

## INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL INSPECTION ON THE QUALITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI

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### Abstract

*Education is a basic right to all persons regardless of their socioeconomic, cultural background and physical characteristics. Research has shown that education is a key to socioeconomic development of any country and the only way to empower individuals and help them lead a productive life. Thus countries invest billions of dollars every year in education in an effort to have an educated society which can contribute to the socioeconomic and industrial growth of the country. It is therefore the expectation of every government to see that the education that is being offered is of the desired quality. This is why school inspection has been used over the years as an instrument for ensuring quality education in schools. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has come with many emerging issues, one of these being inclusive education. While governments are busy maintaining education standards using school inspection, inclusive education which seem to be a new phenomenon in the education system requires special attention to ensure that all the people regardless of their conditions, access quality education. This study therefore explores how school inspection can influence quality of inclusive education in Malawi, expected challenges and way forward.*

**Keywords:** School Inspection, Inclusive Education, Quality Education

### INTRODUCTION

Malawi is one of the developing countries which was under British rule and gained its independence on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1964. It is a landlocked country located in South-eastern Africa and has a population of 18 million people (Phiri, Kadzamira & Kalinga, 2020). Malawi's economy heavily depends on agriculture with tobacco, tea, cotton, groundnuts, sugar and coffee as the main cash crops. About 80% of the country's population lives in rural areas and with half of the population living below the poverty line (Wikipedia). Malawi's vision for the education sector is to be "a catalyst for socioeconomic development, industrial growth and instrument for empowering the poor, the weak and voiceless". The mission of education in Malawi is to "provide quality and relevant education to the Malawian nation. Such education should enable people to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, expertise and competencies to perform effectively as citizens, workforce and as leaders of Malawi, thereby reduce poverty among the people of Malawi" (National Education Sector Plan 2008-2017).

Education is a fundamental human right according to the United Nations' Universal declaration of 1948 Article 26. Accordingly, all nations of the world allocate huge sums of money to education services as a way of meeting this requirement for its citizens. Malawi as one of the signatories to the United Nations Charter, education is also a basic right and section 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi stipulates that "every person is entitled to education and that the schools or institutions offering education should be maintained according to official standards" (Ministry of Education, Science & Technology, National Education Standards, 2015, p.6). Therefore, the Education Act 2013 gives the Minister of Education, Science & Technology (MoEST) duty and power among others "to promote education for all people in Malawi irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability or any other discriminatory characteristics" (The Education Act 2013, p.2). With this mandate, the Minister of education, Science and Technology has put up measures to ensure

that all persons have access to education including the poor and those persons with any form of disability.

Following the 1989 United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child which spelled out the right to education for all children to achieve the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration and the Jomtien World Declaration on Education For All (EFA) (1990), Malawi became the first Sub-Saharan African country to take a bold step and declared free primary education (Chimombo, 2009). Since this period Malawi has been taking bold steps to show commitment to international protocols and conventions with the aim of providing education to all peoples including those communities disadvantaged because of poverty and those who have challenges like any form of disabilities. In 2012, Malawi passed the Disability Act which prohibits discrimination of persons with disabilities in education and training. In 2013, the new Education Act was passed which gave powers to the Minister of Education to promote education for all without discrimination. Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II developed from Millennium Development Goals and National Education Sector Plan 2008-2016 and now 2017-2021 have addressed the issues of promotion of inclusive education in Malawi (National Inclusive Education Strategy, 2017).

## **EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MALAWI**

Malawi has an **8-4-4** Education system, 8 years of primary education which is compulsory, 4 years of secondary education (O level) and 4 years of tertiary education (Bachelor's degree). Majority of the schools are state/government owned while others are owned by private institutions, mostly religious missions like the Roman Catholic, Anglican Church, Church of Central Africa and many others (Scholaro. Com, 2019).

The Ministry of Education, Science & Technology (MoEST) is managed by a Minister and under him there is the Secretary for Education, Science & Technology (SEST) and the SEST is responsible for administrative duties. Under the SEST, there are Directors for various departments including Inclusive Education and Inspectorate and Advisory Services. There are 6 Education Divisions and 32 Education Districts. The Divisions are responsible for secondary education while the Districts manage primary education. Almost all the Directorates at the Ministry headquarters are represented at both the Divisional and District level. As such the Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services (DIAS) which is responsible for quality assurance and the Department of Inclusive Education have offices at all the levels and work with the same aim of achieving the goals of education in Malawi.

## **NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SECTOR PLAN (2008-17 & 2016-21)**

Malawi implements its educational programs in education in line with the National Education Sector Plan (NESP 2008-2017 and now 2016-2021). This is a 5 year plan developed from the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS I, II & III) which is a medium term national development strategy formulated for the attainment of Malawi's long term development aspirations. MGDS I & II were developed to meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) while MGDS III has been developed in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030.

The National Educational Sector plan (NESP) has defined 3 thematic areas of intervention for Malawi to achieve its education vision and mission and these include, (1) Expand equitable access to education to enable all to benefit and (2) Improve quality and relevance of education to reduce drop-out and repetition and promote effective learning (NESP 2008-2017). These 2 priority areas are the major areas for action for the 2 Directorates, Inspection and Inclusive Education. While the Directorate of Inclusive Education is there to ensure access to education to all those who need inclusive education, DIAS is there to ensure that the education which is being provided is of the required standards.

## **THE ROLE OF SCHOOL INSPECTION IN MALAWI**

School inspection is an external evaluation which is conducted to assess if schools are operating according to the set education standards. It is done with the aim of offering "a purposeful and constructive advice for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools"

(Wanzare, 2002 cited in Aguti, 2015). In order for Malawi to achieve its education goals, the Education Act has given powers to the Minister of Education to “set and maintain national education standards”. The National Education Standards have been developed to ensure that there is quality education in all schools so that the goals of education can be realised for the good of all. Hence, school inspectors in Malawi evaluate schools using the National Education Standards. Again, the Education Act 4 (1) (f) has mandated the Education Minister to “monitor, assess and evaluate the education system”. The Minister has thus delegated this authority to the Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services (DIAS) (Handbook for Inspectors and Advisors, 2015, p.6). Therefore, it is the responsibility of DIAS to ensure quality education for all types of education in Malawi including inclusive education.

With the mandate to ensure that all institutions offering education services offer the services in line with the National Education Standards, standards 13 and 23 have been formulated with the aim that school inspectors when conducting inspection and supervision services in schools, should pay special attention to issues of inclusive education thereby ensuring quality inclusive education. Standard 13 (Teaching which meets the needs of all students) requires teachers to “know which students in their class have special educational needs, which are attaining well and which are having difficulties in their learning, use appropriate methods to support students with poor sight or hearing or physical disabilities and adapt teaching and learning approaches and/or provide support to meet the needs of students who work more slowly than others”. Standard 23 (Access, equity and Inclusion) requires “the schools to treat all students fairly with regard to gender, family circumstances, disability and learning needs” (National Education Standards, 2015).

However, much as MoEST has put up such measures that quality of inclusive education should be looked into by school inspectors in their inspection visits, analysis of the findings of the recent study done in South East education Division, Malawi and findings from other African countries on school inspection shows that this area of inclusive education is not featuring much, meaning, it is not being tackled with much emphasis as it deserves. The findings are just concentrating on improvement of teaching and learning in general and not mentioning on issues of inclusive education (Ehren & Visscher, 2008, Matete, 2009, Gustafsson, 2014, Lupimo, 2014, Gaetner et al., 2014, Lyimo, 2015, Kasanda, 2015, Msungu, 2019). The only issue which came out of these research findings and seem to have an impact on inclusive education was the lack of learner-centred methods which Standard 13 emphasizes on. In a classroom there are learners of different abilities and with different challenges and this is why Standard 13 requires teachers to use appropriate methods to support such students. This reveals a gap which has to be filled if Malawi is to achieve its vision on inclusive education which is “an education system that promote access, participation and achievement of diverse learners at all levels by 2022” (National Inclusive Education Strategy, 2017)

## **STATUS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAWI**

Alliance for Inclusive Education (2020) defines inclusive education as “education that includes everyone, with non-disabled and disabled people (including those with “special educational needs”) learning together in mainstream schools, colleges and universities” Whereas UNICEF says inclusive education means all children in the same classroom, in the same school. This principle followed what nations agreed at the World Conference on Special Needs Education which took place in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. Countries agreed to stop separating those learners with disabilities by building special schools for them. Instead, learners with different forms of disabilities should be allowed to learn in schools which are in their communities together with other normal learners so that they should not feel discriminated. Malawi as a signatory to UN conventions has also adopted this principle of inclusive education and has made some strides in promoting inclusive education. In line with the UNESCO’s Salamanca Statement, UN 2007 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Education Act and Disability act and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030”, MGDS and NESP, Malawi developed the National Inclusive Education Strategy 2017-2021. This strategy has been developed to help Malawi attain its vision of inclusive education by 2022. The goal

of this strategy 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” (NIES, 2017). In order to meet this goal, the strategy has put in place measures to strengthen management systems at all levels of the education system, the headquarters, division, district and zonal level. Training of personnel on inclusive education is one of the priority areas for MoEST through the Department of Inclusive Education.

## **HOW SCHOOL INSPECTION CAN INFLUENCE THE QUALITY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MALAWI**

The mission of the National Inclusive Education Strategy (NIES) is “to provide quality and relevant education to learners with diverse needs”. According to the Education Act, 2013, the officers who have the mandate to ensure that there is quality education in schools are school inspectors. Since school inspectors in Malawi evaluate schools using National Education Standards and that MoEST in conforming to the international protocols and conventions on inclusive education included special standards (13 and 23) to take care of quality of inclusive education, still more has to be done to improve quality of inclusive education. There should be a close working relationship between the Inspectorate and Inclusive Education departments. Since the department of Inclusive Education has the expertise on the issues of Inclusive education, there is need to provide thorough training to the school inspectors who have the mandate of ensuring quality education in schools. The National Inclusive Education Strategy realises the need for training of all personnel dealing with inclusive education issues and plans to train teachers, caregivers and support staff (NIES, 2017). As the department for Inclusive Education is planning its trainings, school inspectors should also be trained to enable them provide expert advice to teachers on inclusive education.

Again, considering that there are a number of areas that school inspectors check during a full inspection, it would be better that in addition to the full inspections where inspectors evaluate an institution in all areas of its life, DIAS should be organising special inspections (partial inspections) where focus would be only on inclusive education issues. This would help the inspectors to assess standards 13 and 23 in depth alongside other education standards. It should be noted that inclusive education is more technical and usually demands more attention and expertise and combining it with general issues results in some areas being neglected. This is why issues of inclusive education are not coming out clearly from the inspection reports. If this is practiced, school inspection would make a meaningful impact in improving quality of inclusive education in Malawi.

## **CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD**

Inclusive education being a new phenomenon in the education system, many countries including Malawi seems to be facing challenges in providing quality inclusive education. While countries are showing commitment to meet the requirements set by the international community through the international conventions signed, but achieving quality inclusive education seem to demand more than that. Among the challenges faced by Malawi and other countries is lack of well trained personnel as pointed out by the NIES, 2017. Singh (2016) also mentioned the same challenge for India as records were showing that majority of the regular teachers had not been trained on inclusive education. The analysis which was done by the department of Inclusive Education in Malawi also showed that teacher education programs for both primary and secondary education did not give adequate trainings on inclusive education. There are also inadequate trainings given to in-service teachers on the same. This also applies to the school inspectors who because of lack of expertise on inclusive education issues tend to turn a blind eye to this area. This is why issues of inclusive education are not being captured much in school inspection reports.

Therefore, if Malawi is to achieve quality inclusive education at all levels, in addition to providing trainings to all staff providing inclusive education, school inspectors should also be targeted for thorough training on inclusive education to help them provide expert professional support to teachers on inclusive education.

## CONCLUSION

The mandate of ensuring quality education in Malawi has been entrusted to the Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services. Research findings have proved that school inspection plays a significant role in improving quality of education in schools and therefore, if the quality of inclusive education is to improve then school inspectors should be taken on board in all inclusive education training programs. There should be a close working relationship between Inspectorate and Inclusive Education departments.

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