
**“EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES AFFECTING ACCESS TO
PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR LEARNERS WITH SPEECH AND
LANGUAGE DELAYS IN URBAN SCHOOLS: A CASE OF SELECTED
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SOLWEZI DISTRICT, ZAMBIA”**

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Article Received: 26 April 2026

Article Revised: 16 May 2026

Published on: 05 June 2026

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.3183>

ABSTRACT

Access to education is a fundamental human right that every child needs to access regardless of their physical, emotional, social or financial status. However, children with disabilities in many African countries, including Zambia, often face significant exclusion and marginalization. This study investigated the challenges, and the various interventions aimed at improving the inclusion of children with delayed speech and language in schools. The study utilized a descriptive case study design and mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. A sample size of 101 participants was drawn which included primary school teachers, school administrators, special education teachers, learners with speech and language delays and parents/guardians. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation checklists. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, presented in tables and charts whereas qualitative data were analyzed using study themes. The study found that while the government through the Ministry of Education has put up support measures to alleviate the challenges in accessing Primary Education for Children with delayed speech and language, there was a notable significant barrier to access education at primary level. This was according to the data collected from the respondents which showed a significant seclusion for learners with speech and language delay. The findings further reviewed that about 23% of learners enrolled in urban schools of solwezi district could not be accommodated for longer due to teachers not being trained to

teach special needs children, and differentiated methods of lesson delivery which may not benefit the child with delayed speech and language. The study therefore recommended strengthening teacher training in inclusive and special needs education, particularly in speech and language support strategies; increasing the deployment of specialized personnel such as speech therapists; and promoting the use of differentiated and learner-centered instructional approaches.

KEYWORDS: *Access to Primary Education, Educational Barriers, Inclusive Education, Special Needs Education and Speech and Language Delays.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a transformative learning process that brings about change in individual learners with unique learning abilities. Education is comprised of organised and sustained communication designed to bring about learning, this communication can be oral or written thus the need for a learner to have a developed mode of communication, (Chanda, 2023). Formal education in Zambia was established in the pre-colonial era, as the educational system developed in Zambia, new policies and approach of teaching have been established (Kelly, 1999). These approaches to learning have been creating programs of learning experiences from complex to simple through inquiring, discovery, and imitation (Panneerselvam, 2005). Despite special education sector existing in Zambia for over 100 years, government has put in effort in setting up Special Schools and Special Units, partnering with private sector, waiving tuition fees in government aided schools and policy establishment; this section in the Ministry of Education has been consistently facing barriers in the implementation process especially the government aided schools which have no technical equipment and skilled staff to teach the special child (Mpolomoka et al., 2024). Simuchimba, (2014) revealed that the curriculum offered for pupils in special units was not appropriate because it did not meet the needs of the pupils adequately as special education needs encompass difficulties in learning that range from a particular impairment to those difficulties related to learning and behavioral difficulties.

Mostly individuals with special education may portray difficulties in areas such as communication, cognitive, behavior emotional, social, sensory, and physical (Rautakoski et al, 2021). These areas of need interfere with children's learning unless adaptations are made, which is the essence of special education. Such adaptations include the use of ICT in response to children's needs, which opens new opportunities for participation, inclusion in

culture, curriculum, communities and education (Zohaib et al., 2024). With adequate and necessary adaptations of a school area, education inclusion unfolds which requires education attention from a multi-disciplinary approach.

A worldwide consensus, spearheaded by the United Nations, has identify obstacles to learning and development for every child and to support inclusive educational approaches. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24, The Children's right article Comment No.26. on Environmental Child's rights and the 1994 Salamanca Statement of UNESCO on inclusive education for people with disabilities serve as the foundation for this inclusive education movement, (Chataika et al., 2012). The UNESCO, 1994, O' Conell et al., 2008, and other policy guidelines require all signatory nations to provide inclusive public education to all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, linguistic, or other conditions. However, children with impairments consistently encounter obstacles to enjoying their basic human rights in many African countries and Zambia not excluded (Muvombo et al., 2024). Speech and language delay impacts a child's ability to engage in classroom activities, interact with peers, and benefit fully from educational experience (Phiri et al., 2023).

In Solwezi Urban District, a region characterized by its unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Delayed communication in children can result from a variety of factors, including developmental disorders, hearing impairments, or other underlying conditions such as Autism, Epilepsy, intellectual challenges, Attention Hyperactive Disorder (Chitondo et al., 2024). These delays can hinder a child's ability to participate effectively in standard educational settings, leading to potential barriers in learning, social integration, and overall academic achievement. In primary schools within Solwezi Urban District, these issues may be compounded by additional challenges such as limited resources, insufficient specialized support, and varying levels of awareness and training among educators.

Education plays a crucial role in enabling academic, social, and physical success for children with disabilities. Singal, (2017) states that education fosters engagement in employment and broader social activities, hence the need to access quality education as a necessary policy strategy. Despite education declared a fundamental human right, children with disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa frequently face exclusion, disparities and marginalization in the quest to access primary education ranging from social, financial, human resource allocation and specialised training for specific disabilities, (Delucaet al., 2014). Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning.

Despite progressive education moves in education provision, such as, the establishment of special school, special units, and *guidelines on inclusive and special education in Zambia (2016)*, disparities in educational outcomes between children with and without disabilities have been growing (Male & Wodon, 2017). The global inclusive education movement, supported by international, regional, and national policy frameworks on the rights of persons' with disabilities which was founded on the principle that disability should not be a barrier to inclusion (Michailakis, 2003). Additionally, the then MoE (2016) established guidelines to resolve the disparities in education provision for learners with special educational needs, non the less, implementation of the set guidelines have not been put to effect for learners with Speech and Language delay.

Stigma is a significant factor obstructing access to education. Research indicates that the intersection of disability, stigmatization, and discrimination is a major driver of educational exclusion. Baffoe (2013) highlights that public attitude and belief about disability in African societies, are often rooted in fear and misunderstanding, which lead to stereotypes that result in prejudice, discrimination, and the denial of rights and resources that should be available to all citizens. In contrast to developed countries like Canada, the United States of America, and those in the European Union, which have established best practices for implementing inclusive education (Peters, 2003; Eurostat, 2003), case studies from Africa such as Ghana (Avoke, 2002), Ethiopia (Franck & Joshi, 2017), Kenya (Grunt, 2011), South Africa (Matshedisho, 2007), and Zimbabwe (Chataika, 2007) demonstrate that stigma continues to play a pervasive role in creating and perpetuating barriers to educational access for children with disabilities.

Solwezi Urban District, situated in Zambia's North-Western Province, is an area undergoing significant socio-cultural and economic transformations. Despite economic, social, and cultural progress, the district faces several challenges that affect the educational landscape, particularly for children with speech and language challenges. The district's educational infrastructures are strained by a growing population and limited financial resources, which have affected the availability and quality of support services for children with delayed communication. Primary schools in Solwezi Urban District lack the necessary resources and trained personnel to adequately support children with communication delays. This situation has resulted in insufficient individualized support, limited access to assistive technologies, and a general lack of awareness about effective teaching strategies for these children. Furthermore, societal attitudes and cultural perceptions about disabilities and communication delays have influence the level of support and inclusion that children receive in school

settings (Chanda, 2025). In a survey conducted in Solwezi Urban district School, it was noted that most schools had enrolment for children with speech delay while other schools never had any the past 5 years. It is from this gap in enrolment from the schools that reviewed that children with delayed speech and language have limited access to primary education.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Access to primary education remained a significant challenge for children with speech and language delays despite national and global commitments to inclusive education. Globally, speech and language delays were among the most common developmental disorders, affecting approximately 5–10% of children (Law et al., 2000), with some studies reporting prevalence rates as high as 32% in certain populations (McLaughlin, 2011). In sub-Saharan Africa, developmental delays were also notable, with studies indicating that about 11.7% of children experienced developmental delays, including 4.4% specifically in language domains (Abubakar et al., 2020). In Zambia, structural challenges further compounded this situation, as approximately 40.9% of children experienced multiple deprivations affecting access to essential services such as education (UNICEF, 2020; Siakalobe et al., 2024). Within urban schools in Solwezi District, learners with speech and language delays continued to face barriers that limited their enrolment, participation, and retention in mainstream education. Although the government had introduced interventions such as accessible infrastructure, assistive devices, and financial support, gaps persisted in the effective implementation of inclusive education policies. Evidence suggested that communication disorders were associated with increased risks of academic, social, and behavioral difficulties, which further hindered meaningful participation in school environments (McLeod & Harrison, 2009). Additionally, inadequate teacher training in special needs education, limited use of differentiated instructional strategies, and the absence of specialized services such as speech therapy contributed to the continued exclusion of these learners. Consequently, a significant proportion of children with speech and language delays remained underserved and at risk of early school withdrawal, highlighting the urgent need to investigate the specific challenges affecting their access to primary education in order to inform more inclusive and responsive educational practices.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To identify specific challenges faced by children with delayed speech and language in accessing Primary Education in selected schools of Solwezi District.

- To examine the role of teachers and parents in addressing the challenges faced by children with delayed speech and language in accessing primary education.
- To assess the availability and accessibility of support services for children with delayed speech and language in primary schools.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

With these objectives of the research, the researcher used a social-cultural theory by Lev Vygotsky which points out that children learn through social interaction with significant others who help to scaffold the gaps in speech and language development. The scaffolding can take place in a social environment such as schools and home environment. Through scaffolding the child can learn language which is an important tool in shaping learning and thinking. The theory further relates to how social-cultural models can help a child with delayed speech and language learn within their Zone of Proximal Development to improve their communication through access to primary education.

1.4.1 The Social Model

The social model of disability posits that disability is fundamentally a social construct rather than merely a medical condition (Haeghele & Hodge, 2016; Henderson & Bryan, 2004). Oliver (1981) highlights the importance of focusing on the social dimensions of disability, emphasizing how physical and social environments impose limitations on certain groups of people. Haeghele & Hodge, (2016), add that individuals with disabilities are "disabled" by the societal structures and attitudes that shape their experiences in different social aspects. This model is concerned with identifying and addressing the barriers to participation that people with disabilities (PWDs) encounter due to various social and environmental factors (Pfeiffer, 2003; Oliver, 1990). Mirabito et al. (2016) and Hosking (2008) further argue that disability should be understood as a social construct and a form of social oppression. They emphasize that societal perceptions of disability and access to education are influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. These factors are embedded in societal structures and legal frameworks, which can either intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

1.4.2 Social and community factors

Social and community factors significantly hinder children with disabilities from accessing education. Community stigma and negative attitudes towards disability can lead to the exclusion and isolation of these children (Olkin, 1999). In most developing countries, societal stigmatization is a major barrier to achieving inclusive education (Uba & Nwoga, 2016).

These negative attitudes from the community and families often result in overlooking the abilities of children with disabilities, underestimating their potential, and deprioritizing their needs (Ben-David & Nel, 2013). Consequently, children with disabilities are often denied their right to education and negative parental attitudes create resistance to inclusive education. Parents may be reluctant to support inclusive education due to skepticism about the educational success of their children and a reluctance to incur associated costs (Creamer, 2009). This reluctance further contributes to the barriers these children face in accessing quality education.

1.4.3 School Environment

Challenges faced by children with disabilities are “more frequently a result of the environment in which they live rather than their impairment” (Ben-David & Nel, 2003; Filmer, 2008). School environments also hinder access to education for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities experience various forms of discrimination in school settings. School-based discrimination involves harassment and victimization by staff or pupils, being treated differently and unfairly (Porter, 2016). More so, many schools in Sub-Saharan Africa are resource constrained leading to low budgets being allocated by them towards issues of disability. Chataika et al. (2012a) identifies inadequate human, financial, physical resources and infrastructure as major constraints to inclusive education in many African countries. This has resulted in a lack of suitable facilities and services for children with disabilities. Many schools have inaccessible buildings, high pupil-to-teacher ratios and limited support for children with disabilities. For most schools in rural settings, teachers have inadequate training in inclusive methodologies and cannot deal with a wide range of children with disabilities. Porter (2016) argues that some schools fail to make reasonable adjustments to their policies and practices to facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities. Schools also fail to provide appropriate support due to limited awareness of disability among teachers and school authorities.

1.4.4 Policy and system factors

Policy and system factors play a significant role in shaping the educational opportunities available to children with disabilities. Discriminatory policies, such as those that segregate children with disabilities into separate institutions, often prevent them from attending regular schools alongside their peers without disabilities (Pretorius & Steadman, 2018; Uba & Nwoga, 2016). For instance, special schools or institutions can worsen the isolation of these children, rather than promoting their inclusion. Despite the existence of progressive policies aimed at fostering inclusive education, there is frequently a disconnect between policy

aspirations and actual implementation. Black and De Matos-ala (2016) note that a persistent gap exists between the goals set forth in policy and their practical application, resulting in inadequate resource allocation for educating children with disabilities (Male & Wodon, 2018). Moreover, the effectiveness of inclusive education is often undermined by insufficient training for teachers who work with children with disabilities (Mapuranga et al., 2015; McKinney & Swartz, 2016; Pather, 2011). This lack of specialized training hampers their ability to provide the necessary support and accommodation. Additionally, some children with disabilities may not receive appropriate education or support services due to poor identification and screening processes, which fail to recognize their disabilities and abilities (Dube et al., 2021).

1.5 Significance of the study

This study was significant because it may contribute to a better understanding of the challenges that hinder learners with speech and language delays from accessing quality primary education in urban schools in Solwezi District, Zambia. The findings provided valuable information to teachers, school administrators, parents, policymakers, and special education practitioners on the barriers faced by these learners and the support systems required to enhance their educational participation and achievement. The study may assist the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in developing inclusive education policies, improving teacher training, and providing appropriate learning resources and intervention services for learners with communication difficulties. Furthermore, the research may contribute to the existing body of knowledge on inclusive education and special educational needs in Zambia, serving as a reference for future researchers and scholars. Ultimately, the study sought to promote equitable access to education, improve learning outcomes, and foster social inclusion for learners with speech and language delays in primary schools.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. A descriptive case study design was used to allow an in-depth exploration of challenges affecting learners with speech and language delays within selected urban primary schools in Solwezi District. The design enabled the researchers to capture both statistical trends and lived experiences of participants. The study was conducted in 4 Primary Schools of Solwezi district. A sample size of 101 participants was drawn using stratified and purposive sampling techniques to ensure inclusion of key stakeholders with relevant experience. The target population included 24

primary school teachers, 4 school administrators, 8 special education teachers, 40 learners with speech and language delays and 25 parents/guardians. Data collection instruments included structured questionnaires for teachers and administrators, semi-structured interviews for parents and special education teachers, and observation checklists to assess classroom inclusion practices and communication support strategies. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, presented in tables and charts. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were coded and grouped into emerging themes related to barriers such as communication difficulties, inadequate teaching resources, and limited specialist support. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and permission from relevant education authorities.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this research reviewed that most schools do not have learners with delayed speech or communication and out of the schools visited, two out of the 12 selected schools had at least one enrolled in the school while the other schools had one who they would accommodate and later advised to be taken to special school. Learners with speech and language delay not being in school made it difficult for the researcher to get hold of the parents. However, with consent from the school to the parents some parents were reached and the finding further indicated that most parents did not have their children enrolled in a special school as advised. These findings are an indication that inclusive learning is not effectively implemented in the education provision in Solwezi urban district.

Table 1: List of Schools with Statistics on Learners with Speech and Language Delays.

SCHOOL	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
LEGACY	0	0	0	0	0
YADAH	0	0	1	2	2
MUSHITALA	0	0	0	0	0
ST. DANIEL	1	1	1	1	2
WEZI	0	0	0	1	1
ST CHARLES	0	0	0	0	0
BAMBINO	1	1	1	2	0
MBONGE	0	0	0	1	1
FAIR FOUNTAIN	1	0	0	0	0
KIKOMBE	0	1	1	1	3
KABITAKA	0	1	1	1	2
KING EMMANUEL	0	0	0	1	0

3.1 Inclusive Education Implementation

The findings on inclusive education implementation to accommodate learners with speech reviewed that few learners with communication challenges are in an inclusive school set up with inadequate and inappropriate resources and school environment. The study showed that those learners who were once enrolled in schools would not be accommodated for longer due to the teachers not qualified for special education delivery. Further, the schools that had enrolled children with delayed speech and language in their school reviewed that implementation is not possible as resources for teaching are not adequate, teachers not qualified and methodology for lesson delivery not appropriate for the child with delayed communication (UNESCO, 2020; WHO, 2021). Additionally, the study reviewed that special schools as well could not accommodate the learners with speech and language delay due to different modes of communication used which would disadvantage speech development for the learners with delayed speech and language. The findings are evidence in an interview with an administrator and a teacher who stated that:

Teachers view: *“Learners with delayed speech and language needed to be attended to by a special education specialist and provided with individual support depending on their level of assimilation. So inclusive learning isn’t possible.”*

Administrators view: *“In as much as we are a special school communication is the basis for instructional learning and inadequate communication would derail the learning process. In as much as the school offers education for learners with communication challenges, accommodating the learners with speech delay would not serve its purpose”.*

In another interview with an administrator, the findings reviewed that:

“Parents take their children to a non-special school as they have no knowledge on their child’s disability, and some are aware of the condition but have not accepted. If they knew they would not bring the child to a non-special school instead take them to the right professionals for further attention and intervention”.

3.2 Challenges Encountered in Accessing Primary Education

In an interview conducted with a parent of a child with speech and language delay, it was reported that despite the school being provided with detailed explanations regarding the child’s educational, social, and psychological needs, as well as a medical recommendation for mainstream school enrolment, the child was reported not admitted. One of the parents indicated that:

“The child was considered disruptive to other learners and was therefore excluded. It was further reported that the teacher demonstrated a lack of empathy, as the child was often shamed for making mistakes”.

Another parent reported similar experiences, highlighting challenges such as poor communication and lack of enthusiasm in the child, which negatively affected the child's willingness to engage in social activities. It was emphasized that engagement in social interaction is critical for language development as children learn through imitation and exposure to spoken language. Hoff (2017) supports this view by noting that language development is a biological potential that is activated through social and environmental interaction.

The study further reported that children with speech and language delays do not only experience barriers to accessing education but also face social discrimination that limits their participation in community activities. It was also reported that poor classroom conditions, including inadequate sanitation and lack of proper disability categorization systems, contributed to parents' reluctance to enroll their children in government schools. Instead, some parents opted to keep their children at home or resort to homeschooling due to concerns about substandard infrastructure. Lynch and Irvine (2009) similarly reported that many parents of children with speech and language delays expressed dissatisfaction with available educational services and advocated for improved communication and speech-related support services within schools. These findings are also consistent with UNESCO (2020), which highlights persistent gaps in inclusive education systems, particularly in resource-constrained settings.

The study further reported that some parents initially demonstrated denial regarding their children's conditions, largely due to a lack of awareness, which delayed access to appropriate educational and medical interventions. It was noted that early identification of communication delays is essential for timely intervention. WHO (2021) emphasizes the importance of early childhood awareness and intervention in improving developmental outcomes. Parents further reported that challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient resources, lack of referral guidance, and shortages of trained speech therapy professionals have significantly hindered effective collaboration between the health and education sectors. These challenges align with findings from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2019), which highlights global disparities in access to speech-language pathology services, particularly in low-resource environments.

3.3 Policies to Improving Access to Education

Policies were reported to be relevant to the education system as they were seen to set standards and promote equality in accessing education for every individual regardless of physical, intellectual, or social needs. It was further reported that education was vital for socio-economic development and was aligned with Zambia's Long-Term Vision, the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP), the National Education Policy, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4), which emphasized inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2023). Zambia was reported to have advanced its education system through initiatives such as 'Education for All', the abolition of primary to secondary school fees, and the enhancement of access and affordability (UNICEF, 2024; World Bank, 2023). However, it was reported that in its quest to provide education for all, Zambian policies had not explicitly stipulated the provision of adequately resourced special education services for learners with specific learning challenges, which had negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education for children with special education needs, particularly those with delayed speech and language (Ministry of Education, Zambia, 2022). Findings from the study reportedly indicated that inclusion of children with speech and language delay remained a challenge. A review of the 2024 national budget reportedly showed that while access to education had been enhanced through the abolition of primary school fees, the allocation of funds for Special Education was not clearly outlined, despite the sector requiring substantial resources for effective implementation of inclusive learning. It was further reported in the literature that access to education encompassed the availability and affordability of educational institutions, the inclusiveness of the education system to cater for diverse learner abilities, and the quality of education provided (Chanda et al., 2024). These factors were reported to play a key role in breaking barriers such as economic disparities, geographical remoteness, cultural norms, and inadequate infrastructure, which hinder equitable access to education (UNESCO, 2023). This literature was reported to be consistent with the findings of the study, which indicated that although education was affordable in both private and government schools, the education system still lacked adequate teaching and learning resources, thereby limiting the effective implementation of inclusive education for learners with speech and language delays.

Further findings reportedly recommend that access to education for learners with delayed speech and language could be improved through curriculum change rather than mere adaptation. It was argued that curriculum change would clearly define content relevant to learners with speech and language challenges. This view was reported to align with academic

work by Kapoma (2011), which stated that curriculum content was considered relevant when it met the needs of learners. It was therefore concluded that when curriculum content was modified in line with learners' needs and supported by adequate teaching and learning resources, learning became more meaningful and effective for children with delayed speech and language.

Additionally, teachers mentioned that collaboration with health practitioners concerning a child with delayed speech and language has not been there. However, few individuals have taken their children for medical assessment.

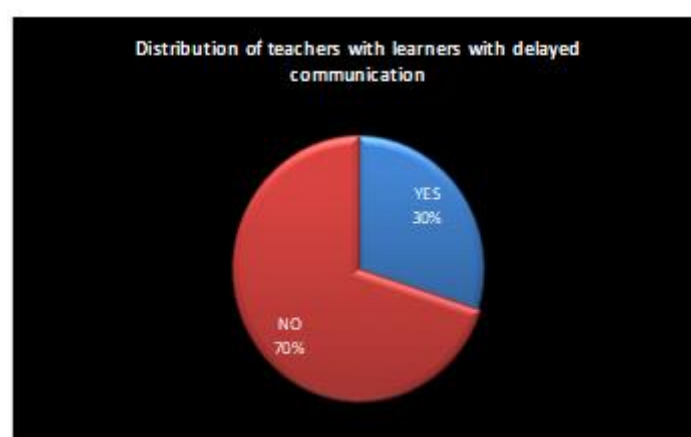


Figure 1: shows the distribution of teachers with learners with delayed communication.

Figure showed that 30% of the teachers indicated that they had learners with delayed communication in their classrooms and 70% did not. Teachers indicated that some learners with delayed speech and language were enrolled but were not coming to school because of certain challenges among them a lack of trained teachers to handle learners them.

Table 2: Teacher Preparedness and Resource Availability.

Statement	YES	NO
Teachers receive adequate training to work effectively with children with delayed communication.	4	28
Ongoing professional development is available for special education needs.	3	28
Specialized instructional materials are accessible in classrooms for children with speech or language delays.	0	32
My school has appropriate classroom support personnel for children with speech or language delays.	8	24
I feel confident in modifying lessons to accommodate children with delayed speech and language.	20	12

The table 2 above showed the responses of teachers to the survey carried out. From the table above it was observed that there was insufficient support for teachers who are handling the special needs children especially one with delayed speech and language.

Table 3: Access to education, Responses from Parents.

Statement	YES	NO
Children with delayed communication face significant challenges in accessing primary education in my area.	25	0
Schools lack sufficient resources to support children with communication delays.	25	0
There are trained professionals available to support children with delayed speech or language.	6	19
Cultural beliefs and social stigma create barriers for children with speech or language delays in schools.	25	0
Economic factors significantly impact children's access to inclusive education resources.	25	0

Table 3 above showed responses from the parents of learners with delayed communication interviewed. For the first statement 100% of the parents stated that learners with delayed communication faced challenges in accessing primary education. And all of them agreed that schools lacked sufficient resources to support their children with delayed communication despite some of them having their children enrolled in primary school. All the parents interviewed stated that cultural beliefs and social stigma create barriers for children with delayed speech and language. It can also be seen from the table that 100% of the parents stated that economic factors impact children access to inclusive education.

Table 4: Access to education: Responses from administrators.

Row Labels	Sum of YES	Sum of NO
Community programs raise awareness effectively about children with communication needs.	25	75
Current educational policies adequately support the inclusion of children with delayed communication.	75	25
Parents are actively involved in the education of children with delayed communication.	75	25
Policy changes are required to enhance inclusivity for children with delayed communication.	100	0
Schools work closely with families to support children with communication challenges.	50	50

The findings in table 4 as reviewed from the four (4) administrators interviewed show that 100% of the administrators agreed that there is need for policy change to enhance inclusivity for children with delayed speech and language. The response further indicated that social exclusion is one of the factors limiting access to education due to a lack of community awareness.

Additionally, the administrator's responses were as follows:

Administrator from school A reviewed that

"The school had one learner enrolled in the school who is speech or communication delayed. The learner chronologically progressed to another grade with no academic progress. The administrators reviewed that the teacher in charge of the classroom that accommodated the learner did not find it easy and seeing no academic progress, the parents were advised to take the child to a special school though she didn't like it. She added that since there was no academic progress I advise them not to waste money instead take the child to a special school where they would benefit. She further stated that inclusive learning is not possible for a speech delayed child who needs individual attention".

Administrator from school B

A speech delayed child cannot learn in an inclusive setting as they may not be given the individual attention needed. The school has no trained special education teacher who can provided the needed standard of education for such a child.

Administrator from school C.

In as much as inclusive learning is relevant for social interaction it is costly to implement both on the parents and the school and its costliness leads to a provision of sub-standard educational resources for the child with communication delay.

Administrator from school D

Stated that ... "inclusive education is possible with a total involvement of a teacher in providing for the learners needs, and administrative support. Admission to a school is the first acceptance and provision of individualised work for a child with speech or communication delay by a teacher is what fosters inclusive learning. This calls for teacher preparedness to effectively deliver."

Additionally,

"Inclusive learning is easy to talk about. However, implementation is a challenge, in a school with varied abilities, there is need for a varied methodology to use. Different disabilities utilize different approaches and methods of teaching hence, enrolling a learning in a school for the hearing impaired would disadvantage the child with communication delay to utilise their speech for communication. In this school we have no child with such condition".

In an engagement with the parents, the parents reviewed the following as the challenges that parent and child faces in accessing primary education:

My child access to primary education is denied to my child. The school he went to could not accommodate him due to his hyperactivity. The school requested that we take him to a special

school or keep him as they do not want to be blamed when anything happens to him; he could run out of the school gate. And a teacher who accommodated him left the school which made it worse for him to continue.

4. Study Recommendations

- **Strengthening Teacher Capacity in Inclusive and Special Needs Education:**

The Ministry of Education should prioritize continuous professional development and pre-service training for teachers in speech, language, and communication difficulties. Teachers should be equipped with skills in differentiated instruction, use of assistive communication strategies, and early identification of learners with speech and language delays.

- **Provision of Assistive Learning Resources and Support Services:**

Schools should be adequately resourced with speech-support materials, visual aids, ICT tools, and assistive communication technologies to support learners with communication challenges. In addition, schools should establish or strengthen school-based support systems such as guidance departments and access to speech therapists or special education specialists to provide targeted intervention.

- **Strengthening Parental and Community Involvement in Inclusive Education:**

There is need to enhance parental engagement and community awareness programs to support learners with speech and language delays. Parents should be trained on how to reinforce communication development at home, while communities should be sensitized to reduce stigma and promote acceptance of learners with communication difficulties.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study established that learners with speech and language delays in urban primary schools in Solwezi District face significant barriers in accessing inclusive and quality education. These challenges are largely linked to inadequate teacher preparedness in handling communication disorders, limited availability of assistive learning resources and specialist support services, and weak collaboration between schools, parents, and the wider community. As a result, affected learners often experience exclusion, reduced participation in classroom activities, and in some cases, early withdrawal from school. The findings further highlight that while inclusive education policies exist, their implementation remains inconsistent due to resource constraints and insufficient capacity at school level. Therefore, improving access for learners with speech and language delays requires strengthened teacher training, provision of

appropriate learning support tools, and active involvement of stakeholders to ensure that inclusive education is effectively translated from policy into practice.

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