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**The Impact of Malawi's National Strategy on Inclusive Education: A case study analysis of
two schools**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Inclusive Education)
at
Rhodes University

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my work, except where acknowledged. It is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Department of Education at Rhodes University in South Africa. This thesis has not been assessed or submitted for examination at any other institution apart from Rhodes University.



G22k3054

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the Almighty God and my loving husband, Albert Edwin Sharra, Ph.D. Your trust in me and unwavering support, sacrifices, motivation, and inspiration have been paramount in helping me discover myself. May the Almighty God continue to bless and expand your territory (1 Chronicle10).

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Abstract

Using a qualitative case study approach, this study analysed the impact of Malawi's National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) on inclusive education (IE) in two inclusive schools. IE is a global education reform for accommodating learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. Malawi developed the NSIE in 2017 to guide IE implementation while working on the actual policy. This study aimed to analyse how NSIE has impacted IE during its first five years of implementation. This was done by examining how the NIES goals were designed, enacted, and implemented, the perceptions of system users, who include teachers, learners, and parents towards IE, and the enabling and constraining factors on its implementation. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of the democratic theory of education and systems theory, this study argues that NSIE has ameliorated IE implementation by putting in place a structural implementation system. However, the implementation is marred by several constraining factors both at the management and implementation (schools) levels. Secondly, there is a disjuncture between NSIE as intended and as implemented in the sampled schools. Thirdly, the IE system lacks effective communication and responsive decision-making, especially in the monitoring process and school involvement. Fourthly, the study shows that IE implementation depends on a functional and well-stocked resource centre (RC) and the availability of enough qualified staff. It was also observed that poor teacher motivation resulting from lack of incentives such as promotions and training were major obstacles to the successful implementation of IE at the school level.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Malawi, National Strategy for Inclusive Education, RC, Special Educational Needs

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Acronyms

CRPD: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CWED: Central West Education Division
EDM: Education Division Manager
EFA: Education for All
EMIS: Education Management Information System
FPE: Free Primary Education
HI: Hearing Impairment
IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IE: Inclusive Education
LSEN: Learners with Special Educational Needs
MANEB: Malawi National Examination Board
MGDS: Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MoEST: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MSCE: Malawi School Certificate of Education
NEP: National Education Policy
NESP: National Education Sector Plan
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
NPEOPD: National Policy on the Equalisation of Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities
NSIE: National Strategy on Inclusive Education
ODL: Open and Distance Learning
PLSCE: Primary School Leaving Certificate
PSHRC: Primary School Head of RC
PSP: Primary School Parents
PSL: Primary School Learners
PTA: Parent Teachers Association
PWD: Persons with Disabilities
RC: Resource Centre
SADC: Southern African Development Community

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SNE: Special Needs Education

SSHRC: Secondary School Head of RC

SST: Secondary School Teachers

SSL: Secondary School Learners

TTC: Teacher Training College

UN: United Nations

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRPD: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with
Disabilities

UNDHR: United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

VI: Visual Impairment

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

In September 2022, during the Malawi School Certificate of Examinations (MSCE), a notable development took place as a group of six learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) received supplementary assistance in a dedicated classroom at a certain secondary school situated in the Central West Education Division (CWED). This school is among the public secondary schools that have embraced the principles of Inclusive Education (IE). Consequently, the learners with SEN were afforded essential support and supervised by specialized Special Needs Education (SNE) teachers, enabling them to successfully navigate through the examination process. The MSCE examinations hold significant importance as they serve as a pivotal milestone for students transitioning from high school to tertiary education.

Since introducing IE and enacting the National Strategy for Inclusive Education (NSIE) as a guiding tool for IE implementation, the Malawi government through the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoEST), in collaboration with the Malawi National Examination Board (MANEB), has implemented measures to support learners with SEN during national examinations. These measures include guidelines for inclusive assessment methods, which involve appropriately identifying and categorizing students based on their disabilities to ensure that the required facilities and accommodations are provided. The students mentioned were beneficiaries of this intervention. They were identified through this system and received additional support to adequately prepare for and complete the national examinations. The positive outcomes of these interventions are evident. For instance, five of the six students passed the 2022 MSCE examinations.

However, this specific case does not reflect the overall national situation. For example, in one of the inclusive primary schools in the same CWED, the learners did not benefit from the intervention during the 2022 Primary School Leaving Certificate of Education (PSLCE) examinations. As a result, only two out of nine pupils with SEN passed the examinations and got selected to secondary school. Thus, when analysing the impact of NSIE and the interventions it came with, it is imperative to focus on case studies within or across education categories. This will help in generating comprehensive analysis.

The Malawi education system is categorized into three: primary, secondary, and tertiary education. While the NSIE is designed to cover all three, more emphasis has been on primary and secondary education as they function as foundations for tertiary education. What we see in the two schools sampled for this study is an indicator of the progress made in IE implementation. Prior to the emergence of NSIE, learners with SEN in Malawi did not have full access to specialized support in the classroom or during national examinations, (despite the introduction of Free Primary Education in 1994). Thus, NSIE, as an intervention has generated the several changes that have created an enabling environment for learners with SEN to learn with others in inclusive classrooms. Although there are several studies on IE and NSIE, what is missing in the literature is a deeper analysis on the extent the NSIE has impacted IE in Malawi.

1.2 Background of IE

There have been several efforts to support learners with SEN in schools. However, serious efforts can be traced from the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006. Its main objective was to eliminate educational barriers and promote reforms in school culture and practice to accommodate learners with SEN (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021; United Nations, 2006). The UNCRPD emphasizes the right to education that values students' well-being, dignity, autonomy, and contribution to society and accommodates learners from diverse backgrounds in mainstream schools (Schuelka, 2018; Sakiz, 2016). This approach promotes equitable access to education and fosters inclusivity and acceptance among students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2020).

Many nations globally have adopted an IE approach that prioritises the integration of all students into regular classrooms regardless of their learning requirements or diversity (Ainscow et al., 2006; Chiwandire, 2021a; UNESCO, 2000). This has prompted governments to allocate substantial resources to education system reforms, including teacher training, infrastructure improvement, and curriculum revisions to promote diversity (Sudhakar, 2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other UN organizations have also been playing significant roles in advocating for IE and issuing universal declarations, such as the Incheon Declaration and the Salamanca Statement (du Plessis, 2013; Florian, 2019; Triviño-Amigo et al., 2022). Many countries across the world have demonstrated their commitment to IE

by signing declarations and developing policies that promote equal access to education (Florian, 2019).

1.3 IE in Malawi

Malawi, like many African countries has been slow in implementing IE in mainstream schools. However, in Malawi it can be traced from the early years of special schools for the deaf and blind championed by the Scottish and South African Evangelical missionaries (Chimwaza, 2015; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008). In line with the global trend towards IE, Malawi ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and endorsed international declarations such as the Salamanca Statement and the Incheon Declaration (Chavuta et al., 2008; Ohba et al., 2021). The underscore its commitment to IE.

In 1994, Malawi registered a step forward with its response to the Education For All (EFA) goals by introducing compulsory Free Primary Education (FPE) aimed at providing basic education to all children. However, the FPE policy created new problems, among others a surge in enrolment rates, with the number of learners increasing from 1.8 to 2.8 million in six months (Kendall, 2004; Riddell, 2003). This resulted in overcrowded classrooms and a high teacher-to-learner ratio. To address these challenges, the Malawian government introduced the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programme for training primary school teachers in Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) to increase teacher output and reduce student-to-teacher ratio (Kendall, 2004; Msiska, 2015). The interests of learners with SEN were also incorporated in the teacher training curriculum in 2006 (Hughes et al., 2016) to prepare teachers to handle inclusive classrooms (Itimu & Kopetz, 2008).

Furthermore, in 2007, the Malawian government formulated the National Special Needs Education Policy (NSNEP) to support learners with SEN by training and deploying additional SNE teachers in education cluster centres (Itimu & Kopetz, 2008). The policy also set a target to reduce the student-to-SNE teacher ratio in resource rooms from 20:1 to 5:1 by 2015 (Hughes et al., 2016; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008). However, according to the findings of this study, this ratio is yet to be achieved. Additionally, Resource Centres (RCs) were established to coordinate IE programs and address issues affecting learners with SEN within their school environment. These RCs, located either as separate rooms within schools or at the zone level, provide specialized support to learners with SEN (Education International, 2020). The availability of these RCs has transformed regular

mainstream schools into inclusive schools, while playing a central role in IE implementation (Ishida et al., 2017).

After the FPE and NSNEP, the government has implemented several policies and strategies to reinforce IE. One of these policies is the 2008-2017 National Education Sector Plan (NESP) designed to provide quality education and uphold the right to education for persons with disabilities (MoEST, 2008 p.1). The adoption of the National Education Policy (NEP) in 2016 further reinforced IE in Malawi, aligning it with national and international education policies and protocols. The NEP focuses on providing equitable access to quality IE from primary to tertiary levels (MoEST, 2016a).

Thus, Malawi has been relying on amalgamating various policies such as the 2008 SNE Implementation Guidelines, 2015 National Education Standards for Primary and Secondary Education (NESPSE), and the 2006 National Policy on the Equalization of Opportunities Persons with Disabilities (NPEOPD) and NESP (Mbewe et al., 2021). While these demonstrate government's commitment to IE, it has been noted that these policies lack clear guidelines for IE implementation. Recognizing this gap, the Malawian government took a significant step by introducing the NSIE in 2017. This strategic framework marks a crucial milestone as it became the first official document to explicitly outline a comprehensive plan and goals for IE implementation in all schools.

1.5 The NIES

The 2017-21 NSIE is the first government document to outline a clear strategy with plans and goals for achieving IE in Malawi. Like most strategies, policies, and guidelines, the NSIE was also developed by the MoEST to address inequality in education and ensure that every learner has equitable access to quality education (MoEST, 2017). The central goal of the NSIE is:

To ensure that learners with diverse needs in Malawi have equitable access to quality education in inclusive settings at all levels through the removal of barriers to learning, participation, attendance, and achievement (MoEST 2017, p.11).

While this is an anchoring goal, the strategy lists five key sub-goals. To:

- (i) Promote learner diversity.

- (ii) Partner with stakeholders
- (iii) Achieve a twin-track approach to service delivery.
- (iv) Promote community participation, and
- (v) Engage with key stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the government believes it can meet the above goals if it improves:

- i. Capacity for IE
- ii. Governance, and Management of IE
- iii. Learner identification and assessment
- iv. IE Management Information System
- v. Teacher Education and Motivation
- vi. Partnerships for IE
- vii. Enabling environment for teaching learning, and
- viii. Financing IE (MoEST, 2017)

As of December 2021, the NSIE had been in place for five years and the government extended its period until the actual IE policy is formulated. Given that the NSIE continues to guide the IE implementation, it was imperative to investigate how it has performed in transforming IE in Malawi during its first five years. Thus, this research was crucial to evaluate the NSIE implementation process and measure its impact and become part of the literature to inform the actual policy. Furthermore, this study responds directly to the call for evaluative reports as recommended in the NSIE (MoEST, 2017).

1.6 Problem statement

Although there are several studies on IE in Malawi, there is still scant literature that evaluates the effectiveness of NSIE in achieving IE. Most of the studies focus on the transition from policy to practice, the challenges of IE implementation and perceptions of teachers towards IE, (Chavuta et al., 2008; Chimwaza, 2015; Chitiyo et al., 2015; De Souza, 2020; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008; Kamchezera, 2010; Kaunda, 2017; Mbewe et al., 2021). There are few studies that focus on the effectiveness of the NSIE in achieving IE (Kaunda, 2020; Mgonezulu, 2017). Thus, missing in the equation is a detailed analysis of how NSIE has impacted IE with a focus on its goals, key priority areas and implementation, a gap this study intends to fill.

1.7 The research purpose

The overall objective of this study is to investigate the impact of NSIE implementation on IE using a case study analysis of two inclusive (primary and secondary) schools. More specifically, the study seeks to understand how the goals and key priority areas of the NSIE were designed to reform IE in Malawi and how they were adopted for implementation in primary and secondary schools. Secondly, the study seeks to understand the perceptions of teachers, learners, and parents towards the IE system. Finally, it seeks to identify the enabling and constraining factors impacting IE implementation.

1.7.1 Research questions

The main research question is:

- How has the implementation of the NSIE (2017-2021) impacted IE in the two case study schools?

The following sub-questions guided the study in answering the main research question:

- i. How were the goals and key priority areas of the NSIE designed and adopted to reform IE in Malawi?
- ii. How has the adoption of the NSIE influenced the IE implementation in the case study schools?
- iii. What are the perceptions of system users (teachers, learners, and parents) towards IE?
- iv. What are the enabling or constraining factors of IE implementation?

1.8 Significance of the study

The NSIE, being the first strategy to guide IE implementation, requires a thorough understanding of its intent and the extent to which it achieved its intended outcomes. This is important given that Malawi is yet to develop its first policy on IE. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its ability to provide empirical evidence-based insights for understanding the impact of the NSIE in Malawi. The findings of this study provide much-needed information on the efficacy of the NSIE during its first five years of implementation, which can be used to inform the development of the IE policy. The findings may shed light on policy gaps that need addressing so that the education of learners with SEN is strengthened and enhanced. Furthermore, the insights generated by this research will act as a basis for future research on IE in Malawi and beyond.

1.9 Limitations of the study

This study relies on an in-depth analysis of IE in the two inclusive schools to tell a national story. This means the findings need to be corroborated or challenged by studies focusing on other inclusive schools. Secondly, the sampled cases study schools are from the urban areas where the situation is likely to be different from that in schools in the rural areas. Similarly, the secondary case study is a national secondary school which is above all other secondary schools in terms of quality of staff, students, and services. Even with these limitations, the analysis provides a universal structure of how IE is expected to be implemented in all Malawian schools and the findings are a sketch of the reality on the ground.

1.10 Map of Malawi



Figure 1: Map of Malawi showing the study area (Source; www.ontheworldmap.com)

1.11 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters.

Chapter 1 provides background information for the study. It introduces policies that incorporate IE and how the NSIE document fit into the IE debates. It highlights the structure of IE as envisaged by NSIE and how the strategy intends to facilitate IE implementation. The chapter further outlines the research aims, objectives, research questions and the significance of this study.

Chapter 2 reviews contemporary literature relevant to the study. It contextualizes the study within the theoretical and analytical framework of the democratic theory of education and systems theory.

Chapter 3 describes and justifies the methodology adopted for the study. It outlines the research design, the data collection, and analytical methods used, including how research ethics were addressed.

Chapter 4 outlines the study context in respect of the education system in Malawi and IE as well as the two-case study schools.

Chapter 5 sets the tone of data analysis. This chapter examines how NSIE was designed to achieve its goals, how it was adopted and implemented. This helps to answer research question one.

Chapter 6 presents the second level of data analysis which answers research questions ii to iv. These questions focus on IE implementation in the case study schools.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings in relation to the literature and presents the key insights generated by the study.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by providing a summary and contemplation of the key aspects of the research from various chapters.

1.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter recognizes the education policies that introduced IE in Malawi and how the NSIE document, which is the focus of the study, complements them. It also identifies the gaps in the implementation of IE in Malawi and outlines the research aims and objectives. By providing a clear roadmap for the research goals, the chapter lays a foundation for the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature review and theoretical framework for the study. It traces the global development of IE and reviews existing literature on the implementation of IE from a policy perspective, highlighting that enable and constrain factors. Lastly it discusses the theoretical and analytical framework adopted for the study, specifically the democratic theory of education and systems theory.

2.2 Tracing the roots of IE

Historically, IE can be traced back to around early 1900. It was meant to fight against stigmatization and discrimination against people with disabilities from educational opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Kayess & French, 2008; Rieser, 2012). By then, over 150 million children under the age of 15 across the globe with moderate to severe disabilities were denied access to quality education due to their conditions (Bose & Heymann, 2020; Hayes & Bulat, 2017; Mont, 2021). According to Guidara, (2003), observable interventions to protect the rights of people with disabilities started to emerge to challenge exclusion. The adoption of the Public Law (Law 94-142), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by the American government in 1975 is recognized as one of the first initiatives to champion the rights of children with different disabilities and learning impairments to access education (Guidara, 2003; IDEA, 2018).

IDEA categorizes disabled children as those with physical disabilities, intellectual challenges, speech, vision, and language problems, emotional and behavioural problems, and other learning difficulties (Dragoo, 2019; IDEA, 2018; Seligmann, 2001). These conditions are together described as called Special Educational Needs (SEN)

According to Kayess & French, (2008), UNICEF, (2007), and Du Pierre, (2013), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 was another landmark in the various interventions to improve education opportunities for learners with SEN. The UDHR played a significant role in advocating for the rights of children with SEN to access education. However, the approach was also controversially aimed at providing education for learners with SEN in special schools before

mainstreaming them into regular schools (Guidara, 2003). Special schools are education settings designed solely for children with disabilities (Seligmann, 2001), while mainstream schools are general education settings that provide education to both learners with and without special needs (UNESCO, 2021). With time, international agencies, and advocacy initiatives, such as the United Nations Conventions and Declarations (UNCD), and UDHR (1948), played a crucial role in advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities to access education in mainstream schools (Kavale & Forness, 2000; UNESCO, 2000; United Nations, 2006). These became an initial wheel in the campaign to improve education opportunities for learners with SEN worldwide (Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; UNESCO, 2000). These initiatives have advocated for inclusive learning in mainstream schools, thereby promoting equal access to quality education for all learners, including those with SEN.

Therefore, it is argued that IE is rooted in the UDHR (1948), which is well known for advocating for the rights of children with disabilities to access education like their peers (Du Pierre, 2013; Kayess & French, 2008). Since then, the international community has launched numerous United Nations Conventions and Declarations (UNCD) that reinforce the rights of persons with disabilities. The key ones include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (WDEFA) (Jomtien Declaration), the 1993 United Nations Standard Rule on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSRPD), the 1994 Salamanca Statement, and Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (SSFASNE), the 2000 World Education Forum Framework for Action (WEFFA), the 2001 Education For All Flagship on the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities (EFAFREPD), the 2005 UN Convention Rights for People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2000).

In many countries, IE emerged in response to various international declarations such as the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and the WEFFA held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 (Armstrong et al., 2009; Mittler, 2005; Smith-Davis, 2002; Srivastava et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2000). It is argued that IE's adoption was driven by the need to achieve the EFA goals, and it is viewed as a global initiative that was influenced by the Salamanca Statement (1994), the Framework for Action, and Incheon Declaration (2015) (Florian, 2019). These

documents were signed by numerous countries, which demonstrated their commitment to formulating policies that ensured all children, including those with disabilities and learning challenges, could participate in learning (Florian, 2009).

Many researchers agree that the UN Salamanca Conference (1994) was the first international framework that plainly introduced the term inclusion in education and that the EFA Flagship and CRPD further expounded on the campaign (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Kavale & Forness, 2000; United Nations, 2006). Now, many countries have developed laws and policies recognizing IE (Du Pierre, 2013; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Mitchell, 2005) which challenges the idea of special schools and promotes the creation of schools where learners with or without SEN are educated together (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). Thus, IE is an education system that incorporates cultures, policies, and practices to address and respond to the diverse needs of all learners, allowing learners with SEN to learn together with those without, in mainstream classrooms (Alper, 2003).

Just like many policies, IE policy formulation started with the western countries where it began as a renewal of already existing school policies to show a clear intention of supporting learners with diverse needs, enhancing teacher training, and increasing parental and community involvement (Armstrong et al., 2009; Srivastava et al., 2015).

The emergence of IE in Africa is uncertain with other arguing that is closely tied to the decolonization movement, while others view it as a colonial project influenced by international philosophies and ideas (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018; Walton, 2018). On the contrary, some argue that this situation is a result of the resource-rich support model that developed countries offer to aid vulnerable and at-risk learners (Kalyanpur, 2019; Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018). Nonetheless, various studies suggest SNE, and special schools were initially introduced in Africa by missionaries and IE emerged on the heels of human rights and advocacy which demands that learners with SEN should now learn together with others in inclusive schools (Acedo, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2009; Chikhungu et al., 2020; Kayess & French, 2008). Thus, IE is a shift from special schools which promoted isolating learners with SEN to inclusive schools.

The Incheon Declaration, which was endorsed by 160 countries at the World Forum on Education in May 2015, has also played a significant role in shaping IE policies in African (UNESCO, 2016). According to UNESCO, this Declaration aimed to recognize the implementation of SDG4, which prioritizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all. Consequently, most IE policies

formulated after 2016 have their objectives aligned with SDG4, with inclusion and equity being the cornerstone of quality education. Thus, it can be argued that the adoption of IE in African countries, including Malawi, has also been influenced by EFA goals and SDG 4, which prioritize IE as a means of promoting equitable access to education.

As evidenced by UNICEF, (2021) and USAID, (2020), IE has made significant strides in gaining formal recognition in the education systems of various African countries. This recognition is demonstrated by the integration of IE policies and strategies within national education frameworks, and the inclusion of the right to education for children with disabilities in the constitutions of some countries (Bartolo et al., 2019; Du Pierre, 2013; Magnússon et al., 2019).

The statistics reveal that 16 out of 54 African governments have committed to IE implementation, including the development of new policies, cooperating with already existing policies, featuring it in teacher education training, capacity-building, and more (Global Disability Summit, 2018). However, reports from UNESCO (2000) show that fewer than 10% of countries have laws emphasizing on full inclusion in education, while others have simply declared and signed the Universal Declaration of EFA but have been slow to incorporate it into their practices as a learning approach, highlighting the need for further efforts to fully mainstream it.

Nevertheless, some countries, such as Tanzania and Malawi, have started with pre-policy strategic plans to explore, clear the paths, and lay foundations for IE policies (MoEST, 2017; Tanzania Ministry of Education and Vocational Training), 2009). Therefore, while some countries have made progress in adopting IE policies, their IE implementation is still at infancy stage (Kadzamira & Rose, 2001; Possi, & Malinga, 2017). Thus, the quality of IE implementation must be carefully considered to ensure equitable and high-quality education for all learners. This is what informs this study, cognizant that laying a good foundation for IE is a prerequisite for an effective IE policy implementation. It is, therefore, imperative to investigate the impact of pre-policy strategies to appreciate what needs to be considered when developing the actual policy.

2.3 IE as an education policy

Magnússon et al. (2019), posit that IE has gained significant recognition as both a policy and political concept. As a policy concept, IE encompasses a variety of ideas about education's goals, curriculum, and structure while as a political concept, it competes with other educational ideals,

including economic ideologies that prioritize efficiency and academic success as primary educational objectives (Magnússon et al., 2019). Thus, IE has become a crucial element in the discourse on education policy, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to education. However, Makoelle (2014) in his paper *'Inclusive Education: Are We There?* observes a theoretical orientation challenge on cooperating with IE in education policies and affecting the formulation of individual IE policies. Makoelle highlights the lack of clear guidelines on how to develop inclusive policies and the implementation framework, raising questions about the nature of inclusive pedagogic practice.

Moreover, Ebersold & Meijer (2016), note inconsistencies between target criteria and rationales when framing the IE process. This has led to many countries unnecessarily adopting one-size-fits-all policies, which have simply created more barriers to IE implementation. This is condemned in the SDG4 global agenda 2030, which, according to Hunt, (2019), encourages countries to adopt the most fit-for-purpose criteria when formulating policies. Allowing countries to formulate policies based on their capacity for implementation will help produce positive feedback on policy performance.

According to Kalyanpur (2019), most developing countries have been victims of the international aid agenda by adopting policies and practices from developed countries without reflecting on their local context. Meanwhile, Phasha et al., (2017) argue that African countries need to develop their own IE policies rather than solely relying on ideas from the international context. This suggests that African countries can learn from international policies but should adapt them to fit their local context. This is also highlighted by Ohajunwa (2022) in his study on *Local knowledge of IE policies in Africa: informing sustainable outcomes*, who found local content limited in the IE policies. On top of that, Engelbrecht et al. (2016) report that African policies (quoting South Africa), have broad and unclear goal statements which demonstrate little commitment or resources and the implementation strategies that is cannot easily be understood. Attesting to this is Flynn & Davis, (2015), who suggest that IE policy formulation should be informed by good plans on how to execute the practice to achieve its intended goals and measure suitability. This is key because a guiding document needs to have set out goals, strategies for achieving them, and how to measure the impact of the intervention. This study treats the NSIE as a pre-policy with well-spelled-out objectives that can be measured.

According to De Souza (2021), and Lawson and Parker (2007), the adoption of IE as an educational policy has been controversial due to the lack of contextual compatibility making it difficult to achieve meaningful outcomes. This is also due to the tendency of African countries to adopt global perspectives without considering their unique needs. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (SADC, 2016) IE policy framework has been copied by many countries in the region and implemented in its raw nature, which has led to implementation challenges (Bibiana et al., 2020; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Ebersold & Meijer, 2016). These scholars argue that national context should be considered when adopting policies that are aimed at covering a region.

2.4. IE and educational policies in Malawi

The integration of IE into Malawi's educational policy frameworks continues to evolve. Researchers, such as Hughes et al. (2016) suggest that the adoption of the IE concept in Malawi just like in other countries is a response to EFA goals, as also outlined by (UNESCO, 2000). Thus, this has resulted in the development of national education policies and strategies that incorporate IE, as well as specific guidelines targeting learners with SEN (Chitiyo et al., 2015; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008; Kamchezera, 2010). Some of which, include the National Policy on Equalization of Opportunity of Persons with Disabilities (NPEOPD) (2006), the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2008-2017, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2016, and the current NSIE 2017-2021. The evolution of IE policies in Malawi suggests a commitment to ensuring education is accessible and inclusive for all learners, including those with disabilities. However, the effectiveness of these policies in achieving their intended goals needs to be examined further individually or as a group. This study focuses only on the NSIE, but the analysis also draws on what other policies say about IE. The reason is that IE has been around before the NSIE, but it took a different format that promoted special schools (MoEST, 2008, 2009, 2016b). The NSIE is critical as it is among the first strategies specific to IE (MoEST, 2017).

According to Ohba et al. (2021), the first significant government policy regarding persons with disabilities is the NPEOPD. It was developed to promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in society. However, it was too broad and did not adequately outline its educational commitments (Ohba et al., 2021). According to Munthali, (2011), the implementation of the NPEOPD has been weak due to low awareness, inadequate adoption, a lack of disability

mainstreaming, and the absence of a legal framework for policy enforcement. As a result, advocacy for the development of additional policies, such as the NESP (2008), and NEP (2016), among others, serve as benchmarks for future policies in this area. IE was first mentioned in the NESP (2008).

A study by Hummel et al., (2018), acknowledges NESP as the primary document for IE in Malawi. According to Hummel et al., the NESP development was based on the broader policy context of the Malawi Growth Development Strategy; From Poverty to Prosperity (2006-2011), EFA, and the MDGs. Meanwhile, Chilemba (2013), recognizes NESP for its goal of improving primary education by focusing on the education of children with disabilities. Through this, NESP is aimed at improving teacher-class ratios in special schools and RCs, fostering the development of educational tools such as sign language and Braille to cater to the needs of children with SEN and increasing community participation in the management of learners with and without SEN (Chilemba, 2013). These goals indicated a direct touch to IE. According to MoEST (2017), the NESP plan of action was further articulated in the NEP (2016) which recognized the importance of promoting IE in all educational sectors and was put into action by the NSIE (also see MoEST, 2008, 2016).

According to MoEST, (2016), NEP clearly outline NESP goals on equitable access to quality education for all and develop objectives on how to incorporate IE at all levels of education. However, De Souza (2022), argues that NEP is too broad and covers all issues in education which affected its implementation. Additionally, MoEST (2017) points out that although education stakeholders have attempted to implement IE through NEP, there is a lack of a framework to guide implementation which resulted in the development of NSIE. Thus, according to MoEST (2017), NSIE is seen as an extended objective of NEP as it translated the NEP policy statement into an action plan covering key areas missed in NEP (p.7).

The NSIE rationale was developed based on the Malawi education situation analysis that reported many exclusionary challenges facing IE implementation. Thus, it can be argued that NSIE is the first well-designed strategy specifically for IE. At the time of the research, NSIE had been around for about seven years. However, there is still scant literature and evaluation reports on IE which could have helped the government to know whether NSIE has achieved its intended goals. Thus,

this study and a few others conducted in the last few years by De Souza, (2020), Kaunda, (2020) and Mgomezulu, (2017), are timely as they can be used to inform future policies.

2.5. The Resource Centre as the heart of IE implementation

Scholars such as Acedo, (2008), Armstrong et al. (2009), Chiwandire (2021), Guidara (2003), Kayess & French (2008), and Riddell (2003) recognize the historical roots of IE in special schools, which provided education exclusively to learners with SEN. The transformation that IE has undergone is the conversion of special schools into toolkits to facilitate IE implementation in mainstream schools (see also Chilemba, 2013; Kamchezera, 2010; MoEST, 2017). These researchers argue that IE did not come to eliminate special schools but to utilize them RC for mainstream schools. Such centres would provide direct support to children with SEN in mainstream schools, professional guidance to mainstream teachers, and offer education to learners with severe/profound SEN who cannot be fully integrated into mainstream schools. These RCs are established as either independent educational institutions or supplementary resource bases within mainstream schools (Ishida et al., 2017a; Pradipta et al., 2020; Šiška et al., 2019).

Recent studies on IE from different countries show that RCs are aiding the effective implementation of IE (see Crespie et al., 2022; Kamchezera, 2010, 2010; Kaunda, 2020; Koganuramath & Choukimath, 2009; Koomen, 2016; Pradipta et al., 2020; Šiška et al., 2019). For instance, Šiška et al. (2019) view RCs as pedagogical hubs that provide specialized materials, assistive devices, and trained professionals to aid both learners and teachers in implementing IE. This also aligns with the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education's (2015) understanding of RCs as central hubs located within local communities, providing specialized support for schools and families through a range of facilities such as libraries, training centres, therapy areas, and communication units (Federal Ministry of Education, 2015).

On the other hand, Pradipta et al. (2020) characterize RCs as specialized institutions aimed at fostering the development of IE, providing a range of resources to support children with SEN, their families, schools, NGOs, government, and communities. Ishida et al., (2017) describe RCs in the context of IE in Malawi as small units located within mainstream schools, offering customized instruction and additional resources to students with special needs, both during and outside regular class hours.

Despite these differences in operational capacity and understanding, RCs share a common objective of supporting the implementation of IE, as evidenced by their establishment in various countries (Ishida et al., 2017; Pradipta et al., 2020; Šiška et al., 2019). In some contexts, and setups (for example in some Malawian primary schools), these RCs are managed by itinerant SNE teachers who move around mainstream schools and communities to provide support and resources to SEN learners, their teachers, support, and round community (Šiška et al., 2019; Trigu, 2004). Alternatively, RCs are established within school settings and are coordinated by SNE teachers (also in the context of other Malawian Primary and secondary schools), with one serving as the head and others as subordinates, responsible for ensuring the effective IE implementation and accommodation of learners with SEN in mainstream classrooms (Chitiyo et al., 2015; Ishida et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, researchers have reported several challenges that these RCs face while trying to reinforce IE. They include limited knowledge by other stakeholders, shortage of professionals, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and shortage of funding to support their functioning (Okongo et al., 2015; Pradipta et al., 2020). These challenges adversely impact the effective implementation of IE such that even itinerant teachers involved do not have sufficient support to fully monitor IE implementation (Šiška et al., 2019). Therefore, if RCs if they continue to be the bedrock of IE, it is essential to addressing these challenges and ensuring they are functioning effectively.

2.6. IE policy implementations

Schuelka (2018), proposes that effective implementation of IE policies has the potential to bring about significant changes and transformations in the school system. Schuelka outlines five key elements that must be considered for the successful implementation of IE policies, and these include: (i) having a clear concept and definition of IE; (ii) clear goals and targets, indicators, measures, and outcomes; (iii) understanding the existing barriers to implementation; (iv) well-organized implementation strategy; and (v) provision of training, sustained support, and resources for all teachers and school leaders. Conforming to this, is Bibiana et al. (2020) who argue that countries implementing IE should consider adopting these elements if they are to come up with a comprehensive and meaningful design of IE strategies, guidelines, or policies.

Nonetheless, other researchers argue that IE policy implementation is overly critical and dynamic. Thus, it should be looked at from a broader perspective both culturally and contextually (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Shyman, 2015; Stubbs, 2008). Also as stipulated by other researchers, the concept of IE is rooted in the UNCRP and its goal is to eliminate educational barriers and promote reform in school culture and practice (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021; United Nations, 2006). Thus, the IE policies should also be implemented along these lines.

Loreman et al., (2014) assert that, while IE policies and laws provide definitions that focus on equity, access, opportunity, and rights, they lack a tight conceptual focus which results in misconceptions and often confused practices, which bring dilemmas on who is meant to benefit from it and how to empower the implementers (Loreman et al., 2014). However, Armstrong et al. (2009), argue that most of the IE policies are aimed at advocating for the rights to education for learners with SEN which according to McManis (2017), is broad. Thus, IE policy implementation must enrich the overall school practice where all learners have their differences and diversity attended to, to the fullest; be they physical, cognitive, academic, social, or emotional (McManis, 2017).

According to McLoughlin, (2016), IE policy implementation must be understood at both the national and school levels to improve shortcomings or ambiguities that can come with the policies. More so, Sharma, et al., (2013) contend that IE policy implementation must be guided by three principles such as collaboration, a need for systemic change, and nothing about us without us. These principles should inform policies formulation that are suitable to achieve IE. Loreman (2014) concurs with this, and he asserts that IE policies must dwell within the input and processes of IE implementation which can be measured through three thematic components i.e., learners' participation, achievement, and post-school achievement. These components must be informed by the process and practice at the macro, mesa, and microsystem levels of the IE implementation system. Loreman's key themes fall within the NSIE objective of creating an enabling school environment for learners where those with SEN can exercise their rights and receive full supported in their school environments.

According to Rapp & Corral-Granados (2021), understanding IE policy implementation must go as far as exploring its long-term goals. These goals structures should aim at transforming education

into a long-term democratization project where all children can receive good education without any form of exclusion (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). Bibiana et al., (2020), acknowledge this by adding that these long-term policy goals must be of quality and adequacy to inform the whole practice of IE and regulate the effective implementation of the education curriculum to offer quality education for all. Furthermore, it is also argued that IE policies must aim at restructuring the entire system and environment to remove barriers that can contribute to IE implementation challenges (Bose & Heymann, 2020). Nevertheless, Schuelka, (2018) citing Frick, (2018) contends that the IE implementation challenges can be prevented if the education system takes charge of learners' needs to fit in the school environment.

2.7 Enabling factors for IE implementation

Several researchers have pointed out that the successful implementation of IE policies requires a multitude of factors. For instance, Sharma et al. (2013) argues that effective IE require practitioners and teachers adequately trained, supported, and provided with resources to stay up to date. Other researchers, such as Hayes and Bulat (2017), agree that a good inclusive policy offers the necessary support and creates a safe school environment for all students. However, others have identified a shortcoming in the distribution of resources and support that undermines the success of IE, leading to negative attitudes from education stakeholders, particularly teachers (Beek, 2002; Corbett, 2001; Valeo, 2008; Xu & Malinen, 2015).

Majoko (2019) and Valeo (2008) attest that realistically, the success of IE depends on the availability of adequate resources. Without resources, teachers, despite their willingness to foster implementation, find it impossible and challenging to deliver quality IE and are significantly less positive about their performance (Majoko, 2019; Valeo, 2008). However, with sufficient training, support, and resources, teachers can adjust and modify content, approaches, structures, and strategies to address the goals of IE (Beek, 2002).

Meanwhile, Villa & Thousand (2003) argue that support for IE policy must be systemic, effective, and collaborative across various sources, including teacher-resource support, educational assistants, other learners, etc., to cater to the needs of both implementers and beneficiaries. Teacher-resource support may involve specialist teachers with special training and experience who can offer valuable support to mainstream teachers, coordinate the services, and support learners with SEN receive (Beek, 2002; Corbett, 2001; Valeo, 2008; Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Additionally, the engagement of other learners is crucial as it creates a supportive environment for learners with SEN. For example, gifted and talented learners, can foster a more responsive learning environment through academic support such as peer flexible pacing and grouping, reading and literacy specialists, tutoring, etc. (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Furthermore, a study by Xu and Malinen (2015) on teachers' views towards support for IE found that, teachers also value parental and community support. The lack of such support causes challenges to their work as both parents and schools have expectations of each other, and the lack of involvement and coordination in the learning process brings about contradictions in each other's expectations (Xu & Malinen, 2015). Therefore, policies need to explore and source support from all levels of education stakeholders.

According to Devecchi & Nevin, (2010), implementation of IE policy requires decentralized decision-making by various leaders at the national and school levels. National leaders are responsible for policy formulation and monitoring, while school leaders play a crucial role in monitoring the implementation process (Villa & Thousand, 2016). Thus, to ensure the successful implementation of IE policies, coordination, and well-defined responsibilities at all levels of leadership are essential (Devecchi & Nevin, 2010; Kugelmass, 2003). Furthermore, Rieser, (2012) suggests that national IE policies must be made in collaboration and consultation with disabled person organizations (DPOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parents of children with disabilities, children with disabilities themselves, and other community stakeholders, as they are all crucial for the successful implementation of IE.

In addition, Hayes & Bulat, (2017) argue that IE is a new education reform and policies should provide comprehensive information on its implementation. Other components suggested to enable the IE policy implementation are the renewal and adjustments of the curriculum to cater to the needs and expectations of targeted groups (Operti & Brady, 2011; Schuelka, 2018). However, implementing such a reform can present challenges, as highlighted by Barrot (2021), including the delivery of instruction, assessment, lesson preparation, school-based initiatives, and the commitment of teachers and school leaders. According to Cross et al. (2002), curriculum reform is also often accompanied by the tension that affects meaningful change in thinking, reclaiming knowledge, and cognition in the classroom. Thus Cross et al. (2002) emphasizes the need for a

detailed and comprehensive approach to curriculum reform, with a focus on addressing the tension that often accompanies such changes.

Nevertheless, other scholars find it crucial to involve teachers in the curriculum reform process, (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Majoko, 2019; Rieser, 2012). These scholars identify teachers as major stakeholders in the implementation of IE policies; thus, their confidence, competencies, knowledge, and positive attitudes can significantly reinforce the principles of inclusion and inclusive curricula. Therefore, the involvement of teachers in the curriculum reform process is vital in developing a sense of value and ownership regarding inclusion within their local, national, and regional contexts. Moreover, the successful implementation of IE policies also depends on the preparation of teachers and related professionals to implement the curriculum reform effectively (Sharma et al., 2013).

However, it is a general observation from various literature that major services such as leadership, EMIS, and curricular reforms are not fully in place to support IE implementation in both developed and developing countries (also see, Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Cross et al., 2002; Devecchi & Nevin, 2010; Kugelmass, 2003; Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020; Operti & Brady, 2011; UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, policymakers need to prioritize the establishment of comprehensive services to support the successful implementation of IE policies.

IE implementation also depends on various factors such as social constructs, relationships between individuals and societal systems, availability of resources, and a conducive implementation environment (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Anderson et al., 2014). These factors are crucial in promoting socialization and education related to personal, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills and competencies among learners with SEN (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Therefore, IE policies must consider the social system as a vital component for successful implementation.

Ankutse (2018) in his paper on *Inclusive Education in Ghana*, identifies the nature of the teaching and learning environment as some of the enabling factors for achieving a successful IE. He further argues that IE can be attained by promoting positive attitudes towards teachers, creating a child-centred curriculum, adopting flexible teaching methods, reducing school dropouts and repeaters, improving school infrastructure, promoting parent and community involvement, adopting appropriate teaching aids and equipment and alternative methods of teacher education (Ankutse, 2018). Another study by Majoko, (2019) considers the teaching and learning environment as a

major enabling factor in the implementation of IE policy, arguing that class performance determines whether IE implementation is making an impact. Kaunda (2017) and De Souza (2020), observed that some teachers have a negative perception of IE because of poor teaching and learning environments, as most schools have insufficient teaching and learning materials and most classrooms are not accessible, and communities are barely involved in supporting learners with SEN.

Although this section highlights various attributes that can contribute to the successful implementation of IE, researchers have identified several constraints that affect the implementation of IE policies (Aguerrondo, 2008; Bibiana et al., 2020; Brussino, 2021; Chimwaza, 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Ebersold & Meijer, 2016; Ludago, 2020; Reicher, 2010; Singal, 2019). The next section presents scholarly views on the constraints that affect the IE implementation.

2.8 Constraints on IE policy implementation

IE is a new education innovation, and as a result, many challenges will continue to emerge (Aguerrondo, 2008; Ludago, 2020; Makoelle, 2014). One recorded challenge is the nature of the policies and a lack of clear implementation strategy is one factor (Owolabi & Makinde, 2012). The main argument in most literature is that most IE policies do not have a properly defined strategic plan of action. The absence of this makes them fail to clearly articulate both the existing context and what ought to be achieved with the IE policy, to prevent constraints due to unclear policies (Stegemann & Jaciw, 2018). Nonetheless, Rahaman & Greenwood (2015) citing Rahaman, (2013) argue that the adoption of IE has a prevalent effect across the board. Thus, it must be looked at broadly not only in terms of policy goals. Hunt (2019) posits that language distortion in understanding IE also contributes to these challenges, creating a divide in interpretation and implementation. One of the primary issues outlined by Hunt (2019) is the variance in the definition of "inclusion," leading to confusion and inconsistencies in policy framing, practice scope, and applicability. This divergence in interpretation has resulted in the misuse of the term, with some policymakers and educators utilizing it in a manner that contradicts the intended meaning and purpose of IE.

Other researchers like Fullan (2001) and Kugelmass (2003) reported poor leadership both at the positional and functional level as being a major cause of the IE Policy implementation challenges.

They found out that, once policies have been oriented for implementation, the responsibilities of leaders turn to be one-sided, and with minimal support. Meanwhile, Mayrowetz & Weinstein (1999), point out that leadership is not supposed to be a one-way thing otherwise it has the power to make a system work or flourish. Therefore, leaders as they accept leadership roles, need to reflect, and pay attention to the moral purpose, relation building, knowledge creation, sharing, and coherence making that comes with it (Kugelmass, 2003). It is therefore important for national policies when being formulated, to consider the nature and sources of leadership required for its expected reformation.

Furthermore, Newton (2021) identifies some of the emerging challenges of IE as value threats due to diversity; power barriers due to restructuring changes in the authority, significant educational reform which conflicts amongst teachers; practical difficulties which appear in the form of system, resources, and time constraints; and psychological issues because of the practical barrier by teachers. Meanwhile, other researchers (Aguerrondo, 2008; Bibiana et al., 2020; Chimwaza, 2015; Ludago, 2020), have also revealed some structural challenges that directly deal with the environmental and attitudinal barriers such as inadequate infrastructure and education facilities, for example, sanitation facilities, lack of ramps, poor classroom infrastructure, equipment, and services. Therefore, there is a strong need for IE policies to have well-designed and aligned strategies, evaluation reports, and school review processes to help explore, capture, and prioritize some of the challenges that hinder their effective implementation.

In addition, a study conducted by Kurth et al. (2018) on the state of IE in 11 nations from five continents (represented by Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, India, Kenya, Nepal, Nicaragua, Philippines, Portugal, Balkans, Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Italy, Mali, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, U.S., and Zanzibar), highlights the following as the shortfalls in most IE policies. These include: i) lack of proper specification of all IE beneficiaries such as categories of disabilities/impairments, ii) little reflection on contextual factors at the local, state, and national level, and iii) little reflection on the transition of policy to practice (Kurth et al., 2018). Naicker (2007), in a study on ‘*From Policy to Practice in South Africa*’, argues that policy formulation should be informed by research and context, not just principles, aims, and goals. Naicker’s argument agrees with Lansdown (2014) that to have a successful IE, the focus should not be limited to having a good policy, but also a supporting system that introduces a comprehensive foundation of legislation, policies, strategies,

guidance, and services to build the culture, environment, and commitment necessary to remove the barriers to quality education for learners with SEN (Nicker 2007; Lansdown, 2014).

This means having a good policy document may not be enough to achieve a successful IE (Chiwandire 2021). Chiwandire further notes that there is also a need for a mindset shift, especially for those non-disabled stakeholders who hold negative attitudes toward learners with disabilities. Thus, it is important for any country working towards introducing IE or developing an IE policy to consider a range of factors raised above as catalysts for successful IE.

Other hindering factors as noted in countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Tanzania include a lack of clear policy, guidelines to guide teachers, support, and resources, lack of commitment by policymakers, and engagement of all stakeholders (See Magen et.al 2007; Possi 2017; Nguluwe et.al 2020; Engelbrecht 2020). Aguerro's (2008) paper on *Altering the Model: Challenges of Achieving Inclusion*, argues that the ever-changing world demands governments to be vigilant in reviewing their education policies and systems to ensure new developments promoting exclusion are addressed from the onset. She concludes that technology may derail the successful implementation of IE as most policies are not informed by technological changes.

Another key emerging aspect is how to deal with attitudes and perceptions towards IE among key players in implementing IE policy. The focus here is on attitudes and perceptions that IE policy implementors (teachers) develop over time in the workplace due to the constraining factors that affect the implementation of IE (see Chimwaza, 2015; De Souza, 2020; B. Kaunda, 2017; Mbewe et al., 2021). Among many others, issues such as lack of teacher training in SNE and IE, lack of teaching and learning resources, lack of parental support to educators, and teachers' occupational stress attribute to increased negative attitudes and perceptions towards the implementation of IE (Blackie, 2010; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hunter-Johnson, 2014; Opoku et al., 2021). Similarly, a study by De Souza (2020) on how mainstream secondary school teachers interpret policies, strategies, and transition to supporting learners with physical disabilities reveals the policy-to-practice disparities. It argues that effective strategies that could lessen policy-to-practice mismatches and advance IE primarily rest with mainstream teachers as they mediate policy and practice (De Souza, 2020). It is, therefore, important to ensure that teachers and other key implementors are motivated and have a positive attitude and perspective toward IE.

Nevertheless, Miner (2013) argues that there are more constraining factors accompanying IE implementation and they co-exist, and more are likely to evolve. Miner commends IE policy implementation to have a complete circle made up of policy creators, implementers, and beneficiaries who should work together diligently to achieving IE. Furthermore, according to Chimwanza, (2015), teachers rely on the government's guidance, supervision, and resource support to deliver IE, which implies that IE implementation cannot work if there is no complementary system supported by all key players. It is, therefore, imperative to not only focus on the inside classroom environment when implementing IE policies and practices but also on the outside environment as these two create a complete cycle of a successful IE implementation (Miner, 2013).

The decision by the Malawi government to start the IE with a formulation of strategy may be a good starting point to establish a system and culture that can help in supporting the formulation of the actual IE policy. Nevertheless, there are varied opinions on the development of the IE strategy. For instance, Mgomezulu (2017) argues that the strategy is a missed opportunity because it lacks some vital content that could have helped create a good foundation for the IE policy. He cites gaps such as the absence of key aspects for promoting inclusiveness, mindset change, and intermediality among the learners (Mgomezulu, 2017, p25). Again, a mid-term NSIE evaluation report by Kaunda (2020) revealed there is a crisis in the lack of resources to support IE implementation in schools.

This study builds upon these arguments to contribute fresh literature on the state of IE implementation in Malawi after the first five years of the strategy which will help to give a current snapshot, as the previous studies were conducted during the early years of the strategy. The NSIE was designed to cover five years from 2017 and its mandate has been extended until a policy is developed. This dissertation is among the first to subject the NSIE to comprehensive scrutiny covering literature produced during the first years of the policy and with reference to literature from other countries.

The table below summaries the IE policy implementation enabling, and constraining factors as highlighted by different scholars.

Table 1: Summary of the IE implementation enabling and constraining factors.

Enabling factors	Constraining factors
Adequate training and support	Poor leadership
Availability of resources	Psychological and occupational stress amongst teachers
Parental and community support	Poor infrastructure, equipment, and services
Coordination and well-defined responsibilities	Lack of clear policy and transitioning to practice
Curriculum renewal and Adjustment	Lack of commitment
Preparedness of the teachers	Lack of resources and support
Conducive environment	Negative attitude by the implementers
positive attitudes toward the implementation	lack of teacher training in SNE and IE,
Appropriate teaching aids and equipment	lack of parental support to educators

2.9 Theoretical and analytical framework

This section describes and justifies the theoretical lenses used in the study, namely, the democratic theory of education and systems theory. The democratic theory of education gives a primary theoretical lens for the research. The systems theory serves as the analytical framework, which is explored through various lenses to understand how it reflects in the data analysis of the study. Below, I start by giving a theoretical overview on how these theories were applied.

2.9.1 Theoretical overview

As Grant et al. (2014) suggest, the theoretical framework establishes the variables to be measured and their relationships to the study. Furthermore, Miller (2007) emphasizes that the theoretical framework's assumptions guide the research as a whole and inform the choice of research design. Below I explain how I worked with the democratic theory of education by Knight (2000) and systems theory by Bertalanffy (1952).

- I adopted Tony Knight's concept of democratic education theory as a primary theoretical framework for the study. This theory emphasizes the relationship between inclusiveness

and democratic education. By adopting this framework, the study recontextualized the NSIE and the IE implementation in line with the research purpose.

- I utilised the key components of the democratic theory of education as lens for gaining insights and analysing the study data to generate a deeper understanding of the factors influencing and affecting IE implementation.
- To structure and analyse the data, I employed systems theory and its corresponding paradigms. This approach provided a holistic perspective and enhanced the understanding of how the NSIE framework is structured to create inclusive and democratic education. By utilizing systems theory, a comprehensive analysis was conducted, shedding light on the interconnectedness of various structures within the IE implementation.

The literature review section has explored different facets of IE, encompassing its origins, policy formulation, and implementation. However, understanding the practical application of IE policy principles remains a challenge. While policymakers and educators are working towards implementing IE, this study aimed to explore how these policies are being put into practice in schools, with a focus on the intended impact. Therefore, the above discussed steps have been instrumental in conducting a more in-depth analysis of IE implementation, enabling a better understanding of its internal logic and system structure. Below I discuss the democratic education theory.

2.9.2 Democratic education theory

The democratic theory of education emerged around the 1990s when most countries in the West were realigning their education systems to embrace democratic culture (Pearl & Knight, 1999). Hartnett (1977) points out that the nexus of the democratic theory rests in understanding the social purpose of education in society. Its earlier conceptualization had a strong influence on the design of worldwide education systems, particularly in the universalization and the purposes of formal education (Biesta, 2007). Knight (2000) adds that this has been pertinent in the face of separation, alienation, oppression, and exclusion of some groups of people in society. He highlights that democratic theory deals with education and the classroom construction of an ‘inclusive culture’. He argues that the democratic theory of education provides an explanation that “merges IE and social inclusion with broader epistemological principles” (Knight 2007:17).

The building of this theory recently underwent alterations to incorporate democracy which is broadly defined as an optimal learning environment for all students. This study subscribes to what Knight calls the ‘seven critical constructs’ of the democratic theory of education. The constructs are:

- i. The nature of authority
- ii. The ordering and inclusiveness of membership
- iii. The determination of important knowledge
- iv. The definition and availability of rights
- v. The nature of participation in decisions that affect one's life.
- vi. The creation of an optimum environment for learning
- vii. Equality.

These attributes are key in determining whether a school or classroom is more ‘inclusive’ and democratic, and the key objective is not to create inclusive classrooms only, but learners who upon completion of their education can fulfil the requirements of an informed active and responsible democratic citizen (Knight 2000:19, Kassel 2014:1431). Democratic education scholars currently draw on these attributes to examine potential “antidotes” to present challenges in the education sector. The importance of this theory is to create a generation that values inclusivity. This study applied these seven principles to illustrate the roles of authorities in implementing IE, particularly in establishing an optimal environment for all learners. It also considers the contributions of various stakeholders, including teachers and parents, to realizing IE which Engelbrecht, (2014) argues to be broadly construed within the scholarship of inclusivity in achieving IE.

2.9.2.1 Nature of authority

According to Knight (2001), while school authorities often hold primary power in provision of education, the interests of students should not be overlooked. Knight (2000)’s defines ‘nature of authority’ as giving ‘learners power’ in the classroom, because that is where democratic and inclusive practices are primarily implemented. According to Knight, it is essential for all learners to feel accepted and capable of learning within the school environment. Thus, teachers must negotiate and considering learners with diversity as valuable participants in a democratic classroom. Other researchers also agrees that learners are the main pioneers of democratic and IE, and classroom practice should prioritize them, regardless of their differences or diversity (See

Lancaster, 2014 and García, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to advocate for school practices that promote competence and fairness. This study employed this perspective to examine how the NSIE defines learner authority and to understand how learners with SEN are integrated into school practices to foster learner diversity. Additionally, it contributed to the understanding of different education stakeholders' perception toward learners with SEN.

2.9.2.2 Inclusiveness

While some scholars (García, 2016; Knight, 2000b; Lancaster, 2014; Marschall, 2021) argue that IE practices in schools are often exclusionary and lacking in democratic principles, Knight (2001) maintains that where democratic education is involved, inclusivity should be centripetal, meaning it should draw diverse learners together. Thus, to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment for a diverse student population, schools need to establish a welcoming and inclusive school culture. This perspective helped to analyse the inclusive practices in the researched schools by examining the patterns of inclusivity, the structures of schoolwork and practice, and the interactions among learners. It also aided the analysis of the NSIE as a secondary data source, to understand its goals in promoting inclusive schools and practices. Thus, this component greatly assisted to gain a deeper understanding of how the NSIE goals were implemented and put into action to achieve inclusivity in schools.

2.9.2.3 Determination of important knowledge

Knight (2000) emphasizes the importance of knowledge as one way of preparing learners to become well-informed, responsible, active, and capable individuals who can contribute positively to society. This entails providing learners, regardless of their learning needs, with the necessary knowledge and experiences to become active members of society (Knight, 2001). Adopting this conceptual understanding allowed me to take a broader perspective in examining the impact of the NSIE on IE, that is, by considering learner characteristics, overall development, active engagement of learners within their school environment which also informed their perceptions towards IE. It further provided a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the education provided in preparing learners for their future.

Additionally, emphasizing the importance of preparing learners to be active, responsible, and meaningful participants, challenged me to focus on how the NSIE and schools ensure an engaging, relevant, and empowering learning environment for learners with SEN. This conceptual

understanding offered a valuable tool for evaluating the quality of education in the researched schools and identifying overall areas for improvement some of which have been highlighted in the recommendations section.

2.9.2.4 The availability of rights and learner participation in decision making

Knight (2001) also emphasizes the significance of recognizing and upholding learners' rights, including the right to express themselves, privacy, freedom of participation, and foster a democratic learning environment. Thus, this component highlights the importance of valuing all learners, particularly those considered minors, to cultivate a culture of democratic education (Knight, 2000). In summary, Knight advocates for a school environment that respects the rights of learners, as it is crucial for students to feel safe to express their opinions and be protected against any oppressive behaviour that undermines their humanity.

In this research, adopting this component engenders a thorough understanding of learners with SEN (who in the study are also considered vulnerable) and how their rights are recognized to be essential for creating an environment that promotes equal opportunities for learning and participation in educational experiences. According to Knight (2021), schools must establish rights for all learners, to foster a culture of responsibility and respect. This ensures that learners are valued and respected for their unique abilities and facilitates the creation of a learning environment that supports the growth and development of every student.

2.9.2.5 Creation of an optimum learning environment

The democratic theory of education argues that the true essence of democracy in education is realized when it is embedded within an inclusive school environment (Knight 2001). According to Knight (2001), an ideal school environment is one that provides equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their intellectual abilities. It also values learners regardless of their diversity and the curriculum being taught, ensuring their inclusion, and enabling teachers to advocate for the significance of the material (Knight and Pearl, 2000). Such school environment fosters a sense of belonging, promotes competence, encourages creativity, and instils hope and excitement.

This perspective directly resonates to with the goals of the NSIE policy, which seeks to ensure equitable and equal access to education. Thus, the concept helped to analyse if the researched schools do encompass the qualities of an optimal educational setting for IE reflecting on the NSIE's

objective towards physical and social environment. Therefore, giving ontological understanding the NSIE concepts and outcome of IE practice outcome

2.9.2.6 Equality

Democratic theory emphasizes on equality in school practices as pivotal in creating optimal learning environments, (Knight, 2001). Meanwhile, according to Knight, schools fail to achieve equality when they subject learners, to unnecessary pain and differential treatment due to humiliation, isolation, and unequal opportunities. Knight and Pearl (2000), highlight other factors contributing to inequality as limited choice in studies, solitary, and meaningless tasks, imposed silence, lack of praise, classroom segregation, and negative attitudes from teachers and peers.

In this study, this component holds great significance as it directly resonates to the NSIE's main goal which also emphasizes on equality. Therefore, it played a crucial role in analysing data through the assessment of the IE implementation and examining how the school environment either fosters or impedes equality. It also assisted in the identification of some additional factors that can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equal learning environment for all students, regardless of their abilities in Malawi.

Overall, the above discussion sums up what IE entails, from a theoretical standpoint. Thus, encompassing these attributes of the democratic theory to the NSIE goals provided a clear understanding of how the Malawi government wanted to achieve. However, to have a thorough understanding of the NSIE and IE implementation structures, the study also relied on system theory which is discussed below.

2.9.3 Incorporating systems theory into the study

Despite the democratic theory providing a significant contribution to the research, it is limited in its ability to fully understand the structure of the NSIE and IE system. To address this gap, the study employed systems theory, to look at the impact of NSIE on IE implementation from a structural perspective. As Brown (2016) explains, systems theory involves analysing all the scales of the system elements, from global and large details to local and small details. Therefore, the inclusion of systems theory in the study complements the democratic theory of education by providing conceptual insights into the IE system. Specifically, a systems theory analysis provides the understanding of how various elements interact and influence each other to achieve successful

implementation of IE, which may then be understood at the micro level using the democratic theory of education. Below, I will provide a breakdown of how systems theory was incorporated into the study.

2.9.4 Systems theory

Systems theory, developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1952, highlights the interconnected nature of components within a system (Lai & Lin, 2017). This theory emphasizes the need to comprehend how different parts of a system interact to achieve effective functioning (Robinson-Pant, 2020). It recognizes that the system as a ‘‘whole’’ possesses properties that go beyond the sum of its parts (Anyebe, 2018).

Therefore, to understand the NSIE desired impact on IE, it was essential for this study to adopt the Systems theory model which according to Anyebe (2018) is well-suited for this purpose. The study utilized a conceptual framework rooted in the systems theory model to examine the influence of NSIE on IE implementation. This involved identifying the characteristics of the system elements and analysing their interactions through a network analysis as presented in the figure below.

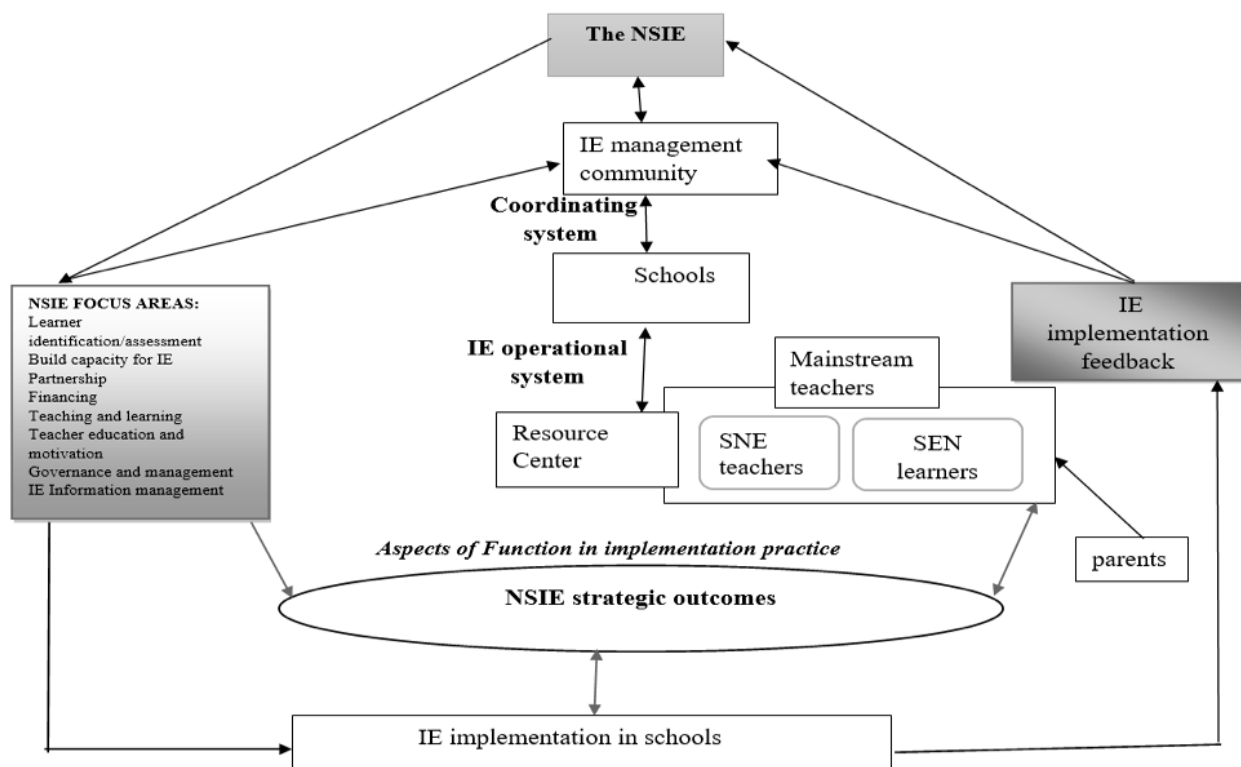


Figure 2: Systems diagram conceptual model illustrating the NSIE and IE network of interaction.

In Figure 2, the network representation showcases the systematic interaction within the NSIE and IE implementation framework. The NSIE elements (focus areas) are depicted on the left side of the diagram and have a direct influence on the coordinating system, represented by the upper arrow leading to the management community. The coordinating system, in turn, influences the operating system within the schools, which includes the RC comprising SNE teachers, SEN learners, and the mainstream teachers.

The RC services are extended to the mainstream teachers and SEN learner who are major players in IE implementation. Simultaneously, the operating system functions on the influence of the NSIE goals defined through the focus areas. The NSIE focus areas and intended strategic outcomes are meant to guide the IE practices in schools, however, this follows a channel of influence through the coordinating system to the operation. To create a feedback loop, the impact of NSIE must be carried back to the coordinating system for ongoing decision-making and adjustments of IE and its implementation structure.

2.9.5 Systems theory paradigms

Paynton and Hahn (2021), examine two key paradigms of systems theory: teleology and homeostasis which concentrate on the goals towards the outcome and maintaining equilibrium, respectively. The assumption is that applying these paradigm characteristics in education policy-related research would help to describe the fundamental characteristics of system structure and function.

2.9.5.1 Teleological paradigm

Teleology, as defined by Paynton and Hahn (2021), is a paradigm that focuses on the establishment of goals to attain specific outcomes. In the context of education, this paradigm has been used to analyse policy frameworks by examining the development of goals, identifying those responsible for setting them, and investigating how they may complement or contradict one another (Anyebe, 2018; Robinson-Pant, 2020). This research concentrates on the NSIE in Malawi, which aims to provide equal and accessible education for all learners in schools, irrespective of their diversity. Therefore, the teleological paradigm was valuable in understanding the NSIE's purpose and its execution to achieve its intended results. It also informed the research objectives which aimed to engage with various authorities associated with formulating and implementing the NSIE to identify if they have shared characteristics that support the NSIE's overall goal.

The importance of teleology in policy studies lies in the understanding that policies should aim to achieve specific goals (Liasidou, 2012). In this research, teleology is essential in understanding the NSIE goals, which resonate with the components of the democratic theory of education. Thus, teleology leads to the hypotheses that if the goals of an NSIE are not democratic, then the outcome would result in non-democratic school practice. Therefore, the NSIE, as a policy document, requires an analytical framework that can demonstrate its achievement of goals, whether they are short-term tactical improvements or long-range strategic restructuring. Meanwhile, Knight, and Pearl (2000) propose that educational policies in general needs to be analysed or assessed against the seven components of the democratic theory of education. Hence, applying the teleological paradigm complemented with the seven components of democratic theory provided a comprehensive analysis of the NSIE document.

2.9.5.2 Homeostasis paradigm

Paynton and Hahn (2021), explain that the homeostasis paradigm in systems theory focuses on achieving a balance between the interconnected elements of a system to achieve the intended outcome at the same time maintain the current function. The assumption of this paradigm is that most implemented systems are functioning stably as they are. So, if some goals in the stable operation are not being achieved there is a need to change the structure of the system (particularly the structure of the elements interaction) so that the new stable state gets closer to achieving the desired goals.

In the educational context, Robinson-Pant, (2020) gives an understanding that, this paradigm explores how different components of the system work together to ensure the schools function effectively and meet the demands of the system. This implies that if the intended results are not being accomplished, the components require adjustments, for example, restructuring the network of elements interaction, replanning the goals, procuring additional resources, and many other factors that may contribute to the failure. Nonetheless, this may take a lot of effort, commitment and time as changing the system in dynamic and requires as gradual process from many players and often does not work (Brown, 2016).

Meanwhile, the NSIE can be referred to as a transformative force in the implementation of IE in schools, to achieve homeostasis by reforming existing school practices to embrace IE. However, its successful implementation requires a collective response from all stakeholders including policymakers, educators, learners, parents, and the broader community involved in the education system to work together to identify and address the systemic barriers and biases that exist and to promote a more inclusive and responsive culture in schools. Therefore, this response must involve a significant paradigm shift in traditional school practices, which in turn will establish a new sense of equilibrium that is inclusive and equitable education for all learners.

Nevertheless, to fully comprehend how NSIE and IE systems work, it is crucial to identify the underlying interaction mechanisms that govern their operations and how they respond to changes to maintain the current system equilibrium and achieve the desired outcomes. Thus, the homeostasis paradigm is just another useful analytical framework that was employed to understand how the NSIE and IE systems operate. The theoretical understanding of the homeostasis paradigm, helped with insights into how the various components of the NSIE and IE system interact, to

influence changes in the school environment, and how they maintained the equilibrium to achieve the desired practice. This, in turn, informed the effort that is needed toward the NSIE and IE implementation.

2.9.6 Synthesis of the two theories

In this research, the both the systems theory and the democratic theory of education contributes the understanding the NSIE goals and IE implementation therefore playing a complementary role in achieve a holistic understanding of the NSIE's impact on IE. Many other researchers have also argued that IE is a democratic practice because it emphasizes on social inclusion and necessitates collaborative efforts amongst all stakeholders in the education system to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment (see Corbett, 2001; Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Miner, 2013; Sant, 2019). Similarly, the systems thinking paradigms emphasizes on the importance of a holistic approach to achieving the system's goals.

Thus, the theories have been used interchangeably to underscore the inclusive framework particularly in capturing the voices of all affected communities. The study was well complemented with a wide array of stakeholders like policy makers, administrators, to teachers, learners and their parents in the school community who contributed to the understanding of how the NSIE have influenced the landscape of IE in Malawi. Therefore, drawing from this integrated framework, the study adopted theoretical lens from both theories to produce a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis of the NSIE impact on IE. This is well discussed in the following chapters.

2.10 Conclusion

In summary, the chapter provided an in-depth overview of the literature review and theoretical framework for the study. It examined the global development of IE, reviewed existing research on its implementation, and identified factors influencing its success and failure. The chapter also discussed the democratic theory of education and systems theory as the theoretical frameworks of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used in the study. It begins with a review of the research objectives, then presents the study design, research sites, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, data coding, and research ethics.

3.2 Review of the research objective and questions

In review, the objective of this study was to investigate the impact of the 2017-2021 Malawi NSIE on IE using a case study of an inclusive primary and secondary school.

The main research question was:

- How has the implementation of the 2017-2021 NSIE impacted IE in the two case study schools in Malawi?

The research sub-questions include:

- i. How were the goals and key priority areas of the NSIE designed and adopted to reform IE in Malawi?
- ii. How has the adoption of the NSIE influenced the IE implementation in the case study schools?
- iii. What are the perceptions of teachers, learners, and parents towards IE?
- iv. What factors enabled or constrained the implementation of the IE in the selected schools?

3.3 Research design and case study approach

The research employed a qualitative case study design, focusing on two schools implementing IE. The qualitative case study research approach was opted for because of its capacity to generate detailed, reliable, and timely data and analysis essential for impact evaluation (Creswell et al., 2007). The other reason was that the research was aimed at exploring individuals' perspectives, emotions, and experiences and case studies are identified as particularly suitable for this (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020).

The studies cases were an inclusive primary and secondary school. In Malawi, IE is mostly implemented in primary and secondary schools. The identification of these cases was based on the 'most similar system approach,' which prioritizes the examination of systemic similarities and differences (Teune & Przeworski, 1970). Thus, both selected schools were inclusive and have been ranked by the government as having a high enrolment of learners with SEN.

3.4 Research sites and description of the case study schools

I conducted a rigorous selection process for the research sites, considering factors such as site accessibility, gatekeepers, and contextual relevance (Gajaweera & Johnson, 2015). This process was guided by a pilot investigation, prior knowledge, a review of MoEST IE reports, and situation analysis documents, including my personal judgment. This also guided the selection of the data source for the study which primarily involved the case study schools for IE implementation. However, the initial and complementary data on the IE and NSIE structure, was collected through secondary data sources such as the NSIE, other policy documents, and some interviews with members of the IE management section at the MoEST.

The case study took place in two public schools (one primary and one secondary) that exhibit characteristics of an inclusive school. These schools were selected based on their reputation for inclusivity and high functioning in the realm of IE. Among the features that define them as inclusive schools is the availability of a RC, teachers specializing in SNE, and the enrolment of learners with diverse learning needs.

The primary school operates under the FPE policy and does not charge tuition fees. This school spans from Standard 1 (the lowest grade) to Standard 8 (the highest grade) and lasts for a duration of eight years. The secondary school, on the other hand, is a national boarding school (see section 4.6), spanning from Form 1 (the lowest grade) to Form 4 (the final grade) and lasting for four years. Learners are required to pay school fees at this level. For a more detailed understanding of how these schools operate, refer to Chapter 4.

Both schools examined in this case study are in the CWED of Malawi (see the map in section 1.10). The CWED is one of six educational divisions in Malawi, which are located across the three regions of the country, namely, the Northern, Central, and Southern regions. These divisions are

responsible for overseeing the management of primary and secondary schools within their jurisdiction.

3.5 Description of the study population

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to carefully select the secondary data sources and the 21 research participants. These 21 participants were selected based on their experiences and roles within the IE system, as they were considered the most appropriate individuals to provide a comprehensive perspective of the IE context for the study. The sample composition was further determined by the concept of democratic inclusion, as advocated by Miner (2013) and Knight (2000) which emphasizes on the importance of representation and diversity within the study population. Thus, they represented diverse educational institutions or entities, including the IE directorate, District Education Management (DEM) office, and IE headquarters (one from each), as well as individuals from the two case study schools. Each school contributed nine participants, comprising the SNE teacher heading the RC, three mainstream teachers, three parents or guardians directly related to the SEN learners, and three learners with SEN who are involved in the RC. Below is a summary of the participants' experiences and roles that influenced their selection.

- IE Directorate, DEM Office, and IE Headquarters: They are the ones responsible for implementing and overseeing IE strategies and guidelines at the broader administrative level.
- Heads of the RCs: They play a central role in governing IE services within the school.
- Mainstream Teachers: They are the ones are central to IE implementation.
- Parents or Guardians to SEN Learners: Their experiences and insights are crucial in the context of IE.
- Learners with SEN: They are direct beneficiaries of IE program.

Furthermore, the participants selected were those who had been part of the system for more than three years since the implementation of NSIE begun. By including participants from various levels of the education system and different stakeholders in the IE process, the study provided a well-rounded and holistic understanding of IE system and practice.

3.6 Data collection

The data collection involved two methods: document analysis and in-depth interviews. The reason for picking the two methods was to gather comprehensive information to understand both the NSIE document and how it is implemented in the two selected schools, including the perception of the implementors and beneficiaries.

Data pertaining to research question (i) was primarily collected by analysing the NSIE document, supplemented by in-depth interviews with IE management representatives. Questions ii, iii and iv focusing on the IE implementation, the perception of the system users and the enabling and constraining factors encountered during IE Implementation respectively, were answered through in-depth interviews mostly with the school participants. Below I give the details of how the document analysis and in-depth interviews were conducted.

3.6.1 Document analysis

This study also employed document analysis as a systematic procedure to scrutinize documented evidence to address specific research inquiries (Bowen, 2009; Gasa and Mafora 2015; Bowen, 2016). This involved examining and interpreting text from written documents or reports to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bertram & Christiansen, 2020). The NSIE strategy document was the primary document used. This document was vital in answering question (i) which is to understand how the NSIE was designed and adopted to implement IE in inclusive schools.

As noted by Bowen (2016), thorough planning is crucial for effective document analysis, including the selection of relevant documentation and the identification of key objectives. Thus, the study focused on understanding the primary goals and strategies of the NSIE document, as well as the involvement of various stakeholders. This guided the selection of specific sections for analysis and determined the appropriate analytical methods (O'Leary, 2014). Additionally, document analysis was used with other data sources, such as the National Education Sector Plan (NESP), reports, articles, and student records, to provide comprehensive insights and contribute to addressing all research questions.

3.6.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth face to face interviews were conducted with each participant to gather their perspectives on the NSIE and its impact on IE. According to Berger (1991), in-depth interviews are extended conversations that are highly focused, allowing for a detailed exploration of the research topic. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) note that such interviews provide freedom for both the researcher and participants to explore additional points and change the direction of the process when necessary. Meanwhile all the participants who took parts in the interviews chosen based on specific criteria to capture a broad perspective of the IE context (see section 3.5).

I particularly schedules my interviews using a bottom-up approach, whereby I started with the participants in the schools before engaging with administrative entities. In the schools, interviews were also conducted, starting with the heads of RCs to understand how the RC operates and get directive on how to engage with the rest of the participants in the school. The RC heads together with the SNE teachers mediate the IE implementation in inclusive schools and are responsible for the welfare of SEN learners.

The following interviews were conducted with mainstream teachers, learners, and parents, respectively. The focus with each school group was to gather information on how IE is being practiced in their schools, and how it informs the NSIE's intent.

Subsequently, interviews were conducted with the IE central managerial offices to gain an appreciation of the overall picture at the government level based on the feedback from schools. This provided the opportunity to ask questions guided by some of the findings on the ground. By following this approach, the research gathered comprehensive and detailed data on the implementation of IE in schools.

Semi-structured interview guides were utilized as data collection tools in all interviews conducted. The guide enabled the interviewer to plan open-ended questions and ask follow-up questions to seek clarification on issues raised during the interview (McLeod, 2014). It also allowed for the exploration of respondents' points of view, feelings, and perspectives, and the collection of raw data that provided a clear picture of the issue under study (Sharra, 2020).

The data collection through interviews focused on addressing research sub-questions ii, iii, and iv, and the question formulation was informed by the NSIE document and the theory of the study.

The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis, with multiple modes of communication adopted based on the interviewee's preference, such as face-to-face, telephone calls, and zoom.

As highlighted by Cohen, Miller et al., (2020), it is ethical to know participants during the interview process to allow flexibility and simultaneously address their needs responsibly. Considering that some participants were young and non-English speakers, which could lead to difficulties in understanding some concepts or dealing with fixed-ordered questions, the study adopted an unstructured approach for some questions. This approach allowed for flexibility in the flow of the interview, mimicking a natural conversation, and to some extent, a local language was used to enhance understanding, particularly during the conversations with learners and parents.

3.7 Data analysis

To bring together what NSIE wanted to achieve, what is happening on the ground and the perception of the system users, the captured data was subjected to critical analysis which involved using software and manual coding. I employed a thematic analysis approach incorporating inductive approach to identify patterns, themes, or sub-themes, following the guidelines provided by Cohen et al. (2018). The data was further mirrored through the lens of critical policy analysis that focuses on providing meaning-making practices, building the practices to generate notable results, locating power in policymaking processes and challenging conditions of inequality by exposing inconsistencies between what the policy says and practices. Each method of data collection was used as a reflection of the other in the analysis. The analysis and interpretation of the data were informed by democratic and systems theory as well as the NSIE.

Document analysis was guided by what the NSIE wanted to achieve during its first five years. However, as a guiding document, its framing was informed by other policies and there have been several reactions to implementation published in different formats. To produce a comprehensive analysis, this study gathered some of the publications that speak directly to the NSIE. This was vital to appreciate some of the weaknesses and strengths being highlighted by others. For instance, MoEST, schools and division and district education offices produce IE reports which act as an update. These documents were vital in gaining insights on how both the government and its stakeholder have been reacting to NSIE implementation. For instance, I relied on the NESP and NEP to understand the structure of IE in NSIE, and the IE reports and other articles helped me to understand some of the successes and challenges with NSIE implementation. Student records in

schools were vital for understanding how the students are responding to IE implementation. All these documents helped me to produce categories and themes for analysis of both the documents and the data collected through interviews.

3.8 Data coding

Data coding began with initial coding and category formation. Initial coding involved assigning codes to the data extracts based on their content, while category formation focused on organizing these coded extracts into meaningful categories. Data collected through both document analysis and interviews was subjected to coding to produce categories and themes for analysis. Firstly, all interview data was transcribed into word documents and coded using NVivo software. To simplify the process of analysing the data, the coding was done in groups and according to schools. This was to appreciate how the responses from the primary and secondary school communities relate. Each school had its data grouped into RC heads, SNE teachers, parents, and learners. Data for IE managers was also coded as a separate group.

This resulted in the formation of 11 groups of data, which were represented by alphabetical letters for easy recognition. For example, the letter A represented secondary school teachers, B for secondary school learners, C for secondary parents, D for primary school teachers, E for primary school learners, F for primary school parents, and G and H for the heads of the RC in secondary and primary respectively, and I, J, K for the district education manager, divisional educational manager, and IE national director respectively.

When the 11 scripts were run on NVivo software, they produced 276 data codes. The visual representation below provides a symbolic illustration of the codes as plotted from NVivo software and how they interacted with each other (due to the number of codes, the words will not be readable). This structural illustration simply helps to better understand the emerging relationships between the codes from the data.

data

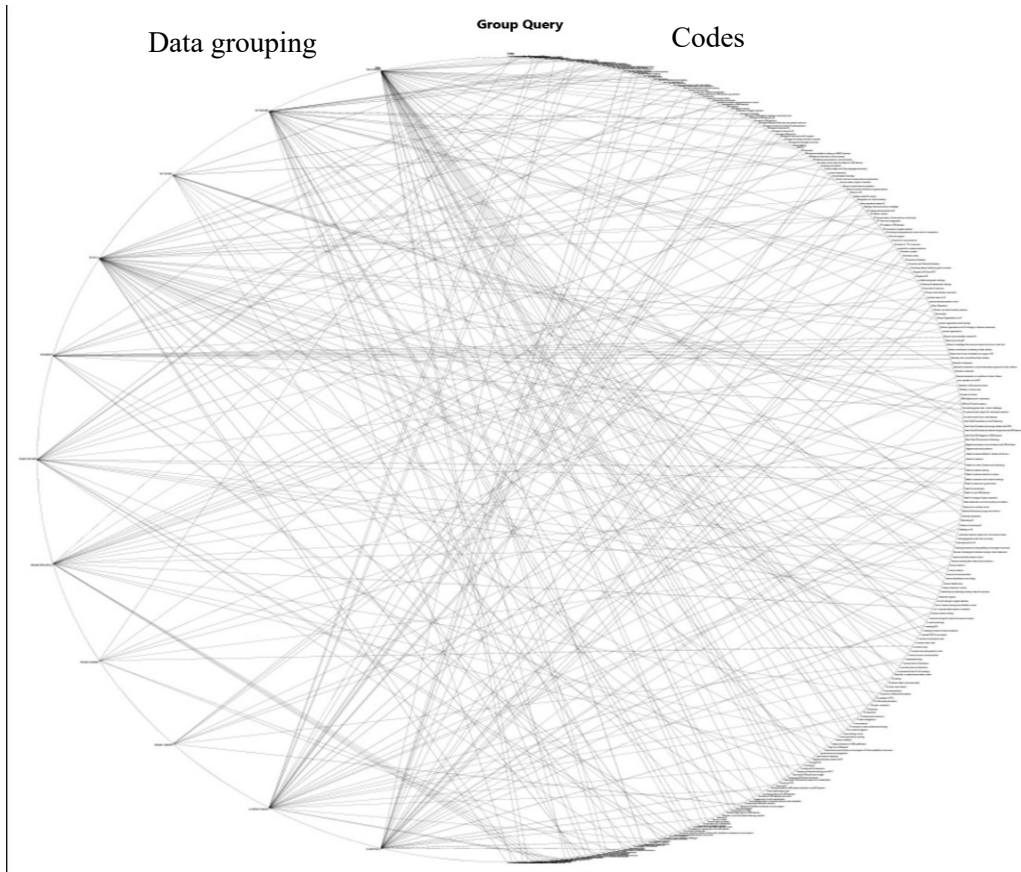


Figure 3: Codes Relationship from interview data files (Source; NVivo and Fieldwork data)

These codes were then merged based on similarities deriving from responses from the external (managers) and internal (schools) systems. The interaction of the codes and how they were grouped have been illustrated in the symbolic figure below.

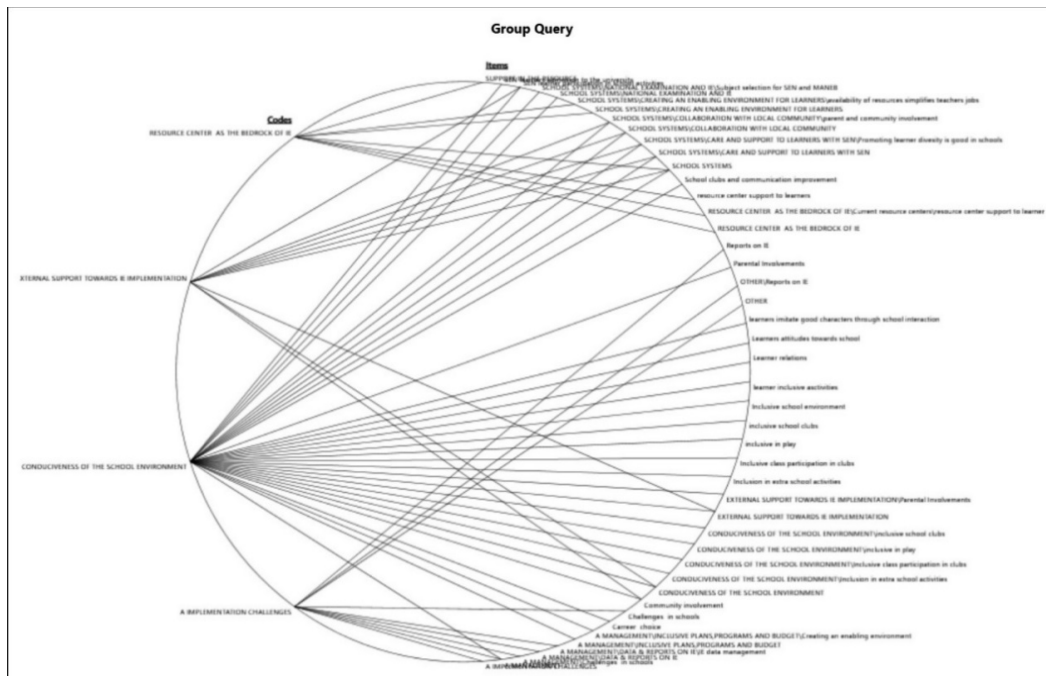


Figure 4: Symbolic representation of code grouping (Source; NVivo and Fieldwork data)

The analysis of data in NVivo revealed common categories that directly aligned with those identified by NSIE through its goals towards IE implementation. Both the NSIE goals and interview responses primarily centred around the schools' ability to implement IE and the support they receive towards IE implementation. Thus, the research data were categorized into two broad categories: (i) the schools' capacity to implement IE, and (ii) the support provided by the external community.

Having developed these categories, the next step was to evaluate the underlying meanings wrapped in the two categories. I relied on the categories to generate sub-categories that informed the analysis. The subcategories generated from the interview data includes.

- i. Role of RC: The RC serves as the foundation of IE, handling all administrative work at the school level.
- ii. Learner Identification and Support: The process of identifying, assessing, and categorizing learners is crucial in preparing necessary support for them.
- iii. Insufficient Resources: There is a lack of adequate human and material resources for effective implementation of IE.

- iv. **Teacher Capacity:** Schools have a limited number of qualified SNE teachers, affecting the capacity to meet learner needs.
- v. **Conducive Environment:** Creating a supportive and inclusive environment is essential for learners with SEN.
- vi. **Parental Support:** Parents play a significant role in supporting their children's education within the context of IE.
- vii. **Monitoring Implementation:** Monitoring of IE implementation is minimal, highlighting the need for increased attention and evaluation.

I also obtained subcategories from the document analysis data (NSIE and other complementary documents such as NESP, NEP, reports, etc). These include:

- i. Functional RC and SNE Teachers
- ii. Effective Learner Identification and Enrolment
- iii. Provision of appropriate care and support to all learners,
- iv. Building teachers' skills to meet learner needs.
- v. Creating an accessible school environment,
- vi. Collaboration with parents, external schools, and other stakeholders,
- vii. Support from MoEST

The subcategories from the NSIE were matched with those derived from the interview data. This comparison allowed for the identification of common themes that were analysed to address the research objective. The resulting themes are presented in the table below.

Table 2: *Categorisation of Codes*

Main categories	Document analysis subcategories	Interview subcategories	Emerging themes
	Functional RC and SNE Teachers	Role of RC	Functional RC and IE implementation

The capacity of the schools	Effective Learner Identification and Enrolment	Learner Identification and Support	Learner identification, categorization, and support
	Provision of appropriate care and support to all learners,	Insufficient Resources	Availability of resources
	Building teachers' skills to meet learner needs	Teacher Capacity	Build teachers' capacity to support learners.
	Creating an accessible school environment,	Conducive Environment	Enabling and supportive school environment
External support	Collaboration with parents, external schools, and other stakeholders,	Parental Support	Parental and Schools' external support
	Support from MoEST	Monitoring Implementation	Government and stakeholders support

3.9 Researcher positionality

In the case of this research, the term positionality reflects on beliefs, judgments, practices (Rowe, 2014) and the authority I have due to my designation in the Office of President and Cabinet in Malawi as it had the potential to influence participants response, and the overall research outcomes. There was a high probability that my work designation could create a powerful social influence on the participants, resulting in risks such as implicit influence, social prejudice, and stereotypes, which could prompt biases or falsification of the findings.

To overcome these, I explained my identity to the participants, including my internal motivations and goals regarding the research. All advocacy regarding what I know about IE was withdrawn by simply focusing on the research aims and goals, and the objectives of the research were clearly spelled out to show that the study was being conducted with the participants, not on them. The purpose was also clearly outlined, indicating that the results would bring up recommendations to inform future policy.

Throughout the research I remained conscious to maintain a good relationship with the participants, adjusting communication to the levels of each participant (high to low). All participants in the study were guaranteed confidentiality of their details.

In addition, I viewed myself as an outsider in the research, regardless of my qualifications and experience as a special teacher with first-hand experience in teaching SEN learners in Malawi. Before joining government office, I taught at a private special school with all the necessary facilities and low teacher-to-student ratio which was pegged at 1:6. The experience was different from teaching an inclusive classroom in public schools where even at the time of this research, the teacher-to-student ratio was still high, and many of the teachers were not qualified SNE teachers. Therefore, to avoid those biases, I respected every position and role in the schools and management and treated every participant as a research participant with first-hand information on what I was looking for. This allowed me to keep my own biases outside the research. I worked to reflexively maintain my position as a co-participant in the study and to be responsible, mature, and courteous to preserve a good and positive relationship with the participants. On the other hand, being an insider in the teaching system made it easy for me to interact with the system officials at all levels to identify participants. This was sufficient to offset the influence of my position and my experience as a teacher.

3.10 Research validity and reliability

To ensure research validity and reliability, I critically engaged with other literature to gain external knowledge and an understanding of qualitative research. This helped me to avoid potential sources of bias in both my research design and data collection processes. This was done through extensive literature review (as acknowledged in the chapter) and consulting with experts in the field. It also helped me to come up with a more comprehensive methodology for the study.

To ensure that the data collected is credible, trustworthy, and reliable, the study used triangulation through which the interviews and document analysis were used interactively to answer the research questions (Flick 2018; Bertram & Christiansen, 2020; Source & Maslakçi, 2020). This helped me to overcome issues of bias and managed to balance the data collected. Triangulation was also applicable when generating themes that were also informed by the theory of the study and the goals of the NSIE document. The theories identified in the data analysis emerged from common codes in both NSIE and interviews as discussed in section 3.8. This helped in presenting findings that

speak directly to what NSIE wanted to achieve against the situation in the schools where the strategy is being implemented.

In addition, data collection tools were well designed to fit every level of the participants and were formulated in such a way that they were interactive. Various modes of communication were developed for other participants based on their preferences. These included face-to-face (school sites, offices, or home visits), telephone calls, google link, and zoom. More importantly, the participants were part of the research and were given the research instruments (as pilot reviewers) to review before the data collection processes. To ensure that the required in-depth data was collected and to be trustworthy to the participants after the data was collected, transcribed, and interpreted, it was referred to the participants for reflection and correction. This was done throughout the study.

3.11 Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in public offices and schools where IE is managed and practiced, and the participants included IE officers, teachers, learners with SEN, and parents. Due to the nature of the study, there were ethical concerns related to the research locations and participants. Thus, following the ethics approval by Rhodes University Ethics Committee (see appendix 12), permission was sought from the relevant authorities, and consent was obtained from all participants before interviews. The approach to all participants was voluntary, and they were fully informed about the study objectives and plans.

Special attention was given to the well-being of learners with SEN, considering their vulnerability. Prior to their involvement in the study, a pilot consultation was conducted with their teachers and parents to ensure that their physical, social, cultural, historical, and psychological needs were considered. Only learners with less severe learning challenges and who were age-appropriate were selected to participate. To maintain a safe and respectful approach, consultations with their teachers were held to ensure the study's process adhered to principles of safety, congruency, authenticity, non-intrusiveness, and purposefulness (Geldard & Geldard, 2008). Additionally, careful consideration was given to the participants' voluntary participation, avoiding coercion or influence. Traumatic memories or discomfort were also minimized, and a conducive study environment was created where learners had the freedom to withdraw or postpone their participation without fear.

With my experience of working with learners with various disabilities, ranging from mild to severe, for over four years, I had a deep understanding of the participants and the behavioural characteristics, such as limited stamina, attention challenges, boredom, agitation, and communication difficulties (see Geldard & Geldard, 2008). To ensure the interview process catered to the unique needs of each participant, I kept the sessions short and learner-friendly, and employed different questioning approaches based on their individual abilities. Additionally, I prioritized the autonomy of the learners, providing them with the choice to withdraw or postpone the interview without any negative repercussions. Throughout the entire research process, I strictly adhered to principles of non-discrimination, anti-stigma, and inclusivity. Furthermore, to mitigate any potential negative impact on the participants, I excluded school mediators from the interview process.

To maintain a strong commitment to confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection for all participants, measures were taken to protect the identities of all participants in the study. School and individual names have been concealed, and instead, participants are identified by specific designations. For those involved in IE, they are referred to as IE Officer 1, IE Officer 2, and IE Officer 3, representing the IE officer from the directorate, DEM office, and IE headquarters, respectively. Participants from the secondary school are designated as SS Teacher 1, SS Teacher 2, SSHRC (SS Head of RC), and SS Learner 1, SS Learner 2, and SS Learner 3. Parents are identified based on the learners they represent, with the parent of SS Learner 1 being referred to as Parent to SS Learner 1. A similar designation approach is applied to participants from primary schools (PS), including PSHRC (PS Head of RC), PS Teachers, PS Learners, and Parents to PS Learners. These designations maintain confidentiality and protect the privacy of all individuals involved. Furthermore, I ensured that all data was securely stored on password-protected devices.

3.12 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter described the research design and methodology used in the study. It introduces the qualitative case study research design and discuss various methodology aspects that were applied and contributed to the success of the study.

CHAPTER 4

MALAWI EDUCATION AND IE SYSTEM

4.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a phenomenological outline of IE in the context of the Malawi education system, the NSIE, and IE management, and narrows down to the structure of case study schools. It presents how these components systematically interconnect to impact the IE implementation in the case study schools.

4.2 The education system in Malawi

The MoEST is responsible for managing the formal education system, which consists of various educational departments, including education divisions, education planning, secondary education, teacher education, basic education, IE, and higher education, among others (UNESCO, 2010). In response to global education agendas, the education system has been going through reforms, leading to the formation of new additional departments and merging others. This study focused specifically on the department of IE which is integrated across all education departments within the MoEST. Like other departments, its role is to coordinate policy formulation, strategy development, and priority identification, ensuring the incorporation of IE principles in these various departments. Meanwhile, the IE department interconnect with all departments through interior established offices which monitor the IE implementation in all sectors influencing the school function.

The diagram below gives a structural understanding of the education system and how the various direct education departments interconnect.

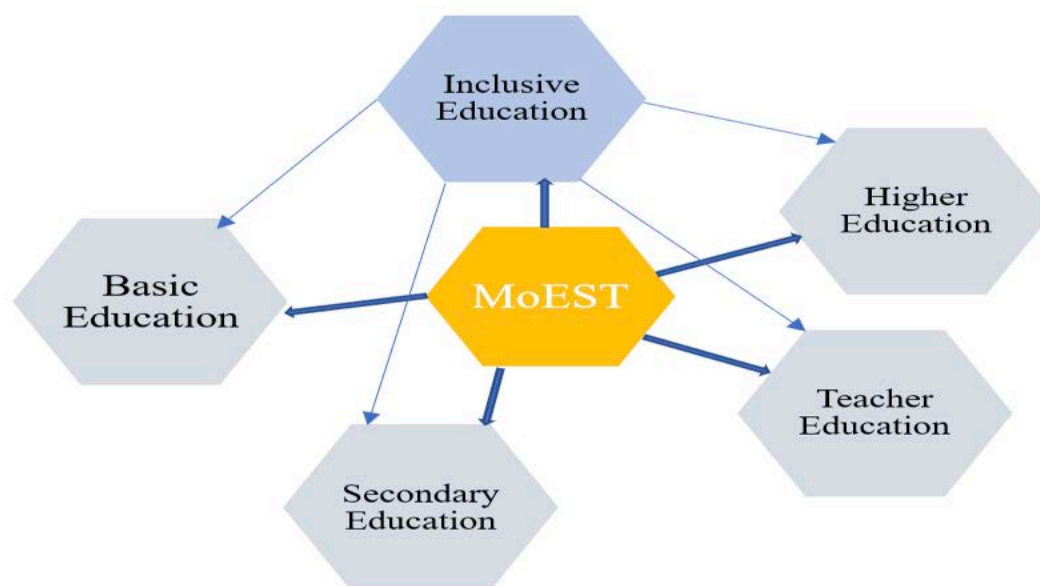


Figure 5: IE Department interconnection with other MoEST department (Sourced from MoEST website)

As shown in the diagram, IE is among the MoEST education departments operating as an independent system. However, it influences other education departments. Below I give an overview of the IE system in Malawi.

4.3 An overview of the IE system

In the education system of Malawi, the IE department is established as an independent entity, while also collaborating with other education departments to ensure the successful implementation of IE across all levels (See Section 4.2, Figure 5). The IE system relies on the interaction and coordination between different departments, to create a comprehensive support structure for IE. The NSIE serves as a key guiding document for the IE department and its associated dedicated offices within other departments, extending all the way to schools. This collaborative interaction and coordination between the NSIE, IE department, and dedicated IE offices contributes to the holistic functioning of the IE system. The diagram below visually depicts this interconnectedness and the flow of information among these key components.

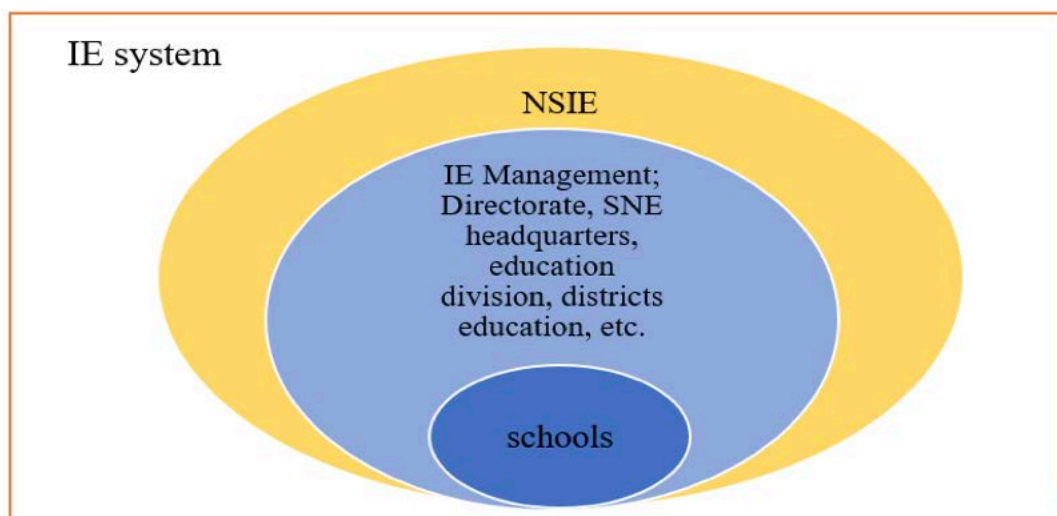


Figure 6: *Structural presentation of the IE system (Source; fieldwork data)*

As shown in the diagram, NSIE is the outer layer of the system that represents the national goals for IE, followed by the management which interprets the NSIE into practice implemented in schools. Below I discuss how the NSIE influences the management system for a causal effect on IE implementation in the case study schools.

4.4 NSIE as an IE implementation strategy

The NSIE is designed to address the education challenges relating to IE and transform the way the education system functions. It specifies several areas that need to be addressed for this to happen. For instance, the framework for viewing its focus, goals for what the government wants to achieve, broad mechanisms for implementing the goals, and actors who will manage and implement these mechanisms (MoEST, 2017). Through these, the strategy aims to influence and promote IE implementation in all systems of education in Malawi.

The NSIE's strategic plan outlines key elements which the management system must adopt for successful IE implementation. These include Capacity for IE, Governance and Management of IE, Learner identification and assessment, the IE Management Information System, Teacher Education and Motivation, Partnerships for IE, the Enabling environment for teaching and learning, and Financing IE (MoEST, 2017, P.20). According to MoEST (2017), the management system should be able to aggregate these elements and pursue them to achieve the broader goal towards IE implementation in schools. According to the NSIE, indicators of achieving the broader goal can see through the availability of, enabling school environments for IE implementation,

necessary resources, partnerships for IE at different levels, improved teacher education and motivation and enhanced identification and assessment of learners.

Meanwhile, the NSIE's course of actions are multi-sectorial, and the rationale for this was informed by a wide range of stakeholders in the education sector and outside. These include the MoEST and other Ministries, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), DPOs, NGOs and Development Partners. Thus, responsibility for its implementation has been deployed to various managerial offices and various stakeholders to monitor and facilitate the implementation of IE in schools in ways that are in line with the goals and the key priority areas. The management system has a responsibility to ensure that there is a decentralized interaction among stakeholders to balance the feedback on NSIE's expected impact on IE implementation in schools. The adoption of a multi-sectorial approach allows different stakeholders to monitor and facilitate IE implementation.

Therefore, its implementation follows a cascading model, where it directly influences the macrosystem, which encompasses the management sector's networking to the IE implementation in schools. The interaction network between the NSIE and its actors is expected to have a significant impact on the schools' function and is critical for the successful implementation of IE in schools. The expectation is that, through this network of interaction, schools should offer education that is fair, of high quality, and accessible to learners with diversity. Thus, the NSIE operates as an intervention to the IE system aiming at addressing the education challenges and transforming the way the system functions to implement IE.

To establish a firm conclusion regarding the anticipated impact of NSIE on the implementation of IE in schools, this research also examined the crucial role played by the IE management system as a decisive link between NSIE and the case study schools. Below I give the context of the management system and how it is expected to impact the case schools.

4.5 IE management system

In the context of IE system, the management holds significant influence over policies and practices in schools. This system follows a decentralized and hierarchical structure, characterized by a top-down approach. The management system plays a pivotal role in shaping the causal effect of the NSIE throughout the educational landscape. They operate as a chain of interactions, creating a web of indirect influences on the micro-system. The process commences with the MoEST through the

IE directorates to formulate policies and strategies, identifying priority areas within their respective departments. These policies and strategies are subsequently disseminated to lower offices, starting with the IE and SNE headquarters, trickling down to various other departments within the IE interaction chain (See figure 7 below).

The influence of the management system on IE implementation in schools becomes apparent when considering its hierarchical structure and the roles performed by different groups. This hierarchy outlines the pattern of interactions within the system and the way distinct roles contribute to ensuring schools possess the necessary capabilities to effectively implement IE. It illustrates the various stages of interaction and the influence exerted by different actors, ultimately shaping the outcomes measured at the micro-system level (schools). Consequently, the schools represent the final point of management of the IE system, profoundly influenced by the pattern of interactions with the other levels of the hierarchy. The diagram below provides a comprehensive depiction of the complete structure of influence, tracing from top management to school management, thereby elucidating the intricate dynamics at play.

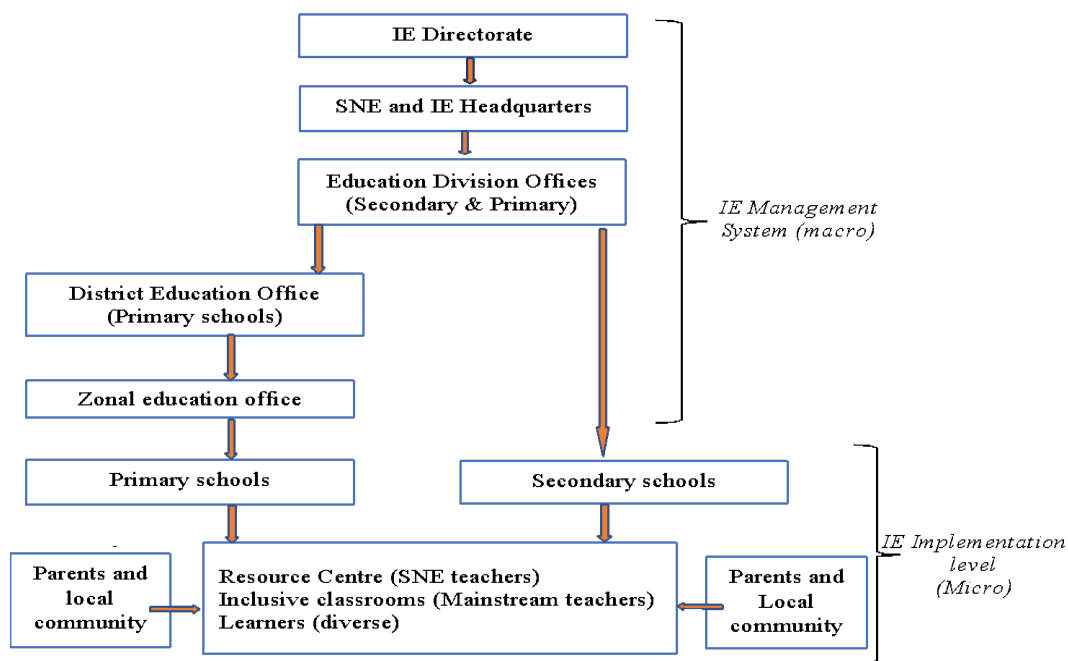


Figure 7: IE implementation interaction hierarchy (Source; fieldwork data)

This hierarchical diagram shows the decentralization of the management system from the IE directorate to the schools. It presents a symbolic pattern of how the management system interacts

(from the top level to down) to affect the IE practice in schools. It's based on the idea that the components are connected and rely on each other to work well. Below I give an overview of the interaction pattern of some parts of the hierarchy that are relevant to the study, highlighting what is done and why.

4.5.1 The IE management interaction pattern

As illustrated by Fig. 7 IE system interaction forms closed cycle of decision-making influence flow from the MoEST to lower offices, then the chain branches at the division level before getting into schools. This information flow forms closed loops and so makes this into a feedback system showing how information about IE implementation influences. This results to the causal structure of the system also been looped. The decisions are further replanned and broken into practical activities starting at the education division level. For example, the division education offices decide on the curriculum development, improving educational materials, conducting research and surveys, and providing in-service training to suits the education reform.

Secondary schools directly benefit from these activities as it receives orders from the education division management, while primary schools receive information through district education offices and zonal education offices to ensure effective dissemination of resources. A feedback mechanism is integrated into the system. Reports from schools regarding their operations and needs are collected and shared. Implementation feedback from secondary schools goes directly to the education division office, while primary school feedback follows a path through the zonal and district education offices before reaching the education division office.

Decisions are made within the division offices based on these reports, with the possibility of further consideration and decision-making by the directorates. This feedback loop allows for assessing the effectiveness of the education system and making necessary adjustments for successful implementation of the IE. In the education system, the division offices play a crucial role in managing both primary and secondary schools. Recognizing the larger number of primary schools in the country, they are organized into districts for efficient management. While district education offices primarily focus on primary schools, they maintain a connection to the education division office by providing feedback on the implementation of IE in primary schools. This feedback is then reported directly to the IE headquarters or further to the directorate creating a cyclical relationship where policy direction influences school practices. The system of influencing and

collecting feedback ensures a continuous flow of information throughout the chain, completing the cycle of communication and decision-making, and thus causality.

This study reveals a comprehensive management structure of the IE system in Malawi, providing valuable insights into its operation. The research relies on the experiences of supervisors within this structure to complement the understanding of how IE is implemented in the case study primary and secondary schools. Subsequent sections explore how these offices address the key elements of the NSIE to influence the implementation of IE in the case study schools.

4.5.2 The IE directorate and IE headquarters

The SNE and IE headquarters work hand in hand with the IE directorate. They collect data on IE from all education divisions. They analyse the data and submit it to the directorate for final decisions. Likewise, they receive decisions from MoEST and disseminate them to the lower levels for action. Thus, the NSIE implementation and feedback are more controlled at this level. It is important to highlight that when the NSIE was created; it was primarily referred to the SNE and IE headquarters, which have authority over of all education services that affect learners with SEN. Thus, the SNE and IE headquarters, have a leading role in managing, coordinating, and regulating all the IE implementation activities as well as monitoring the lower levels such as the IE education division, district education, and education zones offices (MoEST 2017, 26).

At these MoEST offices, they manage IE as a complementary education system that addresses the needs of learners with SEN and those without. This comes in two forms. First, all schools and colleges that accommodate SEN learners should have a well-functioning RC within their school and college premises, to be used as a toolkit for ensuring all learners in mainstream classes get necessary support regardless of their diversity. Second, where a school is closer to an existing ‘special school,’ they should work together to ensure the learners with SEN are supported. The NSIE documents call this the ‘twin-track approach’.

According to the IE directorate and headquarters, NSIE is a multifunctional document, not only meant for one style of schooling but for distinct categories of schooling, which include special schools (i.e., schools for deaf and blind learners) as well as mainstream schools practicing IE. Therefore, it is also referred to as an advocate’s tool for IE, or as a national agenda and it encourages all schools to implement IE regardless of their nature without referring children to

special schools. This advocacy has led to an increased number of schools enrolling SEN learners despite not having the full capacity to do so (the number of these schools is not yet clear). The structure of IE implementation in mainstream schools is expected to follow the special schools' design where they use RCs to address the needs of a particular group of learners with SEN.

Meanwhile, the SNE and IE headquarters have leading roles in management, coordination, and regulation of IE implementation (See MoEST 2017, p.26). Amongst many other roles, the headquarters is expected to lobby the ministry of finance to locate more funds for IE, strengthen supervision, monitoring, and evaluation, ensure the national education curriculum responds to diversity, develop activities for capacity building of IE, advocate for IE, and coordinate stakeholders, just to mention but a few. However, amongst these roles, many assignments are incomplete and will require substantial investment to achieve success. This mini evaluation is based on the feedback on IE implementation in schools by the Education Division Offices. Below I present a summary of how the education division and the district education offices work to influence IE implementation in schools.

4.5.3 Division and district education offices

By design, the education division office is the anchoring office that manages education systems the education regions. According to IE and SNE headquarters, the education division and District education are the key players as they are the ones that identify what is required on the ground for the effective implementation of IE. Their mandate is to ensure that all schools have the necessary support they need and ensure that there are enough teachers where needed. The Ministry of Education posts teachers to various schools where needed based on the requisitions made at the division and district levels. These offices are therefore supposed to have enough data and reports on what schools need for the effective implementation of IE.

According to the hierarchy presented above, the educational division offices work directly with secondary schools while the district education coordinates the data from primary schools and directs it to the education division offices which then aggregates it together with data from secondary schools and sends it to the IE and SNE Headquarters. There are IE coordinators responsible for all-inclusive secondary and primary schools within the division and the district offices. These coordinators monitor and handle the information related to IE in their respective divisions and districts.

The sampled case studies for this study come from Lilongwe Urban Education District and Central West Education Division (CWED). As of 2022, these educational offices had reported an increase in schools offering IE since the introduction of NSIE. According to Lilongwe Urban District, in 2017 there was only one education zone that had 14 schools practicing IE, but now the number has increased to four zones with 23 schools. Meanwhile, according to data obtained at CWED, as of 2022 the division had 29 inclusive schools in six districts. The table below gives a summary of the current inclusive schools for both the Lilongwe urban district and CWED.

Table 3: Summary inclusive Schools for Lilongwe Urban and CWED (Source Fieldwork data)

CWED districts and the number of inclusive secondary schools in each		Lilongwe Urban District zones and the number of inclusive primary schools in each	
Dedza	3	Ngwenya	4
Ntcheu	4	Kafulu	6
Lilongwe Rural East	4	Boma	7
Lilongwe Urban	10	Chiwoko	6
Lilongwe Rural West	4		
Mchinji	4		
Totals	29		23

There are also another 35 primary schools practicing IE by enrolling learners with SEN despite not meeting the basic requirements to manage such learners. This gives us statistics of 58 schools within the district that are implementing IE.

At both the district and division levels, data in schools is collected once a year, within the first three weeks of each term of the academic year. In primary schools, it is collected by the Itinerant SNE teachers who move from one school to another to monitor the implementation of IE. In the Lilongwe Urban District, these teachers work with 23 RCs (RCs) established in the schools and within the four above-mentioned educational Zones. The resources that are found within these RCs benefit all the schools under the supervision of these teachers. On record, there are 3604 SEN learners in primary schools in the Lilongwe Urban District who benefit from the 23 RC managed by twelve SNE teachers.

The above discussion shows there is an existing IE management system that follows a top-down management approach in which those at the top prescribe what should be done across and in the schools. There is, however, a symbiotic relationship and interdependence across the hierarchy in that what comes from the top, shapes what happens at school level. Similarly, what happens at school level informs decisions across the hierarchy in a reverse order. Below, I present the context of the two case study schools sampled from the 23 primary and 29 secondary schools in Lilongwe urban district and CWED division.

4.6 School systems: context of the case study schools

As discussed, in the literature review, IE Implementation is done in schools, and it is also where the actual impact of NSIE is reflected (See also Chitiyo et al., 2015; De Souza, 2020; Kamchezera, 2010; Opoku et al., 2021; De Souza, 2022). This study employed two case study schools, a primary and a secondary. Understanding the IE implementation in these case study schools requires an understanding of the operating system of primary and secondary education and how the inclusive schools are clustered. This will also contribute to understanding the structure of the case study schools.

According to the 2020 International Education Report on IE in Malawi, primary and secondary schools are classified into four categories:

1. Inclusive/Mainstream schools: These schools provide education to both learners with and without special educational needs (SEN) in the same classrooms.
2. Non-inclusive schools: These schools offer education exclusively to learners without special needs and do not have provisions for learners with SEN.
3. Integrated schools: These schools have separate classes and additional resources specifically designed for children with disabilities. They are typically attached and have a learning approach like that of an inclusive school.
4. Special schools: These schools specialize in providing education tailored to the needs of children with disabilities.

In mainstream or inclusive schools, a significant aspect is the inclusion of a RC that assists in providing support for learners with SEN within regular classrooms, allowing them to learn together with peers without SEN. Nonetheless, due to the increasing demand for IE, even non-inclusive schools are forced to accommodate learners with SEN, despite not having the capacity to do.

Primary schools in Malawi provide basic education from standards 1 to 8, divided into infant, junior, and senior levels. Students undergo three regular term assessments until standard 8, with the third term determining class promotion to the next level. In standard 8, they take the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE) which qualifies them for secondary education.

During the eight years of primary education, learners with SNE are identified by mainstream teachers, supported by SNE teachers, based on academic performance, interaction skills, disabilities, or other learning challenges. The assessed learners' information is sent to the MoEST for categorization and coding.

The coding system which is done by the SNE and IE headquarters assigns codes to different SEN categories, such as 1 for blindness, 2 for low vision, 3 for deafness, and 4 for learning difficulties. These codes are important for recognizing SEN learners during the national examination.

At Standard 8, after passing the PSLCE, learners are selected to secondary schools. Secondary schools are grouped into National, District, and Community Day secondary schools (Macjessie-Mbewe, 2004). For all groups, there are inclusive and non-inclusive schools. For learners to be selected to these schools, they must achieve a certain average score. Best performing learners are selected to national secondary schools, followed by district secondary schools, and the remainder to community day secondary schools.

This research found that learners with SEN in primary school are subjected to the same assessment criteria used for assessing learners without SEN. Only the learners with visual challenges get special consideration of having their examination in braille prints. Their scripts are marked by braille specialists. The codes assigned to the SNE learners (which have nothing to do with the assessment) are used at the ministry during the selection process and they guide the allocation of SEN learners (according to their performance) to schools where they will have access to inclusive learning. Their final mark determines whether they should go to a national, district or community day secondary school.

Secondary education runs from forms 1 to 4 and is grouped into two levels: junior level comprising forms 1 and 2 and senior level running from 3 to 4. At both levels, learners write the national examination to qualify for the next level that is, whether senior classes or university education,

respectively. At the junior level (in form 2), they write a Junior Certificate Examination (JCE), and at the senior level (in form 4) they write the MSCE.

The study reveals at during the PSLCE (for primary school), learners with SEN are not provided with any special arrangements. They participate in the examination just like any other learners, without specific accommodations or support. In contrast, in secondary school, there is a different approach. Learners with SEN are assigned to a separate classroom during examinations, where they receive additional time and support to complete the assessment. The supervision and assistance are provided by SNE teachers who are specifically deployed by the MANEB for invigilating SEN learners. This special consideration aims to ensure that learners with SEN have the necessary support to complete their examinations successfully.

This outlined context applies to both schools selected for this study. They also each have a fully functioning RC and a significant population of learners with special educational needs (SEN). The following overview provides a concise understanding of the implementation structure of IE in these schools.

4.7 IE structure in the case study schools

According to the hierarchical structure represented in Figure 5 above, IE management for primary and secondary education follows a different management path. They also differ in their implementation structure.

4.7.1 IE implementation structure in the case study secondary school

The sampled school is an inclusive national secondary school that offers education to learners with SEN and those without. The SEN learner enrolment at this school is controlled based on the availability of SNE teachers, space, special resources, as well as boarding space. 700 learners are accommodated in Forms 1, 2, 3, and 4 and they share 12 classrooms available at the institution. The teacher-to-student ratio is at 1:60 on average. Out of these learners, 22 have SEN. This is against 46 mainstream teachers and 10 SNE teachers. The school has an RC which is a separate room where all learners with SEN and SNE teachers operate from.

Based on the institutional and MoEST terminology, learners with SEN are referred to as learners with low vision, total blindness, learning difficulties, hard of hearing, complete deafness, multiple disabilities, or learning difficulties. Those with low vision and total blindness are classified as

learners with VI or Visually Impaired (VI), those who are hard of hearing or deaf are classified as learners with Hearing impairment (HI). In the RC, learners receive learning support from SNE teachers and have access to different materials that aid their learning process in mainstream classrooms. Those with VI are assisted with the transcription of texts into braille, while those with HI, and LD, are assisted in several ways such as remedial learning and other necessary services to aid their learning. It is at the RC where all activities concerning IE implementation within the school are coordinated. Thus, it is also right to say; it is where IE at the school level is controlled.

The RC is well-furnished with teaching and learning materials to help the learners in their respective classrooms covering almost 80% of the needs. It also supports mainstream teachers with materials to aid the teaching process. However, some learners require specialized, sophisticated personal resources which are not found within the country and are expensive to purchase. On top of that, some resources, which were used to assist learners are no longer functioning due to overuse, and the lack of experts for repairs or spare parts in the country. The school reports to the CWED and receives direct support from the parents.

4.7.2 IE implementation structure in the case study primary school

The hierarchical structure in Figure 7 shows there is a longer chain of influence for IE implementation in primary schools than in secondary schools. IE in primary schools also follows the RC approach. But the primary school is under the supervision of the Lilongwe Urban District which also reports to the CWED management. Based on the categories of public schools (presented in section 4.6), the primary school has characteristics of both an inclusive and integrated school. It is inclusive because some learners with SEN receive instruction in the mainstream classroom while it is integrated because some receive specialized instruction in the RC under a special class program.

The school currently has 2976 learners and 43 teachers. Of the learners, 175 have been formally identified as having SEN in various categories (in relation to MoEST coding described in section 4.6). It has one qualified SNE teacher. The school's highest teacher-learner class ratio is currently set at 1:90, although some classrooms have fewer students than that.

Out of the 175 SEN learners, 90 receive instruction in the different mainstream classes (Grade/Standard 1 to 8). These learners do not visit the RC. They are involved only if there is an

issue that needs special attention, otherwise, it becomes the responsibility of the teachers coordinate their work with the RC to gain support on how best the learners can be managed in the classrooms. The other 85 learners with severe SEN and disabilities are accommodated in the resource room also known as a ‘special class’ and are taught by the one SNE teacher who is available in the school.

Due to the capacity of the resource room, it is not spacious enough to accommodate all 85 learners at once. As such, they are streamed into two cohorts scheduled to attend school twice a week (from Monday to Thursday). The first cohort (43 learners) reports for school only on Mondays and Wednesdays while the other group of 42 learners comes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Fridays, no student in this group goes to school. Therefore, the resource teacher uses Fridays for planning and home visits to see if what is taught at school is also implemented at home. Because of this arrangement, learners with SEN are in school only two days out of five normal school days and lose three days of school. In other words, learners in special classes do not have full access to education like their colleagues in mainstream classrooms.

Meanwhile, learners in the mainstream class are taught subjects (English language, mathematics, agriculture, science and technology, social development, life skills, expressive art, and religious studies) which are examinable at the end of eight years while those in the special learning programme spend more time improving their learning abilities and daily living skills. They are allocated less time for academic work and spend more time on each lesson than their colleagues in the mainstream classrooms. The special class deploys learners to the mainstream classroom through a pull-out program when they improve their academic performance and other daily living skills. The learners are assessed frequently and those who show improvements are moved to the mainstream classrooms.

The school has no assistant teachers, thus, for easy management of SEN learners both in the mainstream and special class, parents, guardians, or home-employed assistants are invited to assist the teacher in their classrooms. When in the mainstream class, parents are allowed to stay outside near the classroom and are called in when the need arises.

The RC also empowers mainstream teachers with the skills to teach and who have a positive attitude towards learners with SEN, placed in their classrooms. The primary school adopted Curriculum Professional Development (CPDs) as one way of providing mainstream teachers with

some basic support on IE implementation. Through the CPDS, teachers are trained with basic skills on how to cope with the inclusive school environment.

4.8 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has outlined how the education system in Malawi operates and influence IE implementation in the case study schools. By applying the concepts of systems thinking. The chapter has shown that IE implementation is a collaborative action.

CHAPTER 5

NSIE STRUCTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the initial phase of data analysis, focusing on answering the first research question. It aims to provide insights into the NSIE, including its intent and the enacted plan for implementing IE in the schools.

5.2 Research objectives and question

The first objective of this study focused on understanding how the goals and key priority areas of the NSIE were designed and adopted to reform IE. The following research question guided the exploration of this objective:

- How are the goals and key priority areas of the NSIE designed and adopted to reform IE?

This question analyses the NSIE intent, which serves as the foundation for implementing IE. It involves analysing the strategic alignment of NSIE's goals and their influence on IE practices in schools, with the aim of achieving desired outcomes. To address this question, the study primarily conducted a thorough document analysis of the NSIE and other complementary documents. Additionally, interviews with management personnel were conducted to ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the findings, providing further insights into the enactment and execution of the NSIE and its intended outcomes.

The data analysis process involved an inductive approach, starting with open coding of the NSIE document to identify key codes categories. These categories were analysed together with the priority areas outlined in the NSIE to gain insights into the government's perspective on IE which led to the development of the subcategories. Answering the research question (i) involved merging several categories and subcategories derived from the coding.

Additionally, field data from the NSIE implementation management provided further insights into the implementation of the NSIE. This comprehensive analysis approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the NSIE intent towards the practical implementation in the schools (detailed in chapter 6).

5.3 NSIE Intent towards IE implementation in schools

This section answers the first part of the research question which explored how the NSIE goals were designed to reform IE in Malawi. Analysis involved traversing through the NSIE document to understand the NSIE strategic design and how it is systematically aimed at influencing IE implementation in schools. Thus, much of the data for this section relied on the NSIE document review (MoEST, 2017) augmented by other documents like the Special Needs Education Implementation Guidelines (SNEIP) 2008, and the National Education Sector Plan (NESP), 2008-2017.

According to the NIES document, the government wants to ensure equitable access to quality education in an inclusive school environment for all learners with diverse needs in Malawi (MoEST, 2017, p.11). To accomplish this, the NSIE document says the government wants to see:

- i. An increased capacity for IE
- ii. Improved governance and management of IE
- iii. Enhanced skills in learner identification and assessment
- iv. A developed IE management Information System
- v. Improved teacher education and motivation
- vi. Improved partnerships for IE at different levels
- vii. Improved teaching and learning environment and
- viii. Increased funding for IE

From these NSIE strategic goals, two core themes were formulated to describe NSIE's overall intent towards IE implementation. This is, to empower schools by ensuring that they: have the 'capacity to implement IE' and are getting the 'necessary support' from the government and other stakeholders. As to whether the school has the capacity to implement IE, this can be identified at the level of the 'micro system' while the support it gets is identified in the 'macro system', and these together create a whole system of IE. All the NSIE goals were analysed and grouped into the two major core themes for effective IE implementation in the schools, which are (i) external and internal support and (ii) the capacity of the schools to implement IE. I begin by outlining NSIE goals to support IE implementation in schools, justified by the MoEST (2017).

5.3.1. NSIE and support towards IE implementation

NSIE stresses that effective IE implementation in schools relies on the external support they get from different stakeholders, in and out of the education system (MoEST, 2017, P.31). The NSIE strategic plan assigns responsibilities to various stakeholders who are supposed to work collaboratively towards the desired strategic outcome. Amongst these stakeholders are: Civil Society Organizations (CSO), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), other government ministries, Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and Parent Teacher Associations, to mention but a few. The Ministry of education through its various IE management posts is a collaborator with all the above stakeholders for the effective implementation of IE. Thus, this research recognizes that education management, particularly those under IE, are key influencers of IE implementation in schools. Apart from that, it also recognizes the support within the school community, the local community, and parents. Below I give the analysis of how NSIE stressed the support towards the IE implementation starting with MoEST support.

5.3.1.1 Managerial support towards IE

The NSIE mandates the MoEST to play a leading role in supporting the implementation of IE in schools. As a result, the administrative responsibilities for achieving the desired strategic outcomes in the key priority areas of NSIE are centralized within the MoEST IE management (MoEST, 2017, P25).

NSIE identifies four managerial offices that are responsible for influencing the implementation of IE in schools. These offices are the IE Headquarters, Education Divisions, District Education Offices, and Zone Offices. The hierarchical relationship between these offices is illustrated in Figure 5 (chapter 4), which helps in understanding how they interconnect. Each of these offices has different roles assigned to them, all aimed at influencing the implementation of IE starting from the higher levels down to the schools themselves (MoEST 2017, p. 26-27). Some of these roles that directly empower IE implementation in schools, include:

1. IE Headquarters: transforming the current education system into a unified system that promotes IE; strengthen supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of IE implementation ensure that the national curriculum responds to the needs of diverse learners and enhances

capacity building for educators; and strengthen capacity building on IE in education sectors and decentralize management of IE services.

2. Education Division: The education division is tasked with coordinating and monitoring inclusive activities within their respective divisions; ensure secondary schools incorporate IE in teaching and learning; identifying students with SEN secondary schools and ensuring that these schools comply with IE requirements.
3. District Education Offices: District education offices have several responsibilities, including deploying SNE teachers across different zones; providing supervision for IE implementation; collecting data on how IE is being implemented in schools; ensuring accessible infrastructure in schools; and fostering collaboration between special schools and mainstream schools.
4. Education Zone Offices: Education zone offices are responsible for supervising, advising, and mentoring mainstream teachers on IE practices; maintain data on IE in schools; guide school leaders in identifying learners who require additional support; ensure equitable distribution of teachers; and conduct continuous professional development sessions on IE at both school and zone levels.

All these roles aim to empower mainstream schools to equip them with the necessary capacity to implement IE effectively. Section 5.4 of the document discusses how some of these responsibilities were put into action.

5.3.1.2 Community and parental support

According to NSIE, parents and local school communities are recognized as crucial stakeholders who play a vital role in supporting the implementation of IE. They directly contribute to the school's practices and are expected to fulfil various responsibilities. Some of these include promoting care and support services, assisting in learner identification, protecting children from abuse and violence, encouraging school attendance and completion, assisting with school assessments, contributing to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), supporting learning, participating in school improvement and rehabilitation activities, and advocating for the interests of their children.

Therefore, in the research, parents and local school communities were also considered as key participants due to their important roles in IE implementation (MoEST 2017, p. 30).

5.3.1.3 Support within the school community

According to NSIE, in the school community the implementation of IE is expected to receive direct support from the school head teachers and RC. On the other hand, the study reveals that IE practice is a resource-centre-based approach and the RC is what describes an inclusive school. These centres are expected to work collaboratively with special schools for easy access to resources for learners with SEN (MoEST, 2017 P.27-28). Thus, the key person responsible for reinforcing IE implementation at the school level is the head of the RC. The head of the RC together with the school headteachers are expected to coordinate and initiate support from the macrosystem so that the school environment is conducive, enabling a well-capacitated inclusive environment that responds to diversity. Below is how NSIE visions a well capacitated inclusive school.

5.3.2 The Capacity of the Mainstream School

NSIE identifies a well-capacitated mainstream school as one that a) has a functional RC, b) has SEN learner identification and enrolment tools, c) provides appropriate care and support to SEN learners, d) has mainstream teachers who are skilled in handling SEN learners, accessible and e) provides an enabling school environment for SEN learners. Below I show how NSIE aimed at achieving the capacity of mainstream schools through these.

5.3.2.1 A functional RC

According to the NSIE, a RC is a valuable school structure that is coordinated by either SNE teachers within the school or itinerant teachers at zone level. Its purpose is to support the implementation of IE in schools, by providing specialized resources and support for learners with SEN within their school environment (MoEST 2017).

The NSIE expects the RC to play a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of inclusive practices by providing necessary resources, support, and expertise. Its function is comparable to that of a special school. Furthermore, the government aims to utilize special schools as RCs, where schools with learners with special educational needs can seek assistance. The NSIE sets the goal for special schools to serve as RCs in the following statement:

“Through this strategy, the government stands to preserve special schools and RCs and use them as a resource base to promote IE. However, this will be done

with strong collaboration with mainstream schools in a bid to uphold social inclusion (MoEST 2017, P 5.)

Thus, NSIE together with the special schools and RCs are supposed to act as toolkits (as described by Crespie et al., 2022) for mainstream schools' inclusive practice. This means the expectation for a functional RC in a school is that it provides recommendations and resources to all school staff to strengthen their capacity in implementing IE. Meanwhile, the NSIE recommendation for a functioning RC is to ensure that it is well capacitated to: build necessary skills in learners with SEN (such as braille/sign language, daily living skills, and language skill); to build skills in mainstream teachers to teach and manage the diversity of learners; providing technical support on learner assessments; providing child protection mechanisms; coordinate school screening exercises in schools; coordinate with parents of SEN learners; collect data within the school and keep records of all SEN learners (MoEST 2017, P.28).

5.3.1.2 Learner identification, assessment, and enrolment

Learner identification and assessment is among the key components of the strategic outcomes outlined in the NSIE document. To achieve it, a set of coordinated activities, monitored by the MoEST, DEMs, EDM, TTCs, and other stakeholders, were established. These activities include: i) developing identification tools for assessing learners, ii) establishing a referral system for further assessments where critical conditions are identified, iii) developing assessment skills in the caregivers, teachers, and teacher educators on how to use the developed assessment tools, iv) purchasing other necessary mobility and assistive devices for learners (MoEST 2017 P.22). The expectation is that at the end of NSIE implementation, identification tools must be developed, a referral system set up, several teachers, caregivers, and teacher educators trained, and a good number of schools need to have assistive devices available (Page 46). The research study also aimed to gain an understanding of learner identification in schools in relation to the goals set by the NSIE.

5.3.1.3 Care and support to SEN learners

According to NSIE, RCs established in the schools, together with the community and parents are key for ensuring that there is appropriate care and support for learners with SEN in schools. However, the strategy does not specify how this will be made possible. What is made clear is that this is something that has been adopted from the SNEIP (2008). SNEIP outlines care and support

as one way of removing the teaching and learning imbalances that learners with SEN face in their respective schools, thus it comes as an objective for the access and equity priority area (MoEST 2009, P 15). Therefore, since these two documents do not offer full guidelines on how this will be made possible, the research also paid attention to what the schools are doing to make sure learners with SEN are cared for and supported in the case study schools, and if there are established child protection mechanisms.

5.3.1.4 Capacity of teachers to implement IE

Between 2017 and 2021, MoEST recognized the need to improve teacher education programs and provide incentives to teachers in inclusive schools (MoEST, 2017). The objective was to better prepare and motivate teachers for delivering IE services. According to NSIE analysis (page17), the existing pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, for both primary and secondary schools, did not adequately equip teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, SNE programs in colleges mainly focused on education for special schools rather than IE.

Thus, the NSIE prioritizes teacher education and motivation as key areas for enhancing teacher capacity. The goals included revising the SNE teacher curriculum to align with IE requirements, developing an IE training manual for primary and secondary teacher educators, and conducting Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs for teachers in inclusive school settings (MoEST, 2017, p.23).

Furthermore, the NSIE aimed to introduce a reward system for teachers in primary and secondary schools by creating more established positions for SNE teachers. This initiative would provide greater opportunities for further training and professional development (MoEST, 2017). The plan was to ensure that by the end of 2021, schools would have teachers and caregivers who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs to effectively teach learners with special educational needs (SEN).

5.3.1.5 Accessible and enabling school environment

Enabling the school environment is also among the key focus areas of NSIE. Through this, NSIE aimed at “adapting the existing curriculum, method, teaching, and learning materials to incorporate IE, equip educators, caregivers, learners school communities with knowledge and skills to support IE”. It also emphasizes the availability of resources, and school environment and infrastructure as

important aspects in promoting the implementation of IE. These are valued to have a direct impact on access, quality, and equity in IE implementation, and to ensure an improved teaching and learning environment. Thus, to achieve this in schools, MoEST and other stakeholders were supposed to procure teaching, and learning resources, provide training in various communication modes and psychosocial support for SEN learners, offer orientation on safeguarding rights of the children, and to train learners to embrace peer support, to mention but a few (MoEST, 2017, P 24)

In addition, NSIE emphasized increasing human capacity. Through this, the plan was to train and recruit more teachers, caregivers, and support assistants for IE (MoEST 2017). It also aimed at supporting the mobility of itinerant teachers as they monitor the implementation and collect data on IE in various schools.

Having understood the structure of NSIE and what the government wants to achieve through it, this study further engages the education and school managers, parents, teachers, and learners to gather their views on how NSIE has impacted IE in their schools. Thus, the next section presents how the above-outlined NSIE intent was enacted and implemented in schools.

5.4 The NSIE implementation

The previous discussion highlighted the aim of NSIE to bring about change by influencing various managerial positions who are supposed to execute its plans to ensure schools are adequately prepared to implement IE. This section now focuses on addressing the second part of the first research question, which explores how NSIE was adopted and implemented to affect IE in schools.

To gather insights on this topic, in-depth interviews were conducted with key IE system managers. Their perspectives shed light on how NSIE was transitioned into an action plan to address the outlined intents. The data collected from these interviews formed a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of NSIE in practice.

5.4.1 Transitioning NSIE into practice

NSIE was sanctioned by the directorate and was given to the IE headquarters for implementation. From there, the dissemination action continued to various management offices down to the school level. Based on the data collected from various management offices, there are several initiatives that the government is doing in response to NSIE, to ensure schools are well-capacitated for IE implementation. Some of these include a) Training teachers in schools through SENCO and CPD

programs, training SNE teachers in colleges, and b) training school managers. I present these below one by one starting with the professional development programs in the school.

5.4.1.1 SENCO and CPD implementation in schools

As one of the proactive steps towards enhancing teacher capacity and ensuring the successful implementation of IE, MoEST, through the DEM offices with support from the IE headquarters have introduced the SENCOS program. By building a network of trained teachers within schools, the program promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment for all students.

The teachers who undergo the SENCO program are selected based on their willingness and passion for working with learners with SNE. These selected teachers undergo training in specific SNE skills to enable them to collaborate effectively with the SNE teachers already present in schools. Upon completion of the training, they are designated as SENCOS. The government's expectation is that these trained and titled teachers, as SENCOS, will return to their respective schools and play a crucial role in empowering other mainstream teachers. One of the participants responsible for this said:

To address the shortage of teachers and attitudes, we have gone to schools to identify those with a passion for SNE and train them into SNE teachers. We call them SENCOS (IE Officer 2, October 3, 2022).

By equipping SENCOS with the necessary knowledge and skills, the program aims to create a cascading effect, where the trained teachers can share their expertise and support their colleagues in implementing IE practices. This approach is expected to lead to improved support and provision for learners with SEN throughout the school system.

In addition to the efforts in training SENCOS, the government has implemented Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs at both the zone and school levels. These CPDs aim to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills, ensuring they align with the principles of IE. According to data collected from the district education office, the zones and schools have been empowered to conduct CPDs through the RCs.

However, there remains some uncertainty regarding the adoption of CPD programs in schools. Specifically, it is unclear how many schools have currently embraced the CPD programs,

especially considering the number of RCs available in primary schools. Additionally, the exact number of SENCOs trained thus far has not been clearly determined.

5.4.1.2 Training of SNE teachers

The implementation of initiatives to improve teacher education and motivation has also been a significant step in addressing the shortage of teachers and promoting IE which the NSIE identifies as one of the challenges towards IE. The government has taken concrete actions to increase the number of teachers undergoing SNE courses in colleges. Additionally, SNE concepts have been integrated into all teacher training programs across colleges and universities.

To ensure comprehensive SNE training, the teacher training colleges have established two categories: Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs and full-time programs. ODL teachers undergo frequent breaks and are sent for practical demonstrations of their skills before returning to school for completion. On the other hand, full-time teachers are deployed to schools after completing their training. The specific of this program is further illustrated in the quote below:

There are special teachers being trained at Machinga TTC, about 200 of them are undergoing diploma studies, and Montfort, 200 are undergoing the ODL program. There is also a plan to train other 200 through a primary school training program. Apart from that, there will be itinerant teacher trainees who will be deployed at the zonal level just to make sure that zones have various skilled personnel in various categories of SNE (IE officer 1, October 19, 2022)

Nonetheless, it also remains unclear how many teachers have completed their training and been deployed to schools during the five-year period of NSIE implementation to fulfil the NSIE goals.

5.4.1.3 Training school managers

As one way of supporting the governance of IE in schools, the government planned to train school managers and administrators on how they can manage inclusive schools (MoEST 2017 P.21). According to the data collected, this programme is underway. There is basic training that is being conducted with various school authorities to ensure that they acquire some basic information about IE. The target audience include zone managers, head teachers and other school officials. Through the training, the zone managers and school heads are supposed to learn how to provide supervisory, advisory, and mentorship services to teachers on IE within their management levels, learn skills

that will enable them to promote reflective teaching which aligns with IE, attain skills of developing an annual work plan that responds to NSIE, and coordinate all school activities that promoted IE.

5.4.1.4 Partnerships

NSIE also emphasized collaboration with different stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of IE. Based on the research findings, several organizations such as Save the Children, UNICEF, and Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) have coordinated with MoEST in promoting IE and addressing implementation challenges.

There are some NGOs who are assisting in the implementation of IE in these schools. these includes save the children, UNICEF, DPOs, and more. Currently, save the children has a project on IE in Mwanza, Neno, Mzimba South and Lilongwe city (IE officer 3, October 21, 2022)

Save the Children and UNICEF have been actively involved in providing technical support to the government and implementing projects aimed at capacity building for teachers, administrators, communities, and other advocates of IE. Through these projects, they have conducted training sessions for teachers, focusing on various aspects and approaches to IE. The primary objective of these initiatives is to address the challenges faced by teachers and schools during the implementation of IE, and to align their practices with the goals set forth by the NSIE. Currently, Save the Children and UNICEF have been focusing on the Northern Region of Malawi, with plans to extend their reach to schools in the Central Region, where the researched schools are located.

In addition to NGOs, DPOs have also played a significant role in raising awareness about IE. Their efforts have contributed to a substantial increase in the enrolment of students with special educational needs (SEN) in schools. By creating awareness and advocating for inclusive practices, DPOs have helped to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for students with diverse learning needs.

Through their collective efforts, technical expertise, and advocacy, these organizations have made valuable contributions towards the realization of IE in some parts of the country. Thus, the assumption is that their involvement in capacity building, awareness raising, and support services

has positively impacted teachers, schools, and communities, ultimately fostering an IE learning environment.

5.4.1.5 Management perception towards the NSIE's intent and implementation

The NSIE is seen as a positive development for the future of IE in Malawi, as it provides national recognition and supports ongoing IE policies. However, there are still unfinished assignments and significant investments required to fully realize the goals of IE. Schools continue to face numerous challenges, which raises concerns about the successful implementation of IE across the country. Furthermore, the limited involvement of stakeholders in collaborating with the MoEST to pursue IE goals is a noteworthy issue. In support of these, the IE officer 3 said.

Different stakeholders are doing their things and there is poor coordination. As such there is a shortfall in implementing NSIE, very handful of activities have been achieved... in terms of financing can overall be rated to have been achieved at 40% which has somehow limited a lot of activities as far as IE is concerned... however, there is need for an IE policy development and it is in progress (IE officer 3, October 21, 2022)

The other major factor that brings about mixed concerns amongst the management is the lack of motivation of the trained teachers to carry on with the skills. Based on data obtained from the IE management section, the limited availability of funds to conduct training workshops for every teacher across the country has led to the adoption of a cascading model for teacher training. This model involves training a select group of teachers with the expectation that they will subsequently train their colleagues within their respective institution. In interviews with IE and SNE headquarters, he expressed concern about the progress of IE as regards sharing knowledge amongst teachers.

In most cases, the challenge has been that we train few people expecting that they will train their colleagues back in schools but those trained remain quiet or are neglected for thinking they were paid to receive such training (IE officer 3, October 21, 2022)

However, the cascade model has been widely criticized because most of those trained do not develop to the level where they can confidently train others. Thus, the argument is that there was

that the shortcomings in NSIE when it comes to this plan on training model, and it does not equip teachers with necessary skills as most of the teachers have attended the IE training not more than twice in the past five years. This is supported by the quotation below.

For IE, there is no direct training that we have received far, and it could surely be interesting if there was something of that kind like what happens in other departments. For example, for science, we meet for SMASSE training and discuss some of the challenging topics and how best to approach them. The only time we had something similar for IE is when a certain organization sent its personnel to teach us how to handle learners with SEN (SS Teacher 1, September 23, 2023).

Other managers acknowledge that NSIE has fallen short in empowering IE school practices, indicating that more work is needed for IE to truly take shape. The challenges faced in schools are considered genuine and reflect the reality of the situation. As a recommendation, it is suggested that IE should adopt a bottom-up approach rather than a top-down approach for more effective implementation. Thus, management work should be informed by what is happening in schools and not the other way round. Furthermore, it is advised that the government involve multiple stakeholders, including large companies and others who can provide resources, to ensure the successful implementation of IE. Without such involvement, the challenges faced with NSIE implementation will persist and continue to hinder progress.

Based on the data collected, it is important to note that there are numerous challenges that have led to mixed feelings regarding NSIE and the implementation of IE. In an interview with some of the management participants, they said:

To be honest with you, my answer to the question of whether we are winning in terms of NSIE, and IE implementation is 'no'. The major challenge is a shortage of resources, and my recommendation is that the government should not overlook this. It should also recruit more specialist teachers, increase finances, etc. (IE Officer 2, October 3, 2022).

Looking at the key priority areas, some of them have made strides, while others not yet. Some have only been attained up to 40% which has somehow limited a lot of activities as far as IE is concerned. Thus, we can say overall the strategy has not

been implemented in full and there will be an evaluation at the ministry level to look at areas where things didn't go well (IE officer 3, October 21, 2022).

This justification of how NSIE intended to achieve IE and how it was enacted is further discussed in the forthcoming chapter which provides an analysis of the implementation of IE in case study schools, shedding light on the effectiveness and enactment of NSIE's goals in achieving IE.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter serves as the preliminary stage of data analysis, addressing the first research questions. It offers valuable insights into NSIE, elucidating its objectives and adopted for implementation fostering IE within schools.

CHAPTER 6

IE IMPLEMENTATION IN CASE STUDY SCHOOLS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as the second part of the data analysis. It provides an analysis of the implementation of IE in the selected case study schools by examining the overall school practices, exploring the perceptions of system users and identifying constraints and enablers.

6.2 Review of research objectives and questions

The research objectives ii to iv aimed at investigating the IE implementation in the case study schools through the following research questions:

- How has the adoption of the NSIE influenced the IE implementation in the case study schools? The question explored the strategies, approaches, and practices employed by the case study schools to implement IE and determine how the NSIE has influenced their implementation efforts.
- What are the perceptions of the IE stakeholders on IE? This question was to understand the viewpoints and opinions of teachers, learners, and parents regarding IE in the selected schools and to provide insights into the level of awareness, understanding, and support for IE among these stakeholders.
- What are the enabling and constraining factors for implementing IE in the schools? This question aimed to understand the prevailing affordances and limitations associating IE management and implementation in case study schools.

Data was primarily collected from the two case study schools sampled for this study and analysed using NVivo software (See section 3.8). The data was grouped based on schools and participants' occupations (head of RCs, learners, parents, and teachers) within their respective schools. The analysis revealed common themes aligned with those identified by NSIE, focusing on the schools' capacity to implement IE and the support they receive.

The themes were categorized into the same two broad categories: (i) schools' capacity to implement IE, and (ii) support from the external community. The primary themes that emerged

related to: RC as the foundation of IE practice, teacher capacity, availability of resources for IE implementation, learner identification and support, accessibility of the school environment, support from guardians of SEN learners, and support from the government and stakeholders. These will be discussed below for each school, starting with the IE implementation in the primary school.

6.3 IE implementation in the case study primary school

The implementation of IE in the researched primary school will be discussed based on fieldwork data and experiences. The discussion will be supported by the data collected from the primary school.

6.3.1. Operation of the RC

The study found that the implementation of IE in the Primary school is well-organized and coordinated in the RC by the SNE teacher. In the school setting, the RC is a separate room that is managed by an SNE teacher, and it offers learning support to learners with SEN. Thus, it was judged that the case study primary school has a fully functional RC that caters for all students with SEN within the school.

6.3.1.1 Learner and teacher capacity in the RC

The researched primary school was noted, the only school in the area equipped with a RC, leading to a high enrolment of SEN learners. At the time of the study, the school had 175 SEN learners who receive support provided by the RC to fully participate in the mainstream classes. These SEN learners exhibit a range of needs, varying from mild to severe. Students with mild SEN are integrated into various mainstream classes from grades 1 to 8, while those with severe SEN receive specialized instruction through the RC's Individualized Education Program in a dedicated special class setting.

The data also revealed that the primary school has only one SNE teacher who handles all the arrangements for mainstream classrooms and provides instruction for learners with severe learning challenges in the special class. As a result, the RC programme is faced with significant pressure due to the limited number of staff and the large number of learners requiring support. Thus, the learners in the special class programme are divided into two cohorts and attend lessons twice a week. The following statement succinctly describes the situation of the RC at the school.

The class is very small to accommodate 85 learners, so, we have streamed the class into two shifts. The other group comes on Mondays and Wednesdays and the other

group comes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fridays I go around their homes to see if what we do here is being implemented at home and do planning. All these learners I am talking about are full-time learners in the resource, but we have other 90 learners who go to the mainstream classes (standard 1 to 8). In total, we have 175 learners... but this is against one teacher. (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.1.2 RC pull-out programme

Learners with mild SEN are included in regular classrooms and taught by regular teachers. Once their academic performance and daily living skills improve, they may be transitioned from special classes to regular classes through pull-out programme. However, the way mainstream teachers perceive and interact with SEN learners greatly influences their placement in classes. Therefore, before assigning classrooms, it becomes crucial to assess the attitudes and abilities of the teachers responsible for these classes.

Other teachers have negative attitudes toward them others do not, it's automatic and normal to be like that. Even when we are promoting learners, we check first which class to refer the child based on the disability as well as looking at the attitude of the teacher in that class (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.1.3 RC teacher empowerment program

To ensure SEN learners are well accommodated in the mainstream classes, the RC plays a crucial role of empowering teachers with the necessary skills that enable them to teach and have a positive attitude towards the learners. To ensure this support, the RC adopted the Curriculum Professional Development (CPD) training programme oriented to them at a zone level which aims at orienting teachers with some basic support on IE (See section 5.4.1.1). This is also justified with the data below.

To ensure there is IE awareness at the school, we have trained them through CPDs at the school level and some basic support about IE and they know. This has also helped to reduce the attitudes the teachers had (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.1.4 Challenges and attitudes within the RC

Data also revealed several challenges that the RC is facing to coordinate all the activities required for effective IE implementation. Some of these include understaffing, shortage of resources, an unconducive interior environment, and lack of support within the school level and motivation for

teachers. The fact that the school relies on one teacher in the RC to deal with a huge number of learners with SEN means the only SNE-qualified person is overwhelmed. In an interview, the teacher sounded very frustrated.

I am the only one teaching this term and I am very tired... It's too much. When it comes to promotion there is no promotion, but the workload is too much. I have supported myself to upgrade my qualifications and I will be leaving the school soon because this is too much (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.1.5 Support towards the RC

This Primary School stands out as a significant case in terms of implementing IE in Lilongwe Urban District. Consequently, the school attracts frequent visits from various stakeholders conducting research and undertaking IE-related projects. However, the study reveals that the school has received minimal support to enhance its capacity to implement IE effectively. The RC is too small and poorly ventilated to accommodate all the 85 learners with SEN who cannot be accommodated in the mainstream classes and attend to the needs of the other 90 learners SEN in the mainstream classrooms who may need extra support. Given the specific needs and severity of the SEN learners, the available room can accommodate fewer than 20 learners at a time. As a result, most days these learners are forced to sit under a tree for their lessons, which creates challenges for teachers in maintaining classroom discipline and capturing their attention.

This room was an open space and we simply constructed walls back-to-back to turn it into a class, otherwise, I used to teach in a small room that was once a toilet. It was very small and dark. ...but this new room is still very small, and it makes it hard for learners to interact with some of the teaching and learning resources. I have some materials like toys, but I cannot use them due to space which affects learners' interaction with the materials. So, we sit outside for lessons most of the time (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

Currently, the only direct support the resource teacher receives is from parents, who visit the school every day to support the learning of their children. Some parents wait for their children during the whole learning hours outside their classrooms while others attend classes together with the children to assist in handling the learners.

6.3.1.6 RC exclusion in resource distribution

The lack of support for learners with SEN is also noted internally in the school practice as data revealed that the RC receives less attention from the school leaders. It was revealed that the distribution of resources to support IE within the school is inadequate and exclusive, with teaching and learning materials often being provided solely to mainstream teachers. Similarly, many of the materials offered by the government to schools for instructional purposes are not inclusive enough to cater for the needs of various categories of SEN learners. A statement below supports this argument.

The government has introduced a new curriculum for mathematics. In the past, we had the national reading programme in primary schools for standards 1-4 and currently, they have introduced the National Numeracy program (NNP) also for standards 1-4 and Lilongwe urban is one of the pilot districts. We have been trained for a week and now we are starting to implement it this term. So, we have received these books to use (figure below)

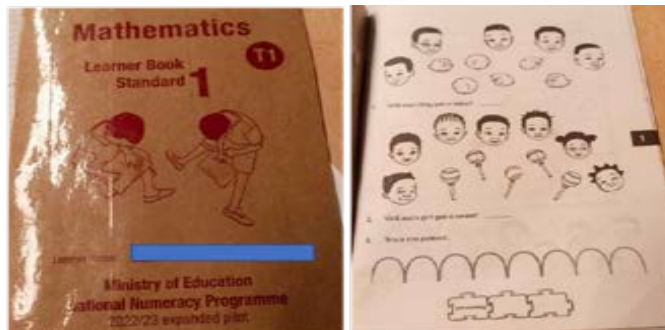


Figure 8: Piloting material for NNP (source; fieldwork data)

Each learner from standard 1-4 is supposed to have a copy (based on their class) and is required to complete a page per day until the term ends. The weakness is that it doesn't engage the learners fully and most of them will only copy things to complete the task without understanding. For instance, today, we worked on number 1 only, but we didn't finish. I am even failing to write a scheme from it because it is not realistic. On top of that, these books have been shared from standards 1-4 excluding us in a special class and I only have this one copy for 85

learners who have different learning difficulties. This happens frequently when distributing textbooks, they forget learners with SEN (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.2. Learner identification

The data revealed a significant gap in primary schools regarding the availability of tools for assessing and identifying learners with SEN. Despite having learners with disabilities and learning difficulties who have been officially categorized by the MoEST as SEN learners (See chapter 4 section 4.6), the school lacks formal assessment procedures or specialized criteria to describe their specific SEN. Currently, the identification and assessments conducted at the school rely solely on general knowledge about the learners' physical disabilities, academic challenges, health conditions, and other observable characteristics.

Most assessments are done in the RC; however, in the mainstream class, we just use general knowledge to identify learners. So, we try to assess on our own and bring the results to the RC. Where they conduct another assessment in the RC and arrange for follow-up programs if necessary (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022).

According to established opinion within the school culture, the responsibility of learner identification in primary school lies with the RC, which collaborates closely with parents. However, due to the challenges faced by the RC (as discussed in section 6.4.2.1.3.), it is unable to conduct comprehensive assessments. As a result, the assessor primarily relies on general knowledge to identify and categorize learners. For instance, they may use methods like hand clapping to check for hearing challenges or observe the learner's behaviour and utilize skills acquired through their SNE training in college.

For deep assessment of the resource, we also use general knowledge for instance, clapping my hands to see if they can hear me for learners with VI, and we refer them to the hospital through their parents (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

6.3.3 Care and support for SEN learners

The primary school embraces learners with diverse needs, ranging from mild to severe. There are catered for through various programme as discussed below.

6.3.3.1 Parental full-time support in classrooms

Due to the shortage of teachers, the school encourages the full-time presence of parents, guardians, or home-based caregivers for SEN learners, ensuring that they receive enough support, assistance, and proper care while at school. The parents assist their children and any other children who need a hand in the classroom and outside the classroom. The teacher also said they have children who experience different problems like seizures or falling sick while in school and they provide them with the necessary support.

6.3.3.2 Learner to learner support

The school places emphasis on ensuring that learners embrace their peers with SEN as a way of promoting diversity among learners and non-teaching staff within the school environment. This serves to enhance safety and assistance among the learners with SEN and those without in instances when the teacher and parents are not present.

Learner to learner relationship is working. I can give you an example of learners here, some come in wheelchairs and their friends help them to go the toilet and classes. Sometimes when parents come to drop them off, they automatically take over from them and help them to get to class. It's like the learners accept that they are different and must assist each other (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022).

This approach has helped the school in creating an environment that is welcoming, which has increased the enrolment of learners with SEN.

6.3.3.3 Teacher development and support

In addition to the CPD programme provided by the RC, mainstream teachers have received professional growth training twice, however, this was a long before 2017 when the NSIE was put into force. The training sessions were organized by an external organization that acknowledged the school's inclusion of SEN learners. The focus of the training was to provide teachers with guidance on how to support learners with learning difficulties. However, it was exclusively offered to teachers who had been teaching in the school for over five years.

We can say we have been trained twice so far, although some of the teachers who came around 2017 have not been trained and don't have the knowledge. So, they learn from us who have gone through the training (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022).

6.3.4 Inclusiveness in the school environment

In terms of the school's physical environment, it is generally welcoming to all learners. The infrastructure includes features like accessible pavements to facilitate the mobility of learners with physical challenges, adequate sanitation facilities, water points, and more. However, there is one significant challenge related to the classroom blocks. They are not particularly disability-friendly and are small, leading to issues of overcrowding. This limits the school's ability to accommodate additional parents to assist with SEN learners or provide special desks. Consequently, this has a negative impact on IE, affecting lesson delivery, the handling of SEN learners, and their overall comfort in the classrooms. Furthermore, the school lacks disability-friendly toilets and mainstream classrooms lack special desks for learners with physical challenges.

Thus, as one of the recommendations to the government, some participants said: “When they are building classroom blocks, the government should make sure they are favourable for learners with challenges and also it should construct toilets, they should include special toilets” (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022).

In terms of social environments, the school tries to be inclusive in all the programme that happen in the school. The teachers also vary the teaching methods.

When it comes to methodology, we vary for those with learning problems to grab what we are teaching, and we use different teaching and learning materials. For some learners who have VI, we put them in front of the class so that they can see. Those with hearing problem we give them a friend to help them or sometimes we use simple sign language to demonstrate what we are teaching. We use personal judgement that maybe when we do this, the learner can understand (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022)

Apart from that, the school also ensures equal participation in activities where learners with SEN are involved, such as participating in school clubs and these learners are given roles to perform whenever there is a function. They are also around to interact freely with their colleagues without SEN in the school and they also rely on them for most assistance such as going to the toilet, pushing the wheelchair, and assisting in mobility around the school, etc.

6.3.5 Perception of teachers, learners, and parents toward IE

The study also explored the perception of the teachers, parents, and learners. These stakeholders are crucial as far as IE implementation in the microsystem is concerned. The study found that these stakeholders have mixed perceptions of IE due to several factors. This is discussed below with a focus on each stakeholder at a time.

6.3.5.1 Teachers

Teachers in the primary school view IE as a positive development, and they appreciate the increasing number of parents enrolling their children with SEN in the school as a response to IE. However, their perception of IE has been influenced by the challenges they encounter, including understaffing and a shortage of SNE teachers, high teacher-to-student ratios, limited teacher training, and a lack of resources.

Honestly, we face a lot of challenges in terms of communication in the classroom, particularly when it involves students with special needs because we don't have enough skills to help them. One of the major issues is the lack of coordination in the class due to overcrowding and a high number of students. This is especially unfair for learners with VI. Our suggestion is to have separate classes specifically dedicated to these learners, rather than combining them with the general student population (PS Teacher 2, October 13, 2022)

The school's heavy reliance on a single SNE-qualified teacher in the RC to handle many learners with SEN has resulted in an overwhelming workload. During an interview, this teacher expressed displeasure. The main complaint revolved around excessive work demands and the challenges of effectively supporting each learner due to the sheer number of students. Furthermore, the lack of motivation, such as opportunities for promotion, was a significant factor. Interestingly, during an interview with the RC teacher, she demonstrated a positive attitude towards her job but expressed a lack of motivation to continue.

I am not happy being the only teacher, but if I leave, even the parents say they will also leave. I love teaching these learners... and if only I can be motivated with, for instance, a promotion, I will stay. As far as I am happily helping others, my personal needs also need to be addressed (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

In addition, other teachers strongly believe that the government should intervene to improve the functioning of IE in the primary School. They emphasize the need for an adequate supply of teaching and learning resources, as well as an increased number of SNE teachers. They suggest that if these conditions are not met, learners with SEN should be placed in separate classrooms for easier management. In an interview, one of the teachers made a particular statement, saying, "What we want is that if these learners had their classes for themselves then combining them with the normal ones, otherwise it's not fair." The argument put forward is that teachers would be better able to assist SEN learners in their own designated classes, tailored to their specific needs. However, it is important to note that having separate classes for these learners contradicts the principles of IE.

6.3.5.2 Learners

Meanwhile, the learners in primary school enjoy the school environment and prefer being in school all the time, to fulfil their predetermined careers. For instance, one student said: "when I am at home, I miss being in class. I am happy when I pass." Another student said: "I only play at home unlike here at school because I am afraid of failing the examination."

6.3.5.3 Parents of SEN learners in primary school

In line with the learners' sentiments, parents' express happiness and gratitude that their children are provided with access to education despite their learning challenges and disabilities. They appreciate the school's approach to SEN learning, which involves starting in a special class and then transitioning to a mainstream class after showing improvement. The resources available to learners include training in essential skills such as reading, writing, and other self-reliant daily living skills, equipping them to thrive in the mainstream classroom setting.

Here in the RC, he was taught how to read and write, then he wrote some assessment examinations to go to the mainstream class which he passed. Apart from that, the RC prepared him to behave in the mainstream classroom (PSP to learner 2, October 18, 2022).

Parents have also praised the support that their children receive in the mainstream class, observing significant improvements in their overall development. In addition to the academic benefits, the learners have gained valuable interaction skills by being part of a diverse classroom with mixed

abilities. It is worth noting that learners with disabilities often exhibit distinctive behavioural characteristics that may differ from the expected norms in a typical environment.

We have noted a noticeably big difference, these children never used to sit down and learn or read, but now they are integrated into the normal classroom which shows an improvement, and the way they behave has changed too (PSP to Learner 3, October 18, 2022)

Some parents are committed to extending the support their children receive at school, to home. They have also taken up the role of assisting other learners who need their support while on school premises despite the negative feedback they receive from their fellow parents who on the other hand feel their children with disabilities may not achieve anything important. One of the participant's parents said.

There are many parents who bring their children here just to run away from their responsibility and we are the same who help them while they are here, yet they look at us as people who don't have anything to do. They say what can these children do. Even if we don't go to school with them, we don't have anything to lose (PSP to learner 1, October 18, 2022)''.

6.4 IE implementation in the secondary school

The study found that IE in the case study secondary school is also a RC-based approach. However, it is functioning in a different capacity as compared to in primary school. The secondary school has a well-established RC and is well organized in terms of its staff capacity, activities, and some other aspects as articulated in NSIE. However, there are a few challenges the school is facing in its attempt to implement IE, and these have brought out different reactions toward IE implementation. These are discussed and justified by the field findings below.

6.4.1 RC function

Some of the few factors that describe the function of the RC in secondary school include the availability of SNE teachers, resources, support, and skills-building programs.

6.4.1.1 SNE teachers in the RC

The secondary school RC has 10 SNE teachers who are specialized in different SEN categories particularly VI, HI, and LD. These SNE teachers operate full-time in the RC, and they offer help to prepare learners for inclusive learning in mainstream classrooms. Among other things, they are present in the classroom to aid the teaching and learning interaction by offering sign language interpretation, braille transcription, and embossing. They also prepare teaching and learning resources that will simplify the learning for SEN learners and teachers in mainstream classrooms. Thus, they make sure all learners under the RC care are given their essential needs to access learning in the school environment leaving little beyond their reach. This was attested by all the mainstream teacher participants in the secondary school (referred to below). One teacher said: “In most cases, as I teach, there is always an inclusive (SNE) teacher in the classroom, who assists in bridging the lessons. Another one said: “Well, when administering tests or exercises, for example, those for learners with VI who use braille, the resource teachers help to interpret.”

On top of all that, the SNE teachers ensure that all learners with SEN are well supported by making sure that learners are full-time in the RC.

6.4.1.2 Resources in the RC

In terms of the resources, the RC is well furnished with teaching and learning materials to help the learners in their respective classrooms. These cover almost 80% of the need. The head of the RC said:

In terms of the resources, we have enough apart from a very few such as the orbit readers, but somewhere somehow, we are a little bit safe. This year, we have also received some textbooks in large volumes for other various subjects. Of course, they might not be much but enough to help our learners (SSHRC, September 23, 2022).

Nevertheless, some learners require specialized, sophisticated personal resources which are not found within the country and are expensive to purchase. Additionally, some resources, which were used to assist learners are no longer functioning due to overuse, and repairs or spare parts cannot be found in the country. It was noted during the interviews that those responsible for resource

procurement are not aware of the exact type of resources required, which results in purchasing the wrong resources. A reference to this is an interview extract below:

Last time, people in the management went all the way to Japan but ended up buying Bluetooth headphones instead of hearing aids and this is because they didn't want to involve the right personnel who are in the schools or audiologists. These materials were wasted like that (SSHRC, September 23, 2023).

This on the other hand shows there is a lack of coordination between procurement people and the staff placing orders for the teaching and learning resources regarding IE.

6.4.1.3 RC support to the mainstream teachers

For effective coordination of IE implementation within the school, mainstream teachers are mandated to visit the RC regularly to seek knowledge, have access to teaching and learning materials that can be used during their engagement with the learners, and assist with remedial lessons for the learners in the resource. However, according to the interview feedback, very few do this, only those who are passionate about SNE do visits. Thus, to ensure learners are adequately assisted, it becomes the responsibility of the RC teachers to follow up on the education of the SEN learners as well as offer support to teachers in their teaching and planning environment.

Initially, the teacher who teaches them the subject is supposed to come and assist learners in the RC. This doesn't happen, but since we have some SNE teachers who have also specialized in the subjects, they assist when the SEN learners ask for assistance in those subjects (SSHRC, September 23, 2023).

6.4.1.4 Skills building programs by RC

As one way of building necessary special skills for teachers and learners, the RC has started school clubs, for example, a sign language club, where all teachers and learners are welcome to interact with deaf learners and learn sign language. This approach to building necessary skills in teachers as well as other learners is assisting in bridging the communication between the learners with HI and providing technical support to their learning process. This was also appreciated by some parents who commended it as having aided the learning process for their child.

I noted that when my daughter (with hard of hearing) was in form 1 she used to struggle with learning because she couldn't hear nor understand sign language but by the end of the term, I found out she learned how sign. She now says she mostly uses sign language to hear when she is learning. At first, she used to complain because the other teachers used to wear face masks and it was hard for her to hear through the lips and expressions that's when sign language became ideal for her (SSP to Learner 2, October 14, 2022)

Furthermore, the SNE teachers all work hand in hand to support the mainstream teachers during instruction as well as assist them with necessary materials which are useful and fundamental to the learning of SEN learners.

6.4.2 Learner identification and enrolment processes

The learner identification and enrolment process for secondary school learners begins at MoEST level. The case study secondary school currently enrolls 22 learners who have been categorized as learners with VI, HI, and LD. These learners have undergone identification and assessment processes during their time in primary school. They have successfully completed the primary school national examinations and have been selected for a national secondary school placement, specifically in accordance with their identified SEN. This highlights the comprehensive chain of learner identification that takes place at various levels, culminating in a final placement decision at the ministerial level, to ensure that SEN learners are appropriately placed in the secondary school setting. This is further discussed below.

6.4.2.1 Secondary school learners' identification

At the national level, the Ministry of Education relies on the identification and assessment conducted by primary schools. Once the primary schools complete their identification and assessments, the list of assessed learners is forwarded to the IE and SNE headquarters through a hierarchical process. At the headquarters, the learners are categorized based on their specific learning challenges, and each category is assigned a corresponding code. For more details on coding learners with SEN, refer to chapter 4 section 4.5 and the data commentary below.

When the learners are writing exams the codes submitted by their school during examination registration are followed and they also help examiners to assess the

nature of the examination paper required, whether large print or braille. When marking the same codes are used to identify whether the paper belongs to SEN learners or not. After that their names are submitted to the ministry who uses the codes to allocate the necessary school where IE is practiced (IE Officer 3, October 23, 2022)

After the learners with SEN are selected and placed in the secondary school, it becomes the responsibility of the school to receive them and allocate them accordingly based on their specific needs and requirements. Within the secondary school, additional assessments and identification processes are carried out when learners encounter difficulties or experience changes in their learning challenges. These changes can be due to various factors such as health issues, physical characteristics, academic struggles, or unusual behaviour. Mainstream teachers play a key role in recognizing these challenges and bringing them to the RC. The RC is instrumental in conducting further assessments, identifying the learners' needs, and providing guidance and support as necessary required for these learners.

6.4.3 Care and support to SEN learners

To ensure the well-being and support of learners with SEN, they are encouraged to spend most of their time in the RC. While this helps ensure their safety and access to specialized assistance, it can create a conflict with the principle of inclusiveness as it limits their opportunities for free interaction. These learners typically leave the resource room only when attending classes, participating in extracurricular activities, or returning to their designated residential areas. Outside of these activities, they receive learning support from SNE teachers. Learners with VIs receive assistance in transcribing texts into braille, while those with various SEN, including VIs and learning difficulties, are supported through remedial learning and other necessary services to facilitate their learning.

6.4.4 Teachers' skills for SEN learners

Some Mainstream teachers strive to create an inclusive environment for all learners by collaborating with the RC teachers. They make efforts to employ diverse teaching methodologies that cater to the individual needs of learners, ensuring they are well-adjusted and accommodated within the classroom setting.

... of course, we try to vary the teaching methods. For instance, for those who have HI, we try to look at them so that they see the expression and sometimes write on the board for them to copy and understand. For the VI we sometimes spell out a word if it's a jargon word (SS Teacher 1, September 23, 2023).

Nevertheless, teachers still face challenges in supporting learners with SEN in their classrooms and the school environment due to a lack of training and knowledge. They expressed concerns about the absence of in-service training programs specifically designed for inclusive teaching. Teachers emphasized the need for skills and knowledge in areas such as sign language, braille, and managing SEN learners. While some had received minimal and outdated training outside the NSIE implementation cycle, others have not received any training in inclusive teaching practices.

In an interview, one teacher shared her experience, saying:

We have not had any training on IE recently. Of course, I remember at one point we had a workshop where they were teaching us some SNE basics, but that was a long time ago. Those basic skills were very helpful as we could understand some basic things in, interpreting braille (SS Teacher 2, September 23, 2022).

The teachers' limited skills have had a significant impact on their productivity and attitude towards IE. They feel less motivated to teach in an inclusive classroom due to the challenges they face. As a result, some teachers have developed a negative attitude towards IE. Interestingly, some teachers express a preference for specific categories of learners with SEN, finding them easier to teach. This preference has also influenced subject choices, as some learners have been asked to withdraw from certain subjects that are perceived as difficult for them.

During an interview, one teacher said:

Based on my experience, inclusion is a disadvantage to learners with HI, unlike those with VI because they can hear what you are saying. Sometimes when we mention something and spell it out, they can write on their own. However, it is not easy dealing with those with HI (SS Teacher 2, September 23, 2022).

A parent also said:

My daughter is deaf and says she will quit sciences after Form 2 because she won't be allowed to study mathematics in senior secondary school class... I just advise her to forgo the tough subjects and concentrate on the ones she can manage. However, it seems she loves mathematics, physics, and chemistry but with her circumstance we can't force things (SSP to Learner 2, October 14, 2022).

6.4.5 Physical and social environment for SEN learners

The school promotes diversity by ensuring coordination of learners in various school programme, including extracurricular activities, reading circles, clubs, societies, and sports. Special clubs have been introduced to foster acceptance and inclusion of learners with SEN. In terms of the school environment, the school is generally well-maintained. However, some classrooms are located upstairs, posing accessibility challenges for learners with physical disabilities. To address this, learners with SEN are placed in a designated classroom on the ground floor, allowing easier access and providing support from SNE teachers. The study also noted the absence of disability-friendly toilets.

6.4.6 Support towards IE implementation

The implementation of IE is supported through the collaboration between mainstream teachers and RC staff who help in the classroom and supply teaching and learning materials. Additionally, the government contributes to the support by providing braille and large print books to the school. Furthermore, the school has received training from an international organization from Kenya on the use of the Orbit Reader, an assistive learning device for learners with VI.

In terms of support, I can't completely say none. We have been trained by government's stakeholders. For instance, we recently had a training by colleagues in Kenya. So far, this is the only one I can point out unless we talk about braille papers and embossing papers trainings which happen occasionally (SSHRC, September 23, 2022).

6.4.7 Perception of teachers, learners, and parents towards IE practice

The study revealed that stakeholders in the secondary school have diverse perceptions regarding the implementation of IE. These perceptions are influenced by various factors described above. The

sections below explore the viewpoints of teachers, learners, and parents regarding the IE implementation.

6.4.7.1 Teachers

The study revealed that teachers have varied attitudes towards the inclusion of learners with SEN in their classrooms. One of the main factors influencing their mixed perceptions is the limited skills and knowledge to teach and support SEN learners. As such, they lose confidence and some of them feel unproductive consequently the negative attitudes towards IE. Some teachers expressed preferences for specific categories of SEN learners.

I'm okey with learners with VI because they can hear what you are saying...but for those with HI, it's a disadvantage to them because most of the time, it's like they don't understand what you are doing, even though we have sign language interpreters. For example, I teach biology, where we have some words that are too technical, and I don't think there are signs for them, (SS Teacher 2, September 23, 2022).

On the other hand, teachers are not against inclusion but lack motivation and assistance to elevate their confidence as teachers. They feel the government should intervene and provide teachers with frequent IE training, IE seminars, and in-service training which will help in motivating and building teachers' skills. Seconding this was a remark by the head of the RC who expressed concern about how sometimes the teachers refer to the SEN learners in the school as belonging to the RC. He added that even the failure of SEN learners in the national examination is blamed on the RC.

Teachers need to be motivated to start liking SEN learners because most teachers think these learners are SNE teachers and they say, '*ana anu* [these are your children]. One teacher once said his class could have achieved a 100% pass rate but could only achieve 98% because of the two learners with SEN who had failed the examinations (SSHRC, September 23, 2023).

6.4.7.2 Learners

The data has revealed good feedback on learner diversity in the secondary schools and the good program structure which allows learners to take part in various school activities despite their challenges. This has helped to give the learners a sense of belonging to the school environment as well as to build their confidence in interaction and participation in various school programmes and projects. It has also driven the positive perception of other learners towards those with SEN.

Below are the remarks made by the three secondary school learners towards their school environment.

School life is fun here because friends help me since they know I do not usually see some things. They do not isolate or discriminate against me. Another thing is that we have tools that help us in learning. For example, I am assisted with the magnifying lens. We also had the CCTV though it is not working now (SS Learner1, October 14, 2022).

The 2nd secondary student said: “Education is particularly good here and so is the interaction”. The other student feels the classrooms are inclusive. The learner said:

There is no exclusion of some kind or stigma in our classes. We all learn together and are assisted accordingly. If we meet some problems, we talk to the teacher who helps us to solve them (SS Learner 3, October 14, 2022).

6.4.7.3 Parents for SEN learners

Parents play a crucial role as direct stakeholders in supporting the implementation of IE in the secondary school. There is valuable feedback from the parents regarding IE practice. Parents demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of including their children in the educational process and are committed to supporting their children's learning journey. Based on the feedback received from parents, the school is highly commended for its welcoming and inclusive environment. The following quotes are from two out of three parents who expressed gratitude towards the school for ensuring their learners are placed appropriately and provided with the necessary support.

My daughter is repeating a class. Previously, she was at XX Secondary school, but we noted that her vision is becoming worse than before, and it is affecting her

learning. The school advised us to find a school with an RC where she would benefit from some of the resources like large prints and support from SNE teachers. Things have improved since she moved to this school (SSP to Learner 1, October 14, 2022).

Another parent explained how referrals are made to ensure learners with SEN are placed in schools with a fully-fledged IE.

My child was originally selected to XX Community Day Secondary School, but we were told that, for her to learn better she needs special materials that are found at that school (SSP to Learner 3, October 14, 2022).

Having analysed the NSIE and IE implementation the subsequent sections presents the overall factors constraining IE implementation as examined in the data presentation above.

6.5 IE Implementation and constraining factors

The study found that there are more constraints than affordances toward IE implementation in the two case study schools. As recorded from the data, some of the critical constraints that the schools are facing include limited skills in teachers, shortage of SNE teachers, exclusion in classroom practice, shortage of and damaged resources, congested classrooms, lack of professional development for teachers, limited monitoring and support, and lack of SNE teacher involvement during the national examinations. This is further informed by the data below.

6.5.1 Limited skills in teachers

Mainstream teachers in both schools have expressed concerns about their limited skills in teaching an inclusive class, attributing it to a lack of training. They strongly advocated for regular training sessions to enhance their confidence and competence in teaching in an inclusive setting. Participants emphasized the need for government intervention in the form of IE seminars and in-service training to motivate and develop teachers' skills. The absence of such training has been identified by teacher as a limiting factor for IE implementation. One teacher compared the lack of IE training to other departmental training in secondary school, highlighting the discrepancy.

In other departments like science, we meet once a month for a science workshop called SMASSE-Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Education, where look at some challenging topics and how best to approach those topics. It could

surely be interesting if there was something of that kind for IE (SS Teacher 1, September 23, 2022).

The need for teacher training is high in both schools and for both mainstream and SNE teachers. The SNE teachers also need it for their professional growth, promotion, and development. However, it is lacking.

6.5.2 Shortage of SNE teachers

Understaffing in primary schools poses a significant challenge to the implementation of IE. With only one teacher responsible for over 170 learners with SEN, divided into two groups of 85 students, the workload becomes overwhelming. Moreover, the 85 students attend school only twice a week, due to shortage of SNE teachers and lack of space in the RC where they receive their instruction. This exacerbates the issue, depriving them of equal educational opportunities. Learners with SEN require individualized attention, necessitating a smaller teacher-to-learner ratio. However, the presence of only one teacher creates difficulties in providing adequate support. Additionally, managing assessments and meeting the diverse needs of many learners becomes a challenging task, impacting the quality of education and support.

The shortage of teachers in primary school contrasts with the secondary school which is well staffed with 10 SNE teachers. Meanwhile, the primary school management at district-level data reveals that a shortage of SNE teachers is a general challenge as the Lilongwe urban district, only 12 serving the entire district. Some of these teachers have itinerant roles, moving between schools to support IE implementation. Consequently, there is a high likelihood that certain schools lack an SNE teacher, despite having SEN learners. This scarcity restricts the support and guidance available to learners with SEN, potentially impeding the successful implementation of IE.

In terms of specialist teachers, we have a challenge because, for all the 58 schools in Lilongwe urban, we only have 12 teachers, whom we have not adequately supported due to limited funding (IE Officer 2, October 3, 2022).

The other factor that leads to a shortage of SNE teachers is the lack of motivation by the regular teachers to undergo SNE studies. The pressure in the primary school resource room and the workload of an SNE teacher demotivate other teachers from further studies in SNE education as

they articulate they will have to undergo the same pressure. This, therefore, leads to a shortage of trained SNE professionals.

Regular teachers seem not to have any motivation to upgrade or specialize in SNE courses because they look at us SNE teachers as if we are suffering. For example, there is a special needs vacancy at Montfort college, and I forwarded it to the school forum no one here has applied because they look at it as torture (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

Managers who were interviewed acknowledged the shortage of teachers and attributed it to the promotion process. They contended that many SNE teachers prefer to work in secondary schools and transfer from primary schools, especially female teachers who relocate to their husbands' locations. On top of that, teachers, after receiving training, seek promotions that often require them to be transferred to secondary schools. This trend may explain why there is a higher number of SNE teachers in secondary schools compared to primary schools.

The lack of promotion opportunities for SNE teachers in primary schools could be a contributing factor to the staffing imbalance. This perspective on staffing criteria and the shortage of teachers was expressed by a participant at the IE directorate office.

The mandate is that all schools that require special teachers are provided accordingly. The divisions and the districts are the ones who know where teachers are needed. Therefore, when posting teachers, they are posted in the districts as per the requisition of the district education managers. Currently, some SNE teachers are not available in primary schools because most of them apply for promotions and when they are promoted, they are referred to secondary schools (IE officer 1, October 19, 2022)

6.5.3 Exclusion from classroom practice

Limited teacher skills have to some extent led to exclusion of SEN learners from classroom practice. Some of the mainstream teachers prefer specific categories of learners to work with, as they find them easier to teach. This has also affected subject choices in the secondary school for SEN learners who are mandated to withdraw from some subjects, which are presumed to be hard

for them despite their preferences. In an interview with one of the teachers, this remark was made to show how IE practice is a stumbling block for some SEN learners.

Based on my experience, I would say inclusion is a disadvantage for those learners with HI, unlike the VI who can hear what you are saying, sometimes when we mention something and spell it out, they know easily but dealing with those with HI, is not easy, it's like they don't understand everything you are doing. Meanwhile, some subjects have scientific terms which have no signs (SS Teacher 2, September 23, 2022).

Despite using HI learners as examples, learners with VI also suffer, as sometimes they feel left out during the lessons, and this was reported to be worse when SNE teachers are not present on that day. In an interview with one learner with VI, she said:

Sometimes they forget we are part of the class. When teaching, they use words like, 'look at that instead of this' but we cannot see where they are pointing on the board. So, we cope up anyway (SS Learner 1, October 14, 2022).

This practice is like primary school where, before learner placement, the resource teacher in charge must assess the teacher's attitudes regarding where they want to place the SEN learners.

6.5.4 Shortage and damaged resources

One of the primary goals of the NSIE was to address the availability of specialized teaching and learning materials to support learners with SEN. This objective was aligned with increased funding to ensure the MoEST had sufficient financial resources to mobilize these materials. However, a common issue identified at both the management and schools was a shortage of teaching and learning resources.

In primary schools, the required curriculum resources are not distributed to the SEN learners and thus there is a huge challenge due to the shortage of essential teaching and learning resources. For example, modified books for SEN learners, braille machines or printers, assessment tools, wheelchairs, and special desks are not available. Similarly, in secondary schools, there is a lack of recorders, orbit readers, and special computers.

The management acknowledged that resources for SEN learners are expensive and not readily available within the country, necessitating their purchase from abroad. Moreover, due to the complexity of these materials, repairing them becomes challenging as the country lacks experts in this area. Consequently, many damaged materials are left unused in schools, increasing the demand for new resources. A mainstream teacher in a secondary school emphasized the significant challenge posed by this resource shortage in the implementation of IE. Cited below is a direct quote from the interviews.

Shortage of resources for the RC is also a big problem, I have once been told some of the machines for braille are damaged and the experts to repair them cannot be found here in Malawi which means it's a problem on its own and very limiting to IE practice (SS Teacher 2, September 23, 2022).

Despite the shortage of resources, parents are often burdened with the responsibility of purchasing teaching and learning materials for their children with SEN. However, they receive no support or guidance to ensure they procure the appropriate materials. For instance, one parent said: "I was told to buy a recorder for my child, and I have tried searching for it in Malawi and South Africa, but I cannot find it." Another parent was instructed to buy a special computer and magnifying glasses, but despite ordering them twice, they have not received them. Another concerned parent said.

My daughter uses specialised glasses which are very expensive to acquire them and alternatively we were told to use artificial lens which we ordered for the second time about three months ago, but up to now, they are not here. So far it has been difficult for her, and we know being a government school they may not be able to provide that for her (SS Learner 1, October 13, 2022)

While some parents can afford these devices, the majority face financial challenges and cannot meet the costs. Thus, the lack of availability and affordability of necessary resources poses a significant burden on parents and creates barriers to their children's access to IE.

6.5.5 Shortage of funding

Despite the NSIE objective of increased funding, this research reveals that a persistent issue is the shortage of funds, which greatly hampers the implementation of IE. Although the government has

so far increased funding for IE from 300,000,000 kwacha to 550,000,000 kwacha (approximately \$292,781 to \$536,765 respectively), this amount remains insufficient to meet the needs of all primary and secondary schools in the country. This is further evidenced by the meagre allocation of funds to each district annually.

For instance, in Lilongwe Urban District, which has 58 schools and over 3,600 learners with SEN as well as 12 itinerant teachers, only MK7,200,000 (\$7,027) is allocated for IE. This amount is deemed inadequate to make a substantial impact. The allocated funds need to be distributed across multiple sectors to address various requirements, including the procurement of teaching, and learning resources, school environment upgrades, support for itinerant teachers' mobility, and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and SEN Coordinator (SENCO) training for mainstream teachers. However, the current funding allocation falls short of covering these essential needs.

Insufficient funding, coupled with a shortage of resources in schools, has also contributed to negative attitudes among some staff members. These individuals believe that funds are being overspent by managers rather than being directed towards addressing the actual needs within schools. This perception further exacerbates the challenges faced in implementing IE effectively.

The leaders are busy making money for themselves other than aiming for change. They are busy going to work and in-service training maybe some of which was meant to be for teachers, but they are the ones going. People up there are busy making money (SSHRC, September 23, 2023).

6.5.6 Congested classrooms and high-class ratios

One of the major problems in primary schools is overcrowded classrooms, which affects both special and mainstream classrooms. This poses challenges in handling learners with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms where only one teacher is responsible for the entire class without any teacher assistant. Moreover, in a special class, overcrowding has led to a reduction in the number of school days for learners with SEN. As a result, they are only able to attend school for two days a week, thus depriving them of their right to daily school attendance.

6.5.7 Limited monitoring and support

One of the constraints affecting the implementation of IE is the lack of monitoring and support. Both secondary and primary schools face challenges in terms of monitoring from management. According to the interviews at the Lilongwe DEM IE office, in primary schools it is expected that monitoring would be carried out by itinerant teachers. However, due to a shortage of funding, supporting their mobility, school visits have been difficult. In an interview a participant at DEM made this remark: ‘... there are specific people (itinerant teachers) who move from one school to another to collect data, but we have had transport challenges for them’. Due to this, there have been limited school monitoring visits conducted in the past five years. This lack of monitoring hinders management's understanding and appreciation of the real challenges faced in schools.

There is also a conflict in communication between different levels of the education system regarding the monitoring of IE implementation. While schools and some parts of management acknowledge limited monitoring, the IE directorate claims to conduct daily monitoring and stay informed about the situation in schools. The directorate utilizes various methods such as phone communication, data collection, and reports to monitor the implementation. However, the conflicting information calls for an investigation into the reports and their utilization to determine the extent and effectiveness of these monitoring efforts and the hierarchy at which it occurs. Cited below is a direct reference to the interview with the IE officer 1 who is participant from the directorate.

The IE directorate does monitor the IE implementation almost daily. However, monitoring is done in different ways, sometimes it's through phone communication, data collection, reports, etc. The office is even aware of various challenges being faced by schools and it attends to reports being collected at the district level (IE Officer 1, October 19, 2022).

6.5.8 Exclusion during the national examinations

Lack of SNE teachers during national exams was also reported to be one of the major challenges towards IE implementation. Data at the schools show that during the past five years, the performance of learners with SEN during the national examination both at primary and secondary school has not been good. For example, in secondary school, only one learner with SEN made it to a public university in five years. The interviews also revealed that there is little consideration

by MANEB for learners with SEN at both primary and secondary levels. It was reported by teachers that there is only one officer at the board, specialized in VI, who manages the examination affairs of SEN learners in the entire country.

In MANEB examinations, learners with SEN take the same tests as others, and their papers are marked by regular teachers who may not understand their needs. Only blind (VI) learners receive special attention. This leads to poor performance for many SEN students. MANEB currently has only one expert in VI which is insufficient to cover the diverse disabilities of learners. Additionally, the primary national examinations should be modified to accommodate learners with special needs as they did with secondary school examinations. They introduced oral examinations, specialized attention, and increased time for the assessment of learners with SEN. Again, the secondary school examinations cover two classes while primary school examinations cover four years (PSHRC, October 18, 2022).

The quote highlights the argument that there is bias in the assessment of examinations for learners with SEN, with special attention only given to those with VI. This results in poor performance for other learners with SEN during national examinations, despite their good performance at the school level. Lastly, the absence of SNE specialists in the marking process raises concerns about potential bias in the examination results.

6.6 IE implementation and affordances in schools

As recorded from the data, the affordances for IE implementation in the schools include the availability of the RC, availability of SNE teachers, availability of resources in secondary school, Parental involvement, Accessible school environment, and acceptance of diversity. These are further elaborated below.

6.6.1 Availability of the RCs

The data reveals that both schools have functional RCs that have been operating for five years and have made notable contributions to IE implementation. Among other things, the RCs have facilitated the development of teaching and learning skills for teachers and students alike, leading to positive developments in the schools. Additionally, the presence of RCs has created a sense of belonging for learners with SEN within the school environment. Thus, despite the challenges the

RCs are facing as explained in various sections above, the RCs are helping a lot in terms of IE implementation in schools.

6.6.2 Parental involvement in schools

Parental involvement in the education of their children with SEN was identified as a positive aspect of IE implementation in the two schools. The study revealed that in both schools, there is effective coordination between the schools and the parents. Specifically, in primary school, the researchers observed that parents' active participation greatly supports the teachers in handling learners with SEN and alleviates the teaching burden. This collaborative effort by parents was highly appreciated by one of the mainstream teachers, who acknowledged the positive impact it has on the educational experience of the students.

Parents come here (at school) with their children, and they wait for them until the knock-off time. Some of them enter the classrooms and assist us in handling their children as they learn (PS Teacher 1, October 13, 2022).

In the case of secondary school, although there may be limited direct involvement with parents, it was evident that parents remain highly attentive to the needs of the school and their children. They demonstrate a prompt response to the school's requests for the provision of necessary resources. Despite the lower level of engagement, the commitment and responsiveness of parents in the secondary school setting are noteworthy and contribute to the overall support and cooperation between the school and parents.

6.6.3 Accessible school environment and diversity acceptance

The data revealed that both schools have fostered an inclusive and welcoming environment, valuing diversity. Collaboration between mainstream and RC teachers has been instrumental in creating an inclusive atmosphere for all students. Additionally, other learners are encouraged to develop positive relationships with their peers with SEN. Furthermore, in both schools, learners with SEN are provided with opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, school clubs, and societies based on their interests and preferences. In secondary school, Sign language clubs have been established to promote communication and understanding between teachers and learners. Additionally, study circles have been introduced to foster peer support and collaboration among students outside of regular class hours. Meanwhile, the positive feedback from learners

further reinforces the conclusion that the schools have successfully created an enabling environment for all learners.

School life is fun here because friends help me since they know I do not usually see some things. They do not isolate or discriminate against me. Another thing is that we have tools that help us in learning. For example, I am assisted with the magnifying lens. We also have the CCTV although it is no longer working (SS Learner 1, October 14, 2022).

The SS Learner 2 said: “Education is particularly good here and so is the interaction.”

Table 4: Summary of the affordances and constraints for IE implementation in the researched schools

	Findings	Primary school	Secondary school	NSIE Management
Constraints	Limited skills in teachers due to lack of training in IE	✓	✓	
	Exclusion by teachers during classroom practice		✓	
	Shortage of SNE teachers	✓		
	Shortage of resources	✓		
	Damaged teaching and learning resources		✓	
	Shortage of funding	Impacts	Impacts	✓
	Congested classrooms and high-class ratios	✓		
	Limited monitoring and support	✓	✓	✓

	Negative attitudes among teachers toward IE	✓	✓	
	Non-inclusion practice during MANEB	✓	✓	
Affordances	Availability of RC	✓	✓	
	Parental involvement and support	✓	✓	
	Accessible school environment and diversity acceptance	✓	✓	

6.8 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter presents a summary of the research findings for questions ii to iv, which primarily examine the implementation IE in the case study schools. The chapter provides an overview of the overall school practices regarding IE implementation, explores the perspectives of various stakeholders in the schools, and identifies the factors that either hinder or facilitate the successful implementation of IE.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings obtained from the data presented in chapters 5 and 6. It discusses them in relation to the existing literature, and theories, and identifies the notable contributions of the study to IE in Malawi and beyond.

7.2 Review of the study aims

The study aimed at investigating the impact of the 2017-21 NIES on IE in Malawi through a case study of two inclusive schools. The argument presented is that NSIE as the first-ever IE strategic document, needs to be thoroughly understood to achieve its intended aims towards IE in Malawian mainstream schools. This is particularly important since the long-term action plan of the NSIE is to inform the development of the IE policy, thereby playing a crucial role in guiding policy development. During its first five years, the NSIE served as both a strategy and policy document and though it will eventually be phased out, it will continue to be a vital resource for understanding how IE implementation was formalized in Malawi's mainstream schools.

7.3 Key study findings

This study utilized systems theory to investigate policy implementation, to gain a deeper understanding of how the NSIE was implemented in two case study schools. The researcher conjointly analysed the NSIE document with field data to identify themes which were classified in two main categories and these include (i) the capacity of schools to implement IE and (ii) the support they received from the external community towards IE. These were discussed interactively with the NSIE and field data to give an interpretive critical policy analysis that focuses on: 1. providing meaning-making practices; 2. building the practices to generate notable results (Krauss, 2015); 3. locating power in policymaking processes; and 4. challenging conditions of inequality by exposing inconsistencies between what the policy says and practices (Sinclair & Brooks, 2022). Through interpretive critical policy analysis, the research aimed to expose inconsistencies between policy and practice and locate power in policymaking processes. From the data analysis in line with the above categories, six key findings emerged. These are:

- i. The implementation of IE in the two schools has shown improvement since 2017; however, there is a disjuncture between the goals of the NSIE and the implementation in the schools.
- ii. The NSIE implementation system follows a decentralized approach, however, the system lacks effective communication and responsive decision-making, especially in the monitoring process and school involvement.
- iii. IE implementation in both schools is primarily centred around RC.
- iv. Teacher education, motivation, and promotion form significant constraints to the implementation of IE in the researched primary school.
- v. There exists a mixed perception towards IE implementation, due to the many constraining factors outweighing the enabling factors.
- vi. There is limited participation of SEN experts in the examination process which hampers the accurate assessment and evaluation of learners with SEN, and training more SEN expert teachers will enhance the fairness and validity of examinations for learners with SEN.

7.4 Discussion of the findings

According to Chimwanza (2015) and De Souza (2020), successful implementation of IE can best be identified in schools where various stakeholders collaborate to create an inclusive environment. This research supports the idea that schools play a crucial role in IE implementation. The NSIE plays the role of empowering schools and structures the flow of relevant support required for the cause.

As also revealed through data analysis, IE implementation is a collaborative process involving multiple participants. The government acts as a guiding force, offering support such as teacher training, resource procurement, and funding, while reality of IE implementation work occurs at the school level. Thus, the significant efforts towards IE implementation can best be measured at the school level.

Meanwhile, Mthoyane's (2011) study suggests that policies linked to school practices are essential in understanding the progress, or lack thereof. This linkage can help to identify whether the policies, implementation procedures, monitoring personnel, or school activities hinder or facilitate IE implementation. The discussion in of the findings in this chapter aligns with the study objectives which describes the NSIEs intents, its adoption and what is on the ground as evidenced in the two case study schools. The format of the discussion follows the same structure as the preceding

chapter. It follows the study objectives, and each objective is supported and justified by key findings.

7.4.1 NSIE goals and its intent towards IE implementation

Researchers such as Schuelka (2018) and Bose and Heymann (2020) observe that IE as a new education innovation, continues to face challenges in implementation because the schools and education systems are still adjusting to it. Thus, as Malawi and other countries adopt IE policies, there is a need to ensure they are structured in a way that they capture the demands of IE and carry with them everyone involved in the implementation of the policies (also see Armstrong et al., 2009; Bartolo et al., 2019; Bibiana et al., 2020; Cross et al., 2002).

The data analysis presented in Section 5.3 reveals that the NSIE's objectives are focused on restructuring mainstream schools to enhance their capacity to implement IE. However, to meet the demands of the schools, these goals must be reinforced by the entire structural framework of the schools and education management (also see MoEST 2017, p.17, 27-28). The NSIE says the schools should:

- i. Have a functional and well-resourced RC with qualified SNE teachers to cater to the needs of SEN learners.
- ii. Be provided with SEN learner identification and assessment tools and categorization process,
- iii. Provide appropriate care and support to SEN learners,
- iv. Be provided with skilled mainstream teachers to handle SEN learners, and
- v. Generate an accessible and enabling school environment for SEN learners.
- vi. Provide monitoring and support toward IE implementation.

On the other hand, the data analysis also reveals that while the goals outlined in the NSIE are well-designed to address crucial aspects for effective implementation of IE, most of these goals are not being effectively implemented in the case study schools especially in the primary school (see section 6.3) and this is blamed on the management. Thus, this poses a threat to the attainment of these goals which become uncertain if the schools should rely on the NSIE and for the management for IE implementation.

For instance, the data analysis on IE implementation highlights various areas that are not in line with the NSIE intent. These areas include a lack of commitment from stakeholders, limited resources and funding, inadequate cooperation among educators, unavailability of appropriate promotions in primary schools, insufficient funding for maintenance and provision of required resources, biased national examinations assessments, and little evidence of effective monitoring-based management decisions to address identified problems (refer to sections 6.3 and 6.4). These factors, among others, present significant challenges for the NSIE's plan of action to achieve its intended outcomes.

According to Heimans, (2014), it is crucial for countries to assess the realism of their policy goals to determine their feasibility and potential to achieve the desired outcomes. The other argument created by Heiman was that the goal of assessments is to assist in the identification of appropriate resources, a suitable implementation plan and the viability of a strategy that can be implemented with the available resources to achieve these goals. This is when they can be considered realistic. In the same vein, other researchers argue that IE policy goals must be designed in a manner that is practical and equips schools with the necessary capacity to support diverse learners. For instance, Ishda et al. (2017) and Chitiyo (2015) note the gap in this and emphasize the importance of developing policy goals that are achievable and realistic for the intended outcomes. Based on those formulation, this study finds the NSIE goals as good but lacking in terms of practicality to achieve the intended outcome. Other researchers such as Mgomezulu (2017), Chikazinja (2018), and De Souza (2020) have also raised concerns regarding the feasibility of the NSIE's objectives.

The study findings indicate that the NSIE emphasizes the importance of effective administration and strategic planning for achieving its goals. It recognizes the need for improved partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders to strengthen the education system in Malawi (MoEST, 2017, p.11 and 23). However, the NSIE lacks clarity on how these stakeholders are expected to provide support and work together to achieve the goals. They are just mentioned in the document and there is no evidence about whether the government knows how to engage them or whether the stakeholders themselves (except for parents) know what is expected of them.

Meanwhile, the study findings report a well-structured IE administrative system in Malawi to the support implementation and lead the partnerships with other stakeholders regardless of the poor

outcome in schools. This builds an argument that having a management structure alone does not guarantee effective service delivery. This argument also aligns with Meltz et al., (2014) and Rayner, (2007) who contend that effective management requires informed decision-making and actions to address challenges and build on successes. This decision making is informed by the implementation outcomes on the ground.

It is evident in the case study schools that despite the good administration system in place, the schools receive minimal support from both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders (as discussed in section 6.5.7). More so, the findings from the case study schools shed light on the insufficiency of the NSIE strategies, resources, and management processes for meeting the growing demand for IE and achieving the stated goals (see section 6.5). This indicates a gap between the expectations outlined in the NSIE goals and the actual support received by schools. These findings align with the perspectives of other scholars, such as Lawson and Parker (2007) and De Souza (2021), who anticipate future challenges in IE implementation if similar obstacles persist in future policy initiatives like the NSIE.

Knight's (2000) democratic theory of education emphasizes the involvement of stakeholders, particularly teachers, in policy formulation to foster a comprehensive understanding of public policy and establish clear and achievable goals. However, the study uncovers a substantial gap between policy formulation and implementation at the school level, where teachers lack involvement and awareness of the NSIE's expectations for IE. This is also supported by research from Brussino (2021), Bukvić (2014), Chitiyo et al. (2015), and Knight and Pearl (1999). This poses significant challenges and contributes to hindering the achievement of the desired outcomes. These researchers suggest that it is crucial to actively engage all involved stakeholders in the decision-making process and provide them with comprehensive information about IE goals and expectations, bridging the gap between policy and practice.

7.4.2 NSIE implementation towards the school practice

According to Heimans (2014), flawed policy goals can disrupt the implementation process and lead to unexpected problems, ultimately hindering the desired outcomes. The implementation of the NSIE in Malawi reflects a decentralized approach, as evident from the data analysis (section 4.5). However, there are notable issues in the system's effectiveness regarding communication,

decision-making, and school involvement, particularly in the monitoring process. While some researchers argue in favour of decentralized decision-making as beneficial (Davies et al., 2003), others like Villa and Thousand (2003) contend that a bureaucratic system can hinder IE implementation. This study identifies obstacles in decision-making and action flow within the system, which hinder effective communication and influence, between different implementation levels (see section 5.4.1.4). Additionally, the study findings highlight minimal direct involvement of implementers in the two schools with NSIE, except for the expected outcomes. This lack of involvement contributes to limited influence of management decisions on school actions, and limited monitoring of the school practice. Consequently, the flow of NSIE implementation is primarily controlled by the management which results in it working as if it were centralized.

As revealed in the data analysis in section 4.5, the hierarchical structure and specific roles within the management system have a substantial impact on the implementation of IE in schools. Thus, it is imperative to enhance communication and collaboration among stakeholders, ensure active involvement of schools in decision-making, and provide them with the necessary resources and support. By strengthening the communication and collaboration processes in the management system and addressing its shortcomings, Malawi's education system can create an inclusive environment that equips schools with the required abilities to successfully implement IE and promote equal educational opportunities for all learners.

As also highlighted by Devecchi and Nevin (2010) and Kulgemass (2003), IE policy enactment needs to follow the decentralized approach and more power should be given to school leaders and those who directly supervise them. For instance, in this study, primary schools are supervised by zones which have little power except for helping with collection of data from the schools. However, it is these zonal officers who are in close contact with the schools. The central arguments of these scholars are that, by giving more power to schools and school leaders, they can follow up and send reminders to managers on the progress of policy implementation. It also allows for a more efficient implementation process, ensures that policies are being implemented promptly, prevents policy implementation from being one-sided, and allows for a more democratic approach to education. This approach ensures that those who are most affected by policy changes are involved in the decision-making process and can provide valuable feedback on the implementation of policies.

This is also how the democratic theory of education envisions the nature of authority in the IE system. The democratic theory of education advocates for the decentralization of power in the education system, giving more authority to the stakeholders in the microsystem of education (Pearl and Knight, 1999). The argument created by Pearl and Knight (1999) is that the decentralization approach prevents one-sided policy implementation and enables the functioning leaders in schools to follow up and send reminders to the managers on the progress of policy implementation. However, centralization must complement decentralization as too much decentralization can make the system lose its focus and hinder some lenses that require public intervention (Davies et al., 2003).

7.4.2.1 IE as a RC-based educational approach

According to NSIE, schools must have separate rooms (like a department) within their premises that function as RCs. These play a crucial role in aiding the integration of IE in mainstream schools (section 6.3.2.1 and MoEST 2017, p.5). Similarly, Crespi et al. (2022), define a RC as a toolkit room for providing inclusive teaching and learning for the entire staff and learners in mainstream schools, providing them with valuable recommendations and resources to enhance their ability to implement IE. The data analysis on the IE implementation in the two schools reveals that both schools have RCs which serve as central hubs for coordinating and managing all teaching and learning activities for learners SEN. Thus, the IE implementation in these two schools is primarily coordinated by the RC.

Moreover, IE implementation being based on the RC has become an increasingly important topic in recent years, and researchers such as Trigu (2004) and Ishida et al. (2017) have highlighted the importance of RCs in ensuring the success of IE in schools. According to these researchers, RC are essential for providing specialized support to learners with SEN and to mainstream teachers in the school environment. Additionally, Helmer et al. (2020) and Akbarovna, (2022) also note that the RC is responsible for providing pedagogical support to all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and learners with SEN. The data analysis highlights that the RC in the two schools also coordinates projects aimed at supporting the learning of SEN learners, such as training, rehabilitation work, and mental development (see section 6.4.3.1.4).

Furthermore, the data reveals that despite both case study schools having RCs that had been in operation for five years, they operated under different capacities (see section 6.4.2.1. and section

6.4.3.1.2). In the secondary school, the RC functioned much better in line with NSIE expectations for a well-functioning RC and with the standards described by other researchers. The RC is headed by a specialist teacher and had nine other SNE teachers offering support to both teachers and learners. The RC in the secondary school offered programs to build the skills of mainstream teachers and learners, provided protection mechanisms to learners, and offered remedial learning to SEN learners after attending mainstream classes. In contrast, the RC in the primary school was revealed to be more complex and did not directly achieve NSIE goals like the secondary school. This was due to a shortage of resources and many other services, which made it difficult to attend to all the expected activities. The RC in the primary school had only one SNE teacher responsible for 85 SEN learners who could not be integrated into mainstream classrooms. As a result, the RC in the primary school was more focused on providing education to SEN learners (see section 6.4.2.1)

Even though having a RC in a mainstream school may be considered a positive step towards IE implementation in schools, some scholars have raised concerns about potential segregation and exclusion resulting from this approach. A study by Somerton et al. (2020) cited by Helmer et al. (2020) supports the latter view. Again, evidence from the case study schools supports these concerns. For instance, data analysis revealed that SEN learners in the secondary school spend most of their time in the RC, leaving only when they are attending mainstream classroom lessons (section 5.6.1). This results in limited interaction with peers and the perception of poor academic performance being attributed to the RC. In addition to this, the negative attitudes towards learners in the RC in the school are prevalent, with some mainstream teachers expressing extreme views, such as attributing lower examination pass rates to the presence of learners from the RC (see section 6.4.3.7.1) Similarly, the nature of the RC in the primary school has made other learners and school staff label them as special class people and automatically restrain them from other activities and resources (section 6.3.2.1.5).

As seen through the NSIE analysis, MoEST intends to maintain special schools to serve as RCs and to establish more modern ones (MoEST, 2017 p.5). However, based on the analysis of the current state of RCs in the case study schools, the government needs to offer plausible alternatives to address the inconsistencies and challenges that existing RCs are facing. Otherwise, it risks undermining the perception that teachers and other education stakeholders have towards IE and

learners with SEN (see section 6.4.3.7.1). This recommendation is also in line with the democratic theory of education, which also advocates that maintaining and developing better, equitable, and permissible boundaries for the operation of RCs is crucial for the promotion of inclusiveness in schools (Knight & Pearl, 2000).

7.4.2.2 IE Implementation in primary school

As revealed by the findings, while both primary and secondary schools are striving to implement IE, it was found that primary schools are facing numerous challenges. According to MoEST (2017), NSIE expects that all SEN learners in primary schools be engaged in a learning environment where they are well-cared for, supported, and adequately prepared for the next level of education. Creating such an environment requires access to IE-skilled teachers, necessary teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, identification, and categorization of learners, as well as providing necessary care and support (Hayes & Bulat, 2017).

However, despite, some positive indicators of IE implementation in both schools, the study records a substantial difference in IE performance in the secondary school compared to that in the primary school. This appears due to several challenges faced by the latter, some of which include high teacher-learner ratios, insufficient teaching and learning resources, limited training, and knowledge of IE for both SNE and mainstream teachers, and negative perceptions towards IE by the teachers (see, section 6.4.2.6.1). The data analysis also revealed that the primary school has only one SNE teacher responsible for monitoring over 90 integrated learners and offering special education to 85 learners through the RC. As noted by UNESCO (2018) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT, 2020), these ratios far exceed the international standard ratio of a regular normal classroom in Malawi and international ratios for special SEN learners. UNESCO and UFT recommend a teacher-learner ratio of 1:57 for regular classrooms in Malawi and 1+1:12 for special education classrooms (international standard). Several studies such as Itimu & Kopetz (2008) show Malawi wants to improve the quality of education for learners with SEN by reducing the teacher to learner ratio in RCs from 20:1 to 5:1 by 2015. A 2020 survey by UNESCO shows the teacher-learner ratio in primary schools in Malawi is high, with an average statistic of 1:73. In the sampled primary school for this study, it was noted that the teacher-learner ratio is at 1:90 (see section 4.7.2).

Furthermore, the study also discovered that IE implementation in the primary school follows two structures: SEN learners included in mainstream classrooms and learners with SEN accommodated in a special learning program through a RC. However, those under the special programme are not receiving adequate support as their school attendance is divided into two cohorts which then attend school twice a week, and they often learn under a tree due to limited space in the RC (see section 4.7.2). Malawi's academic calendar is divided into 3 terms, each comprising of 10 weeks, 13 weeks, and 14 weeks respectively. The learners are scheduled to be in school for approximately 175 school days a year to complete an education curriculum. But in the case of special needs learners in the researched primary school, they attend school for approximately 70 days a year, which indicates they will not have the time to complete the standard curriculum.

Other researchers such as Chikhungu et al. (2020) have argued for the need to change situations like these in primary schools. They emphasize that primary schools provide foundations for secondary education in Malawi, as such, they are expected to provide a high level of education in terms of structure, quality, and adequacy. It is thus essential that all learners in primary education are well-prepared for secondary education and when it comes to the implementation of IE, primary schools must be well-equipped to provide a solid educational foundation for SEN learners, which is crucial in preparing them for secondary education (Chimwaza, 2015).

Due to the above-highlighted challenges faced by the primary school, the delivery of learning to SEN learners has been affected, resulting in challenges with memory and preventing them from attending school five days a week. Incomplete syllabus coverage and a lower quality of graduates have been detected (section 6.5.1.8). It is important to acknowledge that expecting students with learning difficulties to perform at par with their peers without adequate time in school is unrealistic (Alloway et al., 2005).

Despite the objective of NSIE to provide equitable access to education for all learners after five years (MoEST, 2017 p.11), the findings of this study highlight a concerning situation in the primary school under study. According to Riddell (2003), Kendall (2004), Msiska (2015), and MoEST (2017), high-class ratios, shortage of classrooms, and limited skills in teachers are among the challenges that have been faced by primary schools in Malawi for long now. Therefore, the findings of this study regarding IE implementation in the primary school, suggest the NSIE goal

has not been effectively implemented in this primary school as the school still records the same things that NSIE aimed at eradicating.

7.4.2.3 Teacher education, motivation and promotion

One of the goals of NSIE is to enhance the skills and motivation of teachers to implement IE, through teacher development, promotion, and motivation. Through these goals, the NSIE plan was to improve the skills of teachers to deliver in inclusive classrooms, as well as the introduction of reward systems such as promotions and other professional development to improve implementation of IE (p.22-23). Aligning with this is Kaushik (2016), who argues that the capacity of teachers must be broadly addressed, starting with motivation, pre-service teacher training as well as post-training.

The study revealed that, although mainstream teachers in both schools reported having received some training that touched on IE, it was minimal and not more than twice in the five years (section 6.3.3.3). Thus, it argues that training has had little impact on changing their school practices, and on top of that, only a limited number of teachers received the training. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that changing the system and school practices is a dynamic process, and it takes time for the intended actions to take effect (Brown, 2017). Ainscow (2005) also suggests that the government needs to consider a realistic timeframe for the intended change to occur in these schools. Therefore, when it comes to equipping teachers with IE skills, two key factors need to be considered: Firstly, how long does it take for a teacher to be fully qualified, and secondly, how long does it take for the acquired skills to be effective in-service delivery? Addressing these questions will ensure a better future for IE educational reforms (Sakiz, 2016) because embracing inclusivity is partially influenced by how teacher educators prepare teachers for their profession (Booth & Strømstad, 2003).

In response to the goal of teacher education and motivation, the study revealed that the MoEST is training more SNE teachers through teaching certificates and diplomas, with a focus on primary school teachers (see section 5.4.1.2). This is aimed at addressing the challenge of the shortage of SNE teachers in schools. However, at the time of the study, there were no newly trained teachers in SNE in the researched schools, and the primary school relied on the 12 itinerant teachers in the entire Lilongwe urban district. As other researchers have argued, (e.g., Chavuta et al., 2008; Chimwanza, 2015; Chitiyo et al., 2015; Itimu & Kopetz, 2008), Malawi has been training special

needs teachers at Montfort SNE College since the 1996, but they are still insufficient in public schools, and this is also the case for the researched schools.

The study also discovered that many teachers who completed SNE training, particularly diploma programmes, feel unmotivated and overqualified to teach in primary schools. Consequently, they apply for promotions and are transferred to secondary schools, which explains the higher number of SNE teachers in secondary schools than in primary schools (section, 6.5.2). Malawi's teachers grading system assigns teachers with teaching certificates to primary schools and those with diplomas, degrees and university certificates to secondary school (Beytekin & Chipala, 2015; Opoku et al., 2021). Those with degrees in primary education often occupy top management positions instead of teaching. This creates a challenge in managing and maintaining specialist teachers in primary schools since some automatically undergo the SNE diploma programme to get promoted and move to secondary schools. This trend has contributed significantly to the shortage of SNE teachers in primary schools, and it suggests that teacher development may have a negative impact on IE implementation in primary schools.

The data analysis also shows that promotion in teaching is not an automatic process and requires teachers to apply and qualify for it. However, this has been identified as a major cause of frustration for teachers who are not promoted despite obtaining higher qualifications. As a result, some mainstream teachers have negative attitudes towards the SNE profession as well as IE implementation itself because they feel that advancing themselves will not result in a higher rank, but rather add more pressure as they become more involved in RC (section 6.5.2). This is particularly evident in primary school, where even the head of the RC have a negative attitude towards the implementation of IE due to the heavy workload.

Furthermore, the NSIE enactment plan on teacher development and motivation stated that the IE curriculum was to be included in pre-service general teachers' training (MoEST 2017, p.22). However, the study revealed that more teachers in these two schools went through the old curriculum without IE, leading to reliance on SNE teachers' assistance in the RC to deliver in an inclusive classroom (see section 6.4.5 and 6.4.1.1). This has resulted in the perception that IE cannot be achieved without the help of the SNE teachers. The data analysis also recorded that due to the lack of IE skills in teachers, they develop negative attitudes toward SNE learners. Thus, teachers disown and refer to SEN learners as "sons and daughters of the resource teachers," and

some prefer specific categories of IE learners to work with, especially in secondary school (Section 6.5.3). This finding is consistent with other researchers who have reported negative attitudes in teachers due to a lack of teacher empowerment, which devalues their confidence, competencies, knowledge, and positivity toward IE implementation (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Majoko, 2019; Rieser, 2012; Srivastava et al., 2015). This study's finding concurs with Tenerife et al.'s (2022) study on teachers' perceptions of their competence and the benefits of IE, which found that a teacher's ability to deliver in an inclusive environment significantly influences their perception of the system. Meanwhile, several other researchers have also noted negative attitudes among teachers due to lack of skills to teach groups of learners (also see, Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Majoko, 2019; Rieser, 2012; Srivastava et al., 2015).

Ultimately, the democratic theory of education recommends that teachers who work with special categories of learners should possess the necessary IE skills, be motivated, and have the authority to effectively provide care for learners (Sant, 2019). This also includes having a deep understanding of the school culture, knowing how to embrace diversity, and empowering learners with SEN to stand up for themselves in their communities (Levinson, 2011; Sabia, 2012; Sant, 2019). Therefore, in implementing IE policies, teacher professionalism should be considered a critical factor for success.

7.4.3 Education stakeholder's perception towards IE implementation

The study reveals a nuanced perspective towards NSIE and IE implementation among the education stakeholders involved, with both positive and negative perceptions reported. However, the negative perception predominated among teachers, who face numerous educational challenges while trying to implement IE (as detailed in sections 6.3.5.1 6.4.7.1 and 6.5.3). The data analysis also revealed that teachers in both schools often feel unproductive and unmotivated because they lack the skills and confidence to teach in an inclusive classroom. However, further analysis shows that teachers are not against inclusion; they just need more support to feel confident and capable. They suggest that the government should provide more IE training, seminars, and in-service training to motivate and empower them to deliver in inclusive classrooms.

Similarly, other researchers have also observed negative views about IE among educators due to the many challenges and lack of support particularly from the teachers in schools (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Majoko, 2019; Rieser, 2012; Srivastava et al., 2015).

The data analysis in section 6.5.7 revealed that the IE management is aware of the teachers' challenges and negative perception toward IE, and they acknowledge the validity of these perceptions (section 6.5.7). However, the issue at hand goes beyond mere awareness. It pertains to the decisions and actions taken by the management, to address and overcome these problems. The data analysis on section 5.4.1.4 also reveals that, despite the efforts to improve the implementation of IE in schools, the management grapples with internal disagreements regarding the progress of IE. While some managers believe that IE is advancing because of the NSIE, others argue that more work is needed, citing incomplete assignments within the NSIE that require additional investments.

The varying perceptions among key stakeholders have been subject to criticism by researchers such as Praisner (2003) who argue that it significantly impacts the implementation of IE in schools. Gu et al. (2018) further note that perceptions of education reforms have the potential to shape how they are executed. They emphasize the importance of having consistency in perceptions between policy managers and implementers of education reforms, stating that a high level of consistency in perceptions between these two groups has direct and indirect effects on expected outcomes. Therefore, it is important for the policy managers and their influencers of policy enactment have similar perceptions to achieve the desired outcomes (Gu et al, 2018).

Despite inconsistencies and unfulfilled commitments by education authorities through NSIE and the teacher's attitudes, learners with SEN and their parents hold positive views towards IE in schools. Masulani-Mwale et al. (2018), revealed that parents of children with intellectual and other learning disabilities in Malawi experience high levels of psychological distress due to inadequate support and little attention given to learners in schools. However, when given the opportunity, they fully commit to school programs to ensure their children receive the necessary support for their learning. These are also the findings of this study, revealed through the parental commitment to the education of their children in the case study schools (detailed in section 6.6.2).

Additionally, Xu and Malinen (2015) argue that parents' commitment to education where SEN learners are involved positively influences teachers' perceptions towards them. The lack of such commitment creates difficulties for teachers in their work. Nevertheless, it was discovered that the teachers' perceptions in the two case study schools were significantly influenced by the lack of necessary support from the government. Nonetheless, the teachers expressed satisfaction with

parents' involvement in their children's education and appreciated their support (refer to section 6.3.5.3).

Sharma et al. (2013) assert that the achievement of successful IE requires unwavering dedication from various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, teacher training institutions, schools, educators, and the school community. Without the collective commitment of these entities, successful inclusion would be unattainable because of perceptual divides. Many researchers, as outlined in the literature review, including Chimwanza (2015), Kaunda (2017), De Souza (2020), and Mbewe et al. (2021), concur with Sharma and identify emerging challenges to policy enactment and IE practices in Malawi, such as division in attitudes and perceptions among stakeholders and lack of professional competence.

The democratic theory of education emphasizes the importance of teachers and other direct education stakeholders being professionally competent, positive, and authoritative towards learners, enabling them to address real problems faced by learners in their school life and preparing them for democratic citizenship (Levinson, 2011; Sabia, 2012; Sant, 2019). This cannot be possible when teachers are filled with negative perceptions towards the learners. Therefore, as evidenced through the findings of this study in the two-case study school, the researchers suggest that all stakeholders must work collaboratively and commit to achieving successful IE in these schools.

7.4.4 Constraints and impact on NSIE and IE implementation

From the data analysis conducted on this case study, it was revealed that there are more constraining factors than enabling factors that affect both the NSIE and IE implementation (Section 6.5 and 6.6). These constraining factors include limited skills among mainstream teachers, a shortage of SNE teachers, negative attitudes among teachers, resource shortages and damages, congested classrooms, limited governmental support, and exclusion during national examinations. The findings of this study are consistent with the arguments presented by Shyman (2015) and Andrews et al. (2021), who suggest that excessive constraints lead to IE implementation challenges because they co-exist and often cause each other as they hinder policy goals.

The data analysis also revealed that many of these constraining factors coexist and influence each other, and it is essential to discuss them interactively, considering their effect on the NSIE goals.

7.4.4.1 Impact on identification and assessment of learners

The data revealed several constraints impacting the identification and assessment of learners with SEN in the involved schools as part of NSIE's goals (section 6.3.2). These constraints include limited teacher training and inadequate assessment tools. The lack of formal tools and knowledge to conduct these assessments is also leading to biased judgments and disproportionality, as has been pointed out by Becker & Deris (2019), Otaah (2015), and Collin (2002). Without proper training and assessment tools, educators struggle to accurately identify and assess the learning needs of learners with SEN, which affects the support and their categorization (section 6.3.2).

Furthermore, it was noted that the formal SEN categories in the involved schools mainly focus on learners with HI and VI, while those with LD are referred to in broad terms without adequate categorization (section 4.7). Colin (2022) argues that LD is too broad and identifies four main categories of LD, as well as 27 other learning disabilities within these categories. Furthermore, the study shows that learners with VI receive more attention than those with HI and other LDs, both in school practice and during national examinations (section 6.5.8). However, NSIE goals emphasize the importance of embracing all diversities and ensuring that educators have enhanced skills in learner identification and assessment, as well as the necessary resources (MoEST 2017, p.11, 22). Thus, the lack of resources and knowledge on how to properly identify and categorize learners with SEN is a significant constraint that impacts NSIE's goal for identifying and assessing learners with SEN in the case study schools.

Thus, we can conclude that the evidence from the data analysis reveals a dilemma in how to effectively assess, identify, and categorize learners with special SEN in the involved schools. This dilemma is particularly problematic when considering the "inclusive attribute" of democratic theory, which prioritizes understanding, accommodating, and supporting learners according to their assessed needs (Pearl and Knight, 1999). Without a proper examination of learners' learning conditions, there is a risk of questioning the credibility of their SEN categorization.

7.4.4.2 Impact on care and support for SEN learners

According to NSIE, care and support are essential for safeguarding students with SEN in their school settings (MoEST, 2017). However, it is apparent from the data analysis that care, and support encompasses more than just physical protection. Logan (2006) defines care as the role of Special Needs Assistants (SNA), and this study revealed that care and support in the two school

environments are typically coordinated by the RC, with SNE teachers being responsible for it and ensuring that learners are well integrated into the mainstream learning (section 6.3.3 and section 6.4.3). It is also influenced by a range of factors, including resource availability, school support, teacher capacity, and motivation. Meanwhile, the study has noted that care and support of learners with SEN in the two schools is affected by the shortage of SNE teachers, unavailability of teacher assistance, insufficient support for teachers, inadequate skills in IE and high student-teacher ratios just to mention but a few. It was also noted that primary schools sometimes engage parents to serve as assistants in the classroom and to offer physical protection to their children from the school environment stresses (see section 6.6.2). As for secondary school, learners are encouraged to fully operate in the RC for their full care and support (section 6.4.3).

Nonetheless, some literature emphasizes the importance of empowering all teachers in the school environment to provide care and support to SEN learners (Beek, 2002; Corbett, 2001; Xu & Malinen, 2015). Valeo (2008) notes that failure to do so can create a gap in learner support and lead to negative attitudes among teachers towards learners with SEN (Valeo, 2008), which has also been identified in this study.

According to the democratic theory of education, to establish credibility, schools must draw all learner diversity to their attention, with inclusiveness defined as recognizing and providing necessary support according to individual needs (Knight, 2000). Schools that fail to pay attention to diversity are considered exclusive and centrifugal, diverging from the qualities of inclusive schools. To ensure diversity is respected, schools must coordinate various programs, including extracurricular activities for all learners.

7.4.4.3 Impact on external support to schools

The data analysis reveals that government, and its stakeholders are not doing enough in providing resources for the implementation of IE in the two schools and this has led to several challenges (section 6.5.7). These include limited teaching skills among teachers, shortage of SNE teachers, inadequate resources, and a lack of monitoring and consultation. Although NSIE and IE management's commend government for facilitating trainings of SENCOS and CPDs (section 5.4.1.1), cooperating with other stakeholders, and running capacity building for teachers, administrators, and communities, the findings from the two schools show that these initiatives have not benefited many schools (section 6.5.1) and there is need to do more.

Many researchers have blamed poor managerial services in IE implementation arguing this has contributed to many challenges and negative attitudes towards IE among teachers (also see Corbett, 2001; Beek, 2002; Riddell, 2003; Kendall, 2004; Chimwanza, 2015; Hayes and Bulat, 2017; De Souza, 2021). Villa and Thousand (2008) suggest that the support for IE implementation must focus on the major school needs that will create an environment capable of accommodating SEN learners and must target educators and learners directly. They argue that meaningful support must emphasize school resources, schools' capacity, the availability of SNE teachers, and building a more responsive environment. This study notes the same. The support the schools receive goes through a long channel and, in most cases, resources are wasted or diverted while at management level (see section 6.5.5). Reflecting on the challenges faced by the primary school, shows that the support they receive is not enough for the effective implementation of IE.

The democratic theory of education emphasizes the importance of external support and collaboration between schools and external stakeholders in IE implementation (Knight, 2000). According to this theory, schools must embrace support from external partners, and the government must work collaboratively with its stakeholders. This view is also supported by some managerial staff, as detailed in section 5.4.1.4, who feel that engaging stakeholders is crucial to ensuring that IE is adequately supported. However, data from the two schools show minimal engagement of stakeholders by government in IE implementation.

7.4.5 Enablers' impact on NSIE and IE implementation

Despite the various hindrances to the implementation of IE, the data from the researched schools suggests that there has been some progress in IE implementation. Moreover, some factors have enabled and facilitated the implementation of IE in schools. As evidenced in the data analysis sections 6.6.2 and 6.6.3, parental involvement and support as well as the creation of accessible school environments have been identified as critical factors that have enabled the implementation of IE.

7.4.5.1 Parental involvement and support

The data analysis revealed that parents are a critical group of direct stakeholders in schools, providing essential support for the implementation of IE. This aligns with the NSIE goal of parents and communities as IE implementation stakeholders. According to NSIE, parents and communities are assigned crucial roles in supporting the implementation of IE in schools. Specifically, they are

expected to promote care and support services, assist in identifying learners with special needs, protect children from abuse and violence, encourage all children to complete their education, assist their children with school assessments, contribute to Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), support in learning activities, participate in school improvement activities and rehabilitation efforts, and advocate for their children's interests at the school level (MoEST, 2017, p. 30). The analysis of the data showed that parents in both schools are collaborating with teachers to provide the necessary learning support for their children (also as elaborated in section 7.4.3.3). In primary schools, parents are present every school day and they operate as teaching assistants in the classroom. While, in secondary schools, parents respond to any request for support, such as providing learning resources for their children.

Various researchers (Blackie, 2010; Galaterou & Antoniou, 2017; Hunter-Johnson, 2014; Opoku et al., 2021; Xu & Malinen, 2015) have stressed the importance of parental assistance in implementing IE. They contend that parents, as caregivers of their children, possess practical knowledge on how to manage them, and this knowledge can be imparted to teachers. Additionally, they suggest that parental involvement in school activities, can foster positive attitudes towards these learners (refer to section 7.4.4.3 for more information).

7.4.5.2 Accessible school environment

The NSIE highlights the importance of creating an inclusive, enabling, and democratic school environment that allows all learners to exercise their rights and participate equally (MoEST, 2017). Through data analysis, it was discovered that despite facing some infrastructural challenges, both primary and secondary schools have created a welcoming environment that is accessible to all learners, including those with physical disabilities (refer to section 6.6.3). However, according to Knight (2000) an inclusive school should not only prioritize physical accessibility but should also aim to create an environment that promotes ownership, creativity, belonging, competence, and meaning for all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Other researchers emphasize the need to address structural barriers at the policy level, stakeholder attitudes, and the overall school environment (Aguerrondo, 2008; Bibiana et al., 2020; Chimwaza, 2015; Ludago, 2020; Newton, 2021).

Consistent with these views, the data analysis indicated that learners with SEN are actively engaged in different activities in their schools. For example, in the studied primary school, there

are school clubs and events where these students are assigned roles, and they interact with their non-SEN peers, who also on some occasions assist them with their studies and mobility (if physically challenged) (refer to section 6.3.4). Furthermore, the secondary school has implemented several programs, including clubs and societies where some SEN students hold leadership positions, study circles where students assist each other academically, and sign language clubs that cater to the communication needs of deaf students (refer to section 6.4.1.4 and 6.4.5). Overall, both schools have fostered an inclusive atmosphere that allows SEN students to participate fully in various school activities. However, the discussion also highlights the need for numerous interventions in these schools to enhance inclusivity for all diverse learners (as outlined in section 7.4.4, which identifies several constraints that need to be addressed for IE to progress).

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview and analysis of the key findings of the study. These findings have been thoroughly examined in relation to the research questions and supported by insights from other studies.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by providing a summary and contemplation of the key aspects of the research from various chapters. It also outlines the key lessons learnt from the data analysis and discussion of the findings in chapters 6 and 7.

8.2 Synthesis

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the NSIE's impact on IE in respect of the two case study schools in Malawi. This was done by examining its intent, how it was implemented, the perception of the stakeholders, and constraining and enabling factors. The primary objective of this study was to address the gap in the literature concerning the impact of the NSIE on IE in Malawi. Thus, the study aimed to evaluate the strategy's effectiveness in achieving its goals during its initial five years of implementation in selected case study schools.

To inform my study, I reviewed relevant literature on IE (IE) policy in Malawi and beyond. The concepts of democratic education theory and systems theory were also utilized, offering a comprehensive understanding of IE implementation, and guiding the research design and analysis process.

The study utilized a qualitative case study design of two inclusive schools and purposive sampling was used to select data sources and 21 participants. Data collection involved document analysis and in-depth interviews, with thematic analysis applied. The analysis focused on two categories: schools' capacity for IE implementation and external support. Thus, learning from these categories, data analysis centred on seven key themes which includes a) having a functional RC; b) Learner identification, categorization, and support; c) Availability of resources; d) Building teachers' capacity to support learners; e) Enabling and supportive school environment, f) Parental and Schools' external support and g) ensuring there is government and stakeholders' support.

From the data analysis, six key findings were derived:

- i. IE implementation in the two schools shows improvement since 2017. However, there is a disjuncture between the goals of the NSIE and the implementation in the schools.

- ii. The NSIE implementation system follows a decentralized approach characterised by lack of effective communication and responsive decision-making, especially in the monitoring process and school involvement.
- iii. IE implementation in both schools is centred around RCs.
- iv. Teacher education, motivation, and promotion form significant constraints to the implementation of IE in the sampled schools.
- v. There exists a mixed perception towards IE implementation due to the many constraining factors outweighing the enabling factors.
- vi. There is limited participation of SEN experts in the national examination process which hampers the accurate assessment and evaluation of learners with SEN.

8.3 Lessons learnt

The findings shed light on:

- The NSIE intent and implementation
- IE management
- IE implementation in schools

The knowledge that can be obtained from this study includes the following:

- Overall, NSIE goals enactment did not go as planned, with only around 40% of the goals being partially achieved by 2022 as acknowledged by the IE management participants. This confirms the challenges in NSIE and IE implementation.
- NSIE's implementation faces significant challenges and there are several constraining factors as discussed above which need to be addressed.
- There is an increase in enrolment of learners with SEN because of the NSIE (particularly in primary schools), which provides evidence of a positive response. However, this highlights the need for increased investment in resources, IE curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training.
- There is a significant gap between NSIE formulation and intent and implementation at the school level. The study found that the management and teachers are not on the same page.

For instance, some teachers had not seen the NSIE document five years since coming into force.

- There is a need for the government to offer plausible alternatives to address the challenges faced by the schools. Neglecting to do so could negatively impact the interest, value, and belief that teachers and education stakeholders have toward IE and learners with SEN.
- Poor implementation of IE in primary school is sending poor quality of learners with SEN to secondary school.
- Parents' involvement and support have proved to be critical in creating a conducive learning environment for learners with SEN, enhancing their academic performance, and ensuring that they receive appropriate care and support services (section 6.3.3 and 6.4.3).
- In both schools, most teachers did not undergo any IE training as one way of improving their capacity to teach learners with diversity. This turns out to be a contributing factor to negative attitudes toward SNE learners.
- There is need to review the teachers' promotion and upgrading system to ensure that SNE teachers are retained in primary schools. It has been noted that many teachers rush to colleges to upgrade and then get promoted to secondary schools where conditions are better compared to primary schools.
- Delayed or rejected promotion in primary schools has a negative impact on IE (section 7.4.2.4). The data has revealed that because promotion is not automatic, most teachers are not motivated to go through the whole process.
- The shortage of funding for IE has affected the availability of key teaching and learning materials for learners with SEN and this has burdened parents as some cannot afford.
- There is a need to expand the inclusive implementation of examination assessment beyond learners with VI and ensure that all SEN learners are assessed fairly in national examinations.
- There is need to engage expertise of SNE and specialists in marking and evaluating the examinations of SEN learners to ensure fairness.

- There is a need to develop specific examination modes for learners with SEN at primary level, as the current examination process may impede access of SEN learners into Secondary education.

8.4 Recommendations for further studies

The current study is limited to a case study approach, and its findings and discussions are specific to two schools. Therefore, to provide a more extensive perspective and understanding of the NSIE impact, I recommend conducting further research on a larger scale, specifically focusing on rural schools. This would provide insights into the issues faced by a wider range of students, including those with SEN. Secondly, there is need for studies on specific issues such as teacher education and promotion; communication and teacher involvement in policy decisions; mainstream teachers' attitudes and perceptions; examination modes or adaptations for primary-level learners with different SENs and centralized system of IE and assessment of learners with SEN as presented in the study, can help in further understanding the NSIE and IE implementation.

8.5 IE policy recommendations summary

Based on the overall research findings and analysis, I would like to make recommendations that I believe will positively contribute to the implementation of IE and inform the development of IE policy.

1. There is need for the MoEST to conduct a nationwide survey to assess the impact of NSIE. The study should evaluate the successes and challenges in IE implementation, including an in-depth analysis of the reasons and mechanisms behind them. This should be done periodically, and the findings should be used for policy reviews.
2. Primary schools should receive more attention in the implementation of IE. The study found that primary schools provide foundational education to secondary schools, but they face greater challenges in IE implementation (See section 6.5.6 and 7.4.2.2).
3. There is need to review the teachers' grading and promotion system to ensure more teachers are retained in primary school (Section 6.5.2). They are frustrated by low perks and absence of risks allowances since they deal with vulnerable learners (See section 6.3.1.4; 6.3.5.1 and 7.4.2.3).
4. There is need for MoEST to establish a robust monitoring team to oversee the implementation of IE in schools (section 6.5.7). This team should visit the schools

occasionally to evaluate IE implementation. Their findings will help MoEST to respond to emerging issues timeously.

5. The government should establish more well-equipped RCs to support IE implementation especially in primary schools. This should be complemented by increasing the number of SNE teachers to supervise the RCs (see section 6.3.1).
6. There is need to enhance parental and community engagement in IE implementation. Although some parents are already providing support to IE implementation (see Section 6.6.2 and 7.4.5.1), I recommend establishing parental associations for children with SEN in schools. By working together, parents can better support their children and motivate each other.
7. There is need for improving information flow across the IE implementation hierarchy and between systemic levels. This study found that many teachers are not aware of the NSIE policy, and their schools have no hard copies of the policy.
8. There is need to create a team of specialist examiners to be responsible for assessing learners with SEN during national examinations at both primary and secondary levels (See Section 6.5.8 and 7.4.4.1).

8.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has highlighted the progress made by NSIE in the implementation of IE, despite the challenges faced by the IE management system and in schools. Notably, the secondary school has shown greater progress compared to the primary school. Although NSIE has a comprehensive policy framework, its effective implementation is hindered by various constraining factors including lack of resources and frustrated teachers. Thus, addressing these and other constraining factors is crucial for the effective implementation of IE in Malawi.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Map of Malawi



Appendix 2: Letter to the gatekeepers (IE Headquarters)

G22k3054,
Rhodes University,
PO Box 94, 6140.
1st September 2022.

The Inclusive Education Deputy Director
Ministry of Education,
Lilongwe 3, Malawi

Dear Madam,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AT YOUR OFFICE

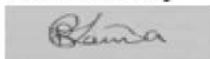
My name is Bridget Kaunda. I am a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) document on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Considering that the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education in inclusive schools. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

Considering that your office monitors the whole implementation of IE in the country, I would like to request your permission to conduct an interview with [REDACTED] on how NIES was implemented and performed during its five years of implementation. The study will also collect data from other education offices and schools to answer all the research questions which will give a complete evaluation report on how the NIES has impacted inclusive education in the country. Participation in this study is voluntary. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided and when understood, will be signed before the interview to consent participation. The information gathered will be held confidential, and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will involve confidentiality and anonymity ethics.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with your office within this period. The time for the interview will not exceed two hours and where sharing the time into several days may be required, it will be very much possible to do so. All the emerging results of the study will be discussed with the participant before the final reporting and copies of the final research will be made available to your office.

I will be glad if you will be able to support my study. For anything, you can contact me through g22k3052@campus.ru.ac.za, or my supervisor and Rhodes University Ethics Committee at b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully




Bridget Kaunda (g22k3054)

Appendix 3: Permission approval (IE Directorate)

Telegrams: MINED LILONGWE
Telephone: (265) 789 422
Fax: (265) 788 064/184

Communications should be addressed to:
The Secretary for Education, Science and Technology



In reply please quote No.:
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY
PRIVATE BAG 328
CAPITAL CITY
LILONGWE 3
MALAWI

9TH SEPTEMBER, 2022

Ref: EDU/IE/09/22

To: Ms. Bridget Kaunda
C/O Mr. N. C. Kaunda
P.O. Box 1253, Lilongwe
(Rhodes University Scholar-G22K3054)

CC: Rhodes University Ethics Committee
Rhodes University
P.O. Box 94, Makhanda
Eastern Cape, 6140

Dear Sir/Madam,


ACCEPTANCE LETTER TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

In reference to the above subject, I hereby authorize you write to conduct an academic research on the impact of the 2017-2021 Malawi National Strategy on Inclusive Education at the Ministry of Education, Directorate of Inclusive Education.

However, you are expected to seek consent from all the participants and observe professional conduct during the interviews by ensuring that all participants understand your research objectives.

Ministry of Education look forward to the research report as this will guide in decision making.

Yours Sincerely,


LUCY MAGAGULA
DEPUTY DIRECTOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Appendix 4: Letter to the gatekeepers (Lilongwe Urban DEM)

G22k3054,
Rhodes University,
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140,
3rd August 2022.

The Lilongwe District Education Manager,
District Education Office,
P.O Box 192, Lilongwe.

CC: The Headteacher
[REDACTED]

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH AT YOUR OFFICE

[REDACTED]

My name is Bridget Kaunda, a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Now the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

Therefore, I am writing to seek your permission to conduct interviews with the following group of individuals under your management.

- i. [REDACTED] for Lilongwe District Education Office
- ii. Head of the resource centre, teachers, learners, and their parents at [REDACTED]

Participation in this study is voluntary, and for ethical reasons, actual names of schools, teachers, learners, and their parents will not be disclosed in the final dissertation. The information gathered will be held confidential, and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will consider confidentiality and anonymity ethics. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided, and when understood, will be signed before the interview to consent to participation. Consent for learners will be sought from their guardians who will also be part of the study.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with the participants both at your office and the school within this period. The time for the interview will not exceed two hours and where splitting the time into several days may be required, it will be very much possible to do so. final reporting and copies of my research will be made available to your office and the study school.

I will be glad if you will be able to support my study. For any additional information or inquiries, please contact me through; g22k3054@campus.ru.ac.za or my supervisor or Rhodes University Ethics Committee at b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully
Bridget Kaunda (g22k3052)

Appendix 5:Permission Approval (Lilongwe Urban DEM

5th September, 2022

FROM : The Chief Education Officer, Lilongwe City Council
TO : The Headteacher, [REDACTED]
School.

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH AT YOUR OFFICE
[REDACTED]

Refer to your letter dated 1st July, 2022 in which you were seeking permission to conduct research on the impact of 2017-2021 National Inclusive Education Strategy [REDACTED] School in Lilongwe Urban School and Institute [REDACTED].

Please be informed that permission has been granted for you to proceed on this exercise not to disturb school activities.

Your usual cooperation will be highly appreciated.

[REDACTED]
Towera Masoka-Banda
CHIEF EDUCATION OFFICER
LILONGWE URBAN

Appendix 6: Letter to the gatekeepers (CWED)

G22k3054,
Rhodes University, PO Box 94,
Makhanda, 6140,
| 1st July 2022.

The Education Division Manager
Central West Education Division,
P.O Box 98, Lilongwe.

Dear Sir,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH AT AN INCLUSIVE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL

My name is Bridget Kaunda, a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) document on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Considering that the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education in inclusive schools. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

Since your office is responsible for monitoring both primary and secondary schools in the central west education division, I would like to seek permission to conduct a research study at xxx secondary school and xxx Primary School. The study seeks to conduct interviews with the following individuals: the Head of the resource centre, Teachers Learners, and Parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and for ethical reasons, the actual names of schools, teachers, learners, and their parents will not be disclosed in the final dissertation. The information gathered will be held confidential and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will consider confidentiality and anonymity ethics. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided, and when understood, signed before the interview to consent to participation. Consent for learners will be sought from their guardians who will also be part of the study.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with the school participants within this period. The time for the interview will not exceed two hours and where breaking the two hours into several days may be required, it will be very much possible to do so. All the emerging results of the study will be discussed with the participant before the final reporting and copies of the final research report will be made available to your office and schools.

I will be glad if you will be able to support my study. For any additional information needed, please contact me through g22k3053-4@campus.ru.za or my supervisor or Rhodes University Ethics Committee at b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully

Bridget Kaunda (g22k3054)

Appendix 7: Permission Approval (CWED)

REF.NO./CWED/ACADRESEARCH/03/2022

30th AUGUST 2022

FROM: THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER, CENTRAL WEST EDUCATION DIVISION, P.O. BOX 98, LILONGWE

TO : [REDACTED]

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN CWED SECONDARY SCHOOL

I write to advise that BRIDGET KAUNDA (G22K3054) has been granted permission to conduct an academic research to collect data for his/her MASTERS IN EDUCATION dissertation in your school.

His/her area of study is:

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STRATEGY ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAWI

However, the researcher will have to seek individual consent from the participants and that normal classes shall not be disrupted.

You are therefore requested to render to the researcher assistance required.

[REDACTED SIGNATURE] J.J. Nkhata

EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER (CWED)

THE EDUCATION DIVISION MANAGER CENTRAL WEST EDUCATION DIVISION 31 AUG 2022 DOSS P.O. BOX 98, LILONGWE

Appendix 8: Letter to the Gatekeeper (Secondary School)

G22k3054
Rhodes University
PO Box 94
Makhanda
6140

The Headmistress
XX Secondary School
Lilongwe

Dear Madam,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Bridget Kaunda, a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Considering that the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education in inclusive schools. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

Having been granted the go-ahead permission by DEM to conduct a study, I would like to seek your permission to conduct my research study at your school with the Head of the Resource Centre, mainstream teachers, learners, and their parents. Please see the attached permission form from the DEM for CWED Office.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and for ethical reasons, the actual names of schools, teachers, learners, and their parents will not be disclosed in the final dissertation. The information gathered will be held confidential and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will consider confidentiality and anonymity ethics. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided, and when understood, will be signed before the interview to consent to participation. Consent for learners will be sought from their guardians who will also be part of the study.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with the school participants within this period. The time for the interview will not exceed two hours and where splitting the time into several days may be required, it will be very much possible to do so. All the emerging results of the study will be discussed with the participant before the final reporting and copies of the final research report will be made available for the school.

I will be glad if you will be able to support my study. For any additional information needed or inquiries, please contact me through bridgetbrika@gmail.com, or my supervisor or Rhodes University Ethics Committee at b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully

Bridget Kaunda (g22k3054)

Appendix 9: Permission Approval (Secondary School)

Permission declaration

I, [REDACTED] (full name) Head teacher (position) for the [REDACTED] hereby accept the research request made by Bridget Kaunda, to conduct research at my school with teachers and learners on the impact of the NIES on inclusive education as part of her master's dissertation. However, the researcher will have to seek individual consent from the participants.

I have understood the content and nature of this research

[REDACTED]
(Signature)



Appendix 10: Letter to the gatekeeper (Primary School)

G22K3054
Rhodes University
PO Box 94
Makhanda
6140

The Headteacher
XX Primary School
Lilongwe

Dear Sir/Madam,

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN EDUCATION RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Bridget Kaunda, a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) document on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Considering that the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education in inclusive schools. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

Having been granted the go-ahead permission by the EDM and DEM to conduct a study, I would like to seek your permission to conduct my research study at your school with the Head of the Resource Centre, mainstream teachers, learners, and their parents. Please see the attached permission form from the EDM and DEM for Central West Education Division and Lilongwe District Office.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and for ethical reasons, the actual names of schools, teachers, learners, and their parents will not be disclosed in the final dissertation. The information gathered will be held confidential and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will consider confidentiality and anonymity ethics. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided, and when understood, will be signed before the interview to consent to participation. Consent for learners will be sought from their guardians who will also be part of the study.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with the school participants within this period. The time for the interview will not exceed two hours and where splitting the time into several days may be required, it will be very much possible to do so. All the emerging results of the study will be discussed with the participant before the final reporting and copies of the final research report will be made available for the school.

I will be glad if you will be able to support my study. For any additional information needed or inquiries, please contact me through g22k30@campus.ru.za or my supervisor or Rhodes University Ethics Committee at b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully

Bridget Kaunda (g22k3054)

Appendix 11: permission approval (Primary school)

Permission declaration

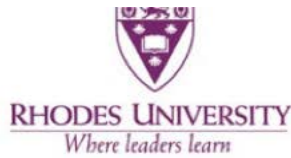
I, [redacted] (full name) Headteacher (position) for the [redacted] school, hereby accept the research request made by Bridget Kaunda, to conduct interviews at my school with teachers and learners on the impact of the NIES on inclusive education as part of her Master's dissertation.

I have understood the content and nature of this research project and grant her permission. However, the researcher will have to seek individual consent from the participants.

[redacted]
(Signature)

[redacted]

Appendix 12: Ethics Approval (Rhodes University)



**Rhodes University, Education Faculty
Research Ethics Committee**
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8393
Fax: +27 (0) 46 603 8028
email: e.rosenberg@ru.ac.za

<https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/>

28 September 2022

bridget kaunda

Education Department

g22k3054@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Miss Bridget Kaunda

Re: Examining the impact of NIES on inclusive education in Malawi

APPLICATION NUMBER: 2022-5706-6980

This letter confirms that your research ethics application has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee (EF-REC). Your permission letter(s) where applicable have been received and you are free to proceed with your study.

Approval is granted for 1 year. An annual progress report is required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the progress report is due.

Should any substantive change(s) be made during the research process, that may have ethical implications, you should notify the Education Faculty REC Chair via email. This includes changes in investigators. The REC Chair will advise as to whether a new application is necessary.

Do keep this clearance letter secure and accessible throughout your study and after its completion. It will be needed when a thesis is examined and when publications are submitted to journals.

Please also submit a brief report to the REC Chair on the completion of the research. This can be done via email. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully and whether any ethics-related matters arose that the committee should be aware of, in order to guide future studies.

Sincerely,



Prof Eureka Rosenberg

Chair: Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 13: Participants Invitation letter (General)

Rhodes University
PO Box 94
Makhanda
6140

Dear Sir|Madam

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

I write to request your participation in my research study. My name is Bridget Kaunda, a master's Scholar at Rhodes University in South Africa, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) document on IE. The overarching aim is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021. The study follows the background of NIES as the first document in Malawi to specifically outline a clear strategy (plans and goals) for achieving IE. Considering that the NIES document has now reached five years of its implementation duration, which is enough period to assess and appreciate its impact, I would like to conduct a holistic analysis of the strategy and how it has impacted inclusive education in inclusive schools. It is hoped that the study will contribute to other research that informs the development of inclusive education policy in the country.

I would like to hear from you based on your experiences as **IE** manager/teacher in an inclusive school on the impact of NSIE on IE. Your participation in this study is vital because you are the main implementors of inclusive education and NIES. Therefore, your responses are central, and they will give the real picture on the ground as far as the implementation of IE is concerned. Data collection will also include interviews with other education offices, learners involved in the resource centre, and the parents of the children.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and for ethical reasons, both participants' names and the school's, will not be disclosed in the final dissertation. The information gathered will be held confidential and anonymized and once the audio recordings of the interviews have been transcribed, they will be destroyed. Any reports and publications emerging from this research and where desired will consider confidentiality and anonymity ethics. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather will be provided, and when understood, will be signed before the interview to consent to participation. Consent for learners will be sought from their guardians who will also be part of the study.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with your participants within this period. I hope and believe that you will support my study. Should you have any inquiries during or after the study, feel free to report to me (on the details below), my supervisor, or the Rhodes University ethics committee through the following emails; b.brown@ru.ac.za and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully

Bridget Kaunda

22k3052@campus.ru.ac.za

Appendix 14: Parents Invitation Letter

g22k3054
Rhodes University
PO Box 94
Makhanda
6140

Dear Parents/Guardians

My name is Bridget Kaunda, and I am conducting research on Inclusive Education (IE) in Malawi. My research investigates the impact of the 2017-21 National Inclusive Education Strategy document (NIES) on IE. The overarching aim of the study is to investigate how the NIES was implemented and performed in transforming IE in Malawi between 2017 and 2021.

I invite you as well as seek permission for your child to be part of my research project. I intend to conduct interviews with the teachers, learners who participate in the resource centre, and parents of the children. Your child has volunteered to participate in the research interview and as per the study design, I would like to interview you too. All the information gathered will be treated as confidential and anonymized once the audio recordings have been transcribed. A Consent Form outlining the objectives of the study and what I want to gather from both of you will be provided and when understood, you will be asked to sign before the interview.

Consenting from both you and your child to be involved in the research will give me the permission to go ahead with the interviews and use the feedback through audio and recording to answer the research question which will deepen our understanding of inclusive education in Malawi.

I intend to conduct the study between the month of August and September as such I plan to schedule interviews with the school participants within this period. I hope and believe that you will support my study. Should you have any, feel free to contact the EDM, me at g22k3052@campus.ru.ac.za, my supervisor at b.brown@ru.ac.za, and ethics-committee@ru.ac.za respectively.

Yours faithfully

Bridget Kaunda

Appendix 15: Document Analysis guide

List of documents	Purpose
National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) document	To analyze NIES strategic goals and the implementation plan
National Education Sector Plan	To analyze the framing of IE and get the insight on how the vision of the NIES instills the culture of the IE practice in schools
IE reports	To get insights on the quarterly and annual reports on IE and analyze the findings.
IE articles	To analyze what has been written around IE and how they relate with my study.
Students' records	To evaluate the outcome of IE on whether the NIES rhetoric relates with practice

Appendix 16: Interview Guides

A) guiding questions for the head of the resource centres (both schools)

Target research questions

- i. How are the NIES key priority areas adopted and implemented in the selected schools?
- ii. What are the enabling and constraining factors of implementing NIES in these schools?

Interview questions

- i. How does the resource centre operate?
- ii. What kind of support do the learners seek from the resource centre?
- iii. How many learners do your resource centre handle in a week/month?
- iv. Can you give me a snapshot of what an inclusive classroom looks like at this school?
- v. What are some of the constraints and enabling factors affecting IE from a classroom perspective at your school?
- vi. Do you know NIES? What does it entail in general terms, and do you think its purpose is being met?
- vii. What has the government done to increase the 'capacity' of the resource centre?
- viii. Are there institutions you work with to support learners with SEN at your school? If yes, how do you work with them?
- ix. Have you ever attended in-service training in SNE/IE since 2017?
- x. What other professional growth and support (capacity building) do you receive at the resource centre? And how do the resource centre support capacity of mainstream teachers?
- xi. How would you describe the way the resource centre has operated since 2017?
- xii. Are there things you think need to be changed, maintained, or added to improve the quality of IE?
- xiii. If the government is to formulate an IE policy, what would be your recommendation?

B). Guiding questions for the teachers (both primary and secondary)

Target research questions

- i. How are the NIES key priority areas adopted and implemented in the selected schools?
- ii. What are the enabling and constraining factors of implementing NIES in these schools?
- iii. What are the perceptions of the IE stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners) on NIES?

Interview Questions

1. How would describe your experience in teaching inclusive classrooms?
2. What kind of support have you received to help you in handling inclusive classrooms?
3. How often do you receive in-service training (capacity-building) to advance your professional capacity as a mainstream teacher?
4. How do you deal with curriculum adaptation, methodology, teaching, and learning materials to accommodate learners with SEN?
5. According to your experience with teaching in a mainstream class, what would you say is the most important thing in creating an inclusive classroom environment?
6. Do you know the National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES)? What does it entail in general terms?
7. Do you think its purpose is being met and is there anything to celebrate from your school so far?
8. What factors promote effective implementation (opportunities) of NIES at your school?
9. What factors hinder the effective implementation of NIES at your school?
10. If the government is to formulate an inclusive education policy, what would be your recommendation?

C) guiding questions for the IE officers 1 and 2

Target research questions

- i. How are the NIES key priority areas adopted and implemented in the selected schools?
- ii. What are the enabling and constraining factors of implementing NIES in these schools?
- iii. What are the perceptions of the IE stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners) on NIES?

Target research questions ii and iii

- i. How many schools are included in your district?
- ii. How many SNE teachers are there to support IE in your district?
- iii. What kind of support does your office provide to inclusive schools?
- iv. How would you describe the first five years of NIES?
- v. How were NIES' key priority areas adopted and oriented in the schools?
- vi. Since its orientation, have there been workshops to follow up on how they are being implemented? If yes, what were the findings, and if not, what is in the pipeline?

E) guiding questions for the learners

guiding questions for the learners

Target research questions

What are the perceptions of the IE stakeholders (teachers, parents, and learners) on NIES?

Interview Questions

For primary learners

- i. What does your school day look like?
- ii. What is fun being in school?
- iii. What is your memorable day in school? What happened?
- iv. Can you tell me the activities that take place at your school? Which ones do you like and why? Which ones do you dislike and why?
- v. What's the most interesting thing about your school? What is not interesting?
- vi. How often do you visit the resource centre? And what do you do there?
- vii. To continue enjoying your school, what do you think the school should do?

For secondary learners

- i. What does your school day look like?
- ii. What things do you like about your school? Are there other things that you dislike? If yes, what are they?
- iii. What is your memorable day in school? What happened?
- iv. What clubs and activities take place here? Which one do you participate in? what is your role there?
- v. Apart from clubs and societies what other every day extra curricula activities take place here at school?
- vi. I found you in the resource room, can you tell me what activities happen here? How important are they to your learning?
- vii. How frequently do you visit the resource centre?
- viii. To continue enjoying school, what do you think the school or government should do?

F) guiding questions for the IE Officer 1

Target research questions

- i. How are the NIES key priority areas adopted and implemented in the selected schools?
- ii. What are the enabling and constraining factors of implementing NIES in these schools?

Questions

- i. How would you describe the implementation of NIES between 2017 and 2021?
- ii. Are there any highs and lows to point out?
- iii. Generally, would you say the objectives of NIES to achieve quality IE are being met?
- iv. How often do you visit the schools to monitor the implementation of NIES?
- v. What has your office done to improve the capacity of schools?
- vi. What about the financial capacity of the schools?
- vii. One of the goals of NIES is to promote partnership. Can you shed light on what has been done so far?
- viii. How do you make sure schools and other offices supporting IE have reliable and accurate data for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and resourcing of inclusive education?
- ix. How many SNE teachers do we have in Malawi now? Where are we coming from and what is in place to improve teachers' capacity building?
- x. How many learners with SEN does Malawi have now?
- xi. As per statistics, there are only 177 inclusive schools in Malawi out of over 7000, isn't this an indication of a failed strategy five years on?
- xii. What more do you think needs to be done to achieve IE and the objectives of NIES?
- xiii. What do you think should improve in the next strategy or policy think did not do well? Why do you think it wasn't achieved?
- xiv. What should we expect in the next strategy or policy on IE?
- xv. When should we expect it?

Interview Questions

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3. How often do you receive in-service training (capacity-building) to advance your professional capacity as a mainstream teacher?
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10. If the government is to formulate an inclusive education policy, what would be your recommendation?

C) guiding questions for the IE officers 1 and 2

Target research questions

- i. How are the NIES key priority areas adopted and implemented in the selected schools?
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