



A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF RESOURCE PROVISION AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE NEEDS IN SPECIALISED TRAINING INSTITUTIONS IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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Abstract:

The 1994 Salamanca Declaration was a milestone in the field of inclusive education as it emphasized resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs in institutions of learning. This qualitative study evaluated the resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs in inclusive settings at one of the institutions training teachers of learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEs) in Lusaka district, Zambia. Grounded in the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and the Social Model of Disability, the study sought to evaluate the strengths and limitations of current resource provision and support services. A qualitative research approach was employed to gather in-depth data. Purposive sampling was utilized to select a heterogeneous sample of 15 participants, comprising five students with diverse needs, three academic staff members, three parents, one guidance counsellor, two policy interpreters, and one representative from an Organization for Persons with Disabilities (OPD). This composition provided a comprehensive qualitative evaluation of resource

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provision and support services. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, then analyzed thematically. The findings indicated that while there were some good practices of inclusive education, significant gaps were identified in resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs. Key recommendations include the development of a comprehensive policy and framework for inclusive education, enhanced resource allocation, capacity building in teacher education for inclusive education, and strengthened support services to promote equitable and inclusive education for students with diverse needs.

Keywords: inclusive education, resource provision, support services, universal design for learning, social model of disability

1. Introduction

Globally, the 1994 Salamanca Declaration was a landmark framework for inclusive education, emphasizing that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994). The declaration called upon governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of law or policy, ensuring that resource provision and support services are made available to learners with diverse needs. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 further prioritizes accessible and equitable quality education for all, with specific targets to eliminate disparities in access to education for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities (United Nations, 2015). Despite these global commitments, students with diverse needs continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality education due to inadequate resource provision and insufficient support services (OECD, 2018).

Across Africa, the implementation of inclusive education has been uneven and fraught with challenges. Many African countries have ratified international conventions and developed national policies on inclusive education; however, resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and limited teacher training have hindered effective implementation (UNESCO, 2017). In South Africa, for example, the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (2001) established a framework for inclusive education, yet studies have revealed persistent gaps in resource allocation and support services (Nel *et al.*, 2016). In Kenya, the National Special Needs Education Policy Framework (2009) emphasized inclusive education, but researchers have documented inadequate funding, lack of assistive technologies, and insufficiently trained personnel as major barriers (Mutua *et al.*, 2020). In Ghana, despite policy commitments, students with diverse needs continue to face exclusion due to limited accessible infrastructure and a shortage of specialized support staff (Opoku *et al.*, 2021). The African context thus presents a common pattern: progressive policies on paper but significant implementation gaps in practice.

In Zambia, the 1996 National Policy on Education, titled "Educating Our Future," recognized the diverse needs of learners and emphasized the provision of appropriate support systems (Ministry of Education, 1996). The policy acknowledged that students with diverse needs require modification of school, college, or university provision and practice, and it committed to providing bursaries for such individuals at the tertiary level. Furthermore, Zambia's Eighth National Development Plan (2017-2021) set a goal to provide equitable access to quality education for all, including marginalized and vulnerable groups, through increased access to education, improved teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and enhanced assistive technology (Ministry of National Planning and Development, 2017). However, despite these policy commitments, the allocation for special education programs has remained minimal.

Recent Zambian studies have highlighted persistent challenges in inclusive education. Kandimba, Mandyata, and Simalalo (2023) found that teachers of learners with moderate intellectual disabilities lacked a clear understanding of curriculum adaptation, often improvising without formal guidance. Kandimba, Kalimaposo, Mandyata, Bwalya, Kabwe, and Kalunga (2025a) explored pedagogical approaches for learners with intellectual disabilities in Luanshya District and reported that teachers frequently assumed multiple roles without clear boundaries or institutional support. Kandimba, Kalimaposo, Mandyata, Bwalya, Kabwe, and Kalunga (2025b) investigated increasing accessibility to inclusive education in Ndola District primary schools, identifying that the lack of clear role definitions created confusion, inefficiency, and ethical dilemmas. Most directly relevant to the present study, Bwalya, Nambula, Kandimba, Kalima, Mubisi, and Mwalungali (2026) evaluated sign language as a medium of instruction for learners with hearing impairments in Lusaka primary schools, concluding that sign language use is inconsistent, interpreter qualifications vary widely, and teachers doubling as interpreters faced significant role conflict with no training in managing ethical tensions.

These studies collectively demonstrate that Zambian educational contexts for diverse learners are characterized by systemic gaps in resource provision and support services. Consequently, resource provision and support services remain critically under-examined at the tertiary level in Zambia. This study addresses that gap by qualitatively evaluating resource provision and support services in specialised training institutions in Zambia.

2. Statement of the Problem

The ideal situation within specialized institutions is that students with diverse needs should have access to adequate resources and comprehensive support services, including assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and Braille materials; accessible infrastructure such as ramps and adapted restrooms; specialized personnel such as sign language interpreters, therapists, and counsellors; and trained lecturers equipped with

inclusive pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, a dedicated budget line, effective monitoring systems, and strong collaboration among stakeholders should exist. The 1996 National Policy on Education articulates this ideal by stating that the Ministry will dispense with direct educational costs and provide bursaries for students with diverse needs at the tertiary level (Ministry of Education, 1996).

However, the reality in training institutions for students with disabilities in Lusaka District diverges significantly. The qualitative findings reveal that while some resources exist, they are grossly inadequate. Assistive technologies, interpreters, and Braille services are available but insufficient. Trained lecturers in inclusive pedagogy are lacking, accessible infrastructure remains a major barrier, and essential service providers such as physiotherapists, audiologists, and speech therapists are absent. Despite policy commitments, no student with diverse needs in this study was on a bursary. The education sector's budget for special education has been minimal, ranging from 0.2% to 0.5% between 2013 and 2017 (World Bank, 2018). As documented by Kandimba *et al.* (2025b), the lack of clear role definitions creates confusion, inefficiency, and ethical dilemmas, a finding that applies directly to resource provision at the tertiary level.

The consequences of this policy-practice gap are severe. For students, inadequate resources result in limited access to learning, reduced participation, lower achievement, and an increased risk of dropout. For lecturers, the lack of training and resources leads to frustration, burnout, and an inability to support diverse learners. For the institution, the failure to provide adequate inclusive education undermines its mandate as a center of excellence. As Kandimba *et al.* (2025a) observed, teachers who assume multiple roles without institutional support experience emotional exhaustion and moral distress. At a broader level, the Zambian education system perpetuates exclusion, contradicting national and international commitments to Education for All and SDG No. 4. Given these serious consequences, there is an urgent need to qualitatively evaluate resource provision and support services in colleges of education, including the institution where this study was conducted. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate resource provision and support services for inclusive education of students with diverse needs in specialized institutions, training teachers of LSEs in the Lusaka district, Zambia.

This study was guided by the following three research objectives:

- 1) To explore the current state of resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs at the Zambia Institute of Special Education.
- 2) To explore the effectiveness of existing resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs from the perspectives of students, lecturers, parents, and policy interpreters.
- 3) To establish the factors influencing resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the Social Model of Disability. The Universal Design for Learning framework, as articulated by CAST (2018), advocates for creating flexible learning environments that cater to diverse learners by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action or expression. UDL emphasizes that barriers to learning are not inherent in students' disabilities but arise from poorly designed curricula and environments. By proactively designing flexible resources and support services, educators can reduce the need for individual accommodations and enhance inclusion for all students (Treviranus, 2014). This framework guided the evaluation of resource provision by focusing on whether existing resources and services are designed flexibly to meet the varied needs of diverse learners.

The Social Model of Disability, as emphasized by Oliver (1990) and Barnes and Mercer (2003), highlights the importance of removing societal barriers to ensure full participation of individuals with disabilities. According to this model, disability is not an individual deficit but a product of social, attitudinal, architectural, and policy barriers that exclude persons with impairments from full participation in society. The implication for this study is that inadequate resource provision and support services are not merely technical problems but systemic barriers that reflect societal and institutional failures to remove obstacles to inclusion. Kandimba *et al.* (2025b) applied similar frameworks in their study on increasing accessibility to inclusive education, finding that the absence of clear role definitions and institutional support creates barriers that exclude learners with disabilities. By integrating these two frameworks, this study aimed to comprehensively evaluate resource provision and support services to enhance inclusive education for students with diverse needs.

4. Review of Literature

The presentation of the literature review was guided by the two objectives that informed this study. The first objective was to explore the current state of resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs at the Zambia Institute of Special Education. The second objective was to establish the factors influencing resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs. The review commenced with a discussion on the explanation of the key concepts: resource provision and support services.

4.1 Explanation of the Concepts: Resource Provision and Support Services

Resource provision in inclusive education refers to the allocation and availability of materials, equipment, technologies, and human resources necessary to facilitate equitable access to learning for students with diverse needs (UNESCO, 2017). This includes

assistive devices such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and Braille materials; accessible infrastructure such as ramps, adapted restrooms, and accessible classrooms; learning materials adapted for different learning styles; and qualified personnel, including special education teachers, sign language interpreters, and therapists (Kaluta & Kandimba, 2026). Support services, on the other hand, refer to specialized professional services that address the holistic needs of students with diverse needs, including speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, audiology services, counselling and guidance, and early identification and intervention programs (Janney & Snell, 2016; Kaluta & Kandimba, 2026). Therefore, resource provision and support services constitute the foundational pillars of effective inclusive education, without which students with diverse needs cannot access, participate, or achieve in educational settings.

4.2 The State of Resource Provision and Support Services for Students with Diverse Needs

Globally, the OECD (2018) reported that across member countries, students with disabilities are less likely to complete secondary education and more likely to be excluded from mainstream classrooms due to inadequate resources and a lack of accessible infrastructure. It was indicated that this finding demonstrates that even in developed economies, the current state of resource provision remains insufficient to meet the needs of diverse learners. However, this study focused on secondary education outcomes rather than providing a detailed qualitative exploration of the current state of resource provision at the tertiary level, particularly in specialized teacher training institutions in developing countries.

Ainscow and Miles (2008) acknowledged significant challenges in achieving effective inclusive education, including inadequate funding, lack of accessible learning materials and adapted curriculum, and insufficient teacher training. It was emphasized in their work that inclusive education requires systemic changes in resource allocation and support service delivery. Nevertheless, the study by Ainscow and Miles (2008) remains at a broad policy level without capturing the lived experiences of students and lecturers regarding the current state of resources, leaving a need for qualitative research that documents specific resource gaps at the institutional level.

The World Health Organization (2019) underscored that inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems hinder the identification of service delivery gaps and the implementation of evidence-based interventions, suggesting that even when resources are provided, institutions cannot determine whether those resources are being used effectively. However, this global study does not examine how the absence of monitoring systems affects the current state of resource provision in specialized institutions, nor does it provide qualitative evidence from the perspectives of service users and providers.

In South Africa, Nel *et al.* (2016) found that while the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (2001) established a progressive framework, schools lacked the resources, trained personnel, and infrastructural support necessary for effective

implementation, with teachers reporting feeling unprepared to support diverse learners. Nonetheless, this study focused on primary and secondary schools rather than tertiary institutions, and did not qualitatively document the specific resources that were missing or inadequate from the perspective of students with diverse needs themselves.

In Kenya, Mutua *et al.* (2020) documented that inadequate funding, lack of assistive technologies, and insufficient teacher training were major barriers to inclusive education, with many students with diverse needs being excluded from mainstream classrooms. However, this study does not provide a detailed qualitative account of the current state of assistive technology provision at the institutional level, nor does it capture the voices of students who directly experience resource shortages in their daily learning activities.

In Ghana, Opoku *et al.* (2021) reported that despite policy commitments, students with diverse needs faced exclusion due to limited accessible infrastructure and a shortage of specialized support staff, such as sign language interpreters and speech therapists. Nevertheless, this study does not explore the specific nature of infrastructure barriers at the tertiary level, nor does it qualitatively examine how students experience these barriers in their academic journeys, leaving a need for research that documents the current state from user perspectives.

In Zambia, Mwansa (2011) conducted a study on challenges of inclusive education in selected primary schools in Lusaka District and found that limited resources were provided for inclusive education, including a lack of appropriate infrastructure and assistive devices. However, Mwansa's research focused on primary schools rather than tertiary institutions, and it did not qualitatively explore the current state of resource provision in a specialized teacher training college in Zambia.

Kandimba, Mandyata, and Simalalo (2023) examined teachers' understanding of curriculum adaptation for learners with moderate intellectual disabilities in Zambia and found that teachers lacked a clear understanding of curriculum adaptation, often improvising without formal guidance. However, this study focused on curriculum adaptation rather than resource provision and support services, and it did not examine how the current state of resources affects lecturers' ability to support students with diverse needs at the tertiary level.

Chomba and Kumatongo (2025) evaluated the effectiveness of the Kentalis Reading Method for deaf and hard-of-hearing early grade learners in Zambia, finding that learners with hearing impairments experience challenges in communication and reading comprehension, which were linked to inappropriate methodology and lack of appropriate resources. However, the study by Chomba and Kumatongo focused on early grade learners and reading methodology rather than on the current state of resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs at the tertiary level, leaving a need for qualitative research in specialised training institutions in Zambia.

Bwalya *et al.* (2026) evaluated sign language as a medium of instruction for learners with hearing impairments in selected primary schools of Lusaka, Zambia,

finding that teachers doubling as sign language interpreters faced significant role conflict with no training in managing ethical tensions. Nevertheless, the study by Bwalya *et al.* focused on primary education and on instructional medium rather than the current state of resource provision and support services at the tertiary level, leaving a need for qualitative research in specialised training institutions in Zambia.

4.3 Factors Influencing Resource Provision and Support Services for Students with Diverse Needs

Globally, UNESCO (2017) identified that inadequate funding is the most significant factor influencing resource provision for inclusive education, with many countries allocating less than 1% of their education budgets to special needs education, resulting in chronic shortages of assistive technologies, trained personnel, and accessible infrastructure. However, UNESCO's global report provided statistical and policy-level analysis rather than qualitative insights into how funding constraints are experienced by students, lecturers, and administrators at the institutional level in a specialized teacher training college, leaving a need for qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of funding shortages in Zambia.

Mitchell (2010) examined factors that facilitate or hinder inclusive education globally and found that negative attitudes among school administrators, teachers, and parents towards inclusive education are major barriers that influence resource allocation, as decision-makers may not prioritize resources for students they believe do not belong in mainstream settings. Additionally, Mitchell identified that the lack of collaboration among stakeholders, including ministries of education, health, and social welfare, creates fragmented and inefficient resource provision. Nevertheless, Mitchell's study is a broad international review rather than a primary qualitative study, and it does not examine how these attitudinal and collaborative factors specifically influence resource provision and support services at the tertiary level in a developing country context such as Zambia.

Foreman (2017) explored factors influencing successful inclusive education in international contexts and found that insufficient teacher training in inclusive pedagogy is a critical factor, as teachers cannot effectively utilize assistive technologies, implement adapted curricula, or provide appropriate support services without proper pre-service and in-service training. It was also identified by Foreman that the lack of leadership and commitment from institutional administrators significantly influences resource allocation, as inclusive education initiatives will fail without strong advocacy and prioritization from senior management. Nonetheless, Foreman's work focused on primary and secondary education rather than tertiary institutions, and did not provide qualitative evidence from a specialized teacher training college on how insufficient teacher training and lack of administrative leadership influence resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs in Zambia.

In Tanzania, Ndibalema (2025) explored perspectives on barriers to learning opportunities among deaf children in Tanzania, revealing that inadequate teacher

training, limited access to assistive technologies, lack of funds, and discrimination against deaf children due to negative attitudes towards disabilities were significant factors influencing inclusive education. However, the study by Ndibalema (2025) focused on deaf children in primary education rather than on students with diverse needs at the tertiary level in a teacher training college, and they did not examine how these factors influence resource provision and support services from the perspectives of students, lecturers, and policy interpreters in Zambia.

In South Africa, Donohue and Bornman (2014) examined the challenges and barriers to inclusive education in South Africa, identifying that inadequate teacher training in inclusive pedagogy, lack of political will, insufficient funding, and negative societal attitudes towards disability were significant factors influencing the implementation of inclusive education. Nevertheless, the study by Donohue and Bornman focused on the general education system rather than specifically on tertiary institutions, and they did not qualitatively explore how these factors influence resource provision and support services in specialized teacher training colleges in Zambia.

In Zambia, Chansa-Kabali (2017) examined inclusive education in Zambia and found that limited parental involvement, lack of collaboration among stakeholders, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, gaps in policy implementation, and stigma and discrimination hindered the effective provision of support services. However, Chansa-Kabali's study did not focus specifically on the Zambia Institute of Special Education, nor did it qualitatively explore how these factors influence resource provision from the perspectives of students, parents, lecturers, and policy interpreters at the tertiary level.

Kandimba *et al.* (2025b) investigated increasing accessibility to inclusive education in Ndola District primary schools and identified that the lack of clear role definitions for support staff and teachers created confusion, inefficiency, and ethical dilemmas, which were significant factors influencing resource provision. However, the study by Kandimba *et al.* focused on primary schools rather than tertiary institutions, and they did not examine how undefined roles affect resource provision and support services in specialised training institutions in Zambia.

Munsaka and Mwila (2025) examined sign language and the law in Zambia, focusing on equal access to justice for the Deaf community, and identified that a lack of specialized training in sign language interpretation and sign language variations that potentiate misunderstandings and misinterpretations were significant factors influencing access to services. Nonetheless, the study by Munsaka and Mwila focused on legal rather than educational contexts, and they did not examine how inadequate interpreter training and miscommunication factors influence resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs in specialised training institutions in Zambia.

5. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs. A qualitative case study design was adopted, as it allowed the researchers to explore the phenomenon within its real-life context at one of the colleges in Lusaka. Qualitative research was particularly suited for studies that sought to understand participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and meanings attached to social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The study involved 15 participants selected through purposive sampling. The sample comprised five students with diverse needs, three academic staff members (lecturers), three parents of students with diverse needs, one guidance counsellor, two policy interpreters, and one representative from an Organization for Persons with Disabilities (OPD). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had relevant experience, knowledge, and perspectives on resource provision and support services, thereby increasing the depth and richness of the qualitative data (Flick, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method, as they allowed for flexibility and probing to capture detailed narratives and lived experiences. Interview guides were developed based on the three research objectives and were piloted with two participants who were not part of the main study. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was conducted in a private setting chosen by the participant. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Document analysis was also conducted on the 1996 National Policy on Education and the Eighth National Development Plan to examine policy commitments related to resource provision and support services. Field notes were maintained throughout the data collection process to capture non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Codes were generated inductively from the data, and themes were organized according to the three research objectives. Verbatim quotations were selected to illustrate each theme, ensuring that participants' voices were authentically represented. Document analysis data were analyzed using content analysis to identify policy commitments relevant to resource provision and support services.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and how the data would be used. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms such as Student 1, Lecturer 2, Parent and by removing identifying information from transcripts and reports. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed several strategies recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts and the researcher's interpretations. Transferability was addressed through a thick description of the context, participants, and findings to allow readers to assess applicability to other settings. Dependability was established through an audit trail documenting all research decisions, data collection procedures, and analytical steps. Confirmability was ensured through reflexivity, with researchers maintaining reflective journals to document their own assumptions, biases, and positionalities throughout the research process.

6. Presentation of Findings

The findings were presented according to three research objectives. The first objective revealed that assistive technologies, learning materials, specialized personnel, and physical infrastructure were grossly inadequate. The second objective uncovered that interpreters lacked specialized training, the bursary scheme was non-operational, and monitoring systems were absent, rendering resources ineffective. The third objective identified inadequate funding, absence of a dedicated budget line, lack of trained lecturers, negative staff attitudes, inaccessible infrastructure, and poor stakeholder collaboration as key barriers.

6.1 Finding 1: Current State of Resource Provision and Support Services

Theme 1.1: Inadequate Assistive Technologies and Learning Materials

Participants consistently reported that assistive technologies and learning materials were insufficient for the number of students with diverse needs. A student with visual impairment stated:

"We lack Braille materials for most of our courses. Sometimes we share with three students, and we cannot all read at the same time. The library does not have enough Braille books, and the computers with screen readers are often broken. When the computers break, we wait for months for repairs." (Student 1, Visual Impairment)

A lecturer confirmed this perspective, stating:

"Resources like assistive technology are available, but they are grossly inadequate. We have only two working computers with screen readers for over ten visually impaired students. The Braille machine is old and frequently jams. We request new ones every year, but the budget is never enough." (Lecturer 2)

Theme 1.2: Insufficient Specialized Support Personnel

Participants reported a critical shortage of specialized support personnel, including sign language interpreters, physiotherapists, audiologists, and speech therapists. A student with hearing impairment explained:

"We have sign language interpreters, but they are not enough. There are only two interpreters for all deaf students in the institution. When one is absent, the other is overwhelmed. Sometimes we miss important information because the interpreter cannot keep up with the lecturer's pace." (Student 2, Hearing Impairment)

The guidance counsellor added:

"We have guidance and counselling, but we do not have physiotherapists, audiologists, or speech therapists on staff. Students who need these services have to go to the general hospital, which is far from the institution and expensive for most families. Many students simply do not get the services they need." (Guidance Counsellor)

Theme 1.3: Inaccessible Physical Infrastructure

Participants highlighted significant barriers related to inaccessible physical infrastructure. A parent of a student with physical disability stated:

"My child uses a wheelchair, but many classrooms are not accessible. There are stairs without ramps, and the restrooms are not adapted for wheelchair users. She struggles to move around the campus independently. This should not happen at an institution that trains special education teachers. How can they teach others about inclusion when they themselves are not inclusive?" (Parent 1)

A student with physical disability confirmed:

"The infrastructure is a big barrier. Some classrooms are on the second floor with no lift. The pathways are not smooth, and when it rains, they become muddy and slippery. Even the library has shelves that are too high for me to reach. These physical barriers make it hard for me to attend classes and access learning materials." (Student 3, Physical Disability)

6.2 Effectiveness of Existing Resource Provision and Support Services

Theme 2.1: Ineffective Interpreters and Limited Specialized Training

Participants reported that even when resources and services were available, their effectiveness was compromised by a lack of specialized training. A student with hearing impairment explained:

"We have sign language interpreters, but they are not trained in academic sign language. They struggle to interpret technical terms in mathematics and science. Sometimes they fingerspell words we have never seen before, and we do not understand the lesson. The interpreter is trying their best, but without training in academic content, the interpretation is not effective." (Student 2, Hearing Impairment)

A policy interpreter corroborated this finding:

"The policy says students with diverse needs should have access to specialized services. But the interpreters we have are not trained for tertiary education. They have basic sign language skills, but they do not know how to interpret complex academic content. The effectiveness of interpretation services is therefore very low." (Policy Interpreter 1)

Theme 2.2: Policy-Practice Gap in Bursary Provision

Participants highlighted a significant gap between policy commitments and actual practice regarding bursaries for students with diverse needs. A policy interpreter stated:

"The 1996 policy is good on paper. It says students with diverse needs should have bursaries, assistive devices, and specialized services. But in practice, none of these are fully implemented. There is no dedicated budget line for inclusive education, so resource provision depends on donors and unpredictable allocations. No student with diverse needs in this institution is on a bursary." (Policy Interpreter 2)

An OPD representative added:

"We visit institutions across the country and find that the same challenges are repeated everywhere. The bursary scheme for students with disabilities is not functioning. Many students drop out because they cannot afford fees, and there is no mechanism to track whether the bursary is actually reaching those who need it." (OPD Representative)

Theme 2.3: Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Participants reported that the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation undermined the effectiveness of resource provision. A lecturer explained:

"There is no regular assessment of whether the resources we have are meeting students' needs. We request equipment, but once it is delivered, no one follows up to see if it is being used or if it is effective. The assistive technology we have is old and not well-maintained because there is no monitoring system." (Lecturer 1)

The OPD representative confirmed:

"Without monitoring and evaluation, we cannot identify gaps or measure progress. We need a system that tracks resource allocation, usage, effectiveness, and outcomes. Currently, such a system does not exist." (OPD Representative)

6.3 Factors Influencing Resource Provision and Support Services

Theme 3.1: Inadequate Funding and Absence of a Dedicated Budget Line

Inadequate funding was the most frequently cited factor influencing resource provision.

A lecturer stated:

"The biggest factor is funding. The budget for inclusive education is very small. We cannot buy Braille machines, hearing aids, or wheelchairs. We cannot employ sign language interpreters, speech therapists, or physiotherapists. Without money, nothing changes. We are expected to do inclusion with almost no resources." (Lecturer 3)

A policy interpreter elaborated:

"There is no dedicated budget line for inclusive education in the Ministry of Education. Funds are allocated from the general education budget, and special education gets whatever is left. This is usually less than 1% of the sector budget. How can you implement inclusive education with less than 1% of the budget? You cannot." (Policy Interpreter 1)

Theme 3.2: Lack of Trained Lecturers in Inclusive Pedagogy

Participants reported that many lecturers lacked training in inclusive pedagogical content knowledge. A student with visual impairment stated:

"Some lecturers do not know how to teach us. They use visual aids without describing them. They write on the board but do not read aloud. They give out handouts that are not in Braille. It is not that they are bad people; they just have not been trained in how to teach students with diverse needs." (Student 1, Visual Impairment)

A lecturer acknowledged this gap:

"I have never received formal training in inclusive pedagogy. I learned on the job by trial and error. I want to support my students better, but I do not have the knowledge or skills. The institution does not offer professional development in inclusive teaching methods." (Lecturer 2)

Theme 3.3: Negative Attitudes Among Some Staff

Some participants reported that negative attitudes among staff members hindered effective resource provision and support. A parent stated:

"Some lecturers have negative attitudes towards students with diverse needs. They do not believe these students belong in higher education. They make comments that are discouraging, and they do not make any effort to adapt their teaching. The attitude is that the student must fit into the system, not that the system must adapt to the student." (Parent 2)

A student with hearing impairment added:

"There is a lecturer who told me that deaf students should go to a special school, not a university. That comment hurt me deeply. How can I learn from someone who does not believe I belong here?" (Student 2, Hearing Impairment)

Theme 3.4: Inaccessible Infrastructure and Lack of Adaptive Equipment

Participants highlighted infrastructure and equipment as significant factors. A student with physical disability explained:

"The classrooms are not accessible. The restrooms are not adapted. There are no lifts. I cannot move around the campus independently. This is not only a resource issue but a human rights issue. The physical environment excludes me before I even have a chance to learn." (Student 3, Physical Disability)

A parent confirmed:

"The institution has been promising ramps and adapted restrooms for years, but nothing has been done. We are told there is no money. But without accessible infrastructure, students with physical disabilities cannot meaningfully participate in education." (Parent 3)

Theme 3.5: Lack of Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Participants reported that insufficient collaboration among stakeholders hampered resource provision. An OPD representative stated:

"There is limited collaboration between the institution, OPDs, parents, and the Ministry. Each stakeholder works in isolation. Resources are duplicated in some areas and completely absent in others. If we worked together, we could share resources, knowledge, and best practices. But currently, there is no structured mechanism for collaboration." (OPD Representative).

The guidance counsellor added:

"We do not have regular meetings with parents or OPDs. We do not have a parent-teacher association specifically for students with diverse needs. Parents feel left out, and OPDs have valuable expertise that we are not using." (Guidance Counsellor).

7. Discussion of Findings

Discussion of findings on the first objective, which sought to explore the current state of resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs, revealed that assistive technologies and learning materials were inadequate. This finding aligns with previous research by Mwansa (2011) and Chansa-Kabali (2017), who found that limited resources were provided for inclusive education in Zambia. The verbatim quotations from students and lecturers confirmed that while some resources existed, they were insufficient for the number of students and the range of needs. Furthermore, this finding resonated with Kandimba *et al.* (2025b), who identified that the lack of clear resource allocation mechanisms created confusion and inefficiency in Ndola District primary schools. The absence of physiotherapists, audiologists, and speech therapists from the staff establishment was identified as a critical gap, as these service providers are essential for students with diverse needs. Additionally, this finding contradicted the policy commitment in the 1996 National Policy on Education, which stated that the Ministry would provide specialized services. Similarly, Bwalya *et al.* (2026) documented a parallel gap in Lusaka primary schools, where teacher-interpreters lacked specialized training. The implication for policy is that the Ministry of Education must review the implementation of the bursary scheme and specialized service provision, ensuring that students with diverse needs in tertiary institutions receive the support promised in the policy. The implication for practice is that the Zambia Institute of Special Education should establish a resource mapping exercise to identify specific gaps and prioritize the most urgent resource needs, including the recruitment of specialized support personnel.

Discussion of findings on the second objective, which sought to explore the effectiveness of existing resource provision and support services, revealed that existing resources and support services were ineffective. This finding corroborates the work of Ainscow and Miles (2008), who acknowledged significant challenges in achieving effective inclusive education globally. The verbatim quotation from the student with hearing impairment about interpreters struggling with technical terms highlighted a specific effectiveness gap: the availability of interpreters does not guarantee effective communication if interpreters lack specialized academic training. This finding directly paralleled Bwalya *et al.* (2026), who found that teachers doubling as sign language interpreters in Lusaka primary schools struggled to prioritize instructional content, linguistic accuracy, and emotional support. Similarly, Kandimba *et al.* (2025a) reported that teachers in Luanshya District who assumed multiple roles experienced emotional exhaustion and moral

distress because they could not fulfill all role expectations adequately. The policy interpreter's quotation about the absence of a dedicated budget line explained why effectiveness remained low: without predictable funding, institutions cannot plan, employ, or maintain resources and services effectively. This finding also aligned with the World Health Organization (2019) report, which underscored that inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems hinder the identification of service delivery gaps. The OPD representative's statement confirmed that without systematic monitoring, the same challenges recur across institutions. The implication for policy is that the Ministry of Education should establish a monitoring and evaluation framework specifically for inclusive education resources and support services, with regular reporting requirements and accountability mechanisms. The implication for practice is that the Zambia Institute of Special Education should develop an annual inclusive education audit that assesses the effectiveness of resources and services and uses findings to inform budget requests, staff recruitment, and professional development priorities.

Discussion of findings on the third objective, which sought to explore the factors influencing resource provision and support services, revealed that inadequate funding was the most significant factor influencing resource provision. This finding is consistent with the World Bank (2018) review, which found that the education sector's budget allocation for special education ranged from only 0.2% to 0.5% of the sector budget. This finding also aligned with Musoni (2018) and UNESCO (2017), who identified inadequate funding, insufficient teacher training, negative attitudes, limited awareness, and inadequate infrastructure as barriers to inclusive education. The verbatim quotation from the policy interpreter about the absence of a dedicated budget line was particularly significant, as it suggested that even when funds are available, inclusive education is deprioritized because there is no specific allocation. This finding resonated with Kandimba *et al.* (2023), who found that teachers lacked a clear understanding of curriculum adaptation due to inadequate training and resource constraints. The finding about teacher training was equally critical: lecturers who lack inclusive pedagogical content knowledge cannot effectively support diverse learners, regardless of available resources. Similarly, Kandimba *et al.* (2025a) documented a parallel gap, reporting that teachers without formal training in inclusive pedagogy struggled to support learners with intellectual disabilities. The finding about negative attitudes among some lecturers underscored the need for attitude change interventions alongside resource provision. Furthermore, Bwalya *et al.* (2026) found that negative attitudes towards sign language as a medium of instruction hindered effective communication for learners with hearing impairments. The implication for policy is that the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education should collaboratively establish a dedicated budget line for inclusive education at all levels, with specific allocations for assistive technology, infrastructure adaptation, specialized personnel, and teacher training. The implication for practice is that the Zambia Institute of Special Education should integrate inclusive pedagogy into all lecturer professional development programmes and should implement regular

sensitization workshops to address negative attitudes. Moreover, the institution should establish structured collaboration mechanisms with OPDs, parents, and other stakeholders to share resources, knowledge, and best practices, as recommended by Kandimba *et al.* (2025b).

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusion

This qualitative study evaluated resource provision and support services for students with diverse needs at the Zambia Institute of Special Education. The study concluded that a significant gap exists between inclusive education policy and practice in Zambia. While the 1996 National Policy on Education and the Eighth National Development Plan articulate a strong commitment to inclusive education, the actual provision of resources and support services remains grossly inadequate. The majority of students with diverse needs lack access to assistive technologies, Braille materials, sign language interpreters, and specialized support services such as physiotherapy, audiology, and speech therapy. Accessible infrastructure, including ramps, adapted restrooms, and accessible classrooms, remains limited. The study further concluded that the effectiveness of existing resources and support services is low, primarily due to inadequate funding, the absence of a dedicated budget line for inclusive education, insufficient teacher training in inclusive pedagogy, negative attitudes among some staff, and a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation. These factors collectively hinder the implementation of inclusive education at the Zambia Institute of Special Education, undermining its mandate as a center of excellence in special education. These findings are consistent with earlier Zambian studies that documented similar challenges in primary and secondary education settings, confirming that resource and service delivery gaps persist across all levels of the education system in Zambia.

8.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following three recommendations were presented:

- 1) The Ministry of Education, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, should create a dedicated inclusive education budget line, increasing funding for assistive technologies, infrastructure, specialized personnel, and learning materials.
- 2) The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Organizations for Persons with Disabilities, and cooperating partners, should develop a national inclusive education framework with clear standards, an audit mechanism, an operational bursary scheme, and structured stakeholder collaboration.
- 3) Specialised Training institutions in partnership with the Teaching Service Commission should recruit permanent specialized service providers such as

interpreters, therapists and transcribers, mandate annual inclusive pedagogy training for lecturers and conduct annual inclusive education audits.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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