

Special Education Developments in Zambia

Education of the handicapped became the responsibility of Zambia's Ministry of Education in 1971. During the last twenty years, special education provision has grown at a very significant rate. Of particular significance in the Zambian system is the regard for teacher-based assessment and the principle of parent partnership in developing special educational programmes.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Republic of Zambia in southern central Africa, shares its borders with a number of other countries; Tanzania and Zaire to the north, Malawi to the east, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana to the south, Namibia to the south-west and Angola to the west.

Zambia became independent on 24th October 1964. Formerly, Zambia was the British Protectorate of Northern Rhodesia. In 1953, this territory was joined with Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) to form the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The Federation was dissolved in 1963 and the following year an independent Zambia was created.

Zambia has an area of about 752,614 sq. km. This is well over five times the size of England. It has a population of approximately 8.5 million (October 1990) of which indigenous people constitute the overwhelming majority and there are no less than 73 different ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Bamba, Nyanja, Tonga and Lozi. There are also small communities of Europeans and Asians. Politically, Zambia has been a Multi-Party State since independence with two major parties, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and the African National Congress (ANC).

In 1972 the people decided to go single party state. This saw the abolition of the

ANC. Again, because of the economic decline, the people thought they would be better represented in a multi-party nation, with an opposition to try and correct the situation. Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) was born in July 1991, as an opposition party to UNIP. In October of the same year, with vigorously contested elections, there resulted a peaceful transfer of power from UNIP to MMD.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

The earliest form of special education provisions were made mainly for the blind who showed great potential for attracting people to the missions by reading brailled Bible sections selected by the evangelising redeemers of their souls (Kalabula, 1989). The education of the deaf followed and the latest was that of the physically handicapped, who were able to move. The period in question is essentially the early 1930s. Lastly came the education for mentally handicapped in Zambia, a very recent development when compared to that of industrialised countries, eg. United Kingdom and United States of America.

In general terms, special education in Zambia is not fully developed and the reason for this delay has been due to the lack of organisational skills and facilities. For a very long time it was provided by voluntary agencies, mainly missionaries. During this time, special education was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. However, following the recommendation made by the Committee of Inquiry into the education and training of the handicapped in Zambia (1967), education for the handicapped became the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in 1971. When the Ministry of Education assumed power to run the department, it put into existence a special education inspectorate to help plan the total spectrum of special education in the country. In addition to this, an inter-ministerial steering committee on special education was established to advise on organisation and improvement of the facilities and human resources for the education of the handicapped children.

At the time of the take over of the responsibility by the Ministry of Education, the following schools were in existence:

The Blind

7 Primary Schools

6 Secondary Schools

1 Unit of Home Economics in a secondary school

The Physically Handicapped

3 Primary Schools

2 Leprosaria

The Deaf

2 Primary Schools

4 Units in Primary Schools

The Mentally Handicapped

5 Units in Primary Schools

1 Day Care Centre attached to a hospital

Well over 1,000 pupils were involved in this type of education during the time under consideration. These school facilities have tremendously increased, relative though to our own local standards. The table below shows the improvement for the past 20 years since the take over.

NUMBER OF TRAINEE TEACHERS AND PERCENTAGE OF INTAKE GROWTH AT LUSAKA COLLEGE DURING 1971 AND 1991

HANDICAP	1971	1991	GROWTH %
Blind	05	25	400
Physically Handicapped	10	25	150
Deaf	03	25	733
Mentally Handicapped		25	
TOTAL	18	100	555

The number began to rise in 1980 when the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA) financed the expansion of the buildings and the supply of necessary equipment for training in the college. Currently the college also trains students from Botswana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Somalia and Burundi.

**NUMBER OF PUPILS ENROLLED IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND
UNITS (1971 AND 1991)**

HANDICAP	1971	1991	GROWTH %
Blind	466	650	39.4
Physically Handicapped	500	950	90.0
Deaf	114	320	180.0
Mentally Handicapped	120	660	550.0
TOTAL	1200	2580	131.6

All of those children in the above table are being provided for as follows:

The Blind

- 5 Primary residential schools
- 8 Secondary residential units
- 9 Units in primary ordinary schools

The Physically Handicapped

- 7 Primary residential schools
- 24 Secondary residential units

The Mentally Handicapped

- 3 Day care centres attached to hospitals
- 2 Residential schools
- 35 Units in ordinary primary schools

The Deaf

- 2 Primary residential schools
- 32 Units in ordinary primary schools

Specialist teachers, trained to teach pupils with particular handicaps, work in all the units, at both primary and secondary level.

LEGISLATION

Until the Educational Reform document in 1977, there was no legal Act existing in Zambia regarding the handicapped children. Cap 234 which embodies the

Education Act 1966, is very silent on this aspect of education. Cap 551 which is the Handicapped Act is also silent although the education of handicapped children had been within their jurisdiction from the early 1930s up to the time the Ministry of Education took over the responsibility for education of special people under the handicapped category in 1971. The only traceable pronouncement in the form of policy is incarnated in the already cited educational reform document above and administrative circular from the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education. However, the Educational Reform policy document (1977) lists the following in favour of the handicapped children:

“All handicapped children, like any other children, are entitled to education. They should receive basic and further education by full-time study as any other children. Further, since the handicapped children are a special case, there should even be ‘positive discrimination’ in their favour in the provision of facilities and amenities for educational purposes” (p.23).

IDENTIFICATION ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT

Identification, assessment and placement have been major problems, and the Educational Reform document has this laid down regarding same:

“There are some handicapped children who have not been identified. This problem may continue unless definite measures are taken to set up machinery which will operate on a permanent and regular basis to identify such children ... Identification and ascertainment will help the individual children whose handicaps might otherwise have gone undetected” (op cit, p.24).

This led to the setting up in 1981 of a Zambia National Campaign to Reach the Disabled Children, whose purpose was to register the handicapped children so that education and other services could be planned and delivered to them. Co-operation from the parents, and from professionals in the Ministries of Education, Health, Labour and Social Services and the University of Zambia was sought. A number of handicapped children was reached and registered. Before this exercise, assessment and ascertainment of handicapped children was done initially by parents and classteachers when they noticed that there was something wrong with children they came in contact with. After teachers suspected such pupils as having a potential handicap, they were referred to the inspectorate who in turn referred them to the hospital for confirmation of the handicap. The doctor,

usually a psychiatrist, tested the children and never revealed the tests used, but the form came back duly completed suggesting a school to which this particular child should go.

Solity and Raybould (1988) say the most commonly used assessment device in special education in recent years, has been the intelligence test. This has its origins in the mental testing movement reflected in the work of Charles Spearman and Cyril Burt in the United Kingdom, Alfred Binet in France in the early part of the century, and later David Wechsler in the United States of America. The major intention of such work was to devise measures that would predict future academic performance. The assumption made was that children differed in their levels of intelligence and this was directly associated with their potential to learn. Although it may be universally recognised that an IQ score provides a reliable estimate of intelligence and that measured IQs represent a largely fixed level of intelligence and that IQs are predictors of future scholastic achievement, it is doubtful whether they could be effectively used in assessing the handicapped children in Zambia as they are not curriculum based and are constructed in a different culture. This however, is not only peculiar to the handicapped in Zambia. Ordinary schools in Zambia never use IQ tests to determine levels of intelligence. This debate and discussion about the nature and measurement of intelligence has been going on for a very long time and is still an education bone of contention. The assumptions above have, however, been increasingly called into question (Gillespie, 1979; Eysenck and Kamin, 1981). What we must continue to do in Zambia is to consider assessment as an on-going process (Educational Reform, 1977; Kalabula, 1989). This assessment should be curriculum related and school based.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The procedure for assessment of children with learning difficulties is as involves: the collection of available information by the classteacher and the headteacher, discussions with parents about the learning difficulties experienced and how the needs can be met with the school's available resources and arrangements. Whilst the classteacher and the headteacher complete their assessment, parents were involved by contributing to the views of their child's abilities and problems, the matter is then referred to a special education teacher, either on the school staff or from a special school/unit somewhere. Parents can agree or disagree. The special teacher does his own assessment with a search for a possible solution to the problem. Like in Britain, the main focus on assessment in Zambia is on the child

rather than the disability.

If the special teacher has no doubt from assessment that the child has learning difficulties, with parents, they seek a referral outside the school to the 'Educational Psychologist' who gives advice and guidance. The report is then written down and it is endorsed by the medical/psychiatrist doctor. No multi-professional assessment is available in Zambia, though Lippitt and Lippitt (1978) who looked at assessment in Britain recommend that "group interviews is some of the most valuable ways to help potential clients to identify and clarify their needs". Once the report is endorsed by the doctor and parents, then the special school/unit has the legal obligation to provide whatever special educational support is available in the school.

Assessment is not an end in itself in Zambia, but a means to arrive at a better understanding of the child's learning difficulties for the practical purpose of providing a guide to his/her education and a basis against which to monitor his/her progress.

CURRICULUM

As far as possible special education in Zambia follows the National Curriculum. This is the curriculum followed by pupils in ordinary education. Since problems abound with the degree and nature of the disabilities, a special education curriculum unit was established in 1982, to design and review educational supplementary materials for pre-school, basic education, secondary education and teacher training colleges. The unit also evaluates, tests and implements the programmes and adequately prepares teachers in the use of new curriculum, while ensuring their availability. Other important areas of the unit include the braille press and the examinations department for special education which works hand in hand with the Examination Council, to modify some papers for the blind and deaf pupils whenever it is necessary.

FUNDING

Special Education is funded by the Government, both for capital and recurrent expenditure. Due to the general cutbacks in Government expenditure, special education has been affected also, as the Government has to maximise its resources as planning any aspect of a country's development needs at any rate to keep a sense of proportion. The second National Development Plan (January 1972 - December 1976) recognised the importance of education for handicapped

children. Under the heading for this aspect of provision, the plan stated:

“The provision of education for the handicapped children is an essential part of the Government’s overall programme for extending schooling for all. The report of the McGregor Committee emphasised that for too long the education of the handicapped ... had been starved of funds, trained staff, sustained official interest and a guiding policy. These serious differences are now being overcome. Most of the work in the field will continue to be done by missions and voluntary agencies, but Government will provide increased resources to support and improve the system”.

The Government has actually continued to honour its obligations to the education for the handicapped, although no capital grants are offered. Recurrent expenditure to run schools is always given every year. SIDA’s involvement in the education of the disabled children has tremendously boosted the Government and children’s morale.

PARENT PARTICIPATION

In the “New Economic recovery Programme’s Interim National Development Plan” (January-December 1988) it was categorically stated that:

“Emphasis will be placed on the principle that education of the disabled is a shared responsibility of the parents and community as well as the schools. Hence, parents and the community will be encouraged to participate in programmes designed for the education of handicapped children. They will also contribute to the running costs of such programmes” (Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) - Interim National Development Plan).

Before this official pronouncement, no parents were engaged in the education of their handicapped children. This does not however, discount the effort made by parents of the mentally handicapped children who after noticing that special education was not moving fast in this area, banded together to advocate for the education of these children. They formed an association called “Zambia Association for Children and Adults with Learning Difficulties (ZACLD)” in 1971. This association has expanded so much that now even enjoying the privilege of being supported by International Association, dealing with the mentally handicapped such as the Finnish Association for Mentally Retarded

(NWAMD) and the Norwegian Association for Mentally Retarded (NFPU). They have engaged in establishing units in mainstream schools and even training of teachers. This awareness should be emulated by the parents of other disabled children if the services to them are to be maximised.

This article, it is hoped, will give the readers an idea of the development of special education in Zambia.

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