights of CWD in ensuring that they are accorded inclusive education. However in case of any violations it is only the domesticated laws that can be applicable. Furthermore, these policies in disabilities are far much better than the Disability Act.

Education is both a human right in itself as well as an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized children and adults can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities.

1.4.2   The national context
1.4.2.1 Constitutional Framework
The review of the country's constitution was made soon after Malawi experienced the political shift from one party era to the multiparty democracy that took place in 1994. A new constitution was drafted and adopted which explicitly and implicitly recognises the rights of persons with disability (**Act No.20 of 1994**). In Chapter IV the constitution provides for a Bill of Rights, which although it is not explicit in some sections but they are applicable to persons with disabilities. The constitution prohibits discrimination of any kind including discrimination against persons with disabilities **(Section 20 of the constitution)**. Further, the constitution provides that Malawi is obligated to actively promote the welfare and development of the people by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at supporting the disabled through greater access to public places, fair opportunities in employment and fullest possible participation in all spheres of Malawian society **(Section 13 g of the constitution).**

Other provisions that apply to persons with disabilities without discrimination are the right to education **(Section 25)** and many more. The constitution, therefore, is an important legislative framework that ensures that the rights of persons with disabilities are upheld.

1.4.2.2 The Disability Act 2012

The enactment of a law on Persons with Disability Act 2012 is a major step towards enabling children with disability realise their rights on the equal basis with others. It prohibits discrimination based on disability, it promotes access to quality education and other social services for PWD and there is a provision for equal opportunity for CWD or PWD to develop their skills.

Under the Act, denial of admission by any learning institution on the basis of disability is criminalised. The Act also provides for one integrated public vocational and technical school in each region of the country and that 5 % of all positions in public schools and private establishments would be reserved for CWD. The law further provides for Special Needs Education for learners with special educational needs.

1.4.2.3 National Policies

The implementation of principles of National policy under section 13 is another major stride in promoting the realisation of human rights on an equal basis for persons with disabilities. There are quite a number of policies that have been adopted with the aim of guiding government that when implementing the Disability Act, children with disabilities should realise and enjoy their rights to the fullest and have equal opportunities like any other child. Some of these policies are:

> ➢ **National Policy on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2005**

The National Policy on the Equalisation of Persons with Disabilities was launched in 2006 and it aimed at promoting the rights of PWDs. Mainstreaming disability across sector ministries was the main recommendation in the National Policy on Equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities. This was intended to satisfy the requirement of inclusiveness as provided in the Disability Act 2012.

Accessing education and ensuring that CWD remain in school is a major challenge experienced by CWD and their families. Some of the challenges learners with disability accepted in mainstream classrooms face are; lack of specialist teachers who can teach learners with diverse needs, school environment is not conducive for learners who are deaf or blind;

there are inadequate instructional materials such braille. The other challenge is that most teachers do not have communication skills for communicating with learners who are deaf or blind, and this critical shortage of teachers with Special Needs Education affects the quality of education delivered to CWD.

> **National Special Needs Education Policy**

Having recognised the challenges faced by CWD, the Government of Malawi established Special Needs Education Policy to provide for special schools to carter for learners with visual and hearing impairment such as Chilanga School for the Blind in Kasungu District, Kaliwa (2006) cited in Munthali (2011).

However, the current legal framework and the policy is moving away from the special schools and is encouraging inclusiveness of CWD in the mainstream schools through the establishment of resource centers. It was viewed that such arrangement was encouraging or perpetrating social exclusion of CWD.

In terms of accessibility, the Act is encouraging construction of infrastructure that is accessible by CWD. Ministry of Education (MoE) has since issued directive that all new structures should be accessible to CWD or should be disability friendly (Interview with the Policy Maker form MoE).

> **National Policy on Early Childhood Development**

This is another policy aimed at promoting the rights of a child including children with disabilities. It was launched in 2006 and one of its guiding principles is that "Every Child has the right to develop to his/her full potential" and that "no child shall be discriminated or abused on the basis of age, sex, race, tribe, health status, economic status, religious or political affiliation in the provision of Early Childhood services". It is interesting to note though disability has not been included as one of the grounds for discrimination in the policy, but this does not defeat the purpose of the policy. A child with disability can still enforce the entitlement not to be discriminated on the basis of disability because of the constitutional non-discrimination clause, Section 20 of the constitution. This is because the constitution is the supreme law and any law or policy or Act of government that is inconsistent with the constitution shall be declared invalid to the extent of the inconsistency. All laws and policies have to conform with the constitution.

> **National Sports Policy**

It was launched in 2007, and it is one of the policies that adequately provides for CWD. The policy commits Ministry of Youth and Sports to ensure that all youths of Malawi have equal opportunity to participate in sports for personal and or community benefit. This policy enforces the equalization of opportunities by ensuring that Government is facilitating that sports is accessible to all persons regardless of age, sex, language religion nationality disability, birth or other status (Munthali et al. 2013). This is also non-discrimination clause that covers CWD. It also encourages inclusiveness in that infrastructure is modified to accommodate people with disabilities.

> **The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MDGS II) 2011- 2016**

This is a Government of Malawi development strategy which is supposed to inform all policies and strategies of government for the period from 2011 to 2016 (Munthali et al. 2013). Despite being such an important document that has priority areas that need to be addressed in terms of finance allocation, it does not mention anything regarding children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are not considered as a special group of children that need special strategies for development and protection from abuse, violence, neglect exploitation and harmful practices. Persons with disability are only mentioned under the social support and Disaster and risk management and the sub theme of the most vulnerable.

1.5 Assumptions of the study

The basic assumptions underlying this study include;

a)   Beliefs and attitudes

It is assumed that some of the contributing factors to exclusion and/or marginalization of a certain group of learners such as children with disabilities from inclusive educational cycle are related to socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes both at home, school and society in general. According to Munthali et al. (2013), prejudice, mockery and abuse take central part in treating children with disabilities negatively. In addition, there is an assumption in Malawi that children born with a disability indicates punishment from God. Such children are regarded as liabilities in the society and that are not worth investing in (Mariga et al. 2014).

b)   Economic attitude

Poverty status or limited resources of a country and/or a family is assumed to have a greater impact in the implementation process of inclusive education (Mariga et al. 2014).

1.6 Dissertation structure

The organization of my work will be in the following way;

Chapter two discusses a review of literature done in the field of special needs education and inclusive education.

Chapter three discusses the methodology used in carrying out the study. Important themes highlighted include; the study location, sampling technique, research design, target population, research participants and research instruments used.

Chapter four presents findings of the study basically from the interviews.

Chapter five gives a general discussion and interpretations of the findings in relation to the concepts and theory.

Chapter six provides conclusions from the discussions and suggestions for further empirical studies.

CHAPTER TWO: ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This section discusses the analytical framework that shows the current trends in what is going on globally in research, practice and policy in the area of inclusive education. This will help the researcher in discussing the findings of the study later in chapter five. The chapter is organized under the following themes; *Diakonia* in context, the concepts of transformation and empowerment, theoretical framework, local study context, inclusive policies, inclusive education in Malawi, teacher attitudes, parental attitudes, and the impacts of inclusion on other children in mainstream schools.

2.1 *Diakonia* in context

The major concern of *diakonia* is with people who are marginalized or are on the peripheral of the society whose justice and participation with others is denied. Therefore, it is on this reason that the concept *diakonia* must play its key role in such a situation in order to address the needs of such people based on the understanding that all human beings were created in the likeness of God and are valued equally despite their status, class or abilities (Gen… 1:27; Gal. 3:28; LWF 2013: 20). Again, this understanding of *diakonia* which is applied through the concept of inclusiveness is in line with the approach taken by Montfort Special Needs Education College which seeks to promote the access to education for the children with disabilities with regard to inclusive education. Therefore, having accepted the value of children with disabilities as being a reflection of God, then aspects of dignity and respect must also be looked into acknowledging that human differences are a potential, not a problem. Furthermore, the concept of inclusiveness empowers children with disabilities for renewed relations and responsibilities.

From a theological discourse, *diakonia* is defined, according to the Church of Norway Plan for *Diakonia* (Church Council 2007: 5) as "*the caring ministry of the Church. It is the Gospel in action and is expressed through loving your neighbor, creating inclusive communities, caring for creation and struggling for justice*".

In the diaconal perspective, the concept 'inclusiveness' aims at creating inclusive community or environment whereby all learners are looked at as the same despite their differences. Therefore, in education cycle all learners must also be looked at as equal because those with

and without disabilities are all created in God's likeness, for which reason they deserve equal rights (Gen. 1:27; Gal. 3:28).

One of the core principles of *diakonia* is human dignity as fundamental. Every human being regardless of his/her circumstances (disability, poverty and the like) need to be treated with respect and dignity. Addy (2011) argues that human dignity cannot be achieved if individuals are socially excluded in the mainstream society. Human dignity according to Addy is associated with people having a feeling that they can actively participate in shaping their own lives through having control and power in community activities. Moreover, lack of access to quality educational opportunities (inclusion) deprives individuals of their human dignity.

The social service systems provided by governments sometimes appear to be unequally distributed among the populations leading to some groups being marginalized or left out of the mainstream system. These groups most of whom are the minority are oppressed through unequal distribution of government opportunities and resources. There must be social cohesion if we need to protect societal inclusive values (Addy 2011; Addy et al. 2011).

Religious communities have for a long period of time worked with local communities particularly those that are disadvantaged in order to enhance human dignity through promotion of service delivery through developmental projects, raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and motivating national political systems to do justice to their citizens. Working on the principles of human rights provides an important framework of fostering human dignity and justice for all particular marginalized and excluded persons. *Diakonia* has a lot of emphasis on the care of individuals who are in need based on Christian faith as well as humanitarian values. This means that *diakonia* does not only work in spiritual environments but also in secular ones because the core responsibility is provision of care for those who need it. Dietrich et al. (2014) posits that non-discrimination is one of the human rights in provision of social services. Spiritual understanding coupled with understanding of the surrounding environment situations is important in the work of *Diakonia*. Serving those in need is equated to serving God (Mat 26: 34-46). Although improving the quality of services such as education and making sure it is accessible to those who are marginalized increases cost, it is a fundamental right that individuals have access to quality education. *Diakonia* therefore aims to incorporate spiritual values into social policy and community work (Schmidt, 2010).

2.1.1 The concept of transformation

According to the LWF, all human beings are vulnerable in one way or the other and as such need each other to journey towards the path of perfection. In our context, those in need of special needs education are vulnerable through their physical challenges and need to be aided to move out of the boundary line. One of the diaconal work's main tasks is transforming people in society especially those who are in the peripheral (the underprivileged or the disadvantaged of society). The church strives to transform the human situation and restore human dignity. This involves fight against injustices of various forms, which are dehumanizing and which have tampered with human dignity. This could be seen in the light of social change and development in society that leads to social cohesion and peace among human beings. It is thus a diaconal task to transform creation to a better and higher level as reflected in the Pauline letters when he admonishes believers "not to be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2). This transformation has to be shaped by the Gospel and values that are embedded in Sacred Scriptures.

In the light of education of the physically challenged, inclusive education needs to help them and transform their lives from their previous to better situations. Through special needs education which is also directly linked to empowerment, the human dignity of those physically challenged can be restored, and their lives risen to a higher level towards the journey of perfection which is every human being's desire. According to the Lutheran World Federation (2009: 43), transformation is:

> A continuous process of rejection of that which dehumanizes and desecrates life and adherence to that what affirms the sanctity of life and gifts in everyone and promotes peace and justice in society.

When it comes to transformation and the aspect of *diakonia*, transformation is described as an ongoing process of change. This process is in relation to total changing direction of life whereby mankind needs to be transformed. In this case, the principle behind transformation is to advocate against any dehumanizing acts that may seem to take away human dignity. In line with this discourse, all people who seem to be the actors in the education scene of children with special needs need transformation because in one way or the other they contribute either positively or negatively. For example, there are some parents, teachers, peers and societies at large who look at disability as something as a curse or punishment from God. On the other

hand there are other people when they have such children they see them as a shame, as a result they hide them. In such a scenario, such people are called to be enlightened in order to let them see these children as people with abilities just like others. Even these learners with disabilities also need to be enlightened in order to let them move from darkness to light (ibid: 44). They need to be transformed in their mind to see to it as a way of acting their abilities such as in sport activities and/or creative art in order to build confidence in them. Furthermore, transformation helps overcome what may be referred to as 'helpers' mind-set that causes disparity that separates the people with abilities from the learners with disabilities.

2.1.2 The concept of empowerment

The principle behind inclusion is to make children learn to be independent in a regular environment by interacting with typically developing children. This implies that rather than seclude them in isolated areas, they need to participate in social activities in inclusive environments. From a theological discourse, human beings were created in the image of God and who endowed them with varied abilities and gifts to do God's will (LWF 2009; Dietrich et al. 2014). God's work still continues and he continually empowers not only those individuals in leadership positions but also those who rarely have an opportunity to speak out. It is important for the faith-based organizations to help communities empower children with disabilities through giving them quality education. Viewed from this lens, Dietrich et al. (2014) argue that empowerment inspires individuals thereby enhancing their skills as well as their self-confidence. Abosi (2008) contends that empowering learners by developing their individual strengths and enabling them to participate is critical in the process of learning. From the *diaconal* perspective, the concept leans greatly on the biblical understanding of creation where the basis is on every man being created in the image of God with capacities and abilities, independent of their apparent social situation. While from the general perspective, the same concept according to McWinter in Jo Rowland (1997) in a counseling context is defined as:

> *The process by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community*

Rowlands feels that doing positive social construction empowers people by seeing themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions (ibid 14)

2.2 Ecological systems theory

Family immediate interactions and the social context forces have a great influence on children's educational achievement of children with disabilities as part of their normal developmental trajectories. Sontag (1996) cites Sailor (1991) who claims that conditions outside the school such as family poverty and the socio-political environment cannot be ignored when considering inclusive education. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory can help us understand and improve the teaching and learning of children with disabilities in inclusive environments. Bronfenbrenner constructed the child as an organism developing in a complex ecological context of numerous complex systems. To understand the multiple environmental complexities, Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides a hierarchical taxonomy of contexts that can enable us conceptualize environmental influences on developmental outcomes. The taxonomy consists of five hierarchical levels; microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. The researcher in this context does not explain in detail Bronfenebrenner's expanded ecological systems model. On the basic level, the microsystem level of this model consists of immediate family environments/settings where the child lives (Singal 2006; Xu & Filler 2008). Family circumstances such as parent concerns and sibling interactions are important influences here that are likely to impact on the child's development. At the meso level, there is interaction of two or more settings (Singal, 2006). This is usually an expansion of the social network of the developing child and includes the influences of the neighborhood, schools and peers. The exosystem does not involve the developing child directly (Tudge et al. 2009; Singal 2006). At this level, Tudge et al. (2009) provide an example of a mother who gets frustrated at work and fails to interact in a usual well with her son when she comes back home. The young boy doesn't go to her mother's work place but he is influenced indirectly. The macrosystem consists of the wider cultural, social and policy environment that include all the other systems (Singal 2006).

Singal (2006) argues that inclusive education can be viewed as development of systems; mainstream systems and of individuals such as teachers attitudes within mainstream schools. It is important to examine how the interconnectedness of the government, schools, classroom

and homes hinder inclusive education. Bronfenebrenner used the imagery of a developing child at the center of the systems. Singal (2006) used the classroom teacher at the center of the systems because teachers are responsible for determining the extent to which inclusion happens. The interactions that take place in the classroom setting therefore assume the microsystem. The linkage between students, other teachers and parents brings together several microsystems and the interactions form the mesosystem. The relationship between school policies and the wider community form the exosystem. The political, cultural, social and economic situations interact to give rise to Bronfenebrenner's macrosystem.

The implication of the theory is that children with disabilities develop in complex environments. Efforts aimed at implementing inclusive strategies must assess the interactions at multilevel contexts and how they are likely to impact on including children with disabilities in mainstream schools. A critical issue that researchers, policy makers and practitioners is to base school restructuring efforts aimed at inclusive education on the importance of children's home as well as the community ecology for instructional processes. Inclusive education cannot be understood in isolation of the family circumstances and the general society beliefs, attitudes and policy environment. Those involved in implementation of inclusive education need to understand the complexity of the environment and its influence on the growth and development of children whose developmental and educational trajectories are limited by their conditions related to disability.

2.3 Inclusive education policies

The awareness of individuals with disabilities is increasing; therefore, as a result of this teachers are increasingly faced with the challenge of teaching children with varying abilities. Within the discourse of inclusive education, many children who would have otherwise been placed in special needs schools are increasingly being enrolled in the mainstream schools (Florian & Linklater 2010). The understanding of how learners with disabilities should be educated has changed over the last two decades. Pijl et al. (2010) has pointed out that the way in which children with disabilities have been constructed educationally has dramatically changed and has become an interesting but challenging area of research, policy and practice. We have experienced a dramatic shift in policy regarding inclusive education and many countries are implementing policies that promote inclusion of learners with disabilities in regular/mainstream schools (Avramidis & Kalyva 2007). Smyth et al. (2014) argue that international conventions and treaties such as UN convention on the Rights of Disabled

Persons and the Salamanca statement have been instrumental in this respect - the Salamanca statement in particular emphasized the idea of inclusive learning for children with disabilities. Similarly, Miles & Singal (2010) argue that Education for All final statement provides an important international commitment of all nations to develop appropriate national policies and environmental conditions that ensure their citizens receive quality basic education for individual well-being and national development.

According to Hardy & Woodcock (2015), the issue of policy is a contentious one. Johansson (2014) argues that although governments may have ambitions policies for inclusive education, the policies have failed to address the issue of how children need to be included in schools. Ferguson (2008) argues that the main challenges facing countries is how to make inclusive education accessible to everyone. Some countries have well articulated policy instruments around this issue while others do not. Even countries which are thought to have well defined and articulated policies experience challenges in achieving inclusive learning environments. The situation is worse in countries that have had problems in developing coherent policies that promote inclusive education. These countries are bound to have more challenges to achieve the inclusive environments because of lack of enabling legislations. Hardy & Woodcock (2015) contends that it is more difficult to achieve inclusive education if policy environments for such an agenda are fragmented, incoherent and inconsistent. Inclusive education is possible but it should be developed in a system where those involved in implementing educational practices are adequately supported by sound policies that promote diversity at all levels. Coherent and supportive inclusive policies are essential for developing legal and environmental conditions for implicit inclusive educational practices.

For many decades, the basic assumption regarding the education of children with disabilities has been that they cannot be educated in mainstream schools (Pijl et al. 2010). Thus, a two track-system has persisted for many years with the majority being in the mainstream schools and those thought to have learning difficulties have been placed in special schools. But the emergence of sociological construction of education and disability seem to have turned things around and research points out that some types of special needs children can attend neighboring mainstream schools alongside their peers. Johansson (2014) assert that policies need to focus on moving beyond the two track-systems and adopt pragmatic strategies that are context sensitive so as to have successful implementation of inclusive education environments. Selvaraj (2015) argues that it is necessary to explore how polices and principles of inclusion are conceptualized and implemented. Successful implementation of

inclusive education goes beyond well-intentioned government policies and requires that the mainstream schools be provided with appropriate tools and support to enhance their capacity in handling diversity.

It is worthy to note that the process of developing inclusive educational arenas is complex filled with challenges as well as numerous opportunities (Hardy & Woodcock 2015). An important challenge for countries is to ensure learners with disabilities get a good education and develop their educational trajectories in a supportive environment with their peers in same environments.

For successful inclusive education, it is important for policy makers and implementers to look at the impending challenges and existing opportunities within their local contexts. Sustainable inclusion policies are those that are developed with an understanding of the local context in mind rather than adopting solutions from outside that most often do not work (Miles & Singal 2010). Johansson (2014) argues that there needs to be a sustainable contextual understanding of how children with disabilities should be educated within the framework of inclusive education.

2.4 Inclusive education in Malawi

Referring to the national policies presented in Chapter 1.4.2.3, there has been a countrywide concern for inclusion of people with disabilities especially children to be included in the mainstream services in Malawi. Though the phenomenon is newly introduced in the country, but much efforts are being reinforced by international and legal framework supporting the realization of rights to equal opportunities such as education of such people are being recognized.

Currently there has been a lot of researches conducted in Malawi to analyze situation of children with learning difficulties to identify the challenges they meet in their quest to realize their academic aspiration, but only a few applied to help inform inclusive practices (Loeb et al. 2004). In spite of the new educational policy reform (Itimu & Kopetz 2008), systemic inequalities, social injustices and exclusion continue to exist in Malawian schools. Therefore, in this regard inclusion in education aims to be involved in trying to bring fairness in the education system that can acknowledge injustices in schools, and thereby create a just environment for all learners despite their differences based on the fact that all are created in God's image.

Malawi has initiated major educational reforms aimed at achieving 'Education for All' agenda (Itimu & Kopetz 2008). Alongside these major reforms, there is a countrywide community support for the government's special needs education. Malawi's legal frameworks as outlined and funding initiatives are good indicators of the government's intentions to promote inclusive education. Curriculum changes and policy formulation are some of the government's commitments in this respect. However, there is little understanding on the implementation of inclusive education in Malawi. Missinzo (2009) argues that implementation of inclusive education is hampered by several factors including lack of understanding of the core functions of special and mainstream schools and the undefined relationship between the two tracks. Missinzo identified that teachers working in mainstream schools do not understand the work of those in special education yet they need to work together in order to make implementation of inclusive education easy. Joint efforts are necessary in implementing inclusive education.

Teacher training is critical in the implementation of inclusive education yet there are inadequate qualified tutors for inclusive education in colleges in Malawi. Although a government policy on special education was designed in 2001, no formal guidance has been developed on how to train personnel and expertise to help create and implement inclusive education practices (Missinzo 2009). There is no national university that trains special needs teachers at a bachelor level in Malawi.

2.5 Teacher preparation and teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusion

The main critical factor in the successful implementation of educational decisions at school level is the teachers in the mainstream schools (Avramidis et al. 2000; Thomson 2013; Pijl et al. 2011) and hence Pijl et al. (2011) asserts that their attitudes are therefore important in the implementing process. Research suggests that school teachers who hold more negative attitudes towards inclusion do not make efforts to learn and apply successful strategies that help learners with disabilities (Galović et al. (2014). Thomson (2013) claims that inclusion can only be successful if teachers show willingness and are able to implement the interventional strategies in their classrooms. Clough & Corbett (2000) strongly assert that there is need to develop teachers who are interested in enhancing the welfare of children with disabilities; teachers who love and respect children, those who can acknowledge and are ready to stimulate children use their knowledge and creativity. The central question is how are they prepared for this task? Avramidis et al. (2000) observes that teachers who are the personnel

for implementing any educational practices have to be receptive to the ideologies behind inclusive education and as such professional attitudes are important. Miles & Singal (2010) argue that it is not enough to address the issues of access and teacher training in dealing with inclusion but rather, it is important to deconstruct the values and beliefs held within the system.

Johansson (2014) in his exploration of Indian teachers understanding of inclusive education found out those inclusive schools covered a wider scope than the mainstream schools because they could accommodate a few more types of children. The impact of teacher experience on teachers' attitudes is not clear. Avramidis & Kalyva (2007) and Pijl et al. (2011) found that teachers in their early career had positive attitudes than those with many years of experience. Pijl et al. (2011) argued that negative attitudes exhibited by teachers with much experience indicate they grow stale and become rigid to change in their profession. However, Avramidis et al. (2000) studied teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. The findings indicated that teachers who had worked in schools implementing inclusion practices were more prepared to teach children with varying difficulties. This is due to the extensive hands-on experience they had acquired handling children with disabilities (Avramidis & Kalyva 2007; Avramidis et al. 2000; Leatherman & Niemeyer 2005). More interestingly, professional development showed to increase teachers' positive attitudes. Teachers with university degrees surveyed in this study had more favorable attitudes and were more proficient in meeting the needs of children with disabilities.

This clearly indicates the role of teacher training in achieving inclusive education. Pre-service training has shown to greatly change teachers attitudes towards disability and inclusion (Center & Ward 1987). Thus both initial and continued professional development could be important in changing teachers' attitudes which could result in successful implementation of inclusive education. Galović et al. (2014) and Avramidis & Kalyva (2007) argue that professional training of teachers could be important in shaping their attitudes. Practicing teachers in mainstream schools have reported they lacked prior training and experience with children with disabilities and indicated they were ill prepared to hand those children (Leyser & Kirk 2004). Campbell et al. (2003) surveyed pre-service student teachers on formal instruction combined with fieldwork experiences in regard to education children with Down syndrome. Student teachers showed stereotypes towards Down syndrome and disability in general at the start of the term. The findings at the end of the term indicated that the student teachers had tremendous understanding of Down syndrome with increased favorable attitudes

on inclusive education. This is in line with Leatherman & Niemeyer (2005) finding that both prior knowledge and classroom experience for in-service teachers contributed to their positive attitude toward inclusion. Further, student teachers had reported changed attitudes in towards disability in general and had increased interaction with children with disability. The authors concluded that information-based instruction combined with practical fieldwork is critical in teacher training

Attitudes towards inclusion are influenced by the nature of disabilities. Teachers have shown to approve some children with specific types of disabilities to be included in the mainstream schools but view others as less possible for inclusion. Teachers are willing to include children whose conditions do not require extra instructional or management efforts (Center & Ward 1987). In their study, Hastings & Oakford (2003) found out that student teachers rated learners with emotional and behavior difficulties to have more negative influence on teachers and other children than children with mental disabilities. As such, student teachers held negative attitudes of learners with emotional and behavior problems than those with mental difficulties (Pijl et al. 2011; Hastings & Oakford 2003; Avramidis & Kalyva 2007). It is important to note that although this is the case, government policies seem to have a huge influence on teachers' attitudes. Bowman (1986) citied in Avramidis et al. (2000) observes that teachers had more positive perceptions of who to be included in countries with policies requiring inclusion.

Pijl et al. (1997) states that there are several factors that influence teaching of children with disabilities in regular schools including; availability of time, teachers knowledge and skills, instructions methods, teaching and learning resources and most importantly the attitudes of teachers. Clough & Corbett (2000) contends that the most key issue is to evaluate the physical and social environment and make decisions on what needs to be modified to ensure inclusive practices are possible. Mitchell (2004) posits that more efforts are required to adapt the school physical environments and provide mainstream schools with necessary services and support. Similarly, Frederickson et al. (2014) assert that the implementation of inclusive education can be successful if the environment is adapted. Re-organization of the environment, resources, and instructional adaptation can help in this sense. Teachers and parents emphasized the key role of financial and physical resources in implementing inclusive education (Frederickson et al. 2014).

2.6 Parental attitudes and participation in inclusive education

The agenda of inclusive education is not a responsibility of schools or the government alone. Mitchell (2004) suggests that holistic efforts need to be taken by the whole society to make it a reality by encouraging inclusive practices from educators, researchers, parents, the general community and the government. The whole communities need to be mobilized and encouraged to work together as a whole in supporting this noble course of inclusive education. Children whether with disabilities or not come from families – it is important to examine closely what parents think about disability and inclusive education as this could give policy makers, school administrators and teachers a good point of departure in helping children with disabilities. Pijl et al (2010) reviewed literature on parental attitudes towards inclusive education. The findings indicated that the attitudes of parents ranged from neutral to positive. It is important to note that parents had negative attitudes towards children with mental and behavioral difficulties compared to other learning difficulties. Interestingly, parents with typically developing children were more positive than those of children with disabilities as they viewed inclusion as a good opportunity for their children to accept differences. In this case, typically developing children are those children who seem to look not disabled. Contrary, parents whose children are disabled did not see inclusion a solution for their children. These parents held concerns about their children's emotional development in regular schools, instruction quality and the services available. Typically, one would expect opposite results with parents of children with disabilities to be more supportive of inclusion. Based on these findings, Pijl et al (2010) suggest strong coordination between schools and parents. Thus, inclusive education needs joint efforts from all stakeholders in the society.

The social and academic benefits of inclusive education are very important for all children regardless of their circumstances. Although parents have varying understanding of disability, there is a clear indication that a reasonable proportion would prefer to enroll their children in the mainstream schools so they can participate socially with their peers (Pijl et al. 2010). However, these children continue to face significant difficulties fitting in mainstream schools. Parents are concerned about their children being in mainstream schools because they are less accepted by peers and do not develop meaningful friendships. Pijl et al (2010) points out that there is less empirical work to explain these behaviors. Leyser & Kirk (2004) examined parents' perspectives of inclusive education issues in the United States who had a child with disability. It was found out that parents, who strongly supported inclusion, identified potential social and emotional outcomes as its benefits. Social acceptance and attitudes of

teachers and other parents was the only concern for most parents in this study. These parents shared an opinion that special needs education teachers were better prepared to teach children with disabilities. On inclusive education, some parents thought it was still good for children to be placed in special schools while others favored mainstreaming. Parents with younger children, children with mild disabilities and those with post-secondary education had more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Interestingly, parents whose children were in mainstream schools have negative attitudes on inclusion compared to those whose children were not. Parents' level of education also influenced their attitudes – those with college/university education perceived inclusive education to be beneficial as compared to those with secondary school education.

Frederickson et al. (2014) examined pupils', parents' and teachers' perspectives on inclusive initiatives in UK. In this study, all respondents regarded social and academic merits of educating children with disabilities in regular schools. Teacher collaboration is essential in changing attitudes. Sharing staff expertise and values is necessary in change of attitude in an inclusive setting. Organizational element of inclusive education seems to be a barrier for teachers. They experience difficulties in planning, timetabling and in curriculum organization. Both teachers and parents in this study singled out proper planning, preparation and effective systems of communication as important elements. Frederickson et al. (2014) claim that well established and supported communication channels between parents and schools provide possibilities for good working relationships that results into shared objectives as identified by parents. It is important for teachers to work together with other stakeholders such as school administrators and parents. Leatherman & Niemeyer (2005) identified that although teachers successfully implemented inclusive practices in classrooms, they clearly indicated that the support they got from school administrator, resource persons and their pre-service training was central to successful inclusive environments. Further, teachers suggested that family involvement was important in implementing inclusive practices. Parental involvement is a critical issue for inclusive education. Parents with or without children with disabilities need to be involved actively in mainstream school activities that enhance inclusion. Pérez Carreón et al. (2005) argue that it is important to address parents concerns in a productive manner by engaging their life experiences and cultural capital they have to inform implementation strategies for inclusive education.

Some parents have reported concerns of the academic achievement impact of inclusion with claims that educating children with disabilities impacts negatively on the achievement of

typically developing children in those schools. Farrell et al. (2007) studied inclusion and achievement in inclusive schools in England. They did not find any substantial evidence that inclusion impacts on academic achievement in schools. They conclude however, that it is nonetheless important not to assume that inclusion has no effect on academic achievement and school teachers and policy makers need to ensure local conditions are monitored carefully. Some teachers still hold the opinion that it is not possible to include children with disabilities in mainstream schools and their needs are better met in special needs schools because their inclusion could lead to possible negative influences on the mainstream children and classrooms. Kalambouka et al. (2007) investigated the effects of inclusion of learners with disabilities on other children. The findings suggested that there were no significant effects. The authors suggested that inclusion is possible since learners with disabilities do not have any impacts on other children in the mainstream schools. This is however true for primary schools. Studies on secondary schools have indicated a negative influence of inclusion on learners without disability. The authors suggested that it is a little easier to achieve inclusion agenda with primary education than in secondary education.

Learners with disabilities have reported academic more than social benefits (Frederickson et al., 2014). An important and critical element that has not been explored extensively in special education as well as inclusive education is children's (both with disabilities and those developing normally) own perspectives. The voices from these young groups who are the main stakeholders in education are rarely heard and taken seriously. Morton et al. (2013) suggest that continuity in inclusive education can be attained if children's views about schooling are taken into consideration both in policy, research and practice. If children will still be rendered voiceless, they will continue to be excluded in the mainstream education

2.7 Chapter summary

Current trends in research, practice and policy on inclusive education have been discussed here. Coherent and consistent policies have been identified as important in the implementation of inclusive education since they make it position for legal and environmental conditions that support the inclusion agenda to be created. Other important factors include teacher preparation, environmental adaptation, resource availability and attitudes of both teachers and parents.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter highlights important stages and decisions made at specific points in regard the methods used in conducting the study. The chapter is coherently segmented under different headings. The main headings include: Research design, research site, target population, sampling procedures and the sample size, data collection instrument, procedures for data collection and analysis, and logistical and ethical issues. The section closes up with a short summary of the chapter.

3.1 Research design

In any kind of investigation, participants and investigators construct their social and cultural surroundings in diversified ways from their individual points of reference. According to Magilvy & Thomas (2011), the way individuals perceive their environment and give meaning to different aspects can be influenced by many factors such as culture, environment.

Exploratory qualitative case study was used to conduct this study because the researcher was interested in exploring issues and presenting them in a narrative manner. The rationale behind the choice of a qualitative case study was to explore the phenomena under investigation in an exhaustive manner by analyzing the perspectives of the participants. The researcher wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex social dynamics that influence programs - in this case, inclusive education (Yin 2014). Stake (2005) cited in Creswell (*2007: 73*) defines case study research as *"[...] a choice of what is to be studied (i.e., a case within a bounded system)."* Furthermore, Stake (2005) acknowledges three components or types of case studies as follows; *"the intrinsic, the single instrumental and the collective/multiple"*, and he distinguishes them by intent of each case (ibid). In this case, this is a collective study. According to Mukherji & Albon (2010), the purpose of a case is to develop a thorough or deep understanding of an issue being examined. Accordingly, Denscombe (2007) argues that case studies help investigators dig deeper into the problems of given circumstances in order to know how the relationships and social processes work rather than their outcomes. Therefore, in this study, fewer cases were used because the researcher's concern was to go in-depth searching for more understanding on how strategies can be implemented to improve education for children with disabilities and make equally accessible to all learners. Montfort Special Needs College was used as a case to establish the intervention measure being put in place for

inclusive education. Ten teachers from the selected schools were interviewed to gain an understanding of how inclusive education is being implemented.

3.2 Research site

The research was conducted at Montfort College, Montfort Demonstration Primary School and Mary View Special School situated approximately 45 km away from Blantyre City as explained in Chapter 1.3 and in four primary schools of Blantyre District Urban. Blantyre is one of the twenty eight districts in Malawi. According to population and housing census preliminary results projected and compiled by National Statistical Office, the total population for Blantyre City was 661,444 (NSO 2008).

 The investigator decided to collect data in the sites mentioned above because that was where participants experiencing the issue or problem under study could easily be located and could provide relevant data for the study (Bryman 2012; Denscombe 2003; 2007).

3.3 Target population

To achieve the intended objective of the study, the following groups of people and institutions formed the population for the study;

According to Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) of Department of Education (2014: 33), the total number of registered learners in Blantyre District (Urban) in the school academic year 2012/2013 is 180,662. Out of these figures, 1,151 were children with disabilities (ibid). Reported by the official from Blantyre District Education Manager's office, there are 32 SNE specialist teachers in the 58 of 112 primary schools in Blantyre Urban (Telephone interview on 8/02/15). The researcher's target population was therefore all learners and practitioners in all the institutions in Blantyre District (Urban). This does not mean the findings of the study represent the whole district but rather to the reader an understanding of the area. The researcher was not interested in making generalizations.

3.4 Sampling procedures and sampling size

3.4.1 Sampling procedures

Purposive sampling was used to select research participants for this study. Although, the participants were drawn from different subgroups, the research did not use stratified purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is employed when the researcher is interested in obtaining

individuals who understand the phenomena being investigated and can provide needed information (Miles and Huberman 1994; Creswell 2007; Denscombe 2007). The investigator was interested in getting the right individuals who "*have experienced the phenomenon, and can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomena in the study*" (Creswell 2007:300).

3.4.2 Sampling Size

Due to financial constraints and other logistical problems, it is not possible to study all learners and institutions in particular region (the whole population). Researchers always try to find means of obtaining individuals who can represent the target population. The researcher therefore used a few cases within the larger target population to respond to the interviews hoping that the findings would reveal some general patterns that might occur in the entire target population.

A total of 28 participants formed the sample size for the study, which belong to five different categories. The interviews were conducted from 24 June to 18 July, 2014.

See below abbreviations and the tables of the research participants

Abbreviations to represent participants who were interviewed in the field are as follows;

- Head teachers from schools with learning difficult resource centers will be represented by HT1 and HT2
- Head teachers from schools without learning difficult but with a resource center by HT3 and HT4
- A teacher from Montfort SNE College was represented as MCTR
- A teacher from Montfort SNE Demonstration primary school by MDTR
- A teacher from special needs primary school by TRSS
- Teachers from primary schools in Blantyre with Learning Difficult Resource Center by BTTR1 and BTTR2
- Teachers from primary schools in Blantyre without learning difficult resource center by BTT3 and BTT4
- Policy Maker from the Ministry of education by PM1
- Policy Maker from the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare by PM2

- Children with disabilities from primary schools with Learning Difficult Resource Center by CWD1 and CWD2
- Children with disabilities from primary schools without Learning Difficult Resource Center by CWD3 and CWD4
- Children without disability from primary schools without Learning Difficult Resource Center by CWTD1 and CWTD2
- Children without disability from primary schools with Learning Difficult Resource Center by CWTD3 and CWTD4
- A child from a special needs primary school by CWDSS
- Parents of children with disabilities in focus group discussion by PCWD
- An official from Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) by FDM
- The official from Blantyre District Education Office in this case has not been given any code.

Table 1: Number of Head Teachers interviewed in sampled primary schools with special needs learners in schools with and without learning difficult resource centers

Name of Head Teacher	Female	Male	Total
HT1	1		1
HT2	1		1
HT3		1	1
HT4		1	1
	2	2	4

The total number of head teachers who were interviewed from 4 different sampled primary schools in Blantyre district.

Table 2: Focus Group Interview parents

Interviewees	Female	Male	Total
Parents of children with disabilities	2	2	4
	2	2	4

A total number of 4 sampled parents of children with disabilities were interviewed.

Table 3: Number of Teachers interviewed at Montfort College and sampled primary schools with special needs learners in schools with and without learning difficult resource centers

Name of teacher	Female	Male	Total
BTTR1		1	1
BTTR2		1	1
BTTR3	1		1
BTTR4	1		1
TRSS		1	1
MDTR		1	1
MCTR		1	1
	2	5	7

The total number of 7 sampled teachers was interviewed at Montfort SNE College, Montfort Demonstration primary school, and Mary View Special School and in other primary schools in Blantyre.

Table 4: Interviews conducted with officials from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, and Federation of Disabled People Organization in Malawi (FEDOMA).

Organization	Female	Male	Total
Ministry of Education (PM1)		1	1
Ministry of Gender (PM2)		1	1
District Education Manager's Office (Blantyre)		1	1
FEDOMA (FDM)	1		1
	1	3	4

Table 5: Number of learners interviewed in the sampled primary schools with and without special needs from schools with and without learning difficult learning resource centers.

Name of school and learner	Female	Male	Total
CWD1	1		1
CWD2		1	1
CWD3		1	1
CWD4	1		1
CWTD1		1	1
CWTD2		1	1
CWTD3	1		1
CWTD4	1		1
CWDSS		1	
	4	5	9

3.5 Data collection instruments

The researcher was interested in exploring the existing patterns within the sample size and presents the finding in a narrative form. The appropriate instrument for this kind of study was therefore an interviews and focus group discussions. The aim of choosing this method was to get in-depth understanding of issues. Semi-structured interview guides were developed for different participants in the study. In addition, a focus group discussion guide was developed for parents of children with disabilities. The researcher used semi-structured interviews because he could probe for more information from the interviewees by asking auxiliary/follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews were to give the investigator enough room to ask or more information (Bryman, 2012; Creswell 2007; Denscombe 2007). The idea was to look for stories and experiences that could illuminate greater understanding

of social reality in relation to disability and inclusion. A part from the semi-structured interviews, the researcher also used one focus group discussion. Four parents participated in the focus group. McCraken (1988; 122) cited in Creswell states that *"for a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews [...] with as many as 10 individuals"* Denscombe (2007) argues that focus groups are important in stimulating participants who are shy to talk. In addition, they also motivate individuals to expound on the ideas that others have already presented.

3.6 Procedures of data collection

Almost eighty percent of data collection in this study was done through key informant and rigorous focus group discussions with teachers, officials from the government ministries, a local non-governmental organization, children with disabilities in all the schools visited and parents of children with disabilities. Classrooms were selected to be peaceful and quiet places to conduct all the interviews and the focus group. The investigator had to visit two government and one non-governmental organization officials in their respective offices. In some cases, special need teachers were used to help in the interpretation of questions and answers to help children comprehend and answer the question satisfactorily.

As explained in 3.3, the investigator also used telephone call to book for and conduct an interview with an official at the District Education Manager's office asking for additional records of learners and teachers from the schools under study. On the one hand the telephone solved the problem of meeting directly with the interviewee who had a busy schedule and could not find time to meet one on one with the investigator. On the other the investigator could not see the informal communication that normally occurs in a face-to-face conversation and the telephone calls were expensive.

Data collection was done in two phases (the period of conducting interviews already given on 3.4.2). The first phase involved interviewing head teachers, teachers, parents and children in their respective schools. The first group to be interviewed was that of the head-teachers followed by the teachers. Then the group of pupils followed after all teachers were interviewed. Finally the focus group discussion with parents was held.

The second phase involved interviews with policy makers (ministry representatives and non-governmental officials). Government officials from the ministries of Education, Science and Technology; and of Gender Children, Disabled and Social Services whose part was to

represent policy makers were interviewed to find out more about the stand of the policies on disability in Malawi as far as education for people with disabilities is concerned. The last person to be interviewed was the official from FEDOMA - umbrella organization for persons with disabilities whose mission is to unify, coordinate efforts and strengthen the advocacy work of its affiliates for the wellbeing of persons with disabilities in Malawi. For the additional information, as explained above, the telephone interview was made with an official from the District Education Manager's office whilst here at the college. The idea was to find out its achievements in advocating for people with disabilities in Malawi, and also see to it if there are some legal provisions that the organization uses which advocates for inclusion of special need children. The researcher used recorded all the interviews and focus group using a mobile phone.

3.7 Data analysis process

The researcher first transcribed the data from the mobile phone using paper and pen every day after the interviews to enable him remember the content of the conversations. After all data was transcribed, they were read over and over again so as to identify the main themes running through. Reading the data several times also ensured that the process of coding was easier. All data were coded and main themes pulled out and presented in chapter 4. The researcher then discussed the finding in chapter five. The discussions and interpretation were done in relation to the study objectives and questions.

3.8 Research ethics

The study was conducted in a private and confidential manner and all the important research ethical principles were observed (Bryman 2012). The investigator felt it necessary to ensure the study was conducted in an honest and accountable manner. Lofland et al. (2006) *cited in* Strauss & Corbin (2008: 30-31) argues that, "*One of the central obligations that field researchers have with respect to those they study is the guarantee of anonymity via the 'assurance of confidentiality.'*

The researcher informed the interviewees that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at anytime if they felt threatened (Bryman 2008). Furthermore, I guaranteed them that the collected material would be for academic purpose only and that a high level of confidentiality will be maintained. This was to avoid harming the participants (ibid: 118). The investigator acted as a participant and not a judge

with the intension to share their experiences. He had to observe and respect the boundaries bearing in mind the research ethical integrity and respect for their rights.

In the case of young children, informed consent was sort from parents orally. Parents had no problem giving consent for their children's participation because the whole research project had been explained to them and they were very enthusiastic to participate. This could be because they are interested in improved conditions for their children.

3.9 Limitations of the study

The fact that the researcher managed to go to the field for data collection and got the needed information does not mean that he did not face challenges. The first challenge was that, even though the researcher had sampled some schools and participants, to find teachers at their work places to be interviewed were also a challenge because a good number of them had gone on a holiday whilst some were tied up with their personal issues. Secondly, the study was also affected by exorbitant bus fares. Third, there were some pupils who failed to express themselves during the interview sessions, especially those with communication problems and the mentally challenged. To solve this problem the researcher had to seek help from a teacher and a parent with sign language skills (skills required of interpreters to convey the message to and from people with and without communication challenges). Finally, the researcher met some resistance from one of the interviewees who strongly demanded to be given allowance (money) at the end of the interview for the time he had spent in providing information. Fortunately enough, the head teacher of that school came to the researcher's rescue.

3.10 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the methodological aspects of the study. The qualitative case study was used to examine the nature of the issues under investigation. Several institutions and participants were purposefully selected and approached in order to provide relevant information to the research objectives. The collection of data was done through different following ways, literature review, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussion. Later on data was analysed, and finally, research ethics was considered.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The investigator in this chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings have been extracted from the interviews with parents, teachers, children, government officials and non-governmental organization. The chapter is organized under several themes that have been carefully extracted from the data. The investigator extracted themes which are directly related to the overall aim of and objectives of the study. They thus respond directly to the research questions raised earlier in the introductory chapter. Themes presented include; teacher preparation – initial training and continued professional development, creating awareness of disability and inclusive issues through workshops, workshops, advocating for increased resource supply by government and the role of other stakeholders. Thereafter, some factors which hinder implementation of inclusive education as a means to improve access to education of learners with disabilities are also discussed.

4.1 The general perspectives about the concept of inclusive education

Participants had varied understanding of the concept of inclusive education. This was expected because inclusive education is a new phenomenon that is being introduced advocated for in Malawi and as such it is possible that some people do not know what it is all about. Besides, social reality is constructed by individuals in their own social and cultural understanding influenced by previous experiences. Even those teachers who have been teaching for long do not fully understand what inclusive education is as illustrated by this quote:

> *To be honest, I have been teaching for so many years but this issue of inclusive education is new to me. All along I had the perception that when learners with and without special needs are mixed in the same class that is inclusive education. I did not know that when you talk about inclusive education it means it is a process which aims at addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through participation in learning either at school or at home. It is just recently when I have come to know about this (Interview with BTT4)*

However, children with disabilities had a different view. Their understanding of inclusive education is derived from the importance of inclusive education for children with disabilities. They show appreciation of the value of inclusive education. One of the disabled learners (wheel chaired) also felt it good to learn together with typically developing children. This is

mainly because she felt she was being supported by her fellow learners in a mainstream school. She had this to say:

> *I appreciate the support I do receive from my fellow classmates. They push me to class, toilet and sometimes even when I go back home. I do not know what could have the situation been like if I were going to a school with disabled fellows only (CWD2)*

The head teacher from one of the schools presented his concern after he has been receiving several complaints from some teachers in his school saying because they do not have skills of teaching special needs learners therefore they are failing to meet the expectations of those learners with special education needs as such he felt that these learners are excluded in the learning process. He however sees a problem with teacher training and suggests for curriculum reform so that special needs courses be made mandatory in teacher training institutions. He is quoted saying:

> *I have been receiving complaints from teachers in my school that it is difficult for them to tell whether the child has understood the lesson or not because they were not trained in special needs education. It is high time special education program was made compulsory in teacher training colleges in order to make all teachers in schools feel comfortable teaching all learners equally (HT3)*

These were just some of the experiences some participants had about inclusive education.

4.2 Role of Montfort Special Needs Education College and inclusive education

4.2.1 Training Special Needs Education teachers

Montfort College is the only teacher training institution in Malawi that trains primary school teachers in special needs education. It does not have enough capacity and therefore does not train enough teachers to cater for the needs of children with disabilities countrywide. The research participants in various institutions expressed the need for enhanced capacity for teacher training across the country. They felt that one of the best intervention measures in regard to the implementation of inclusive education is to train more special needs teachers. One participant made this comment in regard to teacher training:

> *In order to be successful in inclusive education I feel it is good to train many teachers because they create conducive learning environment for all learners in schools, their encounter with learners with disabilities make them feel loved since these children always feel lonely and moody. Teachers also are good at empowering and informing parents of children with disabilities on issues concerning their children. Frankly speaking I commend the good job done by Montfort College for offering special needs education. We need more of these colleges in Malawi if we are to deal with the problem of exclusion in schools (HT2)*

Teacher training is important because it shapes teachers attitudes and equips teachers with adequate knowledge and skills in interacting with children with disabilities. One teacher from Montfort College now working in Montfort Demonstration School had this to say when he was asked how he feels and what is interesting him being a special needs teacher:

> *I am very proud to work with children with disabilities because they have potential as anyone else on that they require special attention and support. I feel like the government and other concerned stakeholders should provide more funds to train more special needs teachers if we want in our country to have inclusive education. It is possible to have disabled children in regular schools if in those schools there are more special needs teachers who can handle these children (MDTR)*

From the above excerpt, the participant emphasized the role of the government in providing funding for teacher training. In addition, the participant thinks that inclusion can be possible if there are special needs teachers in mainstream schools to support children with disabilities. This finding is in line with previous findings presented in the analytical framework.

4.2.2 Creating awareness of disability and inclusive education through workshops

My experience with parents of learners with disabilities during the focus group discussion gave me an opportunity to hear more about how the college is doing in creating inclusive environment for all learners mainly how it makes schools, teachers, peers, parents and communities understand inclusive education. When the parents were asked to comment on the best appropriate interventions used as a means to improve education for these learners, they mentioned about three areas which the workshops help to address. These include; the issue of rights and change in attitude.

4.2.2.1 Learners with disabilities' rights

It is important that we all commit ourselves in protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. Like any other normal/typical person, they have same rights that need to be promoted at all cost. Montfort College has been on the forefront in creating awareness in the community about the rights of people with disabilities. The workshops held by the college have proved to be important as illustrated by this comment form one parent:

> *The workshops that are being organized by the college every now and again, in conjunction with other concerned stakeholders, enable schools around and far and wide, teachers, peers, parents and communities to be aware about many issues of disabilities of which previously were just taken for granted as we were clinching to traditional beliefs which forced us to look at our children as useless (PCWD)*

Still on the same issue, some teachers found these awareness campaign workshops as helpful modes of mediation between those who do not know anything about disability rights issues and those who are familiar such that when they share the knowledge inclusive education can easily be understood and hence be promoted. Here is what one of the teachers had to say:

> *Sometimes we tend to wonder why some people for example our fellow teachers fail to recognize and respect the rights of these children even though they are disabled and yet we all know that every human being has the right to education and that these children are entitled to equal treatment. However, the workshops are really helping because we can share our understanding and experiences about disability. Eventually, change will come (Interview with MDTR & BTTR1-4)*

4.2.2.2 Awareness campaign

Individuals with disabilities have largely been stigmatized in the society because of their conditions. Awareness campaigns which are always being organized by Montfort College and other concerned stakeholders seem to be helpful as they totally condemn the issue of stigma. One learner with disability commended by saying:

> *I have noticed a change here at school and even at home. Previously, we were called by names such as imbeciles and that we do not know anything therefore we were not accepted to mix up with those who are normal. This change has come maybe because the school tells our peers that being human we are equal with those without disabilities (CWD1).*

Teachers felt the same and suggested for more efforts to make sure that the issue of stigma in regard to disability is addressed. The teacher from Montfort SNE College explained the importance of conducting workshops with several schools, teachers, peers, parents and communities by saying this:

> *We know that these individuals have been stigmatized in homes, communities and in schools. Even parents in communities also stigmatize their children because of their status. Therefore, by organizing and extending invitations to these workshops, we want to sensitize everyone who is around these children (learners with disabilities) regard them as any other normal human being. We tell them that disability is not inability. Sometimes we invite notable persons with disabilities who have excelled with education to come as resource persons and talk to them (MCTR)*

4.2.2.3 Change in attitude

The participants in the study expressed their concerns regarding attitudes towards learners with disabilities that need to be challenged. This is because traditionally, individuals with disabilities have held a very low status in the society. The attitudes held against them are not favorable because they have been perceived as lesser beings not capable of doing some tasks. However, the workshops seem to be changing people's attitudes as explained by this parent:

All along when I could see a disabled child I had the perception that he or she could not do better at school and therefore there was no need to send him or her to school because I could ask myself who would waste his or her precious time teaching him or her? But having attended such workshops my attitude towards these children has changed and I even encourage my fellow parents to change their attitudes and start sending their children to school (Focus Group interview with one PCWD)

Change in attitude is not only aimed at parents but to teachers as well. Research has indicated that teachers have negative attitudes towards children with disabilities. One teacher from a regular school without learning difficult resource center confessed that:

Since I attended the workshop which was organized by Montfort SNE College my attitude towards learners with disabilities has been transformed. Previously when I could be approached by either a specialist education teacher or an itinerant teacher to offer my services to such learners I could boldly tell them that that was not my area of specification. Right now I consider these learners just as equal as those without disabilities. Sometimes I even regret why I behaved in such a way (BTTR4).

In addition to the already given sentiments, one teacher from a special needs school also contributed by saying:

In the first place I appreciate what Montfort College did to me. I was trained as a special needs teacher and I am always very happy to see that the attitudes of teachers from mainstream schools in my zone where I normally visit so as to have some lessons on inclusive education have changed tremendously. Previously they were not interested in having such lessons and our relationship with them was sour. They were reluctant to help special needs learners and whenever we could ask them to do so they would not mind about that (TRSS)

Inclusive education is about change in attitude. For a long period of time, it was believed that children with disabilities cannot be educated in regular schools and had to be placed in specially designed schools. This attitude is slowly changing and through such workshops, inclusive education will be promoted. One of the participants had this to say:

Honestly speaking our college is trying as possible as it can to encourage many schools to include learners with and without disabilities in their daily learning activities and participation in schools' programs. The college emphasizes much on the inclusion of learners with special needs because they are neglected in many areas of life either at school or homes. The idea is also to make them feel they are one and equal. At this institution, we even encourage trainee teachers to put this into practice wherever they will be assigned to work (MCTR)

4.2.3 Lobby for increased funding and supply of instructional resources

The government has been reluctant in allocating adequate funds to strengthen inclusive education by restricting mainstream schools, teacher training and enhancing the capacity of already practicing teacher through continued professional development courses. Montfort College is thus lobbying for the ministry of education and other stakeholders to increase

funding and supply of teaching and learning resources in this respect. A teacher from Montfort College said this:

> *Our College has been appealing to the government and other stakeholders to supply special teaching and learning material for children with disabilities in schools as a means to improve their access to education. It is very pathetic to hear that in many schools learners with disabilities especially those with sight problems 'we call them visual impaired' are complaining about sharing one text book with normal learners. Of course, it is good that they learn together but the fact that a learner with a sight problem shares a text book with a normal learner does not make him or her meet his or her need. For instance, we have been receiving stories that in other schools such learners get support from well behaved peers who are normal by reading books for them or sometimes even coping notes for them. This is why our college is trying as much as it can to ask the government and other well-wishers to supply enough teaching and learning materials in schools. I do not condemn the idea of helping learners with learning difficulties, but what I am saying is that books for such learners need to be enough and more money must be allocated to institutions like ours (MCTR)*

Working together as a group towards a common objective is important for community projects. There must be strong partnerships in the community. Making inclusive education a success does not require one entity doing the work alone because it is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers which hinder children's learning as such all levels that help education to be accessible to all learners need to be improved. One participant observed that:

> *It is not the responsibility of Montfort College alone to train special needs education teachers in order to make inclusive education a success, but rather all learning institutions should have policies which do include needs of learners with disabilities. I commend what Montfort is doing working in partnership with the government and all other concerned stakeholders in trying to promote education for all learners even though its main focus is on special needs education (FDM)*

4.2.4 Research on emerging issues

Another important invention which the college is carrying out to improve access to education for children with disabilities is carrying out of research in emerging issues such sign language and curriculum reform among other issues. Research is one of the core aspects of understanding social challenges that face humanity. Inclusive education and the strategies of implementing it are not well known. There is need for more research to help understand how inclusive education agenda can be achieved. One participant form Montfort College supported the College's effort:

> *Suppose the government intends to develop curriculum, the ministry of education in conjunction with Montfort College make sure that the reform meets the needs of children with disabilities. The college acts as a watch dog to see to it that the curriculum has all what is needed for learners with disabilities. Apart from that the college conducts research to see to it that whenever there is a new introduction of sign language elsewhere it keeps on researching*

and sees to it that the newly introduced sign language is adaptable to suit learners with disabilities in Malawi (MCTR)

4.3 Factors that hinder implementation of inclusive education

Having noted interventions Montfort College is carrying out with regard to inclusive education in order to improve access to education of children with disabilities, there are some factors which inhibit implementation of inclusive education. These include Individuals (teachers, peers, parents and community), lack of political good will, culture and attitudes. These are general factors and are not directly linked to Montfort College. However, the college considers these factors as having a great impact on the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

4.3.1 Individuals (teachers, peers, parents and community)

These form important parts of the society that interact with children on a day to day basis. Their actions and inactions either promote or hinder inclusive education efforts.

4.3.1.1 Teachers in schools

Oftentimes teachers in some schools have been in the fore front discouraging learners with disabilities from accessing education in the same manner as those without disabilities through their comments and attitudes toward such learners. As one learner expressed her concern:

> *Whenever I fail to answer correctly when a question is paused to me this teacher calls me imbecile and my answers are considered to be imbecilic. This causes me not to be interested in answering questions and I am always afraid of this teacher (CWD4)*

Another special needs learner also raised her complaint about how some teachers behave to learners with disabilities when they approach them if they need some help:

> *Whenever we seek for assistance from some teachers if those whom we are used to are not available during that opportune time, they tell us to go and wait for them because we do not speak the same language. Because of this we feel isolated and put off (CWD2)*

The head teacher from a one school commented in support of those learners with disabilities to show that she is aware about how some of her fellow teachers act towards learners saying:

> *I am always shocked when I hear during the staff meetings that disabled learners are complaining that there are some members of staff who tend to discriminate them whenever they are being approached. What they forget is that these children are important learning resource the only thing which we teachers are supposed to do is to just encourage them. What I do in my classroom is that I pair them with those who seem to be more knowledgeable by doing this has proved to be effective because I see them having confidence and courage. This is why they like me not because I am the head teacher. If all of us teacher do likewise I am*

quite sure we can change the situation. I always try to ask my fellow teachers to try build the spirit of corporation amongst all teachers and learners alike (HT3).

Another aspect related to teachers is that there are inadequate teachers with adequate competence to handle children with disabilities in mainstream schools. An official from Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) expressed her lamentation as follows when she was asked to comment on the failure to enough advocating for inclusive education in many schools in the country:

> *My organization is trying a lot to advocate for inclusive education so do other stakeholders, but the challenge is that we have limited specialist teachers in schools. We appreciate what Montfort College is doing, training many teachers in special education but we still appeal the government to train more teachers because we do receive a lot of stories about exclusion in schools (FDM)*

4.3.1.2 Peers

Another challenge that has also been given as a contributing factor to the implementation of inclusive education is peers in schools. During the interviews several comments were made on the same as follows:

> *We have been receiving complaints from our trainee teachers whilst in teaching practices and monitoring follow up visits about learners with learning difficulties complaining in various schools that their fellow learners bully or tease them. Worse still they are sometimes even being given different names or badly commented on. Such being the case we have strongly spoken against this during the workshops with different schools, teachers, peers, parents and the communities at large. Sometimes we are being invited in different schools as resource persons to speak about several issues concerning disabilities as such we warn teachers and learners about making bad comments and giving learners with disabilities bad names (MCTR)*

The same sentiments were shared by one learner who has a disability:

> *Some of our fellow learners discriminate against us. While others talk bad about us (CWD1)*

4.3.1.3 Parents and community

During the workshops and short courses parents and community leaders have been taken as partners in promoting inclusive education, but this has sometimes turned out to be the opposite. As this has been observed by some participants during the interviews:

> *There are some parents who tend to discriminate their own children because of being disabled, whilst others do not accept such children. Sometimes they do not send them to school instead they lock them up in homes (TRSS)*

> *Several times we have intervened in situations where parents have been reluctant to send their disabled children to school because they are ashamed of them; whilst other parents feel that their children cannot excel with education because of being in such condition (MCTR)*

What I have been observing is that many parents do not escort their children to schools or even take them back home after school because of this we have been experiencing a lot of absenteeism of learners with disabilities (BTT4)

4.3.2 Lack of political good will in policy implementation

Like in many other developing countries, there is no government commitment in implementing basic policy instruments. A policy cannot be implemented if adequate resources are not provided. In the case inclusive education policy implementation, teachers needs to be trained and their capacity enhanced, mainstream schools need to be restructured and assistive devices provided for learners with disabilities yet the government is so reluctant in investing in this important area. One participant had this to say in regard to lack of political will in Malawi:

I hope you may agree with me that sometimes lack of political will in a country inhibits implementation of access to education for learners with disabilities because it kills the morale of making progress. Besides, the issue of political will and policy implementation often times go together. If in a country there is no sound policy to adopt inclusive education, definitely it will be a challenge to convince others of the value of inclusion-related issues in education. As such, it just becomes a mere song. Furthermore, if national governments fail to fulfill political obligations to provide equality education for all at the same time fail to implement and/or supervise it effectively definitely this is going to hinder the intended purpose (PM2)

Quite a good number of respondents showed their concerns about the issues of limited materials and finances as being among the many factors that hinder children with disabilities from accessing quality and/or equal education in their various schools. The comments were as follows:

The issue of quality education for children with disabilities or inclusive education to be a success requires the availability of enough resources both in monetary and human forms. In order to have more specialist teachers in the field of special education, money is needed. To have supportive devices for these learners money again is needed. These are the needed locally available resources if at all the implementation of either inclusive education as a policy or any program which has to do with disability is to be yielded. I can tell you that these are the biggest challenges that have rendered the policies to be less effective (PM1)

The issue of up-grading teachers' qualifications is also another big challenge which requires finances. Most of them find their own means of up-grading themselves. My institution is also swimming in the same problems of funding. The provision of funding from the government is not sufficient (MCTR)

We try to use other means to make lessons a success such as improvisation but still these improvisations need finances. The government provides a monthly grant of K39, 132 (799 kroner) for the resource. We are failing to perfect our delivery to learners with disabilities because we do not have motor cycles for mobility during home visits, no computers for remedial lessons and storing documents, no calculators for simple calculations and for buying toys. All this stuff needs money (MDTR)

4.3.3 Culture and negative attitudes

There are some cultural beliefs that make it difficult for parents to bring their children in inclusive settings as indicated by this excerpt from one participant:

> *I cannot mention the name of a family which has a learner here who is albino. This family heard the rumor which was going on around that there is a belief which says once a person who is HIV positive sleeps with a girl child who is albino he becomes negative afterward. This story made them not to send their child to school for fear that one day it may happy to their daughter. I tried to reason with them and became successful and as I am talking with you right now the child is back to school. But my question remains, how many people who have heard about the same story elsewhere and have not been told that this is just a rumor have managed to send back their daughters to school? (HT4)*

> *Up to date we still have some beliefs in our communities which say that suppose someone has given birth to a disabled child or children they believe that that disability has come as a punishment from God for the sins the parent had committed in the past as such they do not sent the child to school (PCWD)*

Implementation of inclusive education can also be affected by negative attitudes of some individuals from the general society, school or home. As this was observed by some participants:

> *I am a living example. When my child suffered cerebral malaria she became critically ill. After some time she was unable to speak. I stayed for a couple of months with her in the hospital and when we were discharged she stopped talking. It took her a year to stabilize though not fully because as I am talking to you now she is disabled. Many people some of them are friends and relatives had negative attitudes toward my child. While others felt it was not worth investing in her educationally for being disabled. But by the grace of God she is doing her standard eight now and is doing very fine. What if I had taken what they were telling me, could she go that far….? (PCWD)*

> *Our organization has intervened in most cases in communities where we got stories about some families having a boy and a girl who are both disabled in a family. In such cases parents could opt to send disabled boys to school hoping that they would excel and/or marry but not girls who were regarded as just liabilities at home. While other parents still feel that investing in education for disabled children is just a waste of money. It is better that money should be spent on learners without disabilities because they are thought to be more productive and could contribute to the families, societies or nation (FDM)*

> *Whenever my school organizes Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, parents of children with disabilities are urged not to have negative attitudes toward their disabled children may be because someone has talked negatively about them. They are urged not to be discouraged because being disabled does not mean to be unable to do something. Sometimes names of those people who are disabled but have done wonders because of education are being recited to them as role models (TRSS)*

4.4 The role parents, teachers, community and peers in implementing inclusive education

4.4.1 Parents

Parents are important stakeholders in the schools system and they need to be motivated to take an active role so that their children have good experiences in the schools. They need to support their children at home and in school. One way of supporting children is to provide for their needs and helping them with school tasks when they come home. One mother of a disabled child who uses wheel chair gave her remark to express her supportive effort as follows:

> *I have nothing to worry about my daughter's situation apart from being very supportive to her here at home and even at school. I accepted what God has decided on my child. Being a Christian, I have no doubt that his will shall be done because I have a good example of some women who are also disabled but they have gone far with their education and why not my daughter? Despite the fact that I am a single parent with a very big responsibility of taking care of my children and my old mother, still I manage to take care of my disabled daughter by making sure that before she goes to school I prepare everything for her in relation to school. Sometimes I escort her to school and also pick her back home. Often times her friends bring her back home as they knock off. They play together at school and even here at home. I also encourage her to look at herself the way how her friends are. Sometimes late in the afternoon, I assist her in doing her assignments (PCWD)*

Knowing for sure that she is a girl child, the mother went further explaining:

> *I know that one day she will grow up and becomes a woman and even get married. As such, I teach her some social issues in order to prepare her for the future. I teach her how to cook, wash clothes for herself, etc… (PCWD)*

Since she is a Christian and a God fearing mother of Roman Catholic Church, she says she does the following for her daughter:

> *I teach her to always fear the Lord and trust in him. I always encourage her not to be in despair. I tell her to accept what she is. Whenever she is fine, she goes to Church every Sunday (PCWD)*

The head master of one of the primary schools in Blantyre commended the work parents do in his school by saying:

> *Parents of children with disabilities play a very great role in their children's education because we always look at them as our partners. We listen to each other and by doing that we increase the chances of children doing better at school. You know what? They feed us with more information/history about their children (HT3)*

4.4.2 Teachers

Solomon Ortiz, an American Politician once said that "*education is the key to success in life, and teachers make lasting impact in the lives of their students*". However, in the process of impacting these learners, teaching requires a lot of management of students both inside and outside the classroom, and therefore, teachers need to create conducive atmosphere for

teaching and learning through which skill and/or knowledge is to be imparted to all learners. Several teachers had this to say in order to show how important they are implementing interventions with regard to inclusive education as a means to improve access to education for children with disabilities:

> *Sometimes I am chosen to be a resource teacher to go to neighboring primary schools especially those with resource centers to assist learners there (TRSS)*

> *As specialized teachers in special needs education frequently we share with our fellow teachers who were not trained in special needs education some techniques how they can handle learners with disabilities in schools (Interview with BTTR2)*

> *We always advocate for inclusive education either during the workshops which we organize with schools or when we visit train teachers for assessment (Interview with MCTR)*

4.4.3 Community

It is not the responsibility of the school or teachers and parents alone to advocate for inclusive education and/or promote education for children with disabilities, but also the community at large. During the focus group discussions with parents of children with disabilities, they acknowledged the work well done by well-wishers organizations by saying:

> *We thank the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA) and the Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) for enhancing Community-based rehabilitation programs which empower disabled people mainly advocating for inclusion of all learners in education. Because of these programs the community is propelled to eliminate challenges which learners face at home and school especially those with disabilities (PWD)*

4.4.4 Peers

Despite the fact that sometimes peers tend to cause disruption to education of learners with disabilities, however, a good number of teachers appreciated the role these peers play in promoting inclusive education. The following teachers explained as follows:

> *When children with and without disabilities are put together especially when they are in class or outside the classroom doing different activities and sharing ideas, mainly learners with disabilities seem to be empowered because most of the times they look shy and moody (Interview with MDTR)*

> *Like in my class, I mix these children together especially those who seem to be less intelligent with those who look brainy. The response always is that by the end of each and every exercise those who looked weaker some changes are being noticed in them (BTT4)*

> *We have quite a good number of learners with disabilities here. We see them coming in the morning and even when going back to their various homes they are being carried or helped by those without disabilities. This is a clear manifestation that these children are concerned about their friends' situation and that they value them a lot. In class, I have seen some pupils helping their friends coping notes (BTTR1)*

CHAPTER FIVE: GENERAL INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.0 Introduction

The researcher in this chapter presents the general interpretations and discussions of the findings in order to answer the research questions. The themes adopted directly address the research questions raised in chapter one so that Chapter 5.1 seeks to answer research question one, 5.2 research question two and 5.3 research question three.

5.1 Intervention strategies used by Montfort SNE College to promote inclusive education

The findings of the study indicate that the college has and continue to play an important role in Malawi in the area of special needs and inclusive education. The main areas the college is involved directly are; teacher preparation and advocating for inclusive education in Malawi.

5.1.1 Teacher preparation

Quality education is an important aspect of any society and countries around the world are heavily investing in this area. Education has been identified as a critical driver of economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of societies. We are living in knowledge societies and as such countries want to build strong societies that are able to compete globally. The extent to which a country delivers quality education to its citizens depends on whether it has quality implementers of the educational policies and practices. Teachers have been identified as the most important implementers of education practices at the school level. Hence, for a country to ensure that there is quality education, it must first ensure it has a pool of qualified teachers. The findings of the study indicate that both parents and teachers appreciate the role played by Montfort College in training teachers so that they can help implement inclusive education in Malawi. This finding resonates well with Avramidis et al. (2000), Thomson (2013) and Pijl et al. (2011) who have pointed out that teachers are very important in implementing educational decisions in schools and they should be well trained to do so. It is important to stress however that the college has been in existence for a long period of time yet practicing teachers have reported that they lack skills in handling children with disabilities. There are two possible explanations for this trend.

First, those teachers who have reported that they don't have competence to handle children with disabilities have been trained in other colleges and universities that do not offer special needs education. Leyser & Kirk (2004) argued that these teachers who have no prior training

to teach children with disabilities face many challenges when they are required to teach in an inclusive setting. Similarly, Leatherman & Niemeyer (2005) demonstrate that prior knowledge and experience with children with disabilities increases teachers' positive views about disability and inclusion. The researcher argues that there is a great need to redesign teacher curriculum in colleges that do not offer special needs courses. Special needs courses need to be integral of teacher training so that teachers are prepared to accommodate diversified group of learners including those with disabilities. Curriculum change could help prepare teachers who are prepared to handle children with different abilities. Adequately trained teachers are well informed of the needs of children with disabilities.

Secondly, if those teachers have been trained by Montfort College then the quality of teacher training curriculum needs to be questioned. In addition, it could be that these teachers are new in their career and lack confidence or they have many years of experience in mainstream schools and are not ready to implement the new changes of inclusive education. This view of rigidity in implementing educational changes is shared by Pijl et al. (2011). Consequently, Avramidis et al. (2000) demonstrates that inclusive education can only be possible if teachers are receptive of the ideologies behind it.

Teacher preparation both initial and continued professional development is important because it has shown to change teachers' attitudes towards disability and inclusive education. This argument is shared by Center & Ward (1987). Perhaps, continued professional development courses could be arranged for already practicing teachers who have reported they lack competence in teaching children with disabilities because they might not have had prior experience with or training to handle children with disabilities.

The researcher argues that both children with disabilities and special needs teachers should be integrated in mainstream schools. These teachers can be important resource personnel particularly for mainstream school teachers who have inadequate competence in teaching. Teacher training curriculum need to link theory and practice. This means that student teachers need to have practical work experience in inclusive schools with the help of specialized teachers so they can learn from them. From my own experience as a school teacher, student-teachers are usually sent out on internships for a very short time that do not give them enough time to get enough experience.

5.1.2 Advocating for inclusive education

Montfort SNE College is playing an important role in advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities particularly the right to education. There is limited societal understanding of rights that individuals with disabilities are entitled to and as such many children are out of school because of their circumstances as a result of disability. They do not have access to education and other social services like their typically developing persons. It is important to ensure that there is a general understanding of disability in Malawi and that individuals with disabilities are accepted and regarded as important players in the society as recognized in international conventions. Munthali (2011) supports this assertion that individuals with disabilities, their rights particularly the right to education is enshrined in international conventions that call for individuals to lobby and advocate for quality inclusive education. For example the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) sets a standard to which Malawi has chosen to be bound. However, having the rights of children with disabilities enshrined in international treaties and national policies does not in itself lead to protection of their rights. Good programmes for individuals with disabilities go beyond ambitious policies and require government and community commitment to a common course of action. Johansson (2014) posits that governments have failed to provide quality education to individuals with disabilities despite having well grafted policy frameworks.

Education is the most powerful means of empowering children with disabilities. As a country and community, we need to be committed to empower children particularly those who are in need. Empowering individuals who are in need such as those with disabilities, is one of the core principles of diaconal work in communities. From creation, God empowered every human being with different abilities that need to be developed adequately. Dietrich et al. (2014) observe that God created all of us in his image and endeowed us with varied capabilities which need to be developed to the fullest. Abosi (2008) argues that it is important to empower children by developing their abilities through education.

5.1.3 Research and lobbying for increased financing and supply of instructional resources

Research is important in any field. We are living in a rapidly changing world and for us to adapt, we must discover new knowledge everyday so as to solve the challenges facing us. In a knowledge society, research leads to innovation and new ways of doing things. As noted earlier in this work, inclusive education is a new phenomenon in the education field and needs

to be studied further. Montfort College is actively involved in small scale research activities seeking to discover new innovative ways of how inclusive education can be implemented. Research findings could be used in improving social policy and programmes for children in need. Schmidt (2010) argues that it is in the spirit of *diakonia* to incorporate spiritual values and social policy reforms in their community work.

Besides doing research, the college is working together with ministries particularly the Ministry of Education to challenge the government to allocate more funds towards the implementation of inclusive education. Restructuring mainstream schools to accommodate a diversity of learners needs additional funding.

5.2 Negative factors that influence the smooth implementation of inclusive education

The study identified several factors that hinder the government's efforts in achieving inclusive learning environments in Malawi. The factors identified are discussed below;

5.2.1 Inadequate qualified teachers to implement inclusion

The findings of the study have indicated that Malawi as a country does not have enough teachers trained prepared for inclusive schools. As noted earlier, Montfort is the only College that trains primary school special needs teachers in the whole country even though some teachers are also working in secondary schools. Teachers acknowledged the good work done by Montfort in training teachers but suggested that the government should do more by opening up other similar colleges so that enough teachers are trained to teach in inclusive schools. The issue of inadequate special needs teachers could also be attributed to the fact that the country faces a shortage of qualified tutors in colleges (Missinzo 2009). If a country lacks tutors to teach in colleges then there is reduced capacity for those colleges and they cannot admit many student-teachers. There is need for the country to focus on developing academic staff that will help develop many qualified teachers.

Surprisingly, there is no national university in Malawi that offers special needs education (Missinzo 2009). This means that Malawi does not train special needs teachers at a bachelor level. Teacher training colleges in Malawi do not have the capacity to train teachers at this level. They only have the responsibility of training at a diploma level basically for primary schools.

5.2.2 Inadequate funding from the government

Although the government is committed to implementing inclusive education through its ambitious policies, the findings show that the level of funding is still low. Policy makers, parents and teachers suggested that if the government is willing to make inclusive education successful then there must be substantial funding to the education sector:

> *The issue of quality education for children with disabilities or inclusive education to be a success requires the availability of enough resources both in monetary and human forms. In order to have more specialist teachers in the field of special education, money is needed (PM1)*

> *Our College has been appealing to the government and other stakeholders to supply special teaching and learning materials for children with disabilities in schools as a means to improve their access to education. It is very pathetic that to hear that in many schools learners with disabilities especially those with sight problems are complaining about sharing one text book with normal learners (MCTR)*

Frederickson et al. (2014) found out in their study that teachers and parents strongly advocated for increased financial and physical resources in mainstream schools to increase their capacity for inclusion. Educational policies cannot be implemented if there are no resources. Resources are required in teacher preparation as well as offering them continuous professional development courses, workshops and seminars so that they keep on updating themselves with current issues in the education sector. In addition, teachers indicated that schools lacked necessary resources to help implement inclusive education:

> *We try to use other means to make lessons a success such as improvisation but still these improvisations need finances [...] we are failing to perfect our delivery to learners with disabilities because we do not have motor cycles for mobility during home visits, no computers for remedial lessons and storing documents, no calculators for simple calculations and for buying toys (MDTR)*

Inclusive education needs additional teaching and learning materials needed by children with disabilities as well as typically developing ones. Pijl et al. (1997) argued that adequate instructional resources are needed to make teaching and learning possible in schools. Apart from instructional resources, the environment needs to be adapted for children with disabilities. The way mainstream schools were designed makes mobility of children with disabilities difficult because they were designed for typically developing children who have no issues with mobility. This is in line with Clough & Corbett (2000), Mitchell (2004) and Frederickson et al. (2014) have argued for adaptation of the physical environments in

mainstream schools to ensure children with disability do not encounter many environmental obstacles. Additionally, instructional strategies need to be adapted as well so that they are tailored towards the needs of all children in a friendly environment where everyone feels valued.

On the one hand the cost of providing education to citizens is expensive. On the other hand, education is a basic right of every citizen.

5.2.3 Culture and attitudes towards disability

Culture should not be ignored in implementing some community programmes. Culture defines who we are and sometimes embeds us in some retrogressive practices. The way disability and individuals with disability have been viewed is culturally and socially constructed. It is difficult for instance to implement inclusive education in a culture where disability is seen as s curse and families lock children with disabilities in houses.

Learning difficulties associated to disabilities are socially and culturally constructed. Culturally, children with disabilities are regarded as bad omen in the Malawian context hence people generally have negative attitudes about them. For a long period of time, children with disabilities were hidden in the house not to be seen because they were a disappointment to families. The findings of this study indicate that there are both negative and positive attitudes about disability. However, the situation seems to be improving. The positive attitudes expressed by some parents could be attributed to the increased understanding of disability, advocacy crusades and the increased global interest in promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities. Pijl et al. (2010) agree that the perception of children with disability has changed and as such, Florian & Linklater (2010) have observed that many children with disabilities are now being enrolled in mainstream schools. On the increased global interest, Smyth et al. (2014) and Miles & Singal (2010) points out that international conventions have motivated countries to develop local policies that promote the rights of individuals with disabilities especially the right to education. The negative attitudes could be attributed to lack of understanding of disability and human rights. This is in line with previous studies that have pointed out both negative and positive attitudes among parents and teachers about disability and inclusion.

The negative attitudes of parents towards disability reported by one participant in this study resonate well with several findings highlighted in chapter two.

[…] When my child suffered cerebral malaria she became critically ill. After some time she was unable to speak […]. It took her a year to stabilize though not fully because as I am talking to you now she is disabled. Many people some of them are friends and relatives had negative attitudes toward my child. While others felt it was not worth investing in her educationally for being disabled (PCWD)

Pijl et al. (2010) found that parents of children with disabilities were very negative about inclusion and did not see it as a suitable solution for their children. Similarly, Leyser & Kirk (2004) found out that parents had negative attitudes about enrolling their children in mainstream schools as they believed teachers in these schools were not well equipped to handle their children. They also had concerns about their children's social and emotional adjustment in the mainstream schools and as such, they maintained that it was still better for their children to be enrolled in special schools. This could be an indicator of lack of adequate understanding of the numerous advantages of educating children with disabilities in mainstream schools with their peers. Children with disabilities interviewed in this study were very positive about their inclusion in mainstream schools basically because they received a lot of help from their friends who could for example push them on wheel chairs around the schools and also back to their homes. This is also an advantage of enrolling these children in schools that are close to their homes because they could probably not be helped by their peers that much if the school was far away. Although not covered in this study, teachers have also reported negative attitudes about disability and inclusion.

The issue of culture and negative attitudes towards children with disability negates the value of human dignity. Every individual should lead a dignified life regardless of the situation and circumstances they find themselves in. The focus on human dignity within the society has been a central theme within the work of *diakonia*. By having negative attitudes towards children with disabilities, the community marginalizes them and fails to accord them with the respect and dignity they deserve. Addy (2011) has argued from a diaconal perspective that human dignity cannot be achieved if individuals continue to be marginalized in their own communities. Children with and without disabilities should be treated in the same manner without discrimination. Non-discrimination in the provision of services to individuals is an important aspect of fostering human rights and hence human dignity (Dietrich et al. 2014). The principle of non-discrimination stands central in the work of those involved in *diakonia* projects. They work in both religious and secular environments because they serve humanity without discriminating individuals based on their faith, race, color, and the like.

5.3 Society collective efforts in implementing inclusive education – parents, government, teachers, peers etc

It takes a village to raise a child. This African proverb summarizes the main findings under this theme. To contextualize the perceptions of the research participants, it is important to say it takes a society to educate children with disabilities if we are committed to ensure they have access to quality education. Participants in this study claimed that it is not the responsibility of one stakeholder to implement inclusive education but rather, support must come from all corners of the society to make inclusion a reality. Community collaboration in educational matters is important to ensure everyone gets quality education regardless of the circumstances they are in. Mitchell (2004) suggested for holistic efforts from the society to ensure people work collectively for the successful implementation of inclusion. It is argued that there must be strong links from the government to families so that the whole society can commit itself in ensuring children with disabilities are accepted and enrolled in mainstream schools. Carreón et al. (2005) have pointed out that parents usually have concerns about their children with disabilities. These authors have suggested that parents need to be involved at all levels of inclusive education decision making so that their concerns are addressed and their knowledge and experience used to inform implementation processes.

Parents in this study strongly supported inclusive education and are very supportive of their children. Same parents personally take their children to school in the morning and pick them up in the evening. At home they support them in every way.

> *I have nothing to worry about my daughter's situation apart from being very supportive to her here at home and even at school [...]. I manage to take care of my disabled daughter by making sure that before she goes to school I prepare everything for her in relation to school. Sometimes I escort her to school and also pick her back home (PCWD)*

One head-teacher also commended parents for the strong partnership particularly by feeding schools with adequate information about their children. Frederickson et al. (2014) have argued that there must be strong collaboration between schools and homes with clear communication channels to make it possible for all parties to have a clear understanding of the goals and objectives of inclusive education. Consequently, the authors perceived family involvement in schools activities as being critical to the achievement of inclusive education agenda. It is argued that families are important stakeholders in children's education and as such, they should always be motivated to take an active role.

The findings revealed that teachers play the role of resource persons not only in their respective schools but also in the neighboring ones to help children with disabilities

> *Sometimes I am chosen to be a resource teacher to go to neighboring primary schools especially those with resource centers to assist learners there (TRSS)*

This is perhaps an important finding in this study. Teachers trained in special needs are ready to be used as resource personnel in their neighboring schools. This indicates there is need to integrate special needs teacher in mainstream schools so they can help those teachers who are not trained in special needs education and thus lack adequate understanding of how to support children with disabilities learn in the best way possible.

Drawing on Bronfenebrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, individuals develop in complex environments. The relationships and interactions between the individual and the environment affect the developmental outcomes. These relations and interaction begin at home and expand through the neighborhood, schools community and the general policy and political environment. Community collective responsibilities in working towards one common agenda – inclusive education could bear fruits. Singal (2006) equates inclusive education to development of systems that are interrelated. Understanding the relationships between parents, schools, communities and the government is critical in the ensuring that inclusive education is implemented smoothly. At the macro level, the government's role in policy formulation and enforcement, funding and the like determine to a large extend whether the inclusive agenda will be a reality or will remain a hypothesis. At the micro, meso and exo levels, it is critical to create awareness of inclusive education and disability rights because lack of understanding and negative attitudes impedes inclusive strategies. Parents' as well as teachers' negative attitudes need to be deconstructed.

According to the Lutheran World Federation, diaconal works has a threefold mission which are; Reconciliation, Empowerment and transformation. Through empowerment which in our context has to do with inclusive education, this diaconal activity can help to build children with learning disability, capacities such that they can be able to better their lives and human dignity. According to (Alaszewski et al, 1999), empowerment can be defined in general as *"the capacity of individuals, groups and or communities to gain control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, thereby being able to work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives"*. Empowerment should therefore lead to complete transformation of lives of the kids with learning disabilities. Given the threefold mission of the church as we have highlighted above, for transformation,

reconciliation and Empowerment to take place, inclusive education must be taken seriously as a diaconal task. It is through it that the lives of these disadvantaged learners can be changed. Transformation in our context here should involve the following people:

- Children with learning disabilities; Inclusive education as we have been explaining should be able to Transform their lives so that they have the same opportunities as the other kids in the schools and also have equal opportunities with employment opportunities after schooling.

- This transformation brought about through inclusive education, should be able to bring transformation to the parents too who have a negative attitude towards kids with learning disabilities or who have negative perceptions.

- Teachers too have to be transformed through inclusive education so that they can know how to handle the already fragile kids with care and help them to be able to move along without any problems with the other kids.

- The peers or classmates of children with learning disabilities too ought to be transformed in their ways of viewing and relating with those with learning disabilities. Inclusive education should be able then to transform them so that together the learning process can go smoothly.

- Lastly, the whole community needs transformation. The community has its own negative perceptions about children with these learning disabilities. With the help of inclusive education, the whole community's perceptions should be able to change positively.

If these levels of transformation we have highlighted above are achieved, then that will fulfill the threefold mission of *diakonia* as Reconciliation, Empowerment and Transformation as recorded in *Diakonia in Context* as the Mission of the church.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the investigator presents a summary of the key findings from the study. Conclusions drawn from the findings in regard to implementation of inclusive education are also presented. At the end of the chapter, indications for further research in this area are highlighted for those who are interested in specializing in this field of study.

6.1 Summary and findings

This study sought to explore the challenges that Malawi face in implementing inclusive education. The researcher was interested in finding out the intervention measures that Montfort Special Needs College has put in place in regard to implementation of inclusive education. Twenty eight participants were interviewed and six primary schools were included in the case study so as to have a clear understanding of what is really happening on ground. The major findings of the study were;

Montfort SNE College is involved in teacher training as one of their intervention measures aimed at promoting inclusive education environments. This is a positive intervention because teachers are key drivers and implementers of education at the schools level. They largely determine whether inclusive education will succeed or not. However, the college does not have the capacity to train many teachers and as such, Malawi still has inadequate qualified teachers trained in special needs education.

Montfort SNE College is involved in carrying out small scale research projects to help increase the understanding of how better inclusive learning environments can be created. Research is continuously becoming important particularly now that humanity is faced with grand challenges that need practical solutions. These solutions could be derived from research activities that will lead to innovation of news ideas.

Montfort SNE College holds workshops to create awareness on disability rights, campaigning against stigmatization and change in attitude. In addition, the college lobbies for more funding and supply of instructional materials from the government and other developmental stakeholders.

The impediments in implementing inclusive education included inadequate trained teachers, negative attitudes from teachers, peers and the general community, and lack of political will in funding inclusive education projects.

Hence, inclusive education cannot be achieved by the government alone – it can be achieved through collective responsibility of families, communities, schools, developmental agencies and the government. Partners are key entity in promoting inclusive education.

The study points out that Malawi has a long way to go in implementing inclusive education agenda despite being a party to international treaties that obligate to ensure the realization of the recognized human rights. In addition, Malawi has incorporated the rights of individuals with disabilities in its main legal documents such as schools curriculums and the constitution but it seems that the government and politicians do not have the good will of serving humanity with respect and maintaining their dignity. Individuals with disabilities need to be empowered to stand and defend themselves by giving the quality education.

There is a great need to reform curriculum, particularly that of teacher training. Teachers need to get some general forms of education at the colleges so they can deal with varied cases of children in mainstream schools. Special needs courses should be included in teacher training curriculum and be made compulsory. More important, there needs to be more concerted efforts in raising community awareness regarding disability and the right to quality education.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

This is an area that needs to be explored through wide scale research projects. It will be a good idea first to have reliable statistics of how many children with disabilities are there in Malawi and how many are in educational establishments. Another area of research would be to explore the role of other developmental agencies in the educational sector particular in creating awareness and promoting inclusive education. Finally, an exciting area that needs to be explored in depth is governance of education and policy issues in Malawi. This seems to be a neglected area that is very important for a country that really needs to invest in education for national prosperity.

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Appendix

Part A

INTERVIEW QUIDE FOR HEAD TEACHERS AND ORDINARY TEACHERS

1. Do you have learners with special needs here at your school?

    Yes: ____   No: ____

    If No, why?

2. Have you ever been trained on how to teach learners with special needs?

    Yes: ____   No: ____

3. If yes, how are your skills helping the learners?

4. What type of support do you receive in teaching these learners and from whom?

5. What are the challenges that you are facing when delivering to these learners?

6. Which ones of these challenges can you address by yourself here to change the status quo and how?

7. Which ones of the challenges need external support; from who and how?

8. What can make teaching children with special needs easier and interesting?

9. What are the challenges that the learners are experiencing in their trying to access education at this school?

10. Amongst these challenges, what can you, the community where the children are coming from and them do to resolve these challenges?

Part B

INTERVIEW WITH A TEACHER AT A SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL

1. How do you feel being a special needs teacher?
2. What is interesting in teaching special needs learners?
3. How is this institution helping these learners in moulding their future?
4. Do you have enough rehabilitation, teaching and learning resources?

   Yes: ____   No: ____
5. If yes, who provides them to you?
6. If no, why are there few resources?
7. If you have fewer resources, how do you manage to teach using these resources?
8. What support do you receive as a special needs teacher?
9. What more support could you use to perfect your delivery to these learners and from whom?
10. What challenges do you face as a special needs teacher?
11. Which of these challenges can you resolve by yourself and how?
12. Which of the challenges need external support to resolve them and from whom?

Part C

INTERVIEW WITH ANY PERSONNEL AT FEDOMA

1. What is FEDOMA?
2. What are the mission, vision and objective of FEDOMA?
3. What does FEDOMA do to achieve these?
4. Which stakeholders does FEDOMA work with in these strategies?
5. Can you mention legal provisions that FEDOMA uses which advocate for inclusion of special need children?
6. Which of these do specifically advocate for inclusive education?
7. Who are your stakeholders in advocating for inclusive education?
8. How much are these benefiting special needs learners?
9. What are the challenges surrounding the implementation of these?
10. What can you do to address these challenges?
11. What can the nation at large do to improve the welfare and the environment of special needs learners? Specify role stakeholders.

Part D

INTERVIEW WITH POLICY MAKERS

1. Do you have policies that make special considerations for children with special needs?

   Yes: ____   No: ____

   If yes, state them

2. Which ones amongst these were deliberately and specifically designed to carter for the well-being of young learners with special needs?

3. Within the confines of these policies, what are the provisions that make it easier for young learners with special needs to access quality services that can spur them to achieve more academically?

4. Are there particular special learners who are disadvantaged than the others in the implementation of these policies?

   Yes: ____   No: ____

   If yes, who are these?

5. And why are they?

6. What could be done to address the needs of this group?

7. What are the needed locally available resources if at all the suggested strategies are to yield?

8. What are the successes that have been registered after the implementation of these policies?

9. What are the challenges that have rendered the policies to be less effective?

10. What are the recommendations for these challenges?

11. What other strategies can be used to support young learners with special needs using the same minimal resources you have?

12. Who do you need to partner with to achieve this and why?

Part E

INTERVIEW WITH SPECIAL NEED LEARNERS OF DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

1. What do you want to achieve through education?
2. What motivates you?
3. What type of support do you receive and from who?
4. What more support would you need to achieve more and from who?
5. What do you think is impossible for you to reach for in life and why?
6. What are the challenges that you are meeting in your schooling?
7. Which of these challenges can you resolve on your own and how?
8. Which of these challenges can your family, village or the community where you live help you to resolve and how?
9. What other people do you think can help you attain the future you desire through education and how?
10. How have you managed to reach this far in education?

Part F

INTERVIEW WITH LEARNERS WITHOUT DISABILITIES

1. What is your thought about disability?
2. How do you understand the term 'Inclusive Education'?
3. What are the challenges do learners with disabilities meet in their schooling?
4. What is your relationship with learners with disabilities at this school?
5. What type of support do you give them in and/or outside the classroom?
6. What more support do you think they need to be given and by whom?
7. What challenges do you encounter when learning together with them?
8. How can you advise learners who seem to discriminate against learners with disabilities at this school?
9. What challenges can your village or community where you live help resolve them and how?
10. What other people do you think can help learners with disabilities attain future they desire through education and how?

Part G

INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

1. What is your thought about disability?
2. What do you know about 'Inclusive Education'?
3. Why do you think you got a disabled child?
4. Do you feel ashamed for having a disabled child?
5. What are your relationship with your child and other learners with disabilities who are learning at this school?
6. Do you think disability has any implications on the life of these learners? If yes, what are these implications?
7. How have other people's reactions been to you and these learners with disabilities?
8. Where would you prefer your child to attend his/her education between a mainstream school and a special school and why?
9. What role do you play in education of your children and why?
10. How do you work with the school administration with regard to education of your children?
11. When your children report to you about them being discriminated against by teachers/peers either at home or school, what do you do?
12. What kind of support do you give to your children at home before and/or after school?
13. Which support do you get from Montfort SNE College if any?