

**Effectiveness of peer support in enhancing interpersonal skills among learners with special needs: A case study of a selected combined school Ndola district of Zambia.**

**By**

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**A research report submitted to the faculty of education department of EPSSE University of Zambia in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of degree of masters in**



**The University Of Zambia**

Institute of distance education

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**2021**

**DECLARATION**

I, Newa, Nyendwa Mwila Margaret hereby declare that the work presented herein is original work done by me and has not been published or submitted elsewhere for the requirement of a master's degree programme. Any literature date or work done by other and cited within this thesis has given due acknowledgement and listed in the reference section.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of positive peer support to increase social interaction of students with special needs. This study followed a teacher action research design with data collected on two groups of students with special education need in two different categories of school learning sessions within the same school. The participants included two groups of eight and seven special education students, and two groups of eight and seven typically developing peer supporters and the a special education teacher. Observations and a questionnaire were used to collect and analyze data. The results indicated that special needs students benefit from having peer support from peers to help increase social interaction. Both groups of student's progress supported the evidence stated in previous research stating that peer support would increase positive social interactions. One recommendation is for schools to create and implement programs that support the increase of social skills for students with special needs.

**Keywords:** Special education, social interaction, peer support, special education unit general education

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of key terms, organisation of the study and summary of chapter.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The provision of education to children or persons with special abilities has had been a topical issue from time immemorial. It is widely recognized that special needs education is crucial in meeting the educational needs of children. To this end, a number of interventions had been put in place by various stakeholders to ensure that education is effectively provided to children with special abilities. Interventions such as: the Education for All (EFA) conference of 1990; the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities; the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and; the Sustainable Development Goals are in place to emphasise the need for equality in the provision of education and services globally. It is therefore, follows that because Zambia is part of these conventions and conferences, it has made a number of strides in ensuring that what was agreed, guide its policy direction with respect to the provision of education to persons with disabilities. In Zambia, the Ministry of education has put in place a number of policy documents to support the education of persons with disabilities. These include: 1the 1977 Education reforms which emphasised the need to increase the presence of children with disabilities in the education system; the Focus on Learning policy of 1992; Educating our Future policy of 1996, which stresses the need that all children with disabilities should be integrated into mainstream classroom to whatever degree possible; the Education act of 2011, the Zambia Persons with Disabilities Act and curriculum Framework of 2013 emphasised the need for the integration and adaptation of the general education curriculum to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.(MoE, 1977, MoE, 1992, MoE, 1996, and MoGE, 2013). These interventions recognize the need for inclusive education and the need for teachers to use appropriate interventions in order to meet the learning needs of children with special need in learning institutions. Teachers should use a variety of teaching methods and techniques in order to carter for the range of learning needs of special children while being cognisant of the available resources. Fink *et al.* (2013) contended that children who engage in effective social interaction

with peers are generally well adjusted and well liked, contributes to long term positive outcomes, and saying inclusive education should be supported to its fullest potential as it improves the social skills and friendships of children with educational needs. It therefore, follows that the use of methods that promote active participation of learners and interaction by teachers are essential in the learners learning ability and assimilation. Despite the various interventions that have been put in place in Zambia to encourage inclusive education in classrooms, little is known about strategies that encourage social interactions among learners with disabilities. Enhanced interpersonal skills among learners with disabilities remain central to promoting inclusive practices within and beyond the school environment. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the effectiveness of peer support as a method of encouraging inclusive education to improve the interaction of learners with disabilities in Zambia.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Social isolation and stigma have been major challenges that children with disabilities have faced in institutions in Zambia (Miler et al. 2016). This poses a significant challenge to interaction and recovery, more especially to those in schools. Such children with special needs tend to engage in lower levels of social play, initiate peer interaction, and are less often chosen as partners or playmates, and are more likely to be rejected by peers than typically developing children (Miler et al. 2016). Therefore, a number of interventions have been recommended in the education sector aimed at improving the interaction of learners with disabilities in schools. One such method is the use of peer support by teachers in schools (Fink et al. 2013 and Miler et al. 2016). However, the nature of peer support that would tackle this challenge of social interaction of such children has been studied by many academicians, practitioners and policymakers, and it has posed a significant challenge gap of finding a permanent solution that would enhance social interaction between children with special needs and those without. Thus, this research paper sought to examine the effectiveness of peer support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs with Combined School in Ndola District of the Copperbelt Province.

## **1.3 The Profile of Mwabombeni Combined School**

Mwabombeni Combined School is situated in Ndola district of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia.

### **1.4.0 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this research are divided into the general and specific objectives as follow:

#### **1.4.1 General objective of the study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of peer support at enhancing interpersonal skills of students with special needs.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives of the study were:**

- (i) To identify the kind of learning disabilities that learners have at Mwabombeni Combined School.
- (ii) To identify strategies that teachers use to enhance interpersonal skills among learners with special education need at Mwabombeni combined school.
- (iii) To find out the challenges in interpersonal skills among learners with special education need at Mwabombeni combined school.
- (iv) To establish the extent to which peer-support enhances interpersonal skills among learners at Mwabombeni combined school.
- (v) To establish the challenges encountered in implementing peer support at Mwabombeni combined school.
- (vi) To find out the level of interpersonal skills among learners with special education need after withdrawing peer support at Mwabombeni combined school.
- (vii) To establish the measures that can be taken to enhance the effectiveness of peer support at improving interpersonal skills of learners with special education need at Mwabombeni Combined School.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The study will address the following questions:

- (i) What kind of learning disabilities do learners have at Mwabombeni Combined School?
- (ii) What strategies do teachers use to enhance interpersonal skills among learners with special education need at Mwabombeni combined school?
- (iii) What challenges in interpersonal skills do learners with special education need encounter at Mwabombeni Combined School?

- (iv) To what extent does peer-support enhance interpersonal skills among learners at Mwabombeni combined school?
- (v) What challenges are encountered in implementing peer-support at Mwabombeni combined school?
- (vi) What is the level of interpersonal skills among learners with special education need after withdrawing peer support at Mwabombeni combined School?
- (vii) What measures can be taken to enhance the effectiveness of peer-support at improving interpersonal skills of learners with special education need at Mwabombeni Combined School?

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study was conducted at Mwabombeni Combined School in Ndola district of the Copperbelt Province in Zambia. The study was aimed at examining the effectiveness of peer-support to increase positive social interaction of students with special needs with specific reference to Mwabombeni Combined School. More specifically, the study focused on how peer-support influences social interaction between students with special needs and other actors in the school in order to achieve an inclusive educational environment for all. This study included government official from the Ministry of General Education in Ndola District, the staff of Mwabombeni Combined School, fully developing students and students of special education need.

### **1.7 Significance of the Study**

According to Kasonde (2013), the significance of the study shows the relevance and implications of the study for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in the country. This study focused on the effectiveness of peer-support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs at Mwabombeni Combined School. The findings of this study gave an insight and contributions to the players more especially policy-makers and teachers in positively supporting children (students) with special needs in the country in implementing strategies to enhance peer-support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs more especially at Mwabombeni Combined School. Although this study was for academic purposes, it also assisted authorities and policy-makers in education to formulate appropriate policies that would facilitate social interaction to cover the gap. It was hoped that the findings of this study could be used in other related studies as empirical findings especially those who would be

engaged in the evaluation of peer-support at increasing positive interaction of students with special education needs at Mwabombeni Combined School.

### 1.8 Limitation of the Study

The study was limited only to the staff and students of Mwabombeni Combined School and government official. Time and inadequate financial resources was a limiting factor. The researcher was in full time employment and as such data collection and analysis delayed. However, to mitigate this challenge, the researcher used convenient sampling method to select participants in the study. Another challenge was that, the study was likely to encounter the closure of schools by the government through the Ministry of health and official stake-holders by restrictions on gathering due to the Covid-19 pandemic which affected the gathering of the targeted learners with special education need and those typically developing peers. However, to mitigate this challenge the researcher distributed face masks alcohol based hand sanitizer to the participants.

### 1.9 Definition of Key Terms

The following terms guide the reader to understand the terminologies used when discussing special education in the classroom.

- **Inclusion**-Inclusion is educating children with special education needs together with their typically developing peers in the same environment (Ogelman and Secer, 2012). This allows the support services to be offered inside the general education classroom. This setting can be very beneficial to the needs of special education students.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** - is a principle stating that students with special education need are to be educated in settings as close to regular classes as appropriate for a child. This mandate requires that students with special education need, be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who are not disabled in this case the typically developing learners. Students with special education need have a presumptive right to be educated in integrated settings. The second part states that schools can overcome this presumptive right and that

students may be educated in more restrictive settings when students cannot be educated satisfactory in the general education classroom. The general education classroom is considered the least restrictive environment (Rueda *et al.*, 2000).

- **Peer Support** is an intervention involving one or more classmates without special education need providing academic and/ or social support to a student with a learning need. It also includes "student selection, peer training, peer-delivered support, and adult monitoring" (Carter *et al.*, 2015).
- **Social interaction** is defined as a student acknowledging another student using verbal or non-verbal such physical contact, pointing, and gestures, communicative behaviors. Examples include greetings, talking about upcoming events or activities, providing information, assisting with an assignment by asking or answering questions, and introducing a student to other classmates (Carter *et al.*, 2015).
- **Interpersonal skills:** Are the behaviors and tactics a person uses to interact with others effectively (Kerr 2019).

### 1.10 The Organisation of the Study

The study comprised of five (5) chapters to be presented as follows:

**Chapter One:** dealt with the introduction, giving the background to the study along with the statement of the problem. It also outlined the research objectives together with the research questions, scope of the study, limitations, and organization of the study;

**Chapter Two:** reviewed the related literature regarding the theoretical and empirical review of the effect of peer-support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs at Mwabombeni Combined School. This helped the researcher to widen the knowledge on the study hence, develop important skills relating to the study;

**Chapter Three:** presented the research methodology and focused on research method and design which assisted the researcher to collect data and information required in the study by employing methodologies such as research design, sampling design, sampling techniques and

data processing and analysis. It also attached appendices of data collection tools, budget and time frame.

**Chapter Four:** presented the data that were collected from the field through interview guides and questionnaires where data will be analysed using tables and cases analysis following research question themes.

**Chapter Five:** provided the results analysis, discussion of the findings of the study that were analysed in chapter four of the study; and provided the conclusions and recommendations from the findings.

### **1.11 Summary Chapter**

There had been a growing concern of about the importance of social interaction for students with special needs. Literature suggests that students with special needs can benefit from peer-support when in the classroom setting. Children who engage in effective social interaction with peers are generally well adjusted and well liked, which contribute to the long term positive outcomes. The study analysed the experience of peer-support through communication interaction during classroom activities, then examines the level of social interaction after the support from a typically developing students was removed. This information was used to determine if this would be a recommended practice in inclusive classrooms interaction. In the next chapter, the past literature on the study area was be reviewed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter gives a review of related literature on the present study. The reviewed literature provides related findings from other researchers on the topic under study. The main purpose of the literature review is to help the researcher to develop a good understanding and insight into relevant previous researches and the trends that have emerged (Kumar, 2011). In this chapter, an attempt is made to review the literature directly and indirectly related to present research problem. The literature was classified and presented under the following headings: a theoretical framework of the study; disabilities in schools; peer support; the challenges of inclusive education and a conceptual framework.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study relies on a number of relevant theories, developed by different schools of thought in examining the effectiveness of peer support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs. It is quite imperative to state that these theories remain very central to the understanding of this study. These are discussed below:

**Social inclusion theory** Peter Rodney (2003), explains the basic didactic and psychological belief underlying inclusive education and explained that there is no difference between the educational needs of the child with a special education need and the other children and that both have one common goal that of social inclusion. The learners with special education need would benefit from interactive learning contexts to achieve higher levels of learning as well as higher stages of development. Ultimately, through instructional methods such as peer support, learners with special education need and those without disabilities can be put together to facilitate better life outcomes which would benefit learners with special education need regardless of their disabilities (Wadegaonka et al. 2015).

**The Social Exclusion** Theory by Silver (2007) asserts that social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live. Therefore, social inclusion is crucial in the integration of disabled children into mainstream school. This is because social exclusion leads to isolation which consequently hampers the mainstreaming of the disabled learners. Ultimately, the theory confirms that peer support would prevent social exclusion and improve social inclusion (Wadegaonka *et al.*, 2015).

**The theory of social Isolation** by Harry and Harlow (1949) asserts that extreme social isolation results in irreversible damage to normal personality development. It focuses on importance of training visually impaired students for social skills improvement to lead a normal life and avoid their social exclusion. In this sense, effective peer support if well established and implemented would increase social interaction for students with special needs students (Wadegaonka *et al.* 2015).

According to the Theory of **defectology** by Lev Vygotsky (1993) any physical handicap not only alters the child's relationship with the world, but above all affects his interaction with people. Any organic defect is revealed as a social abnormality in behaviour. Consequently, its socialisation and inclusion supersede the physical impairment and, renders the term defect unfathomable. Hence, if learners with disabilities or special education need are properly trained their social skills would improve which inevitably help them lead a normal life which can be explained with the concept of Compensatory Education Development. Compensatory education is provided to help disadvantaged students to overcome any cognitive and social deficits due to their environment (Pickens-Cantrell, 2016).

The **social development theory** propounded by Vygostky (1978) asserts that social interaction plays an important role in the development of cognition. According to Vygotsky (1978) learners with disabilities benefit from the interactive contexts to advance towards higher levels of learning and higher stages of development. It brings in the idea that cognitive development depends on the zone of proximal development. Therefore, peer support is an intervention that facilitates social interaction would significantly contribute to the cognitive development of the learners (Carter *et al.* 2017).

The **theory of social behaviourism** propounded by Mead (1967) stresses that people develop self-images through interactions with other people, a person's personality consisting of self-awareness and self-image is a product of social experience. It shows that the development of self and identity in the context of intimate and reciprocal relations is important for social interaction and can work for students with special needs. The theory asserts that through planned and organised experiences will lead to the development of learners' self-image and lead to improve their socialisation. Ultimately, planned and organised activities such as peer-support will significantly help improve learners' with disabilities improve social interaction (Pickens-Cantrell, 2016).

Furthermore, the **social learning theory** by Bandura (1977), explains that people learn new behaviour through overt reinforcement or punishment, or via observational learning of the social factors in their environment. Barnes (2021) added that through social learning theory, people can learn through observation and that observational learning can occur in relation to three models: i) the live model where an actual person is demonstrating the desired behavior; ii) Verbal instructional where an individual describes the desired in detail and instructs the participant on how to engage in behavior; and iii) symbolic where modeling occurs by means of the media. Therefore the implementation of the any of the three models will lead to increased social interaction for students with disabilities. Ultimately peers in providing support to learners will act as models for learners with disabilities to facilitate increased social interaction among learners with disabilities.

## **2.2 Prevalence of disabilities in Schools**

Disabilities in children are matter of great concern in the world today. Maciver *et al.*(2019) revealed that the World Health Organization's World Report on disability, estimated 95 million children (5.1%) aged 0–14 years have some form of disability. A study conducted by Vijayalaxmi et al. (2012) on the prevalence of specific learning disabilities among primary school children in a south Indian city found that the prevalence of specific learning disabilities was 15.17 % among sampled children. Similarly, in the United States of America Pullen et al (2017) reports that children with learning disabilities accounted for almost half of all students receiving special education services from schools and 2.4 million school age children were identified as having learning disabilities. In addition, it is estimated that one hundred and thirteen

thousand and four hundred pupils at primary level in Zambia have disabilities. Furthermore, previous studies show that children have different disabilities. These disabilities are may be either physical or psychological nature. It is contended that these disabilities affect the learning and their well-being.

Some of the Common disabilities among children include: autism spectrum conditions, developmental delay, behavioural disorders and learning difficulties. Notwithstanding the disabilities that children have, they have rights to be included in mainstream school (Ainscow and César (2006); Allan (2010); Lehohla and Hlalele (2012) and; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2013). In addition, prior studies reveal that common learning disabilities include: **dysgraphia**- a writing disability in which a child finds it difficult to form letters or write within a defined space; **dyslexia**- a language-based disability in which a child has a problem understanding written words which may also be referred to reading disorder or disability; **dyscalculia**- a writing disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping mathematical concept; **Audio and visual processing disorder**- sensory disabilities in which a person has difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision; and **Nonverbal learning disabilities**- a neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organisational, evaluative and holistic processing functions (Shilpa, 2000 cited by Shukla and Agrawal, 2015, Vijayalaxmi et al. 2012, Rasugu, 2010, and Pullen et al. 2017).

Similarly, a recent study conducted in Zambia by Kasongole and Muzata, (2019) on the reality of inclusive education revealed that the most common types of learning disabilities include writing, reading, mathematics, reasoning, listening and speaking. They contend that the learning disabilities are evident in the behaviours that learners exhibited. These behaviours include difficulties in interpreting graphical symbols, failure to do simple arithmetic calculations, difficulties in shaping letters, failure to follow instructions, forgetting concepts easily, poor handwriting, speech problems, being absent minded most of the time and difficulties in pronouncing words. However, it is contended the study relied on the characteristics that learners exhibit is a gap for future research for professional assessment methods to be used to determine the nature and prevalence of learning disabilities in Zambia. To this end, this study endeavored to fill this gap by using professional methods to identify the learning disabilities that exist among

the learners. Ultimately, the lack of identification of these learning disabilities affected the learners negatively.

Learning disabilities further affect the child's social interactions with others as well as their self-esteem. They felt less socially accepted and reported more feelings of loneliness (Schwab et al. 2015). Therefore, teachers should take into account not only the subject they teach but also the recognition of learning disabilities of the children. This would enable the teacher to put in place intervention that would help improve the well-being of the learners. The identification of learning disabilities provides the basis for effective implementation of intervention that aimed at helping learners in schools. It is thus important that teachers be more familiar with learners with disabilities or special education need and be more favourable of the identification and recognition of these kinds of children in the classroom to prevent the incidence of further mental and social damage by adopting an appropriate teaching method (Shukla and Agrawal, 2015 and Ioannidi and Samora, 2019). Teachers should thus play a crucial role in identifying children with learning disabilities. Therefore, the right type of knowledge and skills or competences can better justice to the children with learning disabilities than a teacher with general pedagogy backgrounds. They require specific abilities and knowledge of different types of learning disabilities and development of instructional strategies. They should adapt an appropriate method that can facilitate learning and exploit the potential of the pupil with learning disabilities. There are many methods that can be used to effectively help learners with special education need. One such method is peer-support (Ioannidi and Samora, 2019).

### **2.3.0 Peer Support**

Peer-support is described as a process of giving and receiving help. This process is founded on core principles of mutual agreement, respect, shared responsibility and empathy (martin, 2019). And Sunderland et al., (2013) describes-peer support as a process of normalising what has been called abnormal because of other people's discomfort. In addition, Dass and Gorman (1985) postulates that peer-support is support that is provided by and for people with similar conditions problems or experiences premised on the belief that people who have faced and overcome adversity can offer support, encouragement and hope to others facing similar conditions. Similarly, Gulliver and Byrom, (2014) posit that effective peer-support is a supportive

relationship which encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with a problem.

In addition, McLeod, (2003) argues that during the process of peer support, peer supporters provide emotional support, teach skills, share knowledge, offer practical help, and connect people with resources, opportunities, communities of support with other people. Furthermore, Sunderland et al., (2013) posit that in educational settings, peer support involves the provision of academic or social support by peers in general education classrooms without disabilities to those with disabilities.

To this end it would be challenging to select peers of with similar experiences, conditions or problems. To counter this, Lockhart, (2017) argues that peer support involves typically developing peers to provide academic and social support to students with intellectual disabilities in general education classrooms. This implies that selected peers have to be developed or trained to guarantee the effectiveness of peer support in general education classrooms. Ultimately, peer supporters can inspire hope and demonstrate the possibility of recovery. They are of significant value for their genuineness for the reason that they can relate to the encounter and have found their way to recovery or to social interaction. It therefore follows that schools should design peer support strategies to help the inclusion of learners with disabilities by ensuring that students with severe disabilities are socially integrated among their peers without disabilities.

Consequently, peer support interventions that are evidence based are necessary to integrate students with intellectual disabilities in the peer culture of the educational classroom environment (Sunderland *et al.*, 2013). The use of peer support in the general educational classrooms makes teachers more capable of achieving inclusion. Additionally, peer support can help bring hope to learners with disabilities and eases the work of the teachers when teaching learners with disabilities.

### **2.3.1 The benefits of peer support**

Prior studies have revealed substantive evidence that a number of benefits that accrue to learners with special education need as a result of peer support as an intervention. These benefits include increased communication to and from their peers (Biggs et al. 2017 and Rasmitadila et al. 2017), enhances the ability for learners to build new friendships among learners and improvement of

self-concept and social relationships (Garcia-Carion et al. 2018, Rasmitadila et al. 2017 and Byrom 2014). Other benefits include increased academic engagement, more progress on individualised social goals and social participation (Carter et al. 2016).

However, a study conducted by Carter et al (2017) revealed that of the four participants, one student's academic engagement did not increase due to changes in instructional patterns during peer support. Therefore emphasis should be placed on the design and delivery of academic related supports (Carter et al. 2017). Moreover, Byrom (2014) argues that peer support empowers children with special needs to overcome the stigma and social isolation that reinforce cognitive and social challenges associated with disabilities. And Garcia-Carrion et al. (2018), contend that the use peer support as an interactive learning approach is an effective approach to for teachers in their profession as it makes them feel improved as teachers. It is through interactive learning approaches teachers have developed a positive mind-set about learners. It has enabled teachers to focus on the strength of the learners rather than their weaknesses. In this research and related studies, the students with disabilities include all learners with learning disabilities in primary schools and experimental design procedures are used. It therefore follows that while studies have conducted on the effectiveness of the peer support as a method to improve the interaction of learners with disabilities elsewhere, there is no study that has been done in Zambia.

In addition, while so many studies have focused on the efficacy of peer support in classrooms, there are studies that have been conducted on the exploration of the complex relationship between individualisation and implementation fidelity. Moreover, there is no study that has been conducted to know how implementation changes over time, when outcomes are optimal, and what factors lead to increase or decrease. And no study has focused on the ways in which the selection of peer partners, the training of peers are provided and the ways in which peer support students might lead to a more widespread impact. Ultimately, creating a positive peer relationship between a general education and special education student may lead to growth in both students in Zambia.

It is argued that, in some cases, children continue to engage in high levels of communication with other student and end-up having opportunities for inclusion throughout the day, but depending on the age and the ability of the child, that may vary. Peer support provides learners

with disabilities with an interactive platform which is essential for their development. It is vital for helping learners with special education need experience care and support which would be vital for helping learners move from a deficit thinking mind-set toward an asset-based, focusing on their and opportunities, rather than on their problems (Tepstra and Tamura, 2008 cited by Pickens-Cantrell , 2016 and Garcia-Carion et al. 2018). Integrating methods such as peer support in the school curriculum facilitates the development of learners with disabilities. The application of peer support by teachers provides an interactive environment for learners with disabilities. This consequently helped learner with special education need be able to learn and improve academically. Additionally, the use of peer support in classrooms did not only facilitate the learning of children with disabilities but also made the work easier for teachers who teach children with learning special education need. Peer support is an effective way in ensuring that learners with special education need improve their interaction and concurrently improve their learning abilities. It therefore follows that peer support is instrumental in facilitating development of learners with special education need. However, despite the positive impact that peer support has on the interaction of learners with special education need, there challenges that the realisation of inclusive education.

#### **2.4 Challenges faced in implementing inclusive education**

Research studies show that the need to achieve inclusive education has faced a myriad of challenges. These include: cultural barriers- there is a belief that if a child has a disability, it is a result of misfortune or sin, which ultimately lead to a situation where mothers fear to take their children with disabilities to schools for fear of ridicule; inadequate resources and training of teachers to support inclusive education, intolerant attitudes of other children without disabilities and lack of clarity of the inclusion policy on the means through which relevant goals can be met (Donohue and Bornman, 2014). Similarly, a study conducted by Garcia-Carrion et al. (2018) in Spain revealed that some students' serious behaviour problems which make it not safe for their peers to participate in interactive groups and the lack of volunteers to facilitate interactive groups.

In addition, Ofori (2018) and Begum et al. (2019) found that teachers' lack of training to handle children with disabilities, negative attitudes of families and people towards children with disabilities, lack of facilities and infrastructure was hampering the implementation of inclusive

education. Similarly, Kasongole and Muzata (2020) the lack of understanding of concept learning disabilities and teachers negative attitudes about children with disabilities makes the reality of inclusion education in Zambia a myth. They contend that this lack of understanding has affected even the kind of help that learners with disabilities face in the classroom. To this end, it is contended argue that these challenges are surmountable. They can be overcome by: ensuring that adequate funding and training to teachers are provided to support and bolster inclusive education, the clarification of the means through which relevant goals of a country's inclusion policy can be realised and be enforced and advocacy and information programmes to demystify negative perceptions of disability within the society and gunner support for inclusive education in communities (Donohue and Bornman, 2014, Garcia-Carrion et al. 2018 and Kasogole and Muzata, 2020). Furthermore, it is clear to note that while most of the studies that have been conducted have focused on the challenges that inclusive education faces generally, not study has endeavoured to identify the challenges that are encountered during the utilisation of teaching methods that promote inclusive education. Hence this study will identify the challenges that are encountered during peer support as a method that encourages inclusivity in classrooms. Ultimately, understanding the challenges that inclusive education is highly relevant to this study. It provides a better comprehension of inclusive education.

This is because the concept inclusive education includes teaching methods. And peer support being a teaching method requires that resources and materials for its effective utilisation and therefore, its use may be limited or stifled due to barriers to inclusive education such as lack of training of teachers or inadequate funding, lack of facilities etc. To this end, the understanding of these challenges will be of significant importance as it will help the researcher find ways on how those challenges that might affect peer support will be dealt with during the experiment. By and large the comprehension of these challenges has provided an in-depth understanding of the reality of inclusive education in around the world and given an understanding of what needs to be done to actualise inclusive education (Ofori, 2019).

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework described, graphically or in a narrative form, the main things studied, including the key factors and the presumed relationships among them (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Therefore, it was used to comprehend the place and clarify the direction of a research

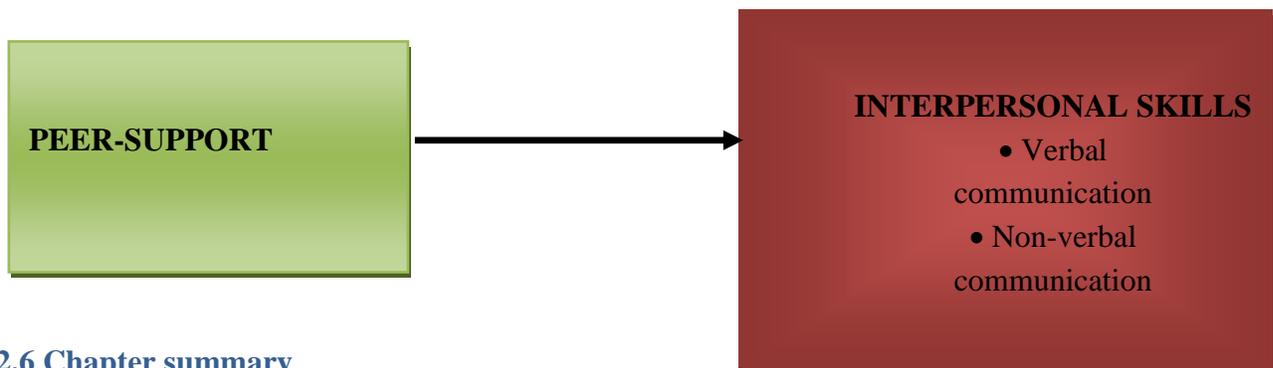
project. It made use of past research to conclude a theory and methodology for a research study (Magher, 2018). Figure 2.1 below is the summary of two categories of variables that guided the framework of this study.

The independent variable is peer support. The dependent variable is interpersonal skills among learners with special education need which included verbal and non-verbal contact class. The study assumed the independent variable (peer support) to be more stable and was consequently used as a factor that contributed to increased positive social interaction of learners with special education need.

*Figure 2.6.1 Conceptual Framework*

**INDEPENDENT VARIABLE**

**DEPENDENT VARIABLES**



**2.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has reviewed related studies to this study. It has given the researcher an insight in to peer support, and how it helps children with disabilities improve their social interaction from various parts of the world as well as those done in Zambia by studying studies conducted by other scholars. The section also expounded on the social inclusion theory, social exclusion theory, the theory of defectology, the theory of social learning, the theory of behaviourism, the theory of social development and, the theory of social isolation as a theoretical framework for this study. And a conceptual framework within which the study will conducted has been given. In addition the review reveals that the following knowledge gaps exist: No study has been conducted on the exploration of the complex relationship between individualisation and implementation fidelity.

- No study that has been conducted to know how implementation changes over time,
- When outcomes are optimal, and what factors lead to increase or decrease.
- There is no study has focused on the ways in which the selection of peer partners, the training of peers are provided and the ways in which peer support students might lead to a more widespread impact.
- No study has endeavored to identify the challenges that are encountered during the utilisation of teaching methods that promote inclusive education.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter places its foundation on chapter two, the Literature Review. Upon reviewing the literature of related documents from chapter two, on issues of the effectiveness of peer support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs, this chapter followed the manner in which this study was conducted. The aim of the methodology in this research was to portrait the research methods chosen by the researcher. The basic assumptions about the research methodology and methods was reviewed and justified here with the support of relevant literature. Research methodology included research design, target population, sampling techniques and sample size determination to be employed. It further identified the data collection instruments that were employed in the research and the procedures for data collection. It was concluded by describing how data analysis was conducted and the output.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study used both the descriptive and experimental research designs. The purpose of the descriptive research is to collect, organise, and summarise the information about the research problem and issues identified therein. Lavrakas (2013) citing Dane (1990) defined descriptive research as a thorough examination of the research problem, for the specified purpose of describing the phenomenon, measuring, and clarifying it. This approach appeared to be appropriate and effective method since it helped secure the necessary information about the research problem and draw meaningful findings, conclusion, and recommendations for the achievement of the objectives under study. And an experimental/observational design used to provide more insight of the relationship between typically developing peers and their special needs peers. The student for the single-subject case study was identified by the teacher as students who would benefit from receiving support from their peers

### **3.3 Target Population**

The target population will comprise of thirty (30) students aged between seven (7) to seventeen (17) years, ten (10) teachers from Mwabombeni School. Fifteen (15) of the students will be classified as special needs, having an independent lesson from Mwabombeni Combined School under special unit. The other Fifteen (15) students will be in general education students who will be recruited, trained and supported by special education teachers to provide individualized academic and social assistance to students with learning disabilities.

### **3.4 Sampling Techniques**

Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were applied in this study. Purposive sampling was used to identify and select special education teachers and students from general education. According to House et al. (2012), purposive sampling was appropriate when one wishes to interview persons who are in good position to supply information. Simple random sampling was used to select students with disabilities. The reason for choosing simple random sampling is that each unit in the population had the same inclusion probability and all the units are independent (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006).

### **3.5 Sample Size**

A sample was a set of entities drawn from a population with the aim of estimating characteristic of the population (Osea, 2017). Cooper and Schindler (2003) as cited by Oyemam et al. (2019) explained that the basic idea of sampling is selecting some of the elements in a population, so that the same conclusions can be drawn about the entire population. This results in reduced cost and greater accuracy of results. The sample size comprised of thirty (30) students with special needs, ten (10) teachers from Mwabombeni School in Ndola District of the Copperbelt Province. An additional group of fifteen (15) peer students from Mwabombeni School was selected, making a total of 55 sample size.

### **3.6 Data collection instruments**

A semi-structured interview guide, a momentary time sampling, and a focus group discussion were used to collect data. The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview was that it allowed the researcher more flexibility to digress and to probe based on the interactions during

the interview. It also provided greater breadth and depth of information, the opportunity to discover the respondents experience and interpretation of reality (Blee and Taylor, 2002). Moreover, to determine the effectiveness of peer support in increasing social interactions of learners with disabilities and the extent to which observed behavior was sustained at Mwabombeni Combined School a momentary-time sampling form was used to monitor the amount of interaction with intervals. The reason for choosing this method was that it minimizes the observation of learners more than other interval recording techniques. The other reason was that, it was good with high rate behaviors (those that occur frequently) in this case social interaction.

### **3.7 Data Collection methods**

Both primary and secondary data was used. To know the effectiveness of peer support at increasing positive interaction of students with special needs, the researcher included modeling of social interactions including time-taking, personal space, impulsivity, and working together as a team. The peer supporter(s) also provided with strategies on how to use eye contact, start conversations, and offer help to the students. The social interaction of the student and their classmates was observed during the two sessions of learning every school day for 26 days. The first class was held in the morning from 8:30am to 11:15am and the afternoon class was from 12:50pm to 3:45pm every school day.

This was done by having a pair of learners which consisted of one group eight from general education student and another group eight special education student in class. The momentary-time sampling form was used to monitor the amount of social interaction within 6 minutes intervals. The observation of students with special needs was typically between their developing classmates. At the end of each session, the total amounts of interactions were tallied together for each day.

This data was then analyzed and charted based on the frequency of occurrences during the observation. And then peer support was withdrawn after a week the researcher had to observe the students' interaction for two weeks to ascertain the extent of sustenance of behavior. Interviews were conducted in two phases. The first was conducted before the experiment to collect information on the demographic of the teachers and to identify the kind disabilities that learners had at Mwabombeni combined school. Thereafter, an interview (particularly getting information

of section 2 of the interview guide) with the teachers who was teaching during the observation was conducted.

This enabled the researcher to understand the teachers' experience/observation during the experiment. A focus group discussion with learners with disabilities was conducted with the help of two special education teachers to facilitate communication with the learners. It was conducted to understand the learners' experience of the intervention. It was conducted after the experiment. The reason for choosing a focus discussion was that the discussion is more spontaneous and honest which was fundamental in ensuring that participants provide indepth knowledge about their experience with peer support (Doody et al. 2013). Moreover, secondary data comprised of meeting records, strategic plans providing the nature of effective peer support strategies used, the nature and source of funds to enable the implementation of effective peer support at Mwabombeni Combined School. This was used as complementary to raw data.

### **3.8 Validity and Reliability**

The reliability and validity of the instruments of data collection will be tested using the test retest technique (Kumar, 2011). The researcher conducted an interview with the five teachers, who were not among the ten (10) participants in the sample but had similar characteristics of the study population to find out the time needed time to answer the questions and difficulties they might have found. And 10 learners from general education were selected to provide support to 15 learners with disabilities during two learning sessions to test the momentary time sampling form and identify what improvements can be made to it. After a week the interview guide and the momentary-time sampling form was used again on the same pilot participants.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The data was quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. Quantitative research entails designs techniques and measures that produce discrete numerical or quantifiable data. The method of analyzing the data was descriptive design since this research used to describe a phenomenon at one point in time. Descriptive analysis was used mainly to summarise the data which was collected. The data was then edited for accuracy, uniformity and completeness and arranged for coding. All data collected from the momentary-time sampling form and semi structured interview guide was carefully analyzed through the use of frequencies and percentages.

Additionally, tables, pie charts and graphs were used to analyze the findings and give the required interpretation of the data using SPSS, version 25. In addition, qualitative data from the interviews was analyzed using *content analysis*- a 24 method of creating structure to organize open-ended information where patterns and themes were emerged. This involved putting similar responses into themes that are in harmony with the specific objective which were investigated (Christensen et al. 2011).

### **3.8 Ethic Considerations**

In the process of adhering with ethical issues in this study, the research permit and approval to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Zambia's Institute of Distance Education (IDE) and Mwabombeni Combined School in Ndola District where respondents were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and consent to participate in the study was sought from each of respondent by signing a consent form to be attached to the questionnaire. All the respondents' information and identity were kept confidentially and the information gathered was used only for the purpose of this study. In this regard, participants were informed that they participate in this study voluntarily and willingly.

### **3.9 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter looked at research methods to be used to carry out this study. The researcher described experimental research design as the best method for this study because of its strengths in valid findings and facts at the same time eliminating opinions. The questionnaire is justified as suitable for this study because of its capability to solicit findings about what the respondents think about the subject.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.0 Introduction

Students with special education need who participated in peer support arrangements had more social interactions, access a wider range of social supports, maintain or increase their academic engagement and develop more friendships (Carter et al, 2015). The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of peer support for positive social interaction for students with special needs. As part of the baseline assessment, the students were observed and data were collected as it occurred without any intervention. After the training, more observations and data were collected to determine if the intervention was successful in changing the behavior. For the purposes of this research, an A-B design is used (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2006). The pre-intervention condition is the baseline which is A. The intervention condition is identified as B. Data had been collected for six weeks to determine the effectiveness, and is described in **AppendixG.**

#### 4.1 Demographics

The school that was used as the research site consists of approximately 2500 students from pre-school through to the twelfth grade. The demographics of the school is in high density area where students with disabilities and able bodied are found. The study focused on two groups of students. (The students with special education need from the special unity class and those from general education who are peer supporters) the first group is comprised of seven students with special education need from special education unit and their peer supporters are also eight from the general education. When looking at academic development, this group which is comprised of seven students with special education need from special education unit developed appropriately with learning concepts in the classroom, but had difficulty working with others. They often needed to be separated from the group and had to work one-on-one with the teacher. Group two had eight total numbers of Students with special education need from the special unit and their peer supporters were eight from general education. According to their teacher, group two was able to grasp some academic concepts when working with them independently. It is difficult to assess their knowledge when in a group setting. They rarely used three-to-five-word sentences when interacting with teachers or peers.

## 4.2 Efficacy of Peer Support

The primary goal of the study was to determine if peer support increased positive social interaction for students with special needs. The data determined that there was an increase in the positive social interaction with both groups. As the intervention progressed there was a gradual progression in occurrences of positive social interaction. The baseline mean for the first group of students with special education need (focus group) started at a total of four occurrences of social interaction. The highest point reached at the end of the study reached 10 occurrences of social interaction out of 15 possible. The baseline mean for group two, started at three positive interactions within the observation period. The highest data point reached for group two was eight occurrences of positive social interaction out of 15 possible. The data can be viewed in the Figure below. 3

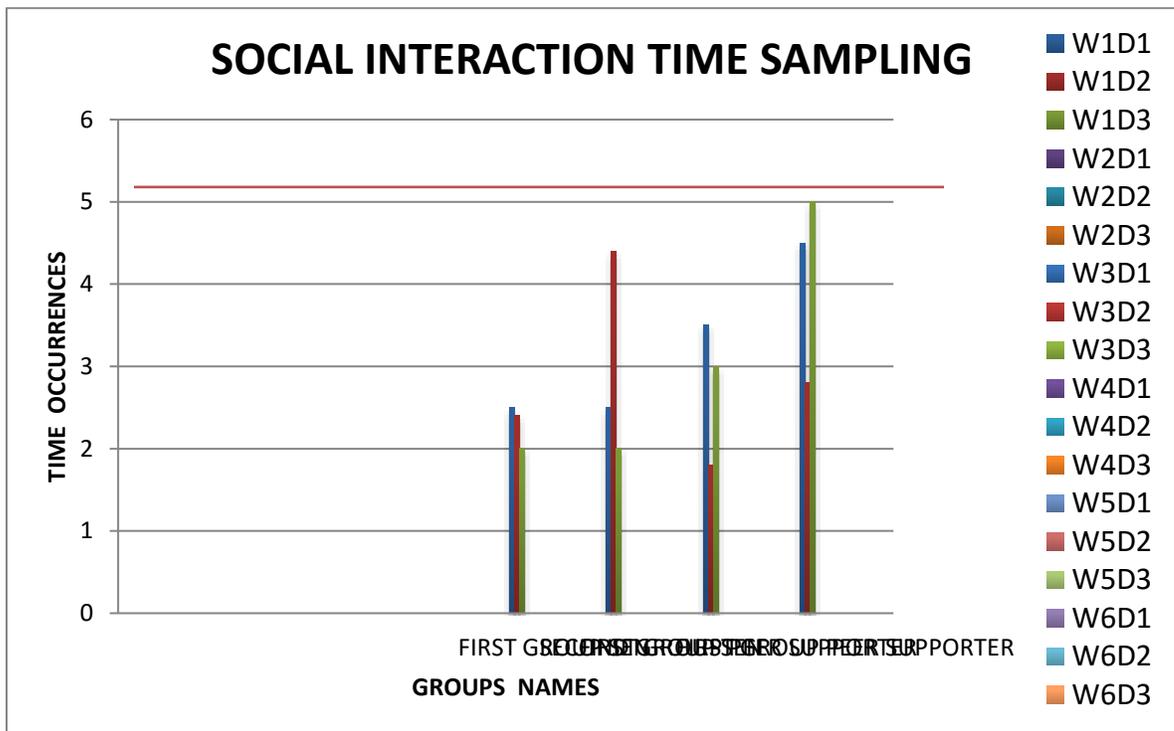


Figure I. Momentary time sampling data collection graph shows the data for the three baseline points, as well as the five week study. Baseline is represented by (B), week is represented by (W) and day is represented by (D). The red line represents the Percentage of Non-Overlapping data (PND), which is drawn through the highest baseline point.

### 4.3 Components of Positive Social Interaction

Positive social interactions are interactions that take place between peers that are positive in nature and successful for both children involved (Bovey & Stein, 2003). The study set out to determine if any, what specific components/types of social interaction occurred that created the most social interactions amongst the students. The data determined that all students interacted with their peers at a higher rate when playing. Some of the interactions did not occur during a time sampling period due to the student being in time out. The data is described in Table 2 below.

Table:2 Average Social Interaction by types of Interactions

Student	Playing	Conversation	Turn-Taking	Time	Out
Student 1	1	6.6	5.2	3.4	2.7
Student 2	2	7.3	4.3	5.2	1.4

Note. The data listed is the averages of the types of social interactions over the course of the intervention. Each day the type of interaction was monitored during the observation, and then the type of interaction was averaged for each student. When analyzing the Percentage of Non-Overlapping Data, the percentages with 90 or more indicate that the intervention was highly effective. Percentages of 70-89 indicate fair treatment outcome. Percentages of 50-69 indicate moderately effective treatment. Less than 50-34 Percent indicate the intervention was ineffective.

### 4.4 Focus Group Discussion

During the interview questions with the focus group, all the question were translated into Icibemba language which the learners understand better. Likewise both written and verbal responses from these learners were equally translated back into English language for the smooth flow of the information. Interview questions were conducted by the researcher and fifteen (15) learners from the focus group. Each learner was interviewed by the researcher; both verbal and written responses were done collectively.

Having collected the data from the focus groups /learners with special education need found it so helpful interacting with the peers from general education. This means that students who were

part of special education classroom joined the regular at certain times which were fitting the special education students. Students with special education need attained higher-self-esteem by being their typically developing learners from regular paced education setting, and had shown to be more confident and displayed qualities of self-efficacy. Any kind of inclusion practice including peer-support interaction allowed students to learn social skills and gain a better understanding of the world around them, and felt be a part of the 'regular' community. After a long chat with a student during the interview questions this is what he had to say:

*“I felt extremely fortunate to attend classes with my sighted peers, while at the same time learning the skills necessary for me to become an independent and successful person. I really appreciated the programme.”*

Without doubt, he was sincerely hopeful that more educators would consider the peer support programme to be implemented in many schools to enhance positive social interaction.

During Peer-support interaction programme at Mwabombeni combined school with learners from general education, it helped change the negative attitude and misconceptions people have on the visually impaired and is an opportunity to prepare them for their future roles in society. Visually impaired children interact with other children in regular school settings; they would play and share ideas and things together.

It further helps them appreciate each other's strengths and limitations. Students learn the norms and values of the community in which they are and this prepared them for the world outside school environment. Students who have been with visually impaired learners in schools understood their potential and gave them chance to participate in social functions and other programmes.

*“attending classes with typically developing peers provided John Bwalya of with invaluable social skills and the incredible opportunity to educate others about autism spectrum disorder , he was the only student in his class, so naturally his peers were curious to learn about Braille and the special technology he was using.*

Furthermore, peer-support promoted healthy competition amongst students with special education need (SEN) and the regular students. If learners with special education need managed to do an activity well in class, this motivated the regular students to strive to work harder for they would think that if the learners with special education need could do well they could do the same.

According to Macbeath, Galton, Steward, Bacbeath (2005), “while there are many examples of social benefits both for children with special needs and their regular peers, there is much positive evidence that the learning needs are being met across the whole spectrum of ability”.

*“from the focus group interviews session.” Mubita Mubita said he had been helped by his peers to read notes for him as he translated from text to Braille for the material was scarce.*

Learning alongside other students with visual impairments also gave Mubita Mubita sense of companionship because his vision loss meant that he could relate with other challenges and be successful.

The wealth of support available for learners with special education need (SEN) is significant reflection to enabling conducive environment to have a sense of belonging and to effectively understand and meet the needs of some of the special education need students, teacher need to adopt an interactionist approach to assessing and understand the learners learning needs, students with special education need (SEN) requires to be understood in the context in which they are.

## **4.5 Special Education Teacher Discussion**

### **4.5.1 Types of disabilities**

#### **4.5.2 Autism**

According special education teacher at under special unit school said there are three types of disabilities in school. **Autism** is one of the disabilities some of learners in school have. Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, which adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences.

## **4.6 Assessment methods to discover Autism**

### **4.6.1 Developmental Monitoring**

Developmental monitoring observes how a child grows and changes over time and whether a child meets the typical developmental milestones in playing, learning, speaking, behaving, and moving. Teachers Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers participate in developmental

monitoring. Using a brief checklist of milestones to see how a child is developing. If one notices that a child is not meeting milestones, teacher speak to doctors or nurse in nearby clinics or hospitals about the particular concerns in a child.

In that case a doctor or nurse will also do developmental monitoring. The doctor or nurse might ask questions about the child's development or may talk and play with that child to see if he or she is developing and meeting milestones. A missed milestone could be a sign of a problem, so the doctor or another specialist might take a closer look by using a more thorough test or exam.

#### **4.7 Intellectual Disability**

Not only that but there also some learners who have **Intellectual Disability** by this its Means significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Some conditions are genetic. Some are present before or at the time of conception, and others occur during pregnancy, during birth, or after birth. The common factor is that something interferes with the growth and development of the brain. Even with recent advances in genetics, especially techniques of chromosome analysis, a specific cause of ID often cannot be identified.

#### **4.8 Assessment methods to discover Intellectual Disability**

The diagnose of the intellectual ability are done at different level of child development and these include Prenatal screening, Developmental screening, Formal intellectual and skills testing, Imaging tests, and Genetic and other laboratory tests.

There is a Formal. Testing formal testing has three components namely Interviews with parents, Observations of the child, Tests in which the child's performance is compared with scores of many children of the same age. Some tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, are done to measure intellectual ability. Other tests, such as the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, are done to assess areas such as communication, daily living skills, social abilities, and motor skills. Generally, these formal

tests accurately compare a child's intellectual and social abilities with those of others in the same age group (called norm-referenced tests).

#### **4.9 Speech Impairment (SI)**

And the last category is **speech Impairment (SI)** means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

#### **4.10 Assessment methods to discover Speech Impairment (SI)**

##### **4.10.1 Comprehensive speech-language assessments**

Assessing, describing, and interpreting an individual's communication ability requires the integration of a variety of information gathered in the evaluation process. Child and family interview, review of auditory, visual, motor, and cognitive status Standardized and/or non-standardized measures of specific aspects of speech, spoken and non-spoken language, cognitive-communication, and swallowing function, including observations and analysis of work samples.

#### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of peer support to increase positive social interaction for students with special needs. Students with special education need participated in the study, had characteristics of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the other student has characteristics of oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). This is a quantitative research study used a single-subject experimental, A-B design (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2006). Data were collected over a six week period, and the data was analyzed in order to answer the research questions of the study. The first question addresses the efficacy of peer-support to increase positive social interaction. The data suggest that peer support is effective in increasing the amount of positive social interaction for students who have special needs and can benefit from additional support in creating friendships. The next questions discuss the components of peer support and types of social interaction that occurred most frequently. The data suggest that the peer supporters helped mediate and prompt the student subject to engage in activities with other peers. Additionally, that playing including sharing and conversation showed the greatest

instances of positive social interaction. Lastly, the study considered to determine if the social intervention would withstand once the peer supporter was not directly involved. The data showed that the interactions did sustain. This is believed to contribute to the peer supporter and other classmates joining in supporting the students voluntarily.

## **CHAPTER FIVE ANALYSIS DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

Children in the general education setting have numerous opportunities to interact social with peers through play. When general education age children interact with each other, they learn to watch, mimic, share, problem -solve and communicate. In many cases this is their first opportunity of interacting with others who are not family members. General education helps “build friendships that promote positive social and emotional development” (Bovey& Strain, 2003). The study investigated the effectiveness of peer support to increase positive social interactions.

### **5.1 Discussion**

#### **5.1.1 The Needs of the Students**

Throughout observations of the two groups of special needs students, the researcher was able to get ideas of how they interacted with their typically developing peers during their free time. Both groups of students showed deficits in creating relationships. The first group had the most difficulty in playing appropriately with its peers and sharing food. Group two struggled the most with engaging in conversation and playing with the other children. Both groups’ students would get upset when they did not get what they wanted. Behaviors would include falling out, tantrums and crying. After observing these students social behaviors, it was evident what skills were needed to be strengthened. This helped determine which skills to stress for the training intervention for typically developing peers.

### **5.2 Teaching Social Skills**

Teaching social skills to students with special needs can be difficult. Having a peer to support their needs makes it easier to show special needs student's positive behaviors and help them imitate these behaviors when performed by their typically developing peers. Prior to the intervention, Students in the first group had several interactions with other students however they were thirty-six negatives from the time sampling observation. Many of the interactions consisted of a good number of the group members hitting, fighting, biting and not being able to share with other students. Pairing them with a positive general education student gave the group members

an opportunity to engage with students who were willing to support their needs and remind them of positive behaviors when needed. Pairing the special education need students with the peer supporter intervention helped them visually see the positive interactions of turn-taking, sharing, and how to deal with impulsivity and having conversations with others. Prior to the intervention, group two of students with special education need did well playing alone, but had very limited social interactions and communication with its peers. The first group of special education also paired with a student who had strong positive social skills and was willing to include and guide the student to be a part of the classroom activities.

### **5.3 Timeouts for Special Education Students**

Through the observations, both groups special education needs students' lost valuable time to interact with their peers due to being in timeout. The timeouts were warranted from behaviors such as hitting others with books and whatever they would lay their hands on , standing on desks on multiple occasions after being warned and running around the classroom. Although there should be some consequences in place, the timeouts given limited them from reaching their fullest potential in obtaining the highest amount of social gains. While reflecting on the researcher's data, it caused the researcher to think whether the timeout was beneficial to the students with special needs. Although, the student faced a consequence, the behaviors that caused timeouts did reappear. This could hinder the growth of friendships and other positive social behaviors which are essential to their development. Teachers can also support their students by giving verbal and non-verbal cues to indicate when the student is doing well in positively interacting with peers.

### **5.4 Perception of the Teacher/Role during play**

The special education teacher of these students had fifteen (15) students enrolled in his class between the morning and afternoon class. Many of the disabilities of the students include developmental delay, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), other health impairments and orthopedic impairment. He believes that the students benefit from being in an inclusive classroom setting, however some of them would benefit more being in a self-contained classroom to better meet their goals. When given a questionnaire about his perception of students with special education

need in his classroom, there was a range of results. He did not believe that students in his class experienced peer rejection, lacked social deficits, or demonstrated the ability to regulate emotions. However, the observations of his students showed otherwise. Prior to the intervention, Students in group one could not control their behavior. They would fight and bite the other children when they could not get their way or when they had to share. The special education teacher did agree that students with special education need experienced difficulty taking turns with objects/materials and in conversation. He also agreed that these students experienced impulsive behavior depending on the student's diagnosis. Some areas where he felt neutral included these students associating with: friends who provide positive influences and having positive social interaction most of the time. Additionally, he felt neutral about these students using language in a socially appropriate manner, them having lower self-esteem and lacking self-control.

## **5.5 Findings**

Dass and Gorman (1985) postulates that peer-support is support that is provided by and for people with similar conditions problems or experiences premised on the belief that people who have faced and overcome adversity can offer support, encouragement and hope to others facing similar conditions. Similarly, Gulliver and Byrom, (2014) posit that effective peer-support is a supportive relationship which encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with a problem.

The findings of this study showed that peer support increase interactions with a wider variety of peers, more significant progress in working towards social-related goals and positive influence in classroom. It increases opportunities to participate in the same classroom activities as non-special education need peers, heightened level of engagement, and more time in the physical classroom. The study eventually indicated that peer support helped learned with special education need to develop new friendships and supportive relationships, as the findings indicates learners with special education need had broader participation in class hence improved their social competence and social skills.

The study further showed the evidence-based for promoting social interactions. Although long-term impacts are unknown, peer support arrangements expanded the social network for learners

with a significant special education need to strengthen their independence and self-determination as well as boost their proficiency in the use of communication systems.

**The Social Exclusion Theory** by Silver (2007) asserts that social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live. Therefore, social inclusion is crucial in the integration of disabled children into mainstream school. This is because social exclusion leads to isolation which consequently hampers the mainstreaming of the disabled learners. Ultimately, the theory confirms that peer support would prevent social exclusion and improve social inclusion.

These social interactions occurred both during and after school, it also existed for an extended duration peer supports and interactions allowed individuals with special education needs to refine social skills, expand their social networks, promote their sense of belonging, participate in peer activities, build relationships, and learn social norms. Not only that, peer support program also allowed typically developing individuals to assist individuals with special education needs in learning how to interact with them and with other people.

**The theory of social Isolation** by Harry and Harlow (1949) asserts that extreme social isolation results in irreversible damage to normal personality development. It focuses on importance of training visually impaired students for social skills improvement to lead a normal life and avoid their social exclusion. In this sense, effective peer support if well established and implemented would increase social interaction for students with special needs students.

Inclusive settings also created potential gains in communication, social skills and adaptive behavior skills for individuals with special education needs. When learners with special education needs were given the opportunity to interact with others, it increased their self-confidence as well as their ability to succeed in school. Peer interaction had shown to benefit individuals with special education needs in permanent, positive, life-changing ways. For learners with special education needs, peer supports increased the frequency and qualities of interactions with classmates, foster greater academic engagement and curricular access, and promote progress toward educational goals.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.0 Recommendations for Further Research

There are numerous steps that can be taken to help increase positive social interaction for students with special needs. In future studies, the intervention period can be held over a longer period of time. One recommendation that can be beneficial to special education students is for teachers to try to provide all special needs students with a peer supporter. Teachers should focus more on positive reinforcements rather than timeouts to discipline the child. Not only that but also the video modeling intervention would give an opportunity to change the behaviors that are not socially appropriate.

#### 6.1 Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if peer support increased positive social interaction for special needs students. I was able to collect data on two special needs preschool aged students and use a peer trainer for support. My finding helped me discover four important themes of social interaction. These themes included playing, conversation, turn-taking and timeout. At the beginning of the study, I discovered that these students had difficulty and fewer occurrences of positive social interactions with their peers. They both had delays in playing side by side with other students/ sharing, engaging in conversation and controlling impulsive behaviors. The next thing I discovered was the influence of timeout and how it affected their social interaction with others. When these students are taken away from their peers during play, then they cannot participate with their peers. Lastly, my study focused on the perception that the special education teacher had about special needs students' involvement in social interacting with their peers. The evidence provided from various researchers support the idea that modeling is a beneficial way to support the needs of special needs students that show deficits in social skills. The best way for students with special needs to develop socially to their fullest potential is to create more structured activities for them to socially interact positively with their typically developing peers. Choice time can be used regularly to train students on how to interact positively. Special education teachers can not only use video modeling to support their students

but using their peers help teach their peers social skills, and build relationships with others. The research also supports the idea that choice time or “play” time can just as beneficial as the aspects of academics at the preschool level. It is encouraged through the curriculum that preschooler learn through play. This concept should extend to social skills as well. Additionally, teachers need to strategize about alternatives to timeouts specifically for the students who lack effective social skills. Once these aspects are taken into consideration and implemented then there will be an increase of peer acceptance, friendships and socialization starting at the preschoolage.

## **6.2 Educational Implications**

Based on the results of the study, students who are identified as special needs and have difficulty with social skills can benefit from this intervention. The peer support intervention is an opportunity to change the behaviors that are not socially appropriate. Schools should come up with more interventions and programs to support the development of special needs students that struggle with positive social interaction. There should also be more teacher professional development opportunities to help teachers learn ways to help support and increase the social interaction for students who need extra support.

## **6.3 Conclusion**

The results indicated that Students with special education need in group two showed greater improvements than Students in group one. Students in group one had difficulties maintaining self-control and controlling impulsive behaviors. The intervention was a positive way to help improve these behaviors. As the study continued Students in group one gradually showed an increase in positive behaviors. Group one’s peer supporter would remind them not to do certain things when they were exhibiting negative behaviors such as running around the class and hitting. The general education peer support also reminded Students with special education need in group one to share when they would fight over food. During the course of the study, students with special education need in group one invited their peer supporters from general education so that they could play. Other students in the classroom also joined in supporting both student subjects. For example, Students in group one were running around the class, and several students were told to stop running in the class. There was an instance when a student from group two started crying and a peer bystander reminded her that we do not scream in the classroom. This

Student from group two seemed to wonder around the class alone while playing. There were moments where she would watch and laugh in areas where other students played. During the intervention, she gradually grew socially. Her peer supporter would invite her to play in areas where she was playing. This area is where she had the most social success. She would engage in conversation, sing familiar songs such as Happy Birthday, and share pretend food with her peers. Hence forth, both groups of students continued to have support from their peer supporter during and at the conclusion of the intervention. Both groups of student's progression supported the evidence stated in previous research stating that peer support would increase positive social interactions.

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**APPENDIX I**

**MOMENTARY TIME SAMPLE**

**OBSERVATION OF THE LEARNERS**

**Instructions:**

- Behaviour definition: Talking/communicating to a peer when the teacher is talking or when performing an individual assignment during class time.
- The total observation time is 60 minutes for both the morning and afternoon sessions.
- Behaviour will have to be observed at 16 intervals with each interval, being 6 minutes long.
- If the behaviour is occurring at the moment not before or after, a checkmark (X) will have to be placed for that interval. And if the behaviour is not occurring at the moment, a checkmark (O).

**1. MORNING SESSION: 08:30am to 11:15am; Break time is 30 minutes**

Date	Interval #										Total times behaviour occurred
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<b>O or X</b>											

**2. AFTERNOON SESSION: 12:50pm to 3:45pm; break time is for 30 minutes**

Date	Interval #										Total times behaviour occurred
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<b>O or X</b>											

## APPENDIX II

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

##### **1. Before the experiment**

###### **A. Demographic characteristic**

1. Gender: Male  Female
2. Age: Less than 24 years  24-30 years  40 years  ove 40 years
3. Educational Qualification: Certificate  Diploma  Degree  Masters

###### **B. Learning disabilities**

4. Explain what kind of learning disabilities do the learners face at this school?
5. Explain the assessment methods you used to discover the learning disabilities?
6. Explain the general conduct of learners with disabilities regarding interaction in class?

##### **2. After the experiment**

###### **C. The effectiveness of Peer support**

7. Explain how effective peer support has been to improve the interaction of learners?
8. What do you think were the major challenges your learners experienced during the experiment?

###### **D. Positive interaction sustenance**

9. Explain how the interaction of the learners has been after the support was withdrawn?

###### **E. Recommendations for improvement of Peer Support**

10. What do think should teachers do to improve peer support?
11. What do you think schools should do to enhance peer support?
12. What do you think the government should do to enhance peer support?
13. What do you think parents should do enhance peer support?
14. Are there any comments you would like to make about something that you feel we did not cover during our interaction?

**APPENDIX III**  
**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
**LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES**

**a. The effectiveness of peer support**

1. Explain how being with the peers has helped you?

**b. Challenges faced during peer support**

2. Explain what problems you encountered when you were interacting with peers from general education?

**c. Recommendations to improve peer support**

3. What do you think should be done to help you overcome the challenges you face when it comes to learning?

## APPENDIX IV

### Invitation Letter to Parents of Single

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your assistance. I am working towards the completion of my Master's Degree in Special Education at University of Zambia. As a part of my final graduate project I am trying to identify the relationship between peer support and social interaction with children with special education needs.

I will be conducting case study on your child. The selection of your child was based on the need of a student recommended that could benefit academically and socially from the support of a peer. Your child's participation is optional and will be kept confidential. Your child's name will not be recorded in observational notes.

Your child will be observed approximately 30 minutes 3 times a week for 6 weeks. Your participation will help give an insight into how we can improve in meeting the needs of our children. If you have any further questions about the study please feel free to contact me via email or a phone call.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

MN. Newa

## APPENDIX V

### Invitation Letter to the Teacher

Dear teacher,

As you may know, I am pursuing my Master's degree in Multi-categorical Special Education at University of Zambia. As a part of my graduate requirement, I must conduct a final graduate thesis.

The question of this study is: **Does peer-support increase positive social interaction for special needs students?** If you agree to participate in the study, I would like you to complete a brief questionnaire about the special needs student in your classroom. The questionnaire is attached to this letter. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire, as your answers will be incorporated into my project. All information will be kept confidential.

Please turn in your questionnaire to my mailbox. Thank you very much. Your help will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
MN. Newa

**Peer support when writing a Braille**





Assessing speech impairment



A learner with Autism disorder

