Journal of
Developing Country
Studies
(JDCS)

Mainstreaming a Disability Inclusive University Environment: Lessons Gleaned from a Zimbabwe Case.

CARI Journals

International Journal of Developing Country Studies
ISSN 2958-7417 (online)
Vol.7, Issue No.1, pp 53 – 70, 2025
www.carijournals.org

Mainstreaming a Disability Inclusive University Environment: Lessons Gleaned from a Zimbabwe Case.

[1*]Efiritha Chauraya, [1]Nyevero Maruzani

[1]Midlands State University Gender Institute, Zimbabwe,

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8820-2584

Accepted: 10th Jan 2025 Received in Revised Form: 20th Feb 2025 Published: 19th Mar 2025

Abstract

Purpose: The focus of this study is inclusion of disabled students at a conveniently selected Zimbabwe university. Guided by the principles of disability inclusion as delineated in the Zimbabwe National Disability Policy (2021), the purpose of this study is an assessment of the level of adherence of the institutional initiatives meant to end discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of students with disabilities to the ZNDP.

Methodology: The study utilizes a qualitative methodology, through open-ended one-on-one interviews with 7 disabled students, 3 of their lecturers, 4 non-disabled students, the coordinator of the disability resource center, and the university student counsellor. The interviews were preferred because they enable getting to the bottom of the issues pursued through exploring in-depth participants' experiences and opinions. Thematic analysis of data was employed in extracting meaning from the data. The thematic analysis involved independent generation of themes across the data set by the 2 researchers and a peer debriefer, uncovering subtleties that could have been otherwise overlooked.

Findngs: The study recorded glimmers of alignments of the institutional measures with the ZNDP, and also bleak departures to standards set by the ZNDP. These departures acted as functional limitations that restricted the students with disabilities' full participation in university life thus resulting in disability discrimination, in some case in concert with gender discrimination. The recorded departures were mainly in inadequate resources (mainly in the form of inadequate lecturer competence for the job and inadequate assistive structures and technology), inaccessible infrastructure, negativity, and stigmatization of people with disabilities.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study findings, on top of adding to existing literature, improves practice through proposing a model of building a disability inclusive university environment that has the potential of being a taxonomy that can arrest the challenge of disability exclusion, not only at the studied institution but can be adapted in other university communities.

Keywords: *Disability mainstreaming, Inclusivity, Higher Education, Qualitative, Framework of Inclusion*

Introduction

Within and outside academia, the world over, the transformational power of education is celebrated. As education is vindicated, it becomes imperative that all pursuers of education get treated with the same measure of dignity and respect. This demand in the provision of education has made Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) buzzwords in education circles from early childhood to tertiary level worldwide. Recognizing this centrality of EDI, United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 is framed to ensure 'inclusive and equitable education….to all' (UN, 2019). Equity guarantees full participation of all groups of people. Inclusion guarantees that all have the same sense of belonging as they equally feel welcomed, valued, and respected. Diversity guarantees the presence of differences. The arms of EDI are mutually reinforcing principles that any educational setting should embrace if every learner must develop to the fullest possible potential.

This study focused on the Disability Inclusion arm, targeting only visible disability at a conveniently selected university in Zimbabwe. The world over, observations are that persons with disabilities (PWDs) are marginalized, stigmatized, and discriminated against, (Manungo and Dohwe 2023, Majoko 2018). Guided by the principles of disability inclusion as delineated in the Zimbabwe National Disability Policy (2021), the context of the measures put in place by the studied institution to include students with disabilities (SWDs) is where this study was directed, with a focus on analyzing the level of adherence of the institutional measures to the provisions of the ZNDP. At the time of writing the ZNDP is the only tool aligned to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that the country drew up, (Mandipa 2011; Manatsa 2015; Peta and Moyo 2019). No study so far has gorged the adequacy levels of the institutional measures to ZNDP. This is the novelty of this study. The CRPD is the world measuring stick for mainstreaming disability.

Literature review

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that underpinned the study is the Critical Disability Theory (CDT), a perspective of analysis that is derived from the 'Critical Social Theory' by Max Horkheimer, (Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz (2017). The central theme of CDT is that disability is a social construct and not a dysfunction of the individual's body (Giddens 1979; Young 1990; Oliver, 1996; Owens, 2014; Windsor et al. 2014). The choice of the theory was dictated by the main thread of the study which views disability as a social issue. This is why the study discarded other theories such as the charity model which views persons with disability as handicaps, invalids, dependant, expecting and nothing else other than objects of charity viewed through lenses of pity and mercy for they cannot fend for themselves. The medical model which views disabled persons as persons with illness that need medical attention was also discarded. The fundamental issues advanced by the theory, such as diversity of disabilities; the influence of language and attitudes on an individual's

personhood and implementation of policies that lead to social change, resonate well with the important issues raised by the study, To the CDT, society evaluates and labels disability in a way that puts a demarcation line between the PWDs and the mainstream To this theory, 'one is not born disabled but one is observed to be one', (Michailakis, 2003).

Pursuant to the CDT, a qualitative methodology for the study that involved interviews with the disabled students among other participants, was in response to the disabled persons' key philosophy of 'Nothing about us without us', (Owens 2014) to ensure that whatever recommendations the study made were informed by those who were directly affected by the situation. The CTD thus framed the study, assisted in explaining the results and shaped the cardinal arguments in the discussion of findings and the subsequent suggested framework.

Empirical review

The world and disability

The world statistics board estimates that PWDs constitute 15% of the world population (WHO, 2011). Disability is as old as humankind and has not changed much unto this era. What has changed is the meaning of disability to humanity, a view which influences how humanity interacts with such people. This view keeps evolving. From a reading of literature, this researcher could put the meaning of disability into 3 waves of humanism. The first wave's view of disability had humankind interpreting disability to mean 'cursed, hence PWDs were totally rejected, abandoned, or excluded from the mainstream. In very rare cultures disability was taken positively (Munyi 2012). As a result of the negative conceptualization, PWDs were neglected, shunned, stigmatized, abandoned, abused, and misused. They were defined through their inability to do certain things, hence regarded as worthless and thus viewed as the 'living dead persons'. In extreme cases they were hidden from the public and deprived of essentials such as education and care.

The second wave, the era of civil rights movements, claimed a favorable climate for persons with disabilities. The movements made the mainstream accept and accommodate the existence of PWDs, not as 'normal human beings' but as deviations from normal people with a medical phenomenon requiring medical management. It was an era of separatism – 'they' and 'us.' The third wave ushered in a new tone in attitude, and belief changing the complexion of humanity's conception of PWDs. This is the rea in which we are. This era's standpoint is that PWDs are just persons and rights holders like those without disability and should therefore, not be excluded from the mainstream. The era is marked by bringing the able and disabled together in the same environment, as the differences are not deficiencies. When disability is not considered as a deficiency, but just an impairment which an institution is prepared to address, the focus shifts from the individual to the institutional environment, (Dreyer, 2017).

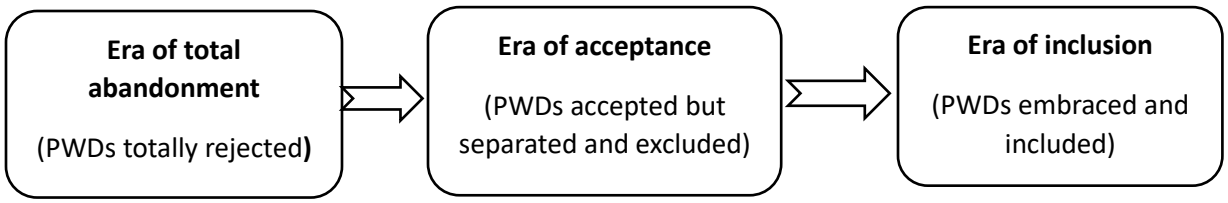

Fig 1: Diagrammatic representation of the shifts in conceptualization of disability.

Education and disability

The global education landscape remains focused on education as a legal right of any learner, and specifically to learners with disability, evolution to inclusivity follows the 3 eras above. The era of total abandonment is the era when SWDs did not enroll at any school. The era of acceptance is when SWDs had their own 'special' schools, and they learnt alone, excluded, and exterminated from the mainstream 'regular schools'. The era of inclusion, which has its roots in the Salamanca Statement adopted by UNESCO in 1994, insists that "all students must be able to learn together through teaching methods that take into account their specific needs" (Dreyer, 2017, p.383). The Salamanca Statement was affirming what member states had agreed upon in 1990 at the UN Conference on Education for All which mandated signatories to ensure that education is a right for all, regardless of individual differences.

Zimbabwe as a signatory to these affirmations upholds the undertakings most recently in 2021, the crafted its national policy on disability spelling out guidelines for disability inclusion. Several people have researched on disability and education in Zimbabwe since the inception of the policy in 2021 such as, Podzo and Phasha (2023), Tafirenyika et al., (2023), Ndhlovu and Mudzingwa (2022) and Duve et al. (2021) among others but none so far has assessed the alignment (or lack of it) of the studied university's measures for inclusion with the 2021 policy. This is the departure of this study from others.

Zimbabwe National Disability Policy (2021)

The ZNDP (2021) is the first to be passed by the country. The policy draws directly from section 56.3 of the Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment Act (No 20) 2013 which states that "Every person has a right not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on such grounds as their nationally, race, colour,…**disability**…" (ZNDP 2021, p.18).The ZNDP also draws from the United Nations CRPD (UN, 2006) which sets standards at an international level for inclusion of PWDs. The purpose of the ZNDP is to guide all sectors and institutions in the country in formulating and supporting the implementation of the strategies that promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities in the country. The ZNDP is underpinned by 33 key standards (p. 33-75), and of these, only those deemed closest to the universities were selected. The selected ones were:

1. **Right to life,** which mandates the institutions to ensure effective enjoyment of the right to life of the disabled students on equal basis with the non-disabled.

2. **Appropriate Living Conditions** which forbids SWDs to be forced to live in a particular living arrangement and ensure their right to institutional services to prevent isolation and segregation from the university community. The university should also ensure that its social amenities are upholding the principle of universal design and ensure that students with disabilities have equitable access to clean water and hygiene and that the facilities are responsive to the needs of the students.
3. **Cultural Life, Recreation and Leisure,** which mandates the universities to ensure that the students with disabilities enjoy access to cultural materials and activities in an accessible format.
4. **Music and Sport,** which requires the universities to organize and develop sporting activities for students with disabilities.
5. **Exploitation, Violence and Abuse,** which stipulates that the disabled be provided an education on how to report exploitation and abuse.
6. **Health,** where the universities are required to ensure that their health centers do not discriminate against students with disabilities. Sign language interpretation services should be available in university health care settings.
7. **Education,** which stipulates that students with disabilities receive individual support they require to facilitate effective learning, with the deaf and blind receiving education in an appropriate mode. Continuous professional development of staff in disability inclusion is compulsory. A disability resource center is a requirement.
8. **Management,** where the university is required to formulate guidelines for protection of students with disabilities in situations of stigma and natural disasters.
9. **Accessibility,** which mandates the universities to ensure that buildings must be accessible to students with disabilities.

These are the grades and commitments which the institution at a minimum should meet and was evaluated against as the study explored and comprehended the mainstreaming measures in a bid to establish the level of adherence of the institutional measures for disability inclusion to the ideals and principles of the country‘s disability policy.

Research process

The research site was a conveniently chosen university and its 2 branch campuses. The study was located within an interpretive paradigm that employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi structured physical one-on-one interviews with all participants to extract a detailed representation of issues raised. Having been granted access to the participants by the gatekeepers the researcher settled for the study sample as detailed in table 1 below.

Table 1- Study sample

Category of participants.	Main campus	Branch campus A	Branch campus B	Total	Sampling technique employed	Interview venue
SWDs	3	2	2	7	Purposive	DRCs
Abled students	2	1	1	4	Haphazard	Open space
Lecturers	1	1	1	3	purposive	Lecturer offices
Disability Resource Center (DRC) coordinator	1			1	purposive	Office
University counsellor (emerged from the data)	1					Office
				N=16		

The haphazard sampling technique employed to select the non-disabled students assumed that these students were alike, hence anyone of them could be chosen solely on convenience of access to the researcher. In employing this sampling technique, the researcher stood by a busy corner during lunch hour and interviewed the participants from an open space.

To avoid tracing information to a respondent, the site and participants' identities are not revealed, hence where names are used in this study, they are pseudo. The guarantees made to the participants were a) explanation for the purpose of the study, b) member checking to ensure non-misrepresentation of information, c) consent covering consent to participate in the study through interviews, consent to be audio recorded and consent to have findings shared through an article, d) right not to answer if one felt uncomfortable, e) right to withdraw at any time without explanation, f) full confidentiality and g) anonymity.

The limitation of the study emanated from the sampling techniques employed as the findings cannot be representative of other institutions, even to other participants who were not part of the study sample. However, the suggested disability mainstreaming model can be relevant through adapting it to different contexts.

Data analysis

A thematic data analysis approach was employed to haul out meaning from the data. Data analysis commenced with the 2 researchers transcribing audio data into text independently. The next stage saw the 2 researchers and a peer debriefer, who was well versed with qualitative research, independently reading through the transcribed data, extracting themes. The three then met and carried out a comparative analysis (Grbich, 2007) of the themes that they had independently extracted from the data. The debriefer emerged with five themes, while the 2 researchers emerged with four. The debriefer's themes were management, architecture, knowledge, attitude and behaviors. The researchers' themes were environmental, academic, perceptual, and cultural. What emerged was that the themes were not divorced of each other. Management and organizational referred to the same issues. Knowledge and academic referred to one thing, as was the case with attitudinal, behavioral, and perceptual, cultural, and also the case with architectural and environmental. At the end, the agreed upon themes were physical environment; social environment; and organizational and academic environment. As such, data were presented as per these 3 themes. Even though the 3 areas were assessed independently, in isolation and separation from each other, they worked towards one whole.

Through generating themes across the data sets, the researchers and the peer debriefer went beyond surface-level observations, uncovering subtleties that could have been overlooked. The analysis unearthed some underlying issues and meanings.

Research findings.

Regarding SWDs, 4 had visual impairment, and 3 had physical disabilities. Thus, the core functional domains in the study included vision and mobility only.

The Physical Environment.

Fernandez-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda and Fernandez-Cerero (2022) call the same environment, architectural environment. Items under the environment included student accommodation, lecture rooms, theatres, libraries, and laboratories among others. Regarding this environment the greatest success story celebrated by the participants was that the institution did have DRCs at all its campuses. This requirement is spelt out in the ZNDP. This came at a time researchers such as Hlatywayo and Mapolisa (2020) observed that some tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe did not have DRCs. The DRC is where special services for PWDs were rendered. Providing these services at its branch campuses showed the institution's sensitivity and responsiveness to disability inclusion. However, it was revealed by the coordinator that DRCs at branch campuses did not have resources allocated to them. The result was that resources initially allocated for the main campus DRC got shared with the branch campuses' resource centers, resulting in resources' deficiency which saw seen branch campuses operate without essentials such as book readers and magnifiers for those with visual impairments.

It was also revealed that the institution utilized the blended learning and teaching approach, with more of the teaching now online. Two blind students intimated that they had challenges with the online learning as they struggled with information shared in image form for the university did not have software that could read images; a situation that was made even more challenging by the frequent changes of online platforms. Even during their face-to-face learning periods, these 2 students claimed that though computers were available, most of them did not have screen reader software that allows the visually impaired to use them. The computers were just white elephants.

The net effect of deficient resources was having students receiving education in modes that were inappropriate to them. Inevitably, this compromised the quality of learning of students. The lack of resources was attributed by students as the reason why students with disabilities were only enrolled in faculties of Education. Business Sciences, Arts and Social Sciences, with none in Hard Sciences, Medicine and Engineering. Although the coordinator attributed this to subjects done by the student at Advanced level, the lecturers and students claimed lack of requisite resources as the inhibiting factor.

It was also revealed by all participants that university buildings were not disability accommodative, save for only the library at the main campus. Students reported buildings that had stairs but no elevators or lifts, which made it very challenging for them to access lecture rooms, toilets, and laboratories which were upstairs. Students also reported that there were no assistive structures for wheelchairs, and on very few buildings where they were, they were of very poor structures that failed to serve the purpose. The coordinator complained about lack of pathways that would have made the SWDs find it easy to independently walk to and from places within the campuses. The SWDs, mostly the wheelchaired and the visually impaired, said they relied mostly on the 'good hearts' of some of the abled fellow students. One visually impaired female student, Chipo, had this to say.

> "*Peers are useful and supportive, but I do not know whether they are not overburdened by us. Without their assistance life would be very difficult, especially accessing the toilets in situations of no running water. Mostly male students offer help, but they cannot take me to the toilets. Besides this, I have also come to realize that not all of them are genuinely good Samaritans. They think because we are blind, we are easy targets.*
>
> Another student, Tari, who was also visually impairment shared a similar observation that:
>
> *"Some students think that the mere fact that one is disabled then one is easy prey. When they accompany us to the hostels they want to see where we stay so that they follow up on us at night and they come to ask for special favors. We need protection against such vultures who diminish and devalue our worth."*

These students claimed instances of gender abuse, adding that even some of the disabled students wanted to take advantage of them. Asked whether they reported the abuses, the students professed ignorance of any knowledge of where to report. This is besides that the ZNDP stipulates that SWDs

be provided with education on how to report exploitation, violence, and abuse. No male student reported undergoing gender abuse. Thus, when disability intersected with gender, females suffered more. SWDs complained about large periods of no running water, which did not correspond to the stipulations of the ZNDP which enlist that it be ensured that PWDs have access to running water. On all campuses, students and lecturers complained about ablutions that were not disability friendly.

The furniture at all campuses was one 'size fit all', hence exclusive to the non-disabled and exclusionary of disabled persons, indicating that there never was a consideration for differently abled students. One amputee reported that he took all his lessons from the wheelchair because there was no suitable furniture for his condition. A lecturer also said:

> *I have a severe hip-dislocation and cannot stand for a long time. I walk with a limp. I lecture while sitting but the chair is not suitable for my condition and I feel very uncomfortable in it., but this is all there is*.

Another student, Tenson at the main campus, who had dwarfism expressed the same sentiments about the furniture situation. Yet another amputee student claimed that he could only sit in one place in the lecture theater and said the place ended up being reserved for him by fellow students.

> *"In the lecture theatre, I sit at the end of the front bench always and when you end up sitting only on one position, it makes the non-disabled view us as a special category. I am constantly reminded of how different I am from the others,*" he remarked.

Mafa (2013) claims that such situations and arrangements as described by the student above, in themselves stigmatize the disabled persons. Having a student sit in one space out of no choice is against the provisions of the ZNDP provisions which forbid disabled persons to be forced to live in a particular living arrangement. This could be the reason Hlatywayo and Mapolisa (2020) worry about adequacy, suitability and appropriateness of facilities and environments. The ideal university facilities should be able to save all students regardless of type or severity of disability, (Dreyer, 2017).

Thus, as regards infrastructure, quite in sync with the theoretical framework, it was not the students' disabilities that made them unable to function, but rather a lack of support for their unique individual needs hindered their participation.

Organizational and academic environment

This environment covered mainly the way the institution is structured in terms of plans in place for students with disabilities as well as the academic delivery. Aspects covered were polices, teaching and learning processes, and assessment criteria among others. Regarding this environment, one of the most critical ideals, as spelt out by the ZNDP, is a guiding policy which offers guidelines to direct institutional standards of conduct as regards persons with disabilities. The institution did not have one, leaving everyone wondering how practices at the institution were

coordinated, guided, directed, and conducted. Absence of a policy made it challenging to measure, account or evaluate inclusivity practices at the institution. While the coordinator talked about a draft policy, the lecturers and students professed ignorance of the existence of a draft policy. A conclusion drawn by the researcher was that since it was a draft, it might not have been cascaded to the stakeholders, but still, it left more questions than answers on issue of stakeholder consultation, bearing in mind the PWDs mantra of 'Nothing about us without us.'

The academic journey started at the enrolment and admission point. Much in line with current trends on disability and education, the application form gave room for self-declaration of disability, shading light on the nature of disability. This was necessary in terms of institutional preparedness for SWDs. Part of this preparedness included ensuring that every SWD secured on-campus accommodation. All the students confirmed this, save for the one from a branch campus where the university did not have student accommodation of its own. This alleviated challenges in student mobility as it made it easy for them to access the library, dining hall and other amenities. It was also confirmed by all that where a SWD required own assistant, the assistant was also guaranteed on-campus accommodation. It was a university rule that at the clinic, dining hall or when boarding university transport the students with disabilities were given first preference, hence did not queue for the service. This was in alignment with the ZNDP. A post graduate student, however, bemoaned lack of allocation of parking space or reserved parking for disabled students. The coordinator revealed that it is something management might not have thought about. Thus, this deprivation was not deliberate nor sheer defiance, but ignorance, and blindness to disability inclusion in structural organization. However, blindness to such succinct issues, though not deliberate, was in itself and by itself part of the exclusion processes and practices.

When it came to the examinations process, the institution was found to be disability responsive as SWDs, especially those with visual impairments, were allowed more time than the able students. The students reported that this applied even to their continuous assessment, where they were allowed more time to work on their assignments. However, three disabled students remarked that while some lecturers were not fuss about due dates for disabled students, others were. It could be a result of lack of training in handling SWDs or deliberate neglect. This could point to a lack of policy on disability at the institution. Also, contrary to contemporary views on disability and education, students with disabilities were not assessed differently from abled students. Musengi and Chireshe (2012) insist on alternative or different modes of assessment to cater for the differently abled students. This is where it merited to have lecturers who have specialized in inclusive education (ibid). It emerged that none of the lecturers had received professional training on teaching SWDs. ZNDP insists on continuous professional development of staff who teach SWDs. Thus, pedagogues were not adequately prepared for an inclusive classroom. This finding concurred with observations made by UNESCO (2016) who bemoans lack of professional training on the part of teachers who teach inclusive classes. This lack failed to create a conducive learning environment that catered for all learners, defying the ZNDP's quest for effective learning of all

students. The lecturers' teaching strategies were reported by students to be 'one size fit all', which literature condemns as a disability blind approach which does not privilege SWDs (Mango & Dohwe, 2023; Majoko, 2015). Worse still, lecturers who are not trained in inclusivity may fail to see instances and situations they can assist as in the case of Mavie who intimated that:

> *"I wear glasses as I am short-sighted. I would appreciate being given lecture materials in advance whenever possible so that I will follow the lecture better."*

The plea of this student was to have educational access equal to their nondisabled peers. If the environment is not adapted to their needs, as was the case, then as the theoretical framework posits, the SWDs get discriminated against.

Another student who used clutches claimed that distances between learning venues only catered for students in full possession of their physical functions. This student complained about timetables that did not allow some SWDs enough time to move between learning venues.

> *"By the time I get in, the lecture will have started. I use clutches and it is a bit difficult to maneuver on uneven terrains. It is unfortunate that only people like me know how difficult it is to negotiate an environment not designed for you.*" he claimed.

Another partially sighted student complained about a learning venue that she claimed had poor lighting, and when there was no electricity, she had challenges reading what was on the board. Even as the lecturer was aware of this student's challenge, he did not even consider swapping venues.

Here were lecturers who could not make condition-suited adjustments that would have made the curriculum accessible to all learners. The lack was in itself part of the exclusion equation through a practice that acted as a discrimination booster. What disadvantaged her was not her condition, but as Reverdy (2019) and Dreyer (2017) observed, sheer lack of support for her individual need.

The lecturers hinted at the high lecturer workload at the institution which forbade them time for one-on-one encounters with students to hear the students' stories. This was a departure from the provisions of the ZNDP which mandates that SWDs receive individual support to assist their learning.

SWDs also intimated that their life at the libraries could be a lot easier had there been library attendants or assistants who would help them access library resources. Thus, the disabled students felt they were disabled not by their condition of disability but by the university failure to provide resources appropriate for their conditions (Mirabitho, 2016).

Social environment.

This environment focused on the sort of beliefs, and attitudes that members of the university community put up for SWDs. The attitudes were found to impact on participation of students with

disabilities in institutional activities. The SWDs indicated this environment as one that needed immediate redress.

These students said they felt the attitudes of some members of the university community were full of a 'piercing stigma'. Results here concurred with Fernandez-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda and Fernandez Cerero (2022)'s observations that attitudes of fellow community members are pivotal for they make or break the PWDs' personhood. Where the SWDs feel valued by their community, they feel included and where the value from the community is marginal (as was the case here), they feel excluded. A student with albinism complained about the language and some terms used to refer to them. She shared an incident when she forgot her room keys at the clinic where she had visited to get medical services. She said when she had gone to enquire if she had not left her keys, she arrived at the moment a fellow non- disabled student who was responding to the health personnel concerning the keys was saying: "*Hadzisi dzangu. Ndodzomusope uya (They are not mine. They are that albino's).*"

She said she was hurt with the language used as it defined her by her disability, making her feel less human and exterminated from the mainstream. This could be the reason why a non-disabled student at a branch campus felt that the students with disabilities "do *not want to freely mix with us, maybe because of social reactions to them.*" The student with albinism described the pervasiveness of the discriminations affecting not only her, but even other SWDs causing them a lot of psychological agony. *When* this student spoke with agony about how she was affected by the negativity shown to them by some students and staff members, the researcher roped in the student counsellor, as part of the participants. The counsellor admitted receiving disabled students with social difficulties for counselling on regular basis and to alleviate the situation she suggested that sensitization of the university community was necessary adding that:

"*People with disability are just as human as anyone else with heartaches. We should be conscious of how we treat and react to them. This culture just has to be a lifeblood of all of us.*"

A non-disabled student at branch-campus A corroborated the views of the counsellor confirming that indeed there were erroneous beliefs and negative attitudes towards SWDs resulting in stigma. The student said that:

"Disabled students are often discredited and regarded as of a lower status within the university community…There is a perception that they do not even feel pain, which I think is wrong and needs correction. They need to be treated with dignity and respect,"

Commenting on the university community's attitudes towards students with disabilities, a non-disabled student at the main campus confirmed the sentiments of the counsellor. She said, *"Attitudes towards students with disabilities is condescending. We need as a university to change our mindset towards disability. Let us focus on what they can do and how they are just like us."*

Yet another non-disabled student from a branch-campus B shared the same vision as he echoed that:

> *"Disability is not a shackle that imprisons one. It is us, the non-disabled folk, who have a challenge. Rather than stigmatize the students with disabilities, we should be celebrating that the mere fact that they are with us at university, is an indication that the negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities as 'good for nothing people without capabilities, is defied."*

Resonating with the same idea was a student with disability at the main campus who hailed the idea of being taught by a PWD saying,

> "*Our lecturers with disabilities and chief coordinator are counterexamples to negative stereotypes. I, for one, am inspired and aspired by them, and I think even the non-disabled are equally aspired, to look at ability rather than disability. They make everyone realize that a disabled body is not a disabled mind. They empower us to write our own destinies."*

The views of the counsellor and the students resonated with the theoretical framework on the power of language and attitudes as a makers or breakers of the disabled people's personhood through reproducing or contesting the social oppression. Almost all interviewees concurred that what was needed to dislodge the dominant story of negative ingrained attitudes about disability, was educating the university community about learning, teaching and living with SWDs.

Sports and recreational facilities were also put under this banner. The ZNDP mandates the universities to ensure that the social environment upholds the principle of universal design. The revelation was that sports and recreational facilities lacked special focus on the disabled students, a situation that chased the disabled students from the sports and recreational activities. The plea of the SWDs was to have the recreational facilities more disability inclusive so that opportunities to have the students participate in country events such as Paralympic games with other tertiary institutions, maybe grabbed. This type of deprivation of student participation in sports and recreation is what Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) label second generation discrimination, that is practices that appeared neutral but inadvertently excluded the SWDs. This was in total departure from the provisions of the ZNDP which demand institutions to ensure that students with disabilities enjoy cultural life, recreation, and leisure just like the abled.

Integrating all, the study recorded adherences to the provisions of the ZNDP as well as deficiencies and functional limitations of a physical, social, organizational, and academic nature that restricted the students' full participation in university life. A strong gender dimension of women exclusion was noted where disability functioned in concert with gender.

Conclusion

The study concluded that certain provisions of the ZNDP were still mainly on paper, and not yet translated into reality at the institution. There was a significant variance between what the ZNDP

said and what the university was doing. Inadequate resources (mainly in the form of inadequate lecturer competence for the job and inadequate assistive structures and technology), inaccessible infrastructure, negativity, and stigmatization of persons with disabilities topped the list. The journey to inclusivity at the institution was far from over as the institutional dive was still not deep enough for a truly inclusive environment.

Recommendations

The institution is encouraged to engineer new measures as well as upscale some existing ones. Upscaling included making the physical spaces, furnishings, materials, equipment, and support systems more disability inclusive so that SWDs fully participate in university life. New measures include compulsory professional training of lecturers and student counsellors so that they acquire expertise and competence to cater for diversity and inclusivity. Disability awareness programmes should be regularly carried out to sensitize the community to the needs of people with disabilities.

The following figure 2, is a proposed disability mainstreaming support mechanism that the university can use to achieve holistic disability inclusion. The framework draws from the study.

.

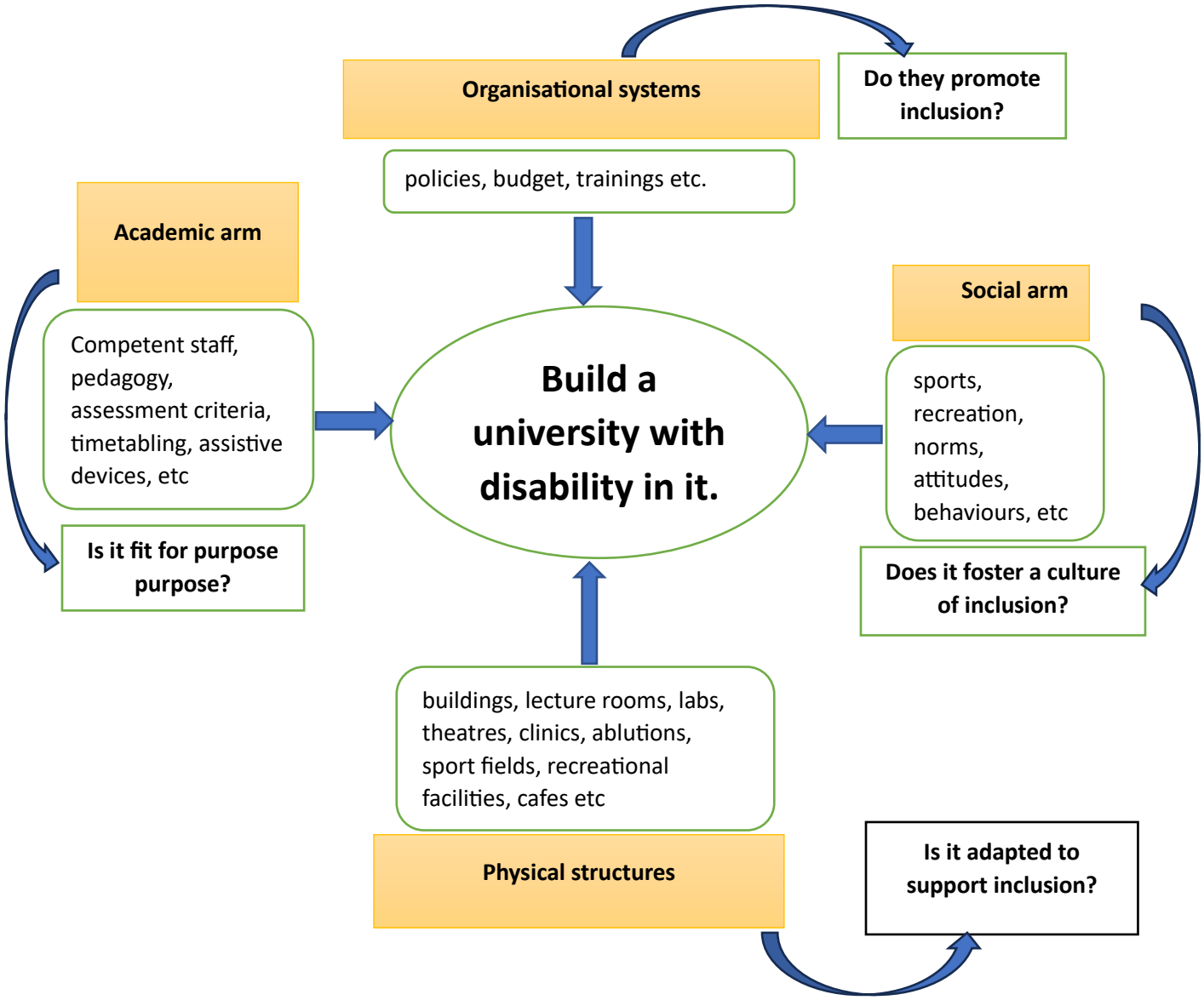

Figure 2. A model of building a disability inclusive university environment

References

Degener, T. (2016). A Human Rights Model of Disabilities. In *Routledge Handbook of Disability Law and Human Rights*. Routledge. https://www.doi.10.4324/978131561288.ch3

Dreyer, L (2017). Inclusive Education, In L. Ramrathan (Eds.), *Education Studies for Initial Development*, (pp.393-399). Juta. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316352226_inclusive_education.

Drydyk J. (2021). Capability and Oppression. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 22(4), 527-550. https://doi:10.1080/19452829.2021.1982880

Dube,T. Ncube, B.S., Mapuvire, C.C, Ndlovu S, Ncube, C and Mlotshwa, S (2021). Interventions to reduce the exclusion of children with disabilities from education: A Zimbabwean perspective from the field. *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol 7 (1). https://doi.10.1080/23311886.2021.1913848

Fernandez-Batanero, M., Montenegro-Rueda, M., & Fernandez-Cerero, J. (2022). Access and Participation of Students with Disabilities: The Challenge for Higher Education. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(19), 11918.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. University of California Press.

Grbich, C. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction.* Sage.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R.J., & Kolb, D. (2013). Educate Everyone About Second- Generation Gender Bias, *Harvard Business Review,* 1-6. https://hbr.org/2013/08/educate-everyone-about-second

Lawson, A., & Beeckett, E.A. (2021). The social and human rights model of disability: Towards a complementarity thesis. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 25(2), 348-379. https://doi.10.1080/13642987.2021.1783533

Mafa, O.M. (2013). Mainstreaming inclusion in teacher education in Zimbabwe. *The International Journal of Engineering and Science*, 2(5), 27-32.

Majoko, T. (2018). Participation in higher education: voices of students with disabilities. *Cogent Education*, 5 (1), 1542761 https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2018.154261

Majome,M.T. (2017). Discrimination in schools. Jessie Majome & Co. Legal Practioners

Manatsa, P. (2015). Are disability laws in Zimbabwe compatible with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Vol 4(4), 25-34.

Mandipa, E. (2011) A Critical Analysis of the Legal and Institutional Framework for the Realisation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe. Unpublished LLM thesis, University of Pretoria. http://hdl.hande.net/2263/18613

Manungo, R. & Dohwe, R. (2023). Listening to students: The experiences of Disabled students learning in a selected university in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Research, Innovation and Implications in Education*, 7(2), 188- 198. https://doi.org/10.59765/szar3410

Masitera, E. (2023). Reflections on Disability (and) Educational Justice in Africa's Structural Unjustice Society During the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown. In A.P. Ndofirepi, F.,

Maringe, S Vurayayi & E. Erima, (Eds.) *Decolonising African University Knowledges*, *1: Voices on Diversity*. Routledge. https://doi.10.4324/9781003228233-2

Mazuruse, G. Nyagadza, B & Makoni, T. (2021) Inclusive Education Implementation Challenges Facing Selected Primary and Secondary Schools in Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Development in Africa*, Vol 6(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.25159/2312-3540/9690

Michailakis, D. (2003). The Systems Theory Concept of Disability: One is not born a disabled person, one is observed to be one. *Disability and Society,* 18(2), 209-229. https://www.doi..10.1080/0968759032000044184

Mirabito, M., Ortnes, C. C., Crosby, E., Wooten, D. B., Machin, J. E., Pullig, C., Adkins, N.R., Dunnett, S., Hamilton, K., Thomas, K. D., Yeh, M. A., Davis, C., Gollnhofer, J. F., Grover, A., Matias, J., Mitchell, N. A., Ndichu, E. G., Sayarh, N., & Velagaleti, S. (2016). The stigma turbine: a theoretical framework for conceptualizing and contextualizing market place stigma. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 35(2), 170-184. https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm15.145

Mtetwa, E. (2011). The dilemma of social difference; disability and institutional discrimination in Zimbabwe. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*,18(1), 169-185.

Musengi, M. & Chireshe, R. (2012). Inclusion of deaf students in inclusive primary schools in Zimbabwe: Challenges and opportunities. *Stud Tribals*, 10(2), 107-116.

Mutswanga, P. & Mapuranga, B. (2014). ODL University inclusion: experiences of students with disadvantages in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*, 1(4), 37-47.

Ndhlovu, E., & Mudzingwa, N. (2022). Disability Inclusion and Accessibility in Zimbabwe: Sharing views and Experiences of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons Living in the City of Bulawayo, *The Journal of Public Space*, 7 (2), 269-278. https://doi:32891/jps.v7i2.1606

Oliver, M. (1996). *Understanding disability from theory to practice*. Macmillan.

Owens, J. (2015). Exploring the critiques of the Social Model of Disability: the transformative possibility of Arendt's notion of power. *Sociology of Health & Illness.*, 3(3), 385-403. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467.9566.12199

Peta, C. & Moyo, A. (2019). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Zimbabwe. In A. Moyo (Ed), *Selected aspects of the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution and Declaration of Rights,* (pp 86-125), Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law.

Podzo, B. & Phasha, N. (2023). Inclusion of students with disabilities at a college of Education in Zimbabwe: A qualitative study. *Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol 22 (1). https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/jeds_v22_n1_a4

Reverdy, C. (2019). Essential information for understanding current education issues: The origins of Inclusive Education. EDUBREF, FEBRUARY Unite veilleanalysesde I'nstitut francais, ENS de Lyon. https://veille-et-analyses.ens-lyon.fr

Scarlett, W.G. (2015). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Classroom Management*, Sage Publications.

Sztobryn-Giercuszkiewicz, J. (2017). Critical Disability Theory as a theoretical framework for disability studies. In J Niedbalski, M Raclaw & D. Zuchowska-Skiba (eds) *Oblicza niepelnosprawnosci w praktyce i teoril* (pp 29-35), Lodz: Uniwersytet Lodzki.

Tafirenyika, J, Mhizha, S., & Ejuu, G. (2023). Building inclusive early environments for children with disability in low-resource settings: Insights into challenges and opportunities from rural Zimbabwe. *Frontiers in Education*, 8. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1029076

UN. (2019). Empowering Children with Disabilities for the Enjoyment of their Human Rights, Including through Inclusive Education, UN.

UNESCO. (2016). 10 Questions on Inclusive Education.Unesco.

United Nations, (2008). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

Windsor, L., Pinto, M. R., Benoit, E., Jessell, L. & Jemal, A. (2014). Community Wise: Development of a Model to Address Oppression in Order to Promote Individual and Community. *Health Journal of Social Work Practice in Addiction*. 14(4), 405-420.

WHO. (2014). World Report on Disability, Geneva: WHO.

WHO. (2011). World report on disability. World Bank Group. https://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/665131468331271288/main_report

World Health Organisation. (2001). The World Health Report: Mental Health: New Understanding, New hope. World Health Organisation, WHO Geneva.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton University Press.

Zimbabwe National Disability Policy (2021). Government Printers.