

**PARENTS AND TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
IN INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION PLAN FOR LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL
EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

MASTER OF EDUCATION IN PSYCHOLOGY OF EDUCATION THESIS

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Bachelor of Education (Primary) - Domasi College of Education

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

SEPTEMBER, 2024



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BY

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Bachelor of Education (Primary) - Domasi College of Education

Submitted to the Department of Education Foundation, School of Education, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Psychology of
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Acknowledgements have been made where other people's work has been used.

Full Legal Name

Signature

Date

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear children Anabel, Alinafe, Madalitso, Mercy and Felix Junior. I am always proud of you. You really understood my absence from home during the period I was conducting my research. You really missed my presence.

I also dedicate this work to my late wife Priscilla, father Hermes, my late mother Dorothy, my late sister Gloria and my late children.

Lastly and above all, I dedicate this work to God who made it possible for me to go through my studies.

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in the development and implementation of Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Existing studies have predominantly focused on either parents' perspectives or teachers' perspectives separately, providing a fragmented understanding of the issue. Hence, this research examines the perceptions of both parents and teachers on parental involvement in the IEP process for learners with SEN. The IEP processes require team work which should involve parents, teachers and other relevant stakeholders for effective development and implementation. A qualitative phenomenological approach with convenience and purposive sampling techniques were employed. The sample size was 4 head teachers, 3 specialist teachers, 20 regular class teachers and 18 parents of learners with special needs. The study made a thematic analysis of data generated through semi structured interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. The findings verified that teachers and parents of learners with disability have a vital role to play in the development and implementation of IEP. In addition, the study revealed that enhanced student performance, improved parent-teacher relationship, source of child profile information and proper coordination of tasks are some of the benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes. The findings also disclosed that attitudinal beliefs, time factor, communication challenges and lack of capacity by parents of learners with disabilities to support activities which need finances impede parental involvement in the IEP processes. One implication is that some parents shall lack interest to participate in the development and implementation of IEP. This also retards initiatives to incorporate parents in the development and implementation of IEP. Another implication is that parents will lack interest to support learners with SEN that will compromise the achievement of the IEP set objectives. The study suggested that introduction of committees of parents for learners with SEN, good communication, provision of civic education, conducting meetings, and building the capacity of parents can promote involvement in IEP processes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CIEM	: Consortium on Inclusive Education in Malawi
DfES	: Department for Education Skills
EFA	: Education for All
FAWEMA	: Forum for African Women Educationalist in Malawi
IDEA	: Individuals with Disability Education Act
IDEIA	: Individuals with Education Improvement Act
IE	: Inclusive Education
MoEST	: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
IEP	: Individualised Education Plan
PTA	: Parent Teachers Association
SEN	: Special Educational Needs
SENCp	: Special Education Needs Code of Practice
SMC	: School Management Committee
SNE	: Special Needs Education
UNESCO	: United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an insight into the background of the study on perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in Individualised Education Plan for learners with special education needs in Malawi. It further presents the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study, limitations and abbreviations and acronyms. Finally, it defines terms used in the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.0 Description of Individualised Education Plan

Individualised Education Plan (IEP) is a written plan describing a special education programme and services required by a particular learner and are based on a thorough assessment of the learner's strengths and needs. It outlines the educational goals and services that are necessary to support the unique needs of a student with diverse needs (IDEA, 2004). It is a roadmap that provides educational support for students with diverse needs to achieve their academic and personal goals. Although, IEP is stated in the Malawi National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2017- 2021), specialist teachers in Malawi do not mostly develop it.

The IEP is developed by a team of professionals such as parents or guardians, specialist teachers, mainstream teachers, head teachers, students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and any relevant specialist. The plan is developed according to the student's specific needs, and may include accommodations, modifications, and specialised services, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy. The IEP is a key component of special educational services provided to students with SEN in order to address the unique needs of each student. The IEP outlines specific

goals, and determines the appropriate support services that each stakeholder needs to provide to students with SEN.

Individualised Education Plan (IEP) is an unavoidable element of education for children with special needs. It is a critical tool in the teaching, learning and assessment process of students with special educational needs and those that need additional support due to the type of disability they may have (IDEA, 2004; BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Cerovic, Jovanovic and Babic, 2016; Kartika, Suminar, Tairas and Hendriani, 2018). IEP is a term whose extent is big enough, not just as an individual teaching approach but several pedagogies employed to meet the needs of an individual learner. IEP is a picture of the student's condition such as strengths, weaknesses and learning needs, the learning map, along with the accommodation required by the individual student, monitoring and means of communicating and documenting student progress (Ferrari, 2015; Dempsey, 2014; Hebel and Persitz, 2014; Wilson, Lodato, Michaels and Margolis, 2005). Dempsey, (2012) emphasizes more on the aspect of individual goals in the IEP to meet individual needs of the learner with Special Education Needs (SEN). The document contains statements about a series of educational goals for individual learners with an aim of meeting their individual needs and contains a description of support services that will be obtained by learners to achieve the objectives of education.

1.1.1 History of Individualised Education Plan

Before 1960s, children with disabilities the world over were denied access to public education (BwalyaBwalya, 2014). There were several court cases filed by human rights activists who fought for the right to education for children with disabilities in the United States of America. In Mills versus Board of Education 1972 case, the Supreme Court ordered states to provide free and appropriate public education to all children with disabilities. The Supreme Court decision in this case paved way for the passage of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated IEPs for students with disabilities in 1975. With the passage of this landmark piece of legislation, schools were required to create Individualised Education Plans (IEP) that took into account the unique needs of each child with a disability.

Success stories of individualised education plan in teaching students with special educational needs have been internationally recorded in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (BwalyaBwalya, 2014).

The idea of tailoring education to individual students' needs emerged in the United States of America in 1960s. Sabino (2020) states that IEP was first introduced into the school system when the rights of learners with disabilities to attend public schools were legally recognised under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in America. At the time of introducing the Act, most students with disabilities were learning in segregated settings. Since then, the act has been changing names to suit the demands of persons with disabilities especially children to access education (Sabino, 2020). For example, the act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 with some notable changes to the original legislation which included regular class teachers as part of the IEP team. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012) parents were treated as full and equal members of the educational planning team for their children with disabilities. IEPs became more widespread, focusing on accommodations and modifications in 1980s (Museum of Disability History, 2020).

In the United Kingdom, the IEP was introduced in 1994 but put into Code of Practice in 1996 (Department for Education Skills, 1996) and reiterated in the revised Code of Practice in 2001 (DfES, 2001). According to the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families (2011) the IEP received explicit support through the establishment of Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (SENCP) in 2002 which was implemented under the authority of the Department for Education Skills. Contrary to the UK, studies show lack of direct piece of legislation guiding the development and implementation of IEP in Australia (Dempsey, 2012). The government of Australia used the Discrimination Act 1992 to safeguard the provision of educational services to students with disabilities. However, the act was silent on the nature of education and the adaptations needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In 2005, a set of education standards that supplemented the Discrimination Act made a clarification on what students with disabilities should expect from schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). While these standards addressed a range of aspects of the school experience, no standard made the development and implementation of individualised education plan for students with disabilities obligatory (Dempsey, 2012). According to the Commonwealth of Australia (2006) schools were

only required to consult the student or a caretaker to find out if the disability affects participation in learning experiences at school, so as to make reasonable adjustments to the student's education program. Dempsey (2012) argues that the Department of Education and Training in Australia recommended the use of IEP only when the student with disability is at risk of not progressing to the next stage of learning or if the student's learning needs require support that is different from peers.

Generally, IEP was mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) and reauthorized in 2004 (Mitchell, Morton and Horny, 2010). It has specific education programmes for learners with disabilities in kindergarten and primary schools. Several stakeholders that provide input include class teachers, parents, special education teachers, and learners themselves when appropriate. IEPs key elements to its provision of services to students with special educational needs include such information as learner's profile, the learner's current academic performance, assessment standards or goals, success criteria, teaching approach and methodology, related services the student anticipate to receive during transition, and how progress will be measured (Mitchell, Morton and Horny, 2010). IEPs are detailed, and designed to meet the unique needs of the student with special educational needs. Research has shown that the quality of IEP documentation is related to the quality and quantity of services received by students with disabilities (Test et al, 2004).

The genesis of IEP in Africa is not clear since literature on the use of IEP and parental involvement is scanty. Nevertheless, many African states have policies which highlight the need for parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP for students with special educational needs following the adoption of Inclusive Education (IE). For instance, the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland through the Ministry of Education and Training published its educational and training sector policy whose primary mandate is to provide access and relevant quality education to all learners at all levels of the education system taking into account all issues of efficacy, equity and special needs (Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). Furthermore, the country's Inclusive Education is concerned with the development and provision of quality education characterised by access and equity. It recognises that every learner is unique and should be treated equitably by the teachers and the system. IE aims to serve the needs of all learners and enable them to reach their full potential, and seeks to involve parents

and communities in this process (Ministry of Education and Training, 2011). The government of South Africa has also gone through a number of initiatives of ensuring implementation of Education for All (EFA) goals. Many of the initiatives promote parental involvement in supporting learners with SEN. It has South African School Act 84 of 199; Quality education for all; Overcoming Barriers to learning and development; Education White paper 6: Special Needs Education: building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education 2001); Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom and assessment policy statements (Department of Basic Education, 2011; National Development Plan, 2012).

A number of African countries such as Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia and Malawi established Special Needs Education Colleges where mainstream teachers are transformed into specialist teachers. Teachers in these colleges are trained on the development and use of IEP (BwalyaBwalya, 2014). According to Avoke (2002) Individualised education plan is being prepared and used effectively in Ghana, Kenya, Egypt, Namibia and South Africa. Contrary, BwalyaBwalya (2014) states that inspite of teacher education colleges providing training on the development and implementation of IEP, teachers in Zambia do not prepare and use it.

1.1.2 The introduction of Individualised Education Plan in Malawi

In Malawi, the introduction of IEP has been a significant step towards providing quality education to students with diverse needs. In 2010, the Malawi government introduced the Education Sector Wide Approach (ESWA) to improve the quality of education in the country. In the approach, government recognises the importance of Inclusive Education and the need to address the needs of learners with diverse needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2013).

In 2013, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) in Malawi developed a policy framework for Inclusive Education, which included the provision of IEPs for learners with disabilities. The policy framework aimed to ensure that all learners, including those with disabilities, had access to quality education. For instance, the Malawi Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2018-2022 has a clear focus on inclusive education and recognises the need to provide special needs education (SNE) to all learners with diverse needs (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2018). The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has

developed policies and guidelines to support the implementation of inclusive education, including the development of IEPs.

In 2019, the MoEST in partnership with UNICEF, conducted a pilot program to develop and implement IEPs in selected schools across the country. The pilot program aimed to develop an effective model for developing and implementing IEPs in Malawi and to train teachers on how to use IEPs to improve the educational outcomes for students with disabilities. The pilot program was successful, and the MoEST is now scaling up the implementation of IEPs across the country. As of 2021, the MoEST has trained over 3,000 teachers on how to develop and implement IEPs, and over 1,000 schools have been supported in developing IEPs for learners with disabilities (UNICEF Malawi, 2021). Currently, the development and implementation of IEP has rolled out across Malawi. All schools that have specialist teachers are supposed to have IEPs. The government has introduced several inclusive education training programmes through diploma courses offered by Montfort SNE College and Machinga Teacher Training College. Montfort SNE College also introduced a certificate programme called Blended Learning in Inclusive Education (BLINC) in 2017. It recruits 180 student teachers in the ratio of 50 males to 50 females. All the initiatives are meant to enhance capacity building in Inclusive Education which offers education to all learners including learners with special educational needs who require the use of IEPs.

The development of IEPs in Malawi has been supported by various international organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These organizations have provided technical assistance and training to teachers and education officials on how to develop and implement IEPs. However, the implementation of IEPs in Malawi continue facing challenges due to lack of resources and capacity. Many schools in Malawi lack the necessary resources and training to support learners with diverse needs, and teachers often struggle to implement IEPs due to lack of training and understanding of the concept. Despite these challenges, the development of IEPs in Malawi represents a significant step forward in promoting inclusive education and ensuring that learners with disabilities have access to quality education.

1.1.3 Parental involvement in Individualised Education Plan processes

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of parental involvement in the IEP process. Collaboration between parents and teachers is considered vital for the successful implementation of IEPs and improving outcomes for students with SEN (Kohler, and Feldman, 2010). Parental involvement in IEPs refers to active participation, communication, and collaboration between parents and teachers throughout the development, review, and implementation of the IEP. It includes parents' contributions to goal-setting, decision-making, and ongoing evaluation of their child's progress (BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Cerovic, Jovanovic and Babic, 2016; Kartika, Suminar and Hendriani, 2018).

Parental involvement is widely recognized as a crucial factor in the academic and social success of students, particularly those with special needs. Research suggests that when parents actively participate in their child's education, it leads to better academic outcomes, increased motivation, improved behavior, and enhanced self-esteem. In the context of IEPs, parental involvement is vital as parents possess unique insights into their child's strengths, weaknesses, and individual needs, which can inform the development of appropriate educational strategies. On the other hand, teachers play a pivotal role in implementing IEPs and fostering a collaborative relationship with parents (BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Kartika, Suminar, Tairas and Hendriani, 2018).

1.1.4 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Individualized Education Plan processes

Individualized Education Plan has a lot of benefits in supporting learners with special educational needs. To begin with, IEP is a tool for enabling teachers to make adaptations to lesson planning and the curriculum in order to account for the needs of individuals and to ensure they gain access to learning alongside their peers in Serbia (Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey, 2010). In addition, an IEP serves as a roadmap for teachers and parents to plan educational activities, monitor and evaluate the child's progress (Jones and Peterson-Ahmad, 2017). In this case the IEP outlines the service period, supplementary materials and related services that the team feels a learner needs in order to be successful. Furthermore, an IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel and learners to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities (Mitchell, Morton and

Horny, 2010). By meeting at least once a term, multiple parties can contribute their ideas on what would serve the learner best. At the same time, by having all the learners' information on one document, everyone stays on the same page and knows what everyone else is doing. This transparency helps with accountability and in monitoring the learner's progress. Again, IEP provides legal protection. Fish (2006) contends that having an IEP in place, gives a learner and parents certain rights such as right to free and appropriate public education; the right to all the service time written in the IEP and the right to any related services deemed necessary by the IEP team. Last, the IEP assist in previewing learner's special needs and allow teachers to plan for classroom accommodation, and modification, build in service time and learn what the learner needs prior to the school year. Therefore IEP is the cornerstone of quality education for each child with a disability.

Today, the IEP is utilized so that every learner with diverse needs has equal opportunity to receive the same education as every other learner. Increasingly, IEP has migrated to regular schools in inclusive education settings focusing on maintaining the specific learning needs, interest and aspirations of individual learners with special educational needs (Mitchell, Morton & Horny, 2010; Hebel and Persitz, 2014). In addition, IEP has been promoted as a tool for adaptation to lesson planning and the curriculum in order to take into account the needs of individuals and to ensure that they gain access to learning alongside their peers (Loreman, Deppeler, and Harvey, 2010). This is a shift away from a medical model approach to social model approach, which focuses on the child's deficiencies to a position where the teacher becomes responsible for planning and teaching so as to overcome barriers to learning (Ainscow and César, 2006).

Again, it encourages parental involvement in the education of their children with diverse needs. Parents with learners with diverse needs as members of the collaborative team are vital in the development and implementation of an IEP (Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu, 2010). Parents are the first teachers of a child before formal schooling. As children grow older, much of the parental role as educator is subsumed by professionals. Yet, parents often remain closely and understandably involved in the process. Parents are the custodians of the child's profile which is needed during IEP development. Research studies show a consistent relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (Gatchallan, 2014; Somers, 2014; Reyes, 2013;

Jeynes, 2005a). Parents with children with SEN play a vital role in assisting their children in many social and academic tasks. Parents support improves performance of the children both socially and academically. For example, a learner with visual impairment may have a problem in toileting and bathing which has been identified as an activity on the IEP. A parent will play a bigger role in those activities of daily living than the teacher hence attaining the intended outcome easily.

In addition, studies indicate that learners with special educational needs progress better when their parents are cordially involved in the development and implementation of IEP and other educational intervention processes (Spann, Kohler and Soenksen, 2003; Gatchallan, 2014; Somers, 2014). School-parent collaboration is necessary for the desired outcomes in a child's education in an inclusive education set-up where all learners receive educational services according to their diverse needs. It is more influential when specific SEN learners require IEP as one of the strategy to meet their needs (Levy, Kim, and Olive, 2006; Reyes, 2013; Gatchallan, 2014; Somers, 2014).

Parental involvement in the IEP processes fulfils IDEA Act and even Malawi National Strategy on Inclusive Education. The value of preparing and implementing IEP for learners with special educational needs is internationally accepted and underpinned by law in many countries including the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Botswana (National Council for Special Education, 2006). The Malawi National Strategy on Inclusive Education (2017- 2021, p.30), calls parents to contribute to IEP and support in the education of wards with diverse needs. In addition, Education Standard 13 of the National Education Standards for Primary and Secondary Schools, emphasises that teaching should meet the needs of all students including those with special educational needs by adapting teaching, and learning approaches which are prepared in advance and shown in IEP (MoEST, 2015). Again, Education Standard 19 dwells on partnership with parents and the community in order to involve parents in the school and academic activities of children with disabilities in the development and implementation of IEP (MoEST, 2015). Parents of children with disabilities and teachers play an important role in the development and implementation of IEP for the success of a child with special educational needs (Spann, Kohler, and Soenksen, 2003; Levy, Kim and Olive, 2006). However, the study on perceptions of teacher trainers and student teachers on ways of promoting

Inclusive Education practices through initial primary teacher education programme showed that many regular teachers lack knowledge in the development and implementation of IEP and on how to involve parents in the development of IEP (Mpakeni, 2019). It is against this background, which prompted the researcher to explore views of both parents and teachers simultaneously on the involvement of parents of children with disabilities in the development and implementation of IEP for learners with special educational needs in four selected primary schools in Blantyre Urban education district.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Overview of the national and international research findings on IEP indicate that different educational systems struggle with issues such as building up, accommodating meaningful IEPs, ensuring parents' participation and involvement, and meeting workload of activities planned on the IEP together with classroom work and paperwork requirements (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Huefner, 2000; Jovanović, 2013). For example, research on the dynamics of IEP meetings produced consistent findings that educators and administrators exert considerable control over the direction of developmental meetings of IEPs, while families are frequently passive participants (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder, 2000). This makes parents to simply become alienated from the IEP process. Other studies show that although the preparation, implementation and revision of the IEP is the responsibility of the team for additional learner support, parents rarely or never report for meetings on IEP (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Cerovic, Jovanovic and Babic, 2016; Jovanović, 2013).

Despite some research studies on parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs for learners with special educational needs, there is lack of comprehensive research that explores the perceptions of both parents and teachers regarding parental involvement in the IEP process. This knowledge gap hinders the understanding of the factors that contribute to or hinder effective collaboration between parents and teachers in the context of IEPs. Existing studies have predominantly focused on either parents' perspectives or teachers' perspectives separately, providing a fragmented understanding of the issue. This limited scope fails to capture the holistic dynamics and complexities involved in parental involvement in IEPs. Furthermore, the specific factors that impede parental involvement remain insufficiently explored, hindering the development of evidence-based strategies to promote effective collaboration between parents and

teachers. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research that examines the perceptions of both parents and teachers on parental involvement in the IEP process for learners with SEN. By addressing this gap in knowledge, the research aims to identify barriers and effective strategies for promoting parental involvement, ultimately enhancing the outcomes and experiences of learners with special educational needs. In light of the significance of parental involvement in the IEP process, understanding the perceptions of parents and teachers is crucial for developing inclusive and collaborative educational environments that maximize the potential of learners with special education needs. By exploring the perceptions, barriers, and potential benefits associated with parental involvement in IEPs, the study aims to provide valuable insights for improving collaboration between parents and teachers, ultimately leading to enhanced support and outcomes for learners with SEN. The researcher was therefore, prompted to inquire perceptions of both parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP processes for students with special education needs in four selected primary schools in Blantyre Urban Education district.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in the development and implementation of Individualised Education Plan (IEP) for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the four primary schools in Blantyre Urban Education district. By considering the significance of parental involvement in the IEP process, understanding the perceptions of parents and teachers is needed for good collaboration between teachers and parents that maximizes the potential of learners with special education needs. By exploring the perceptions, barriers, and potential benefits associated with parental involvement in IEPs, the study aims to provide valuable insights for improving collaboration between parents and teachers, ultimately leading to enhanced support and outcomes for learners with SEN

1.4 Research questions

The following research questions guided the research process:

1.4.1 Main Research Question

What are the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP for learners with special educational needs in four primary schools in Blantyre Urban Education district?

1.4.2 Sub-research Questions

1. What do parents know about IEP?
2. How do parents and teachers perceive the impact of increased parental involvement on the academic and behavioural outcomes of learners with SEN?
3. What are the perceived barriers and challenges faced by parents and teachers in fostering effective parental involvement in the IEP processes?
4. What strategies and recommendations can be proposed to enhance parental involvement in the IEP processes, based on the perceptions of parents and teachers?

1.5 Significance of the study

The study would contribute towards the body of literature regarding issues surrounding the involvement of parents in the development and implementation of IEP for learners with special educational needs. For example, it has presented ways of promoting the relationship between parents and teachers in supporting learners with special educational needs. The findings would further inform the policy makers in coming up with appropriate measures to ensure parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs and help in promoting the government agenda of ensuring quality education for all learners in Malawi. The findings would also inform education practitioners in the sense that teachers will be motivated to involve parents in the development and implementation of IEPs. Furthermore, the findings disclosed effective ways of ensuring parental participation in the development and implementation of IEP.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The study had some limitations in data collection as many parents of learners with SEN tend to hide some information due to fear of unknown. Some parents were illiterate hence it was hard to understand the concept of IEP. The study was limited to few primary schools with specialist

teachers who had at least few copies of IEPs as some schools had no IEPs. This has affected the generalisation of the results.

1.7 Definitions of key terms

Accommodation refers to special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and technological equipment that enable a student to learn and demonstrate learning, such as laptop, additional time for assessments, and priority seating in the classroom (MoE, 2004).

Inclusive education means that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include gifted and children with disabilities, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas or groups (The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, para 3).

Individualised education plan is a written plan describing a special education programme and services required by a particular learner and are based on a thorough assessment of the learner's strengths and needs. It is a mechanism which ensures careful planning and accountability and provides a document plan for the education of a particular learner (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

Parent is a person whom the learner with special educational needs lives with and looks after irrespective of what their relationship is with the child.

Perception refers to the process by which an individual interprets and organizes sensory information from their environment to create a meaningful representation of reality. It involves the selection, organization, and interpretation of sensory data, and can be influenced by various factors such as past experiences, expectations, emotions, and cultural background. In essence, perception is the way people make sense of the world around us, and it can differ from person to person. It's a complex process that involves both conscious and unconscious elements, and can be affected by various biases and assumptions.

Learner means a female or a male of any age pursuing education in a formal or non-formal or informal, public or private education setting (Swanson and Hoskyn, 2019).

Learner with disability refers to an individual who has a physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory impairment that affects his/her ability to learn or access education and may require adapted curriculum or instructional strategies and assistive technology or tools. For example, Learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia), Physical disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury), Sensory impairments (e.g., visual, hearing, or speech disabilities), Mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression), Chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, epilepsy) (Swanson and Hoskyn, 2019)

Learner with diverse needs refers to an individual who requires unique support, accommodations, or modifications to access education and reach their full potential. The term "diverse needs" acknowledges that each learner has unique requirements, and that education should be tailored to meet these individual needs, promoting inclusivity, equity, and excellence for all. Examples include learners with disability, learners with socio-economic or socio-cultural differences and those learners who are refugees or asylum seekers.

Learner with Special Education (SEN) refers to an individual who requires additional support or accommodations to access education due to a disability or diverse needs. Learners with SEN may require Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), adapted curriculum or instructional strategies or Assistive technology or specialized equipment. The term "Special Education Needs" emphasizes the requirement for tailored support to ensure learners receive equal access to education and opportunities for growth (Bateman and Herr, 2017).

Modification is defined as changes that are made to the grade-level expectation in order to meet a student's learning needs, such as decreasing the number or complexity of grade-level expectations or reverting to a previous grade-level expectation (MoE, 2004).

Special educational needs is an umbrella term describing a wide range of difficulties, which may impair children's ability to achieve during their time in school (Stakes and Hornby, 2001)

Special Needs Education are instructions and services designed to meet the unique learning needs of children who have sensory impairments, cognitive difficulties, social emotional difficulties, physical and health impairments (Vaughn and Bos, 2020).

Specialist Teacher is a teacher with expertise in working with children with special educational needs. These teachers are sometimes referred to as special needs teachers or itinerant teachers because sometimes they move from school to school to support children with disabilities. In this study, a specialist teacher has a certificate or diploma and knowledge of teaching students with SEN.

Regular Classroom Teacher is a professional teacher who has pursued a regular teacher certificate and has minimal or no knowledge of inclusive education in their initial teacher education. They are teachers who have not trained on how to handle learners with SEN.

1.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter has provided the importance of IEP in accommodating and adapting different strategies in meeting the needs of diverse learners. IEP was first legally introduced in 1975 in America and then spread all over. However, educational systems are struggling to develop compliant and meaningful IEP and ensure parent's participation. The next chapter is a review of literature related to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

The chapter presents a review of literature related to the study, which explored the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP development and implementation. The chapter is guided by the research questions. It has first discussed parental awareness of IEP and their involvement, benefits of parental involvement in the IEP process, barriers to parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP. Finally, it reviews literature on ways of promoting parental involvement in the IEP process and the theoretical framework which guided the study.

2.2 Parents awareness of IEP and their involvement

The use of IEP started in 1970s in United States of America and Europe (IDEA, 1975). It has evolved into many aspects in an attempt to improve some areas such as involvement of parents of learners with special educational needs. The study of Watts and Obiakor (2017) which took place in the United States of America focused on African American parental involvement, stated that parents of learners with SEN are mandated to be aware and join other relevant stakeholders in the development and implementation of IEPs. Lake and Billingsley (2017) on their study on Parental Perceptions of IEP Meetings, found that parents reported feeling uncertain and unprepared for IEP meetings and valued collaboration with teachers but felt their input was often ignored.

In addition, the study on Parental Involvement in IEP Development by Henderson and Mapp (2002), found that teachers' attitudes and practices influenced parental involvement. Another study conducted in North Korea, on Parental Perceptions of IEP Effectiveness" by Shin and Koh (2017), parents reported mixed satisfaction with IEP effectiveness, valued IEP goals but felt they were often unrealistic and desired more progress monitoring and communication with teachers.

The thrust for parental involvement in multidisciplinary teams in the development and implementation of IEP originated from the legal and ethical obligations (Poponi, 2009). Prior to the 1970's, models of special education intervention tended to stress the role of experts and diminish that of parents (Hubbard and Adams, 2002). Parents were often expected to accept passively the decisions made by professionals. The models alienate parents from actively participating in the IEP processes. Following increased political advocacy by parents, the interest of professionals in parents' rights, and a number of related court rulings, policies shifted to mandate parental participation in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for special education students (Fish, 2006).

Parental inclusion on multidisciplinary IEP teams became a civil right in the United States of America and United Kingdom and a few other countries (Poponi, 2009). Studies show that many parents in the United States of America and United Kingdom are aware of IEP but partially participate in IEP meetings due to other hindrances which parents experience (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Childre and Chambers, 2005; Garriott, Wandry and Snyder, 2000; Huefner, 2000; Jovanović, 2013). Low participation of parents of learners with SEN in developed countries raises a revolution in finding better ways of improving and promoting parental involvement during IEP meetings (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Childre and Chambers, 2005; Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder, 2000; Huefner, 2000; Jovanović, 2013).

In addition to fulfilling legal requirements, there is an ethical obligation to include parents on collaborative teams that is recognised by educational professionals (IDEIA, 2004). Many countries have inclusive education policies, which call parents to participate in decision making for their children with disabilities during the development of IEPs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) was specifically designed to recognise the importance of parental involvement in IEP processes, and mandated that schools take measures to include parents in the special education process. In addition to IDEIA (2004), the Republic of South Sudan National Inclusive Education Policy (2014) stipulates clearly the need for parents' participation in decision-making on their children with Special Educational Needs in the development and implementation of IEP.

Research studies on parental involvement indicated however, that although IEP is the foundation for the provision of special education services and perhaps the most pivotal point in the provision of services, parental perceptions of IEP meetings are not always positive (Vermeire, 2002; Phillippo and Stone, 2006; Poponi, 2009; Epstein, 2010; Elser, 2017). Many studies conducted in Western countries show that parents are aware of IEP but are passive participants during meetings (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Childre and Chambers, 2005; Garriott, Wandry and Snyder, 2000; Huefner, 2000; Jovanović, 2013). Although parents are expected to be involved in the development and implementation of action plans for their children, they do not necessarily maintain ongoing team membership. (Vermeire, 2002; Phillippo & Stone, 2006; Poponi, 2009; Epstein, 2010; Elser, 2017).

The reviewed literature on some research studies on parental involvement in IEP processes in some African countries revealed that many parents are not aware of an IEP and are not invited to attend IEP meetings. This is quite different from what is happening in Western countries where parents are aware but partially involved in IEP meetings (BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Mpakeni, 2019). For example, studies conducted in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana on parental involvement in IEP development and implementation, showed that very few teachers, involve parents in the development of IEP (Prinsloo, 2001; BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Mpakeni, 2019). The studies highlighted little knowledge to parents of children with SEN in the awareness of IEP. This interpreted that many parents are not aware of IEP and are not directly involved in the development and implementation of IEPs. This might be due to lack of legal aspects attached to the use of IEPs in schools (Ibid). In addition, teachers lack knowledge and skills in developing an effective and efficient IEP for every learner with different disabilities (Prinsloo, 2001; Mpakeni, 2019). Many teachers in Africa are not trained on how to develop and use IEP because they did not attend teacher education schools for special needs (SNE), which are mostly inadequate. For example, Malawi has one such school; Montfort SNE College which recruits 120 student teachers in every three years. Inadequate colleges to train teachers in special education retards the capacity building in the enhancement of IEPs in educational institutions. However, the Malawi national strategy paper on inclusive education (2017-2021) emphasises on parents and community contribution to IEPs, support learning of their wards and help them with other school tasks such as homework. The initiatives of promoting the education for all including

children with SEN is sound and relevant on paper but faces challenges during implementation in schools.

From the reviewed literature, parents in western countries are aware of IEP processes although they do not fully patronise the IEP meetings on one hand. On the other hand, most countries in Africa, parents are not aware of the IEP processes and not directly involved in the IEP meetings. This means they do not participate in the development and implementation of IEP processes. In the case of Malawi, there is limited research on parental awareness and involvement on IEP processes though it is stipulated in the Inclusive Strategy paper. Most studies conducted in Africa did not specifically explore the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP processes. This leaves a gap of parents and teachers' perceptions on the knowledge and skills surrounding the development and implementation of IEP.

2.3 Benefits of parental involvement in individualised education plan process

The benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes have been extensively researched and documented. Literature reviewed indicated several benefits of parental involvement towards the academic performance of learners with SEN who use IEP as an intervention to their diverse needs (Erdoğan and Demirkasımoğlu, 2010).

Parental involvement in IEP processes is positively correlated with improved academic achievement and progress for students with disabilities as revealed by the studies of Henderson and Mapp, (2000) and Reschly and Christenson (2012). It is argued that parents with knowledge of activities drawn on the IEP provide enough support to their wards while those not involved in the development and implementation of IEPs shun from supporting their children (Martin, Van Dyke, and Ghosh, 2015). This is so because progress takes long to be recognised hence the neglect of some learners with SEN. This means that academic achievement of a learner with SEN depends on the learner, teacher, parents and other relevant stakeholders. This also applies to parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP to support learners with SEN. Involvement of parents therefore, provides support in the implementation of planned activities on the IEP through monitoring, supervising and teaching.

Collaborative IEP processes foster stronger relationships between parents and teachers, leading to more effective communication and support for students (Reschly and Christenson, 2012).

Many studies on parental involvement in the education of their children, also show that collaboration and partnership with guardians and teachers benefit learners with SEN across ages and performance levels (Resch, Mireles, Benz, Grenwelge, Peterson, and Zhang, 2010). Collaboration is defined as ‘the style professionals select to employ based on mutual goals; shared responsibility for key divisions; shared accountability for outcomes; shared resources; and the development of trust, respect, and sense of community participation’ (Cook and Friend, 2010 p.3). Parents of learners with SEN share the child’s profile with other stakeholders, which helps in developing instructional areas in IEP (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014; Huefner, 2000; Jovanović, 2013). For instance, parents being custodians of information of their children provide the birth history, health history, growth and development pattern of the child with SEN. The information helps in developing behavioural objectives to attain, and intended outcomes planned on the IEP. Other stakeholders such as teachers effectively set appropriate goals pertaining to the child profile in order to meet the needs of the child. It can be said that IEP has services which are shared between parents and teachers as such both teachers and parents play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of IEP for a child with SEN. For example, parents conduct activities such as mobility training, laundering and shopping skills to learners with visual impairment effectively and efficiently. Parent/teacher collaboration in the development and implementation of IEP is vital because parents are the primary advocates for their children regarding what services and support are suitable to address their specific needs (Lo, 2012; McCoach, 2010). Involvement of parents with learners with SEN therefore, contribute in the decision making of what they want about their children.

In addition, parents who are involved in IEP processes report higher satisfaction with their child's education and the IEP process itself (Lake and Billingsley, 2017). Furthermore, some research studies indicate that parental involvement is the greatest predictor of growth, social well-being and academic achievement for learners with SEN (Colarusso and O’Rourke, 2007; Resch, Mireles, Benz, Grenwelge, Peterson and Zhang, 2010). It is reported that parental involvement in IEP processes increases learners’ academic achievement, social and moral development and self-esteem while decreasing absenteeism, low self-esteem and behavioral problems (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002a; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002b; Michael, Dittus, and Epstein, 2007; Sezer and İşgör, 2010; Sezer, 2016). Many children with SEN have low self-esteem and low confidence in academic achievements. Parental involvement encourages those learners with low self-esteem to

change their mindset and have confidence in their education through motivating, prompting and persuading them in academic tasks. Knowledge of tasks outlined on IEP by parents will assist to present them to their children with SEN in a good approach which will motivate the learners to perform the tasks effectively and efficiently.

Parental involvement in IEP processes empowers parents to become more effective advocates for their child's needs and rights (Shin and Koh, 2017). Parents strive in supporting their learners with SEN fully. Literature also revealed that parental involvement assist teachers to ease their workload as parents accept to play the roles effectively in supporting their children with other skills planned on the IEP (Patton, 2015). Teachers only support the preparation of daily teaching plans, assessment and monitoring of students achievement of learning objectives as well as improving communication and team-work effectively. Parents understand the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, the present level of ability, and interests of the child. This means, parents' expectation becomes more appropriate, since it is based on the IEP information. Parents therefore, gain knowledge about the modification of the child's behavior and can monitor the child's development and advocate for it (Sahim, 2012).

A study by Epstein (2005b) emphasises that parental involvement is an essential component of school improvement, owing to its link with the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other aspects of school management. One can argue that a good curriculum meets the expectations of the society hence involvement of parents helps in developing a curriculum which supports learners with SEN. However, the curriculum, which does not include IEP in its teaching approaches will fail to address the needs of diverse learners. According to Knisely (2011) parents who are involved in the development of an IEP easily implement their tasks planned such as assisting their children's homework, contacting a teacher whenever there is a need, and watching every single move a child makes. This means that parental involvement may include: parent-learner communication, parental support on social economic issues, moral and academics, parent-school communication initiated at a school level and the teacher level as well as parents checking learner's homework. Nevertheless, the level of parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP is a significant concern among educators and other stakeholders, because there is a strong relationship established between parental involvement and learner's success (Knisely, 2011). The establishment of strong bond between parents and teachers

creates a conducive environment in supporting learners with SEN to achieve the set objectives on the IEP.

Furthermore, Elliott, Kratochwill and McKevitt (2001) explained that IEP can meet the needs of students with SEN only if parents and other relevant professionals provide the necessary information that lead to proper assessment on student's condition. Gartin and Murdick (2004) add that Individualised Education Plan (IEP) in the United States of America is an essential component in the provision of appropriate educational services to learners with special needs, as the IEP guides the implementation of the education service. The conditions of students with special needs determine the type of services the IEP can provide. Normally students with SEN learn according to individual's ability and speed in order to master the targeted material.

There is limited literature on the benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes in Africa and Malawi but there are some benefits and findings from a few available studies. A study in Zimbabwe by Mugisha, (2017) found that parental involvement in IEP processes can help increase access to education for children with disabilities in Africa. Again, two studies in Malawi by Kachale, (2017) and Mwambene, (2018) found that parental involvement in IEP processes can lead to better academic performance for students with disabilities in Malawi; can leads to more comprehensive and effective IEPs in Malawian schools leading to better IEP quality (Kachale, 2017), and empowers parents to advocate for their child's needs and rights in Malawian schools and foster stronger relationships between parents and teachers in African schools (Mwambene, 2018). The Africa and Malawi studies on benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes are in line with findings of Western studies on the same issue. However, the research studies were mainly focusing on parents with learners with disability, excluding other learners' diverse needs such as learners from ultra poor families and vulnerable children which has been captured in this study.

So, the reviewed literature has shown a consistent relationship between parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP and academic achievement of learners with special educational needs. Though parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP has registered numerous benefits, there are some flaws pertaining to the parental involvement which are elaborated in the subsequent sub-topic 2.3.

2.4 Barriers to parental involvement in individualized education plan process

Despite making IEPs legal policy documents in a number of countries, studies have revealed some barriers which hinder parental participation in the IEP processes. Malawi as a country which signed the Convention of rights for children with disabilities as well as the Salamanca statement of 1998, which echo Education for all (EFA) goals, need to be explored on what are the perceived challenges faced by parents and teachers in fostering effective parental involvement in the IEP processes. Several barriers to effective parental participation in IEP meetings have been identified.

A study by Lake and Billingsley (2017) on Parental Perceptions of IEP Meetings, highlighted that schools and parents often see the child with different lenses. For example, while teachers may identify some abilities in the child with SEN and draw a plan for the child to attain the identified potential, parents may not necessarily see the teachers' vision on the child. For instance, parents may see the child as a failure in all endeavors and this thwarts the teacher's efforts. It can be argued that discrepant views of the child lead to different ideas of the skills, areas of interest or services that might support the child's learning (Lake and Billingsley, 2017). However, the researcher did not highlight the source of stakeholders' discrepant views on children with SEN when developing IEPs. A study by Murzyn and Hughes (2015) argue that parents become uncertain with the services for the child who qualifies for IEP intervention. This means that participation of parents in IEP processes is often limited due to differences as to who possesses a better understanding of what is appropriate. This misunderstanding is detrimental to the performance of the learner with SEN since parents' opposition to activities planned on the IEP discourage teachers from performing their work professionally. However, parents' source of opposition is not clearly stated, probably it might be due to teachers' lack of clarity of ideas to parents.

Literature also states that disparate knowledge around special education services between school personnel and families of learners with SEN bars parental involvement in IEP processes. Parents often see teachers as experts in their field and do not feel comfortable to participate actively in IEP meetings on one hand (Dabkowski, 2004; Saleh, 2014). On the other hand, teachers regard parents as people who are blank on issues concerning their children and may not necessarily need their input, rendering parents passive during IEP meetings. Muelander & Buckley (2014)

argued that parents fear that their ideas are not listened to and given serious consideration during IEP meetings. It is obvious that devaluing parental feelings is a significant barrier to collaboration during IEP meetings. Saleh (2014) described the barrier as power imbalance between teachers and parents of learners with SEN. It is a situation in which teachers have the ability to make final decisions regarding the IEP document as long as they have listened to the parent. It can be argued that this is not authentic partnership but only sets the stage for ceremonial parental participation. When the teacher develops the IEP alone, parents feel isolated and devalued on their children education, which in turn retards the spirit of team work. However, the researcher did not show empirical evidence on whether parents have disparate knowledge on supporting their children with SEN or teachers are not clear on their explanation of activities to be done to children with SEN.

Time and financial resources are other constraints to parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP. Schools complain that teaching learners with SEN is costly, time consuming and require too much of staff (Lake and Billingsley, 2000). The desire for schools to protect resources and families wanting the best possible services for their children put schools and families at odds. As such, some schools choose not to involve parents in IEP processes while parents who feel that the needs for their children are not valued, decide to cost share on the resources needed to relieve the burden of the schools.

Lack of trust is another serious impediment to true parental participation in the IEP process. If parents do not trust that school personnel are acting in the best interest of their child, they will question suggestions made by individuals in the school system and have lower expectations for positive outcomes (Lake and Billingsley, 2017). Transparency and accountability when dealing with the society is vital as it brings trust to the people you are working with. Parents of learners with SEN who require the use of IEP demand accountability and transparency when dealing with their children. However, there is a need to investigate perceived ideas which may strengthen trust between teachers and parents in the development and implementation of IEPs.

Literature has also identified communication as a challenge that can create significant barriers to parental involvement during the IEP process (Tracy, 2007; Fish, 2008). It is reported that effective communication between teachers and parents of learners with SEN is extremely critical as it brings smooth transactions in attaining IEP objectives. Communication during an IEP

meeting is somehow difficult for all participants to negotiate identities, make judgments about others, and work to influence others' ideas and opinions during interactions (Wilson, 2007). Conflict can arise as time, money and materials are all being negotiated between teachers and parents during such meetings (Lake and Billingsley, 2000). It is important that careful use of speech must be enacted to ensure that parents and teachers feel their role in IEP meetings is being validated. Pavitt (2007) states that communication can be problematic between individuals but increases with the entire IEP team. It is imperative that parents must understand the systems that exist within the school in order to adapt to the structures the school personnel have established (Williams, Sanchez and Hunnell, 2011). Studies show that understanding how systems work have an impact in communication and collaboration (Stoner, Bock, Thompson, Angell, Heyl, and Crowley, 2005). For example, Fish (2006); Childre & Chambers (2005) report that parents feel that participation in the IEP process leave them confused because they are treated as passive receivers of information whose primary role was to answer questions. Parents also report that teachers regard them as having limited power in decision-making, lack sufficient opportunity to fully participate in their child's education, and feel alienated when the IEP team emphasizes student needs rather than strengths (Resch, Mireles, Benz, Grenwelge, Peterson, and Zhang, 2010). As a result, parents may feel anxious when attending IEP meetings (McNulty, Prosser, and Moody, 2010). Therefore, while it is vital that teachers communicate with parents throughout the entire school year, meetings in which their child's IEP is designed and reviewed, offer parents crucial opportunities to provide direct suggestions and input that could positively impact their child's education.

Challenges that parents of learners with SEN face in fostering effective parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs, retard progress in attaining set goals of the IEP. Further investigations are required to establish the root of the factors that hinder parental involvement in IEP processes and propose strategies and recommendations to enhance parental involvement.

2.5 Ways of promoting parental involvement in individualized education plan

Enhancing parental involvement in Individualised Education Plan process is crucial for providing collaborative and effective instructions for learners with special educational needs. Although there are so many barriers to parental involvement, studies have suggested ways of

promoting the relationship between teachers and parents of learners with SEN. In order to form a true partnership, certain studies have been dedicated to offering advice to both parents and teachers on how to improve their relationship.

In a study conducted by Diliberto & Brewer (2017) key to successful parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP is found to be open communication. The researchers offer tips on how to maintain open communication from the beginning and communicate with parents freely. It is argued that establishing open and regular lines of communication between parents and teachers, foster a partnership built on trust and mutual respect. This encourages collaborative decision-making by involving parents in discussions, goal-setting, and problem-solving during the IEP process (Epstein, 2010). This therefore means that open communication cultivate a collaborative partnership. However, open communication to parents of children with SEN has to be further explored on its merits and demerits. Again, Diliberto & Brewer (2017) suggest an open door policy that encourage parents to visit the school and participate in classroom activities and even field trips. This will not only allow the parents to be involved in the development of the IEP, but also observe its implementation on their child. This means that if they see something is not working for the child, it can be discussed during future meetings. However, allowing parents to observe classroom activities has to be further examined to find out how best it can be done since other learners with SEN may cling to their parents once they see them.

A more recent initiative to improve parent-teacher relationships is the introduction of parent education and training programs for children with SEN. Reio and Fornes (2016) recognise that after the diagnosis of a child's special education needs, not only does the classroom teacher need to adapt the suitable teaching strategies, parents must also learn how best to optimize the child's learning and development. It is argued that participation in parent education programs is an integral part of parenting a child with special needs as it provides information needed to moderate stress and frustration. Parent education programs are not meant to tell parents how to raise children, rather to assist parents in coping with the stress of having a child with a learning disability and help maintain the consistency of the IEP in a home setting. Parent education provides the parents with specific knowledge and systematic activities with the goal of promoting the development and competence of the child. Parents can still feel confident in

working with the child at home, such as on homework and other school activities. This makes parents feel a sense of empowerment, which helps to build a collaborative and meaningful relationship with teachers. No longer will parents be passive listeners during IEP meetings, but take an active role and provide information on how interventions are working into family routines (Reio and Fornes 2016).

An investigation of parental perceptions on what schools could do to improve the IEP process reveals a need to make the IEP meetings more democratic for parents to feel being equal contributors (Fish, 2006). The study states that teachers should be open about placement, discipline, and instruction by being friendly, valuing and listening to parental input. It is necessary for teachers to be flexible and more willing to adjust to student needs, and educate parents about the IEP process. In a follow-up study, Fish (2008) concluded that parents felt that teachers can improve the IEP process by allowing sufficient time for the meetings, creating a welcoming environment, encouraging parents to bring an advocate familiar with the IEP process. In addition, using common terms instead of jargon to lessen confusion, refraining from completing IEPs before parental input, involving parents in writing the goals and objectives, and providing parents with a copy of the IEP objectives prior to the meeting to allow time for review. It is important for teachers to offer comprehensive and understandable information about the IEP process, including rights, procedures, and terminology, to empower parents in understanding and participating effectively. Teachers may provide translations and accommodations for parents with limited IEP terminologies or those who require alternative formats to access information. Develop strategies to bridge cultural gaps and address language barriers, ensuring effective communication and collaboration with parents from diverse cultural backgrounds (Harry and Klingner, 2006).

A study by Fish (2008) emphasises on applying strategies that promote parental involvement through proper communication by notifying parents the agendas in advance. Simon (2006) states that providing IEP agendas in advance, prompts parents to think about issues that will be discussed at the IEP meeting, to enhance parents' sense of ownership and foster increased communication both during and after the meeting. It engages parents in decision-making as parents get fully prepared and actively get involved in decision-making related to the child's educational goals, accommodations, and services. This therefore, provides opportunities for

parents to contribute their insights, preferences, and aspirations for their child's education during IEP meetings and discussions (National Council on Disability, 2002).

Literature further notes that teachers must avoid generalisations and characterisations that insinuate a child being defined by his or her disabilities (Esquivel, Ryan and Bonner (2008). The study urges education personnel to share knowledge of the child as an individual with unique interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Teachers should also offer ongoing support and guidance to parents throughout the IEP process, ensuring they feel equipped and confident to actively contribute.

By employing the discussed strategies, schools and teachers can foster meaningful parental involvement in the IEP process, leading to more effective and individualised educational plans for learners with SEN. However, the discussed approaches need to be investigated further in Malawian context if they can promote parental involvement and if ideal to parents of learners with SEN in Malawi.

2.6 Theoretical framework

The study was guided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997, 2005) Motivation for parental involvement model which was developed to understand the factors that influence parental involvement in children's education. This review of constructs focused on three sources of parents' motivations for involvement, which include parents' motivational beliefs, parents' perceptions of invitations to involvement, and parents' life-context variables (Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, 2005).

The first source is parents' motivational beliefs relevant to involvement. The model suggests that parents' involvement is encouraged by two belief systems: role construction of involvement and a sense of efficacy for helping their child learn and be academically successful. In parental role construction, the role activity for involvement incorporates parents' beliefs on what they should do in relation to their children's school (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Parents' belief about child rearing, child development and appropriate home support roles in children's education influence role construction. Parental role construction also grows from parents' experiences with individuals and groups related to schooling and are subject to social influence over time (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). The power of role

construction influences and shapes parental involvement (Chrispeels and Rivero, 2001; Drummond and Stipek, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents who hold an active role construction are more involved in their children's education than parents who hold less active role beliefs (Deslandes and Bertrand, 2005; Gutman and McLoyd, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Sheldon, 2002). Another parent's motivational belief relevant to involvement according to the model is parental self-efficacy for helping the children to succeed in schools. Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes. It is an important factor in shaping the goals an individual chooses to pursue and the level of persistence in working toward those goals. Applied to parental involvement in IEP, self-efficacy theory suggests that parents make involvement decisions based on the outcomes that likely follow their involvement in activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Self-efficacy is therefore, socially constructed and influenced by personal experience of success in parental involvement.

The second source of motivation for parental involvement according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model is parents' perceptions of invitation to involvement which include invitations from the school, teachers and children. Invitations are manifest, for example, in the creation of a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere, and practices that ensure parents are well informed about learners' progress, school requirements and school events. They are also reflected in school practices that convey respect for responsiveness to parental questions and suggestions. Studies indicate that positive school invitations that are welcoming and trustworthy in supporting parental involvement are vital (Lopez, Sanchez and Halmiton, 2000; Simon, 2004; Soodak and Erwin, 2000). In addition, specific teacher invitations also act as a motivator to parental involvement (Kohl, Lengua and McMahon, 2000; Simon, 2004). Teacher invitations are therefore, influential because they underscore the teacher's valuing of parent contributions to learner's academic success.

The last source of motivation for parental involvement is personal life context variables. This influences parents' perceptions of the forms and timing of involvement that seem feasible, including parents' skills and knowledge for involvement, and time and energy for involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Parents' perceptions of personal skills and knowledge shape their ideas about the involvement activities they might undertake (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Skills and knowledge are combined in the model because they form a set of personal

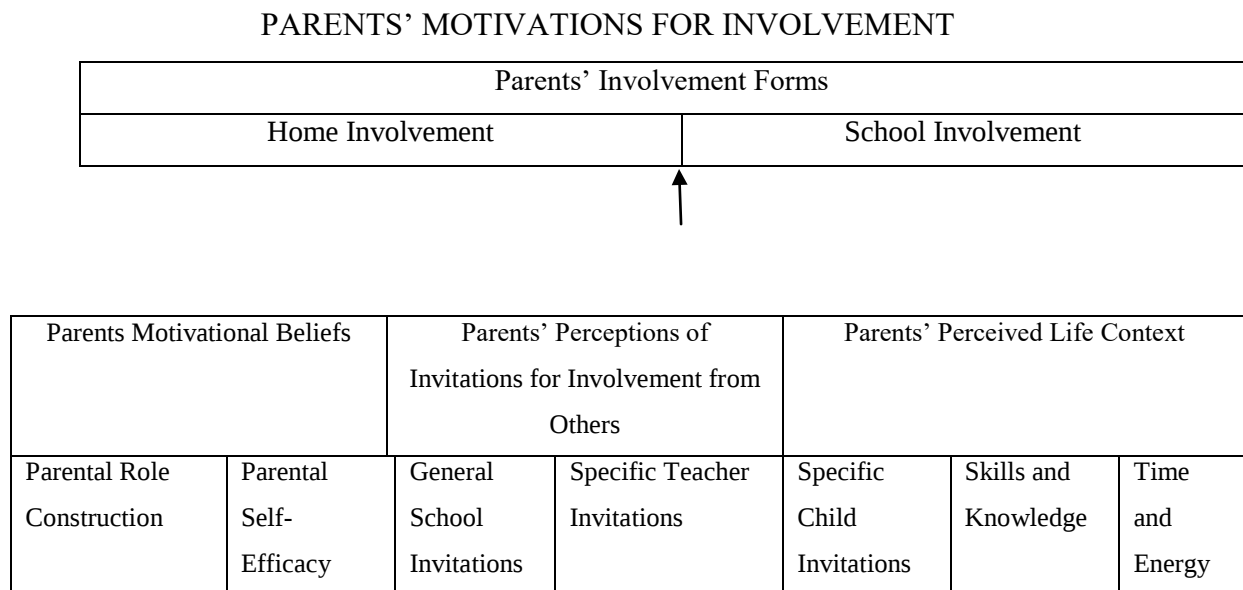
sources that theoretically impact a parent's decisions about varied involvement opportunities in a similar manner. For example, a parent who feels more knowledgeable in Mathematics than in Social and Developmental Studies may be more willing to assist with Mathematics homework; a parent who feels comfortable and effective in public speaking may be more likely than a parent who does not believe he or she has such skills to agree to talk about his or her occupation in front of a class of students. Although skills and knowledge are related to self-efficacy for involvement, they constitute a theoretically and pragmatically distinct construct; individuals with the same level of skills and knowledge may perform differently given variations in personal efficacy beliefs about what one can do with that set of skills and knowledge. Inclusion of skills and knowledge in the model suggests that parents are motivated to engage in involvement activities if they believe they have skills and knowledge that will be helpful in specific domains of involvement activity (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Furthermore, parents' thinking about involvement is also influenced by their perceptions of other demands on their time and energy, particularly in relation to other family responsibilities and varied work responsibilities or constraints (Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green and Walker, 2007). For example, parents whose employment is relatively demanding and inflexible tend to be less involved in the development of IEP than parents whose jobs or life circumstances are more flexible and parents with multiple child-care or extended family responsibilities may also be less involved in IEP particularly in school-based activities.

Precisely, the Hoover-Dempsey model (2005) explains how parents' perceptions of their role in their child's education are developed. The model proposes that parents' perceptions are shaped by a number of factors: parental beliefs about their ability to influence their child's learning and educational outcomes; parental efficacy in their ability to help their child learn and succeed academically; explicit and implicit invitations to parents to participate in their child's education; parents' personal circumstances, such as work schedule, family dynamics, and socioeconomic status, that affect their ability to participate; and the school's culture, policies, and practices that support or hinder parental involvement.

The factors interact and influence one another, shaping parents' perceptions of their role and responsibilities in their child's education. The model suggests that parents are more likely to be involved when they: believe they can make a difference, feel confident in their ability to help,

receive invitations to participate, have a supportive life context, encounter welcoming school norms and practices. Conversely, negative experiences or perceptions in any of these areas can lead to decreased parental involvement.

Table 1: The first level of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s, (2005) revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process



Overall, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model provides a useful framework for understanding the process of parental involvement in children's education and can inform the development of effective interventions aimed at promoting parental involvement. The model provides a powerful theoretical framework to look at specific predictors of parental involvement. The model has been used in the research to understand the factors that promote or hinder parental involvement in children's education. It has also been used to inform the development of interventions aimed at promoting parental involvement, such as school-based programs and parent-teacher communication strategies (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

The model was chosen to guide the research because it unfolds factors that influence parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP to foster children's education which

the research wants to explore. Therefore, the study explored views of parents and teachers on parental involvement in development and implementation of IEP from the perspectives of parents of children with special education needs. The study specifically seeks to understand experiences of parental involvement in IEP, parents' roles, and partnerships between parents and teachers as environment that influences the learner's achievement in different aspect such as academic or vocational skills. It also focused on parental motivations to influence their involvement in the development and implementation of individualised education plan.

2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview on the parental awareness of IEP in some countries. It has highlighted the importance of parental involvement in the IEP process as they provide important information regarding their children and assist in its implementation. Further, the chapter has included barriers of parental involvement in the IEP process. Some parents feel to have limited power in decision-making. Thereafter, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model of parental involvement was discussed in the theoretical framework. There is a gap in literature on parental involvement in IEP development and implementation. The following chapter is about research design and methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

With an intention to achieve the purpose of the study which is to explore the perceptions of parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP on children with SEN in Blantyre Urban Education District, this chapter discusses the following aspects: the research paradigm that informs the study, research design, methodology, sampling techniques, methods used to collect data and how data was analysed. In addition it explains ethical consideration and trustworthiness issues.

3.2 Research Paradigm

The study employed a constructivist paradigm. Basit (2010) contends that this requires an in-depth understanding of human perceptions and behaviour of a group of participants. The basic assumption guiding the constructivist paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process and that researchers attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000; Merriam, 2014). The other basic belief of constructivism is that there is a balanced representation of views of respondents or participants and interactive link between researcher and participants (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this case, the researcher got views of various stakeholders, namely head teachers, regular class teachers, specialist teachers and parents with children with special education needs. An interactive link between the participants and the researcher was done through focus group discussion and interviews. Constructive researchers however, reject the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known, therefore, the researcher's goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge.

3.3 Research design

This study used a phenomenological research design. The design is opted for because the research focuses on multiple stakeholders' views and experiences. Again, the design is selected in order to understand views of parents and teachers on parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP in detail. Phenomenology is a theoretical view point which believes that individual behaviour is determined by the experience gained out of one's direct interaction with the situation or event being investigated (Creswell, 2014; Johnson and Christensen, 2014). It rules out any kind of objective external reality. During interaction with various events, human beings interpret them and attach meanings to different actions or ideas, thereafter construct new experiences (Wertz, 2005; Merriam, 2014). Therefore, the researcher develops an empathic understanding of the process of interpretation among individuals in order to reproduce opinions, motives and feelings that were behind the action of respondents.

Phenomenology is also described as a philosophical interpretive qualitative approach which seeks to explore personal experience perceived by participants (Wertz, 2005). Phenomenological research design is therefore a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about the event. A phenomenological approach relates to the nature of inquiry to search for truth and understanding from a person experiencing certain things that occur in their everyday world (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). In other words, it is an inside approach to be used by a researcher to gain information from the lived experience of a person in a particular phenomenon under study (Denscombe, 2007; Donmoyer, 2006). Luttrell (2010) contends that a phenomenological approach is used for co-operative researcher-participant relationships such as a focus group discussion. Through this, the researcher intrudes into a participant's world to access information from their lived experience, in order to clarify individuals' situations in everyday life (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003).

The study specifically used interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), IPA is interested in how particular people in particular context make meaning and interprets their experiences. Different people might experience phenomena differently. IPA is interested in research participants' perspectives on their experiences and in their somewhat distinctive experiences rather than attempting to describe their transcendental experiences (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). In this case, teachers and parents of children with

special education needs become an important aspect in understanding their views on parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs in primary schools of Blantyre urban education district.

3.4 Methodology

Research methods are the means to answer research questions. This study used a qualitative research approach to explore views of parents and teachers on parental involvement on IEP development and implementation. Qualitative researchers investigate in depth small distinct groups because the researcher is concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participant perspective. Since personal experience is crucial in understanding the topic under investigation, qualitative research is ideal as it employed an inductive research strategy that could facilitate such understanding (Merriam and Simpson, 2000; Johnson and Christensen, 2014; Merriam, 2014).

3.5 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study used criterion purposive sampling. Criterion purposive sampling helped the researcher to select participants who met desired characteristics such as handling learners with SEN and exposed to IEPs (Patton, 2015). Purposive sampling was used in order to understand the research problem through gathering data directly from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, and Poth, 2018), in this case teachers and parents with children with special education needs. This was based on the logic that appropriate sampling always yields appropriate data for the phenomenon under study and gives a complete picture of what is investigated (Merriam, 2014). For instance, the researcher targeted appropriate participants such as parents of children with special needs education, head teachers, specialist teachers, and regular class teacher with special needs education learners under inclusive education setting.

Head teachers play administrative role at the school such as enrolling all learners regardless of their impairments as well as checking all teaching records including IEPs. Specialist teachers are qualified teachers who had undergone training on how to handle SEN learners through different adapted and accommodative approaches including development and implementation of IEPs. Regular classroom teachers are the ones who only graduated on initial teaching training. They are not qualified on handling learners with SEN. They are only classroom teachers for general

teaching. Inclusive education setting refers to schools which enroll and teach all learners under one roof regardless of their learning disability.

The study targeted four primary schools; 4 head teachers, one from each school; 3 specialist teachers one from each school but one specialist teacher was manning two schools; 20 regular class teachers with special needs learners, five from each school; and 18 parents with children with special education needs, two schools had 10 parents, five from each school and the other two schools had 8 parents, four from each school. The latter two schools had 4 parents each as they were the only ones who meet the research criteria. These numbers were obtained from four schools that had learners with special education needs under the assistance of specialist teachers found in those schools who had at least two or more IEPs (as shown in appendix 10 - IEP template and descriptions). Schools with SEN learners and specialist teachers but no IEPs were left out as the target was on the availability of IEPs. Forty-five participants were used.

3.6 Area of Study

The study was carried out in four primary schools which had resource centres for learners with special educational needs in Limbe and Zingwangwa zones in Blantyre Urban education district. The choice for the area of study was based on convenience, hence choice for Limbe and Zingwangwa zones. Out of all primary schools in the selected zones, only six schools had resource centres and only four out of the six primary schools had learners with SEN who had IEPs which was a major requirement for the school to be involved in the study. The researcher easily got teachers and parents with children with special education needs who had IEP for intervention, since it was a little bit close to the researcher's residence. Therefore, convenience sampling was used in order to cut costs by allowing the researcher to carry out the study within the area of residence.

3.7 Methods of Data Generation

Data was collected using interviews, focus group discussion and qualitative document analysis.

3.7.1 Interview

An individual interview is a conversation between two people that has a structure and a purpose. It is designed to elicit the interviewee's knowledge or perspective on a topic. Individual

interviews, which can include key informant interviews, are useful for exploring an individual's beliefs, values, understandings, feelings, experiences and perspectives of an issue. Individual interviews also allow the researcher to ask into a complex issue, learning more about the contextual factors that govern individual experiences and provide a room to prompt or rephrase the question for better understanding of the phenomena (Basit, 2010).

This study employed interviews as a primary source of data gathering with the purpose of exploring views of parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP in primary schools. Interview was used as a research method of gathering qualitative data in this study due to several reasons. Firstly, the interviews were aimed at getting views of teachers and parents on parental involvement in IEP development and implementation, in order to illustrate such a definite phenomenon within a specific context (Basit, 2010). Secondly, it is an excellent way of accessing individuals' meanings, feelings and opinions of events and structures of reality (Punch, 2009) while seeking and gaining an in-depth data (Basit, 2010). Lastly, the participants were able to ask the researcher to further explain a question or meaning of any term not understood or provide more clarification to their answer when needed while the researcher will be able to probe responses of participants to ensure accuracy of data (Hobson and Townsend, 2010).

The views of Gordon (2013) and McIntyre (2012) influenced the researcher to use semi-structured interview method to collect qualitative data. The strengths of this interview approach are simplicity and flexibility. The researcher used semi-structured interview so as to listen to participants' deeper lived experience concerning the phenomena being studied. This brought the researcher closer to the participants as well as the situation being experienced by different stakeholders on parental involvement in IEP.

The semi-structured interview technique was used to probe participants on personal perspectives, stories and experiences that would have been unlikely to be shared in a questionnaire. The semi-structured interview used in this study allowed the researcher to have a systematic guideline covering a set of reflective questions which formulated in response to gathering data that enabled the researcher to answer the key research questions at the end. In addition, there was a room given to both participant and researcher to clarify one another's understanding, and ask follow-up questions in case the researcher wanted detailed and comprehensive responses (Newby, 2010).

Semi-structured questions were formulated for head teachers, specialist teachers, regular class teachers and parents at each school which guided the interview process (as shown in appendices 3, 4, 5 & 6.) Appendices show templates of semi-structured interview guide for parents with SEN learners, headteachers, regular class teachers and specialist teachers respectively. The semi-structured interview guide had questions focused on participants perceptions on IEP awareness, parental involvement, barriers to parental involvement and ways of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes.

Interviews were taking place on one to one approach in a closed room and was taking 10 - 15 minutes per participant. All 45 participants were interviewed.

The interview guide is a relatively brief series of questions the researcher use to guide the conversation (Creswell, 2014). However, one of the disadvantages of the interview method is that it consumes time (Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen, 2010). Interviewing individual participants may take a lot of time. This was controlled by ensuring that the respondent is not off track. Interviews were also recorded apart from taking notes. This was to ensure full capture of information from the respondents.

3.7.2 Focus group discussion

Krueger and Casey, (2000) refers a focus group discussion as an organised discussion between 4 to 7 participants as it was in this study, or more. Focus group discussions provided participants with a space to discuss a particular topic, in a context where people are allowed to agree or disagree with each other. Focus group discussions allowed the researcher to explore how a group thinks about an issue, the range of opinions and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variations that exist in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices as in line with Patton, (2015) and Hoover-Dempsey mode (2005).

Focus groups have participants who can generate information on the topic provided by the researcher through interacting and communicating (Cohen et al., 2007). Through prompts during discussion, participants brought their views to the surface thereby enabling the researcher to retrieve a more collective view of the inquiry. In this case, the researcher asked a small number of general questions and elicited responses from all individuals in the group (refer to appendices 7 and 8). The appendices show templates of focus group discussion guide for teachers and

parents with SEN learners respectively. The focus group discussion guide had items to collect data on participants perceptions on IEP awareness, parental involvement, barriers to parental involvement and ways of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes.

Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees would likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other. They are also useful when the time to collect information is limited and individuals are hesitant to provide information while others may be reluctant to provide information.

In this study, two groups of participants were formed at each school; a group of parents with children with diverse needs and a group of a specialist teacher, head teacher and regular class teachers with special education needs learners. The groups formed focus group discussions which presented their views on parental involvement in IEP development and implementation. The focus group discussion were being carried out in a closed room and it was taking 20 - 30 minutes for each group. A group of teachers was composed with 7 teachers per school. And a group of parents with learners with SEN consisted 4 - 5 at each school. The research study in total had eight focus groups.

However, a focus group discussion can be challenging for the interviewer who lacks control over the interview discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Also, when focus groups are audio taped, the transcriptionist may have difficulty discriminating among the voices of individuals in the group. A phone recorder was used in this study to maintain the original data as well as speeding up the focus group discussion thereby saving time (Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2009). In addition, the participants were coded and provided responses according to their sitting arrangement which was always from right to left. Head teachers were coded from HT1-HT4; specialist teachers were coded from SPT1-SPT3; regular class teachers were coded from RCT1-RCT20 and finally parents were coded from PT1-PT18. The codes were used during both individual interviews and focus group discussions.

3.7.3 Qualitative Document Analysis

Qualitative documents refers to public documents such as newspapers, minutes of the meeting and official documents or private documents such as personal journals, diaries, letters and e-mails (Creswell, 2014). In the case of this study, the researcher collected and checked IEPs and minutes of IEP meetings as a secondary data collection mechanism to find their availability and parental involvement in the documents. Document analysis checklist was used to collect the presence of the documents and involvement of parents depicted in the documents (as shown in appendix 9).

3.8 Data Analysis

The study used qualitative thematic data analysis which was performed through the process of coding in six phases as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Therefore, the researcher first read the data several times to familiarise with its depth and breadth. This involves marking ideas and patterns in readiness for coding. Thereafter, codes were generated by attaching names to pieces of texts that are related to specific research questions. The third phase, involved analysing and sorting the codes into potential themes which were reviewed and refined in the fourth phase. In this phase, some of the themes were combined while some were discarded due to insufficient data to support them. The next phase was defining and naming themes by identifying the aspect of the data that each theme captured and how each theme was related to the research question. Finally, the identified themes were coded and some extracts of the data was cited to support the themes in the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The coding process of the raw data was done in order to develop categories of description which helped to establish meaning from the data. Basically, coding procedure during the analysis was guided by what participants were saying during interview (Patton, 2005).

3.9 Trustworthiness and Reliability

The researcher addressed the aspects of trustworthiness and reliability to increase confidence in the findings and their applicability to real-world contexts.

Trustworthiness is about establishing that the research findings are credible, transferable, confirmable and dependable (Morse, 2015). Firstly, credibility is how confident the qualitative

researcher is in the truth of the research findings. To establish credibility, the researcher used triangulation, member checking and peer review. Triangulation was accomplished by asking the same research questions to different study participants during interviews and focus group discussions as well as using multiple sources of gathering data such as note taking and audio taping as in line with Pitney, (2004). The aspect of member checking was done by providing participants with the data or interpretations of the results in order to verify the accuracy based on their experiences whereas peer review was achieved by using experienced colleagues, a panel of experts and supervisors to re-analyse some of the data as a way of ensuring that the researcher has analysed the data correctly (Gunawan, 2015, p.11). In this research, supervisors looked into the analysis of data and provide their input. Again, an external supervisor was asked to review how data was analysed. Then, the researcher addressed or the comments and pieces of advice given.

Secondly, transferability is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research findings are applicable to other contexts. The notion of transferability in qualitative research assumes that when similar things are done in an apparently similar context, a finding is likely to be transferable to other situations. Given (2008) argues that only consumers of research can determine whether a finding is likely to be transferable to their situations. In this instance, it would be up to the users of this research finding to determine the generalisability of the findings to other primary schools in Malawi. On the other hand, the findings of this research would be transferable to other context as it enhanced by thick description and has provided details of the study as stated by Patton, (2015).

Thirdly, confirmability means that the findings are based on participants' responses and not any potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. This involves making sure that researcher bias does not skew the interpretation of what the research participants said to fit a certain narrative. To establish confirmability, the researcher was objective and neutral in the findings which was achieved through reflexivity and transparency of the researcher as in line with Creswell, and Miller, (2000). Again, the researcher provided an audit trail, which highlighted every step of data analysis that was made in order to provide a rationale for the decisions made (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg and Coleman, 2000). These mechanisms helped to establish that the research findings accurately portrayed participants' responses.

Finally, dependability refers to the notion of repeating the study by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent (Polit and Beck, 2011). In other words, if a person wanted to replicate the study, they should have enough information from the research report and obtain similar findings as your study did. The researcher used inquiry audit in order to establish dependability, which required outside persons whom reviewed and examined the research process and data analysis in order to ensure that the findings are consistent and stable, and could be repeated. In the case of this research, my two supervisors kept on checking the research processes and provided feedback time and again to ensure the research findings are dependable. And finally, the whole document was assessed by internal and external examiners and their comments were effected.

In addition, reliability of the research was enhanced through piloting of the interview questions (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). Another way the researcher used to upholding reliability of the research project was minimising the possibility of bias during interviews which was on of the method to gather data. However, Merrian (2014) states that such biasness can be difficult to avoid because of follow up questions. Bearing this in mind, the researcher kept an open mind regardless of the kind of data from the participants. Again, there was transparency through clear documentation and reporting of methods, procedures, and findings.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

The researcher obtained a letter of consent from the Postgraduate Office of the University of Malawi (refer appendix 1: An introductory letter from Chancellor College) before the process of data collection started. Then, the researcher submitted the letter to the District Education Manager (DEM) of Blantyre Urban where the four schools studied, are found. The same letter after being stamped and signed by the DEM was delivered to the schools' head teachers for them to grant the permission.

In terms of the interviews, each participating stakeholder was verbally informed about the information of this research project during the first contact to further make an appointment for interviewing (Creswell, 2012). The interview guide contained an informed consent form in which a participant was asked to read and pen a signature (refer appendix 2: An Informed Consent letter and form). Furthermore, before a focus group discussion, each participant received

the written informed consent together with an information letter which explained and clarified important details of this research project as well as contact information of the researcher.

As regards to confidentiality, privacy and anonymity in the study interviews were conducted one on one (Refer to appendices 3, 4, 5 and 6: Interview guide for the participants). The maintenance of anonymity was carried out by using codes. Schools were coded with letters W, X, Y, and Z. All participants were coded with letters and numbers whereby the first letter was representing the school they are coming from. This was done in order to paint a sound picture of the going-on in each school. Parents were coded as WP1, XP6, YP11 and ZP15 whereby the first letter stands for the school they were coming from. Headteachers were coded as WHT1, XHT2, YHT2 and ZHT4. Specialist teachers were coded as WST1, XST2, YZST3. And finally, regular class teachers were coded as WRCT1, XRCT6, YRCT11, and ZRCT16.

3.11 Chapter summary

The chapter has discussed constructivism as a theoretical paradigm, qualitative case study design and qualitative methodology which were used in the study. It has also highlighted purposive sampling and data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion. It has also explained about the thematic approach of analysing data, including issues to do with trustworthiness and reliability and ethical considerations. The next chapter is findings and discussion

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Chapter overview

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study which explored views of parents and teachers on parental involvement in individualised education plans in four selected primary schools in Blantyre urban education district, Malawi. The presentation and discussion of the findings was guided by the following research questions: What do parents know about IEP? How do parents and teachers perceive the impact of increased parental involvement on academic and behaviour outcomes of learners with SEN? What are the perceived barriers and challenges faced by parents and teachers in fostering effective parental involvement in the IEP processes? What strategies and recommendations can be proposed to enhance parental involvement in an IEP processes based on the perceptions of parents and teachers? This study followed thematic data analysis approach. The approach was descriptive in nature because what participants said was described (Creswell, 2014). The findings are presented in accordance with the themes culminating from the four research questions and guided by the theoretical framework that informed the study. Each theme is further categorized into sub-themes of description as a result of data analysis process. In the presentation, each sub-theme is described and explained with extracts from participants' statements, highlighting the content.

4.2 Knowledge of Individualised Education Plan by Parents

The first research question explored the views of head teachers, specialist teachers, regular class teachers and parents/guardians of children with special education needs on the knowledge of parents about Individualised Education Plan. Knowledge of parents with learners with SEN about IEP in this study is important as it helps the researcher to verify parental involvement in the IEP processes. Knowledge of parents about IEP reveals their involvement as they are exposed to IEPs during the developmental stage of IEP. Knowledge of IEP to parents with learners with SEN is important because it guides them on the activities planned on the IEP to be played by parents. Parents' awareness of an IEP increases motivation for parent to be involved in

IEP process as in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model on personal motivation factors.

4.2.1 Parental knowledge of IEP - Views from parents

The researcher gathered views from the parents of schools W, X, Y and Z by using one on one interviews and focus group discussion which were guided by the following leading questions:

- a. Are you aware of an IEP?
- b. What information does it have?

Eighteen parents of children with SEN from four schools were interviewed, thereafter, focus group discussion was conducted and responses were extracted and recorded. Ten parents were from schools W and X, that is 5 parents from each school. And eight parents were from schools Y and Z, that is 4 parents from each school. During one to one interviews, fourteen parents from schools W, X, Y and Z stated that they once saw an IEP but are not conversant with it. Some extracts from the interviews are captured below:

WPT3 from school W during the interview, elaborated by stating that:

"I was only called once when my child was in standard 1 where I was asked to give historical information about my son so that the specialist teacher should prepare an IEP which he showed me after he developed it. Since then, I was not called to attend any meeting concerning the performance of my child though is now in standard 4. Then I am not much aware and conversant of the IEP you are talking about," (Interview: August 6, 2021).

XPT8 stated that, *"I have been hearing the word IEP when one time, the specialist teacher invited me to answer some questions about my daughter,"* (Interview: September 20, 2021)

And YPT12 explained, *"What I can say is that I am not conversant with the IEP but I remember one time the specialist teacher showed me,"* (Interview: September 22, 2021)

Lastly ZPT18 said *"My child is now in standard 5, but I cannot recall to see an IEP in the last two years. However, I can say that when my child was in standard two we attended a workshop organised by USAID where we told of the IEP and its importance,"* (Interview: October 7, 2021)

The explanation were evidenced by unavailability of IEPs of some learners with special educational needs in all the four schools under study. In addition, three primary schools under the study had no documents which captured attendance of parents to IEP meetings though having few IEPs. The few available IEPs observed had no information showing involvement of parents in IEP meetings.

Some extracts from focus group discussion are captured below:

Parents from W school responded partial awareness of an IEP but are not conversant with it. For example, WPT5 said, *"We just heard the word IEP from our specialist teacher but we are not conversant with an IEP. The specialist teacher only asks us questions which he said he use the given information to develop an IEP,"* (FGD: October 8, 2021).

Parents from school X during FGD stated that they do not know IEP but heard about it. Parent XPT9 said that: *"We are not aware of the document (IEP) you are talking about. What we know is that sometimes we are called by our specialist teacher who asks us to give historical information of our children and also their performance which she said wanted to use the information in the development of an IEP,"* (FGD: October 14, 2021).

Parents from Y school gave similar sentiments in line with parents from W and X schools.

ZPT16, ZPT17 and ZPT18 expressed state of partial awareness of IEPs and their non-involvement in most decision making about their children. One parent explained, *"We can say that we are not conversant with an IEP, and in my case I once attended an IEP workshop when my child was in standard 2,"* (October 21, 2021).

The findings from the interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis showed that many parents of learners with SEN lack knowledge on individualised education plan.

Based on the information provided, it was found that many parents do not have knowledge of IEP but are sometimes called to give historical information about their children. Evidence from

the focus group discussion with parents revealed that specialist teachers do not involve parents in most times. Parents are only called when there is a case to answer concerning their child with SEN. The implication of this is that parents failed to effectively support their children with SEN as they are not aware about their roles in assisting their children according to what specialist teachers planned on the IEPs. This is contrary to what Balli (2016) found that parents play a major role in challenging the dynamic inclusion process that starts with the parents' decision to place their child in a mainstream setting. It is Parents' right to be part of every decision-making that affect the welfare of their children (Ibid). The findings are contrary to Poponi (2009) statement that parents should participate in decisions making for their children in the IEP meetings. The findings are in line with Prinsloo (2001) studies conducted in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana which showed that very few teachers involve parents in the development and implementation of IEPs. One of the main aspects of parent's involvement in educational process is related to their participation in drafting the IEP, not simply by signing an IEP prepared by the teacher. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) Motivation for parental involvement model posits that specific teacher invitations that are trustworthy motivates parents of learners with special educational needs to contribute to IEP development and implementation.

4.2.2 Parental Knowledge of IEP - Views from Regular Class Teachers

The findings showed that sixteen regular class teachers interviewed doubted if parents are knowledgeable of IEP. The sixteen regular class teachers interviewed expressed doubts if parents of learners with SEN are aware of IEPs. For example, WRCT4 stated that she did not see any parent attending the IEP meeting. In addition to WRCT4 response, XRCT7 had the following to say:

"I really doubt about the involvement of parents of learners with special educational needs in the IEP process. However, I sometimes see parents coming to the resource room but I do not know the purpose of their visits," (Interview: August 3, 2021).

YRCT11 explained, *"In my case, I know the IEP but I doubt if parents are aware of an IEP of their children... However, our specialist teacher invite parents with learners with SEN to ask them questions of their children, and I think this might be the time parents are told about an IEP,"* (Interview: August 4, 2021).

ZRCT17 elaborated, *"I might say parents are aware of an IEP because most of the time those parents visit the resource centre to leave and pick their children, so I am hoping that the specialist teacher told them about IEP,"* (Interview: September 29, 2021).

The research findings from regular class teachers interviewed and from focus group discussion revealed that regular class teachers see parents coming to resource rooms where learners with SEN come to pick their children. However, one school under study had IEP minute book which showed names of parents of learners with special educational needs attended the meetings. However, the researcher noted that the date for the last meeting was conducted in January, 2018, while the study was carried out in 2021. The dates of the last meeting showed rare involvement of parents with SEN learners.

Based on the information from regular class teachers through interviews doubted if parents are aware of IEP though seeing them merely coming to resource rooms. The sentiments from regular class teachers in the study showed that they are not also involved in IEP meetings though it is their requirement as stipulated in IDEA Act (2004) and Poponi, (2009). The evidence from document analysis (IEPs and IEP minute books) which only one school out of four showed attendance of parents to IEP meeting in January 2018, revealed that currently parents are not involved in the development and implementation of IEP. Hence, parents become unaware of IEP. The finding is in line with Mueller and Vick (2019) study which identified negative parent experiences with the IEP meeting process and lack of parent inclusion during IEP development, (Childre & Chambers, 2005; Fish, 2008; Mueller& Buckley, 2014; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Contrary to Mueller and Vick (2019), the study found that IEPs are not developed to many learners with SEN, hence no need to invite parents to attend IEP meeting while in Mueller and Vick (2019) study, learners with SEN have IEPs which are developed without parental involvement who do not have interest in attending IEP meetings. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model, parents' perceptions of invitation to involvement manifest a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere, and practices that ensure parents are well informed about learners' progress, school requirements and school events.

4.2.3 Parental knowledge of IEP - Views from Specialist Teachers

Findings from three specialist teachers (one specialist teacher works in two primary schools Y and Z) from four schools W, X, Y and Z on the parental knowledge of IEP showed that parents are not aware of the technical word IEP but are used to share important information which is used in the development and implementation of IEPs. WSPT1 said from school W, *"I can say that parents are aware of an IEP as I can recall that we had IEP workshop where parents attended. But those parents who did not attend the IEP workshop might not be aware of an IEP and its detailed contents, ... though they are told,"* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

XSPT2 from school X stated that: *"I always invite parents when I am about to draw an IEP so that they give historical information and current performance of their child in the previous assigned tasks for the parents to help their child at home,"* (Interview: August 10, 2021).

Similarly, YSPT3 from school Y stated that parents are indirectly aware of the IEPs but some parents do not know an IEP by its name. This was evidenced by the availability of IEPs which had background information of the children's profiles which showed date of birth, on-set of the problem and family history, provided by parents. This showed that some parents attend IEP meetings where they provide information pertaining to their children with SEN but without knowing they are attending an IEP meeting.

Based on the information provided, the findings gathered from FGD of two Head teachers, one Specialist Teacher and ten Regular Class teachers from schools Y and Z also revealed that parents are invited to share information of their children. The major challenge is the continued use of SNE jargons to parents, most of whom might not be conversant with. The problem of use of technical words is in line with the findings of Mueller and Buckley (2014) in the study conducted in USA and BwalyaBwalya (2014) in Zambia that some parents hardly infer the meanings of certain technical words. Hoover-Dempsey, (2005) model contend that parental involvement in IEP helps to make involvement decisions based on the outcomes that likely follow their involvement in activities.

4.2.4 Parental Knowledge of IEP - Views from Head teachers

In order to develop and implement IEP processes, head teachers are supposed to be informed and attend IEP meetings. This helps in supporting the system in a number of ways such as securing

teaching and learning resources needed. Therefore, the researcher wanted to find out from the head teachers if parents are knowledgeable on IEP. The head teachers from schools W and Y stated that parents are aware of the IEP as they are invited to give information of their children. For example, head teacher from school W had this to say:

“I should say that parents are aware of IEP as we invite them to attend IEP meetings concerning their children, but are not told that this is an IEP meeting.” (Interview: August 2, 2021)

Two head teachers from school Y and Z stated that they just see parents coming to drop and pick their children as they had never been involved in IEP processes. From the prompted question on why they are not involved, they said it can best be answered by the specialist teachers. This showed that parents are partially invited to school to share information about their children but are not told that its name is IEP which is used for the intervention of learners with SEN. On the contrary, the two head teachers failed to produce IEP minute books and IEPs for all learners with SEN in their schools.

Through document analysis of IEPs and IEP minute books, one school out of four showed minutes where parents were invited to attend IEP meetings. However, the dates showed the minutes were captured three years ago in 2018. The other three schools had no IEP minute books showing parental attendance in IEP development process. The researcher observed 38 learners with SEN who required IEPs for their education intervention in the four primary schools studied. Out of 38, only 14 learners with SEN had IEPs. The absence of IEP minute books and presence of few IEPs in the four primary schools showed that parents with learners with SEN are partially involved in the development and implementation of IEPs. The observed IEPs had no indication of services to be played by parents. Hence, many parents with learners with SEN are not knowledgeable of IEPs.

The research has revealed that many parents had no knowledge about IEPs though previous years IEP minute book at one school showed that parents were called to share information of their children with SEN. The findings of partial involvement of parents of learners with SEN in IEP development and implementation are in line with several studies conducted in USA, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia (Childre and Chambers, 2005; Fish, 2008; Mueller and Buckley, 2014; Zeitlin and Curcic, 2014; BwalyaBwalya, 2014; Elser, 2017) though displayed different

factors such as lack of interest of the parents and time factor. However, the study has disclosed presence of few IEPs against the number of learners with SEN. Few IEPs and lack of parental services in IEPs perceive the extent of parental involvement in schools studied as low and affect knowledge of parents on IEPs. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model suggests that parental role construction for involvement is shaped by parents' beliefs and perceptions about how children develop, how parents should raise their children, and what they should be doing at home to help their children succeed.

4.3 Impact of Increased Parental Involvement in IEP Processes on the Academic and Behavioural Outcomes of Learners with SEN

The second research question sought the views of head teachers, specialist teachers, regular class teachers and parents on their perceptions on the impact of increased parental involvement on the academic and behavioural outcomes of learners with SEN through IEP intervention. All participants were interviewed to express their views on the impact of increased parental involvement on the academic and behavioural outcomes of learners with SEN through IEP intervention. The responses on the research question were classified into themes which included source of information on child profile, student achievement, communication between parents and teachers, love towards SEN learners and relationship between parents and teachers.

The researcher gathered views from the parents of schools W, X, Y and Z by using one on one interviews and focus group discussion which were guided by the following leading question:

What do you think can be the impact of increased parental involvement on the academic and behavioural outcomes of learners with SEN through IEP intervention?

4.3.1 Source of information on child profile

In order to develop IEP, child profile is important as it states date of birth of the child, the onset of the problem, pattern of child growth and development and other health issues. The child profile information increases the teacher's understanding of the child's environment and background (Smith, 2001). Many parents of learners with SEN said that parents are the main source of information on historical background of their children. From the interviews conducted, parents expressed a common view on their role as custodians of information for their children. For example, WPT3 stated:

"...We parents, have important information of our children such as date of birth, onset of the problem and what the child is able to do and unable to..." (FGD: October 8, 2021).

Another parent, XPT7 said:

"... I think it is good to involve us so that we may tell teachers the problems of our children, their dates of birth as well as how the problem started since we are the ones who live with the children since their birth ..." (Interview: August 6, 2021)

Parents in a focus group discussion revealed similar views. However, two parents failed to give their views on the question. But three specialist teachers expressed that parents of learners with SEN are the main sources of information on the child's historical background in addition to child's health passport book. WSPT1 had this to say:

"Parents are the main source of information to be captured on child profile during IEP development. They are knowledgeable about the onset of the problem of their children and how it developed." (Interview: August 2, 2021)

ZSPT3 added:

"I always go round visiting homes of parents of learners with SEN to collect information concerning their children such as date of birth, history of the child and other relevant information regarding IEP development. Sometimes I invite them here at school...." (Interview: August 27, 2021).

Similarly, regular class teachers and head teachers had the same view that parents are the necessary ingredients for appropriate and individualised education programming with information on child profile. From focus group discussion WHT1 had this to say:

"There is no way we can run away from involving parents as far as the education of children is concerned.....the same applies to learners with SEN, their parents are needed to share date of birth of their children, child profile I am sure this information can only be accessed from parents or guardians." (FGD: October 5, 2021)

The findings on parents of learners with SEN as information providers on child profile during IEPs development are in line with other research study findings. Smith (2001), in his research on involving parents in the IEP process disclosed that parents play a number of important roles in

their relationship with their child's background information. Teachers use the background information in planning effective strategies of assisting the child with SEN when developing IEP. On the contrary, the research showed that some parents depend on oral information not a written one. Some parents had no written evidence on date of birth of their children and onset of the problem. The limitation of oral information is that it may change the content as time elapses. One of the main aspects of parental involvement in educational process is related to their participation in developing the IEP, not simply signing an IEP prepared by the teacher. Teachers prepare and use IEP with input from members of the IEP team, parents inclusive, which enable teachers to recognise learner's abilities and tailor the education system to learner's individual needs with focused instruction (Balli, 2016; Poponi, 2009; Mueller and Vick 2019; BwalyaBwalya, 2014). The research showed views of participants that parental involvement in IEP processes motivate parents of learners with SEN to provide child profile information which is used in the development of IEP. The information assist teachers to strategically put in place effective pedagogies to meet the individual child's needs. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model posits that parents with high efficacy are more likely to make active decisions to be involved in their children's education and are more likely to persist when faced with difficult decisions or obstacles.

4.3.2 Student achievement

The research findings on this theme showed that parental involvement in IEP processes assist learners with special needs to excel in various tasks intended to be attained. Parents of learners with SEN expressed willingness to share the challenges of their children in the IEP meeting which may assist the teachers on how best to handle the learner. Again, parents perceived that teachers may ask parents to assist their children with other work needed to be done at home. Parent WPT3, during focus group discussion had this to say:

"We can say that if parents are involved in IEP meetings, we can tell teachers the areas of weaknesses of our children and teachers may advise us what we should do to support the learning of our children." (FGD: October 8, 2021)

In addition to parents sharing challenges to teachers, parents stated that their involvement in the development and implementation of IEP may make parents with learners with SEN own the IEP

and play a role in supporting the activities planned on the IEP. Many parents further suggested that parents may also be in a better position to assist their children in homework and other activities such as reading, writing and numeracy. Parent XPT9 had this to say: *"...If teachers involve us parents, we can easily support our children to achieve what our children are supposed to attain. We are very ready to assist our children so that they do well in their education as anyone else,"* (FGD: October 14, 2021).

Parent ZPT18, said, *"We believe team work can easily make our children excel in their education. Teachers and parents should work together. Teachers should be telling us areas we can assist our children to do well in their education."* (FGD: October 21, 2021)

Parental assistance in school academic activities assures triangulation approach in assisting learners with special educational needs. The learner is assisted by specialist teachers and class teachers at school, and by parents at home. Teachers' views corroborated with the views of parents on students' achievement. Teachers perceived that increased parental involvement in IEP development and implementation may promote both behavioural and academic performance of learners with SEN. Teachers will play their part at school and parents do the rest at home. Teachers suggested that increased parental involvement may fast track the performance of learners with SEN as parents will be monitoring and supervising their children on the activities planned on the IEPs.

ZRCT18 from school Z reported:

"Many parents assist their learners with homework which teachers give to the learners. On the same, parents are advised what are supposed to do with their child when at home. This speeds up student attainment on the intended outcomes planned. This may also apply to learners with SEN when their parents are involved in IEP processes," (Interview: September 29, 2021).

Another teacher WSPT said:

"... working together with parents in IEP development and implementation is good as it can help learners with SEN to be fully supervised and monitored by parents increasing time length of learning. Parents may be assigned some work to be doing when the child is at home. This may promote academic achievement to learners with SEN with ease" (Interview: September 10, 2021).

Head teachers, regular class teachers and specialist teachers,- during focus group discussion expressed that children with SEN can learn better when there is proper supervision and monitoring on the activities they are doing as listed on the IEP, by both teachers at school and parents at home. Many teachers concurred to what WRCT5 said: *"We are very sure that increasing parental involvement during IEP development and implementation may promote the performance of learners with SEN,"* (FGD: October 8, 2021).

YSPT3 explained, *"... When we fully involve parents with learners with SEN in all stages such as IEP development, implementation and reviewing can effectively bring a change in the academic performance of these learners... Parents if involved may assist in monitoring and supervision..."* (FGD: October 12, 2021).

Contrary to this, the study findings revealed that parental involvement with inadequate teaching, learning and assessment resources may retard the progress of learners with SEN. The studied schools had limited teaching, learning and assessment resources to support learners with SEN apart from low parental involvement in IEP development and implementation.

Teacher XCRT10 during focus group discussion had this to say: *"...another challenge is that we do not have enough teaching, learning and assessment resources to assist learners with SEN. ... imagine IEP development needs stationery, and parents may need other teaching resources to better support their children with SEN at home."* (FGD: October 12, 2021).

Based on the information provided, the findings show that lack of parental supervision and monitoring impedes academic progress of learners with special needs (Smith, 2001; Poponi, 2009; Elser, 2017; Balli, 2016). Activities outlined on the IEP need proper supervision and monitoring by both teachers and parents for effective progress. Participants mentioned that when parents are involved in the development and implementation of IEP, they ably supervise and monitor the progress of their children. This shows that only parents who are knowledgeable of what is contained in the IEP of their children, become auxiliary teachers through supervision and monitoring. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model contends that parental role construction is socially constructed as such beliefs, perceptions, and expectations of teachers may shape parental role construction. Again, Smith (2001) in the study on involving parents in the IEP process showed that parental involvement in IEP process add to parent's knowledge on

the child's education setting and understand areas of focus in assisting their children. Parents ably supervise and monitor the progress of their children in line with planned goals on the IEP. In addition, the views that increasing parental involvement in IEP development and implementation may increase the performance of learners with SEN are in line with other research study findings. For instance, Poponi (2009) study on the relationship between student outcomes and parental involvement in multidisciplinary team meetings found that students whose parents participated in IEP meetings performed better than students whose parents did not participate. Similarly, Strickland (2015) study on the effects of parental motivations on home-based and school-based parental involvement found that increased parental involvement led to higher scores on standardized tests and higher student grades. Again, Jeynes (2012) confirmed positive correlations between parental involvement and academic achievement on learners. Finally, the research has disclosed respondents' views that increasing parental involvement in IEP processes may enhance academic and behavioural achievement of learners with SEN through parental support in supervision and monitoring the progress of their children to attain intended goals on the IEPs.

4.3.3 Communication between parents with learners with SEN and teachers

Effective communication between parents and the school ensures proper coordination of activities, smooth progress and achievement to the intended outcomes planned on the IEP (Smith, 2001; Balli, 2016; Elser, 2017). Coordination ease work load through sharing of tasks. Participants expressed that increasing the involvement of parents in the IEP processes can only be done when communication between parents of learners with SEN and teachers is cordial. Good and effective communication ensures proper coordination of tasks assigned among the team members of the IEP development. XPT6, XPT7, XPT9 and XPT10 shared a common view on the impact of increasing parental involvement that can help in sharing responsibilities and tasks in implementing the IEP when there is proper communication between stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of IEP. For instance, XPT7 commented:

“Allowing parents of learners with SEN to be involved in IEP processes will assist in sharing responsibilities. Teachers will have their tasks to do, the same as parents. This can only be done if there is cordial communication between us parents and teachers” (FGD: October 14, 2021).

ZPT18 commented, *"We think that if teachers invite us, we cannot deny coming, which is why today we have come upon being called. We believe teachers should improve their mode of communication so that they reach out all parents with learners with SEN. Good communication will make us parents to be actively participating in IEP meetings."* (FGD: October 21, 2021).

Sharing parents' sentiments, specialist teachers agreed that the power of a team in IEP development and implementation is unwavering. WSPT1 had this to say: *"If we really involve parents in IEP processes can enhance effective communication between specialist teachers and parents which is a challenge. Once communication is improved, it can ease our work through specialisation of tasks to be done on the child,"* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

Commenting on the impact of increased parental involvement in IEP, regular class teachers shared the same view on improved communication and proper coordination of tasks. WRCT3, XRCT7 and ZRCT18 had the following sentiments respectively:

"Learners with SEN require a lot of activities to be done to achieve a goal. Hence, parental involvement in IEP processes can provide a room for proper communication in sharing of roles between parents and teachers. Teachers can concentrate on academic areas while parents on activities of daily living," (Interview: August 3, 2021).

"Let us improve our communication aspects which are not good with parents... involving parents will help a lot easing our work since we will be sharing roles," (Interview: August 12, 2021).

"I can say that parental involvement will reduce our workload. The tasks will be shared with parents," (Interview: September 29, 2021).

From the findings above, participants mentioned effective communication between parents of learners with SEN and teachers, as one of the most outcomes when involving parents in IEP processes. It ensures proper coordination of activities, smooth progress and achievement to the intended outcomes planned on the IEP. This is in line with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which was created to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate education. One hallmark of IDEA is the promotion of collaboration between schools and parents of children with disabilities. The letter and spirit of IDEA encourages a working relationship between the home and school that fosters an educational team with the goal of providing the child with SEN with appropriate services. IDEA provisions regarding parent

involvement imply a picture of the family and school team working together amicably sharing visions and goals, and ultimately making decisions collectively (Mueller, 2017). Unfortunately, collaboration between parents and teachers were not revealed during the study of this research. This is contrary to the Malawi Government implementation guidelines for the national policy on SNE (2009) which highlights roles and responsibilities of parents of learners with disability through care and support services and mobilization of resources for their learners. The study revealed that perceptions of participants that increased parental involvement in IEP processes can also promote effective communication and share roles to ease the workload of teachers. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model state that effective communication encourages parental involvement through direct instruction, modelling and reinforcement, which in turn influence children's educational outcomes.

4.3.4 Relationship between parents and teachers

The findings in this study showed that parental involvement in IEP processes may encourage relationship amongst stakeholders such as teachers and parents. Participants to the study expressed that increased parental involvement during IEP development and implementation may promote the relationship between parents of learners with SEN and teachers. YPT11 and YPT13 had this to say during Focus Group Discussions, respectively: *“When we are invited to meet teachers at the school we are also privileged to know teachers who teach our children,”* (FGD: October 14, 2021).

“We really appreciate and feel honoured when invited to meet teachers. This will promote our relationship” (FGD: October 14, 2021).

Similarly, specialist teachers and head teachers shared the same views that parental involvement in IEP processes promotes relationships between parents and teachers which currently, the relationship is sour. In addition, many regular class teachers said that the relationship can be strengthened as long as parents and teachers collaborate in the development and implementation of IEP. YRCT14 mentioned:

“I am very sure that if parents are fully and consistently involved in the education of their children with SEN, it will create good relationship between teachers and parents. Once we create good relationship, it will be easy to work as a team between parents and us teachers” (Interview: August 12, 2021).

While ZRCT19 said: *“Parental involvement in IEP processes will promote cordial relationship between teachers and parents as decision made on the child will be a result of collective contribution by both teachers and parents,”* (Interview: September 30, 2021).

Again during focus group discussion, ZSPT3 said, *"Involvement of parents with learners with SEN in IEP processes will ensure strengthen relationship between us teachers and parents... and it can create a conducive learning environment towards learners with SEN."* (FGD: October 19, 2021)

The findings shared above expressed the views of participants that parental involvement in IEP processes can enhance good relationship between parents of learners with SEN and teachers. The view of promoting good relationship ensures good collaboration between parents and teachers in supporting learners with SEN. The IEP process requires collaboration between teachers, parents and other stakeholders (Rotter, 2014). Parental involvement on IEP processes provides the opportunity for collaborative partnerships in jointly developing goals for learners with SEN. It creates conducive environment to learners with SEN. The IEP process represents a venue for the application of several theoretical mechanisms of parental involvement (Poponi, 2009). Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) theory predicts that children whose parents are involved in their education will be more likely to develop a strong, positive sense of efficacy for successfully achieving in school-related tasks than will children whose parents are not involved.

4.3.5 Love towards SEN learners

The research findings also surfaced love towards learners with special educational needs as another important impact when parents are involved in the IEP processes. Parents and teachers interviewed shared a common perception that increased parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEPs can draw parents to come closer to their children with SEN and loving them. Parents of learners with SEN opined that if involved will change their mind set and learn to love their children upon seeing the positive results when implementing the IEP. YPT12, YPT13 and YPT14 shared parents' views that parents love their children when they get information from teachers that learners with SEN can learn and excel with their education.

YPT15 had this to say in a focus group discussion: *"I believe that if teachers start involving us parents of learners with SEN in the IEP process, will also motivate us to love our children as we will have a hope that disability is not inability,"* (FGD: October 14, 2021)

Similarly, this is what XPT7 expressed: *"To be frank with you, I had no any hope that my child can learn and excel with his education, so I ignored supporting him with school resources... and I could if teachers were involving me. I could have changed my mindset and start loving my child as anyone else by supporting him with school resources as I do with other children without SEN."* (Interview: September 20, 2021)

Some parents during group discussion at school Z reported that some parents deliberately ignore to support learners with disability. ZP15 said, *"Many parents do not love their children with disability. They do not need to waste their resources on children with disability, ... had teachers encouraged us parents that learners with SEN can excel with education, we could have changed and start loving them. So, we believe that if parents of learners with SEN are fully involved in IEP development and implementation will start loving children with SEN and support them on their education,"* (FGD: October 14, 2021).

Specialist teachers corroborated that parents do not love their children with disabilities as they regard them worthless and quickly pointed out that parental involvement in IEP processes will wash out those attitudinal beliefs towards learners with disability. YSPT3 explained:

"Some parents with learners with SEN do not love their children with disability. Some lock up their children. Some do not buy good clothes to children with disability. Therefore, I believe if we involve such type of parents in IEP processes they may learn to love and support their children with SEN." (Interview: September 27, 2021)

In addition to the views of specialists, head teachers agreed that parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP can change parental mindset towards learners with SEN.

ZHT4 commented: *"Some parents have negative attitude towards their children with disability due to ignorance. So if these parents are involved, will understand the importance of educating a learner with special education needs,"* (Interview: September 27, 2021).

Regular class teachers shared the same views that involving parents in IEP development and implementation may aid in changing the mindset of some parents who do not show love to their children with SEN. During focus group discussion at school Z, teachers reported that parents have no hope in learners with disability. For instance, ZRCT20 said, *"Some parents do not love their children with disability. They see no future in those children. They regard it as punishment from God. So these type of parents need to be involved in IEP processes so that they may learn and change their mindset,"* (FGD: October 19, 2021).

The above sentiments showed that the involvement of parents of learners with SEN in IEP process can promote parental love towards children with SEN. The finding is in tandem with Balli (2016) study in Albania which found that parents improve their parenting skills when involved in IEP processes. The study showed that parents loved their children with disabilities more than before. In addition, parental involvement has long been believed to be associated with change in attitudinal and cultural beliefs towards learners with disability (Green and Walker, 2004; Mueller, 2009; Muellar and Vick, 2019). On the contrary, Mkandawire (2016) paper "A comparative assessment of special education situations between Lesotho and Malawi", highlighted attitudinal barriers as one of the challenges which learners with SEN face. Many parents in Lesotho and Malawi are still ignorant about the importance of educating their children with disabilities. They feel that the money spent on the education of their children with disabilities would rather be spent on something or someone they believe would economically contribute to the needs of the family (Mkandawire, 2016). The sentiments showed lack of love of parents towards their children with disability due to ignorance. For instance, the research has found that some parents lock up their children with disabilities while some parents favoured children without SEN by providing them with enough education resources than learners with SEN. These aspects were not mentioned in other studies. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (1995, 1997) proposes that it is essential to consider how parents' life context shapes their involvement in their children's schooling. This life context shapes families' knowledge, skills, time, and energy and subsequently their involvement with the school.

4.4 Perceived Challenges Faced by Parents and Teachers in Fostering Effective Parental Involvement in Individualised Education Plan Processes

The third research question sought to find out the perceived challenges that make parents not to be involved in the development and implementation of IEP for their children with SEN. The evidence from the interviews and focus group discussion revealed the barriers as attitudinal beliefs, time factor, communication barrier, ignorance, poverty and sour relationship between parents and teachers.

The researcher gathered views from the parents of schools W, X, Y and Z by using one on one interviews and focus group discussion which were guided by the following leading question:

- a. What do you think are some of the challenges that make parents not to be involved in the development and implementation of IEP for their children with SEN?

4.4.1 Attitudinal beliefs

The research revealed that many parents have negative attitude towards learners with SEN. Some parents prefer to concentrate on learners without SEN rather than learners with SEN. They consider learners with SEN as children who cannot excel with their education. Many parents interviewed expressed lack of trust with learners with SEN that can excel with their education. During interviews and focus group discussion, many parents had similar sentiments which indicated that their children with a disability cannot perform as their friends. For example, WPT2, XPT8, YPT12 and ZPT16 and had this to say respectively:

“I send my child just to play with friends but I don’t think has a future as other learners.”
(FGD: October 8, 2021)

“My child inherited the problem from his mother. His mother is also mentally challenged and did not go to school because of her problem. Then we think that her child has no future, so we just send him to school to keep him busy.” (FGD: October 14, 2021).

“I feel it is wastage of time to come and attend the IEP meetings of my child who has no any future at all. I don’t know anyone with cerebral palsy to have gone further with education”
(FGD: October 21, 2021).

“To be frank with you, I don’t regard this child with disability as important as other children without disabilities, then I chose deliberately not to attend the IEP meetings of children with disability” (FGD: October 21, 2021).

In addition, teachers expressed similar views that many parents of children with disabilities have negative attitude towards their learners hence they neglect them. WSPT1, WRCT5 and YHT3 respectively during the interviews stated:

“Most parents of children with disability, they don’t want to reveal the disability of their children thinking it is a punishment from God. They feel shame with the child. So I think that is why they do not come to attend IEP meetings” (Interview August 2, 2021)

“...Some parents even changed phone numbers so that we should not communicate with them about the progress of their children. They feel it is a waste of time to attend a meeting of a child who is disabled believing has no future. I can say, that is why even specialist teachers stopped inviting parents as they do not come when invited” (Interview August 4, 2021).

“Some parents more especially those with little education think that disability is inability. They think SEN learners cannot perform as other learners without SEN. So they chose not to come when invited” (Interview: August 10, 2021)

The sentiments shared in the research study by the participants showed that some parents regard their children with disability as worthless hence have no future. Some parents have negative attitude towards learners with SEN as such neglect them. This prompts parents to shun from being involved in IEP processes. Some studies carried out in Malawi on inclusive education revealed the same parental attitudinal belief as one of the major challenges to parental involvement in IEP development and implementation. Mkandawire (2016) stated that many parents in Malawi feel that the money spent on the education of their disabled children would rather be spent on something or someone they believe would economically contribute to the needs of the family. Ministry of Education (2009) in their Inclusive Strategy paper stated negative attitude of parents with learners with SEN is a major barrier to the development of SNE in Malawi. Children and youths with special educational needs face discrimination, lack of parental responsibility, neglect, rejection, abuse, and overprotection by some parents. This could also be aggravated by lack of information, misinformation, cultural practices, beliefs and values

(MoE, 2009; Rieser, 2012). In addition, negative attitude of the community towards the education of learners with special educational needs affect the delivery of special education needs services. Negative attitude leads to exclusion from some school activities, academic failure, low self-esteem, isolation, bullying, abuse, and school dropout (MoE, 2009). For example, some communities in Malawi and other countries hold a belief in the construct of normality that all children should acquire the characteristics of a so-called normal child even though they have special needs (Ahsan, Sharma and Deppeler, 2012). This showed that other cultures have negative attitudes towards children with disability.

4.4.2 Time factor

The research findings recorded time factor as a challenge for parental involvement in IEP processes. Many parents are working in businesses and in Indian companies. Parents in Indian companies are denied an exit during their working hours which is between 7:00 am - 5:00 pm, Monday to Saturday. WPT1, WPT3, WPT5, XPT6, XPT7, XPT9, YPT11, YPT13, YPT14, ZPT15, ZPT16, ZPT17 and ZPT18 shared common idea, stated lack of time to attend the IEP meetings as one of the challenges for some parents of learners with SEN. Some parents have busy schedules as others who work in Indian Companies are not allowed to go and attend to such meetings.

Parent WPT3 had this to say: *"Some of us parents don't have free time to go to school to attend meetings of our children. We work in Indian companies where we are not allowed to get an exit or one day-off ... our wages are deducted once being absent... we work from Monday to Saturday, starting at 7:00 am up to 5:00 pm, "* (FGD: October 08, 2021).

Parent XPT7 said, *"We depend on small scale business to earn a living and support my children in buying food. I do business everyday just because it is hand to mouth ..., therefore, I do not have free time to leave my business and attend school meetings. I always leave my children asleep when leaving home and coming back at night."* (Interview: August 6, 2021)

In addition, WRCT3, XRCT7, YRCT11 and ZRCT16 also mentioned time factor as one of the hindrances. For instance, XRCT7, YRCT11 and ZRCT16 respectively, stated:

“Many parents do not come to attend school meetings because they are always busy. Others run businesses while others are employed by companies which do not allow their employees to get permission during working hours.” (Interview: August 4, 2021)

“Some parents fear to be deducted from their wages when absent from duties. So they choose to go to work than attending the school meeting.” (Interview: August 12, 2021)

“Some parents are working hence do not meet time set for the IEP meetings.” (Interview: September 29, 2021)

Similar views were shared by head teachers who reported that some parents are always busy especially those who work in Indian companies and others run small scale businesses which just give them their daily food so coming to a meeting is a waste of time to them. XHT2 and YHT3 had this to say, respectively:

“Many parents around this school catchment area who send their children here are small scale business people and many work in Indian companies. They have difficulties to find time to come to school to attend school meetings and I think even the IEP meetings you are talking about are not exceptional,” (Interview: October 12, 2021).

“It seems many parents do not have what we call free time to come and attend school meetings and I suggest many of them are business people or working in Indian companies Specialist teachers resorted not to be inviting parents ... that is what I suggested,” (Interview: October 19, 2021).

Finally, specialist teachers alluded to the same views that many parents do not have time to attend IEP meetings when invited. They said parents are always occupied with their businesses.

The research has shown that some parents of learners with SEN do not attend IEP meetings due to time factor. Most of these parents have difficulties in allocating time to attend school activities due to conditions of work where they are employed and other commitments. The results concurred with Poponi (2009) study’s recommendation that parents should be informed in time with articulated details of the meeting such as goals and objectives of the meeting. The amended IDEA (2004) requirement of schools to parental participation provides for a timely notification of the meeting and scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed upon time and place. The

amendments were made to minimise the problem of time for parents to attend IEP meeting. Smith, (2001) indicated time as a challenge to most of parents failure to attend school activities. Scheduling of time difficulties related to work or other responsibilities hinders parental participation. The findings are in line with the model by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) in which the third source of motivation to parental involvement alluded to personal life context variables that influence parents' perceptions of the forms and timing of involvement that seem feasible, including parents' skills, knowledge, time, and energy for involvement. The theory urges schools to understand and support the life context of the families that do not attend meetings due to busy schedules to invite parental involvement in their students' education.

4.4.3 Communication challenges

Effective communication is considered as one of the most important aspect for smooth operation of school activities. Effective communication between teacher and parents of learners with SEN promote collaborative relationship in IEP team work (Elser, 2017). However, the study revealed communication as challenge between teachers and parents of learners with SEN.

Though the above findings indicated that many parents with learners with SEN have negative attitudes towards their children and have no time to attend school meetings, respondents added that there is also communication challenge between parents with learners with SEN and teachers. Many parents expressed communication breakdown as one of the challenges that impede the involvement of parents in school activities as well as IEP meetings.

YPT13 stated: *"I sometimes receive messages very late may be a day before the meeting. This makes me unable to adjust my time in order to attend the meeting."* (Interview: September 22, 2021)

While ZPT16 said: *"Invitations do not reach us in good time. Worse still, some messages do not come to parents directly, hence not reaching us parents. Sometimes it is verbal with incorrect dates of the meeting"* (Interview: October 6, 2021).

The focus group discussion also revealed communication breakdown between teachers and parents. WPT3 commented: *"... Messages are sent through learners whom sometimes may forget to give it to parents or forget the actual date of the meeting"* (FCG: October 8, 2021). While WPT5 explained: *"...Late communication puts us at panic to adjust our time to attend the*

meeting,” (FGD: October 8, 2021). And ZPT18 said: “Some of us are working in companies where taking exit anyhow is a challenge. So we need proper communication to be made in advance of may be two weeks before the date of the meeting” (October 21, 2021).

Furthermore, ZHT4 admitted that there is sometimes communication breakdown between specialist teacher and parents. ZHT4 had this to say:

“Sometimes messages are sent verbally through learners and might forget the message or mentioning another date. I remember, one day two parents of learners with disability came to my office to say they have been invited to attend a meeting while the specialist teacher was absent that day. Upon calling her, she mentioned it was not that day but the following week of the same day,” (Interview: September 27, 2021).

Similarly, WRCT1, WRCT2 and WRCT3 stated that previously some parents have been coming to the resource room when the specialist teacher is absent. WRCT1 said: *“... One day the parent of learner came to meet the specialist teacher only to find she was absent. The parent was not happy that day...” (Interview: August 3, 2021).*

While WRCT2 stated: *“I have forgotten when but I can recall that I saw two parents at the resource room while it was closed. Upon asking them, they said they were invited to meet the specialist teacher whom was absent that day.” (Interview: August 3, 2021).*

And WRCT3 had this to say: *“One parent came to my class to ask if the resource teacher was present that day as he was invited. The resource teacher was not present that day,” (Interview: August 3, 2021).*

Responding to a follow up question, participants expressed that specialist teachers stopped from inviting parents due to their previous frequent failures to attend IEP meetings. Some participants said that currently, specialist teachers are no longer inviting parents to attend meetings at the resource centres.

The study revealed that currently some parents do not attend IEP meetings because they are not invited by the specialist teachers. YPT13, YPT14, ZPT15 commented that they were not invited to attend any meeting concerning their children since 2019. For example, parent YPT13 had this to say: *“I remember my last invitation I got from school was four years ago when I was invited*

to give historical background of my child. Since then I was not invited.” (FGD: October 14, 2021).

YPT14 said, *“I cannot say that I do not attend meetings when there are no invitations. I do not remember the date when I was once invited to school to give details of my child with disability. It was long time ago. But for the past two to three years I did not receive any invitation from school.” (FGD: October 14, 2021).*

ZPT15 explained, *“Parents of children with disability are not much involved in the education of their children. The school does not invite us to attend meetings concerning our children with disabilities. For example, the resource teacher made a decision of placing my child in the resource room without my knowledge. She did not invite me,” (FGD: October 14, 2021).*

Similarly, WRCT3, WRCT5, XRCT7, XRCT8, XRCT9, YRCT15, ZRCT16 and ZRCT18 reiterated the same sentiments that sometimes parents are not invited to attend IEP meetings of their children.

The study has disclosed that teachers do not invite parents when developing IEP. This is contrary to the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Malawi Disability Act of 2012 which promote the inclusiveness of parents of learners with disability in all educational activities of their children. The findings are in tandem with the theoretical model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) which highlighted the value of invitation as one of the motivating factor to parental involvement. The sentiments showed that some challenges which hinder parents with SEN from being involved include use of learners as channels of communication, late dissemination of information, communication breakdown between parents and specialist teachers and passing of incorrect information. The communication channels used distort information passed from teachers to the parents.

The above findings are contrary to other study finding on barriers to parental involvement in special needs education. For example, Elser (2017) reported that teachers sometimes use technical jargons which make parents not to understand the concept being discussed, hence opt to withdraw from attending the subsequent meetings. Use of technical jargons was not expressed in the study as mostly communication is in local language. Another area of communication problems may result from the intricate and sometimes arcane language used in the IEP which

may confuse or discourage a parent (Smith, 2001). Again arcane language was not mentioned in this study. The findings on communication are in contrast with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model of parental involvement process basing on the second source that parents' perceptions of involvement, include general invitations from the school and specific invitations from teachers. Parents are motivated when they are invited through proper communication channels such as letters or phone calls and invitations served in time.

4.4.4 Lack of knowledge

The research findings revealed that some parents of learners with SEN did not attend IEP meetings due to lack knowledge of the outcomes of school meetings to their learners with SEN. WSPT1 explained: *"Some parents do not want to reveal the disability of their children. They do not want to share information with teachers concerning their children with disability for the fear of unknown."*(Interview: August 2, 2021).

The evidence from the focus group discussion revealed that some parents regard learners with special needs as government property, hence parents are not supposed to play any role. ZRCT16 stated that: *"Some parents of learners with disability are illiterate. They do not know the importance of attending IEP meetings. They need awareness campaign."* (FGD: October 19, 2021)

Some parents expressed that they have no any knowledge on what is taught at school so feel it hard to take part in school meetings pertaining to their learners with SEN. YPT14 had this to say: *"I gave up supporting my child with disability... I do not know how to help him in his school activities as I am illiterate... And I am not sure if my child can learn properly as others."* (Interview: September 20, 2021)

ZPT18 explained: *"What I know is that teachers were employed to teach our children not us parents. Parents we are there to search for food to feed our children."* (Interview: September 20, 2021)

Similarly to parents' views, WHT1 said: *"Most parents are ignorant on the importance of educating SEN learners. So they choose not to attend IEP meetings of their children when invited."* (Interview August 2, 2021). While YHT3 stated: *"Some parents think that sending the child with disability to school is unsafe. They overprotect their children. So these types of*

parents choose not to attend meetings deliberately so that their children should drop the school,” (Interview September 30, 2021).

The finding on ignorance due to illiteracy level is in line with a number of studies conducted in Malawi which showed prevalence of high illiteracy level (National Statistics, 2018; Hagen, 2016; GoM, 2019). High illiteracy levels translate into many Malawians not being knowledgeable on most pertinent issues such as education of people with disability. Some parents or guardians of children with disability are not aware that disability is not inability. Mkandawire (2016) stated that many parents in Malawi are still ignorant about the importance of educating their disabled children. The results from the study findings and literature showed that some parents are ignorant about the benefit of educating children with disabilities. Then parents find it difficult to attend IEP meetings.

4.4.5 Socio-economic status of parents with learners with SEN

The study also found that poverty is one of the hindrances to parental involvement in IEP processes. Some parents have a perception that each school meeting is about asking parents to contribute money towards school development activities. Some parents with learners with SEN expressed their economic status as below poverty line, hence do not afford to contribute money meant for school projects. So, they chose not to attend any school meeting.

WPT5 said: *“I chose not to attend any school meeting just because of school fund. I am poor. I rely on piece work for my family survival. The priority is to buy food once I get money. So I feel ashamed to go to attend school meetings and sometimes my child is sent back because of school fund.”* (Interview: August 6, 2021).

While ZPT 16 stated: *“I get money on daily basis through piece work so it is hand to mouth. This makes me difficult to attend school meetings as the child will need food once are back from school. I feel better to go to piece work to earn money to feed my family rather than going to attend school meetings.”* (Interview: September 22, 2021).

Parents shared similar views that they come from low income families. They associate attending IEP meetings with contributions on school fund meant for school development activities. In addition, regular class teachers mentioned poverty as one of the contributing factors which

impedes parental involvement in IEP processes. During focus group discussion three regular class teachers XRCT6, XRTC10 and YRTC14 mentioned poverty as one of the hindrances to parental involvement in IEP meetings. They said some parents do not afford to pay school fund term by term, hence afraid of positively responding to any school invitation. YHT3 agreed by stating: *“Some parents struggle to pay school fund. So when you invite them to attend parental meetings they shun thinking that they will be asked to pay school fund.”* (Interview: September 27, 2021)

High poverty rate in Malawi is one of the barriers to education, including the education of learners with special needs (Hagen, 2016; FAWEMA, 2012, p.4). Most Malawians are below poverty line (National Statistics, 2018). Many parents do not afford supporting their children with necessary teaching and learning resources as well as paying school fund (FAWEMA, 2012, p.13). Hidden costs of education are still a barrier to poorer families (CIEM, p. 13). Direct as well as indirect economic causes on parents such as lack of resources are some of the reasons preventing children with disabilities from attending school (CIEM, p. 29). The result of poverty is school dropout which is contrary to Education for All (EFA) goals and other UN convention rights for people with disability which Malawi is a signatory. In addition, the most recent regulation regarding people with disability in Malawi is the Disability Act of 2012 which promotes the education of people with disability in supporting EFA goals. Therefore, parents of learners with SEN do not participate in IEP processes due to the fear of paying school fund and other education costs due to their socioeconomic status. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model (1995, 1997) postulate that there is a tendency of schools to assume that low socio-economic status of parents are not likely to be involved in their children’s education because they lack the time, energy, ability, knowledge, or motivation to do so.

4.4.6 Relationship between parents and teachers

The study found that poor relationship between teachers and parents hindered parental participation in the development and implementation of the IEP. Some parents complained about the unwelcoming behaviour portrayed by some teachers which made some parents finding it difficult to become equal and meaningful partners of support team that develop and implement

the IEP. During focus group discussion, WPT3 stated: *“I was once told by the resource teacher that I am not knowledgeable on how to assist my child with intellectual disability. Therefore, I should leave her alone supporting the child as she is an expert in the field. The was shouting at the time when I wanted to know why my child was placed at the resource centre on full time basis not allowed to learn together with other learners in a regular class,”* (FGD: October 08, 2021).

And XPT7 had this to say: *“Sometimes, resource teachers do not involve us in decision making. They say it is their role to decide what is supposed to be done on children with disability not parents.”* (FGD: October 08, 2021). Furthermore, XPT8 commented: *“The resource teacher always shouts at us when we ask the reason of his/her regular absenteeism on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. He/she said we have no time of asking the reasons.”* (FGD: October 08, 2021).

In addition, XRCT7 stated: *“It seems the relationship between the specialist teacher and parents is not good. I remember some parents have been coming to my class complaining the frequent absenteeism of the resource teacher which makes learners with special education needs knocking off earlier.”* (Interview: August 12, 2021).

Similarly, ZHT4 said: *“Some parents have been coming to complain the treatment they receive from resource teacher. Many complained of being shouted when they come to pick their children home by referring the time as late though they come in time. The resource teacher always knocks off early hence wants parents to come and collect their children early so that he/she knocks off early,”* (Interview: September 27, 2021).

Relationship challenges between teachers and parents were disclosed as one of the hindrances to parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP. The findings are in contrast to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model of parental involvement which focuses on environment playing a role in supporting the cognitive development of the child. Hence sour relationship between parents and teachers create poor environment to learning of the child.

4.5 Participants' perceived Ways of Promoting Parental Involvement in Individualised Education Plan Processes

Participants were asked to suggest ways of promoting parental involvement in individualised education plan. The study found that the participants mentioned different ways of encouraging parental involvement. The responses were put into the following themes: introduction of parents of children with SEN committees, promoting good communication, sensitization meetings, involvement of other stakeholders which include Parent and Teachers Association (PTA), School Management Committee (SMC) and Community leaders and increasing capacity building.

The researcher gathered views from the parents of schools W, X, Y and Z by using one on one interviews and focus group discussion which were guided by the following leading question:

- a. What do you think are some of the ways of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes?

4.5.1 Committees of parents of children with disabilities

Participants suggested the need to establish a committee of parents of children with SEN with an aim of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes, encouraging one another and empowering parents of children with SEN in decision making. Participants believed that working as a team with a common interest will enhance stronghold in the fight against barriers of parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP. For example WPT1 commented: *"Parents of children with disabilities need to work together and share ideas since we have a common agenda. I think we can only come together through creation of a committee for parents of children with disabilities."*(FGD: October 08, 2021). While YPT11 suggested: *"Role models are needed to motivate us (parents of children with disabilities). We can form a group of parents and share ideas and learn from each other,"* (FGD: October 14, 2021).

Regular class teachers shared the parents' suggestions of coming up with a committee in order to encourage and motivate each other when other parents are failing to support their children with disabilities due to many factors such as lack of interest and love, negligence and negative attitude towards children with disabilities. ZRCT19 said: *"...Peer learning can promote other parents who have no hope of their children with disabilities. I recommend parents forming their association of parents of children with disabilities,"* (Interview: September 29, 2021).

Furthermore, the evidence from the interview with head teachers revealed that formation of parent of children with SEN committees can enhance parental involvement in school activities. WHT1 stated: *“Many parents of children with disability took it as a misfortune and neglect from supporting their child with disability. Forming parent of children with disabilities can assist in gaining courage and hope to some parents who have negative attitude,”* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

Similarly, specialist teachers were of the same view with parents, regular class teachers and head teachers on the formation of a committee of parents of children with disabilities. WSPT1 had this to say: *“It is easy to work with parents as a group rather than as an individual parent. Meeting with all parents as group for the common agenda saves time and energy,”* (Interview: August 5, 2021).

While YSPT3 commented: *“We had parent of children with disability committee some time back. I remember it was helping in sensitizing their fellow parents to send their children with disability to school and took part in school activities. I recommend if we reform those committees,”* (Interview: September 27, 2021).

The participants in the study suggested formation of committees of parents of children with SEN as one way of increasing parental involvement in IEP processes. The views of the participants are in line with the Ministry of Education Guidelines (2009) on access and equity as its priority number one. The guidelines portrays collaboration of stakeholders in encouraging parents of children with disabilities to send their children to school and take part in school activities; and equip parents with necessary knowledge and skills for caring and supporting learners with special education needs as some of government strategies. The formation of committees of parents of children with disabilities will enhance achievement of government agenda of promoting access and equity by targeting a group than an individual.

Again, the participants views are in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005) level 1 and level 4. Level 1 stresses parent motivation. Parents' beliefs and attitudes about their role in their children's education can be promoted through parental committees. And Level 4 states about parent involvement at school. Parents' participation in school activities and decision-

making processes is also enhanced through school committees of parents of children with diverse needs.

4.5.2 Good communication and rapport

Participants also suggested an improved communication process and creation of good working relationship as a way of countering poor working relation culminating from poor communication between parents and teachers. WPT4 commented: *“I suggest resource teachers should have phone numbers of all parents of learners with disabilities and should call parents a week before the date of the meeting and keep on reminding them,”* (FGD: October 08, 2021). And WPT5 said: *“I recommend writing of letters and sent in good time rather than verbal communication through learners which sometimes may forget to communicate to the parents,”* (FGD: 08, 2021).

In addition, parents said that resource teachers should avoid words which may negatively affect parents. For example XPT7 said: *“A certain teacher shouted at me that my child with disability is troublesome like myself. I felt pain hearing those remarks and frankly I hate the teacher up to now,”* (Interview: September 20, 2021).

While XPT8 added: *“Teachers should respect parents by selecting language which is palatable by parents. Imagine speaking English to a parent who does not understand it. The parent may feel embarrassed and choose deliberately not to attend school meetings,”* (Interview: September 20, 2021).

Similarly, WHT1 emphasised the importance of effective communication by carefully choosing words to communicate to parents to avoid frustrating the parents. WHT1 reported: *“Sometimes, teachers do not use friendly words when talking with parents. They may use jargon words that make parents losing interest in the conversation,”* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

Based on the information provided, teachers suggested changing the medium of communication from the use of learners to direct phone calls to the parents. However, teachers were quick to explain the challenge of using phone calls like costs since there is no provision of airtime for communication. The teachers opted for the use of Whatsup group if it can be accessible to many parents. Smith (2001) study’s recommendation on communication problem was that prior to the meeting, educators should solicit information from the parents about their preferences and needs

regarding the meeting, including a convenient time and place. Parents must be formally notified in writing about the purpose of the meeting, the time and location, and participants of the meeting. Teachers should understand that parental roles differ from one parent to another so teachers should think of designing different strategies to convince parents that their involvement can help their children with disability (Strickland, 2015). In addition, mentioning the objective of the meeting in advance may tame fears of school fund reminders and make parents free to attend the meetings. This is in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model of parental involvement should base on parents' perceptions of invitations to involvement, including general invitations from the school and specific invitations from teachers.

4.5.3 Civic education, sensitisation and orientation

Another perceived means of improving parental involvement was teaching parents of children with disabilities to remove misconceptions and raising awareness campaigns on the importance of parental involvement in IEP processes through civic education, sensitisation and orientation on both parents of learners with disabilities and teachers.

The evidence from focus group discussions and interviews revealed the need for civic education targeting stakeholders from all the four schools. For example, WHT1 stated that: *"Some parents are not aware of what is an IEP and its importance. I suggest these type of parents should undergo civic education on IEP development and implementation so that they understand their role in supporting the children,"* (FGD: October 5, 2021).

Similarly, YHT3 commented: *"I recommend to civic educate these parents since many do not have knowledge on what is IEP. What they only know is just sending the child to school and consider the child with disability as a government property who is fully assisted by the school. They do not know their roles in supporting the children,"* (FGD: October 12, 2021).

WSPT1 seconded: *"I am in support of conducting civic education even to all parents of children with disability as many parents do not understand ways of assisting their children when at home. Many parents do not have knowledge of an IEP."* (FGD: October 5, 2021).

XSPT2 had a similar view and had this to say: *"I remember one time when I asked some parents on what academic support they give to their children. They answered that they do not know how*

they can help their children with disabilities apart from feeding them. So I think these parents need civic education so that they really understand the importance of their involvement in IEP processes,” (FGD: October 12, 2021).

Similarly, regular class teachers also mentioned civic education as one way of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes. YRCT13 said: *“I suggest parents need to be taught their roles and the importance of their involvement in IEP processes. This should be emphasised so that those parents without IEP knowledge should benefit from the civic education which can be conducted,”* (Interview: September 20, 2021).

ZRCT18 also commented: *“Knowledge is power. We cannot expect someone without knowledge of IEP to be involved in a thing which he/she does not know. Only civic education can assist on this problem.”* (Interview: October 19, 2021).

Six parents echoed teachers’ views of civic educating parents to understand their role in IEP development and implementation. These include: WPT2, WPT5, XPT6, XPT9, YPT10, ZPT15 and ZPT18.

The study also identified sensitisation as another way of improving parental involvement in IEP processes. The findings revealed a need to sensitise both teachers and parents of children with special needs education on specialisation of responsibilities when supporting SEN learners. The research disclosed that some teachers have a deficit on how to work with parents of children with disabilities as mentioned in the hindrances of parental involvement.

Finally, the findings also added orientation of all stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of IEP. The orientation will level the ground to all involved stakeholders to understand the importance of parental involvement. For example, six regular class teachers mentioned the need for orientation of class teachers together with parents. WRCT 2 commented: *“Many class teachers have very little knowledge of IEP. It is only the specialist teacher who is knowledgeable enough about the document. If teachers have very little knowledge, what more about parents of learners with disability? I suggest we need to be oriented together with the parents. This will assist to promote involvement of many stakeholders including parents themselves,”* (Interview: August 4, 2021).

Evidence from focus group discussions, indicated that parents opted for orientation on the development and implementation of IEP. The parents reported that orientation will make them aware of IEPs and their specific roles in their development and implementation. Parent ZPT17 had this to say: *“It is my first time to hear the word IEP. This means that I do not know it. I need to be taught the importance and what am I supposed to do as a parent,”* (FGD October 21, 2021).

The sentiments shared by participants were in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005) on Level 1 about parent motivation. Parents' beliefs and attitudes about their role in their children's education can be promoted through sensitisation. Sensitised parents become knowledgeable and motivated to support their learners with special education needs. It is evident from the information provided that parents of children with disabilities are ignorant on most issues that concern the education of their children. This therefore, requires civic education to sensitise or orient parents the importance of parental involvement in the IEP processes.

4.5.4 Conducting meetings with concerned stakeholders

The findings revealed that conducting meetings with parents of SEN learners, teachers, School Management Committees (SMC), Parent and Teachers Association (PTA), Mother Groups (MG) and other community leaders can improve parental participation in IEP processes. This surfaced during interviews and FGD with all categories of participants. WPT1 had this to say: *“Teachers should be conducting meetings with all parents of learners with disability as a group or one to one with those parents who may not comply in supporting his or her child. Inviting a parent for a one-to-one meeting or visiting their homes will motivate a concerned parent to start supporting his/her child,”* (Interview: August 6, 2021).

Other parents such as WPT4, XPT7 and ZPT18 also suggested conducting meetings with parents of children with disabilities through home visitations. Similarly, regular class teachers WRCT2, XRCT6, XRCT7, XRCT9 and ZRCT16 echoed the same sentiments. XRCT9 said: *“I suggest that specialist teachers should be calling individual parents and talk one-to-one with all parents who do not attend IEP meetings when called or visiting their homes. This may encourage the parents to start supporting their children,”* (Interview: August 12, 2021).

In addition, head teachers suggested conducting meetings with the school management structures such as SMC, PTA and MG can assist in encouraging parents of learners with disabilities to take part in IEP processes. WHT1 stated: *“I suggest involving other stakeholders such as SMC, PTA and MG who stay together with the parents to initiate meetings. Parents of learners with disabilities will be encouraged and intrinsically enforced when those leaders have a talk with them on the importance of their involvement in IEP processes. These leaders will easily track parents who may default and also track the progress of the agreed task,”* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

Specialist teachers added that use of religious and local leaders in promoting parental involvement in IEP processes would be ideal. ZSPT3 said: *“If we involve religious leaders in parental meetings will dispel some beliefs parents have about children with disabilities. They will discourage those beliefs and parents will change their mindset. While local leaders will talk on some cultural beliefs attached to children with disabilities such as misfortune from malpractices one parent had gone before bearing a child with disability,”*(Interview: September 27, 2021).

Adding their voice, WSPT1 and WSPT2 said involving community leaders would influence parents on mindset change against misconceptions that some parents have.

4.5.5 Capacity building

The study disclosed shortage of specialist teachers in primary schools which resulted into having too much workload. The study found that two primary schools had one specialist teacher who worked for both schools. WSPT1 complained: *“I am alone handling learners with SEN in two schools. This is a big challenge for me to work effectively. I need to teach SEN learners. I need to prepare IEPs. I need to conduct home visits. To be frank, I only focus on teaching SEN learners more than other activities,”* (Interview: August 2, 2021).

The sentiments showed that the specialist teacher has limited time to involve parents of learners with disability in the IEP processes due to pressure of work. Similarly, XSPT2 commented: *“I work not only here but also assist in other nearby schools as an Itinerant Teacher. I suggest if government could recruit many specialist teachers to ease our work in the field as the shortage is acute,”* (Interview: August 10, 2021).

Head teachers agreed that there was an acute shortage of specialist teachers. WHT1 had this to say: *“We have one specialist teacher whom we share with our colleagues of the other school. It’s a big challenge to have only one specialist teacher catering two schools,”* (Interview: August 2, 2021). HT2 and HT3 view is that acute shortage of specialist teachers was limiting them from fully involving parents in IEP processes.

The research found that there is an opportunity of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes through strategies which include introduction of committees of parents of learners with disability, good communication, civic education, conducting meetings, and increasing capacity building. The recommendations are in line with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (2005) states that parents become involved due to three main factors: personal motivation, invitations to become involved, and life context. Personal motivation is derived from parental role construction and self-efficacy, while invitations to become involved can come from teachers or other parents. Life context refers to the individual circumstances that affect a parent's ability to become involved, such as work schedule or family responsibilities. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parental involvement process which base on three major sources of motivation which base on valuing parents, considering time and energy, and good communication.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has analysed and presented results of the study based on the four main themes which were further classified into sub-themes that culminated from responses from participants. The findings indicated that parents of learners with disability lack knowledge about IEP. It also indicated the benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes which includes enhancing student performance, parent-teacher relationship, source of child profile information and proper coordination of tasks. It also disclosed hindrances of parental involvement in the IEP processes such as attitudinal beliefs, time factor, communication challenges and socioeconomic status of parents of learners with disability. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted ways to promote parental involvement in IEP processes. Some of the ways include: introduction of committees of parents of learners with disability, good communication, civic education, conducting meetings, and increasing capacity building. The next chapter is about conclusions and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Chapter Overview

The chapter presents a summary of the research journey from chapter one - background to the study up to chapter four - main findings from the research study. Then, conclusions drawn from the findings in regard to views of head teachers, specialist teachers, regular class teachers and parents on parental involvement in individualised education plan are presented. The chapter also highlights the implications of the study findings. At the end, indications for further research studies are highlighted for those who are interested in specialising in the field of study.

5.2 Research Journey

The research journey started with chapter one, the introduction to the study whereby it highlighted background to the study which encompasses detailed description of an IEP, the introduction of an IEP in Malawi, description on parental involvement in IEP processes and its benefits. The introduction also described the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study and finally definitions of key terms.

Chapter two followed with the reviewed literature related to the research study. The literature reviewed was from global level, region level and local level. The reviewed literature unfolds four main areas of the research study which include parental awareness of IEP and their involvement, benefits of parental involvement in IEP processes, barriers to parental involvement in IEP processes and ways of promoting parental involvement in IEP. Then, Theoretical framework

which guided the research study was unveiled. The study was guided by the revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model (2005) on motivation for parental involvement in their children's education.

Next was chapter three, research design and methodology. The research used a constructivist research paradigm and phenomenological research design. The research used qualitative research approaches to explore views of parents and teachers on parental involvement in IEP process. The study used criterion purposive sampling technique. The methods used to generate data were interview, focus group discussion and qualitative document analysis. The study used qualitative thematic data analysis to analyse its data. Finally, the researcher ensured trustworthiness and reliability of the research and the ethical consideration followed.

The other chapter was findings and discussion which were based on the views of the participants who were teachers and parents with learners with special education needs from four schools W, X, Y and Z. The main findings have been highlighted in the next sub-topic 5.2.

5.3 Conclusion

On the first specific question of what the parents know about the individualised education plan, it can be concluded that parents have limited knowledge of individualised education plan. This is so because participants in the study stated that parents are not told the name of the document but only asked to share information of their children with special education needs which is mostly done once when registering the child. Parents accepted partial awareness of the document during the interviews and focus group discussion. Some class teacher doubted on parental awareness of IEP. So, it can be concluded from this study that parents are partially aware of the document called IEP despite being asked to give information about their children and advised to perform some tasks on their children as few parents in the study attended IEP workshop in 2018.

On the second specific question of how parental involvement promotes IEP processes, parents and teachers shared the common sentiments which promote parental involvement in IEP processes. Hence, concluded that parental involvement promotes the development and

implementation of IEP. The study revealed perceptions from the participants that parental involvement in the IEP processes strengthens the relationship between parents and teachers. It also promotes love towards SEN learners and ensures proper coordination of tasks between parents and teachers on supporting SEN learners. In addition, parents assist in supervision and monitoring the progress of their children with disability and give a feedback to teachers which promote student performance. Finally, parents help teachers to access information on child profile. Therefore, parental involvement is vital in the IEP processes. Hence need to be promoted by strategizing better ways of incorporating parents in the education of learners with special needs.

On the third specific question of what hinders parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP, it can be concluded that barriers to parental involvement are many which need to be addressed with an aim of promoting parental involvement in school activities of their children. Conflict relationship between parents and teachers, socioeconomic status of parents, ignorance, communication challenges, time factor and attitudinal beliefs are some of the hindrances towards parental involvement in IEP processes discovered in the study. Parents suggested time factor, communication challenges, conflicts and ignorance; more than teacher. On the other side, teachers suggested socio-economic status of parents and attitudinal beliefs; more than parents

On the fourth and last specific question of how can parental involvement be promoted for successful development and implementation of IEP, it can be concluded that introducing committees of parents of learners with disability, good communication and rapport between parents and teachers, civic education, conducting meetings and increasing capacity building are some of the ways of promoting parental involvement in IEP processes. The committees will encourage parents to attend IEP meetings and some parents will act as role models. Effective communication will enable parents to plan properly and reschedule their activities in order to pave way to attend IEP meetings. Parents and teachers shared common aspects on ways to promote parental involvement in IEP processes.

5.4 Implications of the study

One key finding of this research is communication challenges. Sometimes parents are not invited or are invited late and using unreliable channels. The implication of this is that parents fail to attend IEP meetings in most of the times. This demotes parental involvement in IEP processes. Hence, discourages effective relationship between teachers and parents in supporting learners with special education needs. Effective communication through use of formal and timely invitations can improve parental involvement in IEP processes. Invitations may be sent to parents well in advance and teachers may use letters or phone calls as compared to use of verbal communication sent through learners with diverse needs. In addition, use of Technology-Based Communication, such as video conferencing or online portals, to enhance communication and involvement where that opportunities exist.

The other finding is attitudinal beliefs some parents have towards children with disability. It has been established in the study that some parents regard children with SEN as low performers. They have negative attitude towards children with disability. The implication is that parents do not have interest to support learners with disability. They judge that children with disability have no future. This also retards initiatives to incorporate parents in the development and implementation of IEP. Application of culturally responsive practices such as use of culturally sensitive language and materials, and consider parents' diverse backgrounds and needs can improve the implication caused by attitudinal beliefs. Again, sensitisation, training and support to parents can help them navigate the IEP processes and advocate for their child and gain confidence towards the future of their child with disability.

Lastly, socioeconomic status of some parents of learners with disabilities is another key finding from the study. Its implication is that if those parents are not economically empowered or supported with income generating activities, learners with disability from that family would not continue further with their education and the country would not achieve education for all policy although government is tirelessly advocating for it to achieve SDG 4. Economical empowerment to parents below poverty-line may improve their economical status hence support their learners with education materials effectively.

By implementing these strategies, educators and IEP teams can increase parental involvement, improve collaboration, and ultimately benefit the student's education and well-being.

5.5 Areas of further study

The following are areas for further research study:

- The same but quantitative study in primary schools of other education districts to triangulate.
- Exploring the impact of making Individualised Education Plan mandatory through policy.
- Investigating the role of NGO's in improving parental involvement in IEP development and implementation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Letter of Introduction



ACTING PRINCIPAL
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19th July, 2021

To Whom It May Concern

Letter of Introduction: Mr. Felix Ndagwiransonga

This letter serves to confirm that **Mr. Felix Ndagwiransonga** is a registered postgraduate student in the Education Foundations Department, of the School of Education, of the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. He is studying under the Master of Education (Psychology of Education) program. His registration Number is MED/PSY/10/19.

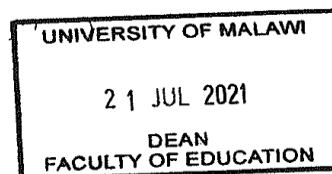
Mr. Ndagwiransonga completed his coursework. As a requirement for completion of his study program, he is conducting a research titled "*Exploring stakeholder views on parental involvement in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in Blantyre Urban Education district*". This letter therefore, serves to request your institution/organization to assist our student to collect the required data.

For any inquiries please contact the undersigned via the following email address: med@cc.ac.mw

Sincerely yours,

Chikumbutso H. Manthalu, PhD.

Postgraduate Programmes Coordinator – EDF Department



APPENDIX 2: Informed Consent Letter

Dear participant;

I am a student from the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, pursuing Master of Educational Psychology. I am currently conducting my research project on exploring views of stakeholders on parental involvement in Individualised Education Plan (IEP) in four selected primary schools in Blantyre urban education district, Malawi.

This study would be helpful in understanding issues concerning the development and implementation of IEP by involving all concerned stakeholders at a school level. So the issues to be investigated will help to disclose challenges in the development and implementation of IEP and their possible solutions.

The interviews will be through note taking and recording in order to acquire important information provided. Nobody will have access to your data except me and you will not be recognized by any one.

I consider your opinion as very important and I will appreciate your participation. However, participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw any time you wish to do so.

If you wish to participate in this interview please complete the attached letter of consent. If you have any question regarding this study at any time please contact:

Felix Ndagwiransonga, Chancellor College, P.O. Box 280, Zomba

Phone: +265 884 529 438/996 664 507; Email: med-psy-10-19@unima.ac.mw or ndagwiransongaf@gmail.com

AN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I have received oral and written information concerning the study. I would therefore, like to participate in this study.

Full name of participant_____

Date_____Signature_____

Phone number_____

APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS WITH SEN LEARNERS

Designation: _____

Gender: _____

Level of Education: _____

Category of the disability of the child: _____

1. Are you aware of an IEP?

(Kodi mumadziwa kutipali chikalata chomwe chimalembedwa chokhudza mmene mwana wanu azimuthandizira mwapadera?)

2. Do you take part in the development and implementation of IEP?

(Kodi inu mumatenga nawo gawo polemba ndikugwiritsa ntchito zomwe zalembedwa muchikalatacho?)

3. What role do you play in the development and implementation of IEP of your child?

(Ngati mumatenga nawo gawo, kodi udindo wanu ndiwotani pakulemba ndi pakukwaniritsa zomwe zakonzedwa muchikalatacho?)

4. Do you think your involvement in the development and implementation of IEP important in academic performance of your child? How?

(Mukuona kuti inuyo ndi ofunika kuti mudzitenga nawo gawo pakulemba komanso pa kukwaniritsa ntchito yomwe yakonzedwa muchikalatacho?)

5. What do you think can make you fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of your child?

(Fotokozani zomwe mukuganiza kuti zimapangitsa/zingapangitse kuti inu musamatenge nawo gawo pokonza ndi pokwaniritsa zomwe zalembedwa muchikalatacho)

6. What is the relationship between you as a parent with your child's teacher?
(*Nanga ubale wanu ndi aphunzitsi omwe amathandiza mwana wanu ndi wotani?*)

7. What are some factors to consider in promoting parental involvement in IEP process?
(*Tafotokozani zomwe mukuganiza kuti zingathandizire popititsa patsogolo ubale wanu ndi aphunzitsi kuti nanunso muzitenga nawo gawo pakulemba ndi pakukwaniritsa zomwe zakonzedwa muchikalatacho.*)

8. Do you have any comment or questions concerning IEP?
(*Fotokozani ngati muli ndi zoti muonjezere kapena ndemanga pa zomwe takambiranazi*)

Thanks very much for your cooperation

APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HEADTEACHERSDIX

5:

Designation: _____

Gender: _____

Teaching Subject: _____

Teaching Experience at primary school: _____

Level of Education: _____

Specialisation in SNE: _____

1. Are you aware that SEN learners require IEP?

2. Do you take part in the development and implementation of IEP?

3. What role do you play in the development and implementation of IEP of SEN learners at this school?

Are parents with SEN learners involved in the development and implementation of IEP?

4. Do you think parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP important in academic performance of SEN learners? How?

5. What role do parents with SEN learners play in the development and implementation of IEP?

6. What do you think can make parents of SEN learners fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of their children?

What are some factors to consider in promoting parental involvement in IEP process?

What is the relationship between teachers and parents of SEN learners?

Do you have any comment or questions concerning IEP?

Thanks very much for your cooperation

APPENDIX 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR REGULAR CLASS TEACHERS WITH SEN LEARNERS

Designation: _____

Gender: _____

Teaching Subject: _____

Teaching Experience at primary school: _____

Level of Education: _____

Specialisation in SNE: _____

1. Are you aware that SEN learners require IEP?

2. Do you take part in the development and implementation of IEP?

3. What role do you play in the development and implementation of IEP of your SEN learners in this class?

4. Are parents with SEN learners involved in the development and implementation of IEP?

5. What role do parents with SEN learners play in the development and implementation of IEP?

6. Do you think the involvement of parents with SEN learners important in the IEP processes?

7. What do you think can make parents of SEN learners fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of their children?

8. What are some factors to consider in promoting parental involvement in IEP process?

9. What is the relationship between you as a teacher with parents of SEN learners?

10. Do you have any comment or questions concerning IEP?

Thanks very much for your cooperation

APPENDIX 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SPECIALIST TEACHERS

Designation: _____

Gender: _____

Teaching Subject: _____

Teaching Experience at primary school: _____

Level of Education: _____

Specialisation in SNE: _____

1. Are you aware of an IEP?

2. Do you take part in the development and implementation of IEP?

3. What role do you play in the development and implementation of IEP of your SEN learners?

4. Are parents with SEN learners involved in the development and implementation of IEP?

5. What role do parents with SEN learners play in the development and implementation of IEP?

6. Do you think parental involvement in the development and implementation of IEP important in academic performance of your SEN learners? How?

7. What do you think can make parents of SEN learners fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of their children?

8. What are some factors to consider in promoting parental involvement in IEP process?

9. What is the relationship between you as a specialist teacher with parents of SEN learners?

10. Do you have any comment or questions concerning IEP?

Thanks very much for your cooperation

APPENDIX 7: FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE HEADTEACHER, CLASS TEACHERS AND SPECIALIST TEACHER

1. Do you involve parents with SEN learners in the development and implementation of IEP?
2. Do you see any importance of involving parents with SEN learners in the development and implementation of IEPs?
3. What role do parents with SEN learners play during the development and implementation of IEP?
4. Do parents with SEN learners attend the IEP meetings when called?
5. What do you think can make parents of SEN learners fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of their children?
6. What are some factors to consider in promoting parental involvement in IEP process?

Thanks very much for your cooperation

APPENDIX 8: FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR PARENTS WITH SEN LEARNERS

1. Are you aware of an IEP?
2. Are you involved in the development and implementation of IEP?
3. Do you see any importance of involving you in the development and implementation of IEPs?
4. What role do you play as parents with SEN learners during the development and implementation of IEP?
5. Do you attend the IEP meetings when called?
6. What do you think can make you fail to be involved in the planning and implementation of IEP of your children?
7. What are some factors to consider in promoting your involvement in IEP process?

Thanks very much for your cooperation

**APPENDIX 9: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OBSERVATION CHECKLIST FOR THE
AVAILABILITY OF IEP AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

School code:

Enrolment of SEN learners:

Item	Yes	No
Are IEPs available at the school?		
Are minutes of IEP planning meetings available?		
Does the IEP shows list of stakeholders involved in IEP meetings		
Is the headteachers involved in IEP planning and implementation?		
Is the class teacher involved in IEP planning and implementation?		
Are SEN learners involved in IEP planning and implementation?		
Are parents involved in IEP planning?		
Are parents involved in implementation?		

APPENDIX 10: INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION PLAN TEMPLATE

Learner: _____ Date of Birth: _____ Sex: _____

School: _____: Class _____

Zone: _____ District: _____

Placement: (mainstream, resource room, full time/part time)

Teacher: _____

Instructional area: (areas of concern e.g. numeracy, literacy, socialization, all day living skills, vocational skills) _____

Date of IEP meeting: (when parents, teachers, learner and other professionals met)

Date Services Begun: _____

Learner Profile: (what is the learner's family situation, school attendance, medical information, learning style etc.?)

Current Level of Performance/Functioning: (what is the learner able to do now and with how much assistance? What is the learner not yet able to do? Knowledge of national curriculum is important at this level (Assessment report assists in compiling this section).

Assessment Standard: (what will the learner eventually do and to what extent? The goals/assessment standards are usually derived from the current level of functioning)

Success Criteria: (what will the learner do this school year; to what extent; under what conditions and with how much assistance? The objectives/success criteria are made from the goals and aligned to the curriculum/teacher's guide, make sure that they are task analyzed (each goal must have its own success criteria)

Teaching Methods and Adaptations: (How will the learner be taught, i.e. type of setting, grouping, and adaptations (modification/accommodations) to be made, hours per week, techniques and teaching-learning resources to be used, means of measuring achievement? People involved in the programme and what they will do)

Related Services: (does the learner need assistive devices, counselling, orientation and mobility, therapies, who will provide them)

Evaluation Procedures: (How will the programme be monitored and evaluated, when?)

Review Date :(When will the team meet to evaluate the progress?)
