

EXPLORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSITIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED TO LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES IN CHINHOYI URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE

Jabulani Mpfu

Zimbabwe Open University
Department of Disability Studies and Special Needs Education

ABSTRACT

This study explored the effectiveness of transitional services provided to learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban in Zimbabwe as perceived by their parents. The effectiveness was measured in terms of suitability of available transitional services to learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban, whether the services meet the expectations of their parents, availability of vocational skills training and absorption of young adults with disabilities in the world of employment post school level. A survey approach was used to collect information on the effectiveness of transitional services from 30 parents of learners with disabilities (15 Males 15 Female) learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools. Data was analysed using measures of central tendency. Results from the study indicated that transitional services for learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban were not suitable for most learners with disabilities. The services were also not meeting the expectations of most parents. Learners with disabilities were also not being equipped with vocational skills making it difficult for them to be absorbed by in the world of employment post school level. The findings of this study have the potential for the inclusive education policy makers and researchers to better understand the transitional needs of learners with disabilities in Zimbabwe at large

KEYWORDS: Learners with disabilities, transitional services, vocational skills, employment, adulthood

INTRODUCTION

What is transition?

Transition is the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another, for example transition from childhood to adulthood (Career, 2005). It is strongly believed that learners with and without disabilities should progress smoothly from childhood to adulthood without problems. Transition imparts employment ability skills and individuals gain skills of interdependence and competence as workers (Avoke, 2004). Transition of learners with disabilities is very important in that it addresses lifelong needs after school, (Haugh, 2001). Transition services should aim at fulfilling or meeting the learner's interest and preferences and should also aim at imparting independent living skills for its clientele (Hoyt & Vaughan, 2000).

Transitional services for people with disabilities in Zimbabwean context

In Zimbabwe, current evidence about the transition of learners with disabilities suggests that it is being marginally provided in Zimbabwean Schools. However, Zimbabwean laws e.g. the Constitution (COPAC, 2013) uphold transitional services for learners with disabilities in Zimbabwean Schools. According to the country's Laws learners with disabilities like any other learners are mandated by the Constitution (COPAC, 2013, Disabled Persons Act, 1992) to receive transitional services that enables them to progress smoothly from childhood to adulthood without problems. These transitional services assist them in enhancing opportunities for full participation in adult life (Stewart, 2006). Zimbabwean transitional services for learners with disabilities are holistic in nature. They focus on learning academic materials not post school training for employment ability skills. Learners with disabilities in addition to academic skills need empowerment and independent living skills (Blake & Langone, 2007). Academic skills mainly focus on reading and writing. This current situation is probably caused by non-availability of a clear policy on how transitional services must be provided to Zimbabwean youth with disabilities in Zimbabwe Schools (Mpofu et al, 2018). The only policy that is available on transitional services is the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy of 1997. The policy provides framework to provide common aspirations and priorities for youth development across Zimbabwe. Through this policy, the government declares the importance of the active involvement of young people in national development (Zimbabwe Youth Council Amendment Act No 16, 1997). Although the policy is a nice piece of paper it is not clear how it intends to support young learners with disabilities on the transition process. This study investigated the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities as perceived by their parents in Chinhoyi Urban in Zimbabwe.

METHODS

Methodology

A survey approach was used to collect information on the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities from parents of children with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools. This study made use of survey method because it has the advantage that the findings can be generalised to the target population (Creswell, 2009). Thus in this research findings obtained represent the general parental perception towards the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities as perceived by parents with children with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

The research instruments

The research used questionnaires to elicit information on parental perception on the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities to their children learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary Schools. The study adopted the use of a questionnaire because it was consistent with the study design (survey) and seen appropriate since the study sought information based on someone's opinion (parents) about a certain phenomenon (transitional services for people with disabilities) (Creswell, 2012). A questionnaire was also adopted because of the limited time that was available for the researcher because of other work commitments.

Sample and Sampling procedures

The sample of the study was comprised of 30 parents (15 males and 15 females) of learners with disabilities learning in parents in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools. This sample constituted 25 % of parents of learners with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The research used a stratified random sampling to obtain study's respondents. Stratified random sampling was adopted by this study to accommodate different strata's found in the target population of the study (Cohen et al, 2005). The study also used stratified sampling techniques because the study population was heterogeneous and organised in isolated (strata). The respondents were selected by separating the population into non-overlapping groups of similar characteristics called strata and then selecting a sample from each stratum (Creswell, 2012).

Pilot testing

An equivalent of 15% (6) of similar subjects from each similar stratum was used to test the content validity and reliability of the research instruments (Kaputa et al, 2012). The pilot participants were selected using convenient sampling method from a similar population from a neighbouring town to avoid sharing of information (Cohen et al, 2005).

Data collection procedures

Permission for parents to take part in the study was sought from the parents themselves and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education provided names and location of the respondents. With the information on the location of selected respondent's in Chinhoyi Urban in Zimbabwe. The researcher made appointments with selected respondents to visit them and collect data on effectiveness of transitional services provided to learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe. Data was collected over a period of two days.

Data presentation and analysis

The researcher used tables for data presentation and analysis to present and analyse data on the effectiveness of transitional services provided to learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe (Creswell, 2009). Tables were adopted in data presentation in this study because they are easily read and understood (Cohen et al, 2001). Raw scores were converted into percentages to explain the information

Ethical Considerations

This study was guided by principles that provide a generalised framework of how the research must be conducted. The study addressed the following ethical considerations:

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Respondents who were parents of children with disabilities learning in regular classes of Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools were given all relevant information about the risks or harm that could arise

if they participate in the research. However, this study had no risks attached to it. They then choose to participate or not to participate in the study (Makore- Rukuni, 2004). They were also allowed to pull out of the research at any point should they wish to without any penalties.

Protection from Harm

The researcher made sure that respondents were not being exposed to any undue physical harm or psychological harm. The researcher tried to be honest, respectful and sympathetic towards all participants and if by any chance participants required debriefing after completing the questionnaire the researchers provided this and made referral whenever possible (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001).

Confidentiality and Privacy

The researcher promised to protect the anonymity of the research respondent's and the confidentiality of their disclosures by consent to the release of personal information. Respondents' information and responses shared during the study was kept private to protect identities of participants (Creswell, 2009).

RESULTS

Results on parent's perceptions on the effectiveness of transitional services for learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe are presented following the study research questions.

Transitional Services and needs for learners with disabilities

Respondents who were parents of children with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools were asked to give their opinions on whether transitional services for learners with disabilities being implemented in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools their schools were suitable for the needs of learners with disabilities. Responses are shown in Table 1

Table 1: Responses from parents of children with disabilities on whether transitional services for learners with disabilities being implemented in their schools were suitable for the needs of their children.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	6	20
Undecided	2	7
Agree	18	60

Strongly agree	4	13
Total	30	100

N=30

Table 1 shows responses from parents of children with disabilities on whether transitional services for learners with disabilities being implemented in their schools were suitable for the needs of their children. Twenty percent of the respondents were not in agreement (Disagree) that the transitional services available in their schools were suitable to the needs of their children, 7 % were Undecided, 60% were in agreement (Agree) and 13 % Strongly Agreed that that the transitional services available in their schools were suitable to the needs of their children.

The respondents were also asked whether transitional services available for learners with disabilities in their Secondary schools were responsive to the expectations as parents of learners with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools. Their responses are shown in table 2

Table 2: Responses from parents of children with disabilities on whether transitional provisions for learners with disabilities in their schools were responsive to their expectations as parents of learners with disabilities

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	1	3
Disagree	14	47
Undecided	1	3
Agree	14	47
Strongly agree	0	0
Total	30	100

N=30

Table 2 shows that 3 % of the respondents strongly disagreed that transitional provisions for learners with disabilities in their schools were responsive to their expectations as parents of learners with disabilities, 47% Disagreed, 3% were Undecided and another 47% were in agreement (Agree).

The respondents who were parents of children with disabilities were also asked to give their opinions whether the current transitional service provisions for learners with disabilities at school adequately prepare them for post school adult life. Their responses are shown in table 3

Table 3 Responses from parents of children with disabilities learning in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools on whether the current transitional service provisions for learners with disabilities at school adequately prepare them for post school adult life.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	2	7
Disagree	8	27
Undecided	1	3
Agree	16	53
Strongly agree	3	10
Total	30	100

N=30

Table 3 shows that 2% of the respondents strongly disagree that the current transitional service provisions for learners with disabilities at school adequately prepares their children for post school adult life, 27% disagree, 3% were undecided, 53% agreed and 10% strongly agreed.

The respondents were also asked if the current transitional activities in their schools were adequately equipping learners with disabilities with skills that will enable them make a meaningful decision in their future careers. Their responses are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Responses on whether Learners with disabilities are adequately equipped with skills that will enable them to make meaningful decisions about their future careers

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	1	3
Disagree	11	37
Undecided	2	7
Agree	12	40
Strongly agree	4	13
Total	30	100

N=30

Table 4 shows that 3% of the respondents felt strongly disagreed that Learners with disabilities are adequately equipped with skills that will enable them to make meaningful decisions about their future careers, 37 %, disagreed, 7 % were undecided, 40 % agreed and 13 % strongly disagreed.

The respondents were also asked if their schools were providing vocational training programmes meant to equip learners with disabilities technical skills for the world of work. Their responses are presented in table 5

Table 5: Responses on whether Learners with disabilities are involved in vocational training programmes that adequately prepare them for the world work.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	21	70
Disagree	5	17
Undecided	0	0
Agree	1	3
Strongly agree	3	10
Total	30	100

N=30

Table 4 shows that 70 % of the respondents strongly disagreed that their schools are providing Learners with disabilities are involved in vocational training programmes that adequately prepare them for the world work, 17 % disagreed, 3 % agreed and 10% strongly disagreed.

Parents of children with disabilities were also asked if their children Learners who graduate from transitional programmes at a school are absorbed into the world of work. Their responses are shown in table 6

Table 6: Responses from parents of children with disabilities on whether their children who graduate from transitional programmes at a school are easily absorbed into the world of work

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	5	17
Disagree	14	47
Undecided	4	13
Agree	7	23

Strongly agree	0	0
Total	30	100

According to results on table 6 17 % of the respondents strongly disagreed to the assertion that young learners who graduate from transitional programmes at a school are easily absorbed into the world of work, 47 % disagreed , 13 were not sure and undecided to take a position and , 23% agreed.

DISCUSSIONS

This study results indicated that learners with disabilities in Chinhoyi Urban were not receiving transitional learning activities to tailor made to suit their needs. These transitional services are meant to assist learners with disabilities in enhancing opportunities for full participation in adult life (Stewart, 2006). Transitional services are meant to meet the needs of youth learners with special needs as they move from childhood to adulthood services (Blum et al, 2002). It is more than just a services approach as it involves a process of taking on new roles and adapting or changing existing roles (King et al, 2005). The findings of this research are consistent with the situation in New Zealand. In a research, ‘Creating pathways for young disabled people’ carried out in New Zealand, Ten (2009) noted that despite numerous legislative and policy initiatives on disabilities and transitional services very little action is taking place to alleviate the plight of learners with disabilities on this aspect. It is now over ten years, young learners with disabilities are less likely to have school or tertiary qualification or to be employed when compared with everyone else, including other majority groups in New Zealand (Ten, 2009). This suggests that transitional services for learners with disabilities in New Zealand may not be relevant to its clients.

Another study carried out in Canada by Shear & Bauer (2003) on the experiences and outcomes on transitional services for young adults with disabilities’, shows that young learners with disabilities fail to achieve their goals or failed to meet the role expectations and expectations of young learners (Shear & Bauer, 2003). Although learners with disabilities have same aspirations and dreams as those without disabilities, a gap between their aspirations and outcomes has been described in several articles (Wehman, 2007).

The study’s results are however inconsistent with the situation in the USA. There are several USA laws on transitional services for leaners with disabilities and these laws are very effective in provision of effective transitional education for learners with disabilities. Example of such laws include School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, the Improving Americas School Act of 1994, the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the No Child left behind Act of 2001c

The study also found out that learners with disabilities were not easily absorbed into the world of work. These results also indicated that learners with disabilities were not equipped with the skills that will enable them to make meaningful decisions about their future careers. They were not adequately equipped with vocational skills, community living skills and employment options. The study results are consistent with the situation in other African countries. The literature on learners with disabilities shows that most of them are living in extreme poverty being caused by continuous reliance on poor households and unemployment (Cohen, et al, 2003). Poverty tends to reproduce itself among children with disabilities from already impoverished families. Conditions of poverty further hamper access to basic services offered by social development approach in countries like South Africa. South African policies recognise the ways in which poverty caused by challenges relating to unemployment affects children with disabilities and suggest that government should work jointly with all key stakeholders particularly the private sector in addressing blockages in the labour market. Unemployment among young adults with disabilities turns to bring with it a number of social problems for example poor health, loss off self-esteem and confidence needed to participate in the broader society. Unemployed young adults with disabilities struggle to participate meaningfully in the wide range of concerns and problems they experience in finding employment (Bolin, 2003). Some programs were put in place to help young adults with disabilities such as Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Youth Development Forum, Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa and Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition which address youth unemployment.

In Ghana, some transitional services research studies on learners with disabilities were carried out. Among them were children with mental retardation and handicapped adolescents. The studies show how that transitional services are adversely affected by continuous experiences or failure among these selected groups and therefore they do not get meaningful goals for their future (Hayford, 2000). Ghanaian has restructured its educational curriculum to include transitional services for learners with disabilities. In the past, the focus was on the number of skills that the student performed in the classroom, although this has not allowed them to achieve a quality of life in adulthood. The life of Secondary school was none of the business (Kniel, 2007).

Other African countries such as Botswana have different situation to the Zimbabwean situation. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, together with the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, set in motion policy changes that have allowed many thousands of children and young adults with disabilities in Botswana the opportunity to gain the educational and social skills needed transition to living, working and participating as adults in community life (Gumpel, Tappe & Araki, 2000). The debate continues as to whether these acts have gone far enough in making the changes needed to enable learners with disabilities to leave school, attain post-secondary education and training and achieve employment rates and levels of wages comparable to their peers without disabilities. In providing transitional services to learners with disabilities who are still in secondary education,

vocational rehabilitation (VR), agencies collaborate with state education agencies, local education agencies and institutions of higher education (IHE) to do this.

Western countries such as UK are also reported having effective transitional services for learners with disabilities too. A study conducted by Hung-Chinn (2010) in the United Kingdom on analysis for high-school students with intellectual disability, shows that transitional services were provided in some schools as part of regular education programmes. These programmes were helpful to students. The programmes were given at an early stage even those who did not manage to proceed to secondary school would still use the pre-transitional skills and be able to live a successful adulthood life. It was the school, which will help an individual to get job. In the study, Hayford revealed that, schools have follow up system once the student is out of school after successful completion of course. The school will check on job adjustment problems and inadequate facilities at work place. According to Hayford, it was the duty of schools to check with the employers the provision of special facilities or machine modifications to suit the individual with disabilities. Employers were also seen to be reluctant to hire special persons due to fear that it may affect the output to use individuals with disabilities. The study found out that about 45% were helped to get jobs linkages that were factored into transition programmes (Huang & Cuvo, 2009).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

What has been gathered from the research is that schools in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary schools are not giving adequate and effective transitional activities to learners with disabilities. Most of transitional services available in Zimbabwe were much of academic activities not much relevant to the needs of learners with disabilities. Learners with disabilities need to be equipped with vocational skills which are very important for adult world and the world of work. 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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