

## **EXPLORING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS IN KARIBA URBAN SCHOOLS OF ZIMBABWE.**

**JabulaniMpfu**

Zimbabwe Open University, Department of Disability Studies and Special Needs Education

Email Address: jabumpofuh@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

This study sought to explore the quality of life for learners with disabilities learning in inclusive settings in Kariba Urban Schools. A phenomenological research approach was used to collect data from 10 participants, (5 males and 5 female) who were purposively sampled from learners with disabilities learning in Kariba Urban schools. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and transcribed verbatim. Three themes emerged from the inductive thematic analysis of data sources. It was found that participants were developing better levels of self-determination as a result of learning in an inclusive education setting in. They also felt that they had access to their rights as learners. The participants also indicated that their level of emotional well-being and social capital was improving as a result of learning in an inclusive education setting. The findings of this study have the potential for the inclusive education policy makers and researchers to better understand the quality of life of learners with disabilities in inclusive education settings.

**Key words:** Quality of life, inclusive education, learners with disabilities, emotional well-being, social inclusion, self determination

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **What is quality of life?**

Quality of life is conceptualized as an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live in relation with their expectations, standards, goals and concerns (Schalock & Keith, 2016). Quality of life also reflects individual's social perspectives (Keith & Schalock, 2000). Two people with the same degree of disability may differ greatly depending upon their social support networks, living conditions and life expectations. Quality of life indicators are measures that are non-monetary, socially oriented and qualitative in context Schalock et al (2005), explains that quality of life indicators is varied and development, leisure activities, safety, housing and freedom of expression. Quality of life indicators provide sufficient and timely data and information for high quality decision making which is assessment and planning (Bonham et al, 2004). Quality of life indicators systems have been established as useful and insightful ways of determining the status and position of people including those with disabilities (Verdugo et al 2005). The issue of quality of life for people with disabilities is cause of concern globally. Various conferences were held globally such as the Salamanca Conference (1994) to

reaffirm the commitment to enhance the quality of life of people with disabilities.

### **Quality of life in the context learners with disabilities in Zimbabwean inclusive education settings**

The general quality of life for people with disabilities in Zimbabwe has shown some improvement over the last decade. This has been due largely to the involvement of these individuals with disabilities in various inclusive community strategies (Choruma, 2006). The adoption of inclusive community practices by many countries in Africa came as a result of international conventions and pressure from disability advocacy groups, mainly from international communities such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom (Chimhonyo et al., 2011). Those who remained behind in group homes are catered for by special institutions such as Jairos Jiri, Daniko and residential rehabilitation hospitals that are scattered around the country (Mpofu&Shumba, 2012; Mpofu et al., 2012), as inclusion has its own limits (Hansen, 2012). This study investigated the quality of life for people with disabilities learning in inclusive education settings in Zimbabwe.

### **METHODS**

This study was informed by the qualitative research methodology (Creswell, 2012) and guided by the principles of thematic content analysis (Creswell, 2009, Braun & Clark, 2007). Given that the aim of the study was to explore the quality of life of learners with physical disabilities learning in inclusive education setting, a qualitative research methodological approach in which adolescents with physical disabilities experiences and voices are foreground in both design and analysis was appropriate.

#### **Sampling and sampling techniques**

The sampling frame for this study was 10 (5 males and 5 females) learners with disabilities learning in Kariba urban mainstream schools. This purposively selected sample was able to yield credible data for the purposes of this qualitative study. The sample was able to achieve data saturation (Cohen, Kahn &Steeves, 2000; Creswell, 2007). To be included in this study the participants must have been learning in Kariba Urban schools either intermittent or continuous for at least 6 months.

#### **Data collection**

Consistent with qualitative research methodology this study made use of open ended interviews (Baxter &Jacke, 2008; Scholz&Titje, 2002) as the method of data collection. Participants responded to one on one interview questions which were based on prepared interview schedule on how learners with disabilities construct their views and experience on inclusive education settings against their quality of life (Keyton, 2001; Punch, 2005; Cohen, Manion& Morrison, 2001). Furthermore, the use of qualitative research methodology approach on learners with disabilities experiences is associated with accessing marginalised experiences and voices (Hesse-Biber, 2007). The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone, with each interview lasting between 1hr and 1hr 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted, transcribed and analysed by the first author.

#### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics committee of the University of Pretoria. Ethical principles of informed consent and voluntary participation, protection from harm, confidentiality and privacy, were adhered to throughout the research process and of data collection

and analysis.

The researcher gave goal of the studies to the participants all relevant information about the risks or harm that could arise if they participate in the research (Woodson&Karim, 2005). However, the study minimised risks and enhanced potential benefits to the greatest extent possible (Emanuel et al., 2000). The researcher also gave participants options to pull out of the study at any point, should they wish to without any penalties (Loue&Okello, 2000). The researcher also solicited for consent from parents participates and assent for participants whose ages were below 16 (Beskow et al, 2004). Sixteen years is the legal age of majority in Zimbabwe (COPAC, 2013).

The researcher also ensured that respondents were not exposed to any undue physical harm or psychological harm. The researcher provided pre and post interview counselling to the study participants to cushion the respondents against possible negative effects of taking part in this study (Emanuel et al., 2000).

The study also protected identities of our study participants by using pseudonyms throughout the study and not having their names or location in the study (Emanuel et al., 2000). The study also kept private participant's information and responses shared during the study by anonymously presenting them in the study's results (MakoreRukuni, 2003). The researcher deleted recorded interviews from the mobile phone to ensure that people who had access to the phone could not listen to them.

### **Data analysis strategies**

Data analysis from this study was done using the thematic content analysis approach (Grbich, 2004). The first stage involved familiarising with the data. This was done through listening to and transcribing of the interviews. The second stage involved creating codes linked to research questions by identifying key words and sentences. The third stage involved grouping codes into themes and the last stage involved reviewing themes labelling them and having suitable quotes to represent the themes identified from each transcript. In carrying out the analysis, coding was data driven but also influenced by the study's research questions.

### **Rigour of the study**

To ensure rigour of this study we checked for credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Creswell, 2007). To enhance the credibility of our study we prolonged engagement of our participants through engaging them in interviews that lasted more than one hour (Cohen, Kahn &Steeves, 2000). The study also triangulated the fourteen interviews held to produce a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also conducted peer debriefing in this study in order to see agreement in data labels and the logical paths taken to arrive at those labels. We also conducted member checking in this study. The study allowed participants to read the transcription of their interviews to ensure that these have been accurately recorded and are therefore credible (Creswell, 2007).

## **RESULTS**

This study results indicated that the participants were of the feelings that their participation in inclusive learning activities was helping them to develop good quality of life. They indicated that inclusive education was enhancing their levels of self-determination, promoting their children's

rights, emotional well-being and social inclusion.

### **Self-determination as a measure of quality of life**

Responses given by participants revealed that their participation in inclusive education was helping them enhancing their levels of self-determination as a character of quality of life. The following statements are verbatim narrations on inclusion and self-determination as indications of good quality of life for learners with disabilities in inclusive education settings in Kariba

Taurai (male, cerebral palsy, 16 years) also said,

“... Learning with others without disabilities assist me to develop skills that makes me live independent of others. I have learnt to do things on my own without or with limited assistance...”

Susan (female, physical disabilities-hand amputee, 11 years old) said

“... as a learner inclusive education assist me in giving decisions on what I want, through observing my colleagues without disabilities, I’m challenged to decide on our own”

Edgar (male, cerebral palsy, 14 years) also said

“...my involvement in inclusive education activities on enhances my access to knowledge, skills and resources that enable me to gain positive control of my life and improve my quality of life through efficacy, participation, collaboration, sense of control and meet personal needs...”

Sasha (female, physical disability, 12 years) also added

“... Learning together with others without disabilities gives me opportunities to make decisions that affect my life and can do activities that I prefer. It gives me choices to do things of my interest”

### **Children’s rights in inclusive settings**

The participants also indicated that learning in an inclusive education setting makes them to realise their rights as persons living with disabilities. Realization of the rights of children with disabilities is an attribute of quality of life. The following statements are verbatim narrations on realisation of children’s rights as an attribute of quality of life and said by the participants

Tafara (male, cerebral palsy, 16 years old) contributed that,

“...Learning in an inclusive education setting helped me to realise that my standard of living is not pleasing, my parents are poor, they cannot pay hospital bills for me to attend physio-therapy, although I go to school there are some services I cannot access due to their requirements. There is limited adapted material to offer. Some of the classrooms and the environment are not easily accessed. Sports are only for the able bodied, we only participate during the Danhiko Games once a year as recreation....”

On the other side of the coin, Taurai (male, cerebral palsy, 16 years) contributed;

“...my presence at this school improved my standard of living, psychologists and health personnel assess my performance. The wheelchair offered improved my mobility and I can also participate in wheelchair basketball. I can access the environment without difficulty...”

On Children’s rights Spiwe (female, mental retardation,9 years) said

“... people used to call me sorts of names, I had no time to attend school. I had no friends at home, my neighbors used to allocate duties for me in return of food but now I can reject their offer...”

Wisdom (male, amputee, 12 years) also added

“... I was thinking of staying home when I was learning in a resource unit because most boys did not want me to play with them. Some teachers called me referring to my leg which was amputated. When I started learning at an inclusive school I realised that I have the same educational rights as others although I am still facing infrastructural problems when visiting some of the places at my school.”

### **Emotional well-being**

Some participants revealed that inclusion has positive impact on their emotional well-being which is an attribute of good quality of life. On emotional wellbeing and quality of life

Tafara (male, cerebral palsy, 16 years) said

“...at first I used to look down upon myself thinking that I cannot do what my counterpart Simba does. We later enjoyed mathematics together. Sometimes I performed better than everyone in most learning areas. Now I realize that I have potential, I am able....”

Sasha (female, physical disability, 12 years) said also added

“... care givers used to walk alongside me, I used to fall down whilst on my way to the toilet. I needed someone to open my lunch tin and feed me but now I can do it although with some difficulties, but one day I will be perfect. I can now respond to question with little questions than before....”

Tanaka (male, cerebral palsy, 15 years) also added

“... I have the opportunity to make decisions that affect my life, education and my interests. I can do activities that I prefer. I have the choice to do things of my interests. I am now able to overcome pressure from other people. If I say no, I mean no....”

### **Promotion of social inclusion**

The participants also felt that inclusive education setting was also promoting their abilities to social inclusion. The issue of inclusion also came out as a response to quality of life in learners with disabilities. On Social inclusion Susan (female, physical disabilities, 11 years) said,

“... before my enrolment to this school, I had no friends to talk to me. I used to play alone or sleep in couch. Currently I am now enjoying sports at school. I might not be very good in sport but my presence in the fields and peers` reception is welcoming. I sometimes participate in arts, leisure activities, sports educational and cultural activities. I am now recognized....”

Sasha (female, cerebral palsy, 9 years) added

“... I used to be shy to participate, I also used to play alone but now I can fit well in my family, I am now confident on what I prefer to do. Friends and relatives are now accepting me. I can now have the power to initiate a discussion and I can now settle misunderstandings amicably but there are other mates who call me names, some look at me as if I am not a human being...”

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This study results indicated learning in an inclusive education settings were helping learners with disabilities developing good quality of life. They indicated that inclusive education was enhancing the following qualities of life: self-determination, promoting their children`s rights, emotional well-being and social inclusion.

### **Self-determination**

Self-determination is not about letting children make every single decision that affects their lives, such as what time to go to bed. Self-determination is about providing opportunities so that children develop the skills necessary to become independent as well as to interact freely and joyfully within their environment. A person`s actions are self-determined if the person acts autonomously, regulates his or her own behaviour, initiates and responds to events in a manner indicating psychological empowerment, and behaves in a manner that is self-realizing. Self-determination helps youth with disabilities achieve positive adult outcomes. Several curricula are available to help students learn self-determination skills, and to help families support youth. The result will be a measurable increase in self-sufficiency and, perhaps even more importantly, greater sense of purpose and satisfaction in adulthood (Wehmeyer, 1996). In a study carried by Stancliffe et al (2000) on inclusion and self-determination and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The researchers found out that students with disabilities have increased opportunities to learn skills related to self-determination much better in an inclusive education setting than resource units. They learn effective decision making and problem solving skills through inclusion in the mainstream have been shown to enhance positive transition outcomes for learners with disabilities. It was also revealed in this study that by promoting self-determination in learners with disabilities it helped a lot in facilitating learners in inclusive settings with activities done in the community and this further helped them to develop survival skills.

### **Children`s rights in inclusive settings**

This study found inclusive education setting assist learners with disabilities to have access to their rights as learners with disabilities. According to Reem (2013), progressive strides have been made in advancing the rights of children with disabilities in many communities. Children`s rights and increasing children`s protection have been on the radar of the international community in the last decade harmonious development of children, all while ensuring their safety and well-being and govern the protection and promote the rights of children around the world.

### **Emotional well-being in included children**

From the results that came out, emotional well-being was cited as one of the attributes of quality of life among learners with disabilities in an inclusive education setting. Emotional wellbeing emphasizes much on the understanding of one`s value of emotions and use of them to positive direction. Respondents indicated that their involvement in the inclusion had an impact on the quality of life they now have as inclusion influences positive relations within learners with and without disabilities. This finding contradicts results from studies done by UNESCO (2009). UNESCO (2009) suggest that most learners with disabilities learning in an inclusive education setting are facing environmental barriers that affects the development of their emotional well-being as an attribute of quality of life. Negative attitude towards those with disabilities from significant others such as peers and other teachers, and unadaptable physical environment contributed to the failure of the development of emotional well-being among learners with disabilities in inclusive education

settings.

### **Social inclusion in inclusive settings.**

Results from this study also indicated that inclusive education settings were helping learners with disabilities develop good social inclusion skills. Social inclusion skills are considered as attributes of good quality of life. According to Bailey (2005), social inclusion is aimed at improving the terms on which take part in the society which ensures equal participation in the social economy, political and cultural systems of the society. Social inclusion addresses barriers for inclusion of groups and communities that are marginalized. This study finding are consistent with findings of Morton and Mental Health Coordinating Council (2007) on the contribution of inclusive education settings to good quality of health for persons with disabilities. In their study Morton and Mental Health Coordinating Council (2007) found out that social inclusion improves physical health, increased activity level, development of social support networks, psychological well-being, that is the increased brain function.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this research the researcher concludes that inclusive education settings assist in enhancing their levels of self-determination, promoting their children's rights, emotional well-being and social inclusion of learners with disabilities. Based on the complex nature of the interaction between aspects such as inclusion, disability, quality of life and public policy, several recommendations can be made for populations with similar characteristics as the one covered by this study. This study recommends the need for further research on inclusion, disability and quality of life. Discourse analysis that investigates the relationship between inclusion and quality of life of learners with disabilities could lead to improved implementation of inclusion. The findings of such studies could guide the development of inclusive policies that encourage community participation of non-dominant cultures such as people with disabilities in designing community activities that enhance their personal development.

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