THE STRUGGLE OF THE STRUGGLING: ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION
FOR PHYSICALLY DISABLED PEOPLE IN ZIMBABWE

By

Energy Lincoln Chivaraidze Manyimo

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Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for studies in Education
University of Toronto

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This dissertation examines questions of accessibility in relation to physically disabled high school graduates in Zimbabwe who are seeking to further their education. The work aims at giving voice to those who have been rendered voiceless in society in matters affecting their lives while also attending to how cultural experts and educational officials make sense of the lack of access to education faced by these disabled students. The study builds on previous research on poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe by the author (Manyimo, 2005) that showed that disabled people are among the poorest in the country and that lack of education together with low societal expectations exacerbates their poverty. Employing a qualitative research methodology, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-two participants. The interviewees included 12 disabled high school graduates; selected 4 mothers of the graduates; two cultural experts; four senior administrators of universities and colleges; two members of associations of and for disabled people and eight government officials from ministries of education. Findings show that indigenous culture plays a significant role in determining how far disabled people can progress in education in Zimbabwe. The role of indigenous culture was characterized by the interviewees in relation to how they are marginalized by their
own families, their own communities and the society. Due to the introduction of other cultures and religions in the country, the population suffers from competing cultural conceptions of disability that manifest themselves through societal attitudes toward disabled people.

This dissertation, therefore, demonstrates the need to attend to indigenous knowledges as a framework for engaging and theorizing how students with physical disabilities can better achieve their educational aspirations. The work proposes an alternative model of disability based on indigenous cultural beliefs of the indigenous people in Zimbabwe. A set of recommendations was developed that reflect this need. Thus the dissertation makes significant contributions not only to Zimbabwe, but also to the field of disability studies research especially among societies with strong indigenous belief systems by documenting and attending to the usually unheard voices of students with physical disabilities.
Dedication

This piece of scholarly work is dedicated to my ‘living dead’, my ancestors, for their continued role of uniting me with my Creator and to my 1 to 14 wonderful family that gives me my raison d'être. May the past, present and future members of this family derive pride in this work from now ad infinitum.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the Shona and Ndebele cultures of Zimbabwe the birth of a disabled child is “associated with witchcraft, (Department of Social Services 1982), promiscuity by the mother during pregnancy (Addison, 1986) and punishment by ancestral spirits.” (Chimedza & Peters 1999, pp. 10-11).

“I had thought God was going to punish me twice, by giving me a disabled child and give me a hard time raising him.” (Mrs Mugodi, mother of a disabled child: Interview 2010).1

“When I am tying my child to a tree and I don’t send that child to school is because it is a long way, a long journey or I don’t even know where the schools are. I am not being cruel to the child. I want to fetch some water and firewood so that I cook and this child eats. The child is disabled. I can’t carry the child on my back anymore. The child has to eat including other children.” (Voice of a single mother of a disabled child in one rural Zimbabwe area as narrated by Nyaradzo Zhou: Interview, 2010).

“I think I am now a grown up man and I think it is time I tell you something that I have wanted to tell you all along. You should stop fighting with my mum because it does not encourage me in any way. It actually discourages me. I think you have a gift in the house which is me. Maybe you did not realize but you will soon see how special I am. And if you continue fighting, it means you see me maybe no more.” (Gift Mbambo: a disabled child’s letter to his father: Interview, 2010).

“What can a disabled person do Mr Manyimo given that vadzimu (ancestors) have already condemned him at birth? Why are you people wasting money like that?” (Anonymous: Field notes, 2010).

Culture, its understanding and interpretation, can be a source of dissonance leading to disagreements and disharmony in a society. The above quotations clearly show the competing and conflicting cultural conceptions of disability in Zimbabwe. Chimedza and

1 All names for interviewees and names of institutions are pseudonyms.
Peters (1999) indicate that in the Zimbabwean cultural understanding, disability always has a cause and does not just happen, but none of the given possible causes can be easily accepted by the society. The possible causes could be that something went wrong with the mother or with the family of the disabled child or that the community angered the ancestral spirits and the child is a curse or punishment. While in this understanding the punishment is not meted against the child, it is the child who will face all obstacles related to disabilities, which include marginalization and stigmatization. Because of the inherent belief that in one way or another, society blames the mother for the arrival of a disabled child in a family, Mrs Mugodi was in tears and being a Christian, started to ask God why she was being punished by having a disabled child. Instead of loving the child as is usually expected, the child becomes a source of punishment and a drawback on the mother’s Christian faith. Mrs Mugodi knew that the disabled child was going to be a source of misery all her life because of prevailing societal attitudes.

The single mother in the voices above became single because the spouse left her at the time the disabled child was born, but she has accepted the child as a gift from God. Her dilemma is when people see her tie her disabled child to a tree to keep him away from harmful objects; they see her as a cruel person. Society sometimes fails to depict the love implied in the tying of the child to a tree and become judgmental by condemning the mother and not appreciating her circumstances. The child in this case becomes the source of his mother’s sorrow with no help at all. Although the child is of school going age, the mother has no means or knowledge of where the nearest school is because of poor administrative structures in the rural area where she lives.
Gift Mbambo, on the other hand, exemplifies how complicated and difficult it is for disabled people to voice out what is affecting them. Although Gift was staying with his parents under the same roof, the unfriendly home environment created by his father who continuously harassed his mother for his birth, made Gift express his feelings through a letter. He could not face his own father. His letter exemplifies how disabled people are rendered helpless by the very society they live in. It is such courage that is needed for the disabled community to speak out and articulate their feelings and preferences if changes in policies affecting their well-being are to be implemented.

Regrettably, some educational policy makers do not seem to be worried much about such circumstances as can be read in the words of one anonymous policy maker in my last citation above. To him, sacrificing resources on a person already condemned by the powers that be, does not make sense. This is the kind of policy maker who still believes that society should get rid of disabled children at birth.

My dissertation looks at the complexity of trying to understand the fate of physically disabled students who struggle to access higher and further education after graduating from high school in Zimbabwe, when such competing and conflicting conceptions of disability by their society are in their way. Some cultural expectations make it where it was most likely that the child would not survive the initial diagnosis by traditional specialists, and such expectations are now in conflict with both state laws and Christian faith brought in by missionaries. These considerations led me to my research questions:

2 Higher or further education in Zimbabwe includes all formal education beyond Form 4 (high school) such as Form 5, University or College education of any discipline, apprenticeship etc.
1. How can a society under constraints of its own indigenous culture help promote the education of its disabled community?

2. What role can the government of Zimbabwe play to improve the education of physically disabled high school graduates?

3. What role can the Zimbabwean indigenous communities play to improve access to higher education for disabled students?

4. What can disabled people themselves do to help their own situation in matters affecting their education?

5. How can disability research be improved in communities with strong indigenous belief systems such as that of Zimbabwe?

In this dissertation I was guided by these research questions as I examine how accessible it is for physically disabled high school graduates to advance to higher or further education in Zimbabwe. This research provided an opportunity for the usually voiceless members of the Zimbabwean society to reflect on and voice matters that affect their lives. My previous research on poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe (Manyimo, 2005) had shown that a majority of disabled people are among the poorest and that lack of education together with low societal expectations exacerbate their poverty.

In my dissertation, a qualitative research methodology was applied utilizing one-on-one semi-structured interviews with thirty-two participants who included twelve disabled high school graduates, four mothers of some of the graduates, two cultural experts, four senior administrators of universities and colleges, two members of associations of and for disabled people and eight government officials from ministries of
education.\textsuperscript{3} Indigenous knowledges\textsuperscript{4} were used as the theoretical framework for this research. Manyimo (2011) informs us that:

One big advantage of using this framework is that it forces one to be immersed in this immense pool of indigenous culture without the distraction of colonial considerations; important as they may be, they will not help in articulating indigenous knowledges. It is unique to a particular culture and society (p. 129).

Results of the research showed that indigenous culture plays a significant role in determining how far disabled people can progress in education. They are marginalized by their own families, their communities and the society. Because of the introduction of other cultures and religions in the country, the population suffers further from competing cultural conceptions of disability that manifest themselves through negative societal attitudes toward disabled people.

A significant outcome of this research was the possibility of developing an alternative model of disability based on indigenous cultural beliefs of the indigenous people. A set of recommendations were identified that include the introduction of the Zimbabwe sign language in the school curriculum, extensive research in the education of disabled people, introduction of social safety mechanisms, revamping rural administrative structures and the school system for curricula and infrastructure,

\textsuperscript{3} There are two ministries of education in Zimbabwe, The Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education and The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture.

\textsuperscript{4} The indigenous framework operates at the level of the people’s authentic values and belief systems that are not usually exposed to the public and yet they influence their behaviors.
improvement of technology and civic education, improvement of the political environment and a way forward for aspiring researchers in Africa.

It was clear therefore that disabled people’s progression in education was almost predetermined from birth mainly by the ingrained belief systems that every disability has a cause and this cause has to do with the relationship with the Creator. When it comes to the education system, things do not just happen. The way the system is structured has dire implications for the access to further education for disabled people. It is important to understand Zimbabwe’s historical background as it has significant bearing on the education system as a whole and consequently, the education of disabled students.

**A brief history of Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe is an independent African country in Sub-Sahara Africa. It is land locked and shares borders with South Africa to the south, Mozambique to the east, Zambia to the north, Botswana to the west and through the Caprivi Strip with Angola to the north-west. It lies in the tropics with four distinct seasons but no snow. It was born out of a bitter struggle against its colonial masters of Great Britain and gained its independence in 1980. It is, therefore, one of the young independent nations in Africa. Before gaining its current name, it went through a metamorphosis of names during the colonial rule. Initially, it was named Southern Rhodesia after one of the first foreign occupiers Cecil John Rhodes with the present Zambia as Northern Rhodesia. The country maintained the name during the time of the federation with Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Nyasaland (now Malawi) from 1953 to the time when the other two got their independence in the 1960s. In 1965, the white settlers led by Ian Douglas Smith declared unilateral independence from their motherland Great Britain and renamed the
country Rhodesia. This was the time the struggle for indigenous independence started militarily. It was not easy for the settlers to continue and in a way to try and appease the local people, they agreed to share government with some ‘moderate’ Africans who became their inferior partners and decided to call the country Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. Zimbabwe-Rhodesia did not last long because the guerilla war had intensified and most of the land had then been under the liberation forces. Under pressure and with the facilitation of the British government, the settlers agreed to the terms of the Lancaster Agreement that brought in a democratic system of choosing a government albeit with some clauses to safe-guard the settler regime for at least the first 10 years of independence. This is the time in 1980 that Zimbabwe was truly ‘reborn’ under the leadership of the current president, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who secured the majority vote in the first plebiscite.

Zimbabwe has two main languages, Shona that is spoken by about 80% of the population and is comprised of several dialects that include, Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, Ndua, Manyika and Chikunda, and Ndebele spoken by about 18% of the population. There are also other minority languages that include Venda, Nambya, Tonga, Chichewa, Kalanga, Afrikaans, Zimbabwe sign language and English. Interestingly, although English speaking people are probably the smallest minority, their language remains an official language more than thirty years after independence and the whole population is expected to at least understand it. (See Appendix 1 Language map of Zimbabwe).

**Researcher’s Location**

I am a Zimbabwean born and grew up in the country. My entire education up to undergraduate level, bumpy as it was under colonial rule, was in Zimbabwe. I grew up
exposed to disability issues having had a disabled uncle who was deaf and who lived with my father. My father was one of the first deaf teachers at a missionary special school for the deaf in the south eastern part of the country, in Masvingo Province. He was driven to take up this challenge because he wanted to help his young brother who had shown a lot of potential and wanted him to realize his true potential which he did. For me and all my siblings this type of disability was nothing but normal to us. We interacted with deaf people on daily basis. It was only after I was old enough to realize that although my uncle had received enough education and training, the system, in whatever way it may be defined, was not on the side of disabled people. I witnessed how my uncle was being exploited, sometimes by family members, for services he provided. The exploiters would take advantage of the lack of communication as an excuse and never compensated him enough for the services he gave. My uncle died a bitter man but one consolation I have is that he was grateful for all the intervention I made on his behalf. Unbeknown to me, this was the beginning of my interest in working with disability issues.

My uncle, however, was not the only encounter I had when I was a child. I spent my first early years with my maternal grandmother who was also married to a disabled man, my grandfather. In his case I was made to understand, that his disability was not natural but was a result of torture by the white regime for some minor offense he had committed. I will spare the reader the details so that I do not lose focus of the intention of this thesis. Suffice to say that I grew up with all kinds of scenarios of disability, natural and man-made. Moreover my father instilled in me a feeling that affording education to disabled people was the best that the rest of society could do to help them live independent lives.
I lived with my grandmother from the time I was 4 months old, yes 4 months not 4 years, until I was ready to start school. It was during this time of my formative years that I was exposed to pure rural Zimbabwe life and my grandmother was my best teacher. I still recall her teachings to this day. Through storytelling and the living example of my disabled grandfather I learnt a lot about disability and how the indigenous population related to this phenomenon called disability. My educational experience included being in class with people with disabilities such as those with hearing impairments, blind people, people with paraplegia, children with cognitive impairments and even some with epilepsy. My experiences of disability, colonial education in Zimbabwe are profound and I drew from these experiences on my journey in this scholarly work. It was a journey full of challenges that called for responsible narration and meaningful recalling of events as they occurred in my early life.

My ‘lived’ experiences with disabled family members, contributed to values instilled in me by my parents about how to interact with disabled people. This combined with my early school classroom experiences and the very rich rural upbringing by my grandparents, gave me the determination to tackle this seemingly complicated and in many ways misunderstood topic of disability. Having undergone colonial education myself, and, moreover, having witnessed what the colonial education system did to disabled children, I feel confident and competent enough to write on the education of disabled people as they are defined elsewhere in this submission. The reader will notice that I have restricted myself to physically disabled persons and their access to higher or further education because my experience was mostly with this kind of disability.
The way that colonialism affected indigenous cultures generally in Africa, has made it difficult for scholars to articulate indigenous cultural practices, especially if they have had no prior exposure to these cultures. But one can take comfort in what Ahmed (2007, p.16) refers to as a paradox of the footprint when she says, “Lines are both created by being followed and are followed by being created.” This is a powerful analogy that holds both literally and philosophically. It becomes imperative for aspiring scholars of indigenous knowledge, of which I am one of them, to retrace the little cultural knowledge there still is in Africa in order to claim back their own culture. It is only through such effort that indigenous culture affecting disabled people can be reclaimed, re-examined, refined and re-introduced to our new generations and those acculturated into Western cultures. Ahmed goes on to explain this further by informing us that, “The lines that direct us, as lines of thought as well as lines of motion, are in this way performative: they depend on the repetition of norms and conventions, of routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition” (Ahmed, 2007, p.16). In addition my own graduate work prepared me for such a venture.

My Masters thesis was on poverty alleviation in developing countries with particular reference to Zimbabwe. I use the term ‘developing’ grudgingly for lack of a better term to use because I believe every country is developed against its own standards. During this study, I realized that most disabled people were poor and received less education than their peers or no education at all. I then undertook to study further and conduct detailed research why this situation holds.

My aim is to be part of those who help trace back indigenous cultural practices especially that which concern disability issues, that can help our understanding of the
disability phenomenon rooted in indigenous cultural belief systems. Borrowing again from Ahmed’s (2007) analogy of lines, my work follows some lines more than others that we might acquire our sense of who it is that we are through tracing back our culture – it is a culture that defines a people. Understanding it and living it will make us better policy makers on disability issues that are affected by indigenous culture. I felt obliged, given my position and current interest in disability issues, to be a significant part of the research team of myself and my participants, looking into the education of people with disabilities and especially those who are physically disabled in Zimbabwe.

**Brief Overview**

Although Zimbabwe government’s education policy through its Education Act (1996) talks of ‘Education for ALL,’ Choruma (2007), reports that education has not really been for all children with disabilities. In a study conducted by SINTEF in 2003, she draws from statistics that indicated that 32% of people with disabilities in Zimbabwe have had no schooling at all, 36% had some primary schooling, and only 32% had some education beyond primary level in a system where education is compulsory for all children of school going age (between 5 and 7 years). The possibility of further education beyond high school is not even considered. Thus, a negligible number of disabled high school graduates have gone beyond high school to Form 5 and beyond. The same question remains: why do disabled children fail to access schooling when most of the children are in school?

We can always speculate as to why physically disabled people are marginalized in as far as higher or further education in Zimbabwe is concerned and probably come up with a seemingly plausible justification. But in my native language (Shona) we say
This simply means that we should not rely on guess work or speculation to find out why; we should take time and effort to find out the exact situation. There is need for us to find out how and why this group of students faces insurmountable barriers in order to proceed with their education. In my opinion, disabled people have suffered from the problem of being talked about, being written about and all kinds of subjective interpretation of their being, as if they cannot have a voice of their own. Mills (2003, p.77) warns about the difficulty power and knowledge has created within sociology and other disciplines “where studying other communities can be seen to turn them into objects of knowledge.” Not being given a chance to express their opinions is a big barrier in the lives of disabled people. How can we know about someone’s experiences without giving them a chance to express their positions? Doesn’t this ‘know it all’ attitude by the so called ‘non-disabled’ people create a barrier for the disabled people to express themselves and their concerns? This project accorded disabled people a barrier free opportunity to articulate how the Zimbabwe education system and societal attitudes impact on their education. Speaking to the experience of physical disability Susan Wendell, author of The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability as quoted by Scott (2007) makes a very poignant observation regarding physically disabled people when she says

Not only do physically disabled people have experiences which are not available to the able-bodied, they are in a better position to transcend cultural mythologies about the body, because they cannot do things the able-bodied feel they must do in order to be happy, normal, and sane. If
disabled people were truly heard, an explosion of knowledge … would take place. (p. 274).

The aim of my project is, thus to give physically disabled people a voice and to examine why so many of them have not transitioned to post-secondary education levels in Zimbabwe. My project focused solely on those people that the education system labels as physically disabled high school graduates’ access to higher education. I interviewed disabled high school graduates who were born in 1980 or after in independent Zimbabwe. I chose this cut-off point so as to reduce the influence of direct colonial education on my research. Children born after 1980 have not experienced what it was to learn during colonial rule and were therefore able to articulate the impact of independent Zimbabwe education system. My project was informed by anti-colonial, post-colonial and indigenous knowledges frameworks in order to contextualize the rationale behind my research question.

My project however, did not focus on informal education (that often happens tacitly) and takes place within the family or communities. The project was concerned with formal education within a school environment that leads to some generally recognized qualifications like college or university certification. In today’s world, it is these formal qualifications that determine the success or otherwise of an individual. The higher the educational level attained, the better chances there are for employment and access to other resources.

In this project, five possible influential factors were examined. These are: the inherent impact of colonialism; role of indigenous culture and cultural knowledges; post colonial education policies; different disability models; and the impact of the Zimbabwe
economy. The recommendations and observations derived from this project will be used to help shape or enhance government educational policies for disabled people. The project will also contribute significantly to indigenous knowledge through recommending a possibility of using indigenous knowledge as an alternative research tool for communities with strong indigenous culture bases.

In addressing the question of access to higher education for physically disabled high school graduates in Zimbabwe, the goals of my project were as follows: (i) to examine the influence of colonial legacy; (ii) to examine the contributions of post-colonial education policies; (iii) to examine the role played by indigenous culture and the process of acculturation and societal attitudes; and, (iv) to examine the impact of the country’s economy on their education.

Throughout the world, education is highly valued because of the general colonial belief that education is a precursor to any advancement in life. While education does not necessarily lead to prosperity, it certainly makes a difference in the quality of life one can lead. Miles and Singal (2010) cite UK Department for International Development (Department for International Development/HM Treasury 2006) which illustrates that “Education benefits not just children, but families and communities, and whole countries. It improves job chances and prosperity; promotes health and prevents disease” (Foreword, p. 3). Education has become a basic necessity for most nations but we continue to get marginalized people who are overlooked for whatever reason and in this case because they are disabled. Even in the so-called developed countries it takes a spirited struggle for minorities to get a fair share of the educational cake (Savolainen, Matero, & Kokkala, 2006; Rieser, 2005). Within these minority groups disabled people
are marginalized more than any other groups since they very much depend on the general society for their wellbeing. The society has to understand disability issues, change attitudes towards disabled people, and, in most cases, this involves examining the cultural values that drive their attitudes.

It is these considerations that led me to think of this study. Looking at all areas impacting disability one would need a lifelong research. Even after narrowing it down to education, I still considered it to be too wide a topic for the constraints before me. Much research on disability has been conducted in most developed countries and undertaking research in a ‘developed’ country such as Canada was not going to fit my research aspirations. My life experiences rang louder in my mind; life with my grandparents; life with my deaf uncle; life with my colonial education system from grade 1 to university; and my realization of how disabled people are impacted by poverty especially if they have not received adequate education; were the main foundations of my desire to embark on this journey. A major problem with the education of disabled people is the question of access to education. Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson (2004) observe that, “Disabled students pose particular challenges to higher education (HE) not only in terms of gaining physical access to buildings, but also in relation to much wider access issues concerning the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment.”

Rather than looking into the whole area of access to education for people living with disabilities of all categories, and in a bid to narrow down my area of research, I concentrated on access to higher and further education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe, but only in terms of physical

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5http://www.ces.ed.ac.uk/PDF%20Files/Brief032.pdf [retrieved May 10, 2012.]
access, curricula offered, admissions policies and assessments. I particularly paid
attention to Rioux & Pinto (2010, Abstract) who state that:

The participation of children with disabilities in regular schools is too often
the prerogative of education boards, who decide whether a child can learn
within existing educational environments, rather than pressuring for systemic
change and organization in school curricula that would grant the right of
education to all children.

The whole aim was to produce a useful document not only for Zimbabwe but also
to offer as an informed contribution to disability education research and educating
societies in general. Looking at disability issues with a different lens from the one used in
Western research protocols led me to examine if there were other ways more appropriate
for cultures rich in indigenous knowledge such as that of Zimbabwe.

Disability researchers and activists have come up with different models of
disability depending on circumstances of their experiences. Johnstone (2001) informs us
that:

The search for an agreed model and definition of disability has been most
eloquenty explored and explained in the United Kingdom by Oliver (e.g.
Studies in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to explain disability through the
dominant relationship between illness, impairments and disablements (p. 10).

Models help us to understand the underlining philosophy of any complex phenomena that
are prone to different or conflicting interpretations. Noticeable are the two major models
that are well articulated by Oliver (1983) and that divide disability into either individual (also known as medicalization of impairments) and social which in my opinion embraces a number of sub-models such as the affirmative model and the rights based model. Swain and French (2000, p 569), describe the affirmative model as “essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment that encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people grounded in the benefits of life style and life experience of being impaired and disable.” On the other hand, Johnstone (2001, p. 22) describes the right-based model as “a more politicised extension of the social model of disability. It has been articulated by a variety of groups at the margins of an increasingly consumer-driven society and began to emerge as a phenomenon in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Western Europe and the United States.” My research aims at preparing groundwork for developing yet another model that will be unique to African philosophies and cultural practices as I use Zimbabwe as my entry point to this world of knowledge. The understanding of disability in Zimbabwe by the indigenous people is not based on political or social awareness by disabled people but by how society has understood disability issues through its cultural practices that have survived from generation to generation to this day. The belief systems of the indigenous people that guide the conceptions of disability justifies why a different model based on these beliefs systems is essential. I look forward to disability researchers in Africa in particular, and any other researchers whose work will depend on indigenous knowledges of a people and their culture, to be able to use this model so as to fully understand and articulate disability and other related issues in Africa, without forcing the application of Western models into their work. The proposed model will be based on indigenous knowledge because as is
demonstrated by this research, indigenous knowledge and culture play major roles in issues of disability not only in Zimbabwe but also in other countries that rely on indigenous knowledges for sustaining their cultures.

It takes courage to undertake research of this kind in a country that is struggling for its own survival. Zimbabwe has suffered heavily economically especially since 1997 to 2009 due to both internally and externally driven problems. Colonial legacy has kept a noose around economic development of the country through programs such as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The political leadership’s egocentric attitudes and its actions also exacerbated the situation. The population is so politically polarized that most systems have come to a halt and the education of people living with disabilities that had attention during the formative period of the country’s independence has suffered a heavy setback as a result of this situation. The dissertation has nine chapters as detailed below.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the research by setting the tone of the dissertation. It is the chapter where I position myself as the researcher, give a brief historical background of Zimbabwe, detail the research questions and general goals giving an overview of the whole project.

Chapter 2 is an overview of the history of education in Zimbabwe generally, and that of disabled people in particular. The influence of colonialism especially through religious teachings of Christianity and the continued role played by missionaries in today’s education system are highlighted. Effort to address colonial anomalies in education policies by the current administration is also discussed.
Chapter 3 is a brief synopsis of literature on disability that will also help inform the analysis of my findings. I discuss disability in general, that is the different understanding of disability by different scholars and what that would contribute to our understanding of disability in Zimbabwe. Three types of culture; dominant culture, disability culture and Indigenous culture are also discussed. Because my intention is to propose an indigenous knowledge disability model as one of the outcomes of this research, a brief overview of different models of disability is also discussed in this chapter. The model I propose will be based on the understanding of how indigenous knowledge has considerable bearing on the indigenous people’s conception of disability. Societies react to disability issues based on their cultural understanding of the phenomenon.

Chapter 4 is a combination of the methodology and the theoretical framework used in this dissertation, I combined these because I believe that the methodology I chose, which is qualitative methodology fits neatly with the indigenous knowledge framework given how ‘voices’ are important for such a framework as compared to a quantitative methodology. A one-on-one semi-structured interviews technique was the main method of data collection used, but textual analysis was also utilized where publications were available.

Chapter 5 is the first chapter of the analysis of my research findings. In this chapter I examine the data collected in the field through interviews, in order to reveal the competing cultural conceptions of disability as they affect disabled people and society generally. The chapter examines the impact of culture and family on disabled people with regards to their well being and access to education. This is the first chapter where
disabled students also have a say in how these competing cultural conceptions of disability affect them.

Chapter 6 details how competing cultural conceptions of disability manifest themselves through societal attitudes towards disabilities and disabled people. The chapter discusses how negative attitudes, even from parents, especially fathers of disabled children, demotivate and reduce these children’s self esteem. Christian teachings and the indigenous belief systems tend to confuse the indigenous people’s understanding of disability issues with a net result of the disabled child being sacrificed by these conflicting and competing understandings.

Chapter 7 presents disabled people’s voices beyond justification of exclusion. Disabled people voice out for the first time why they think society, including their own families is making excuses to justify its lack of appreciation of the needs of disabled children. Negative societal attitudes manifest in a number of ways that include, poor admissions policies, inaccessible buildings, poor social safety network to help poor disabled children afford health and education, provision of suitable curricula and assessment tools and usually put forward lack of resources as its main justification. The disabled graduates and other well wishers view such justifications as mere excuses to cover its lack of appreciation of the needs of disabled people.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. In this chapter, I offer recommendations made directly by participants who included both disabled and non-disabled people. This is because I wanted to separate what sometimes becomes a ‘wish list’ of recommendations from the researchers that at times has little, if any, bearing to what the participants would have said. In this chapter participants’ recommendations come out in their own voices which is
one of the objectives of this research - giving voice to the usually voiceless. Participants are asking for better education facilities, assistance with school and health issues and a recognition that they are also humans and deserve respect. I also make further recommendations (you may call it a wish list!), as it may turn out to be, if the people who are supposed to implement these recommendations dismiss this work as another academic exercise. In my opinion these further recommendations, that include the introduction of the Zimbabwe sign language for primary and secondary education for every student, are feasible and pragmatic although they may have a revolutionary effect. They are derived from my research observations, my personal experiences, and as further elaborations of what was implied but not probably said directly by the participants.
Chapter 2: Education in Zimbabwe

For over a century the education system of Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) was designed along the British systems who were the beneficiaries of the 1894 Berlin partitioning of Africa. The major difference was that there were three systems of education, one for the whites another for Asians and Coloureds\(^6\) and a third one for the indigenous African people. Indians and people of mixed parentage were considered more superior than the blacks but still inferior to the whites. Because of the segregation nature of the education system then, these people had their own schools and their own education system which was better than that of the African people. It was the settler’s policy to downplay education for the African people. Mungazi (1991), talking about a Mr. George Stark who was in charge of African education for over twenty years, reminds us that:

> It is important to remember that there were two essential components on Stark’s philosophy of education for Africans. The first had to do with practical training; the second was to prepare Africans to live under tribal conditions never leaving that environment to interact with an urban one (p. 43).

In my opinion, white settlers were convinced that the Indigenous African people were nowhere near the ‘advanced’ intellectual development of even the least intellectually developed white person. To emphasize this point, until early 70’s, Indigenous African children were always two years behind their age mates who were

\(^6\) People of mixed race parentage were known (to some extent even today) as Coloureds.
white. An Indigenous African child had to do substandard A and substandard B\(^7\) before they went for first grade although they would have qualified straightaway age wise. This in itself speaks volumes in terms of where on the intellectual continuum a disabled child (and more so, a disabled Indigenous African child) would be placed in the system. I feel that the disabled children suffered double marginalization, being Indigenous Africans and being disabled, a condition whereby even among their own family members, they were not regarded highly.

It took a minimum of fourteen years to access university education for an Indigenous African with numerous hurdles along the way. It was a regulatory requirement that an Indigenous African had to ‘pass’ every grade to continue to the next one. There were three main hurdles that were politically put to curb the education of the indigenous African child. The first was at standard 6 where only about the top 12% of the students were allowed to continue to secondary school (Mungazi 1982). The second barrier was at Form 4 where less than 2% would be allowed to continue to lower sixth (‘A’ level) (Kumbula, 1979). The last educational hurdle was to enter university education where an indigenous African Student would meet a white, younger student in the same course for the first time at the only university that was at that time. Very few of the ‘A’ level graduates would continue to university. Thus, before independence, access was greatly reduced by the restricted number of places made available for African children. Hendrikz (1979) provides us with shocking statistics on the status of education in Zimbabwe prior to independence. In 1976 there were 37,897 non-African (White,

\(^7\) Substandard A and Substandard B were equivalent to present day preschool education but in this case it was targeted at indigenous children who would otherwise qualify for grades 1 and 2.
Asians and those of mixed race parentage) primary school children in 168 schools, and 28,451 secondary school children in 1741 schools. In comparison, by 1977, there were 851,025 African primary school children enrolled in 3,526 schools and 28,252 children in 85 academic secondary schools. All this was despite the fact that non African population was less than 4% of the total population.

Zimbabwe acquired its independence from Britain in 1980 after a long and bitter armed struggle. In order to make a difference and address injustice educational practices brought in by the settlers, the new government embarked on an unprecedented expansion of the education system at all levels. Machingaidze, Pfukani, and Shumba (1998), senior officials in education, reported that:

[The] first task of the new Government of Zimbabwe in the 1980s was to dismantle the inequities that had characterized the colonial education system.

To accomplish this task, and to keep faith with its electorate, the government declared education to be a basic human right and, with the help of local communities, set out to expand access to primary and secondary education within the framework of a unified and non-racial system of education (p. 2).

As a result of this effort at national level, contemporary education policy in Zimbabwe is no more divided along racial lines. Enrollments at all levels have increased and so are schools, universities and other education institutions. Literacy levels are believed to be above 80% average which is remarkable in Africa. Machingaidze, Pfukani & Shumba (1998), further report that:

Zimbabwe’s most recent population census (August 1992) revealed that the national literacy rate in the adult population (15+ years) stood at 80.4 percent.
The average rural literacy rate was 73.5 percent, whilst that in urban areas was 92.8 percent. There were gender disparities in these literacy rates. The rural sector had a female literacy rate of 67.4 percent compared with 91.2 in urban areas, with an overall national female literacy rate of 75.1 percent (Ministry of Education, 1996) (p. 1).

Of note is that this comprehensive report prepared by policy makers in charge of education does not touch on any aspect of disability. It is business as usual in their report, with the only extra consideration they make being of the girl child and not the disabled child. Then one continues to wonder why the education of a disabled child is never considered important by Zimbabwe education policy makers. Is it a reflection of attitudes of society? Is it a result of indigenous belief systems concerning disabled people? Or are we reading too much into it? Championed by the settler white government and adopted by the independent government with no modification, is that disabled children continue to be the responsibility of specialized missionary schools that to this day are responsible for the bulk of the education of disabled children.

**Education of Disabled People in Zimbabwe**

*Pre-colonial education.*

The Director of the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS) in Cape Town, South Africa, Kwesi Kwaa Prah, who is also renowned for his prolific contribution to studies in Africa, defines education as:

The process of cultural transmission and renewal, [and goes on to describe it as the process whereby] the adult members of a society guide the
development of younger members of the society into adulthood and initiate them into the culture of the society (Prah, 2007, p. 9).

Prah explains that, in pre-colonial Africa, education was transmitted orally and through predetermined apprenticeships organized by the family in conjunction with the community at large. It was the community’s responsibility to educate its children. Education was an entitlement for every community member so that culture could be transmitted from generation to generation. Prah (2007, p. 9) also advises that, “In general, the African child was raised by the community and educated in the culture and traditions of his or her people.” This education was given to every child regardless of whether they were disabled or not. It was complete and relevant to both the needs of the individual and the needs of society. Besides general education that every child was exposed to, there were some children who the society earmarked for specialization such as medicine, leadership, warfare and arts and crafts that got more than general education. There were no monetary costs attached to this form of education but the level of education depended on the ability of the individual and the availability of necessary resources. Since education was designed to be appropriate to every child, it meant that even disabled children received this education. It is therefore important to examine and find out if the current education curricula in Zimbabwe indeed still meet the requirement of every child.

One would hope that post-colonial education would make as much use of pre-colonial education system as much as is feasible. The question is now, whether this type of education is still appropriate or not given the changed circumstances, or, does the Zimbabwean society yearn to go back to the foundations of its belief systems that some children’s education can be sacrificed that way? This would come by some ‘respect’ of
traditional beliefs and structures whether they enhance or work against the advancement of disabled people’s education.

*Colonial education of disabled children*

Before attaining independence in 1980, according to Hulley (1980), the provision of special needs education in Zimbabwe was in a haphazard manner with various uncoordinated church and charitable organizations each doing its own thing with regards to the education of disabled people. Among such organizations were the Jairos Jiri Association that is still very active to date, the Council for the Blind and agencies like Oxfam, Red Cross and Christian Care. Foreign to the people of Zimbabwe, and to Africa generally, and against indigenous cultural trends, the colonial regime through missionary work introduced separate schools for disabled children. In Zimbabwe the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) missionaries for example, opened specialized schools that include Margaretha Hugo School for the blind and Morgenster Mission\(^8\) for the ‘hearing-impaired’ and those who could not speak (then called the dumb), in the Masvingo province just to mention a few prominent institutions. Another aspect of the provision of special needs education in pre-independent Zimbabwe was segregation. During the colonial era, the provision of education to pupils with special needs followed the pattern that was evident in the provision of general education. There were educational facilities for African pupils living with disabilities, separate from special schools for non African pupils living with disabilities.

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\(^8\) My elementary education was at this Mission where my father was one of the teachers of the ‘Deaf & Dumb’. My uncle who was categorized as ‘deaf and dumb’ and lived with us, was one of the disabled children at this school. At that young age, I started realizing how different disabled children were treated as compared to the non-disabled.
According to Hapanyengwi (2009), of note among the missionaries was a
Margareta Hugo of the Dutch Reformed Church who pioneered the provision of special
needs education to Africans when she established a school for the blind at Chivi in 1927.
Starting with only 3 blind pupils, the school expanded to an enrollment of forty pupils in
seven years before the school was moved to its current location in 1939. In 1976 it
opened a secondary school section. The Dutch Reformed Church was also able to
establish a school for the deaf at Morgenster Mission in 1947. Interestingly my father was
one of the first teachers of the deaf at that new school for the deaf in 1947.

In 1962, Waddilove a Wesleyan Methodist Institution embarked on the training of
teachers to enable them to teach blind pupils (Zvobgo, 1991). This was to lead to the first
experiment with inclusive education at Waddilove where pupils were introduced to Grade
1 Braille, mobility training and recreational activities. Hapanyengwi (2009) reports that
this was also possible, because of the assistance from the Council of the Blind. Two
resource rooms were established at Musume Mission and Lower Gwelo Mission in 1966.
The Ministry of Education granted Waddilove permission to introduce secondary
education in 1979.

The Dutch Reformed Church and Wesleyan Methodist Church institutions were
thus pioneers in the provision of education to African children with disabilities
(Hapanyengwi, 2009). Because of the segregated system of education prevailing then,
European children were in their own institutions such as St Giles in Harare and King
George VI in Bulawayo with better and more appropriate facilities as compared to those
for Africans.
Compounded with disability, these school environments, from my experience and recollection, have never been anything but sources of frustration and stress for disabled children. During that time (during colonialism) children with special needs were usually placed in such rural boarding schools or institutions where they were taught practical skills such as basketry, brick laying, woodwork, leatherwork, sewing and cookery (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). The curricula offered by missionary schools for disabled people were carefully structured to make sure that they remain perpetually dependent and that their labour could be utilized *ad infinitum*.

Along with unsuitable curricula, that were mostly manual labor, disabled children were further disadvantaged through lack of support systems. More often, in cases where basic support items were available, they were usually beyond the means of the disabled or their families since these mission schools were not free.

**Post-colonial education**

It was after independence that the new government thought about the provision of education to pupils with special educational needs. In 1980, Hapanyengwi (2009) reports that the new Zimbabwe government adopted the policy of universal primary (elementary) education. While there was a substantial increase in the number of pupils needing special education because of this policy, Page (1980) on the other hand, thinks that it would be naïve to believe that the policy of universal primary education addressed the needs of the pupils with special educational needs.

It was not every disabled child who benefited from the special dispensations of the respective governments when it came to their education. The only targeted groups of children living with disabilities during the colonial and even by the new independent
government were mainly, students with visual impairments, hearing impaired, physically challenged and those with learning difficulties and speech and language problems (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). On 24 October 1981 Jairos Jiri Association opened a school for the blind. Thus, there were two residential institutions for the blind in Zimbabwe in 1981 (Hapanyengwi, 2009).

It was then evident to the independent Zimbabwe government that, if the education of special needs children is to be expanded in line with the anticipated challenge for primary education for all, there was need to train special education teachers for the program. In 1983 the government of Zimbabwe introduced a Department of Special Education at the United College of Education in Bulawayo (Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). It also organized vacation courses for specialist teachers of the blind. Hapanyengwi (2009) also reports that, it was after eleven years that the only national university then, that was inherited from the colonial era, the University of Zimbabwe responded to the need for highly qualified special needs education teachers that it started to train teachers for the Bachelor of Education in Special Needs Education degree in 1994.

Of credit to the new government is that it has accepted the provisions of The Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action and the Dakar Framework for Action (Hapanyengwi, 2009). All these aimed at enhancing the development of education. By adopting the above declarations, the Zimbabwe government hopes to meaningfully address the education of ‘special needs’ children. The government aims at ensuring equity in the provision and delivery of education services
with special focus on marginalized groups including the girl child, children of migrant/seasonal labourers, orphaned children and children living with disabilities (Hapanyengwi, 2009).

Adopting these declarations alone was not enough given that there were no adequate preparations to meet the implied challenges. Mashiri (2000) in Hapanyengwi’s report (2009) points out to the lack of a national disability pre-school education policy as the reason why there are no pupils with special educational needs in pre-schools in Zimbabwe. Another equally compelling reason, he points out, is that until 2005 most pre-schools in Zimbabwe were privately owned and charging high fees and that these schools were run on commercial lines with proprietors trying to attract as many people as possible. These proprietors were reluctant to enroll disabled children on the ‘guise’ of lack of facilities. However, Mashiri (2000) further argues that such pre-schools would not accept pupils with disabilities for fear that some parents would remove their children once such pupils were enrolled. To the best of my knowledge, these children were and probably are still stigmatized in these schools.

Recognizing the plight of people with special educational needs, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture resorted to the use of a series of circulars, beginning with the 21 June, 1985 Secretary's Circular Minute No. P. 36, that replaced that of 27 November, 1979. The circular aimed at assisting in the provision of special needs education with the main trust being the determination and placement of “children who, because of poor mental ability, are unable to benefit educationally from normal school curricula and methods” (Secretary's Circular Minute No. P. 36 of 1985). The circular clearly spelt out that it was the duty of headmasters to identify and place pupils with
special educational needs in special classes. In so doing the headmaster had to be assisted by psychologists from the Schools Psychological Services. Of course this had to be with the permission of the parents of the children concerned (Hapanyengwi, 2009).

It was not until 1987 that the government of Zimbabwe came up with the Education Act, 1987, in which it is stated that, “every child in Zimbabwe shall have the right to school education.” The Act also places on every local authority the responsibility of providing education to all children under its jurisdiction. While the inclusion of children with disabilities could have been implied in this Act, Hapanyengwi (2009) emphasizes that:

It is important to note that no mention whatsoever is made of the right of children with disabilities to education. It would appear therefore that to assume they would be catered for in the blanket statement may not be a faithful interpretation of the Act


Before 1989, schools for those with mental disabilities each had their own curriculum that gave them the freedom to, or not to, present its pupils for public examinations that were taken by the mainstream pupils. The Chief Education Officer's Circular Minute No. 3/89 of 1989 changed this and directed special needs education schools to follow the curricular used in mainstream schools and to have the pupils write public examination as opposed to school examinations as was the case then. This development was prompted by the realization that pupils from these schools often left school with a school leaving certificate that made them less competitive for further
education or employment than those who would have written public examinations. That way government wanted also to have a way of increasing its influence in special needs education. Hapanyengwi (2009) reports further that:

Another Secretary’s Circular Minute No. P36 of 1990 attempted to rectify the anomaly in the Education Act. It elaborated the nature and conditions under which special needs education was going to be provided in Zimbabwe. It points to the need for integration of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools, the need for resource rooms in regular schools to cater for the needs of pupils with special needs and special schools for those with severe disabilities.

But the Secretary's Circular Minute No. P36 of 1998 was the first document that attempted to link the provision of special needs education to the Education Act 1987. This circular called upon secondary school heads to facilitate the enrollment of hearing impaired and deaf pupils into their schools. The Secretary of Education had noted that very few hearing impaired pupils continued beyond seven years of primary school. The highest educated person with a hearing impairment had gone up to two years of secondary education. Hence, the call on secondary school heads to facilitate the continued stay for secondary education by hearing impaired and deaf pupils.

It is clear that at policy level, the government tried to make it reasonably attainable and ‘normal’ for children living with disabilities to get some education. In 2004, a Director's Circular No. 2004 instructed schools to include learners with
disabilities in all school competitions. The circular then provided guidelines that were to be followed in the inclusion of learners with disabilities in sporting activities including drama, poetry, poster writing, essay writing, music/singing as well as story telling (Hapanyengwi, 2009). So (in theory) for all school competitions there was to be a category of those with special needs who had special entry arrangements.

When the Education Act was revised in 1994, in spite of the above developments, no reference to special needs education was made. Thus, the Act remained silent as far as the right to education of pupils with special needs and the type of education they should receive were concerned. The Act is still silent to this day.

Hapanyengwi (2009) summarizes succinctly the ensuing problems and contradictions that developed since 1996. He explains that:

In 1996, the government of Zimbabwe came up with the Disabled Persons Act which empowered the National Disability Board that among other things was tasked with the responsibility to formulate and develop measures and policies intended to achieve equal opportunities for persons with disabilities by ensuring as far as possible ‘that they obtain education and employment, participate fully in sporting, recreation and cultural activities and are afforded full access to community and social services’. It made it illegal to discriminate a person on the basis of disability. It is important to note that this Act fell under the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and not the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. No attempt was made to link it to the Education Act or at least to relate this section to the general Education Act. This has often created problems with the disbursement of funds meant to
be school fees for pupils with disabilities. For example the Secretary of Education's 1999 report indicates that many pupils with disability were turned away from school because the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare through its Department of Social Welfare had not remitted the fees to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. The same story is reported in 2003 (Circular Minute Number 1 2003). It is also important to note that the Disabled Persons Act does not commit the Zimbabwean Government to the provision of social services and special needs education in any concrete way.

According to Lang and Charowa (2007), the Government of Zimbabwe was one of the first countries in the world to pass disability legislation. The Disabled Persons Act was enacted in 1994 and revised in 1996. The Act specifies that it is an offense to prohibit or deny disabled persons access to public premises, services and amenities and that it is also an offense to discriminate against disabled persons in employment. Regrettably, the Act solely focused on health issues, and is silent on issues of education, rehabilitation and even on the provision of devices such as wheelchairs and braille facilities.

This is further elaborated by the introduction of The Labour Act of 1997. Before 1980, the need for employment among Africans (except for hard manual labour) was not recognized by the Colonial Government. In 1997 the Government of Zimbabwe introduced the Labour Act to recognize the need for and regulate employment among all people in the country. While the Act is clear and specific in as far as discrimination on
basis of race, religion and gender were outlawed, surprisingly, no specific mention of disability was made in this Act. Yet such people were being discriminated against in employment (Hapanyengwi, 2009).

Writing for the Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) funded by the Department For International Development (DFID), a British government department responsible for promoting development and poverty alleviation in ‘developing’ countries, Zvarevashe (2007) reports that in Zimbabwe, disabled people are one of the most marginalized, socially excluded and poorest groups of the society. The report estimates that there are approximately 1.4 million (about 11%) people with various types of disabilities (Zvarevashe, 2007). This is a more realistic estimate as compared to the Zimbabwe Inter-census Demographic Survey conducted in 1997 that estimated disabled people to be only 2% of the population. Accurate statistics are difficult to get because of poor national records, however, we know that the colonial impact, the war of liberation and poverty led to higher rates of disability.

Currently, education policies, especially those that seek for specialization, have served to segregate disabled children from their non-disabled counterparts by creating ‘special’ classes for them. In African culture, segregation between disabled children and their non-disabled counterparts was nonexistent since education was administered at family or communal levels that were nondiscriminatory. Introduction of special education in Zimbabwe and the subsequent implementation of integrated and special education classes have tended to frustrate the disabled child further. As reported by Chitiyo and Wheeler (2004, p. 50) integration units “are classes in their own right and teaching is done in these units with the children with disabilities only interacting with their non-
disabled peers during playtime and co-curricular activities.” Thus the disabled child is denied chances of intellectual engagement with his/her ‘normal’ peers in a learning environment. Worse still, for those disabled children who attend special classes (schools) they have no chance of meeting their peers until they can graduate to ordinary classes. Chitiyo and Wheeler further observe that special education services in Zimbabwe have been mainly “designed to address the needs of those children with four major types of disabilities (hearing, visual, cognitive and physical)” (p.48-49).

To date, the debate for and against integration in schools rages on, and regrettably it is the medical profession that plays a pivotal role in deciding which child is to be educated (Drake, 1999). Knowing indigenous culture alone is not sufficient to understand whether it might or might not have a bearing on the education of disabled children. In most African societies, as reported by Chitiyo and Wheeler, people with physical and mental disabilities did not command respect in society. “In fact, some communities shunned them as outcasts.” (p. 46). Even today, the problem is further exacerbated by transportation and infrastructure schemes that do not seem to consider needs of disabled children in Zimbabwe. Then, sometimes one wonders why, if education is so important even in the ‘eyes’ of the developed world, consideration for the education of disabled children becomes an afterthought. This project examines whether current education polices, indigenous culture and the built environment play any role in influencing access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe.

In conclusion, while government is keen to make a difference for the lives of disabled people, it falls short in putting its act together since despite its own departments
reporting anomalies into how the different pieces of legislation can or should be implemented, there is still no attempt to revise its stand.
Chapter 3: Literature Review

Understanding Disability

It is important to conceptualize the meanings or understanding of terms like impairment, disability and sometimes even handicap when dealing with issues of disability. This chapter explores the various ways that disability has been conceptualized over time. I begin with some of the conceptions that have arisen from what began in the UK as the “social model of disability” and show its difference from more medicalized conceptions, such as the WHO. Having a working sense of a few of the differing models of disability is important for us to make sense of possible different understandings of disability. This becomes more important since I plan to propose a new lens of looking into differing conceptions of disability that may arise from different cultural backgrounds.

In a summary of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS)’s document *Fundamental Principles of Disability*, Oliver (1996) cites the Union’s view on disability that states:

In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairment by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called ‘disability’, of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social
organization that takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression (p.22).


Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function, ... [disability] as any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being, ... [and handicap] as a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors) for that individual (p.10).

Davis (2002) refers to constructionist model that “sees disability as a social process in which no inherent meanings attached to physical difference other than those assigned by a community” (p. 41). Referring to the constructive mode, Davis (2002) goes further to state that:

In a constructive mode first articulated by the late Irving Kenneth Zola of Brandeis University, disability scholars make the distinction between impairment and disability. An impairment involves a loss or diminution of sight, hearing, mobility, mental ability, and so on. But an impairment only becomes a disability when the ambient society creates environments with barriers - affective, sensory, cognitive, or architectural (p.41).”
Bury (1996) summarizes disability as:

[T]he product of definitions and practices that seek to exclude individuals who might be seen to deviate from the socially constructed norms of the ‘able-bodied’. In short, ‘disability is what a ‘disablist’ society decides so to call. ...It is not the inherent nature of disability that matters, but the labelling process, that categorises people by virtue of their position in relation to the dominant structures and values of the society (p.25).

Johnstone (2001) goes even further in reference to the workplace when he says:

The tendency to have an undifferentiated view of disabled people as a homogeneous group operates in a workplace as well as other areas of life. This means that people, with disabilities and learning difficulties in particular, are placed in low regard (Thompson 1997). Too often they are thought only capable of undertaking repetitive and ‘simple’ tasks and if such work does not exist then a person with a disability will not be considered as employable (p.36).

Definitions or the understanding of disability range from the biomedical and economic to the liberal, social-political, minority rights, and Universalist models (Penney 2002 as cited by Wolbring). According to Wolbring, there are three main perspectives the first of which he terms - the *medical individualistic perspective*. This perspective understands or conceptualizes disabled people as patients in need of being treated so that

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their level of functioning and appearance approaches that of the so-called non-disabled people (the norm); the second, the transhumanist perspective is similar to the medical perspective with the modification that it sees both disabled and non-disabled people as patients, (the human body in general is judged to be defective and in need of indefinite enhancement); and finally, the third is the social justice perspective that does not see disabled people as patients in need of treatment or enhancement so much as society is in need of transformation (Wolbring). Wolbring’s perspective are similar to the individual and the social model with an addition of the social justice perspective. But according to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, "disability" is defined as "a disadvantage or deficiency, especially a physical or mental impairment that interferes with or prevents normal achievement in a particular area, or something that hinders or incapacitates." The ‘deficiency’ factor makes it difficult to accept this definition at face value. Such a definition, while common, has far reaching negative implications. It creates room for doing little or nothing for disabled people especially in developing countries. Schriner (2001, p. 651) cites Peter Coleridge (1993) who reports that:

In many developing countries disability is often perceived by governments and aid agencies as a problem, but not as a priority. Income, access to land and/or jobs, basic health care, the infant mortality rate, and the provision of sanitation and clean water are all seen as greater and absolute priorities. These are the pressing problems, and disabled people can be attended to later.... Even people who are "progressive," "gender-aware," and in all other respects "developmentally minded" perceive disabled people as belonging to a category marked "social welfare," which is the new term for "charity." The implication is
that disabled people can be ignored altogether in the development debate (p. 5).

Rioux, Zubrow, Bunch & Miller (2003) map out the trends in defining disability from biomedical to the disability rights. Their understanding of the biomedical perspective is that:

[D]isability is characterized as a disease, disorder or “abnormal” physical or mental characteristic. Disability-related problems are seen as a consequence of an individual pathology, and solutions are directed to “curing” or “treating” the individual. In other words, the solutions aim to decrease the prevalence of the disability by addressing it within the individual (pp. 9-10).

Rioux et al inform us further that:

A Social/Environmental definition of disability emerged out of the disability community. Disability is seen as a form of social oppression, comparable to sexism and racism. The focus is on the barriers that people encounter in their environments, and whether or not these are being addressed. Social responses focus on removing barriers and increasing the participation of people with disabilities at home and in communities, school and workplaces (p. 10).

I am aware that every culture has its own ways of defining disability ranging from those cultures that emphasize ‘normal’ as the standard (thus acceptable) to those who view disability as differences that do not necessarily translate to abnormality. Because the majority of the American society views disability as ‘a problem’, legislation signed into law to provide equal access for individuals with disabilities in the United States is an
example of how disability is interpreted by most Western cultures. According to the
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a person is considered to be disabled if he or she
has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of his/her major
life activities, or has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an
impairment (Linton, 1998). The last two parts of this explanation from Linton clearly
show that even if a person has no substantially limiting impairment, people can still
discriminate against him/her. Thus “The ADA recognizes that social forces, such as
myths and fears regarding disability, function to substantially limit opportunity” (Linton,

This Act derives its definition of disability from that provided by the World
Health Organization (WHO) initially in 1976, that describes in part that disability is any
restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the
manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. But WHO has since
revised its definition or understanding of disability. In a resolution by all the 191 WHO
member States in its Fifty fourth World health Assembly on 22 May 2001, WHO
introduced the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, known
more commonly as ICF, as a classification of health and health-related domains.
According to WHO¹⁰ “these domains are classified from body, individual and societal
perspectives by means of two lists: a list of body functions and structure, and a list of
domains of activity and participation (and since) an individual’s functioning and
disability occurs in a context, the ICF also includes a list of environmental factors.” This
is a huge departure from its earlier definition but still with problems of universal

applications. Nonetheless, Sotnik and Jezewski (2005, p.26) explain that, “the meaning of disability [as observed in both the ADA and WHO definitions] is influenced by the cultural beliefs and values of consumers and service providers,” in any given community. The authors further note that, Euro-American values of equality, and individual ability as a source of social identity, shape a concept of disability that may not be applicable in other cultures. For the Euro-American perspective of disability is akin to the labeling theory in criminology where labels are used repeatedly (such as in this case disabled person) until the labeled person ends up believing and living according to the label. Johnstone (2001) states that “Labelling has long been associated with disablement..... The labels themselves have emerged from the implicit disapproval and associations with ‘unworthiness’ that lie at the heart of society’s judgement of normative difference and disability as deviance (p.6).” They are a source of stigma in disability as Johnstone goes on to say:

Diagnosing the physiological or psychological state of a person has long been important as a means of determining individual pathology or functional disability. It not only serves as a basis for understanding curative or remedial treatments but also, clearly linked to medical-biological labels and explanation for individual treatments and conditions. Labels may emerge as a consequence of embarrassment, shame of stigmatisation. One of the inherent evils of labelling is that the label comes to be viewed as an attribute of the individual concerned (pp. 7-8).

Besides the use of labels in criminology, contemporary disability writers have also discussed the unavoidable use of labels in their field. Titchkosky (2007) informs us
that “the word ‘disability’ is used by people to perform an untold number of forms of recognition. Moreover, our words for each other are used to symbolize, enact and accomplish our ways of perceiving how we are not the same” (p. 195). It is unfortunately these different ways of perceiving disability that bureaucracies like the Education system in Zimbabwe use to label disabled people as ‘Others’ in a way to justify its inability to provide a ‘level playing field’ for every child regardless of their impairments. Labels are very powerful and can determine the destiny of the people carrying the label. Miller and Sammons (1999) describe labels as “potent symbols, not of the features of specific disabilities, but of society’s attitudes and values about the people being labeled” (p. 92).

My research therefore concentrates on those labeled ‘disabled’ by the education system in Zimbabwe and determines what implications these labels have had or continue to have on this group of students for their access to higher education.

In this research I examine the notion of disability from the African perspective and in particular the way disability is construed and understood among the indigenous Zimbabwe people. My understanding of disability is rooted in my understanding of indigenous culture in Zimbabwe. Generally in Zimbabwe disabled people are viewed as different but complete as they are. WHO’s definition differs substantially from descriptions of traditional beliefs in some countries especially in African, Asian and Latino communities. This shows how differential interpretations of the meanings of disability can become a source of dissonance and such dissonance can be listened to for how it might provoke new meanings. In these cultures, disability reflects the totality of the family rather than just the member with the disability as can be observed in most African cultures where the stigma that is usually attached to the disabled person in the
Western world will be targeted instead to the family of the disabled rather than the disabled persons themselves. Fawcett (2000, p. 16) describes disability as “a contested area [where] definitions of disability vary according to historical context, cultural and social locations and the nature of the environment” in which it is observed, an aspect that WHO’s ICF has now incorporated into its classification of disability.

Disability is, therefore, a discourse with multiple interpretations depending on what section of society wields most power. It is usually associated with failure of an individual to meet expected standards of performance by society usually regarded as due to some form of impairment and exacerbated by societal attitudes. When it comes to remedies of disability, Harry (1992) also indicates that families who believe that the source of a disability lies in spiritual rather than physical phenomena may be committed to spiritual rather than medical interventions, a common practice in Africa. This is determined by the model of disability the particular culture is familiar with. Oliver (1996) discussed models of disability as observed from the Western point of view and this research develops a parallel disability model based on indigenous knowledge and research findings in Zimbabwe.

Before delving into Oliver (1996)’s disability models, it is important to understand how culture as covered here impacts on the understanding of these models.

**Dominant Culture**

There are so many definitions of culture found in the literature. For example, the Dictionary of Modern Sociology describe culture as the total, generally organized way of life, including values, norms, institutions, and artifacts, that is passed on from generation to generation by learning alone (Hault, 1969). In this dissertation I agree with
anthropologist Jezewski, (1990) who defines culture as a system of learned and shared standards for perceiving, interpreting, and behaving in interactions with others and with the environment. What is important here is to note that culture is learned and that it is shared. It is learned through interaction. For human beings culture is learned from those with whom they interact, beginning from birth (and some would say before birth). Families, as well as any of those who care for young children, are the formidable teachers of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors. In my case, it was my maternal grandmother and those in her environs who instilled the values I hold to this day that I believe form the basis of my beliefs and behaviors. Because of the permeating nature of culture from generation to generation I undertook to interview not only the disabled participants but their family members as well whenever it was feasible.

According to Marshall (1998), modern societies are often a conglomeration of different, often competing, cultures and subcultures. In such a situation of diversity, a dominant culture often emerges. It is a culture that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on a subordinate culture or cultures. This may be achieved through legal or political suppression of other sets of values and patterns of behavior as what happened with colonialism and is still the case with the contemporary neocolonialism, or through monopolizing the media of communication. A dominant culture can have a hegemonic affect on others cultures. Foucault (1980b, p. 133) is cited by Mills (2003, p. 75) describing hegemony as:

... a state within society whereby those who are dominated by others take on board the values and ideologies of those in power and accept them as their
own; this leads to them accepting their position within the hierarchy as natural or for their own good.

Dominant culture can thus be used in a negative way as Young (1990) argued in her commentary about cultural imperialism when describing the experience of oppressed or marginalized groups who find themselves subjected to “dominant meanings of society [which] render the particular perspectives of one's group irrelevant at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.” (cited by Drake, 1999, p.142). While Young (1990) was referring to the question of masculinity as a dominant force, the same sentiments can be expressed regarding disabled people and the attitudes of dominant cultures towards them. Thus, dominant cultures seem to fail to appreciate and celebrate differences. They do not view disabled people as having a culture of their own that needs recognition and accommodation. Shakespeare et al. (1996, p. 56) described disability as “a social identity, not a consequent of physical change.” While physical change is apparent in what dominant cultures view as disabled, there are so many cases of invisible disabilities that are subjected to the same marginalization and exploitation as the physically disabled. Although there is no unified conception of disabled people in Africa, for example, but because through their similar experiences of prejudice against their well being, disabled people find solace in presenting themselves as a unified culture – albeit complementary and not supplementary to dominant cultures. They find solidarity in their being ‘different’. Disability movements are mainly built on these premises and understanding. In the case of Africa, it is important to understand indigenous cultures to

11 In Zimbabwe disabled people have been united through associations such as Jairosi Jiri which helps disabled people find a source of mutual support against societal prejudices.
examine how these cultures uniquely impact not only on disability of indigenous people but on their education as well.

**Disability Culture**

Any community where people share their beliefs and values develops its unique culture. Because of many similar experiences, disabled people also may develop cultures of their own in response to how other cultures have an impact on their lives. Brown (2001) describes disability culture as not the same as how different cultures treat different disabilities but instead as “a set of artifacts, beliefs, expressions created by disabled people” themselves to describe their own life experiences. Brown, himself a disabled person, goes on to say, “it is not primarily how we are treated, but what we have created.” He recognizes that disability culture is not the only culture most of disabled people belong to since they are also members of different nationalities, religions, colors, professional groups, and so on that are also types of cultures on their own. Brown emphasizes that, “No matter what the disability or location of the person with the disability we have all encountered oppression because of our disabilities.”

From a psychological and/or social point of view, disability culture evolves through self-protection mechanisms that disabled people develop in order to challenge and thrive with the reality of their sometimes-oppressive society. In Africa, disability culture becomes even more complex to understand because disability culture has been shaped by various factors including colonialism and now neocolonialism, globalization and cross-cultural marriages. The settlers, whenever they had a window of opportunity to make a difference, imposed their own expectations on disabled people to the extent of alienating them from

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12 http://www.independentliving.org/newsletter/12-01.html#anchor1 [Retrieved April 15, 2012].
their indigenous cultures. In the case of Zimbabwe, cross-cultural marriages, especially as a result of an influx of people of Malawian origin who came to Zimbabwe in pursuit of employment in the farms and mines, has also added to the complexities of both the mainstream culture and disability culture. While one would expect the indigenous culture of Malawi and Zimbabwe to be similar but in reality they are quite different. Zimbabwe is a predominantly patrilineal society whereas some sections of the Malawian society are matrilineal which makes a big difference if a family of such a combination of cultures has a disabled child. Mwale (2002) informs us that:

It is difficult to identify the dominant ideology for African societies outside Africa’s recent experience of slave trade, colonialism, and nationalism. However, anthropology and archaeology, that pretend to dig deeper into Africa’s past, and re-construct the Antique Africa antedating the 3 recent experiences of Africa, reveal to us that there are matrilineal and patrilineal societies in Africa. In the patrilineal societies, for example, Ngoni, Tumbuka, Sena, Ngonde in Malawi, males are dominant. However, broadly speaking, in matrilineal societies women are more ‘powerful’ than men, an issue that is accentuated by the husbands’ settling in their wives’ villages upon marriage. One would expect that in a setting where land is the most valuable property, due to reliance on agriculture, a landowner would command a lot of power and influence. Husbands, as co-opted landowners, will in principle and practice have less power and influence than their wives. Therefore, if the western gender’s ‘power paradigm’ is anything to go by, the matrilineal society depicts a reversal of the western gender model. In Malawi, Chewa,
Yao, Mang’anja and Lomwe societies are largely matrilineal in principle. (p. 134)

This clearly demonstrates how conflicting cultural expectations can lead to confusion and misunderstanding for a disabled child growing in such an environment even among other disabled children.

Although it has been with us for a long time, disability culture is still subject to debate and varied interpretations. For disability studies, however, and for understanding disability generally, it is crucial to understand disability culture itself. As already noted above, disability culture as we understand it today is born out of disabled peoples’ activism as a way of emancipation from a society with oppressive cultural norms. Referring to the ‘birth’ of disability culture, Oliver (1996), described how the disability movement begun to challenge the ideology of personal tragedy theory especially the notion that disability is an unfortunate ‘anomaly’ on a person that needs correction, through development of ‘disability arts’. The disability movement has encouraged its membership to engage in writing, poetry, songs, theatre, art as well as its own organizations and journals. The aim, as Oliver (1996, p. 124) puts it, is to “celebrate difference(s) and produce its own disability culture.”

Given the way culture is understood generally, it becomes difficult to zero-on an agreed definition of disability culture. Lois Bragg (cited in Peters 2000, p. 584) says there is no justification for the existence of disability culture on the grounds that, as Barnes and Mercer (2003, p. 101) put it, “disabled people's claim fails to meet the qualifying conditions of a common language, a historical lineage, cohesion, political solidarity, acculturation from an early age, generational/genetic links, and pride in difference.”
Bragg’s only exception was Deaf Culture that has been recognized, at least by some people, as a culture for a long time probably because it has its own language. A cursory observation shows that there is no unifying culture, language or set of experiences; common to people with disabilities. Disabilities are not homogeneous, and as Bickenbach (1999, p.106) observes, there is “much prospect for trans-disability solidarity.” Corker (2001, p. 36) in her article on Sensing Disability supports the argument that it is difficult to unify disabled people because, disabled people are “geographically dispersed and socially and culturally diverse in addition to being one of the most powerless groups in society.” This goes on to show that even among the disabled people, there is yet no agreed criterion to justify a feeling of a shared culture. Would this lack of agreement on a shared structure affect education of disabled people?

Even so, not everyone agrees with these observations regarding the existence of disability culture. Simi Linton as cited in Barnes and Mercer (2003, p. 101) argues that disabled people in America have 'solidified' as a group. She declares:

We are everywhere these days, wheeling and loping down the street, tapping our canes, sucking on our breathing tubes, following our guide dogs, puffing and sipping on the mouth sticks that propel our motorized chairs. We may drool, hear voices, speak in staccato syllables, wear catheters to collect our urine, or live with a compromised immune system. We are all bound together, not by this list of our collective symptoms but by the social and political circumstances that have forged us as a group. (Linton 1998, p. 4).
Simi Linton is obviously proudly engaging her disability. It is this sense of pride, the sense of being special and unique, that helps to nurture the culture disabled persons strive for and give them the energy to celebrate their being. Linton is not alone in this feeling. Peters (2000, p. 593) similarly argues that disability culture is alive and vibrant. It is held together by shared values of, “radical democracy and self-empowerment” [as well as] identity, voice, justice and equality.” She believes that disability culture demonstrates commonalities in historical/linguistic terms, by a commitment to social/political issues and changes, and through its personal/aesthetic values that are self evident.

Vasey, (2004) on the other hand, cites occasions that help to understand and appreciate disability culture. According to her, any assistance rendered to disabled individuals in order for them to live comfortably along with everybody else constitutes their culture. Vasey adds that, “if a disabled person needs help with eating, or crossing the road, or getting up in the morning; this is part of their cultural experience” (p.106). Vasey goes on to give examples that include people using wheelchairs, or those who read Braille or use sign language for communication and emphasizes their disability as part of their experience and their way of being that constitutes their culture. Therefore, according to this understanding, disabled people’s experiences with the society is the sum total of their culture commonly referred to as disability culture.

This understanding implies that disability culture is primarily born from the experience disabled people get by interacting with the dominant culture(s). Michalko (1998, p. 8) explains this concept succinctly when he explains blindness as “always experienced in the midst of sightedness. People are either born blind into a world organized by sight or lose their sight in the same world.” The same is true with disability
culture. It only exists in the midst of a dominant culture of the non-disabled people. Unlike other cultures, disability culture will never become ancient history unless there comes a time when impairment is eradicated (Vasey, 2004). Disabled people have no other experience except what they go through day after day that constitutes disability culture.

The above observations demonstrate that disability culture presumes a sense of common identity and interests that unite disabled people. The exact basis for group cohesion and consciousness will vary, as will the level and form of any engagement in cultural activities (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). Because of sometimes bad attitudes of non-disabled members of a society towards disabled people, in most cases disabled people regardless of the kind of disabling conditions and the diverse interests each group may have, are united in opposition to ‘outsiders’ (the so called ‘normal’ people) by their specific cultural styles, customs and social interaction, such as their experiences in segregated residential schooling, specialized institutions, or by any distinctive set of social experiences. It can be presumed that disability culture rejects the notion of impairment difference as a symbol of shame, and stresses instead solidarity and a positive identification. Barnes and Mercer’s (2003, p. 102) observe that, “a general disability culture may be contrasted with subcultures located around specific impairment groups.”

To justify the existence of disability culture, disabled activists such as Michael Oliver (1983), and other disability scholars had to identify aspects of disability that would demonstrate a unique culture of disabled people. Although members of the disability rights movement encompassed a very diverse population, a group identity emerged in
England by being proactive and effective in defining their own needs, as observed by Miller and Sammons (1999), through their:

…working to change legislation and attitudes [of society]. Increasingly, other people with disabilities - political activists, writers, artists, athletes, professionals, and educators articulated their shared values, their common challenges in working for legal and social change, and their similar experiences of being stereotyped, stigmatized, and separated - both socially and physically—from the rest of society (p. 42).

Shared values, experiences, beliefs and shared goals, have brought disabled people together to develop a culture of their own. Disabled people share a common history of oppression and a common bond of resilience. They have excelled in art, music, literature, and other expressions of their lives aspects that have brought them together. The most important attribute to disability culture is the pride they have for being what they are as people with disabilities, as part of their identities.

Disabled people also have a part to play in understanding the differences between their culture (disability culture) and that of the mainstream society. In all societies, individuals with disabilities are not only recognized as distinct from the general population, but value and meaning are also attached to their condition and the way they help to construct that meaning is important. As noted by Groce (2005), conceptual frameworks of disability puts it:

…also affect the ways in which individuals with disability see themselves and the world around them. They influence the manner in which people in their worlds, members of their families and their communities, interact
with them and they are the basis upon which societies implement policies and programs that directly and indirectly affect many, if not most, aspects of their lives (p. 6).

Groce advises that these frameworks, whether positive or negative, are important to understand to effect positive change, that is, for policy planners and implementers considering the needs and aspirations of disabled people in policy formulations. By being assertive disabled people can also influence policies affecting them despite the presence of a dominant culture. Disability culture is just as foreign to the non-disabled people as Western culture would be foreign to any indigenous African culture and vice versa. Emphasizing Groce’s point, we need to be aware of these differences and interact constructively. So one of my questions in examining factors affecting access to higher education for people living with disabilities in Zimbabwe is how a lack of understanding of disability issues by policy makers has bearing on the education of disabled people. Or how alternatively/concurrently indigenous cultural ways of life also impact on education of people living with disabilities?

**Indigenous Culture**

Indigenous culture is a way of life for natives of any specific community that is informed by their common beliefs, norms, values and practices. It is the authentic culture of such a community that is not heavily affected by a cultural modification resulting from intercultural borrowings commonly known as acculturation. Acculturation (notwithstanding how contested this phenomenon is in sociology, anthropology and critical race theory) takes place when indigenous peoples come into contact with a
technologically more advanced society as what has been happening to Zimbabwe since colonialism (Manyimo, 2005).

What does it take to understand indigenous culture? There is a danger in trying to examine or draw implication of indigenous culture through biased publications from foreign authors whose experience is from second hand sources and therefore may not have first-hand experience of the cultures they are describing or writing about. There is need to go to the grassroots and interact with indigenous people to learn and properly record relevant aspects of indigenous culture, that is what this research undertook. My strongest asset in this regard is that in as far as Zimbabwean culture is concerned, I was brought up in situ. I have lived experiences to hang on to. I engaged with community elders and also interacted with and involved disabled people who articulated their lived experiences, in my research, to increase and improve the knowledge base of understanding indigenous culture in Zimbabwe especially in the way it may affect access to higher education for physically disabled people.

I emphasize on the role played by indigenous culture, sometimes referred to just as ‘native’ culture, simply because it is the discourse that determines the distinction of one community from another and has a bearing on societal attitudes and beliefs of that community. This was true in historic times and is still true today despite the ‘global village’ concept advocated by the imperialist society. The more accurate terminology for what I call ‘native’ culture should simply be the ‘indigenous culture’ of any given people. Cultural differences have, since time immemorial, defined the differences between communities and even sub-divisions of the same communities. Culture manifests itself through language, customs and beliefs, religion and other values. The more these
attributes are shared and agreed upon by a community, the more the individual members of that community understand each other. One community may not share the same values with another community and that becomes the source of differences in cultures and cultural attitudes.

For example, giving birth to a physically deformed child is sometimes considered as a bad omen on the family in some African cultures but it is however never viewed as a curse on the deformed child itself. Chimedza and Peters (1999, p.10-11) describe the birth of such a disabled child in the Shona and Ndebele cultures of Zimbabwe as “associated with witchcraft, (Department of Social Services 1982), promiscuity by the mother during pregnancy (Addison 1986) and punishment by ancestral spirits.” Some communities in Zimbabwe strongly believe that a family may be bestowed with a ‘gift’ of a disabled child as a curse for a bad deed the family committed in the past. This belief is widespread among most African cultures. It is worth noting that the curse in such cases is a collective responsibility of the whole family including ‘extended’ members of that family but not including the child. It is also not necessarily aimed at the parents of the child but to the collective responsibility of the entire family or even community in some cases. This is in contrast to some beliefs in Buddhism. According to Sotnik and Jezewski (2005, p. 27) “Southeast Asians adhere to the concept of karma, a belief that one's present life is determined by what one has done, right or wrong, in a previous existence. Thus, followers will accept a perceived misfortune, such as a disability, as predestined.” So, from the African cultural point of view, a disabled child is never held accountable for his/her condition. That is why, even in adult life, the community respects the disabled person in spite of his/her impairment.
My personal experience with the community I grew up in was that the presence of a disabled person among the community was viewed as a reminder that the powers above were not happy with something the community or some members of the community did. It is common in Zimbabwe, however, for the community to also believe that they may be exonerated by the Spirit above (Mwari in Shona), through the intercession of their ancestral spirits, if they ask for forgiveness or have settled a causal dispute. It is also strongly believed that if forgiveness is granted the disabled child may bring with him/her some supernatural powers useful for the community. These powers could come in the form of healing powers (nganga), art and craft specialist (mhizha), or as a medium of intercession with higher spiritual powers (svikiro). The disabled child may also grow up to be a community leader (but not as a king) especially during worship and traditional rituals where the connection with the spiritual world may be called upon.

Thus, under such circumstances the concern about the deformed body becomes extraneous. But these may not be all the causes attributed to disability. In some cultures, as Groce, (2005) says, the cause of disability as observed among immigrants in North America is not always believed to be divine or supernatural. Some of these immigrants believe that, “a disability can be ‘caught’, transmitted either by touch or by sight, is found widely [among these cultures]. Pregnant women in particular are discouraged from seeing, ... or touching someone with a disability, for fear that they may give birth to a similarly disabled child” (p.7). Thomason (1994) also reports that even children of some Native American parents continue to be discouraged from even touching assistive technology devices such as wheelchairs for fear that they will acquire a disability through this contact.
In extreme cases, as was the practice in some parts of Zimbabwe, a child born severely disabled, would not see the light of the day. The midwife in consultation with the elders would not allow that child to live. But because in most countries such an activity would now be construed as infanticide and there are laws against this practice, many disabled children have survived against the wishes of both the parents and the community at large. The implications for the education of these disabled children born under such cultural beliefs are very complex. This draws us back to the question whether this type of indigenous practices would have any bearing on the education of the disabled children generally and particularly in Zimbabwe.

Devlieger (1999, p. 169) informs us that, “disability is a sensitive barometer for local development.” In view of this statement, it is important to examine what influence local knowledge in a community, in a developing country, would have in the education of disabled children. Local culture and local disability culture specifically, as demonstrated in this research has a strong bearing on the success or otherwise of disabled children’s education. In the global arena the discourse of disability is taking centre stage based on human rights ideology that is emphasizing on community support rather than service.

The same cannot be said about developing countries. Any effort to help disabled people that has minimized or ignored completely local cultures of the indigenous people has failed. Local knowledge of disability issues has proved to be very resilient and implementation of any programs has to be cognizant of this. Stone (1999, P. 9) noted that, “where activists, academics and practitioners are from or trained in the minority world, [such as Canada], working in or with people in the majority world [such as in Africa], there will always be risks”. There will always be questions of whose agenda has
to dominate, whose ideology is put into practice, whose definition of impairment or
disability rules, whose cultural or religious values to be considered, whose social systems
or ways of working have to be followed (Stone, 1999). But what impact would
indigenous knowledge or influence of indigenous culture have on the education of
disabled people? Would a clearer understanding of disability from the indigenous point of
view help us understand education of disabled people by using a different disability
model based on indigenous knowledge?

**Disability Models**

Since one of the major outcomes of my research is to prepare the ground for the
development of an indigenous disability model for the future, it is important to
understand more about these models and the possible role they can (or play) in
understanding disability issues in general. In Western cultures two main models of
disability seem to take centre stage in disability discourses. These are the individual or
medical (medicalization) model as Oliver (1996) prefers to call it and the social model. In
my research, I am proposing for the future development of an indigenous knowledge
model as a follow up to this dissertation that may be more appropriate for cultures that
have strong indigenous belief systems. As suggested by the proposed name this model
would draw on indigenous cultures and how these cultures influence a community’s day
to day activities regarding disability issues. The differences between these models are
fundamental and appreciating and understanding their differences will go a long way in
answering the question of whether indigenous knowledge and culture have any impact on
the education of disabled children. Education systems, in general, and educational
institutions in particular, may consciously or unconsciously prefer one model of disability
over the other. This choice may have profound implications for the disabled students’ access to higher educations.

The medical model

The individual or medical model views disability as a problem encountered by an individual that needs to be rectified. According to Oliver (1996, p. 32), the individual model “locates the 'problem' of disability within the individual and, ... it sees the causes of this problem as stemming from the functional limitations or psychological losses which are assumed to arise from disability.” Wolbring supports Oliver when he also points out that the medical model sees disabled people as patients in need of being treated so that their level of functioning and appearance approaches that of the so-called non-disabled people. And according to the labeling theory this model in addition, assumes that disabled people perceive themselves as patients, who view their own biological reality as defective or subnormal and needing medical attention. This can lead disabled students to deselect themselves for further education as a self fulfilling prophecy.

The medical model derives its support from the notion of normalcy where disability is construed as a deviation from the expected norm. The problem with this model is that medical practitioners concentrate on what they perceive as ‘problems’ of disability at the expense of the individual’s interest. Beatrice Wright as cited by Enns (1999, p. 102) attributes this biased attitude of medical professionals to a clinical emphasis to problems at the expense of the individual. Wright notes that, "being problem-oriented, [one] easily concentrates on pathology, dysfunction, and troubles, to the neglect

\[13\] ibid
of discovering those important assets in the person and resources … [such as societal attitudes and the built-up environments], that must be drawn upon in the best problem-solving efforts.” Colonial education was mainly driven by this model for disabled people. It is no wonder that missionary education centers in Zimbabwe for the disabled were and are still guided by the type of impairment perceived through medical analysis for the concerned students.

**The social model**

This model views disability as a social construction whereby the society is responsible for the disabling environment it creates for people with impairments thus disabling them. This can be done through creation of physical barriers, through denial of access to programs and opportunities the non-disabled people get and even through some cultural expectations. Developing and drawing on the social model, Oliver, (1996, p. 32), (co-founder of the social model) explains that disability is not “individual limitations, of whatever kind, that are the cause of the problem but society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organization.” Hence, disability according to Oliver, “is all the things that impose restrictions on disabled people; ranging from individual prejudice to institutional discrimination, from inaccessible public buildings to unusable transport systems, from segregated education to excluding work arrangements, and so on.”

In support of Oliver’s position with the social model, McDermott and Varenne (2007)\(^{14}\), assert that, “at the most general level, people in all cultures can use established cultural forms to disable each other.” Established cultural forms could mean anything

\(^{14}\) [www.serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/culturedisability.html#part3](http://www.serendip.brynmawr.edu/sci_cult/culturedisability.html#part3)
from built-up physical structures that may not be accessible to other sections of society such as public buildings that have no ramps for those in wheelchairs, or even an unsuitable educational measuring instrument that excludes other people’s cultural considerations. In essence, McDermott and Varenne explain further that anything that leaves “people locked out of public places, through bad school assessment systems that keep people from learning what is in some way needed, on to metaphors and tropes that deliver so consistently a view of people as less than they are,” exemplifies the understanding of the social model of disability approach to address how people with impairments are made into disabled people. McDermott and Varenne observe that there are numerous ways to think about the nature of culture and disability. The uses of each term – culture and disability, “differ along a continuum of assumptions about the world, its people, and the ways they learn.”15 They distinguish three approaches of how society constructs disability. These are the deprivation approach; the difference approach; and the culture as disability approach and they also go on to show how these different approaches influence understanding of disability.

**Societal Construction of Disability**

**The deprivation approach**

The deprivation approach takes up the possibility that people in various groups develop differently enough that their members can be shown to be measurably distinct on various developmental milestones (McDermott & Varenne, 2007). The approach usually involves the society starting with a stable set of tasks and uses these tasks to record varying performances across persons (if in one culture) and/or across cultures. Low level

15 Ibid
performances by members of a group are taken as examples of what the people of that group have not yet developed. Good examples of societal expectations include but not limited to IQ tests, certain versions of abstraction, syllogistic reasoning where a person is assumed to be able to reason from the general to more complex issues. This approach divides society into categories where some people are the only ones with *culture* and the others do not have it. Those with sight for example may view the ‘blind’ as lacking some aspects of *culture* and, therefore, deviant (disabled) in as far as they are concerned.

**The difference approach**

The difference approach takes up the possibility that the ways people in different groups develop “are equivalently well tuned to the demands of their cultures and, in their various ways, are equivalent paths to complete human development” (McDermott & Varenne, 2007). McDermott and Varenne go on to point out that this approach relies “less on predefined tasks and instead focuses on the tasks performed by ordinary people, well beyond the reach of the laboratory, as a matter of course in different cultures.” If it is possible to describe the task structure of varying cultures to depict similarities and differences, then it is possible to discern what abilities and disabilities cultures might develop. Ability in one culture might be construed as a disability in other cultures. Failure to articulate in the English language in Zimbabwe for example was considered a disability by the white settlers and unfortunately, even today because of acculturation, the independent Zimbabwe education system still upholds these values. This approach is based mainly on attitudes especially towards ‘the Other’.
The culture as disability approach

The third approach, that McDermott and Varenne term ‘culture as disability’ takes up the possibility that every culture, as an historically evolved pattern of institutions, “teaches people what to aspire to and hope for and marks off those who are to be noticed, handled, mistreated, and remediated as falling short.” In other words, a dominant culture can be a source of disabling factors for disabled people. Cultures offer a wealth of positions for human beings to inhabit and each position requires that the person inhabiting it must possess, and must be known as possessing, particular qualities that symbolize, and thereby constitute, the reality of their position to others (McDermott & Varenne, 2007). People are, however, only incidentally born different and in some cases are subjected to early enculturation into being different. It is, therefore, more important to understand how they are put into positions for being treated differently.

It is also interesting to note that by this approach, no group stands alone, nor even in a simple relation to more dominant other groups, but always in relation to the wider system of which all groups, dominant or otherwise, are a part (McDermott & Varenne). Thomas, Meyer, Ramirez and Boli (1988) describe this approach as one that “takes a whole culture of people producing idealizations of what everyone should be and a system of measures for identifying those who fall short for us to forget that we collectively produce our disabilities and the discomforts that conventionally accompany them.” (cited by McDermott & Varenne, 2007). Baldwin (1985) also offers fundamental thoughts about how disability culture evolves among disabled people. He notes that the world’s definitions that is, expectations and standards, are one thing and the life one actually lives.

16 Ibid
is quite another. A disabled person cannot allow his/her life to be dictated by the whims of the world, but must find a way to be stronger and better than that. Disability culture is strongly built around this way of thinking and this way of being. It is about understanding one’s rights as Rioux et al (2003) inform us that:

The Disability Rights model of disability presumes that all people have the same rights, regardless of their disability.17 Disability is seen as a product of discrimination and inequality in social, economic and political life. The focus is on broad systemic factors that enable or restrict people from participating as equals in societies (p. 10).

It is all these considerations that we must pay special attention to in examining what model best addresses the situation before us and in this case that of access to higher or further education for people with physical disability in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Theoretical framework

Anti-colonial and Neocolonial Influences

This research is heavily influenced by the colonial legacy experienced in Zimbabwe. While the country has indeed attained some semblance of independence as a result of the armed struggle, it still has to attain economic, cultural and (hard to believe) political independence. The prevailing neocolonial environment in Zimbabwe and indeed in formerly colonized countries of Africa makes it even more difficult to conduct a purely indigenous African culture based research that is what this research was determined to do. It is worth noting that the anti-colonial sentiments as advocated by wa Thiong’o (1986) and Fanon (1967), were a direct result of the birth of Africalogy even for those people who were outside Africa. It is a field that is growing fast in African Studies which Asante (1990, p. 14) defines as the “Afrocentric study of phenomena, events, ideas, and personalities related to Africa.” Asante warns of the danger of scholars who impose Western criteria on African phenomena as not constituting Africalogy but something else. In Africalogy the scholar generates research questions based on the centrality of Africa. In this case the centrality is on the impact of indigenous knowledge on access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. Asante (1990) goes on to assert that, “uses of African origins of civilization and the Kemetic high culture as a classical starting point are the practical manifestations of the ways the scholar secures centrism when studying Africa.” It is, therefore, important to incorporate important underlying attributes of a phenomenon of its origin. Disability in Africa has a long and rich history and this history is embedded in the African indigenous culture. While this starting point
is important, this project suffers from inherent constrains of time and budget but all attempts to get authentic African (in this case Zimbabwean) perspectives to the phenomenon of disability has been made. My aim is to make an addition to the knowledge base of Africalogy especially of the often neglected area of disability studies in the African context.

While every attempt is made to come up with truly African perspectives when research is conducted under the aegis of African studies, Asante (1990) asserts that African researchers are “bound by the same protocols as the European scholars” and they end up not properly doing authentic African research but rather a European style research in Africa” (p. 6). This is mainly due to the protocols and requirements dictated by both the academy and funding institutions, a limitation this research fought against. Under the European (Western) way of research, the methodology and outcomes are almost predetermined whereas for proper African studies research, some of these constraining protocols are either ignored or overlooked albeit against great academic risks. That is how colonialism is still impacting on research in Africa by Africans today. My project could also have suffered from this, but thanks to my well informed and progressive supervisory committee it was possible to resist this ableist approach to disability research that is often the case in Western cultures.

In recommending a different methodology for conducting sociological research in non-Western indigenous societies, I am drawing on Brohman (1995); although his concern was on development theories, much of his work can be inferred for the field of disability research. In order to understand and articulate meaningfully concerns about disabilities in non-Western societies such as in Zimbabwe, the researcher needs to be
more sensitive to the complexities of various disability experiences, including possible causes, to produce appropriate grounded theory for such a society. On development, Brohman (1995) says:

An ongoing tension exist within development theory between the desire to formulate universally valid principles and formal models (based on a stylised version of the development history of the West) and the need to understand the great variety of actual experiences and potential alternatives for development in different societies. Given their Western social science background, many development theorists across a range of disciplines [including sociology], have been preconditioned to look for parallels between the development history of the West and contemporary development in non-Western societies; as a result, the actual development experiences of the different societies have been simplified and distorted. Because of this, many analyses have been conceptual incapable of addressing the root causes of critical development problems in these societies (p. 121).

My aim is to try and avoid the usually Eurocentric methodologies of research that conduct research to prove a usually predetermined result based on theories already developed in the West and trying to justify parallels in non-Western situations. As Brohman says, “the actual development [disability in this case] experiences of the different societies [will] have been simplified and distorted. Alternative methodologies appropriate and unique to a given society and situation, are the only tools capable of
addressing the ‘real’ causes of some sociological behaviors by society members - in this case towards disability issues and disabled people.

The aspect of culture in Africa can be equally complex. Asante (1990, p. 9) advises that a “useful way to view the cultural question Afrocentrically lies in the understanding of culture as shared perceptions, attitudes, and predisposition that allow people to organize experiences in certain ways.” While Asante was referring to African Americans in this case, the same sentiments are employed to the general African culture on the continent and to Zimbabwean culture in particular. Like the African Americans, Africans in Africa constitute the most heterogeneous group of nationalities but perhaps one of the most homogeneous group socially. A careful examination of different African cultures shows that they have a lot in common. Despite the distortions caused by colonial rule in Africa, the similar cultural roots are still intact. All what is needed is to dig deeper through informed research methodologies to bring to surface this rich culture.

Having been trained in Eurocentric perspectives, it was likely that I could approach my research from a Eurocentric viewpoint, a view that is decidedly different from that derived from my personal experiences as I was victimized by the imposition of Eurocentric expression. Admittedly, I overcame many constraints in approaching this project in a truly Afrocentric way. The temptation was great to follow the ‘proper’ protocols and procedures at the expense of discovering profound information through the African indigenous way of knowing. According to Asante (1990):

Afrocentricity is inevitably the philosophy of African scholarship in this historical moment. One cannot transcend it until it has been exhausted in its confrontation with our reality. The circumstances, the set of
circumstances, are uniquely social, but it is only out of the social environment that one is able to derive the authentic empirical experience; otherwise we are playing ‘head games’ (p. 38).

The danger of Western trained researchers in Africa is that they are often trapped in theoretical and methodological prisons from which they can only escape with great danger to their reputations (Asante, 1990). It is only through an Afrocentric approach that an African research scholar can rise to a new level of consciousness which as Asante puts it “claims that it is the concrete act of turning the table so that Africa assumes centrality that grants African people a new economic, historical or linguistic vision” (p. 38). Economic, linguistic, and cultural conceptions of issues such as those pertaining to disability cannot be left to chance, they must respond to a theoretical framework where each phenomenon is examined within the context of the authentic empiricism so fundamental to the methodology.

**Indigenous knowledge approach as a framework**

In this research, I am guided by a theoretical framework that forms the basis of the recommendations that result from this exercise - the Indigenous knowledge theoretical framework. This theoretical framework pays more attention to the usually overlooked attributes to disabilities in Africa that are embedded in indigenous culture and belief systems that a Western research ‘lens’ may not delve into. It is time that research in Africa pays attention to ‘real’ factors that have an impact on disabled people and how these factors can be addressed in a more meaningful and genuine manner. There could be a disjoint or even a confusion in the minds and reactions of African societies to
disabilities because of what happened during the colonial era. During this era, disabled people were viewed as a burden for society and any education they were given was to prepare them for manual labour and any menial chores. University education for example, was never a considered option for disabled people.

The Law Commission of Ontario informs us that, “Conceptualizations situating disability as the problem of an individual or individual ‘pathology’ have dominated the last century. These conceptualizations have generally been divided into two subgroups: the biomedical approach and the functional limitations approach.” 18 The Commission further contends that:

The bio-medical approach assumes that disability is caused primarily by an impairment, that is, a disease, disorder, physical or mental condition that is aberrant or abnormal. It is because of this impairment that people are excluded from participation in society. Under the bio-medical model, medical practitioners are considered to be the experts regarding the nature, causes and appropriate responses to disability. Income supports or other benefits are provided on the basis of charity, with persons with disabilities being considered the ‘deserving poor’. [p. 8]

While my theoretical framework accepts the disabling barriers that hinder disabled people’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others, it also recognizes that the indigenous belief systems, in this case those of the Zimbabwean people, play very significant roles into the way disability is understood and

acted upon. The fact that disability is a communal rather than an individual problem speaks volumes to what becomes of a disabled person.

I agree with Faye Harrison as cited by Ulysse (2003, p. 283) in their personal communications when she says, “Native [African] contributions cannot be restricted to the input of otherwise inaccessible data. Natives [Africans] must penetrate and reconstitute the core of the discipline’s discourse by restructuring theories premised upon alternative sets of priorities, visions and understandings.” There is need to develop well informed theories especially in most usually misunderstood phenomena such as those pertaining to culture and specifically to disability issues in the African context using indigenous knowledge. Wane (2008, p.183) argues that, “Indigenous knowledge is a living experience that is informed by ancestral voices.” Indigenous Zimbabweans, at least a majority of them, believe in a vertical relationship between themselves and their ‘dead’ ancestors. This understanding is key to my approach in developing a truly African (Zimbabwean) disability theory. This is different from theories such as what Wolbring\(^{19}\) says:

Science and technology are pursued for human benefit. But the particular benefits of scientific research and technological development are the result of human activities embodying various cultural, economic, and ethical frameworks as well as the perspectives, purposes, and prejudices of any given society and of powerful groups within it. One group that should benefit includes disabled people.

But such benefit, he goes on to explain, will to a large extent depend on the “governance of science and technology, the involvement of disabled people themselves in their governance, and on the very concept of disability, an issue that is more contentious than commonly recognized.” Wolbring’s theory is based on observable trigger factor for any such behavior whereas Wane and Asante believe that a belief system of a people can be responsible for their behaviour and actions. The indigenous people of Zimbabwe believe in how their ancestral spirits can influence their behaviour. This belief is not based on any scientific findings such as that of Wolbring. Regarding the most important factors to consider when conducting such a research, Johnstone (2001) informs us that, researchers in the social sciences, that is what my research is all about, although it is not a totally ethnographic research, have

... [T]aken considerable interest in discovering which factors have the most influence in shaping the ways in which the members of different social groups interpret their situations. Ethnographic accounts, in particular, seek the opportunity to find out how different people conceptualise the social world in which they live. They also seek to respect the cultural and ethical values integral in the lives of their informants (p. 118).

Thus, the goal of employing an indigenous knowledge theoretical framework in my project is to give those people in Zimbabwe, who are subjected to labeling as “abnormal” by their own education system, and in some cases by societal attitudes corrupted by colonialism, have voices of their own on issues that concern them.

20 ibid
Concerning education and disability, one might want to know what perception of disabled people government has, that guides or helps in the formulation of education policy? What role do people living with disabilities in Zimbabwe, play in the process of this education policy formulation and even its implementation? Clearly involvement of disabled people in decision making and implementation depends heavily on societal perception of the so called *disabilities* and disabled people. The choice of participants in this project is purposely targeted at those high school graduates with physical impairments that the system labels as disabled in a bid to give them a voice in matters that concern them. This research tries to give voices to both the physically disabled high school graduates and any supporting or influential sectors involved in the education of disabled people as is detailed in my method section.

**Method**

This project’s method of research is qualitative. There are a number of compelling reasons why I choose to emphasize this method. Qualitative research allows respondents to have a voice that they might otherwise not have if a quantitative method is used. Quantitative methods tend to aggregate information together and sometimes the human ‘touch’ is lost. The paradigm for disability that emerges from the social model (which acknowledges that social barriers are imposed by society) aims to regard the person with the disability as the decision maker and at the centre of any research encounter (Johnstone 2001, p. 113). Consequently, Moore et al. (1998) advocate for creating an environment whereby the disabled respondent feels empowered and in charge of the encounter when they say:
The role of the obligatory cup of tea and affable enquiries about families and week-ends should not be underestimated for establishing some ongoing commitment in a new research enterprise. While this may seem a superficial practicality to raise, it is important for researchers to be aware of the dilemma posed by trying to match research and social roles and also separate the two parts (p. 44).

This kind of environment can only manifest itself through one-on-one interviews using the qualitative method of research. The main attributes or specifically the focus of my research is on attitudes and culture of society towards education of disabled people that are/maybe difficult to measure quantitatively. I used semi-structured interviews that enabled me to dig deeper on issues that are usually glossed over in areas of indigenous culture and attitudes. All interviews with parents or guardians, cultural experts, administrators of learning institutions and disabled participants were conducted in environments conducive to reflection on what contributed to the success or lack of success to access higher or further education for physically disabled high school graduates in Zimbabwe. Quantitative methods would not have effectively gone that deep for such a culturally focused research.

Tom Shakespeare (1996), as cited in Johnstone (2001, p 118-119) gives an insight into the rules by which he conducts qualitative research:

The aim is to give an accurate representation of the views of those involved in the research process, providing a sufficient and adequate explanation of the purpose of the research and providing the opportunity for participants to ask questions and to revise their statements. Any research interviews undertaken
need not be rigidly structured - giving participants some say in the direction that it is taken during a research exchange is important. When carrying out any piece of research there can be pitfalls.

In disability studies particularly, the method chosen can affect the outcomes in a profound manner especially through how researchers present themselves. Their presence can influence how participants behave and how they give their answers. It was therefore advisable for me to develop some form of rapport or create a free discussion environment conducive to prepare my participants for the interviews.

I also collected some demographical information such as age, gender, home area, language spoken at home, ethnicity, and sex to help me with my data analysis. I used a short self-administered survey which my twelve disabled participants completed at the end of each interview, to collect this data (see Appendix R). There was no medical or psychological data collected from the participants. Most research protocols would probably prefer a quantitative approach for its ‘scientific’ interpretation of data but my research focus could not naturally fall into this type of approach. A combination of the two methods could probably have some impact since, as Tashakkori & Teddlie, (2003) point out, the distinction between quantitative and qualitative styles of research and the mixing of these styles is certainly important as Brewer and Hunter (2006, p. 63), advise focusing on this distinction exclusively “ignores a wider range of methodological problems and opportunities to solve them.” Byrne-Armstrong, Higgs and Horsfall (2001), also point out that in looking at the question of whether to do qualitative versus quantitative research, it “isn't whether [one] wants to do qualitative or quantitative research (or what the terms actually mean), but where [one is] coming from, what
paradigm [one is] working from, how [one] conceptualizes knowledge and the purpose of research” (p. 33).

My choice of the main method of research was therefore highly dependent on the nature of my research and its envisaged outcomes and not as a question of qualitative versus quantitative. My research questions investigate the barriers faced by people living with disabilities that made it difficult for them to gain access to higher or further education. And this has implications for my research design. I used mainly a qualitative analysis method to maximize on its strengths especially given the nature of my research problem.

Within my qualitative method, I employed a combination of approaches to obtain data. These included use of semi-structured audio recorded interviews and textual analysis of available documentation. Interviews were targeted at physically disabled high school graduates, some parents, institutional administrators and ministries of education officials, cultural experts and relevant disability associations while document reviews provided information on possible gaps resulting from my interviews. In the case of parents and some disabled graduates I was cognizant of the fact that this section of the community (especially the elderly) may not feel comfortable with audio-tape interviews. Flick, von Kardoff and Steinke (2004, p. 193) reminds us that, “interviewing confronts the researcher with an uncommon social situation with which he or she has to cope professionally.” I was aware that the use of a recorder could lead to my elderly participants’ contributions being guarded or inhibited. Hermanns (2004, p. 210), also advices that: “It is therefore the duty of the interviewer to accept responsibility … for managing the feeling of ‘recorder-discomfort’” for his or her participants. As a
precaution during all such interviews I gave my interviewees choices and reverted instead to corresponding field notes when I felt the participant was feeling uncomfortable to continue.

Together, I interviewed 32 participants; 12 high school graduates who are physically disabled, six from Matebeleland and another six from Mashonaland. Seven of these were males and five of them were females. The sixth female who was also going to be interviewed was involved in an accident with her wheelchair (because of artificial barriers put in place by society), a day before the scheduled interview and was hospitalized. I also interviewed two people who are considered in Zimbabwe as cultural experts, two representatives of disability associations, four college and university administrators, and eight government officers responsible for both secondary and higher or tertiary education. In addition, and with the consent of the interviewees, I interviewed four mothers of some of my disabled participants. It is also worth noting that all the participants were residing in cities. Due to poor tracking system, it was very difficult to get participants from rural areas. There were no addresses for any students who had graduated at high school level and went to their rural homes.

I have used pseudonyms in my research to maximize the confidentiality of the sources of my information as much as is practicable. I am aware that some of the content in my reporting may give away through the context of that reporting, who the possible respondents are. Besides, I have found pseudonyms to also enhance the underlying, unspoken sentiments espoused by my respondents. Thus, the determination of pseudonyms for the graduates was centered on the general family or societal attitudes towards the disabled child which is usually the case in naming of children in Zimbabwe. I
thought of some names as a result of sentiments expressed by the graduates themselves or those who spoke about them. A good example is Mandla which is a short-cut for Mandlenkosi meaning this was through the power of the Creator. This name suggests the sentiments that if it is not of human making and so there was no need even to consult the traditional specialists. Some of the names reflect the ingrained colonial indoctrination in the family, names like Iswear or Trymore which by the way are typical in some Zimbabwe communities but probably of no meaning to the holders. The majority are Christian based although my research shows that the Christian thrust by most families with people living with disabilities is a cover up. They are deeply rooted in Zimbabwean traditional cultural thinking and practice. Beta, one of the traditional cultural experts I interviewed, said, “…even some of our church ministers during the day, we meet at night at the traditional healers for consultation.” He goes on to say, “Sometimes they consult about how they can motivate their congregations to stay!” Beta was trying to emphasize that, even those people who seriously follow Christian teachings, resort to their traditional understandings when confronted with cases such as those of disability. So, the names used in this research were not randomly chosen but are heavily weighted towards adding context to the findings.

I used a semi-structured one-on-one interview format where my general opening thrust was to allow my participants to relax, gain composure and focus on themselves and their circumstances. A typical opening question would be for the participant to say anything about themselves and their families and then carefully go deeper with my questioning as detailed in Appendix P. Some of the interviews were heartbreaking especially for those who had to disclose ‘deep’ secrets they had not told anybody. To
help participants go even deeper into their personal lives, I also shared my experiences where appropriate and I found it to work very well for this process. Their natural reaction was to start crying and I provided a conducive and safe environment for them to do that without missing the overall objectives of the interview.

**Data Analysis**

As advised by Dey (1993, p. 32), “The first step in qualitative analysis is to develop thorough and comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study.” I moved from general descriptions as narrated by my respondents and connected similar descriptions before classifying into themes for further analysis. Analysis of data was an important step in my research process. Cooper (1998, p. 104) explains data analysis as involving “reducing data points collected by the inquirer into a unified statement about the research problem.” Good data analysis depends on data that has been carefully collected, systematically recorded, transcribed and relevant to the project. Having gathered my materials as outline above, I set up categories for my analysis that I coded against my coding guide, tested them and revised accordingly. All the data I gathered through interviews and texts were coded according to these analytical categories. On the basis of this coding Schmidt (2004, p. 253), advises that, “case overviews can be produced; these form the basis, [in the final stage], for the selection of individual cases for in-depth single-case analyses.” The guiding principle, according to Schmidt, in this analytical strategy is the “interchange between material and theoretical prior knowledge” (p. 253). This interchange began from the time of data gathering as interplay between theoretical considerations on one hand and my experiences during field work. I was then in a position to make general statements about social life from specific human behavior that I observed. This gave me a chance to refine some of my pre-assumptions by
questioning them and altering them as needed. In view of this approach I shared with proponents of ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser and Straus, 1967, Straus and Corbin, 1990, 1994) who state that, “grounded theory assumes that the researcher’s theoretical perspective is not imposed on the researched, but allows the theory to emerge’ inductively’ through ‘interplay with data …throughout the course of a research project” (Straus & Corbin, 1994, p. 274). For such a field where little has been researched on, there was need to use grounded theory approach because the theory I have developed has its base (grounded) in specific observations of social life (Glaser & Straus 1967). Following on Neuman (1991), Bailey (1996, p. 28) informs us that, “it is only through inductive reasoning and an interpretive model that a researcher can hope to reveal the meanings, values and rules of living used by people in their daily lives.” My data analysis was thus guided by these considerations that gave me 3 broad themes; competing cultural conceptions of disability, manifestations of these conceptions through societal attitudes and disabled people’s voices beyond justifications of exclusion. These broad themes are part of my analysis chapters. The whole process was, for me, innovative because I did not have to follow the usual research rigor predetermined by research protocols the academy prefers. While the utilization of indigenous culture was my main methodological consideration, it was not the sole lens I used in this research. Some social factors observed or highlighted by some participants had nothing to do with indigenous knowledges. It was also apparent that if I am to get the full picture of factors influencing the progress, or lack of it, of people living with disabilities with their education, colonial and neocolonial factors had to be considered as well. The choice of my method allowed me that flexibility as will be evidenced in my data and analysis
chapters that follow.

Limitations of the Study

A study of this magnitude would obviously have some limitations. Besides the usual limitation of resources such as finance and time, the sensitive nature of the study in a country suffering from political uncertainty provided substantial limitations. There was a tendency of respondents being guarded because they were not sure if their contributions would put them in trouble. This was most prevalent with government officers who thought just because a small sample was selected for interviews, and because they held senior positions, they needed strong assurance of confidentiality. I had to invest in time to cultivate this mutual trust.

Another limitation was the choice disabled participants. To start with they had to be identified by their former high schools, first as having been their student in within the last 10 years and secondly what their addresses were during that time. Most students had moved from their registered addresses and locating them was not an easy task. Sometimes I had to travel long distances to locate students only to find that they had moved to unknown locations or had since died which brought discomfort for both me and the families. In addition, while I consider my sample of disabled students to be fairly representative of the disabled high school graduates, I am mindful of the fact that recruiting in the rural areas was very limited because of poor roads and non-specific addresses for the students.

These considerations of my methodology and method of research are my guiding principles to make sense of my analysis chapters that clearly show the impact of
competing and sometimes conflicting conceptions of disabilities. Three themes emerge from this study and are covered in detail in the following three chapters.
Chapter 5: Competing Cultural Conceptions of Disability

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to help in understanding the question of access to higher and further education for people living with physical disabilities in Zimbabwe after they graduate from high school. This chapter introduces the analysis of the interviews that I conducted with selected officials from the Ministries of Education who are responsible for developing or influencing educational policy; administrators of relevant disability associations who have interest in disability issues in general; some university and college administrators who are in charge of implementing education policies; some Zimbabwean cultural experts who have in depth knowledge of Zimbabwean indigenous traditional way of life and the role played by traditional healers and spirit mediums; and families who become the focus of interest for society at the introduction of a disabled child in their membership. In total, I interviewed thirty-two participants during the period June 2010 to August 2010, of which twelve were disabled high school graduates. A number of important competing cultural conceptions of disability emerged from these interviews affirming how complex the question of access to higher education for physically disabled students can be.

This chapter, therefore, examines the complexity of cultural conceptions of disability. It also reveals how traditional culture based on the indigenous Zimbabwean people’s deep rooted values and belief system impacts on disabled people and their families, as well as the complex balancing act education policy makers and implementers have to perform to give a perception of ‘normalcy’ in their decisions, and the frustrations
disability associations and disabled students are forced to experience as a result of these competing and sometimes conflicting cultural conceptions of disability.

**Impact of Culture**

In discussing the role of culture, and in the context of this indigenous culture, it is important to understand some underlining undertones of culture. In commenting on the impact or role of culture in the education of disabled people, Vivienne Viki an official of a leading disabled people’s association (Sekuru Madzore Associations)\(^{21}\) had this to say when she was referring to what they confronted with when they go into rural communities to help families with disabled children:

> Always in the beginning we face resistance so when we go out there we will be prepared to meet resistance because you know, culture always ties hands of people. Most of the people will start by saying this is my gift [disabled child] from God. I don’t want to part with my gift. So this child with disability is my gift. I want to stay with my child here. I don’t want to part with my child. You are taking my child! You know people are being cut their heads and going to South Africa. That is what you want to do with my child.

The Sekuru Madzore Association is involved in outreach programs whereby they cover most areas including rural areas, offering help to children with disabilities by giving them opportunities to attend school, but often away from home or community. As Vivienne reports the Association meets insurmountable resistance at times from the families and

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\(^{21}\) Sekuru Madzore Association was founded by a man who himself was not disabled in the last century as an philanthropic organization to support and train disadvantaged people in Zimbabwe (Then Rhodesia).
communities involved because of their traditional belief systems. The situation is exacerbated by lack of schools and service centers in most rural areas of Zimbabwe (see recommendations in Chapter 9). The fear of disabled people being killed for rituals is real, although no one can give a concrete proof. South Africa is believed to be where these rituals are finally conducted but again, there is no proof. Even Chivara Masungu, a leading cultural expert in Zimbabwe, prefaces our discussion on the education of disabled people by endorsing Vivienne’s assertion when he says:

Ok, where do we start? I think we perhaps start with the perception of the people, how they perceive it, how they see it because that would ultimately affect their attitude toward the disabled people and ultimately their behavior.

Here, Masungu wants us to discuss the issue of the education of disabled children with a full understanding that people’s attitudes, that are mostly determined by their culture, are taken into consideration first. It is only after understanding these attitudes that the role they play in the education of disabled children can be understood. My understanding of culture in this sense is restricted to all that which guides or determines the value system of a community, a tribe, a clan, a family or an individual. Generally, culture, and indigenous culture in this case, provides the radar for society to allow it to understand behaviors of its communities and individuals. It comes in different forms - song and dance, stories, teachings through proverbs and poetry, sports and arts, health systems, communal rituals such as burials, value systems, attitudes, worship and marriages. Because culture is an interactionally constructed set of values and value judgments, that determine acceptable and expected behaviors among individuals, it is dynamic and therefore evolves with time and with the introduction of other competing cultures.
Commenting on how disability, in general, based on cultural values and how culture plays in accounting for the genesis of disability, Masunga goes on to suggest that:

The problem, if we might call it that comes from the fact that disability came because, … you need to go into African thinking that nothing just happens on its own. That is African belief.

Tavuya Beta another cultural expert, who is also a member of the Zimbabwe National Traditional Association (ZINATHA), concurred with Masunga when I asked him to explain how disability issues are handled by Zimbabwean communities. He had this to say:

Firstly, I think it depends on the type of the problem you have, but in general, even the treatment depends on the type of problem. In most cases, disability I think was regarded as something that which just happens to the family and therefore the family must unite to assist the individual throughout his or her life. They must cooperate. That is generally dealing with all types of disability.

It is interesting that both experts, in a taken for granted way, see disability as a problem rooted in African belief and culture. Therefore, it is important to remember that before we delve into the intricacies of access to higher and further education for physically disabled high school graduates, we need to understand some factors that may

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22ZINATHA was founded in 1986 with the full blessing of the new independent government as a way of acknowledging and accepting the role played by traditional healers in the Zimbabwe society.
likely be ignored or marginalized when they could have profound bearings on the phenomenon in question. The two cultural experts agree that disability does not just happen but is deeply rooted in the people’s belief system. Disability is rarely seen as a positive thing universally. Fernado Fontes (2008), referring to approaches to disability in Portugal as portrayed by the 2002 state campaign where a wheel chair image is used to deter motorists from reckless driving, analyzes disability and disabled people as being construed as “firstly, the idea of disability as punishment, in this case for the irresponsibility of car drivers, .... secondly, the idea of disabled people not active (‗slower‘) and more limited in their activities; and, thirdly, the idea of disability as tragedy” (p. 86). These ideas are also found in Zimbabwe, for example, Mrs Mugodi the mother of Trymore also viewed her own disabled child as a punishment from God when she says, “I had thought God was going to punish me twice, by giving me a disabled child and give me a hard time raising him.” But on the other hand Mrs Shava, mother of Shingayi, had a different understanding about her ‘gift’ from God after an explanation from one of her church ministers. She says;

I then sought audience with our church minister who assured me that even in the bible there were people who were born disabled. His explanation was that since all children come from God, He is the one to choose who the family of such a child should be. In His view you are the only person who can look after this particular disabled.

While Fontes was referring to the Portuguese society, it is clear that the negative conceptions of disability are also in Zimbabwe. Moreover, these conceptions of disability have consequences for life chances as exemplified by what Masunga says about disabled
people as perceived by the Zimbabwe society, in that, disabled people are not complete and therefore it follows that they are not fit to hold important positions in society especially that of leadership. Disability from a Zimbabwean cultural perspective then becomes a barrier to life chances such as leadership and may include education as well since it is also viewed as punishment, as a limitation and as a tragedy just like Fontes observed. In our discussion during the interview, Masunga adds:

Who we see as not being whole as we know from African society that if you are not whole you are not the rightful heir. In the case of the late chief Kayisa Ndiweni, the rightful heir [to the chieftainship before Ndiweni] was one Nzehe but he was observed not to be full to be a whole human being [being disabled]. So that is how they passed him. He was passed over [as the rightful heir to the thrown] because of his disability.

Chieftainship in Africa is a reverenced position and being denied such a position is truly a punishment not only for the individual but also for the family of that individual. To emphasize this point Masunga goes on to say:

So, generally once you have a deformity you cannot be a king. That is the African now. Because again they will see a relationship between your deformity, you’re not being complete with the kingdom that you are leading it will not be complete. It will take on you. It will take your image. It will be a reflection of your condition. So they would pass you over. You will not become a king even if you were in terms of birth the rightful heir you would
not see a person like that being appointed as king. They will pass you over whether chief or king.

The family structure too is connected to the meaning that disability holds in Zimbabwe. A typical Zimbabwe family will include what is commonly known as ‘extended’ family constituting a close knit family whereby having a disabled child is considered as punishment to the entire family but not to the individual living with disabilities. Beta says:

There are other types [of disability] where in fact families regarded it as punishment for what they did and this individual is a punishment and they are being punished so it has got to be treated in that way.

Masunga reiterates Beta’s point when he says:

There is some causation or causality to it and usually when it comes to disability they think it is a result of some angered spirit because the belief is that spirit has power on things material and therefore it can manipulate the material world and one way that can be shown is when a child is born in that form that perhaps someone angered the spirits. So immediately people become judgmental which now is the introduction of a stigma. I think the stigma; they look at it as one forsaken by the ancestors for some crime. It could be a crime of commission or a crime of omission; you did not do certain things that you ought to have done or you did certain things that you should not have done. It is seen as some kind, as a result of, as a physical manifestation of punishment. As a result people tend to shun the child. So in terms of victimization it will operate at two levels. It will operate at the level
of the parents; it also operates at the level of the child himself. So we look at it at that and probably the more critical one is how we perceive this child.

That is why the most disturbing punishment meted at most disabled children in the past was when they were condemned to death at the time of birth. Culturally, and traditionally in Zimbabwe in the past, it was lucky if a disabled child survived to adulthood. Both Beta and Masunga allude to this. Beta talks about the predicament of the disabled child as follows:

Well, in some cases, the individual or the child was in fact killed in order to remove the problem in the family if it was regarded as that kind of punishment. In many cases it was the parents who had been punished and therefore it was treated – the process was that of trying to remedy that situation. So in this particular case, in fact, even the experts were brought in like the traditional healers of a special type and spirit mediums to diagnose. In fact, in most cases, all cases for that matter, you had to go through diagnosis by the traditional experts and they would then recommend the way forward.

I further asked Beta if the specialists would ever recommend getting rid of the child say by killing the child and he says: “Ya, I think in certain cases like the albino we referred to, there is no treatment required it was said you get rid of the child.”

Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association\textsuperscript{23} says it was not only the disabled who would face death at birth, but also those who were known to be born against

\textsuperscript{23} Chiripamusasa Association is the umbrella body for organizations of and for people with disabilities in Zimbabwe founded in 1969.
accepted tradition such as twins and children born out of an incestuous relationship also ran the same risk. He says:

We have realized, of cause, this is gradually dying, the phenomenon of having twins was viewed as myth and one of them had to go - naturally killing one of them. Today the phenomenon of disability is also considered as myth and as a curse.

Killing the disabled child was therefore seen as justifiable during those times and the question is whether this inclination is still prevalent in society but probably not implemented because of current laws against infanticide in Zimbabwe. Beta eloquently explains this when I asked him if traditional healers, or experts as he prefers to call them, still have a say in the fate of disabled children. He says:

They do, except that the law of the country also now applies to them and when it comes to killing another individual even where they thought was necessary they would not themselves recommend that treatment but of course I know that some of them would indirectly encourage the parents themselves to do it! Yes there are also specialists, traditional specialists who would then, in fact when the child is born in this way they bring in experts, traditional experts. First of all to carry out the diagnosis why did it happen then they treat or recommend the ways of dealing with this individual yes.

Not much has changed today even when there are laws against infanticide. Beta remarks:

I don’t think it has made much difference because even in the modern situation with modern experts with administrators coming to family issues people reject advice from government officials or whoever if themselves
believe that this is the way, they are convinced that this is the way we should proceed they will find some way of proceeding along those lines disregarding advice from officials. There have been some slight changes. It depends on the case before them [the parents] but it is my feeling that in most cases they will reject the advice of government officials and listen more to their own understanding of the situation and the advice they receive from traditional specialists. This is likely to be given more weight than what the nurses or doctors in the hospitals say about the situation.

For the family of the disabled child and the official position of government regulations, the birth of a disabled child brings in an insurmountable dichotomy between ‘reality’ for the family and the laws of the country. Once condemned to death directly or by implications through traditional specialists, it becomes difficult for the family to value their disabled child the way they would normally do for a non-disabled child. It becomes a competition of disability conceptions where the loser is predetermined - the child. If such a feeling is still prevalent today (my participants think it is), how would this impinge on the education of disabled children in modern Zimbabwe? Would the attitude of society be better or worse when it comes to accessing higher or further education for physically disabled high school graduates? Do we have disabled children who are left to die ‘naturally’ because of these competing conceptions of disability? Mrs Mugodi, and Mrs Shava both mothers of disabled children, allude to Beta’s assertion that even with the current laws against infanticide in Zimbabwe, the tendency for families confronted with the birth of a disabled child to tend to traditional healers for advice is still prevalent. As Mrs Mugodi says:
Then relatives started suggesting that the child should be taken to traditional healers for special attention. That is when it dawned on me that the child was really not worth to be called a child. I wished he had died and took days to agree to breastfeed him hoping he would just die naturally.

What does that tell us about the future of children under such conceptions of disability? Mrs Shava recalls her first reaction to the birth of her disabled child, “It was painful to look at her and I went through much soul searching.” This speaks volumes of what would have happened if the laws of the country were not in place.

There are also other cultural factors that may also affect the disabled child. One of them is that the child may be subjected to exclusion or stigmatization. Masungu observes that:

Human beings are by nature gregarious, they form social groups. I think the one problem that the child would face is exclusion. The other children may be afraid or it brings fear or sometimes it is what we say *ukuyenyanya*, in Sindebele, *kusema* in Shona (nauseating). You see you have that but all of them are leading to exclusion. So you need this sense of belonging, socialization involves not just one person but in a group that socializes you. You must belong to a group that would inculcate certain values, values that society wishes to preserve, values that will determine the functioning of relations between individuals, between groups, between communities. So this person becomes excluded. This is why you find perhaps at practical level a lot of people would not bring these children to the public. They are hidden. They
hide these disabled children. Even now it is happening. If you were to check in townships you will find a lot of hidden children.

Here Masunga is trying to emphasize the importance of socialization for a child especially when they are young. In the past, disabled children who survived at birth, were not denied this socialization process. But, because of prevailing conflicting attitudes regarding disabilities among indigenous communities in Zimbabwe, some parents deny their disabled children this culturally important process of socialization by hiding them away from the socializing environment.

Dzokai Maramba, an administrator at an institution catering for both disabled and non-disabled students at technical level also views indigenous culture or precisely cultural beliefs and values playing a leading role in how parents relate to, or value their disabled children. She observes that in a family where a child has disabilities, that child will be the last to have his or her fees paid, if at all they get paid. Some parents believe that disabled children are a responsibility of government and that institutions such as hers should be responsible for the welfare of the disabled children. Referring to some of her experiences she says:

We have parents who come here and, you know, just today I had one parent, I don’t take it lightly because this place is not a dumping place where you say I am bringing my daughter because I can no longer manage. I can’t stay with her. I have problems she says, so it will be better if she stays here where there are others with disability. But no, that is not what we are here for. We are not just a place where people with disabilities come. Culturally we are still
affected by that stigmatization even within families. And not only that, I also had interviews with some parents when a student asks me to do it because the student cannot convince the parent that it is important that he or she gets training materials. And then the student tells you that the father can afford or even the mother can afford ‘but anywhere I know they don’t care because I am disabled’. The student would go no to say ‘Yes because I know I heard them say so. None of them wants to own me and they accuse each other that this disability is because of so and so’s family and the other one says the same’. As a result, most of the time I am counseling the students.

Stigmatization is sometimes caused through overt differences observed between disabled people and the majority of the community that creates fear regarding why one person should be born or acquire such a remarkably different disposition from the rest of the community. Longmore, as cited in Barnes and Mercer (2003, p. 93) asserts that, “What we fear, we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy. Popular entertainments depicting disabled characters allude to these fears and prejudices or address them obliquely or fragmentarily, seeking to reassure us about ourselves.” It is therefore mystification of disability and the fear that one day one might meet similar ‘misfortunes’ that people tend to stigmatize disabled people. Barnes and Mercer (2003, p. 93) inform us that:

In one of the most cited collections, *Images of the Disabled, Disabling Images* (Gartner and Joe 1978), Laurence Krieger concludes, after reviewing sources as diverse as Lady Chatterley’s Lover and Moby Dick, that, ‘The
world of the crippled and disabled is strange and dark, and it is held up to
judgment by those who live in fear of it’.

While this notion of fear and stigmatization can probably be generalized across cultures
Masunga thinks, based on what he calls orature, that once a disabled child has been
interpreted as life worth living by his/her family or local community stigmatization and
fear are greatly reduced. He says

I think sometimes it is important to turn to orature to get some inclination as
to how people’s attitudes operated. In Ndebele there is an expression which
says *akusilima sindlebende kwabo* loosely translate to (one is not seen as a
disabled person among his own people)….in other words someone with long
ears is somebody who is despised, somebody who is [stigmatized generally]
but what that proverb is saying is that among the relatives, those people who
are close to him/her accept the person.

The closeness to the disabled child, in such a case is caused by the feeling of oneness as a
family. Once accepted, especially if this closeness is after advice from traditional
specialist, is likely to last. Not all disabled children are construed as a family burden or
punishment, some are born in a family as a special gift for the role they are predicted to
play in their adulthood that may bring fame and pride to the family. This is why it
becomes important to realize the inherent power of the indigenous knowledge framework
in such discussions. This discursive framework makes it easier to understand and
appreciate the seemingly contradicting scenarios in disabilities issues involving
indigenous cultures.
In addition, Masunga asks us to pay particular attention to the language used even among family members or relatives. The language used will determine the level of acceptance of the disabled person in the community. He goes on to explain further that:

At the same time you will listen to the term *isilima* itself (*chirema* in Shona) when it is being used -- again language is very important. Language some people underestimate the importance of language. Language contains a lot of things, our values, and our attitudes. If we care to listen to language it will tell us a lot of things just like the example of a proverb I have mentioned. So through that orature we are learning something about their attitude towards these disabled people’ their acceptance or their tolerance. Then when they say *eh wena uhisilima*,[not necessarily directed to a disabled person] now *isilima* when they say it (that way) it is an insult now. It means you are not whole.

That one I think it emphasizes the point that this person is not whole. *Isilima* almost like *ilema* (fool). You will see that relationship.

Language in this case is used to depict inability as disability. Thus, a disabled person’s being is used as a way of insulting or conveying a message of failure and hopelessness to another person who is not disabled. Anybody who fails to measure to expectations is therefore compared to a disabled person. Masunga explains this quite clearly when he says:

It has to do with certain expectations of how a normal person behaves, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, but when we see you failing to meet certain parameters like this person is (*isilima*) failing to meet certain parameters, they could be mental,
could be physical. Now when a person that we expected to be normal, whole, also fails, it is like this one who is failing, it is the failure of meeting certain criteria. You have certain criteria just like physical, we know your arm should be this long or, in relation to the leg, it should be this. There are certain proportions which ‘normal’ people expect.

The question of using language to convey messages is further corroborated by Vivienne who sees this manifesting in the naming of children who are disabled. She says:

Even if you look at the names given to those children, for example *Chisorochengwe* [Leopard’s head] you begin to wonder. The child has got a mother and a father but they decide to call the child *Chisorochengwe*, or *Maideyi* [is this want you wanted to happen?], you can actually see that they associate disability with witchcraft. [The parent would say].... *something happened that caused my child to be like this. I want to expose this witchcraft to people by giving that name.*

Names in Zimbabwean culture are not just randomly chosen, even if they turn out to be English or other language, other than the family’s home language. One does not need further explanation as to the underlying meaning of the name in question as I explained with my choice of pseudonyms referred to in Chapter 4. In most cases, for many families with disabled people in Zimbabwe, the source of disability is either from the angered spirits or from witchcraft. It is rarely considered a natural condition. Naming, therefore, becomes a way of acknowledging the existence of a problem or its source.
Masunga the cultural expert also thinks that there are other reasons why historically the people of Zimbabwe, especially among the Ndebele who were constantly at war among themselves or with external enemies, negative attitudes towards people living with disabilities have flourished. During the time of war, a disabled child was seen as a burden and a liability and hence not worth living. He/she was put to death and no feelings of guilt were not expressed. Masunga goes on to elaborate that:

*Isilima* was just seen as a kind of hindrance – for migrating people that the Ndebele were running away from one of their own such as Tshaka initially and they are running away from the Boers. *Isilima* becomes an encumbrance and therefore you find out that some of these (disabled) were put to death by their own people.

This was culturally acceptable but besides war situations, Masunga says there were also other reasons why the disabled child would be killed by his/her own people.

Sometimes at a very tender age when they realize [that the child was not ‘normal’] they put it to death. So there was that killing. There were probably three reasons for killing disabled children, to avoid that stigma that we have been talking about, to avoid continued suffering of the child, and also, to try to stop the genetic continuation. I am not sure if that is the correct term. Because once you have a certain gene and you allow it to thrive, chances are that it will recur. But if you eliminate the gene by killing the person you are reducing the recurrence of that genetic abnormality in future. So you are
tempering with it at the genetic level. I don’t know whether I make myself clear?

Culturally, traditional specialists and spirit mediums have a big role to play with disability issues. While it was their expected and accepted role to determine the fate of disabled children in the past, prevailing legislations in Zimbabwe pose serious constraints in terms of how far they can exercise this role. One may ask, how does this aspect of indigenous culture impact on the disabled people’s education?

Views of government officials on the role or impact of indigenous culture on the education of disabled people are very interesting and informative. Given that these are the very people who influence education policy, their understanding and take on this issue becomes not only pertinent but crucial as well. Dzikamai Dzikiti of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, which is the ministry responsible for grading high school students for further, education had this to say:

Yes, we still have cultural practices that do not allow, that do not accept disability. So they tend to hide these children from the public and they do not want them to go to school and so on because they think there is stigma in disability. That is the problem. Although nowadays some parents are more enlightened and they educate their disabled children and they are not shy for the other people to know that they have a disabled child. But you find that most parents don’t like disabled children. They hide them.
Hiding away disabled children is not unique to Zimbabwe or even Africa for that matter, it is universal. Linton (1998, p. 44) cites a New York Times article by N. D. Kristof (1996) where Osamu Takahashi, then forty-nine and the director of a center for disabled people in Japan, told the reporter that:

[He] never went to any school and was hidden in the house from birth until the age of 26. While the rest of his family are together, he was served meals alone in his room. His family allowed him out of the house only about once a year, and then mostly at night so the neighbors would not see ... [and] that view still survives in some households.

Dzikamai’s assertion that parents hide their children that reduces or even eliminates their chances of getting any form of formal education or socialization is also supported by Masunga who refers to human beings as being socially gregarious and needing to belong to a social grouping. Thus, it disadvantages disabled children when they are hidden away from society since the hidden child has no chance of developing social bonding with other children and, as a result, remains stigmatized for life. Exclusion enhances the stigmatization process and this in turn impedes the development of the value system in the child substantially.

Gakava Gava also of the same Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture says that as a Ministry they liaise with traditional people in a bid to demystify disability in the classroom. The question of hiding away children with disabilities came as a big surprise to me but officials in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture seem to agree that people living with disabilities suffer further when society hides them away from the public. Nyaradzo Zhou from one of the departments of this ministry agrees that
indigenous culture has a role to play in the education of disabled people but thinks that sometimes we do not understand the seemingly ‘cruel’ handling of disability issues prevalent in society. She says:

Culture has also its part in disability issues. For example we still now have some children who are kept in homes. But when I was talking to communities it (turns out to be) more for the love of the child that (some parents do what they do). This parent was saying when I am tying my child to a tree and I don’t send that child to school because it is a long way, a long journey or I don’t even know where the schools are, I am not being cruel to the child. That was in Mudzi, back of beyond. Then the parent is saying I want to fetch some water and firewood so that I cook and this child eats. The child is disabled. I can’t carry the child on my back anymore. The child has to eat including other children. It’s not that I don’t like my child. When you see me tying my child (to a tree) is not that I don’t like the child. I cannot carry the child when I want to do something. I want to work in the garden and I am afraid if I leave him he will move around and crawl around and get hurt. As you have rightfully said the definition, the redefining, even this attitude where we usually say negative attitude it’s more of ignorance.

Nyaradzo however, believes that some cultural beliefs still affect the wellbeing of disabled people as she continues to say:

But it is the attitudes of maybe other people who look at a person with disability then they start to talk. To say stories especially these days with
tokolotschies (goblins). And if you are a little bit rich they would say it is because that (disabled) child is used as a money making something.

Joseph Mukamuri of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, strongly believes that the indigenous culture of the Zimbabwean people has a negative impact on the educational advancement of disabled people. Being a person able to influence policy, one cannot help paying attention to what he says carefully. He is quite philosophical about the whole question of education of disabled people as it is influenced by indigenous Zimbabwean culture when he says:

Our culture is not positive on the education of the disabled. In fact, from the minute a child is born and is an albino or is a spina-bifida or somebody who is (disabled), our society is very negative. Just upkeep before we have talked about education our society is not positive. They take the disabled to be a curse and as such do not invest in the disabled. [The disabled child] is actually the first according to me [to be disadvantaged by society] and the second being a girl child. They would rather not send a disabled child to school because they don’t see much investment in that. Because I think it’s more to do with our philosophy, how we value humanity. How do we look at people? Do you look at people as a soul or as a body? We don’t value that. To me every person is equal to any other because there is no disabled soul. Every person has got a human spirit, but people look at the physical. They would say what can he do? He cannot herd cattle; he cannot weed the crops so he is not adding value. Even if he goes to school what is he going to do for us? So
it’s a question of mentality but if people want to look at it positively and develop the little that is in that person the person can excel.

Here, Joseph Mukamuri introduces another conception of disability. He is going deep into the spiritual world where he imagines there is no disabled soul. That angle of thinking makes us want to think deeper on the phenomenon of disability. If we construe humans as representations of souls that according to Joseph are not disabled, where do we go from there as academician? This is one of the reasons why I propose a new lens of looking at disability issues using indigenous knowledges in Chapter 8. The question of human flesh versus the spirit becomes too philosophical and is beyond the scope of this research.

The Impact of Family

Family is perceived and understood at different levels depending on the society and culture of the people involved. Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare (1999, p. 97) describe family life as “a central institution in the lives of most people.” Without running the risk of generalizing or over simplifying how family is perceived in most African cultures, my experience is that the Zimbabwean family is defined by all possible relationships an individual has or can have to family, friends, or neighbors. Cousins and nieces are treated as brothers and sisters, stepbrothers and stepsisters are ‘free from step!’ but just brothers and sisters, uncles (your father’s brothers) are treated as fathers and your mother’s sisters, regardless of their age relative, to you they are regarded as your ‘mother’. In other words, what we understand as ‘extended’ family in Western cultures does not widely exist in African cultures especially with the same distant connotations such as half brother or half sister or a cousin. Family in most of these African cultures,
and specifically in Zimbabwe, can be a large collection of individuals who are interconnected through birth, marriage and at times even sharing a common totem.

My intention is not to minimize the impact of a nuclear family when it comes to questions of disability but to show how the bigger picture of the family has profound bearing on the functioning, attitudes and performance of the nuclear family. It is no doubt that in these family settings, the role of the mother becomes paramount. She is the one who can justifiably protect, or help destroy her disabled child. This concern and care was displayed by Mrs Chatikobo who realized that her son was not developing the way most children develop but found ways of accepting it. Mrs Chatikobo recalls that:

It was only after a year when I noticed that he was not developing normally like other children. Then when he was 2 years old I and my husband accepted the situation and realized that this was the condition he will live with. We realized that it was not just the drooling [which we had already noticed] but he was not developing well physically.

While the father agreed to accept the condition of the child, the ‘burden’ of care was left for the mother from that time to this day.

Yes, for up to six years I was caring him on my back. He could not do anything else and I never imagined he could even go to school. He could not even hold a pencil. I used to prepare him for learning to write by taking care of his drooling. My aim was to see if his brains were all right.
Even as a mother, Mrs Chatikobo doubted her own child’s ability to do anything intellectually challenging. Then one wonders what an ‘outsider’ will think of such a child. But Mrs Chatikobo played down the influence of the bigger family and she evasively defended her mother-in-law when I asked her what her in-laws’ understanding of the condition of the child was. She says with a shaky hesitant voice:

Ah not much. Even my mother-in-law accepted the situation as it was but attributed the problem to the caesarean operation procedure that something could have gone wrong. She has never said bad words to me concerning the child’s condition.

This clearly shows that she was expecting negative attitudes from her in-laws and was surprised that even the mother in-law accepted the child’s condition but still apportioned the blame to the way the child was born. In a typical Zimbabwean setup, an elderly woman should have monitored the arrival of the child to avoid ‘alien’ ways of delivery. While the mother-in-law was not blaming Mrs Chatikobo directly, she still holds her responsible and accountable for not following the traditional ways of bearing children especially where it involves the first child. Mrs Chatikobo’s family were the ones responsible for this chore but it seems she did not get the message from her mother in-law, hence the hesitation.

Not all mothers I interviewed had the same inclinations towards the conditions of their disabled children. Mrs Shava, who also had a caesarean baby, underwent what she called a ‘soul searching’ period. She says:

[My girl] was born by caesarean because the medical people said she was what they called a breach. I only got to know about her condition on the
second day when they showed me the child. It was painful to look at her and I went through a lot of soul searching.

It took her some time to accept what she witnessed but the larger family could not take it. They persuaded the parents to seek traditional consultation where ‘proper decisions’ and counseling would be done. In this case, the parents’ acquired Christian values had to take precedence and naturally this ushered in a rift in the ‘extended’ family. She says:

From this point I fully accepted it. My parents did come to visit us but my in-laws did not come. Both our parents had decided that we consult traditional healers but my husband being a devoted Christian, refused. He could not imagine how bad spirits could have access to a child in her mother’s womb. Witch doctors can only kill but all this was the work of God. This decision did not go down well with our parents. Then I and my husband decided that we should accept and love our child as she was.

The decision that the parents made destroyed the support system that is usually given by the larger ‘extended’ family. They had to face all the difficulties of raising the child alone.

While Mrs. Chatikobo and Mrs. Shava had some support from their spouses, it was not true for Mrs. Kumalo, the mother of Iswear who herself is also disabled. Talking of her child’s birth she says:

My first child was ok at birth even the younger one but their condition changed with time. When I fell pregnant for the third time, even before the
child was born, my husband started questioning why I was giving birth to such children. He emphasized that in their family such children are never born and then asked me to explain what was going on. But I insisted that I could not do away with my children and then I moved to Harare\textsuperscript{24} [from Mutare] during the war [of liberation] before Iswear was born. We were then allocated these stands when I was pregnant with Iswear. I did not want to give birth in town so I went back to my rural home in Churumanzu where the other child the girl was born. I came back after the child was born to stay here. But my husband could not take it anymore when my third child, Iswear, turned out to be disabled as well. He then left me alone with all the children.

The husband insisted that in his family lineage no such mutated gene exists therefore the problem was with Mrs Kumalo, his wife. Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association further authenticates this type of thinking by citing his experiences with some families with disabled children where the husband would say:

\textit{Kwangu hakubudzvakadzidzivo. Chii chawandiitirai ichi} (In my clan we do not have such things. What is this you have done to me?). And in most cases the divorce means go with your children including the able bodied ones. This is what we are seeing. A lot of families we are seeing children with cerebral parleys and it’s a serious challenge.

\footnote{24 Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe. Like most capital cities the cost of living is very high and life for a single mother with 2 disabled children may not be attainable.}
The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that Mrs. Kumalo was herself also disabled in a similar manner although not as ‘profound’ as the children were. Mufaro cites the existence of an organization whose members’ constituency confirms what Mrs Kumalo experienced when her husband deserted her and left her alone with all three disabled children. He says:

We have an organization called the Zimbabwe Parents of the handicapped children Association. It has branches throughout the country. The majority of the parents of handicapped children there are single mothers. The reason is, men, after having – even having 4 other able bodied children, and the 5th is disabled there will be divorce.

The mother is therefore left with the burden of care and in most cases other members of the family withdraw their support as well. Vivienne supports this and says:

Yes, yes, mostly children with disabilities, most of them have got single parents. And if you want to find out why they have single parents, parents separated at the birth of this child. If not at the birth, then by the time the child is diagnosed as a disabled. That’s when they separated. Unoroya iweiwe ndosaka nhasi mwana wako ava chirema kudai (You are a witch that is why your child is disabled). And the society [even members of the family] starts to say yes this is a curse from God.

Nyaradzo Zhou of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture also sees the mother as a victim of cultural beliefs when it comes to disabled children. She says:
Everything bad is attributed to the mother even for children with disabilities. Those are cultural issues that are going on and we still have many of our children who are brought up by mothers. Some marriages are broken because of that. You know our attitudes towards that, we sometimes make the parent hate the child for example, one woman says to me “You know we don’t live comfortably with the husband because of this child, is there a place I can place this child?” She actually said it. And some bring their children’s clothes and when I say no you take the child back with you they almost look at me in shock and start crying. They want a place to dump the child and forget about the child. And we have had instances like that especially with schools with residential facilities where parents don’t collect the child during holidays but this child is left roaming and the Head of the school is forced to look after the child for some time until we locate the parent then they leave. Not because they are not able to look after the child but just because they want the child out of their environment as a way of dumping the child. So we still have that.

Nyaradzo brings in a different conception of disability whereby killing the child is no more an available option for the parents but ‘dumping’ the child seems a good alternative for them. This adds on to the complexity of these conceptions of disability. Policy makers and implementers have to understand all these intricacies to make meaningful interventions regarding the education of disabled children.

Masunga, a cultural expert, seems to have some justification why mothers are blamed for the birth of a disabled child in a family and gives persuasive reasons why
when it comes to the stigma attached to disability, it is the mother who shoulders more of the burden when he says:

Rightly so, oh no probably not rightly so, in terms of birth and upbringing, I am trying to avoid a long talk here; Africans acknowledge that the person who does the bigger part of not upbringing but conception itself and the early stages of upbringing is the woman.

It is probably because of this conception, that women undertake, that society tends to justify its apportioning of blame for any ‘mishaps’ that may occur during this process to the mother. While I do not share this belief entirely, I am persuaded to agree with Masunga. In most cases even career women are forced to abandon their careers to look after their disabled children with no income. This understanding resonates with Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare’s (1999) observations when they refer to the family as “a place where a great deal of (unpaid) work is performed – largely by the female members (p. 98). Mufaro supports this when he observes that:

In some instances working women are being pulled out of employment to cater for their disabled children. I saw so many who have children with autism, who have children with muscular dystrophy, who have children with down syndrome, who have pulled out of employment to cater for the children. And while they are out of employment they may find the husband gone as well. This is how divorce is so common among families with disabled children and that affects the children greatly. It means they won’t go to school.
In some cases even the non-disabled children may also suffer. Mufaro’s observation is supported by Vivienne Viki of Sekuru Madzore Association who attributes this type of family behavior to be a major source of poverty in families with disabled members particularly in Zimbabwe. Beside the single parent not working, the disabled child also does not go to school and as a result will be unemployable as an adult and the cycle goes on. She says:

Yes. Right, the same applies to what I was saying just explaining that as soon as the mother gives birth to that disabled child there is divorce. Now when they divorce you find that maybe the mother is going to be married to another man who doesn’t care about this child. The child is denied education.

Education is the single most important avenue to wealth generation for most people in Zimbabwe. Education for this child may get compromised through poor family relationships and the poverty cycle continues for the disabled child into adulthood.

Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture officials have a different take on the seemingly less opportunities for physically disabled high school graduates accessing higher and further education. Besides what Masunga, the cultural expert, said about how parents ‘hide’ their disabled children from the public and thus limiting them to access education, Kokerai Ngoda of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture thinks that the seemingly poor statistics of disabled students for higher education may not be because disabled children are hidden away, but because they are construed as valueless. He says:
I don’t know perhaps, I am just speculating here, they may just think [the parents] that it is not worth investing in a disabled child. I think that may be one of the sources of that problem.

Kokerai is implying that because some disabled children are never sent to school by their parents in the first place, numbers of those who are in the education system tend to ‘shrink’ as they progress educationally, that may lead to poor statistics for higher education. Nyaradzo Zhou of the same Ministry agrees with Kokerai and even gives a detailed explanation that also implicated her own belief that disabled children are of no material benefit to the family. She says:

When resources are limited those who are of benefit [to the family] are the ones who get educated. *It is common sense*. Because they say if we send this one to school, the one without disability, they will also help the one with a disability. I think it’s more of ignorance and limitation of resources where you have to prioritize and because of the disability they say let’s prioritize those who are able bodied so that they can help the disabled. But it does not mean they don’t like the child. That’s one thing I noticed although some do not like them for sure, we have pockets of people who don’t like their children because they have a disability.

‘*It is common sense*’ she says, obviously implicating herself in this belief. Most families in Zimbabwe with disabled children still seem to have problems of educating their children. According to Beta, one of the cultural experts as well as an advocate of traditional interventions, the arrival of a disabled child in a family that construes the child
as punishment from the powers above, it is unlikely that the child will be regarded as benefiting from education. He asserts that the environment the child grows up in, the unwanted feeling and sometimes covert or even at times overt gestures of the parents’ frustration of bringing up a disabled child, affects education possibilities in a profound way. He says:

I think it would affect them [the disabled children] where it was felt that this child was punishment for what we did as parents or as community. Yes it would affect the education of that individual throughout their life – the feeling that I am not wanted.

Given the current government regulations against such practices, I asked Beta if many families still believe in traditional healers’ advices. He says, “The majority [of the families] still do, even those who go to church do, although they won’t admit it!”

Tatenda Besa, a senior administrator at Freedom University, also attributes the lack of motivation for disabled students to the way some parents treat their children. He notes that some parents exaggerate the way they relate to their disabled children in as far as they treat them as little children even when they are adults. He finds this to be prevalent especially with prominent figures who pamper their children to the extent that the children get spoiled. Besa recalls a case where one of his disabled students from a well-to-do family was not meeting the expected requirement for his courses despite having had more than necessary support from his parents. Besa sees in this case, parents being the source of the child’s problem who even bought him 3 or 4 cell phones just to please the child. He recalls saying to one of the parents:
Why are you giving him a false sense of security when I want him to be independent? Do you want him to be a perpetual child? I asked the mother if she still uses dippers on him every day (to show that he is still a baby). Why not tell him you are grown up, you should be independent, and all we have to do is make sure that we pave the way for you to achieve what you want.

Besa puts the onus on the parents to take responsibility of the behavior and performance of their children. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through oral teachings and demonstrated behaviors and practices by the elderly for the younger generations to learn. In this process parents play a crucial role for their children.

Given the accounts from these traditional experts, the bureaucrats, parents and well wishers I turned to my disabled participants to give them a voice in what affects them directly. This way, the competing conceptions of disability can be better analyzed.

**Disabled People and Disabling Attitudes.**

As emphasized earlier, one of the main objectives of this research is to give voice to the usually voiceless, those very people who are disabled and are marginalized in decision making, even decisions that have a bearing on their lives. Writing on disabilities in Tanzania, Joseph Kisanji informs us of the importance of giving a voice to disabled people when he draws our attention to a Kiswahili proverb that states:

*Mzee (mgonjwa au mlemavu) anajifahamu mwenyewe or Aliye dhaifu yapasa ajifahamu mwenyewe* [which means], an elderly, sick or disabled person is the best judge of his/her needs and difficulties; s/he should make these known
to those near him/her otherwise it will be difficult for them to offer appropriate help when it is most needed.

(www.aifo.it/english/resources/online/books/cbr/innovations/5kisanji.pdf)

I turned to my disabled participants for their input into how family and society’s differing conceptions of disability affects them especially their progression to higher and further education. One of the main points they made about their families members is their lack of appreciation of what they are capable of achieving. Interviewees expressed the sense that parents and other family members doubted their potential. Even some of their mothers who looked after them during hard times, represented this doubt as well. It can be conjectured that because they had no confidence in what will become of their disabled children, families resorted to traditional experts’ advice hoping that they would be relieved of such a burden.

Lovemore Dube, a recent high school graduate who is unemployed and could not continue with education, suspects that his parents consulted traditional healers for a decision on his disability. He did not feel valued probably because of the advice they got about him. Gladys Patsika, a disabled girl who is working at her former high school when asked if the parents ever consulted traditional healers or spirit mediums says, “Yes there was [consultation]. They did go to every traditional healer [possible] and even the churches but nothing materialized.” But Gift Mbambo also a disabled high school graduate, was even more emphatic about the whole question of parents or other relatives wanting to consult more about what caused his disability and why it was him. He says:

Yeah the situation of trying to find out what happened, what’s wrong with this child, this I was told not that I know it myself. Even if they did not tell
me I was going to suspect that they once did that. Ya because of the problems, because I am told they even went to vanaMadzibaba (Apostolic church spiritual healers). They would like pray for me trying to make me stand up. The problem that I had with my father’s side is that they did not believe that it is called disability. They did not. In addition, I have heard all sorts of stories. They would tie bones all over me, pray, I don’t know what else. I heard of many stories of what they did. My family actually did consult traditional healers but my mother was against it.

Ntombana Zhangazha who did not proceed for further education because the family would not let her do the courses she wanted to do as a nurse believes that whatever happened to her is the work of God. Besides being a member of a Christian family, Ntombana still suspects that her parents must have consulted traditional healers extensively when she says:

I would not know what the parents would be doing behind closed doors. But to the best of my knowledge, I started walking when I was at primary school. It was a miracle from God that I changed from crawling to walking.

Njabulo Ndubiwa, who works as a technician at a local institution after failing to get access to higher education, believes that his parents must have consulted heavily to find out what the ‘problem’ was with him. He says:

I am pretty sure they did but they never told me about it but because it is something bound to happen to any family especially when they are not aware of people with disabilities. I think they somehow did all the rituals. I
remember one time I was taken to church they prayed for me, they tried to make me walk but I couldn’t walk.

Thandiwe Velapi, an administrative clerk also living with disabilities, believes and understands that her parents consulted extensively.

[I think so], especially when I was young and not knowing what was going on. I am told they did the best they could. They could not accept that I am disabled. They thought one day a miracle would happen and I would just walk. They went to all places of which I think if they had money to go overseas [for that help], they would.

Mandla Gumede blamed both the community and his parents for not acknowledging his abilities when he says:

The only problem, if it was a problem was that the community could not believe that I can actually go to school. I started grade one when I was 8 years old because they [the parents] were still arguing if I could do it. Even my mum couldn’t believe that I can go to school and make it. But when my grandfather managed to convince my mother that I had the potential of doing well at school, that is when my mother allowed me to go to school for grade 1 and to her surprise --- guess what? I was passing! And actually when I was in grade 3 I was proposed to jump another grade because I was actually ahead of all the other students but I just said let me continue like that. Then some members of the extended family, thought we were just being taught easy stuff because we were disabled. So they would just say they learn easy stuff and never believed in my capabilities.
Mandla reported further that his sister who was born ‘normal’ never had these obstacles. She started school at the right age and continued to high school without a hitch and stopped proceeding further than high school by choice. She is now working in a government department. Gift Mbambo, believes that his parents were not ready for him. He witnessed major misunderstandings between his parents as a result of his disability.

When asked to describe his upbringing and the role played by his family Gift says:

I am turning 26. I come from a family of four, three girls and I being the only boy and the only child who is also disabled. I am also the third born. The life story of mine has lots of ups and downs but it’s a story of success at the end of the day. Like, I did not just grow up in a very friendly environment, no. It was sort of what I would call full of misunderstandings because when a disabled child is born in a family, the parents might not know what they will get so they will be surprised or shocked [to get a disabled child] and they behave awkwardly. Sometimes they may also try to say no this is not the thing that we are expecting. But through education and through being educated also by other people who have been in similar situations they got the knowledge. So I grew up in such an environment whereby the father would not accept me there and then but later on did. So we had lots of fights, lots of misunderstandings insults and shouting in the home. We also had lots of movements. Like, we would move out of the house, me and my mother that is, because of some situations or some misunderstandings.
Gift feels pity for his mother for the hardships she went through just for having him as a child despite the fact that his three sisters are not disabled. He, however, blames the influence of the ‘extended’ family for the actions taken by his father when he says:

But I really felt pity for my mum because she put a lot into my growing up and my upkeep. My father was a man who was very good to me but he was a bit confused. I think it was influence from other relatives, [his] sisters and his parents. It was just a matter of misunderstanding. They were influencing him giving him different stories about disability.

As Gift grew up and continued to witness the rift between his parents and especially the attitude his father and other relatives continued to portray, he decided to write a letter to his father. The letter is touching and moving. He narrates the contents of the letter:

So what I did I remember one time I actually wrote a letter to my dad when there were fights at home. In my letter it says: *I think I am now a grown up man and I think it’s time I tell you something that I have been wanting to tell you all along. You should stop fighting with my mum because it does not encourage me in any way. It actually discourages me. I think you have a gift in the house which is me. Maybe you did not realize but you will soon see how special I am. And if you continue fighting, it means you see me maybe no more.*

Gift says this was a turning point in the family’s relationships but it came too late for him to benefit from proceeding to higher education. Although the education system was supportive in his case, the home environment was just not conducive enough to sustain
more years for further education after high school. Besides problems at home, Gift suffered rejection by most members of his father’s family including his grandmother, something that is not usual for grandmothers in the Zimbabwean culture. He recalls how his rural grandmother complained about his use of a wheelchair when he was with her during school holidays.

You know as a child you really need to go on holidays and so there is one story which I am not usually open to talk about but which I can tell you. When I was with my grandmother during the holidays, she used to complain that my wheelchair was busy disturbing her maize crop and so forth, and so forth, as I wheeled my wheelchair to the toilet through a very narrow path. She would never come to me directly but would express her feelings on my mum. So my mum, I think she is that kind of person who wanted me to grow up knowing what was happening to me, so she would tell me. So I would know. She was explaining it in a nice way but my grandmother was never nice to me.

Gift’s grandmother was not the only one who could not stand his disability. His father’s sister who was reported to be quite wealthy did not want him to come into her house. While his other siblings had more than one chance of visiting their aunt, Gift was never afforded that chance because of how his aunt related to his physical condition. He reports that:

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25 A grandmother in Zimbabwe is expected to love her grandchildren unconditionally. Grandchildren go to her for protection even against their own parents. It is a role a grandmother normally proudly undertakes and communities respect that.
Yes, so I also felt separated and I was saying what is going on. Because I remember at one time when I was about to write my grade 7 I also called my aunt and said why is it that many people, like relatives, come to your house but you never invite me. And she was like, oh no I will invite you. I never went to her house. I understand she was very rich and everybody wanted to go there and I also wanted to go there. She died. I never went to her house to this day. It was also one of those things that happen to you when you are disabled.

Thus, the misunderstandings between members of the family had a great impact for the education of these disabled students. But even in families where there were no obvious misunderstandings, poverty and anxieties took over.

Iswear lived with his mother and his siblings who were also disabled and not working. Although he was the youngest in the family, the responsibility of bringing food on the table was bestowed on him. He is the only one who has graduated from high school level but could not continue because he had to look after the family that had been abandoned by the father. So, in this case progression to higher education was curtailed by poverty in the family. Iswear is not alone in the poverty dilemma. Asked why he did not proceed to higher or further education, Lovemore Dube, who lost all his parents early in his life, simply said, “I had no money for fees.” Mandla on the other hand, reported that he was doing very well during his elementary education but due to lack of finance for secondary education, it became another big huddle and says:

Then for my Form 1 the first challenge was in terms of finances. My father could not afford and maybe he still had doubts. My relatives, with their
negative minds, continued to think that I could not make it to secondary level 
so they were not prepared to help my poor mother.

Gladys Patsika who had lost her parents when she was young tried to access higher 
education through distance education run from South Africa (Unisa) but again finance 
was a constraint. She says:

I did apply through Unisa when a certain person wanted to sponsor me but it was during those years when there was a big problem with Unisa institutes around Zimbabwe. So I never made it. Then I did Counseling only for 3 months then I quit because of financial reasons.

Surprisingly, she was being sponsored by the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (Unicef) for the Counseling course, but they dropped her after only three months of sponsorship for some frivolous reasons not clear to Gladys. So she could not continue with higher education.

Another graduate, Ntombana Zhangazha, who had lost both of her parents, reported that her problem was that of uncertainty of the future and the unstable life of living with a widowed ‘step-mother’. Describing her educational constraints she says:

I just want to draw your attention to how we are staying here. After my mother and father died we have a big problem. Example, this home is now in the courts because my step-mother is claiming that it is hers. For now everything is in the hands of the courts. We don’t know what the outcome will be like. It is another issue to add on to the family section so that you

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26 Unisa is a long distance education university based in South Africa attracting students world wide
know the family concerns. My stepmother declared before my father died at a family meeting that she had nothing to do with us [Ntombana and her biological siblings]. We even prepare our meals separately although we stay in the same house. I will not even bother asking her and she does not care either. I struggle to get money for education.

Unlike Ntombana, Njabulo Ndubiwa has all the family support he can possibly get and thinks he is also intelligent enough to have proceeded to higher education had it not been the family poverty situation. He had kind words for his family especially his mother who gave him the same treatment as any of the other children. Interestingly, Njabulo thinks that disabled children are usually treated differently. He says:

They treat me like any other normal person. I probably think maybe it was because of my mother because she – when I was young she never really treated me so differently from other people. She never made me a very, very special person because she wanted me to be just like other people. She wanted me to feel just like other people so I think that’s where it all came from. So they [sisters] treat me just like their brother.

The family was, however, expecting a miracle to happen in such a way that one day Njabulo would walk on his own without assistive devices. “I remember one time I was taken to church and they prayed for me, they tried to make me walk but I couldn’t walk” he says.
Njabulo lived happily with his parents and sisters but Thandiwe Velapi reports that living with relatives was the most difficult part of her life especially after both her parents passed away. Because there were 3 disabled children (one deceased) in the family, the mother had a hard time coping with the harsh expectations of the father and relatives who blamed her for giving birth to disabled children. Although in this case the father did not abandon the family. She says:

We are 8 in our family. Two of us are disabled, my brother who is 3rd born in the family is also disabled. All I know is that my father wanted to divorce my mother because of that but then I don’t know what took place because it never happened. As for support after my parents had passed on, it was a bit difficult especially when I finished my course and I did not have a job. I really found that it was hard for a disabled person not to be working and living with relatives.

Living with relatives was for sure troublesome for Thandiwe although culturally in Zimbabwe the children belong to the larger family and not just for the biological parents. While there is this general understanding, the story is different for a child who is disabled for various reasons including the fear of bringing the same disability in the new ‘home’ for the child. Thandiwe enjoyed the mother’s love as she grew up but lost the family support when both parents died. Higher or further education ceased to be an option for her although her disabled brother managed to proceed to higher education when the parents were still alive.

While Thandiwe was experiencing difficulties staying with relatives without a job, Magugu Mtombeni had a different problem with her relatives. After high school, Magugu
managed to get employment but still needed assistance to manage day to day routines. She turned to her relatives with the assumption that being part of the larger family, they would understand her condition. She even paid them for the services but this is how she describes her experiences with assistants who are also family members:

In terms of having an assistant who is a relative maybe let me take one situation. I once had a cousin who was in Form 1, I took her and stayed with her, helped her through education. She made it. Then after high school you know, while she was looking for a job and at the same time it was pointless for me to employ somebody when there is someone staying with me at home. But you know, when somebody wants to move on it’s not easy for them to say ‘auntie or cousin it’s time I moved on’ You try and make them happy with something maybe take them to colleges for courses things like that but you know, when somebody wants to move on they would hardly tell you that ‘I have to go’. They start having attitudes and things like that. Actually [in such cases], I think a stranger is much better because at least if we have a problem we won’t like ruin our relationship.

Disturbing moments for Magugu were the numerous occasions when relatives, who are supposed to be part of the family, made unpalatable remarks towards her disability. She clearly remembers the remark made by her aunt’s husband when they were together. She recalls:

I remember one time I was traveling from school going home with my mother then we meet this, my Aunt’s husband I had never seen before. So he looked at me almost with utter shock and remarked ‘Oh my God this is like oh I feel
talking to my mother. ‘you know I think Jesus was better than you even if they hit him on a cross. Yours is worse than that’. To this day I have not forgotten these words.

Summary

It is clear from these interview voices, given this wide range of participants that indigenous culture has profound impact on disabled people’s lives let alone their education. From the time they are born, regardless of the family cultural orientation, disabled people are subjected to all sorts of direct and indirect discriminations. Some parents wish their children had died, some traditional healers and spirit mediums advice the putting to death of these children at birth, those who survive this ordeal may also suffer stigma, making education and the access to higher education a more daunting task for people with disabilities. The foregoing accounts and testimonies clearly show the important role played by the family in both the upbringing and education of a disabled child. Cultural experts still believe that the underlining indigenous culture with its unique value system and beliefs still plays a major role in the welfare and education of people living with disabilities. It is hard for parents to readily accept this ‘gift’ as they all refer to it. But, it is more often the mothers who have to shoulder the ‘burden’ of looking after these children and in most cases as single mothers after the spouse deserts the family because of the birth of a disabled child. For the parents who overcome the initial shock of a ‘gift’ they did not expect, sometimes because of their Christian beliefs and, other scenarios such as poverty and ‘extended’ family members become a hindrance to a smooth educational progression for the disabled child. Some parents go to the other extreme of treating their disabled child as ‘special’ which slows down their independent
intellectual and social development. While it is a general belief, and widely practiced understanding, that a Zimbabwean family is more than just the biological parents and children, but includes also the extended family members, aunts and uncles, grandmas and grandpas, cousins, nephews and nieces, it seems that this understanding and practice is not extended to people living with disabilities. They continue to be marginalized and stigmatized such that their education is compromised. The colonial background, through a different belief system of Western religion such as Christianity, continue to confuse the situation. This clearly shows how society, through these differing and competing conceptions of disability, can negatively influence the possibility of access to higher and further education for people living with disabilities even after they manage to graduate at high school level. Their upbringing and the struggle they are forced to endure for their elementary and high school education, coupled with poverty in the family with little or no outside assistance, become inhibiting factors for these disabled students to want to continue beyond high school even if they graduate well at that level.

The experiences of the graduate participants, with their different family setups, show clearly that, the sometimes preferred or purported family support, derived from indigenous culture, that most Zimbabwean communities seem to enjoy, is not readily extended to people living with disabilities. The next chapter details how these competing and sometimes conflicting conceptions of disabilities manifest themselves through attitudes. Some of these attitudes are subconscious while others are deliberate according to the people’s understanding of disabilities based on their indigenous culture and knowledge.
Chapter 6: Manifestations of competing cultural conceptions through societal attitudes

In the midst of these competing and even conflicting conceptions of disabilities, people living with disabilities forge a life and a sense of ‘self’ or what is possible including life changing chances. I now turn to consider these conceptions. An analysis of competing cultural conceptions will not be complete without also analyzing how these conceptions manifest themselves in society. Given the dichotomies that exists for people with disabilities such as having escaped death at birth to be denied human rights; having been introduced to school but not afforded opportunities to accomplish what they want; born in poverty and living in perpetual poverty; the constant gaze and all the innuendos from language and actions of society; the self doubt of ‘why me?’ that sometimes haunts them; and above all the compromised government systems that view disability as a minority issue not worth of determined investment, it is interesting to know how people make sense of or work with such conceptions.

This chapter addresses responses from interviews I held with eight Ministries of Education senior officers, two well renowned cultural experts, four university and college administrators and two managers of leading associations with interest in disability issues. The leading question was: In your opinion and experience, what is the society’s attitude towards people living with disabilities? My experience during these interviews is that in the face of describing general societal attitudes towards disabilities, most of my respondents were in fact, narrating their own attitudes. This was more prevalent with
government officials who found themselves in unique positions of protecting government policy and at the same time adhere to their own indigenous belief systems. Because I was aware of the potential of such a problem, I took my time to cultivate mutual trust with my interviewees and assured them of the high confidential level of my interviews in order for them to open up. It worked. As is represented by voices in this chapter, it turns out that the competing cultural conceptions of disability in Zimbabwe manifest themselves very clearly through described and displayed attitudes by my respondents towards both disabled people and matters that affect them.

Human beings are by nature gregarious animals and cannot or should not live in isolation but be part of a society. Sociologists define society as the people who interact in such a way as to share a common culture. The cultural bond may be ethnic or racial, based on gender, or due to shared beliefs, values, and activities. The term *society* can also have a *geographic* meaning and refer to people who share a common culture in a particular location. It is society whose attitudes to disability and disabled people that has to be examined here. The interviews conducted clearly show that societal attitudes in Zimbabwe have a great bearing on people living with disabilities, especially regarding their education.

Masunga a cultural expert thinks that attitudes are formulated quite early in life. When children grow up they acquire values and beliefs provided by the environment in which they grow. These values and beliefs become part of their belief systems into adulthood and will take a conscious effort to change them. He recalls during his high school days the school authorities made it a point of accepting at least one disabled child a year to help cultivate good attitudes towards disabilities in other children. This is how
he personally reversed the bad attitudes towards disabled people he had acquired from his community during his early stages of life. He says:

So we were exposed at a very tender age, that was at the formative stage, very important in developing our attitudes or my attitude. Some of them [disabled pupils], were walking on crutches, we had one who had a hunchback. We did not have wheelchairs. There were crunches and the other one who was short with a hunchback. But because we were living with them, sharing everything with them my attitude is different. I do not even see them as cases for a sorrowful sight. No, no, no I come to see them as normal because I used to contact with them at my formative stage.

Personal attitudes are very easy to detect. Masunga’s voice tells us that even he himself thinks that disabled people are not normal people but it was his school that helped him to see them as normal. In this case ‘normal’ becomes paradoxical. On one hand, being non-disabled is considered ‘normal’ and the planners design buildings for ‘normal’ people and that sounds reasonable whereas on the other hand if we are to consider disabled people as ‘normal’, why do we then say designing buildings with ‘normal’ people in mind is not fair? Or in this context do we have anything that is not ‘normal’? From my experience, Zimbabwe culture accepts that disabled people are normal but different from the majority of the population. It is therefore the ‘difference’ that has to be addressed and not the question of normality. By emphasizing the need to be part of the lives of disabled people like what his school managed to do successfully for him, Masunga goes on to advise us again to turn to what he calls ‘orature’ because he
believes that societal attitudes are significantly influenced by orature in a very subtle and largely subconscious manner when he recalls the proverb *akusilima sindlebende kwabo* and emphasizing how living together and wanting to accommodate can change the otherwise negative attitudes in people to accept everyone as normal in their own way. He says:

Now *akusilima sindlebende kwabo* in other words, someone with long ears is somebody who is despised by other people but what that proverb is saying is that among the relatives, those people who are close to the disabled person they accept the person as he or she is [normal].

The school environment became a normal ‘home’ environment for all the students regardless of their physical configurations. Acceptable attitudes where cultivated in this way and according to Masunga, most of the students graduating from that school had no problems associating with disabled people and they see them as ‘differently’ abled. He illustrates his point quite vividly when he continues to illustrate his point by using the Ndebele proverb and says:

That school’s environment illustrates a good example of how acceptance by the people close to you as a disabled person can be achieved. Whereas others will say ah, ah, ah this long eared thing, this thing with a big eye ah, ah, ah with a hunchback, etc but no those within the community into which the disabled lives, whether it was a family into which this long eared thing was born, or the school they go to at a tender age, the immediate community don’t see them as being long eared. They accept them as they are.
One of the major contributory attributes of negative attitudes disabled people is stigmatization (Goffman, 1986). Stigma plays a big role in shaping people's attitudes towards disability generally, and people with physical disabilities in particular. Masunga does not believe that stigma pays a major role in influencing access to higher education for disabled students who have gone through high schools. He says:

Because when you have gone through primary school, I think to me it’s the removal, the early stage it’s actually the removal of the stigma. At higher level there is no more stigma because what is working now is your intellect and when you passed your ‘A’ levels surely I don’t understand why there will be few there [at higher education level] or perhaps there were few starting out I don’t know. Because there should be no stigma if, yes, if we are saying getting to Grade 1 that is where the stigma should apply at its highest, not at university or college levels.

Poor attitudes can manifest themselves not only through stigma but also in many other different ways. Failure to provide an enabling environment by government especially by not making government buildings accessible to physically disabled people is one insensitive government attitude that struck me most. In one particular case where this provision was attempted through constructing a ramp, the gradient of this ramp was so steep that even a determined wheeler would not make it to the top. Masunga goes on to show how the provision of infrastructure though not directly a result of stigma, can be heavily influenced by attitudes of society especially of those who are responsible for infrastructural planning. He continues to say:
Elevators in this building are not working now, so if universities have that structural handicapper problem then it excludes most of the physically disabled higher education aspiring students. They are being excluded not by stigma alone, yes it’s no longer the stigma but these people who are not conscious of their needs. It’s people who are not conscious. You see, when you are helped you can go up a flight of stairs but now when you are sick or physically disabled, you can’t. So people think about the normal person, that’s the problem as if we will always be normal. In our planning we need to deal with planners, those who plan buildings. They must always have other people in mind that, oh yes, people on crutches or wheelchairs need to access and it’s a right for them. But sometimes we forget them and that is an attitudinal problem not necessarily stigma. Access is denied even before they apply for higher education by these physical barriers created by people who are in the majority in society.

The division of majority/minority is what, according to Masunga, one of the most influential factors leading to the development of negative attitudes towards minority groups. Masunga expands this phenomenon further by elaborating on Zimbabwe’s attitude towards this majority/ minority divide. He observes that:

Yeah the other thing perhaps, related distantly perhaps, is this majority people being incensed with the idea of majority. You will see majority vs minority. I think it has an effect. You may start with majority tribe minority tribe; it will end up with majority normal people minority abnormal people. And generally the voice comes from the majority and disability in practical terms, in terms
of voice, you are dealing with a minority. The question then becomes, what is Zimbabwe’s attitude towards minorities? So you may find that attitude surfacing in terms of the so-called minority languages, minority political parties etc.

Masunga emphasizes that because the country’s political and social philosophies are built on this strong divide, negative attitudes are cultivated and nurtured at national level to look down upon minority groups and the disabled people are not spared the ‘rod’. Most people think because they are in the majority, they have a right and an obligation to make decisions for themselves and for the minority groups as well. Because they are a majority they develop a certain attitude towards a minority and can decide whether they can get access to higher education or not. Masunga strongly feels people should be aware of this divide and be careful of how they make decisions for others as he says:

Yes, because they think majority, they have a certain attitude towards a minority. It is as if those minorities are abnormal because the normal are in the majority. But why differentiate from the majority? So bayi zilima (they are disabled). These minority groups hizilima (are disabled in whatever sense, they are different from the majority). It is the same kind of thinking. Is the same with that pregnant woman, if the majority of our people were pregnant a pregnant woman would not be referred to as isilima, chirema, but because they are in the minority, society labels them disabled. No, so that is the aspect that perhaps you need to bring in that this idea of majority versus minority, that normal is majority, abnormal is minority [is what is influencing
attitudinal decisions even at higher education institutions of learning]. In this case you are dealing with the minority which is abnormality.

One good example of the majority/minority decision making process at national level in Zimbabwe is the Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project that was planned to bailout Bulawayo and Matabeleland’s water woes as early as 1912, a full century ago, that has not materialized to this day. Manyimo (2005, p. 64) informs us that:

As early as 1912, seven years shy of a century today, [2005], the idea of the Matabeleland water problems had been identified. The Zambezi river water project is therefore not a new concept ushered in at the advent of independence [in 1980]. It is an idea and plan which has survived the colonial era and twenty five [now thirty two] years of independent Zimbabwe. Some commentators think that the plan is heavily political and of late it has been used to advantage by politicians as a way of winning the support of Matabeleland.

Masunga says this is typical of the concept of majority/ minority divide that at national level also influences and upholds negative societal attitudes towards minorities such as the disabled people. We can only make sense of these differing conceptions of disabilities if we pay attention to how they manifest themselves through such concepts and practices of the minority/majority divide. Masunga thinks the project will not easily take off since it is construed as benefiting a minority group the Ndebele people in that region. He says:

That’s the argument. That is why I say bring in this majority/minority dichotomy. It will help you because sometimes our behavior seems to be
influenced by that. A minority will not oust one from power so you can ignore them. But when it is the majority, ah, I must shake up because they will remove me. So it is the same with these people in Matabeleland they are a minority. It therefore behooves them to have a bigger voice if they are to be listened to. They need a strategy that will bring discomfort to the ruler. It’s not easy being a minority. Attitudes against the minority will flourish in a society that is divided so much by the majority/minority syndrome.

Tavuya Beta, another cultural expert, who himself has the experience of heading an institution of higher education learning, agrees with Masunga and says:

Yes, I think the main reason is that the assistance from the society as a whole, from government and other agencies can be criticized for being biased in favor of what is regarded as normal boys and girls and not much assistance to the others. I think society too has got something to answer for as far as that is concerned. ....... Society looks at a disabled person as someone who is not likely to succeed, so [society says] lets put more effort on these children who are not disabled - more money on them, more facilities and so on because they are likely to succeed not these. So already we have a biased attitude towards disabled people in as far as their education is concerned.

Beta faced a determined resistance as the head of his former institution from both his fellow members of staff and the non-disabled section of the student body when he introduced what he saw as fair treatment of the people with physical disabilities. His finance department saw it as a waste of money to improve structural facilities to cater for
a minority group; some of the staff members accused Beta of lowering standards by trying to accommodate disabled students; non-disabled students on the other hand, complained that the introduction of measures to accommodate these ‘people’ slowed down their programs. It was all a question of engrained attitudes caused by the majority/minority syndrome that Masunga alluded to and existing at national level.

It was not only cultural experts who noted the prevalence of negative attitudes in the Zimbabwean society that impact on the educational progression of people living with disabilities, but also officials of organizations whose main focus is on helping disabled people, their welfare, education and place in society, made profound observations regarding societal attitudes towards disabled people. One of the qualifications to have access to higher and further education is a language credit. Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association an umbrella organization representing all organizations for and of disabled people in Zimbabwe says:

Our country demands English for you to access further education. So we have blocked the education of the deaf in their country. The issue of trying to alleviate after ‘O’ level to say we have UCE (United College of Education) in Bulawayo teaching special education is not working. The graduates who come out of that special education as teachers, specialize on the visual impairment, specialize in hearing impairment, specialize in mental handicaps but the graduates for hearing impairments cannot Braille, cannot sign. So the visually impaired would get a teacher they expect to Braille, but they can’t Braille. The deaf would expect teachers who can sign but they can’t sign.
Hove’s point here is that the society, represented in this case by educational requirements needed for access to higher education is biased, and in favor of, the majority of ‘normal’ students. Government only pays lip service by churning out ‘ill-qualified’ graduate teachers who will not make meaningful impact on the education of disabled people. He goes on to say:

So the majority of our society today is not giving value, has not attached value to people with disabilities. They will support the able bodied children and ignore the rest of the children with disabilities. But unfortunately whether that is by design or by coincidence, unfortunately the majority of children with disabilities happen to be born in poor families. The society’s attitude is that it is normal for disabled people to be poor.

Most of the society’s attitudes manifest themselves through the programs or initiatives that are initiated at national level according to Hove’s observation. He cites an example of a poverty alleviation program the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) that is meant to help those in need of financial and health assistance from poor backgrounds. The majority of the targeted recipients are orphans left behind due to the devastating nature of HIV/AIDS and the disabled children whose majority as observed by Hove, are born in poor households. For Hove, it is not the intention that is faulty, it is the implementation that is full of structural anomalies and inconsistencies and in some cases out rightly impossible to implement. Noting that this program is mostly geared for students up to high school, and given that most specialized schools are in cities while the bulk of poor families are in rural areas, Hove says:
We are talking of basic education before Form 4. How many parents can afford to transport their children from Kariba to Emerald Hill, to Morgenstar or to Danhiko? So it means for BEAM to function the communities around where the child comes from should recommend that child for BEAM, at Emerald Hill. But the money that goes to a school in Kariba, the headmaster and the counselors [in Kariba], would rather keep the moneys for their school not to say the moneys would accompany a child far away. The regulation encourages that the recipients get that education from the school nearest to them. [The school authorities would say] if we are given $1000, and we are supposed to pay $20 per child at a rural school, we would rather pay for those five hundred or those twenty students than one boarding child who needs $300 for fees and would also need another $300 for a wheelchair, in which case all the money will go to one person. This is how deserving cases in rural areas are overlooked by this program and our people just watch quietly as this goes on. So society has not realized that we are all potentially disabled, all of us.

Vivienne Viki, an officer in one of the associations for disabled people, the Sekuru Madzore Association, finds the attitude of government not seriously supportive of the education and welfare of people living with disabilities. She cites an example where

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27 Kariba is an example of a remote rural area where specialized institutions do not exist. Disabled children have to relocate to city areas where specialized education is available but at a cost.

28 Emerald Hill, Morgenstar and Danhiko are examples of institutions offering specialized education and/or facilities for disabled children located in urban areas.
government is not sensitive enough to realize that because the services of her organization are expanding to reach out for people in rural areas, the assistance grant for staff wages from government is now not adequate. It is a fixed constant figure despite the hefty increase in their staff. She says:

Although our Association is stretched all over Zimbabwe this means that our workers are increasing but they [Government] still remain with their stipulated figure [of staff they will provide a grant for] and the remaining part [staff], we have to top up ourselves.

Vivienne’s concern is a clear indication that the government’s attitude towards matters concerning disabled people is that of nonchalant. This type of attitude makes me want to revert to individual government officers so that we see how the officials uphold the implied government policies. What do the people creating, implementing and policing education policies say about the education or precisely the access to higher and further education for physically disabled high school graduates? This question is met with, in some cases, vague answers, or partial answers or in other cases, cover ups or sheer ignorance. The negative attitudes towards disability and disabled people are so apparent and sometimes exist in the subconscious mind for these government officers. Nelson Rusere, a high level officer in the National Council for Higher Education\(^{29}\) says, when asked what measures his organization, which is responsible for influencing policy at university level, had put in place with regards to access to higher education institutions for disabled people. He says:

\(^{29}\) This is a parastatal responsible for accreditation of universities in Zimbabwe in close liaison with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.
There are only two things we are trying to do now. From 2005 all applications for establishing institutions were put on hold until the board was in place. But when now the board became available there is now pressure for us to do something. Then from our section we have already generated instruments to find out the statuses of the universities. So that is our priority so let alone to start looking at all these things [to do with disability]. So we have nothing on that.

The foregoing statement clearly shows that anything to do with disabilities has not appeared on the radar of this council. Rusere even refers to disability issues as ‘these things’ clearly demonstrating that even at personal level disability issues are not a big deal. This is a reflection of societal attitudes at both personal and state levels. Even after having had some experience with disability issues working for the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education when disabled university students used to send delegations to his office for what they considered as unfair treatment by their university, Rusere did not see this as a priority given that he is now in position to influence policy. He recalls his experiences with the disabled students and says:

So it so happened that if there was a change or modification they [The Ministry or the University] would forget to adjust the grant for the disabled. So when they [the disabled students] start meeting problems they would quickly think that it was all because they no longer received those grants. They would then form a delegation and come and pack in my office. So really we do not have information which we can provide for now because we have not done any work in terms of that. But I would have thought by now the
Ministry should have been taking out some of the policies which are in place already especially those which hinge on access to higher education for the disabled students and analyze what had to be planned for them.

This shows again that this council is far from considering disability issues as anything to worry about and preferring the issues to be dealt with by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education officials, some of whom do not seem to understand the needs of disabled people either. Apparently if what Timothy Garwe of the Ministry says is to guide us, it seems some of them have not even taken an interest to understand disabled people, their expectations from society and their capabilities. Timothy was surprised when a disabled lady objected to them assisting her in getting in Combies. Because society sees all disabled people needing assistance, it had not registered in Garwe’s mind that it was a question of attitudes in people, and not a need of assistance by disabled people. Sometimes this assistance is not called for. Garwe confirms this as he narrates his story:

And they [the disabled] say you are now thinking for us as if we are not there.

I have another lady I was working with some three, four, five years she is paralyzed the whole side. She did not like that each time we go out we lift her into a Combi or bus. She confided in me and said Tim, I don’t like the way you people lift me up let me do it myself. I began to understand that these people do not want being led every time, they also need their independence.

30 Combies are the main mode of public transport operated by licensed individuals which were introduced when the government run public transportation failed to cope with the high demand of transport after independence.
Given that experience I asked Garwe if that has helped influencing policy for disabled students in his Ministry. His articulation of policy on education of disabled students, seemed very limited but his colleague, Shamiso Muchemwa, seemed to understand the limitations of current ministry policies regarding both the welfare and education of disabled students. Having worked closely with one university administrator who was responsible for disabled students she noted how treating disabled students with the same care and attention as any other students sat well with the disabled community. She thinks that the disabled students, like the lady who confronted Timothy Garwe about assistance, should assert themselves so that they cannot be taken advantage of. She says:

Of what’s happening now, I want to believe that some of these students, I think, do go and visit [the authorities] and perhaps that’s where they open up and tell them what their problems are. Because I think generally they show that they [the disabled students] are not afforded a listening ear in a number of institutions. I just think when you talk to one or two of them you feel that there is, maybe I am wrong, there is a feeling that there is a need to be afforded more time. I don’t know about Freedom University now because the time I dealt with them while I was still in HR, there was a gentleman who was dealing with specifically that group of students, the disabled students, specifically. We were communicating with him and he apparently knew almost all of them very well. I don’t know whether Freedom University still has that but during that time, he knew almost everyone of them by name. He knew their problems. It was a pleasure dealing with him. The students liked it.
Shamiso has observed a bit of a dislocation especially during the hardship years experienced by Zimbabwe that were caused by a record decline in economic activities. Inflation hit record high figures and local currency ceased to have any meaningful value. During that time Shamiso says she witnessed much instability with qualified and experienced staff leaving government employment in search of greener pastures. Disability issues took a back seat as a result of that. She recalls:

You have a bit of a dislocation because I really think, but you see the other problem for the last two, three, four years, it was tough. People were just coming and going. You employ somebody today, they go away after a month or two months. There has been so much instability. But we hope that with a little bit of stability sitting in now we really could, I think, go back and pay extra attention to this group of students. There is a bit of stability now in universities but it is not hundred percent.

When the nation was in trouble economically, the people to be sacrificed were the disabled people. Attention was taken away from issues that impacted their education, an attitude that the nation, led by its own government, supported. It was further noteworthy that neither the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture, from where the students graduate at high school level, nor the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, that is supposed to give access for these graduates into its institutions of higher learning, kept any statistics or records of what happens to disabled students after graduating at high school level. At one hand, after graduating at high school level, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture just releases the physically disabled graduates into, at
times, an uncaring society, while on the other hand the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education ‘cherry picks’ those they want and are not bothered about the plight of the rest. Nobody seems to want to take either the blame or the responsibility for what happens to the bulk of these students. Shamiso says:

It’s a bit difficult to really know because I don’t know whether after that level we do have possibilities of tracing what has happened to these students after ‘O’ level. I don’t know whether Education, Sports, Arts & Culture have the means of tracing where these students will have gone to.

To illustrate her point further, Shamiso laments the lack of opportunities and facility for the large population living in rural areas. She says:

It’s those in urban areas who may be lucky to go through the system and be trained into something but for the huge numbers in the rural areas, there is no office, you can’t go to register, there is no social worker. Even during the good times in this country we still did not have social workers in districts, we didn’t. They are all dotted in urban areas. We have got this lot [the disabled high school graduates], they really don’t know where to go. You are in Churumanzu⁴¹, that is where you are and you die there. You finish your ‘O’ level that’s it. The system forgets about you.

The rural folks seem to have given up trying to help the situation. They feel they can do nothing more to help their disabled members. In a casual conversation with some rural people in Masvingo, I was told that the problem they had with physically disabled

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³¹ Churumanzu is an example of a rural district where such facilities and opportunities for disabled students do not exist.
people was that there was no point ‘wasting’ money to send them to further education since they were not going to be useful to them, and in addition, they could not even afford the assistive devices such as wheelchairs that would be needed for their education, let alone the school fees, levy and uniforms. Shamiso agrees with this and says:

It is like you are born to a lost cause. Everyone would just say as long as you are still alive there is nothing we can do. The parents would say as long as we feed him, that’s all about it. And if we [as government] don’t strengthen and establish these structures [district offices to care for the disabled] at grassroot levels particularly for this group of students we will have failed them as a nation. We will have failed them. I mean we can have these offices in Gweru or Harare but how many disabled people live in Harare? How many people live in Gweru as compared to the rural population? Somebody is down there in Lower Gweru, there is no office nearby. There is need to build these structures you know. It seems as a society we are not prepared to take that route.

When asked about what she thought the impact of the Zimbabwean people’s indigenous customs was on disabled children and how that shaped the seemingly unconcerned attitudes by society, Shamiso says:

I think one gets the impression that as I said earlier, we are a nation not ready for these children. We are not ready for these children. From a point of view of customs, it is a curse. That is how people look at it. Society asks how do you end up giving birth to a deaf child? A child with no legs, or blind or an albino? Society asks those questions. I do not know who the society is asking
and there are no answers. I think as a nation we are not ready for these people. And this is why we do not seem to be making an effort to smoothen their lives. I think to us they could be a burden. I don’t know. I may be wrong. But when you see these mothers talking on television and stating what they go through in the village with such a child you feel like crying. But as a mother you cannot run away from the child. But everybody else runs away from your child and from you including your husband. I don’t know because I really think that such reactions should not come into being because somebody is educated on that. These are reactions that should come naturally. Because you know, saying to the nation please can you learn to accept that an albino is a gift from God is not an unreasonable thing to ask society but we don’t do it.

It seems Shamiso is implying that the Zimbabwean society would question your own sanity if you start advocating that disabled people are just as ‘normal’ as everybody else. Her assessment saying, ‘I think as a nation we are not ready for these people’ is profound and emphasizes these competing cultural conceptions of disabilities in Zimbabwe. I agree with her and I believe that it would take concerted effort, from all that is individuals and government alike, to influence change in attitude, we so desire and hope for. She continues to say:

This is what we need to do but to me it’s, I don’t know whether people listen to that because you can’t force them, it is difficult to force a nation to love something because there is a deep seated question mark in their belief system. To say how did I come to give birth to a blind child? To a child who can’t hear? To an albino? The child who has no hands? The child who has no feet?
To a child who has hydrocephalus? I think we spend more time asking questions rather than directing our energies towards trying to ease the lives of these people. Too much energy is directed towards wrong reasons. Its questions of suspicions and apportioning blame to the mother. The husband would say ‘This is from your home we have no albinos in our clan – not a single one. We do not have a single deaf person, yours is the first in the clan. We do not have people without hands, we all have hands including you. If I had no hands would you have agreed to marry me? So if you give me a child without hands what do you want me to do?’ All these questions are misdirected and have no answers.

Shamiso seems to see the ‘cracks’ in the education system of Zimbabwe in as far as there are no clear policies of assisting with the education of disabled students after high school, but her other colleague Joseph Mukamuri thinks everything is under control. His contribution is very interesting because he truly means well but his assumptions are questionable. Joseph was excited to discuss this topic and pointed out that he had passion for disability education and advised me that all higher or further education institutions under his jurisdiction had been instructed to reserve a quota for the enrollment of disabled students in their institutions. He says:

It is an area I have passion for. And this is why even in the Ministry I deliberately instructed all colleges to reserve a quota on their enrollment for the different categories of the challenged.
Asked how far the institutions were complying with that instruction, Joseph says confidently, “There are no takers”. He implies that the opportunities are open for people living with disabilities but they are unwilling to accept the offers as he goes on to explain and defend the heads of his institutions and says:

They [Heads of Institutions] want to comply but there are no people. There are no physically disabled people to take up these posts. You go to Masvingo for example you find that for somebody who is primary trained and in a wheelchair he has so many limitations because he has to do agriculture, he has to do physical education you see. And because of that the students themselves do not enroll for the primary teacher training.

Joseph was shooting himself in the foot when he gave the example of students who do not enroll for primary teacher education citing the constraints the job will entail for someone with physical disabilities. What he fails to realize is that the program was never meant to attract such people anyhow, and creating a quota is just academic, with no practical value whatsoever. Joseph blames the society for not encouraging disabled students to take up training and says:

But now the problem is society itself. It has always discouraged these students from taking up any form of training. I was at Mzilikazi College for five years and that was our target group for training in various special skills.

It was a problem. We had problems just getting the students to enroll.

When I asked him why his Ministry does not introduce a statutory instrument to force institutions to comply with the regulations so that the institutions would come up with
alternative ways of utilizing the skills of the trained disabled teachers they are compelled to train, Joseph was adamant and in support of his staff and saw no value in enforcing the regulation any further than it is now. He says:

The reason why we have not come up with something like a statutory instrument is because to us it is not something that should take our time because there is no room for flouting, it has no room for disadvantaging anybody, everybody is keen to do it because we are educationists. We have not come across a situation where a principal will say we are not taking this disabled student in which case we introduce a statutory instrument. No.

Unknown to Joseph was that these heads of institutions had a sly way of refusing to admit disabled students. It could be through direct discouragement especially the constraints of the job, or the institution not creating a physically conducive environment, or having no suitable instructors to take up the challenge of teaching students with disabilities. That way the institutions come out clean because the student will voluntarily opt out. At the end it would look like the student is opting out whereas in reality he/she had been given impossible conditions. At the end Joseph realized the flaws in the system and put all the blame on the attitudes of society ranging from architects who design ramps with an incline they cannot climb themselves, to heads of institutions who need to be forced to comply. He says:

Yes. Our society has a problem. I do not know how we can have an opportunity when constitutional consultations are being carried out because I want to contribute on the issue of the disabled people. I want to contribute to the constitution. Let’s start there. We do not even care of our own disabled.
We bypass them when they are struggling on the road without offering any help even parting with a cent to help with transport. Like what we were discussing about the admission process in colleges, that if right from the door step of the principal’ office where they could meet hard feelings, what more with the lecturer, with the matron and so on?

It is clear from Joseph’s change of heart from the foregoing statement that sometimes we need a little discussion to conscientize each other about issues affecting our societies that we may not be aware of. From this discussion of less than one hour, Joseph started to realize the limitations his ‘agreed on’ directives with heads of institutions had serious flaws he was not aware of. The Heads, most likely influenced by societal attitudes did not help to advise their Head Office of the possible constraints the disabled students would meet if they had to access higher education through these institutions. Dialogue especially with the very people affected is not only useful but should be a priority and concern for every caring member of the society.

The Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture personnel had a different take on the question of access to higher and further education for their ‘O’ level graduates. They saw their responsibility ending with the high school certification and the remainder becomes other institutions’ responsibility. Some of them like Gakava Gava actually tried to resist having an interview with me for “issues that do not concern us” he says. He even goes further to try and advise me how I should go about to get meaningful results. “You should be going to Higher Education not here. Your letter says access to higher education and does not even include tertiary and we are neither higher education nor tertiary” he went on. Like in the case of Joseph of the Ministry of Higher & Tertiary
Education, Gakava settled down to some meaningful discussions when I explained to him the rationale of my interviewing officers in his Ministry. Gakava blamed society for its negative attitude towards people living with disabilities and believed that disabled people have a role to play in society had it not been poor attitudes that people develop even at early stages of their lives. He observes that:

".........even in the classroom you still see some kind of discrimination amongst the pupils themselves or maybe should I use the term stigmatization of people who have some disabilities. Depending on what kind of disability we are talking about. There are those people who have those humps and some humps emit some liquid some people may not want. Those are the beliefs of several people. But as a Ministry, we discourage that because we believe that as they always say disability does not mean inability. There are so many people who are doing very well who are disabled. Even Roosevelt the [former] president of USA, he ended up a disabled man but a full head of State.

Dzikamai Dzikiti, a senior officer in the same Ministry as Gakava Gava refuses to single out disabled students as the only sector suffering educationally. He insists that because of the financial hardships faced by the country in recent years, a number of people including the orphans left behind through the death of their parents due to AIDS, the children from poor families and some single parent households, together with the disabled children are going through tough times. Dzikamai is aware of these problems but says government has its hands tied. Referring to possible assistance for disabled children in meeting their assistive devices needs he says:
Yes if it was possible. If we had the money we would hand them out, because disabled people most of their guardians or parents cannot afford the equipments. So if government had the funds they would give out to the disabled because they know that the guardians and parents are unable to buy these equipments. These days most students come from disadvantaged homes, homes where the parents or guardians are unable to cater for the education of their children. This is why we have about a million people who are benefiting from the BEAM program.

Dzikamai seems to think that, the responsibility of financial assistance for disabled children should be placed elsewhere and not with the government, portraying that disability issues should not be a main concern of government. He goes on to say:

The Ministry is aware of that but because of financial constraints they are unable to assist. They [the Government] expect Non Governmental Organizations and well-wishers to assist disabled people. That is what they expect, these NGOs must actually buy wheelchairs and assist the disabled children. The Ministry itself is unable to, at the moment, but they are aware of the problem. Yes, if the situation changes, the economic situation changes, and the Ministry is given more money it might budget for the disabled.

The key word here is might, clearly showing it is nowhere near an immediate priority. To emphasize this point, Dzikamai even admits that the Ministry has no policy documents, old or new, drafts or pending or even the intention of producing on the education of disabled students, none at the moment. He says:
No there was nothing done [at independence]. Consciousness of the need to do that was low. There was no consciousness. But now there is more consciousness but the resources are very limited. That is the problem. At the moment we do not have, because as I said the system is hit hard economically. We can’t move as it were. So making that policy now won’t be useful because there are no funds.

Kokerai Ngoda, a senior officer with the Examination Branch of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, however portrays a different attitude towards how disability issues are handled in his department. Kokerai explains that for a disabled student to get preferential or special treatment they should prove their disability beyond doubt. His department depends heavily on medical information that emphasizes their strong belief that disability is a form of illness and is an abnormality. The department gets its information about the disabled through a mandatory information form and a supporting letter from a medical doctor. He says:

We get that information coming in through the entry form. The entry form has space for them to indicate that but we also request that they submit a doctor’s letter. Our fear being that anybody could just ask for these [special arrangements] so that they have a preview of the question paper. We are using the scanable type. The candidate or whoever is assisting the candidate can always state the type of assistance that they want if it is an enlarged print or Braille, they can indicate the nature of the handicap. My counterpart in Testing and Development is to look at the questions and ensure, probably ensure is not the right word, that the question does not unduly disadvantage
the candidate. Our emphasis quite honestly, is on avoiding disadvantaging the candidate. There is not that much emphasis on avoiding giving the candidate undue advantage.

Kokerai realized that he was not being ‘politically’ correct and immediately added “I think generally we, which is a sad thing really, we look at them as objects of sympathy or pity rather than full candidates”. One interesting observation I made is that the department’s Examination Administration team does not employ a single person with disabilities even for sections dealing with disability matters. Asked if the department employed people with disabilities, Kokerai says:

Not in the Examination Administration team. We have a guy in Finance who is handicapped I think as a result of polio or something like that. Our Regional manager in Mashonaland Central had an amputation sometime back but he is able bodied for all practical purposes. [As for employment here], frankly no. I remember a lady in Mashonaland East who came to me and said look I am partially sighted but I can assist you with things like Braille and so on. I sent the application through but to my knowledge she was not hired as an examiner.

Kokerai admits that when it comes to employment of people with disabilities, society tends to turn a ‘blind’ eye on them. He blames media for wanting to ‘celebrate’ disabilities in a way that ends up demeaning these people. He goes on to say:

No they [the disabled] are not ‘visible’ for employment. We tend to celebrate these things. Only last week I had to deal with an application for extra time for a candidate whose arms were amputated who uses his toes to write and the
center had also attached a newspaper cutting from way back when the press was articulating his problems. The way the press does it, it was so graphic, I mean it ends up demeaning the person. For me yes it helped me quickly decide that this was a deserving case, but I think if the candidate himself read this he would not be pleased.

On a positive note for the department, it sincerely gets out of its way to try and create fair examination conditions for people with disabilities that they will have identified. Without changing the marking scheme, the questions and examination environments are adapted to suit the requirements of the disabled students. Kokerai reports:

We have worries about having a different marking scheme. I think it may be discriminatory if we have a marking scheme specifically for them. We think that these other interventions, allowing them a modified question paper because in the modification the answers will also be modified perhaps not to the extent that they require. I think it’s those grey areas. How far do we go in assisting? Another opportunity is where we solicit the center’s input but again it’s special consideration and is not available for private disabled students.

This in itself is already discriminatory and disadvantaging those disabled students who government has already deselected from benefiting from its coffers. In this case it is that physically disabled student who is struggling alone who is not given a hearing by national systems. Would it be any wonder if this student cannot access higher and further education?
Nyaradzo Zhou another senior officer in the same Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture acknowledges that financial constraint may play a substantial role in disadvantaging disabled students but she places the main concern on societal attitudes towards these people. She narrates examples of well intended pronouncements regarding infrastructure by her Ministry that are not backed up by actions. She also blames attitudes created during the early days of special education when disabled children were officially secluded. She says:

I think there are economic constraints and maybe we cannot rule out attitudes of society that might not prioritize the needs of disabled students. But I think in principle people see the need and it should be done but --- it is difficult to…Ya, I think it’s more or less due to attitudes because I remember even the building section at head Office, there is somewhere where they say make sure that the buildings are accessible by every child. But putting it into practice now, it becomes difficult partly because of attitudes [of society] and also partly because of the history of special needs education [as advocated by Government] where people still feel that these disabled children should be on their own. That is seclusion in my opinion.

Having put a portion of blame on Zimbabwean societal attitudes towards disabled people, Nyaradzo quickly goes to the defense of the source of some of the seemingly negative attitudes as observed from the Western viewpoint. Nyaradzo says disability; the way it is known in Western countries is different from how it is known here in Zimbabwe. She says:
It is different. Yes, because the person they say has a disability in the Western system, in Zimbabwe here we say he has no problem at all. A problem may be realized but is not an issue. But when we come from our Western point of view, and we see a disable child tied to a tree to protect him/her from danger, we say, see what this mother is doing to her own child. There was an instance and it just happened that the child had intellectual disability, he was tied to a bed and the mother went away and left a candle on, and probably, the child fidgeted and the candle dropped on to the bed and there was fire in the room. The mother rescued the child with burns but anywhere he is alive. And she was explaining why she had done it but an outsider might not understand that it was out of love for this child that the mother had to do it.

She goes on to say poor attitudes, especially those derived from the Zimbabwean culture still exist to some degree and they may influence people on how to relate to disability as she goes on to say:

The cultural issues of bewitching, but I don’t think they are that prevalent now, influence the attitudes of maybe other people who look at a person with disability then they start to talk suspiciously about the source of their disability.

Some indigenous cultural beliefs give society excuses to pay less attention to the needs of people living with disabilities because most of these beliefs make society view the existence of a disabled child as a curse in a family and would rather have nothing to do with it in case the ‘problem’ comes to them as well. She says:
We have had instances especially with schools with residential facilities where parents don’t collect the child during holidays and this child is left roaming and the Head of the school is forced to look after the child for some time until we locate the parent then they leave. This is not because they are not capable of looking after the child, but it is just because their belief system tells them that this child is a curse and they want the child out of their environment.

Nyaradzo’s sentiments here are shared by Tsitsi Maveneka, a senior administrator at Mzilikazi College, an institution that enrolls both disabled and non-disabled students for up to ‘O’ level, when she observes how some parents and guardians (not many) behave towards their own disabled children. She estimates that about 10% or less of parents show negative attitudes towards their children. She says:

I can say 10% or even less, but the way they behave for those who are negative about these children is quite bad at times. Because they will send these children to school with no pocket money, very little tuck, they don’t bring them to school, they just leave them by the school gate. They are not interested to take them in maybe because they are afraid we might ask for fees because it has been in some cases three years without payment. So they just drop the child at the gate and leave. The child will be seeing how other children are treated and you should see how the child feels.

But the majority of parents in the neighborhood of the institution have developed positive attitudes towards disabled children. Tsitsi attributes this to the environment that the institution has created in the area over the years. She says:
No, we don’t have many parents with negative attitudes because this school has been around for a long time such that the parents in this local environment are people who grew up seeing disabled children and they in turn have their own disabled children who also come to attend school here. Even when our non-disabled students use public transport especially in this area they know how to assist someone in a wheelchair.

Institutions of further education especially those that readily accept the responsibility of extending education opportunities to people living with disabilities develop ways of coping with negative societal attitudes. Dzokai Maramba, head of the vocational education wing of Mzilikazi College, a division also catering for both disabled and non-disabled vocational students is proud of what her institution is capable of, and actually does. To start with, she accepts disabled students who do not meet the minimum five ‘O’ level subjects qualifications demanded by the education system for a student to go for any further education especially in a government controlled institution. She says, regarding the courses they offer for vocational training:

For those courses you need at least three ‘O’ levels. But then we also get people with disabilities who do not have the three ‘O’ levels because of various reasons. It really goes back to the background as well, that those with disabilities are the last people to be sent for any course or education. So you find those without minimum ‘O’ levels would have done at least some secondary education. We place then accordingly because we have got our Mzilikazi College certificates [that will improve their further education requirements].
Because of the integrated nature of the institution’s enrollment, Dzokai explained how that works to create a family atmosphere so that students feel at home with each other and negative attitudes are reduced or even eliminated by this arrangement. This is similar to Masunga’s experience where his boarding school, though not specializing in catering for disabled students, made it a point to include at least one disabled student every year so that the bulk of the student body realizes how normal it is to live with disabled people. This way, student’s negative attitudes that they could have brought in from the society are minimized or removed altogether. Dzokai goes on to say:

That is why we have inclusive integrated form of education where we have the able bodied and those with disability together. So they live together as a family and it’s wonderful. Most of the time everything is on course and students help each other. So we also have challenged students. Students who do not speak or hear who go about silently. Those students we have a greater number. Most of them take up courses like woodwork technology and garment making and are doing very well. After the National Foundation course most of them opt to go further to study for a National Certificate and others opt for employment. We have our own production unit. I can go and show you the students that we have trained, that we have employed, and now they are working in the production unit earning and living well.

The fact that their disabled graduates are employable is very pleasing for Dzokai as she continues to say:
Yes, isn’t that pleasing? So we are saying it’s a very good course. The limitations that they have, we really take them as opportunities and challenges because that is what we work on. Those without upper limbs, lower limbs, those who have had accidents etcetera we work together as a team. Because what it needs is no pity but empathy. Our lecturers have just the basic training, so when we employ them we sit down and we discuss issues. Issues about the language that they are going to use, issues of what the organization is like, especially our vision and our mission. We even involve our students in extra-mural activities such as horse riding, yes horse riding in conjunction with the Police as a social activity and our students love it.

Yes, a plethora of challenges and opportunities for the Zimbabwean society indeed but a paucity of care and assistance with the education of people living with disabilities has been observed. Opportunities and challenges that, in my opinion, our Zimbabwean general public misses, because of these competing conceptions of disabilities. If society could do even half of what Mzilikazi authorities are trying to implement, life would be much better for disabled communities. Dzokai observed from the reactions of the disabled students that attitudes from society where they come from are in the main, still negative. Students would rather stay at college than going back home to an unfriendly environment. She says:

Our disabled students would rather stay here. So much so that even when we close you find them still roaming around and it is all because some parent did not take that responsibility to collect their child. Even when we talk about fees and clothing
[with some parents] I think there is still that negative thinking where people do not take people with disabilities as people who deserve the same treatment as any other. I ask them, as a parent, why should your son or daughter with disabilities be the last one to get the fees or any other equipment that they need for training or something? We have parents who come here and you know, just today I had one parent, I don’t take it lightly because this place is not a dumping place where you say I am bringing my daughter because I can no longer manage. I can’t stay with him or her. I have problems. What problems? So it will be better if she stays here where there are others with disability. No, that is not what we are here for. We are not just a place where people with disabilities come. So when the parent comes I also want to establish that relationship, we also want to talk about their son or their daughter and not just to leave and hurriedly go away because they [the children] are important. They also want to be loved, talked to, given time. Time is a very important issue when you are dealing with disability because in most cases people are in a hurry, they want to leave you.

Lack of patience with disabled people reminds me of a situation I witnessed at a Canadian University where some students where resisting leadership from a fellow student who had speech impairment on the grounds that the student was too slow for them. This clearly demonstrates how societies can cling to frivolous excuses to justify marginalization of disabled people.

Most of higher education happens at university level in Zimbabwe. The input from these institutions of higher learning was crucial for assessing the impact of societal attitudes towards the education of physically disabled high school graduates. The
university education of Zimbabwe requires that a student gets further qualifications after graduating at high school. This provides a further constraint on disabled graduates who have to get these Advanced level (‘A’ level) qualifications if they are to access university education. The system of ‘A’ level as a requirement for university education was inherited by the Zimbabwe independent government from the former colonizer Great Britain. Given this obvious constraint for access to higher education for disabled high school graduates, some universities show obvious concerns about the plight of disabled people’s education by adapting their systems in order to create a near normal environment for disabled students who would have struggled this far against obstacles and barriers created for them by their own society’s attitudes. Tatenda Besa, of Freedom University states that once the disabled student had made it this far the university has to create a conducive environment for the student to concentrate on his/her studies. He cites financial consideration as a key factor that is normally ignored when university budgets and allocations are made. He says:

To make sure that, you know, we are paying serious attention to the needs of students with disabilities, instead of giving them 1% of the operational budget we sort of pushed it to 4%. Then if you are budgeting money and you don’t have a line item of the disability learning resource centre when it stands there, it does not make sense. When you are allocating moneys to departments and faculties it also gets an allocation as a standalone unit because of the attention we are paying. You see our basic philosophy is very simple – empower these individuals to be less dependent on other people. That really is the guiding principle.
I totally agree with Tatenda Besa that education is indeed empowering. It is an avenue to possible employment and a tool to combat poverty. Tatenda laments the limited number of disabled students who make it to university level. He attributes the problem to be the limited institutions that offer opportunities for disabled students to do their ‘A’ levels that qualifies them to get access to university education. He says:

Because there are very few, very few coming from Kapota. Basically it’s Kapota which helps students through ‘A’ Level. Waddilove used also to do that but I am not sure if they are still taking students for ‘A’ level. So it’s really the source which is the problem. That there are fewer ‘A’ level schools with the capacity to help students with disabilities especially those with hearing problems and sight problems. Even some with physical disabilities, you know, limping or something so most schools don’t have basic resources or facilities to accommodate students.

Even at primary or secondary levels access to education is still a hustle for these students because, as Tatenda says:

Most schools do not know how to deal with these students with special requirements. That is where the problem is. If there were there [disabled students at these schools] I think you would have more universities saying we will try but you know right now I think this university is the only university that takes students with disabilities especially those who are blind and deaf or partially blind or totally blind.

But in reality, it is because disability is already construed as a problem by society and not ignorance of how to deal with disability issues, that creates these negative attitudes under
the guise of ‘not knowing how to deal with disabled students’ in the school system. According to Tatenda therefore, the biggest barrier for disabled high school graduates to get access to higher education is the lack of ‘A’ level schools that offer or are willing or able to offer these students a chance to get the extra qualification (‘A’ level) that is needed to continue to university. For the few who filter through to his university, he goes on to say:

I think, you know, you can never have any increase in terms of numbers to higher education if the primary school section and secondary school sections are totally insensitive to the special needs of these individuals. The society has got to identify these individuals and then create a supportive environment for them to learn and treat these individuals just like normal individuals. But then there is no one who is normal. It is the issue of who is making the judgment, you know. Because if we were to have people from Mars making judgment they might actually find all of us totally disabled and, you know, it would create lots of difficulties. So normality is subjective.

Tatenda is concerned about the disabled students’ financial constraints and the kind of uncaring attitudes they might have encountered along the way and so he tries to make life easy for them. With the whole student body out of residents for some operational reasons, Tatenda has managed to arrange accommodation for this group at a place convenient for them to attend classes. He says:

And then when it comes to paying fees, I made a decision when I became Vice Chancellor that I am not going to charge disabled students any tuition
fees. They just learn for nothing. If the society is not sensitive enough to the
plight of disabled students then someone has got to be. As for the bulk of the
students’ accommodation, I don’t know where they stay. I really don’t know
where they stay but for disabled students I said we would have to find ways
of providing water and so forth .......... so that we try and create a more
conducive environment for them to learn. So that is the only group that is
here on campus.

He goes on to emphasize that such a decision is his own as a way of his contribution to
the disabled students’ development and says;

Now when I say to Higher & Tertiary Ministry of Education you need to look
for money to pay for tuition fees for disabled students, if you don’t then I will
let them learn for nothing. So since 2003 they learn for nothing. They stay in
halls of residence for nothing and I think that is a small contribution I am
making towards their development and preparation for future life. I am saying
I prefer to see these individuals with degrees to be employed somewhere so
that they reduce their dependence on people who think they are able bodied
and are normal and all these terms we use.

Otherwise without such an arrangement, especially given how difficult it has
become for securing accommodation in the city, Tatenda believes that a decision to leave
them on their own is tantamount to saying to them:

Forget about your university education, and that creates even more problems
in terms of the burden to society because as individuals they should get
empowerment through education. You will have them denied that empowerment. They will consequently become a perpetual burden to society. And what we want is to develop in them a sense of worthiness that they are worth something and can contribute a lot to society. Disability is not inability.

When I asked him about the attitudes of his staff and that of the student body concerning students with disabilities, Tatenda was adamant that such a problem, to the best of his knowledge, does not exist at his institution. He however did not rule out negative attitudes in the general public who in some way see disability as a curse and something to shy away from. He says:

Not here. Not here. All other people know that this is the policy of the institution. You can only gage from probably what policy makers and government do that sometimes people don’t…… I do not want people to be sympathetic. I want people to simply recognize that this is another group of individuals we have in society. Individuals, you know, who are not in those conditions because they wanted to be in those conditions but they just, you know, they were the unfortunate ones by whatever, struck them at birth or while they were still in the womb or as they were growing and so on. [These attitudes] to a large extent are some of the failures of the society and so really you can’t say it’s the disabled’s problem. There are also policy makers who are totally insensitive. Of cause, you know, there is always a stigma especially in the black communities that if you really have even an albino it’s a curse. If you have a child born blind it’s a curse. If someone has got some deformed limb it’s a curse. That I mean is the case but that has nothing to do
with this. It is just a biological problem. But you know of cause in this country that the government has tried its best to recognize the existence of this special group by providing I think one or two parliamentary seats to these individuals, people with disabilities. All those are efforts but of cause you know the reception of people in the society and communities is something else. You can’t legislate for that. You can’t say when you see a disabled person smile or talk nicely or so forth or treat them, they also don’t want to be treated like objects.

Tatenda’s thoughts show us that disability is indeed not a personal choice but disabling someone is. Not all universities in Zimbabwe perform with the same understanding as is being articulated here for Freedom University. Tatenda’s position seems obstreperous compared to ‘normal’ expectations of both the general public and specifically the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. I found out, however, that some administrators of other universities had a nonchalant attitude towards issues concerning disabled people. The situation at Kudzidza Ishungu University, where Pascal Midzi is the administrator was a total opposite to that of Freedom University. With a mission statement that was all embracive for anyone who needed higher education, this university did not have a single disabled student enrolled ever since it was established. When asked about the university’s policy on enrolling disabled students, the university’s administrator Pascal Midzi says:

That is a problem because we don’t have any disabled students here. We have never had people with disabilities. We have never had a policy. They have never really applied I don’t know why probably because Freedom University
will take them. I taught at Freedom University for years at least there they have the facilities for example people who are blind they have Braille facilities but here we don’t have them applying. Disabled students do not even apply for admission here.

What was surprising for me was the seemingly lack of interest in people with disabilities by the university that does not even attempt to attract them in the first place, and yet blames disabled students for not applying. Despite low enrollment levels this university is experiencing, attracting disabled students has never been an option for them. On further discussion, however, Pascal realized the shortcomings of their expectations and admitted that it is something they have to think about. Pascal Midzi’s university administration may be guided by attitudes they personally brought from communities they grew up in that may also have been confused or affected by competing conceptions caused through colonialism.

One of the ways these competing cultural conceptions of disability manifest themselves is also through government policy. It was evident to me that most government officers were reluctant to speak outside the confines of their policy guidelines as to what can be shared with outsiders or not. I found institutional administrators more forthcoming with information on policy that may or does affect people living with disabilities as compared to officers who were direct custodians of government policy. Policy be it at local or national level has considerable impact on what happens to disabled people. It was prudent for me to find out what policies (if any) helped the decision makers to determine or influence smooth educational progression for these disabled students.
The Ministry of Education Sport Arts and Culture states that it has no direct say in what happens to the students who graduate from their institutions. That responsibility they say is for the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. The only indirect policy that one of the senior officers of this Ministry elaborated on is that of school fees while the students are still in their jurisdiction. Dzikamai Dzikiti says:

So what we have done is, for all rural primary schools there is no tuition but there is a levy. From Form one upwards there is school fees unlike in the primary schools where rural schools do not pay but secondary schools do pay. But all parents who wish to send their children to school the government tries to make sure that the place is there. No child is stopped. So that is the policy. Secondary education is not free. Primary education partially free tuition wise only.

Dzikamai stresses that they do not discriminate on paying of fees because they all pay the same fees, they pay the same levy at secondary school level. He admitted however that their fees policy never considered other extra expenses disabled student are likely to incur such as assistive devices and health bills. Clearly this kind of policy segregates against those from poor backgrounds of which most disabled students are. Even for those exempted from paying school fees at primary level find out that the levy combined with buying of school uniforms, may probably be much higher than the regulated school fees. The struggle the disabled students undergo, (hence the title of this research), just to graduate at high school level may reduce their willpower to go beyond. Assessments for those who need assistance are not always favorable for disabled
students, as Iswear Kumalo’s experience with the Department of Social Welfare attests to. Iswear was denied financial assistance by a government department despite the fact that he is from a poor background and has a visible physical disability. It seems there is no clear policy regarding such situations.

It is interesting as well that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education could not articulate any policy impacting on access to higher and further education for students living with disabilities. They leave the responsibility to institutions of higher or further education but give them general unmonitored guidelines that should shape individual sectors within their jurisdiction. Dzokai Maramba Head of Mzikazi College elaborates this arrangement very clearly. She says:

We get our vision/mission statement from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education as our guideline and then we tailor make our own in line with our policies. Important issues like research, human resources development, etc, following the exact lines according to the guidelines. Then we bring in the elements that concern us. Because definitely our main area is different [from other institutions] so we have to engineer all that to make sure that it is a success. We don’t really have problems because it’s all about in-depth study. You look at the time table for examinations, you look at all these other things about the subjects, and then you have to relate them to the conditions that you have here, the limitations that the students have here such as time issues. You have to cover the syllabus but when it comes to examinations we need more time. When it comes to lessons there are so many adjustments you have to make.
For policy on recruitment of students she goes on to say:

[Our policy on recruitment of disabled students is that] if a person has got physical challenges we try as much as possible to accommodate them. If a person cannot look after himself or herself, it becomes very difficult to register the student but that’s when we go to the extent of asking the student to bring somebody who can also enroll. All our students pay fees at the same level whether disabled or not.

But Tatenda Besa, of Freedom University states emphatically that his institution does not receive any guidelines from anybody. For policy the university stands alone because according to Tatenda:

No, no guidelines, there are no guidelines. No, no, no, because you are dealing with academic matters here and you cannot come and say the curriculum for disabled people should be weaker or should be so so. If you do that then that is discrimination. So we don’t want discrimination. The only thing we push government to do is always to, if or when government is giving loans to students or grants, we always say they need to give an extra 10% or 15% to students with disability because their requirements are more than the requirements of normal students.

Asked about his institution’s policy on admission of disabled students given that the university has a total enrollment of less than 70 disabled students he says:

The admission, when someone has passed 2 A level subjects that is enough.
So 2 is enough for them. They don’t compete with anyone, they just come in.
We have no quota system. No, as many as apply we take them. We have never gone beyond 100, you know. The number is always between 60 and 70 total across all years.

Pascal Midzi of Kudzidza Ishungu University states that they have no policy for admitting disabled students and they do not have the necessary infrastructure to their needs. For this university the whole discussion on admission of disabled students seemed ‘misplaced’ because he says, “those students never applied to come here anyway” signaling some bit of frustration and embarrassment about the direction of the discussion.

The question of universal school fees for all students seems to overlook the extra financial burden people living with disabilities face. On the other hand Dzikamai Dzikiti of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture, and Dzokai Maramba of Mzilikazi College’s assertion that paying the same fees for all students regardless of their circumstances falls flat because they fail to consider extra ‘fixed’ expenses disabled students incur that other students do not. It is easy to quickly justify the practice of making every student pay the same fees but after a serious discussion with me the respondents agreed that the policy had to be revised to accommodate the extra need of disabled students. But on admission, if one university can admit every qualifying student at national level, so where is the problem? Why are there so few disabled students in universities? Is it the transition from Form 4 to Form 6 that is the biggest hurdle? Are other universities then right not to compete for such a small reservoir of potential disabled students? All these are questions that this research is attempting to answer, complex as it is turning up to be.
Summary

In conclusion, clearly the education of disabled people is heavily influenced by societal attitudes towards them and their education. Although the indigenous culture dictates that disabled people are normal but different, some of the attitudes do not portray this positive attitude by some communities. Manifestations of negative attitudes come in different forms such as stigmatization, the majority/minority divisions, allocation of resources by both government systems and families, and the very indigenous cultural belief systems. Some of these belief systems’ attitudes surface even through the way some government officers marginalize disability issues. The government systems do not have enough qualified staff to train or teach on disabilities as observed, and that those who are trained to teach the deaf for example, cannot even ‘sign’ and those who are trained to teach the blind cannot write in Braille. Where the Zimbabwe government has tried to ease the burden of disabled people of lack of resources such as through the introduction of the BEAM project, corruption by the policy implementers has seriously rendered this initiative ineffective. Rural people have also resigned to helping or contributing to the education of disabled people because of lack of administrative structures such as centers that have the interest of disabled people at heart in rural areas. This has resulted in disabled people being viewed as useless and a burden to communities. Through these attitudes and actions, that are derived from its belief systems and its understanding of disability, society tries to justify its lack of support for disabled people by creating seemingly justifiable excuses. But, disabled people are quick to notice that these attitudes are nothing but excuses put forward by their society to justify its
behavior towards them. The next chapter details how disabled people voice out against these justifications of exclusions by their own society.
Chapter 7: Disabled People’s Voices Beyond Justification of Exclusions

Voices of the Usually Voiceless

Chapters 5 and 6 above have shown how competing and sometimes conflicting conceptions of disability impact the lives of people living with disabilities. The chapters reveal and reflect obvious conflicts between what traditional beliefs and customs dictate regarding disability issues for the indigenous population, and the current expectations through government regulations. These competing conceptions of disabilities affect everybody but particularly people living with disabilities, their families and friends.

As pointed out earlier, part of my research included interviews with twelve physically disabled high school graduates and four mothers of four of the graduates. My aim was to give voice to the families and people who are directly affected by societal actions and attitudes towards them. Given that the graduates were adults in their own rights, I needed their consent to discuss about them with their parents. I managed to get consent from four of the students resulting in four interviews for mothers. The mothers’ stories were both revealing and touching. Revealing in the sense that it was possible to get down to the bottom of their belief systems and the authentic feelings they have towards their communities and government regarding their disabled children. Two of them went down in tears saying it was the first time they were given an opportunity to tell their stories in a non-threatening environment. In one case, the mother was narrating how she wished her child had died at birth because she could not imagine living with such a child. Touching in the sense that their stories were like horror stories that needed much courage to relive as they narrated them. This was their only avenue of talking back at society who they thought did not care about their plight.
The graduates also had a chance to share what they all along longed to share with somebody who would understand their frustration with society. Of the twelve graduates I interviewed, only one had managed to continue to university and graduated at that level but not without struggling. Some managed to do some diploma work after their high school but not out of choice. The main causes of this lack of progress were poverty, government systems, societal attitudes and, in some cases, lack of support from their own families. One graduate who wanted to do nursing was discouraged by her own family citing the problems she would have as a disabled person. The graduates convey messages that ask society to put aside its determined effort of dwelling on the causes of their disabilities. They want society to realize that, it cannot just wish them away because they are there, living and want to succeed like everybody else. While the wish to be like anybody else would be a solution for people living with disabilities, it is that very wish that becomes problematic with society because society sees them as different. Like some of the mothers’ stories, the majority of these disabled graduates have narratives regarding their life experiences they are also telling for the first time. One graduate tells how he had to write a letter to his father whom he was staying with to ask him to stop tormenting both himself and his mother for his existence. The situation was so bad that the father had no time to attend to his needs although they were staying under the same roof. Another graduate decries government systems that are so insensitive to the lives of disabled people as if the government wants them to stay in perpetual poverty by design.

Beyond the justifications of exclusion, this chapter brings out the voices from the disabled students, some mothers and voices of those who happen to understand disabled people’s circumstances with regards to attitudes and actions taken by both society and
government. The manifestations of societal belief systems through attitudes toward disability fail to realize that disabled people also have a right to what the country can give its people. People living with disabilities are real people with families and needs like anybody else. How they happened to be in a situation they are in now, is of no consequence anymore because it cannot be reversed or substantially changed. Their voices, and some input from other non-disabled participants and my running commentaries that follow will help us to draw a number of lessons from disabled people’s experiences. The narratives in this chapter also include opinions from those who seem to understand the situations affecting disabled people and can reflect on it. The focus of my research is on what happens to the disabled students that might affect their chances of accessing higher and further education in Zimbabwe. Having observed how different sectors of the society’s attitudes impact on the education of disabled children generally, it becomes necessary to find out what impact these attitudes have on the disabled high school graduates from their own point of views. It is interesting to note that, while the disabled students in Zimbabwe are usually non-vocal on issues that affect them, given a conducive environment, the students have much insight from which to generate knowledge that could inform society. One important thing they all stress is that they are part of the society whose attitudes we are trying to analyze here. It was not surprising, therefore, that some of these disabled high school graduates were critical of their own families or even, at times, some of their fellow disabled students’ attitudes. This chapter looks at issues that concern poverty, funding, government systems and societal attitudes as experienced by both the graduates and the mothers who I interviewed. But before turning to what the families and the disabled graduates have to
say about what they believe are excuses society makes for justifying their actions that
disable them further, I want to point out what other participants (cultural experts,
government officers, college and university administrators and members of disability
associations) consider as possible constraints to the education of disabled students.

The question then is whether the constraints are just excuses or are unavoidable
situations. My research shows that there is much going on in terms of defending one’s
territory and pushing the blame elsewhere - a common tendency with the Homo sapiens!

Chivara Masunga, the cultural expert thinks that the main constraint blocking
disabled students’ progression in education is lack of suitable infrastructure. This was
evident even at buildings housing the Ministries of Education offices. For example, the
Mhlahlandlela Government Offices Building in Bulawayo has no working elevators or
ramps and yet students have to visit these offices to make applications for further
education. Masunga says:

If it is true or it is statistically true that there are lesser people up [at higher
and tertiary levels] that would it be because of the education system itself,
which is not probably at that level supportive of disabled people? Ya, like
Mhlahlandlela (Bulawayo Government complex) this building. Imagine
somebody, I have seen some of them coming for social welfare, they struggle.
At least those on crunches eventually manage but can you imagine someone
on a wheelchair? You can’t access this building because we have steps. The
lifts yes they were there once upon a time working but they are not working
now and the fellow can’t simply access the building, or the lecture theatre at
an educational institution, how does he get there? He can’t.
Tavuya Beta, another cultural expert who is also a renowned educationist internationally, attributed the constraints of poor access to further and higher education to infrastructure that he also says is designed for ‘normal’ people. He is critical of the admission structures and processes used to admit these students to institutions of higher learning. He says:

If you look at the facilities the school is providing to our system – to participate as normal human beings you find it is concentrated more on the normal boys and girls. Yes, when I took over [as a Vice Chancellor of Freedom University] I had already observed a number of constraints in the treatment of disabled students. Beginning with the admission process itself, then later on, in the teaching arrangement and the effort put in teaching all these students, there are a number of criticisms I already had in my mind. And then once I got there I started trying to remedy what I believed was unfair treatment of disabled people and I think I did quite a lot but not without personal sacrifice. There was determined resistance against change.

He goes on to say on admission:

I think it applies in all areas of disability but when they want to enroll they are not treated fairly by the teachers, by the administrators. Even coming to the writing of the examinations I did complain quite a lot to the administrators and other lecturers on how these students were treated and I decided that we should all have meetings to decide on the best ways of handling these problems and I think we came up with a number of things. It was systematic, compromising in our academic standards, some may say, but
making it also possible for them to work alongside their colleagues and perform to the best of their ability. Again I could enumerate a number of areas where we did try to do that. A disabled female student is disadvantaged more and has very slim chances of making it because, one she is a girl and two, she is disabled.

One of the disabled female graduates had similar experiences with access to Mbuya Nehanda university but was only rescued by political ‘arm’ twisting of the university authorities. She happens to be the only student among those I interviewed who made it to university level.

National Associations also made their observations regarding possible constraints for access to higher and further education for disabled students. Mufaro Hove of the Chiripamusasa Association thinks that these students are affected by two distinct but related constraints, poverty and a system that does not empathize. He says:

Coming to your issue, the issue of education, my heart is actually bleeding when it comes to education of people with disabilities. I would look at it generally. People would look at how costly the situation is for those in rural areas. But if you look at disability we look at assistive devices, one needs a wheelchair to go to school, one needs hearing aids to go to school for the deaf, one needs a walking stick for the visually impaired. But when you consider these issues, these are outside school fees. So before the child goes to school, we are talking of beyond ‘O’ level, we are looking already at impediments to accessing the education by this sector because of these issues I talked about.
Mufaro goes on to elaborate why lack of finance is a big constraint by itemizing even daily expenses that a disabled student has to meet and his/her counterpart who is non-disabled does not. He says:

The wheelchair now costs $350.00, and if that child is a day scholar, the child is wheeled to school and he/she needs an assistant to push the wheelchair. The child or student pays bus fare like now 50 cents, the wheelchair pays 50 cents, and the assistant pays 50 cents. That means for one trip to school just one way to school daily, it would cost this disabled student $1.00 more than the able bodied who would just pay 50 cents to access the same education you are talking about and does not have to buy a wheelchair.

Given the modern wheelchairs that are motorized it could be argued that an assistant to push the chair would not be needed and that would cut down the daily costs. But Mufaro is asking us to look at reality so that we can formulate our policies based on practicabilities. Even with motorized wheelchairs, barriers still exist, such as lack of ramps, and become major constraints to accessibility issues. Mufaro explains the situation in Zimbabwe:

We cannot afford the motorized wheelchairs because the maintenance of these wheelchairs needs people who are out of this country. Very few working people here can afford motorized wheelchairs that are very easy to handle on your own. You live independently, you can choose to go to the library on your own, but in this case one needs to be wheeled around. There is a cost. Then consider the issue of maneuvering going to the toilet, going to most of the libraries where there are steps the wheelchair bound student will
be provided with a serious challenge to go there for education. This is a constraint and a man-made barrier for educational access for our disabled students.

The respondent brings forward another important observation about the constraints that hearing impaired students face. I was equally surprised that the education system in Zimbabwe, advanced as it seems, is not aware of this immense constraint affecting hearing impaired high school graduates. As Mufaro observes:

But, the most serious aspect I want you to pick on is that of the hearing impaired. Zimbabwe as a country does not have tertiary education for the hearing impaired or the deaf. It doesn’t have. There is no one to teach them. As I speak right now, our universities do not have special teachers who can teach in sign language. But, what we have is the requirement for you to proceed from ‘O’ level to beyond is that you should have five ‘O’ levels including a language. And in this case, the language is sign language for the deaf. It is not there!

Mufaro laments the inadequate training teachers of the hearing impaired undergo. The education system, he thinks is not serious with its intent of including these students in the learning process. High qualifications for special education are conferred on would be teachers for these students but Mufaro thinks the emphasis is misplaced and that is an unquestionable constraint for any educational progression for deaf students. With regard to the training of special education teachers he says:

They are trained theoretically to manage such issues but practically even those who have gone through our university with a Bachelor of Education in
Special education can’t sign though some have Masters in Special Education but can’t sign. So I think it’s just a way of going through a theoretical aspect of special education missing out on the practical aspect. This is a challenge that may not be seen up there but is reality. Go to all our universities and check if they have handled one child, a deaf child. There is only one who is now late who went through the system not because teachers were able, but because she was able to lip read. That was the only one through lip reading.

To assist students from poor families and orphans, the government of Zimbabwe has introduced the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). Mufaro thinks that this noble idea with good intentions is not benefiting the people it is meant to cover. This is mainly at the implementation stage where decisions and monitoring are weak. He has observed rampart corruption with the implementation of this project. He notes:

   BEAM on paper is a very valuable policy. But, when you come to implementation, it’s a challenge because believe me or not, the beneficiaries are children of the wealthy. The policy should cater for the poor but the definition of poverty is defined by the committees in the schools where the children are coming from. And in terms of monitoring who is benefiting from this fact, the monitoring mechanisms are not there. Even if they are there probably there are no vehicles for anyone to go and check what is happening on the ground. So beneficiaries of BEAM, the majority of them, are from wealthy families. The sons of headmasters, the sons of teachers, the sons of counselors are the beneficiaries. When it comes to people with disabilities the challenge is that most of the schools, which also adds on to why we don’t
have this access that we talk about, happen to be boarding schools which are usually very far away and they are defined as special schools, Kapota, Danhiko, Emerald Hill for example. People have to come from Kariba\(^{32}\) to Emerald Hill. So you have to be a boarder to access that education. This in itself is another constraint for poor disabled students inspiring to access further education.

Vivienne Viki of Sekuru Madzore Association is in agreement with Mufaro Hove. Vivienne also cites the main constraint to education for people living with disabilities beyond high school in relation to where they live. They are concentrated in rural areas where facilities are either poor or even non-existent. Her organization tries to reduce this problem by sponsoring these students for boarding schools but its own finances are also limited.

Dzikamai Dzikiti of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture as well identifies finance as a big constraint for the government, which he says is willing to help the poor. He, however does not single out the physically disabled as needing any special consideration from the government point of view because the government has to look after everyone in a ‘fair’ manner. His main concern for the disabled students is the provision of assistive devices that the government cannot afford because of the prevailing economic challenges. Dzikamai remarks:

Yes, we are thinking of the gadgets that the disable people use including Braille exercise books and so on and hearing aids and what not. We had those at our centre but they become old and we need to replace them, only the funds

\(^{32}\) Kariba is a very long way from any of the schools or colleges which can accommodate disabled students
are difficult to come by but we are conscious that we need to provide for these disabled people in those areas. If we had the money we would hand them out because the disabled people, most of their guardians or parents cannot afford the equipment. So if government had the funds they would give out to the disabled because we know that the guardians and parents are unable to buy these equipments but government also cannot.

The respondent further says that the question of physical accessibility in schools has been a constraint in attracting physically disabled students especially those in wheelchairs. This problem is now being addressed through a regulation that was passed and which compels every new school building to be accessible to every student unlike in the past when this was not considered at all. Dzikamai says:

We now insist when building a classroom, we now insist they have a ramp where wheelchairs can go through. In the past there were just steps and we did not cater for the disabled but now the Ministry is very conscious and it caters for the disabled wherever is possible.

Timothy Garwe of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education also identifies infrastructural constraints as a barrier to smooth educational progression of people with physical disabilities. At policy level, he reports that his Ministry has put in place all legislation that will compel all their tertiary education institutions to comply with infrastructural regulations such as the provision of suitable washrooms and construction of ramps advocated by government. It is the Ministry of Construction and National Housing, which he reports as not fulfilling its obligation, because even where ramps have
been constructed, most of them have a gradient that is too steep for a wheelchair. He comments:

One particular policy that I know that exists is on infrastructure. On infrastructure it is now mandatory and a requirement that our entire infrastructure should be user friendly to people with disabilities. But there are limitations. There are certain categories of disabilities that are catered for like those who are on wheelchairs. You will find that most of our buildings cater for that. There is a requirement also that there should be a special toilet. You know our toilets have certain measurements for able bodied people but now there is a requirement that there should be another one that is wider to accommodate a wheelchair. That one is very clear and has been incorporated in all our Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) projects. Even the old projects it is now mandatory because in the past those institutions that did not have these requirements were screening people with disabilities.

Timothy agrees that the ramps are not of good standards but gives credit to his Ministry for the intention even if the ramps are not user friendly! He says, “Yes, the ramps are too steep but the intention is there. What is lacking now is the specialist who would now say this gradient is too steep, I think.” Another constraint identified by Timothy is that of lack of suitable facilities in some colleges encouraging the authorities to turn down some applications from physically disabled high school graduates such as the visually impaired. He however dismisses these as just limitations when he says:

But we have on enrollments a policy that nobody shall be turned away due to disability. There is a limitation as I was saying because it doesn’t spell out the
kind of disability. It is just a blanket policy for example if you go to Belvedere Teachers college we say that they shall not turn away anybody because of disability but there is no equipment for Braille for those who are visually challenged. Naturally they are turned away because the equipment is not there. It’s not because they are intentionally saying that but it is because of the facilities that do not exist inside that institution. I am saying there is a limitation although the policy provides that nobody can be turned away because of any disability.

While Timothy Garwe identifies infrastructure and lack of suitable facilities in his Ministry’s institutions, Shamiso Muchemwa thinks that lack of information of what happens to physically disabled high school graduates is the biggest constraint. It makes it difficult to plan or even come up with accommodation and support policies and services that speak to these students. When I asked her to explain if she thinks there is merit in stating that most disabled high school graduates do not go to tertiary and higher education she says:

It’s a bit difficult to really know because I don’t know whether after that level we do have possibilities of tracing what has happened to these students after O level. I don’t know whether Education, Sport, Arts and Culture have the means of tracing where these students will have gone to.

As already stated, the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture releases these graduates into the population and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education
cherry picks those they want and the bulk remains unattended. Asked if there exists policy catering for this problem, Shamiso replies:

This scenario of the ministries is true but I am not really very sure if there is any policy. I am not sure on that one. Perhaps the respective Permanent Secretaries maybe in the know. But really I think as you say the challenge we have is once they have written their ‘O’ levels they go to their homes and there is nobody really who says we had this child here for Form 4, what has happened to the student? I see this as a big constraint in the students’ education. But I also think that they are not the only ones affected because I think at the moment the system has so many ‘O’ level students whom it cannot absorb to go further than ‘O’ level.

Nyaradzo Zhou of the same Ministry identified current constraints for educational advancement of disabled students as the lack of funds by government to train special education teachers, especially after losing so many of them due to the economic downturn the country is going through. She says:

When government still had resources the special needs education was introduced in all schools. Unfortunately there was a high turnover of staff and those who are coming in now some have and others don’ t have special education qualifications. And some are not even interested. It’s not their priority to deal with people with disabilities. This severely hinders the education of our disabled students and is a possible constraint for their accessing further or higher education.
Another constraint Nyaradzo points out is the size of classes especially at primary and high school levels. While her education system advocates for ‘inclusion’, they have had to create special classes within schools where possible, but again personnel is a problem. Some schools are forced to have total ‘integration’ and given the size of the classes, the disabled student is most likely disadvantaged as she notes:

In most African countries like in Zimbabwe we have a teacher pupil ratio of 1 to 55. Then when you take a child with a disability and put that child there without enough support services you are actually excluding the child and maybe providing the child with more emotional problems and the child will be excluded. That is why we came up with this special unit and special classes as a way to get into inclusion, total inclusion. We obviously have financial and staff limitations in trying to implement our version of inclusive education.

Donna Reeve (2008, p. 214) says, “Inclusion in schools will produce future generations of people who are accustomed to having disabled friends and colleagues.” But Wilson and Lewiecki-Wilson (2001) (eds.) warn us to be more careful when implementing inclusion especially at higher level of learning. They advise:

Inclusion of the disabled in higher education, as well as in workplace, especially when it requires adapting environments, testing situations, kinds of work, and so on, is fraught with anxiety and negotiations. ... Inclusion can very quickly trigger cries of reverse discrimination, exclusion, or injury from the seemingly displaced, nondisabled group that identifies itself as the norm.
Concepts of universality and the norm, then, are deeply embedded in how a society defines, talks, and writes about disability *per se*, and these concepts play a significant role in more general sedimented discourses and institutional practices circumscribing the place for the disabled (pp. 5-6).

This shows that any inclusion program has to be implemented carefully because there are many variables that have to be taken into consideration. The above two quotations speak directly to Nyaradzo’s concerns about implementing programs that are not ‘home grown’.

Tatenda Besa of Freedom University renders limited constraints on the student once the student has made it to university. He is proud to have transformed an institution that was built without consideration of disabled students into a more disability friendly and accessible university. This has been achieved through making roads, halls of residence, libraries and classrooms easily accessible to disabled students. Unlike most high schools that do not have adequate infrastructure, he says they had to:

...as an afterthought because when the university started no one ever imagined that they would take students with wheelchairs, the ramps were not there so we had to start putting ramps in halls of residence, the library, and various lecture theaters and so forth, the idea was to become friendlier to people on wheelchairs.

In addition, the university has established a resource centre that is well equipped to take care of the diverse types of disabilities the institution may attract. Tatenda says the following about the resource centre:
It's a learning resource centre for students with disabilities so it has got all these supporting gadgets plus a special library in Braille form. With certain materials the officers we hire translate some of the materials. It caters for all types of disabilities. It covers everything. Then we also have some officers who support some of them especially those with knowledge of Braille so that while they write in Braille someone must translate it to what we can read. We have certain special equipment that we have purchased for them so that we try and make learning easier for the students including IT related type of equipment. They have computers. We even at some point installed for those who are blind but can hear, the Microsoft dictation software.

Tatenda reiterated that the problem he sees affecting disabled students’ access to university education is the lack of ‘A’ level schools that can attract students with disabilities. Most of them are not adequately equipped with facilities suitable for such students. The only area that he identifies as a constraint on the university’s part is that of their failure to admit disabled students for science courses that involve practical work. He observes:

The only problem area where we have found very difficult to admit students is in the sciences because they are not in a position to independently do practicals which are a major component in the training. So it becomes very difficult to offer them such courses which becomes a limitation on our part.

This boils down to just an excuse by the University to justify the exclusion of potential science students who are disabled.
Mothers’ Voices

While government officers, cultural experts, and administrators of associations and higher education institutions viewed constraints from a technical point of view, the mothers I interviewed express disappointment with some excuses used by bureaucrats to justify denying their children educational opportunities. These mothers show a keen interest in their disabled children’s education or at least them being given a fair chance to prove themselves. Mrs Kumalo, mother of Iswear who has three disabled children, chronicles her worst experience with societal attitudes when her son started to go for secondary education. Iswear had attended primary school in their rural home and had transferred to Harare to stay with the rest of the family. School fees for a mother abandoned by the husband for giving birth to disabled children was hard to get but she was advised to contact the Department of Welfare for assistance. This is what she experienced:

Iswear started school back home for his primary education and came for secondary education here in Harare. Fees were my hardest hurdle. People advised me to go to the Welfare department but I could not believe what I experienced. After completing all the documentations including that the child was now attending school here in Harare the officer in charge refused to process the application because his birth certificate indicated that his home area was Mutasa which is in Manicaland. Then I queried the logic of going to Mutasa to apply for money to use here in Harare. The officer then tore all my application papers and threw them into a dust bin. Both my child and I started crying in disbelief. We left with that bad experience. The sister could not
believe it. We were so poor that my boy children used to put on their sister’s blouses and shoes to school. The elder brother was them staying with my mother. The following day my daughter took her brother back to the Welfare Department and said no word to them but just cried. She then asked if it was policy that disabled children do not go to school. Moved by the plea of a young girl fighting for the rights of her disabled young brother, the authorities then approved that Iswear get ‘limited’ help for his education up to Form 4.

Another thing that worries Mrs Kumalo is the constant accusation by society that she gives birth to disabled children because she uses herbs during her pregnancies, an accusation she denies. She however, takes comfort from her children accepting the situation as it is despite what people say to them about her. She says:

My children thank me for accepting them as they are. They do not hold me responsible for their disabilities. As for me, I just said to myself ‘who was supposed to be given these children by God?’ People in the neighborhood refer to my family as a family of disabled people since I am also disabled and I always say to them yes and the disabled children are mine.

Mrs Shava, the mother of Shingayi experienced double prejudices against her child’s education from the uncaring society. Given the intelligence the little girl displayed, the parents wanted her to go to a ‘normal’ school but they faced significant prejudicial hurdles. After the Head of one school finally accepted the child his school, a higher authority only referred to as Ms Jacobs, a white lady, refused to endorse her acceptance citing lack of facilities. Mrs Shava recalls:
Yes, they told us that they did not have facilities for such children. We were deeply disappointed because we knew that the government was encouraging the integration of disabled and non-disabled children that was advertised even on national television. The headmaster had accepted but Ms Jacobs refused. To this day we do not like her.

In this case, besides the child’s disability as a possible barrier to her education, the parents could not help thinking that Ms Jacobs decision was in addition, racially motivated given the colonial experience of the black population in Zimbabwe as discussed in chapter 2.

It is clear that these mothers wish their children could be afforded the same opportunities as any other child. Their wishes are not without constraints. The most pressing constraint for them is financial. The poor background of these families makes it extremely hard for them to raise enough money to sustain the requirements of both the education system and the day to day upkeep of their families. The society, given its mainly negative attitude towards disabilities, is not quick to assist with this financial situation. Both Mrs Kumalo and Mrs Shava cite finance as their biggest worry in as far as the education of their children is concerned. Mrs Kumalo, talking about Iswear’s education, says: ‘fees were my biggest problem’. Mrs Shava also referring to her child Shingayi who had passed her ‘A’ level examinations adds: “our next huddle was fees for her university education.”

The main constraint that the mothers feel confront them, however, is that of attitudes of school authorities who refuse to accept their children on grounds of disability. While government policy on paper stipulates ‘education for all,’ they soon discovered
that, ‘all’ in the minds of the implementers does not include their disabled children. Mrs Shava, reiterates this point when she says:

The same happened to us again as what we experienced with Ms Jacobs with access to high school when it was time for Shingie’s progression to university. After she finished her ‘A’ levels, the authorities at the University of Mbuya Nehanda turned her down on the same grounds of lack of facilities and that computer laboratories which they alleged had on tables which were too high for her.

The most interesting part is that it was from the same university she has just graduated courtesy of some ‘arm twisting’ of the university authorities by higher powers to admit her for higher education. While Mrs Shava is citing her experience with an integrated school for secondary education, Mrs Chatikobo, the mother of Dambudzo had similar experiences with an institution established to give access to education for people with disabilities. She says:

After his primary education we had to look for a place for his secondary education. It was not easy. His father approached a special school in Ruwa but they turned him down on grounds that he was not fully independent and the school had no manpower or facilities to help him out.

**Disabled Graduates’ Voices**

The frustrations these mothers face with government authorities is also experienced by the disabled graduates themselves who see their situation as a way society, and government systems in particular, try to justify engrained societal belief systems and
exclusion. They see these excuses as not being fair and just to them because of their disabilities. I then asked these graduates what they believe to be the main causes of their disabilities and their responses are plausible. They dismiss these excuses as manipulative and cite poverty, lack of employment opportunities, harsh and insensitive regulations and general societal attitudes as the main causes of their disabilities.

Iswear Kumalo, the youngest of the Kumalo disabled siblings who are all disabled together with their mother, blames poverty as contributing to poor attitudes he has experienced as a disabled student. Negative societal attitudes are displayed even through there are government departments that are set up to assist the poor and the disabled. He recalls his experience with the department of Social Welfare that his mother also narrates when he says:

Yes, even at school for you to register at the department of Social Welfare as a disabled person is an uphill struggle. They toss you up and down. I am a good example all my school life despite my disability I have never had adequate assistance for fees from the Welfare department. But surprisingly some students from normal families get assistance. I used to be expelled time and again from school because I could not afford school fees. I tried to explain that my parents were in our rural home but still they did not approve. But they should have qualified me based on my obvious physical condition.

During his high school, Iswear recalls how even the school authorities were at times so insensitive to his condition that they tried to force him to do subjects that were obviously beyond his physical capabilities. This is an example of how societal attitudes manifest themselves through school curricula. He recalls:
Yes, especially when I was doing Form one. I was told to do building and I told them that this practical subject is very difficult to do for me because of my disability. I cannot stand for more than fifteen to twenty minutes and I don’t think I can manage to go there and fetch some water taking those bricks and layout especially during practical work. So after a determined appeal to the school authorities, they then decided to take me out from that class that was doing building and changed me to another class that was doing woodwork.

But Iswear did not suffer alienation from his fellow students both during his primary education and secondary education. He attributes this friendly environment from his schoolmates to have prepared him to deal with negative societal attitudes. About his school life he says:

It was ok. I was in that school where there were no other guys who were like me. I am talking with reference to my type of disability. They would just treat me like anybody else so that I was just like anyone else. That is why I can have enough challenge to fight for better life because I am like anybody else. Because of those people especially my schoolmates they treated me just like anybody else. I really appreciate the way they used to treat me. Even from primary up to secondary.

Iswear’s emphasis on ‘just like anybody else’ shows how deep the society has conditioned him to think that he is different from other people and would not normally deserve such treatment. It comes to him as a surprise that he does not expect. But as an
adult and being the sole breadwinner for the family, Iswear continues to experience the very poor attitudes he faced from government authorities when he was young, the time he and his family were denied financial assistance by the Department of Social Welfare that would have enabled him to go to school. Employment levels are currently very low in Zimbabwe given the economic meltdown the country has suffered in the last decade. High school graduates like Iswear are hard hit, especially those who are disabled as well. Iswear attributes his failure to go beyond high school to lack of finances and also the fact that he was the only member of the family who could bring food to the table and take care of other family members. People in his situation revert to the informal sector for self-employment but Iswear has experienced insurmountable obstacles and especially those emanating from government systems. He has decided to engage in importing and selling cars for a living as he explains:

Even when I need to go and import a car they would not accept disability documentation in my passport but they need a letter from a specialist doctor who will state that I am disabled. These doctors are very expensive and yet they will just agree with what is in my passport.

This clearly shows that the ‘systems’ would happily exploit the very communities who are struggling to make ends meet. A non-disabled person would not need a letter from anybody to be able to do the same trading that Iswear is involved in. Iswear continues to attribute his misfortunes and lack of support from society to disability and poverty:

Here, for us the disabled especially with our society, and if you are again from a poor family you are never given human respect. But if you are self
sufficient doing your own thing even if you are disabled you gain their respect. That is what I noticed. This is why I said to you I do not have many problems with the community because just owning and driving a car being disabled is enough. They will respect me. For some it is like a miracle to see me drive a car. They wonder how I got the car in the first place given that the country does not support the disabled. You cannot even start a project with the assistance of the government.

Shingayi Shava, popularly known as Shingie, is one of the physically disabled high school graduates who managed access to higher education. She has just graduated from a local university although not without addressing hurdles. She, however, attributes her success to her own attitude towards the society. She gives credit to her family who value her as any other child and for the development of a feeling of self-worth she now has. She says this about her family:

My family has been good because like they would just treat me like any other person. Not treating me like someone special or pity me. As you have seen I was busy cleaning the house when you arrived and I feel good about it.

It was equally impressive for me to find Shingayi doing household chores voluntarily. As in the case of Iswear, Shingayi finds it interesting and rewarding that her family treats her ‘like anybody else’. This shows that it is very likely that, this type of treatment for disabled people is not common outside the confines of the family. At the university, Shingayi decries the kind of personnel who are in charge of the disability resource centers. She cites these personnel’s lack of experience with disability issues as a
hindrance. This is what happens when the so-called “normal” people think they are the ones equipped to ‘help’ disabled people. Pointing to the resource centre at her university Shingayi remarks:

But it seems as if the people who were running it, who were responsible for it are people who have no idea of disability. It would need someone with disabilities to understand the problems another disabled person is encountering. Yes [having non-disabled personnel in charge of disability facilities] is totally different. It is like you going to be a representative of people with disabilities when you have no experience [as a disabled person]. You do not even understand their shortfalls and whatever. So that’s how it was like. They wouldn’t understand the limit like the certain limit for us so it was really difficult and, you know, people had different attitudes. Some of them would accept some of them just did not understand. Sometimes it is not their problem but it’s because they need to be educated about how to interact with people with disabilities since they do not have lived experiences themselves.

Besides having no experience with disability issues, Shingayi thinks that some of the staff resent disabled students and others look down upon them. When asked about the attitudes of resource centre staff towards disabled students she says:

They had different attitudes. Some of them resentment, some of them just feel disabled people are inferior and just looking down upon them. But we are all the same isn’t it?
I then asked her, “What about a person like you who would excel in class, would that change their attitudes towards you because you are doing well in class?” Her response was:

Normally as for me I did not have a problem because people I dealt with they did not have a problem with me. They would just treat me as normal. Sometimes it also boils down to what are you willing to accept – do you want people to pity you? If you want people to pity you they will pity you and they will just leave you like that. So they just treat you the same. Some will pity you some will resent you just like that. As for me if they resent me I will just laugh!

Shingayi’s circumstances show how the family background and upbringing together with instilling a sense of self-confidence can also help enhance a disabled person’s ability to navigate this web of negative societal attitudes toward them. Combined with her natural intelligence and willpower to be like anybody else, it is no wonder Shingayi managed to get access to university education which, for most disabled students would be a pipe dream. Shingayi also points out the importance of lived experiences and advises the powers that be to think carefully when staffing departments for disabled students.

Lovemore Dube is a double arm amputee, who is also an orphan. He lost his parents when he was very young and was looked after by his sister. His fortune ended when the sister got married and it became evident that the support would not continue. He then turned to music recording as a source of income, but that was not without problems. Going beyond high school was not a choice available for him anymore, given the
family’s financial standing. As for societal attitudes towards disabled people, Lovemore acknowledges some problems with the society but does not have kind words for some of his fellow disabled schoolmates. He says:

Some of them [disabled students] do not want to play with normal people.
They just want to do their own thing shying away from the non-disabled.
They do not want to go out there and explore what is outside there. Me I go.
They then complain of discrimination and yet they are the ones discriminating.

Without the general community members talking to him directly, Lovemore senses that they do not trust him and are not sure of what he does for a living. As for their attitudes, he says:

Some of them [in the community] may think these guys [Lovemore and his friends] are thieves or something and that is the problem only in this community because we do not go to work, and we don’t have normal jobs. So our jobs when there is no electricity like this we just go and sit by the road side. Most of those who say bad things about me are usually small children not big ones. Small children 3 or 2 years who would say for example “look he has no hands” or something like that.

Lovemore should have noticed that children are a vehicle through which family values are espoused. I witnessed the same humiliation of disabled students during my colonial school days when it was common in our rural home school to see disabled children humiliated in public, including on the way to school. Some fellow non-disabled children and even some adults at times, would make jokes of disabled children. Klasing
(2007, p.103) reports that in rural India, disabled children endure “repeated confrontation with jeering and ridicule [resulting in these children experiencing a sense of shame and disgrace] as they [internalize] the powerful and dominant social voice of stigma and humiliation.” Lovemore lives with such a situation on daily basis. His biggest problem, however, is with employers, who he says have very negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. He indicates that:

We are also discriminated against for jobs because of disability even if we have the necessary qualifications. So most disabled people are forced to be dependent on other people. I would recommend that schooling and healthcare for disabled people must be free because they cannot afford alone. That is what government should do.

Trymore Mugodi, was born disabled. His mother, Mrs Mugodi had a confession to make about the current condition of her child as a result of the influence she got from society. He was born with two clubfeet. The parents managed to have one foot operated on, and it was successfully straightened out. Following pressure from family and society, the parents did not take Trymore for a second surgery, which could have resolved his disability completely. I asked her what answer she would give her son today if he asked her why the other foot was not operated on since the first one was successful? At this point she started crying, saying:

I would not have an answer for him. Our problem was ‘traditional’. We all thought the child should not repeat the procedure again pachiboyi chedu (according to our traditional culture). Since he could then walk we decided to leave it like that. The community was on our side and they also discouraged
us from going for the second surgery. It was not the question of funds. We were able to raise funds for that. But it was mainly people’s opinions that persuaded us not to go ahead. If we had done so, people would not have known that he was born disabled. We regret what we did but we were under pressure from the family.

It is evident that societal attitudes persuaded the parents to stop a procedure that probably would have changed the child’s life for the better. Societal attitudes towards Trymore’s disability are likely the reasons why he has been driven into isolation. Though a devoted Christian, he has no friends and he does not want to befriend anybody either. He prefers to relate only to his family because members of his community do not seem to understand his position and for him, they seem to be in a class of their own. He says:

I have a time to talk to people, I have a time to do my own things. Most of the people are in the high class that is why I do not have friends in these schools. Because when I look at myself and I look at these people I don’t think I can qualify to be their friend. On the other hand some will feel pity for me and I do not like it either. Some people will say my mother made me disabled I feel angry about that because she was not expecting me to be what I am today but this is just the will of God. I cannot point a finger towards my mother for what I am, because she is my mother. Some people can say so but I feel angry if I hear that.

Trymore is angry with people who blame his mother for his disability, a belief that is so deep seated in the Zimbabwean belief system, especially among men who constantly
think women are to blame for disabilities. It seems Trymore was driven into isolation because of the society’s attitudes towards his disability especially the way the society blamed his mother for his condition. It clearly shows that trying to identify the causes of disability does not benefit anybody, especially, the disabled persons. Trymore is trying to put this message across though probably in self-inflicted isolation. An interesting observation that I noted is that Trymore is consciously aware that he has no friends and sees no problem with it. Among all my graduate interviewees, he is the only one who does not value education so much, but says he is in it to gain minimum skills to start his own business. He has his father as his role model and says:

> My father did not go to school to be a dressmaker but just saw others do those things when he was working in industry long back ago and now he is a good dressmaker. I can also do the same.

This clearly shows how family values can have lasting impact on a child.

Mandla Gumede, a successful high school graduate who would normally get access to a university education, has not been spared the frustration encountered by disabled students. He made an application for access to the Chipinge Institute of Liberal Arts in his city but was turned down without giving him reasons why. He was not even offered an interview or a qualifying examination to show that the university had some interest in him. He says:

> In the meantime I am still looking for a place at University level. I applied at Chipinge Institute of Liberal Arts but I got a negative reply. I do not know why and I have not asked why they gave me a negative answer. They did not
invite me for interviews but I suspect the letter I attached on my application from my High school confirming my disability influenced their decision.

Mandla is not surprised with this kind of attitude and outcome. He says that even his own parents, let alone the community he grew up in, never believed that he was capable of achieving anything given his disability. His childhood community did not believe that he was capable of surviving school life and make the grades. Even his parents were constantly debating whether he should go to school given his disability and that is why he started school at 8 years old. Of his community and family, he thinks, “They looked at me as somebody who is disabled. They were not sure if I was normal in terms of mental capacity.” Mandla has fought hard to be recognized intellectually from primary school days to this day. He has also surprised his teachers, parents and classmates with his achievements including recently when one of his classmates confessed to him about it. Mandla says:

One of them, my friends, one day came to me and he said, Mandla, I have something to say. And I said what? When I saw you the first day I thought maybe you do not know anything. And I said why? And he said the way you are. And I said so now what do you think? He said you are like everybody here, we are all the same but in terms of learning you are actually better than some of us.

This was the first time he got such positive and honest compliments from a fellow student but the general public still looks down upon him.
Gladys Patsika tries to live as independently as is practically possible but she still needs assistants for routines she cannot manage alone. It is through these assistants that she realizes how society is so detached from the wellbeing of people living with disabilities. She has realized almost without exception that these assistants are in it just for the money without giving a ‘human touch’. She explains:

As long as you are having an assistant who really understands and is not just in it for the money it is quite ok. But you can tell whether the assistant is in it for money or not through their behavior. Sometimes you see them when they do something you can tell that this person is not doing this whole heartedly but just doing it for the sake of being paid at the end of the month. My personality could also be a factor but if you get stressed by this person, things are going to get worse and worse.

Regarding societal attitudes, as she grew up, Gladys recalls her mother telling her that she was under pressure from other family members not to fall pregnant again in case a repeat of such a misfortune reoccurs. With other people who are not relatives Gladys says:

Well sometimes you get treated so specially special that you feel out of place. Sometimes it’s not nice. Yes, and sometimes they make those comments when you are there like one who said ‘Oh what God does sometimes is so sad. How can God make such a beautiful child to look like that?’. At times they comment on why my siblings relate so closely to me as if to say they will be contaminated. When I get to think of it now, I don’t think it is very necessary for them to do that.
What frustrates Gladys more is the lack of sincerity the society generally, and government systems, in particular have. Their rhetoric is not supported by actions as she explains:

The first thing and still is affecting me even now is how we are not really accepted. Even if people try to advocate for us, you can tell sometimes and ask yourself why they even bother when they actually don’t mean it. Yes, it’s a song that is sung all the time that [we should] say out what [we] want to say express yourselves and you will be heard. But, even if we do it, it is a waste of time. I don’t know what it will take society to really adjust to us. No matter how much you try, push yourself into the society to be part of it, at the end of the day you are pushed back into that cluster of yours.

These are strong words from someone who is impacted by societal attitudes on a daily basis. She strongly feels that she is not accepted by society because of her disability. Society is not paying attention to the needs of disabled people. Is it any wonder that even when she got access to further education, choices for both the school and courses to take were made for her and she had no say in what she wanted to do? So in her case there was no free access to further education but a conditional progression based on societal attitudes.

Gift Mbambo, a gifted musician was also not spared negative attitudes by his community as he grew up. At home, the neighbors did not want him to play with their children for fear of ‘infection’. Why society should see a disability as an infection is probably because of the indigenous belief system that attaches causality to all disability
cases and infection from the mother is one of them and the belief that it can be contagious. He says:

I faced a lot of problems with the community like our neighbors. Children were told not to play with somebody like me because they thought it was sort of an infection. It would infect them you see. So whenever my friends would come to me when they go home they knew that they were going to be beaten up by their parents. So they would hide to come to me then we would play. So basically most of my life I would play all alone. So that is why when I was at school, going home for the holiday I was never really excited about it, because I had no friends. Although other children wanted to play with me but the elders would not allow them and my parents did nothing about it either.

This kind of environment affected Gift’s perception of community living and about himself in the process. He grew up with confusion and had a number of important questions not answered for him as he recalls:

Growing up was really painful because I was very young and that is when I realized that I was different from everyone. During that time, and not now of cause, during that time as a child I started isolating myself because of what people said about me. But, the way I was told I was not told by the neighbors or my friends. I was asking my mum what is wrong with me? Why is it that I cannot have friends? So she tried by all means to explain to me. When I understood what it was I was very worried about it. Even the way my relatives, like my auntie – I had a problem especially with my auntie my
father’s sister. They would say things, not good things in front of me like saying to my father I wasn’t theirs.

He also recalls the problems he had when he started pre-school education in his home town at a school of non-disabled pupils. He became an ‘eyesore’ for the community that did not appreciate disability. The whole environment was not positive for him as he says:

So I had also gone there to do my pre-school but I couldn’t manage because you know, I think it was also a matter of me being the only person who was disabled. They couldn’t cope, I couldn’t cope. When I say they I mean teachers, students and the community also.

Gift attributes society’s negative attitudes to lack of awareness and experience. Speaking of the people who influenced his father to be negative towards him he says:

Inexperience and lack of awareness is like a rich man. A rich man will never believe that there is somebody who is poor. It takes time for him to get used to that situation until they do not have that money then they experience the situation. So that is why I say I don’t have that anger against them. I kind like feel pity for them because they do not have that knowledge. If they had that knowledge probably things would be different.

Now that Gift is grown up and understands disability, he is less worried but says he still experiences the same negative vibes but now in a more sophisticated manner.

Ntombana Zhangazha, a high school graduate who is repeating Form 4 after failing to make it the first time, says her experience with negative attitudes has been
mainly with her life in high school and children in her community. While she had no problem with integrating with non-disabled students at high school she witnessed some resentments of disabled students by some non-disabled students. She observes:

For me it was fine. They used to encourage us to work and play together with the able bodied students. But some able bodied students shunned away from those who were severely disabled and who would need some assistance. The boarding master did not help the situation either. He just watched injustice happening and this led to a bad feeling about the school among the disabled students.

Concerning her local community at home, Ntombana noticed that people always laughed at the way she walks, although they never said a word about it. They would just look at her and start laughing. Like in the case of Lovemore noted above, it was mostly the young children who would verbalise what they experienced about her disability. Ntombana says:

I would be saying to myself why glare at me? Do they not know a person with disabilities? Adults would just stare at me but small children would draw the attention of other children to ‘see’ a disabled person. But, I dismiss that as being from children who do not know what they are doing.

What Ntombana may not realise is that children are a window of family values. Children will be reflecting something they get from elders. They get their values from home and a child’s action is a reflection of those family values and beliefs. Of course the child will not be aware that he/she is carrying family values with him/her. It is because
the family would be saying such things that the children repeat outside their home environment. They do not all of a sudden come up with such things from nowhere. They are a good reflection of the family values and attitudes and in turn those of the society they live in.

Speaking of a career, Ntombana had wanted to be a nurse all the time but she was discouraged by both the family members and the general community because of her physical disability although she felt she could do it. This is the same attitude portrayed by some schools and universities giving excuses that suitable facilities are not available for them. Consequently, these authorities and family members discourage disabled students from developing and pursuing their areas of interest simply because of the society’s own biased assessments of the physical conditions of these students.

Njabulo Ndubiwa works as a video film producer for his former high school. He has learnt to cope with his disability through interactions with other disabled children but, has issues with the general public’s attitudes towards disabled people. His main concern is that he is always looked down upon especially with people who do not know his background. Reflecting on his friends, he says:

I know one thing for sure that I really learnt from being with other children with disabilities, they helped me to accept who I am because there comes time when we may discuss about our disabilities and for an outsider you will probably think that something is going wrong or we are about to fight. But actually, we play that way so that I think, we help each other to accept who we are. So now I joke about my disability which does not even affect me. I do
not appreciate similar jokes from people who are not disabled though because
I think they may not mean well.

Besides his mother constantly pushing for his rights and recognition in the family,
other relatives and the father never saw value in him until he started working and was
able to travel long distances alone without needing an assistant. He still finds that using a
wheelchair for most people symbolizes incapability or inability to do anything
meaningful. He has to prove himself always for the public to accept him:

I think people still have got an attitude especially when they see somebody in
a wheelchair, probably they will be expecting me to be in a corner begging
for some money. It all comes back to them having confidence in you. So what
I normally do when I see that people have a bit of an attitude to me, I move
towards them and show a bit of confidence, show a bit of challenge. I will
challenge them. And probably I will start talking to them (asking) what they
are doing in life because I know they will also ask back what I also do. So
when I tell them I do video filming and I can do graphics and I work at this
institution they start realizing that, no this is a different person than we
thought was. So that is what I normally do. But, yes some people still have
attitudes and some have tension towards people with disabilities.

The societal attitudes have also affected Njabulo’s relationship with his girlfriend to the
extent that they have agreed on a ‘time out’ so that she can first understand him well
without listening too much to how the public evaluates him, and that seems to work in his
favor.
Thandiwe Velapi, who is now an administrative assistant at her former high school, recounts her experience during her primary education at a school that was specializing in educating disabled children. The school authorities did not understand that, being young children, Thandiwe and some of her schoolmates had some limitations in what they could do or manage. She says:

I never liked it at all, the primary school experience. I was at a boarding school from Grades 1 to 7 and I was never with my parents. And the way they looked after us, I never liked it. They used to beat us for minor offenses such as failing to do something, and as you know, we were young we would ‘wet’ ourselves and we would be in trouble for that. And if you go to the dining room late you won’t have anything because it will be finished. You know when you are a child and then you have to stay hungry how it feels.

Thus, the attitudes of her primary school authorities still shock her to this day. Thandiwe has continued to meet societal negative attitudes even after graduating from high school. She found that prospective employers have such negative attitudes against people with disabilities that she had to come back to her former high school for employment. She goes on to say:

So I did not know what to do. I just found myself stranded until I came back here it was so difficult. I tried to look for a job somewhere in other companies but they wouldn’t accept me. They never gave me the reasons why they could not accept me because I had good qualifications but you would see with their response. They would treat you like a baby like they ask \textit{where do you stay} and I would say I am staying near the General hospital. Then they would say
ok we are very soon going to open a company (branch) near there and that will be easy for you. Just lying to you. You try all of them but still they would say that we will call you back or we are going to open a company near your place, just to wish you away. And then you know that it is because of my physical condition. The same attitude you get if you want to go for further education in some of these colleges.

Magugu Mtombeni has been living independently [not with her family] since graduating from high school but because of her disability, she also needs assistants as part of her everyday living. It is through these assistants that Magugu experiences some attitudes towards disabled people that the society holds. She has not been able to maintain an assistant for more than six months at a time. Her experience is that it becomes worse if the assistants are relatives regardless of how much you pay them. She thinks she could probably have also exacerbated the situation through her own expectations. I then asked Magugu if it is an attitude issue with these assistants that could be the source of her problem to which she responds:

Yeah, that one is there. As I mentioned that I need an assistant all the time, I am actually living independently. I stay at my own house that I am renting. I have got an assistant who is helping me. I have had assistants, you know, because I left home in 2001 up to now so I have been living independently. You can get a person who helps you whom you pay but at the end of the day, you know, I can’t even count the number of people I have changed. Because later attitudes sink in. It could be from me or the other person, one has to change. The fact that I need a person, I just have to have one. But you keep
changing because later on maybe if a person stays with you for about six months some say they want to get married, some will tell you I am going to South Africa or going to Botswana I have got something you know, something like that. But, the truth is they cannot stand living with disabled people. With time their true attitudes begin to surface. Attitudes are there.

**Analysis**

The foregoing accounts from the high school graduates indicate a long range of factors caused by societal attitudes that impact on their progression and/or access to higher and further education in Zimbabwe. Their experiences include government systems and its personnel, school authorities, prospective employers, neighbors, other disabled people, assistants and even family members. Study participants such as Gladys reports of only rhetoric in terms of supporting disabled students by different sectors of the society but sees no action to back it up. In addition, Gladys and Magugu experience poor attitudes from the very people who must assist them to lead normal life, their assistants.

Iswear, Ntombana, Thandiwe and Gift all were affected by how the school authorities handled disability issues, while prospective employers had their share in looking down upon them. One disempowering factor, especially for Mandla, Lovemore and Njabulo, has been lack of recognition of their abilities or, even at early stages, their potentials, by society just because of the negative attitudes some people have toward disability and disabled people.

Ntombana and Lovemore’s input shows us how societal attitudes can manifest themselves through small children. Children’s behaviors can be read as barometer for family and community values. These two students reported torment from the jeers and
laughters about their disabilities from small children with a net effect of lowering the students’ self-esteem. Undoubtedly, all these experiences have a bearing on the potential of these students gaining access to higher or further education. Most of these are direct barriers such as government and school attitudes, lack of finances and lack of family support. Others are psychological such as lack of recognition and low self-esteem by the students themselves.

One of the most disturbing causes of disability, that some participants articulate, is that disability is a curse. It is a punishment especially for the family or community in which this disabled child is born. Disability in most Zimbabwean families, because of their indigenous belief system, is not accepted lightly because, it is interpreted as the anger of God meted on them. This further emphasizes the application of indigenous knowledge framework to understand disability issues among Zimbabwean indigenous people. As a result, the child never gets full acceptance even into adulthood. Thus, to this day some people in Zimbabwe strongly believe that having a disabled child is God’s way of giving punishment and that such an act by God is one cause of disability. Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association extends this belief to the birth of twins where it was (but not so now) also considered a curse just like the birth of a disabled child.

Because disability is conceptualized as a curse or punishment from God, Vivienne Viki of the Sekuru Madzore Association informs us that, where such a child survives, he/she will be burdened sometimes with a name that shows displeasure in the family and the society makes it worse. Names like Chisorochengwe (Leopard’s head) or Maideyi (Is this what you wanted to happen?) are used. Beta singles out albinos and considers them
to be believed to be a result of a curse, although he says there are other forms of disabilities that are also in this category. He says:

Yes, I think the easiest example would be the albino. Yes, the albino is a special type where the family would shun away because of the type of disability or because of the thought of how it came about. I think in most families or in many families, that was regarded this way, as a curse, yes and so the treatment for that type of individual differs from the general because it’s a special case. But, there are other types where in fact families regarded as punishment as well, for what they did and this individual is a punishment and they are being punished so it has got to be treated in that way. This was a punishment for the family and not the disabled child.

Treatment, according to Beta, is the act of killing the disabled child at its infancy. Families with disabled children, according to this custom, have choices made for them by traditional specialists and, in the past, this would be acceptable. There was, and still to some extent today (covertly), that disrespect for the lives of disabled children. Shamiso Muchemwa of the Higher and Tertiary Education Ministry has no doubt that such disrespect for lives of disabled children still exist to this day in the Zimbabwean belief system although no one will openly admit it. She attributes such negative attitudes of society towards disabled people to the notion that disability is still considered a curse and, therefore, not worthy of respect. She says:

I think one gets the impression that as I said earlier we are a nation not ready for these children. We are not ready for these children from a point of view of
customs it is a curse. That is how people look at it. [Society asks], how do you end up giving birth to a deaf child, to an albino, etc?

Joseph Mukamuri of the same Ministry also blames culture for believing that a disability is a curse for the family. It is a lifelong belief that, even with modern understanding of disability, most Zimbabwean people still uphold. Tatenda Besa of Freedom University is baffled that even some policy makers strongly believe that disability is a curse and not a natural biological happening. He wonders what then guides them for policy formulation if they truly believe that disabled students are worthless.

The search for causes and constraints is a big concern for families and the disabled community. They see it as a way society is trying to find justifications so as to segregate against people living with disabilities. It does not sit well with me either. The underlining assumptions that disability is ‘caused’ and, therefore, not a natural occurrence is worrisome. It gives emphasis on disability being a ‘problem’ and not something to celebrate or accept. Most Zimbabweans, and possibly most African cultures, view disabilities with a different lens from how most of the people in the Western world will look at it. This research, however, is about disability issues in Zimbabwe, and in this context, disability has causation and does not just happen which worries me more. This then justifies a discussion on what causes disabilities in Zimbabwe. Respondents generally attributed disability to a curse, a punishment from spiritual powers for offenses of commission or omission the family would have been guilty of. Some even go further to associate disability with witchcraft or misuse of traditional herbs by pregnant women. A substantial number thinks that it could be a result of genetic mutations and, therefore, carried from generation to generation as outline by
Masunga who informs us that the Ndebele people sometime killed their disabled children at birth to stop the reoccurring of the same gene mutation in future. Whatever the causes, understanding the social meaning of disabilities is complex and probably formed from a combination of other factors that are not usually spoken of.

Disability is, therefore, a phenomenon most people rarely understand or grudgingly accept. The main reason is that most people who attempt to research on disability and to draw inferences from their research work, lack lived experiences that are very necessary to articulate disability issues convincingly. I am thus putting more emphasis on the voices of those respondents who have lived experiences for what they perceive or understand to be attributes to their disabilities. I find these results interesting and educational. They are not new findings, per se, but the context in which they are given is intriguing. What we need to understand is that it is not so much about what non-disabled people want or expect to be the causes of disability, it is what disabled people experience to be the causes of their disabilities that matters. Blaming the mother or attributing disability to infection or believing that it is God’s way of communicating, does not satisfy the disabled person who experiences different causes of his/her disability. According to my findings, the major causes of disability are poverty; lack of employment, poor health facilities, building infrastructure, transportation and societal attitudes as already discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

The detailed observations in this research show that there is some correlation between poverty and disability. Manyimo (2005) observed that a high percentage of disabled people are also poor. A question is why does it work out that way? Iswear, one
of the disabled graduates, had very plausible input to this cause of disability. When I asked him what he thinks is the cause of his disability, he explained:

We the disabled people are from poor backgrounds. Most of us are from poor backgrounds. Families with disabilities will not have adequate money for say medication. Some people are not born disabled but because they fall ill and the family has no money for medication they end up disabled. So if you have no money you are prone to disease attack, for example, probably I should be wearing glasses but since I cannot afford even the eye examination fees, I can just go blind or end up with other disabilities as a consequence.

I swear in this case is putting emphasis on outcomes of disability resulting from poverty. From my discussion with him, it was clear that plausible inferences can be drawn that link poverty to disability. This is corroborated by the World Bank report that also says:

Poverty causes disabilities and can furthermore lead to secondary disabilities for those individuals who are already disabled, as a result of the poor living conditions, health endangering employment, malnutrition, poor access to health care and education opportunities etc. Together, poverty and disability create a vicious circle.\(^{33}\)

This may be why many disabled people are found in poor families. Poverty creates a good environment for disability to occur from the time of conception right through one’s

Thus, poverty could have profound impact on influencing disabilities just as Shirley (1983) emphasizes:

The combination of poverty and disability is a fearsome one. Either one may cause the other and their presence in combination has a tremendous capacity to destroy the lives of people with impairments and to impose on their families burdens that are too crushing to bear (p. 79).

These burdens include lack of finances for education, lack of funds for a mother to attend ante- and post-natal visits, or lack of funds for getting vaccinations needed to prevent some of the causes of disability such as polio. Apparently, most of the graduates I interviewed attributed their disability to polio attacks of one form or another. Sometimes as a result of poverty, some babies are delivered under conditions where complicated delivery facilities are not available and the delivery may result in some form of disability in a child who would otherwise be ‘normal’ had suitable facilities be made available. Iswear goes on to add:

Yes, if we had money for medical examination say, for sight we would end up with fewer disability cases because prevention is better than cure. We may have some things lacking in our bones but we do not know them because we have no money for examinations.

Vivienne Viki of Sekuru Madzore Association agrees with Iswear’s observations that poverty and lack of basic education could be significant causes of disability. She singles out polio and stress, as probably the main causes of disability for a developing child in the mother’s womb. She says:
Polio can affect the child when the child is still in the womb. It can start in the womb. That is why mothers are supposed to attend antenatal processes. The child can be born with polio. So it can happen. There are so many other issues that can cause a child to be born with disabilities such as stress. If a mother always stresses while she is pregnant, that can cause a mother to have a child with disabilities. The body of the child can be deformed as a result, you produce a child with disabilities. So the father could be the cause (of stress) but as we know, when the child is born and happens to be disabled, the father will say *in our clan there is no such a child*. So instead we always teach the mothers to follow those vaccines, for the pregnant mothers so that their children are not affected by polio. The reason why [most affluent communities] and those educated normally don’t suffer this problem like polio is because they now know the benefits of going to the clinic for antenatal and postnatal examinations.

She adds that:

So you will find that the generation can always multiply if these disabled children are not educated as well. They will still bear children who are also disabled. And I can say about 70% cases of disabilities are through polio. Almost 70%, because some of the disabilities like hydrocephalus can be controlled.

Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association attributes most of the causes of disabilities especially for people who become disabled later in life, to policy makers as being responsible for some causes of disabilities. They expend their energies and influences in
trying to position themselves well for political gain, but given that these disadvantaged people are in the minority, their concerns become of no consequence to the politicians. He says:

And if we make policies that protect those that are there and forget that because we drive we are exposed to the possibilities of disability, because we sleep on beds we may fall and break our backs, because working in mines we are continual candidates of disability, we are bound to continue to have this problem. So the governments, and countries not only Zimbabwe, should ensure that we have policies that protect the would be disabled. Governments, including our own are not considering this fact. Today the political dispensation is focusing at its own survival and not peripheral issues like those of disabilities. As we speak, disability for the politicians is in the peripheral.

The above sentiments show that some disabilities, especially those that are physical, can be caused by poverty, lack of education, poor political policies or a combination of these. Of great interest is the bi-directional relationship of poverty and disability. Poor people are usually unemployed, are subject to poor nutrition, have no money for education or medication and, therefore, are prone to disease that may result in disability. On the other hand, disabled people are marginalized for purposes of education and employment, and because these are the main vehicles to a better life, such disabled people end up poor even if they had started well. It is, therefore, important that any responsible government pays attention to this poverty-disability cycle and put in place systems that will address these issues. As Mufaro Hove says, “we are all potential
candidates of disability” so we should make good of our responsibilities when we are in a position to make a difference.

**Summary**

In summary, access to education for disabled students is inundated with all sorts of constraints ranging from poverty on the part of their families, to poorly monitored government systems. The students fail to get fair treatment from school or college authorities who sometimes do not give them a chance to prove themselves. As for the little financial assistance government can possibly give such as through the BEAM program, corruption by senior authorities has sunk in due to general economic hardships faced by the country. Lack of funds to equip educational institutions so that they can meet the requirements of all students by government and the private sector, is also a major constraint for smooth educational progression of disabled students. There has been a high staff turnover in the education sector due to qualified and experienced staff leaving for ‘greener pastures.’ Most of the current staff are either inexperienced or poorly trained to handle disability issues in educational setups. In addition the teacher/pupil ratio that at primary school level is reported by one of the respondents to be at 1 to 55 will exclude the disabled child from gaining full participation in his/her education. Without extra-specialized assistance, a disabled child in such a class will at the very least be a very frustrated child. Given that most schools and colleges do not have adequate facilities, if there are any, to meet the diverse requirements of disabled students, the situation is even worse for high school and higher education. These are real constraints that may have profound impact on access to higher or further education for physically disabled high school graduates in Zimbabwe. I am however, convinced that solutions can be found if
this question of competing conceptions of disabilities is seriously addressed at both societal and government levels.


Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusion

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 above have explained the various findings that study participants brought forth in this research. Chapter 5 elaborated the complexity of cultural conceptions of disability and revealed how traditional culture based on the indigenous Zimbabwean people’s values and belief system impact disabled people and their families and consequently their education access. Chapter 6 builds on chapter 5 to show how competing cultural conceptions manifest in society while chapter 7 explains conflicts between what traditional beliefs and customs dictate for the indigenous population regarding disability issues, and the current expectations and existing government regulations of how disability issues are to be addressed. One may ask then, what next? After careful reflections, study participants concluded with a number of important recommendations that need to be taken into account to bring about change. This chapter discusses those recommendations.

Non-disabled Participants’ Recommendations.

Recommendations outlined in these chapters will have more impact if society can receive civic education to raise an awareness of what negative attitudes do to disabled children. The dichotomy of ‘normal’ will have to be explained such that when the community accepts that their disabled members are normal but different, it must be the differences they have to work on to make the lives of disabled people truly normal. The reader will notice, therefore, that the model is one of the recommendations emanating from this research for future use. It is, therefore, worth noting that some of the recommendations are based on the social ramifications of how society behaves towards disabled people and not necessarily on how indigenous culture directs their behavior.
During this research, respondents made recommendations regarding areas that they considered needed attention or further considerations. These recommendations varied according to individual interests and policy limitations. It was also a chance for me as a researcher to give a voice to the usually voiceless on issues that impact on their wellbeing. In this process, I noted that some government officers had very good recommendations to put forward, but I could tell that they could do little but to implement government policy. Most disabled students considered their recommendations as *pipe dreams* because they deeply think that society has no room for them. Their main argument being that, if their own relatives, including fathers in most cases, have no heart for them, how could strangers listen to their cry? As one of the students, Gladys Patsika clearly states, “the public is full of rhetoric but the rhetoric is never translated into action, even when it is from government.”

Chivara Masunga, a cultural expert, is concerned about the majority/minority divide that the nation led by its own government, seems to emphasize when dealing with disability issues. He recommends that the nation, by whatever means possible, even if it means pushing the very people affected in the forefront, should bring some awareness to both the government and the disabled people themselves. He says:

There is need to lobby government so that it is always conscious of disability access to buildings problems and urge them not to pass a building plan which does not take into account people with disabilities. And also for a minority to have rights they must fight very hard for them very, very hard. Just like you see with minority languages, the so called minority languages, we don’t seem
to be listening to their voices. They have to fight hard and the nation must be behind them.

Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association blames the lack of an effective social protection mechanism policy in the country. Noting that disability can be very expensive not only because of expensive facilities and assistive devices needed, but in most cases disabled people incur huge health bills to survive. The most unfortunate part is that they are from poor households and this poverty trend continues from generation to generation if interventions are not made. He says:

That is the trend [of poor generations] we have witnessed and aggravating all of this is the issue of lack of policy for the country. We should have a functional social protection mechanism. The country does not have that. Where we will have a social protection mechanism, they will forego that. We know the education & health are catered for to some extent but the families which happen to be poor spend most of their moneys on the health needs of that child. So they would rather concentrate on the survival of the child than going to school, because it is an added burden. Not that the parents don’t want to, but even those of us who are on it today find disability to be very expensive.

Mufaro thus, recommends that government develop a comprehensive social policy that will make it affordable for poor families to participate in the education of their children. Such a policy will also make it affordable to send disabled students to specialized boarding schools that at the moment are out of reach for many disabled students
especially those from rural areas. Implementation of BEAM is not effective because the social policy that should support and monitor it is either weak or even nonexistent.

Tsitsi Maveneka, a senior administrator at one integrated high school, does not see the effectiveness of the BEAM program when it comes to issues concerning disabled students. She has problems with how the assessments are done and that disabled students are not given extra considerations based on their extra needs. She makes a bold recommendation that the government should legislate all corporations, commonly referred to as companies in Zimbabwe, and church organizations to support the education and other needs of disabled children. She says:

If government could legislate that all companies and churches, (they are the ones who make money), that they ‘own’ a percentage of these disabled children and help them. Not knowing whether claims for disability would increase as a result, but a disability is not something one would wish to have. Disability is not a choice. Government would just say each church should support at least four children and reflect that on their annual returns. Four or even two depending on what the policy would say. The companies and churches will be responsible for the children’s education and should themselves employ them in their organizations or arrange for their employment with other companies. That way every company will be responsible for a disabled person at least. This would encourage other disabled children to want to go to school because they would know that employment is guaranteed. They can do whatever job they are qualified to do.
Every registered company must have its people. Some at school and others at work because it must be a national effort.

Tatenda Besa of Freedom University emphasizes that the problem of having fewer disabled students at university level has nothing to do with the selection and admission processes at this level. He says his university can accommodate all ‘A’ level graduates with at least two ‘A’ level passes. According to him, the problem lies with the source base that is ill equipped to support the education of disabled students and that both primary and secondary school sections are totally insensitive to the special needs of disabled students. He recommends that the government pays attention to these sectors of education. He says:

I think you can never have any increase in terms of numbers to higher education if, you know, the primary school and secondary school sections are totally insensitive to the special needs of these individuals. The [communities] have got to identify these individuals and then create a supportive environment for them to learn and treat these individuals just like normal individuals. Yes, they have never thought seriously about looking after the needs of those people. But, you know, if you want a true developed Zimbabwe then you must pay attention to all groups such as this, and that is what you need to do otherwise you are not really looking after the needs of your citizens.

Tatenda is encouraging us to forget about concentrating on ‘symptoms’, that is, looking at statistics at the highest level of education without first examining the source base and understanding constraints so inherent in our systems. The fact that he says his
university takes all disabled students who qualify should make us think about and question why majority of the high school disabled graduates do not qualify. It is important to pay attention to the primary (elementary) and secondary (high school) systems and see how they can be improved in order to provide a more meaningful source for universities and colleges to recruit from.

Dzikamai Dzikiti of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture recommends that government sets asides funds earmarked solely for disabled people especially to assist them to get assistive devices that include wheelchairs, hearing aids and Braille materials. He says:

I think, actually, government [of Zimbabwe] should set aside funds to assist the disabled, especially for buying gadgets and things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, Braille and so on. They should make sure they improve the situation concerning Braille in the classroom and those are special books, special writing books and they cost more, and the Ministry, when it allocates the per capita grants should think of the disabled at each school so that a certain amount goes towards catering for the disabled children.

Interestingly, Dzikamai Dzikiti is part of the policy maker’s team in his Ministry and one wonders why he cannot influence such a recommendation from within. As I stated earlier on, some Zimbabwe government officers are working under heavy constraints where choices are not easy to make because of the conflicting conceptions of disability and the prevailing economic conditions. Their own belief systems and the calling of their government duties are at times, incompatible when it comes to issues affecting disabled people.
Kokerai Ngoda of the examination branch is concerned about the absence of personnel in his department that live with or experience disability and who could advise what is appropriate or not. He comments:

I think we need to recruit people who have the psychology of how they [the disabled] feel. Already we were talking about how we treat them by being sympathetic and perhaps being overly protective. We need a situation where somebody can advise us from an informed position that this will do and that would not do. Because I am sure in a lot of circumstances we are being overly sympathetic and that probably annoys them. Our tests are mainly designed for the so called able-bodied and the modification that we are doing may not be going far. It is an issue perhaps to do with the development of our education system.

Employment of qualified disabled people is another area that should be of concern to everyone but even government departments that should be championing this move are reluctant to employ the very people who go through their education system. The examination branch should set a good example by recruiting some qualified disabled people to participate in the administration of examinations. Shingayi Shava, the only disabled participant in this research who managed to go to university is also concerned that even the resource centers at the universities that are created to assist disabled students are staffed by people who have no lived experiences with disability issues, and yet, there are so many qualified disabled people who could be administering those centers effectively.
Nyaradzo Zhou a senior officer in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe recommends in-depth research into disability issues as they affect Zimbabweans. She decries the country’s reliance on foreign concepts of disability, such as the categorizing of disabilities, which, in most cases, do not apply to local circumstances. Johnstone (2001, p. 76) also informs us that:

Historically, provision for people with disabilities has been ignored in developing countries where the economic and material basis for living tends to be impoverished. There has been an absence of suitable textbooks [or research findings], describing the circumstances and needs of people with disabilities in the developing world. Those that have been available are usually adopted from a Western European cultural perspective. Any detailed discussion that does emerge is frequently based on generalizations that are assumed to be held in common, but, in reality, are of relatively minor importance.

I also add that Zimbabwe has traditional beliefs to take into account, there is poverty to attend to, limited specialized trained staff, and there are no clear policies in place for the education of disabled people. This is part of the justification for the need to develop an indigenous knowledge model of disability and to conduct more research. Nyaradzo agrees with this position and says that there is a need for proper and well-funded research to help the nation. She recommends:

I think what the Ministry of Education has done is ok, but I would recommend a comprehensive research. You will find that the literature we read everything we read is Western based and the environments are
completely different. And if you try to take it wholesale to our environment it doesn’t work. So we need a big research where we see how to adapt to our local environment. So I think there is need to carry out a research and come out with inclusive programs that are practical in under resourced environments such as ours. This is the problem we are making as Africans or as Zimbabweans or as whomever, we just take. The philosophy is ok I appreciate it but if we take it as is, it is not working. Overseas their classes are small with about 10 to 15 children but ours range from forty to sixty children with no teacher assistant and no pupil assistant, and we don’t have the resources. So if I had the means that’s what I would start with - a research that will involve all the stakeholders, the persons with disabilities themselves, the parents, the academicians from colleges and the like, officers from government and then we come up with something that is practical. Then we may even pilot it and we say ok this is what we want to do rather than saying oh they are saying inclusive education let’s do it too! That is a challenge I am giving you the academicians to come up with a research proposal to carry out this massive research with practical homemade recommendations.

In support of Nyaradzo, Johnstone (2001, p. 76) advises that, “tests and methods of special education recommended for the use in Western countries are quite inappropriate for use in developing countries.” Hence, the need to pay attention to Nyaradzo’s recommendations and encourage Zimbabwe to develop its own inclusive curricula. This is a challenge every concerned disability research scholar, government, society member and all other stakeholders should accept and commit to undertake.
Because of the wide and well-researched recommendations that are likely to be outcomes of such a research, it is a recommendation that the government of Zimbabwe should consider seriously. It is in such a deep detailed research for a country with such engrained belief systems in their culture, where the indigenous knowledge based model of disability, if developed would be highly beneficial as both a basis for the theoretical framework and a tool for the methodology. More work needs to be done to develop such a model.

Shamiso Muchemwa worries more on what happens to disabled students, a majority of whom live in the rural areas. There are no coordinated structures such as provincial or district service centers where disabled people can get assistance or information of what is available and possible for them. Shamiso does not see this as something needing much money or extra manpower because, basic government supported structures such as chiefs and headmen, district office staff, and the governor’s office are already in place. A coordinated approach would help these students because:

We have a huge number of high school graduates which just melts into the nation. It’s a huge number and so this is where our disabled graduates also get caught up in that. So I think really what we need is perhaps setting up very strong structures throughout the country. We tend to have these organizations located in urban areas and when we do that what happens to a blind child in Churumanzu [rural area] where Shamiso comes from? That child has to go either to Masvingo or Gweru [urban areas] to register because we do not have a facility in the neighborhood which takes care of these people. We do not
have structures close to where the people are and we need to build these structures.

Shamiso adds further that:

It is those in urban areas who may be lucky to go through the system and be trained into doing something but for the huge number in the rural areas there are no offices, you can’t go to register, there is no social worker. Even during the good times in this country we still did not have social workers in districts, we didn’t. They are all dotted in urban areas. We have got this lot - the rural areas high school graduates, they really don’t know where to go. And if we don’t strengthen and establish these structures at grassroots levels particularly for our disabled students we will have failed them as a nation.

Another recommendation that Shamiso puts across has to do with having regular and consistent tracking for disabled students so that realistic plans can be made for their education without uprooting them from the environment they are used to. At the moment, as already indicated, nobody does a follow up of the whereabouts of the high school disabled graduates. She says the task will be easy because of government structures that are already in the rural areas. For Shamiso:

You need the structures at the village level, from village to village taking census of disabled children and the type of disability. This is I think what we ought to do. To take an accurate census of the children who fall in that category, village by village. The easiest way to do it is to do it village by village then you know that you do not miss anybody. And I think this can be done. After all, there are so many people who are supposed to be representing
their people’s interests. You have the headman, the chief, the councilor, now you also have got a senator, you have an MP! All these people are supposed to represent a small group of people. Why can’t we set up these structures? It is a small group of people. Even the ‘hidden’ disabled children will surface. Then you can establish the needs of the child whether it is a wheelchair or crutches or lotions spectacles or what? We are a very literate society, headmen can do that.

Joseph Mukamuri, also of the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education makes a recommendation that can help inform policy makers to improve their policies and regulations. He is advocating for a detailed research of the current situation so as to come up with practical policies that are implementable and easy to monitor. He says:

In fact, one way of developing policy is where you researchers come up with such evidence. We now have evidence to fall back on because without evidence how can we just say this is not working when we have not researched why it is not working? When a research is done we can then say according to research by Manyimo (2011) it was found that 45% of principals did not create conducive environments to attract disabled students to their colleges, therefore in view of this (here is a statutory instrument). You cannot just go to people and accuse them of not complying without research.

Such a recommendation, if implemented, will help improve conditions for enrolling disabled students in tertiary or further education colleges that at the moment are constrained by poor facilities, poor physical infrastructures and lack of grounded policies for recruitment of disabled students. Any research work conducted will have to take into
consideration all these factors including paying attention to the underlying belief systems of the indigenous implementers that may provide negative ‘under currents’ to the whole project if not taken care of.

**Recommendations from Disabled Graduates.**

My research would not be complete without the voice of disabled graduates. They had important recommendation on what should be done to make their lives easier and manageable. When I asked them what, in their opinion, they would recommend to society and government to improve the lives of disabled people and their families, most of them were initially reluctant to make recommendations citing previous recommendations that were never taken seriously. On further discussions, some of them made the recommendations presented below. It is no surprise that their recommendations centered on school fees, educational opportunities, health issues, employment opportunities and assistance with purchasing of devices they need for their daily living. Some of them regretted that they could not make recommendations based on their experiences with societal attitudes because they think that such awareness should come from within society and it cannot be legislated. In general, their recommendations were based on the social model, how society creates disabling conditions in their lives.

Iswear Kumalo and Lovemore Dube both recommend free education for people living with disabilities. Both of them are from poor family backgrounds and failed to access higher or further education because of lack of money. They both see their government as uncaring and not likely to take their recommendations seriously. Iswear says:
I would recommend that such people have access to free education because they are already disadvantaged. We the disabled people, most of us, are from poor backgrounds. Some of us do not have formal work. The lives of disabled people are not good because our own country does not want us if one wants to be objective. In some countries disabled people get grants.

Lovemore goes further and includes healthcare and job opportunities, as some of the areas government should also pay particular attention to, when it comes to disabled people. He observes:

I would recommend assistance with healthcare and even for going to school. These facilities should be free for such people. In most cases it is very difficult for disabled people to make money enough to sustain themselves. When they fall sick they cannot even afford health fees and as a result their illness becomes worse and worse. They are also discriminated against for jobs because of the disability even if they have the necessary qualifications. So most disabled people are forced to be dependent on other people. So schooling and healthcare for disabled people must be free because they cannot afford alone. That is what government should do. Some countries do that. The disabled earn some minimum allowances from government every month to help them manage their lives. Our government just treats everybody as if it is normal. Our circumstances are not normal.

Ntombana Zhangazha and Iswear recommend that disabled students be assisted with gadgets and devices to make their lives better. They see this assistance as a must for
a caring society and not something the society or government should grudgingly do. On one hand, Ntombana remarks, “There is need for government or society to assist especially with assistive devices for those who cannot afford”. Iswear, on the other hand, suggests that the constitution should speak to this problem. He says:

Yes, they need to be given enough to balance out their disadvantages so that life becomes ‘normal’ for them. You need to be given all that which will make your life achievable, wheelchair if you should use one, crutches if you need any, dental and regular medical examinations are necessary, but we have no money. That is what I call prevention of disability before it begins. Our constitution must consider disability problems and make life easier for disabled people.

Trymore Mugodi is more concerned with assistance with fees for disabled students who show intellectual promise but are too poor to manage on their own as he notes here:

I recommend that government helps people with disabilities. In terms of education, when it comes to someone may be who wants to go to ‘A’ level but does not have money for school fees, he or she being intelligent enough they may need to be assisted even with books to read and government needs to assist with such cases.

Mandla Gumede, Thandiwe Velapi and Magugu Mtombeni are concerned about the education system itself. They do not see disabled people being given fair chances and opportunities to prove themselves. Collectively, they recommend that the education
system be revamped to consider the interests of disabled children. Mandla advocates for a quota system especially for higher and further education whereby a certain percentage is always reserved for disabled children in the education system. He comments:

Let me give an example like this education for all policy. I think government should specify a certain percentage of those funds to be directly channeled towards the education of people living with disabilities, and also, maybe at university level they should reserve a certain percentage like what they are doing to the girl child to promote them.

Thandiwe recommends that the infrastructures in education premises be made user friendly. There are too many limitations for disabled students to access some buildings and use some facilities such as washrooms. She says:

In terms of facilities in the institutions I really wish if the institutions could be built in a way that is user friendly, that makes it possible for any disabled person to be able to attend school at that institution. Because some of us as for me I wanted to proceed with my education but because of the way the buildings are, classrooms are upstairs, there are no lifts, there are steps. I just dropped the whole thing and here I am just a bursar. It’s fine, it’s ok but I wanted to do more than that. And if I think of doing even evening classes I would need someone to push me up and down. I need a place where I can move around on my own. I wanted to end up as an administrator. I wanted to do a course in Institute in Administration and Commerce but the institutions that offer these courses they are upstairs and I cannot attend on a wheelchair.
We need a government legislation to force these institutions to comply with accessibility issues.

Magugu is advocating for an integrated school system where both disabled and non-disabled students live and learn together. This calls for improvement of infrastructure and will help develop better attitudes towards disabled people. She singles out Chaminuka College as a good example. She says:

I would like to encourage integration in the schools. I have always hated, what can I say, I have always wanted to scream or get up to somebody’s neck like in our office I also do enrollment of boarders. One parent comes and says, “My child has been at a normal school and the headmaster told me that they cannot take her because they cannot manage her.” What is the difference with this child? Like what we are doing at Chaminuka College we have children who are non-disabled. That makes them understand disability. Even when they are out there you should see how they interact. They work like teams. It is now at the tip of their fingers, effortlessly. I recommend government help create such an environment in the education system.

Njabulo Ndubiwa and Thandiwe Velapi recommend that employment policies need to be looked into and improved. Qualified disabled people are discriminated against by many employers directly or indirectly. The most disabled people get in the employment sector is an interview if they are lucky, and usually, and systematically, many of these interviews never end up in employment. Njabulo explains this further as follows:
The employment sector is a bit tricky when it comes to going to companies that are not really aware of people with disabilities. Or shall I say, people who ignore people with disabilities or who ignore that there are people with disabilities. You will find that if you go, maybe to a building, you find there are no lifts they only use stairs. You find that probably the company that would offer you a job is on the 12th floor and you can’t get there by stairs. So I think it is a very, very big challenge when it comes to employment because people are not yet aware of, or do not yet know how to ‘functionalize’ people with disabilities.

It is clear from the voices of the participants that the government of Zimbabwe has to make a substantial shift in its policies regarding the education of its disabled children. Rhetoric and well crafted legislations that are not backed by action are not working at the moment. It is also clear that access to higher and further education for disabled students is heavily influenced by the whole process of education from primary (elementary) to university level. It is clear that the participants’ recommendations are varied and well meant. Most of them are directed at the government of Zimbabwe for either direct action or cause other sectors, private or civil organisations to act. It is noteworthy that even government officers, who in this case are all senior officers, allowed themselves to do some introspection into the very system they are implementing, in order to openly discuss some areas that may need their attention. Student participants emphasize on improvement of infrastructure especially for buildings and classrooms that are either impassable or demand much outside help to navigate. They also recommend some improvement to healthcare system for disabled people and ask government to
provide free healthcare for them as minimum. For education, they are asking for a change in the education system so that schools will be encouraged to truly integrate non-disabled students with disabled students to promote family values and positive attitudes toward each other. At the same time free education for disabled people, a majority of whom come from poor backgrounds, would be welcome.

Government officials and other senior institutional officers directed most of their recommendations to government or established government systems. Of note was Tatenda Besa’s assertion that the number of disabled students who can make it to higher education cannot improve if the source base is not improved. His recommendation is centred on improving facilities, systems and attitudes of both primary and secondary sectors so as to attract more disabled students. Recommendations for in-depth research on disability as it is understood in Zimbabwe is highly recommended. Another important recommendation, that when implemented will have far reaching effect, is that of introducing a social protection mechanism which Mufaro Hove of Chiripamusasa Association is advocating for. The implementation of such a mechanism will make some of the social recommendations put forward, such as free health and free education, redundant, because this recommendation will cover all that. One of the thorny areas for disabled people is lack of employment opportunities and if Tsitsi Maveneka’s recommendation that every company and church organisation in Zimbabwe be legislated to sponsor at least two to four disabled children to school and be responsible for their employment could be implemented, it will be a unique solution in Zimbabwe, if not the best in the whole of Africa. More research is still needed to see how feasible this can be, but as an idea it is excellent.
Further Recommendations

My further recommendations can only be meaningful if we take Nyaradzo Zhou’s recommendation seriously. Nyaradzo is recommending a comprehensive countrywide research into issues concerning disabilities in Zimbabwe. A comprehensive research will be of necessity and entail paying special attention to the Zimbabwean culture, in particular their belief systems, in terms of disability issues and disabled people. This is crucial because, the Zimbabwean society being consulted in such a research is the one that will be responsible for implementing any outcomes of such a research. This is when the disability model I am advocating here is of essence and makes sense. Nyaradzo is quite clear that as a ‘developing’ nation Zimbabwe tends to be gullible to whatever the West comes up with without considering its own circumstances. Therefore, in my further recommendations, I am mindful of all these considerations, although some of my recommendations may seem theoretical, with careful analysis and a positive attitude, all the recommendations made in this research are feasible and above all ‘doable’.

Recommendation 1: In-depth research into disability education

One of the participants (Nyaradzo Zhou), recommended that it is important for Zimbabwe to conduct a comprehensive research into the education of people living with disabilities. This recommendation was made because of the frustration the participant, who is part of the policy implementation team for the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture experienced when trying to implement programs developed for foreign countries, those from the West in particular, in Zimbabwe. It is important that any program that has to be implemented for education purposes be ‘home’ made so that
attention is paid for important considerations that could have some bearing on its implementation. Zimbabwe has its unique circumstances. It has a healthy cultural heritage which, if not attended to, can get lost and replaced by foreign cultural practices. Before colonialism, disabled children received appropriate education that paid attention to their respective circumstances and relevance to society. In any country, the belief system of a community cannot be compromised because it will provide ‘under currents’ that will jeopardise any program that is construed as working against this belief system. Education of disabled people cannot and should not be divorced from the belief systems and practices of the concerned society. A comprehensive research that involves all interested parties including politicians, educationists such as teachers and lecturers, education administrators especially in institutions of higher and further education, associations for and of disabled people, churches and other religious organisations, traditional and cultural experts, and more importantly, disabled people themselves and their families, needs to be conducted. Such a research is likely to put forward recommendations that will be of benefit to the nation as a whole.

**Recommendation 2: Development of an Indigenous Knowledge Model**

It is important to note that, this kind of research as detailed in the first recommendation should not be conducted in the very manner in which most of us are accustomed to. When conducting research on disability there is need to move away from the usual ways of researching, especially in the West, and think outside the box, to give room for other research methods that may be more appropriate. One such method would be by utilising the rich local indigenous knowledge base such as that found in Zimbabwe. For any research that has a potential of impinging on indigenous people’s belief systems
and culture, it is strongly recommended that attention be paid to the indigenous knowledge base, and in this case, of disability. The advantage of using this approach is that, the society in question, would easily buy into programs developed from such indigenous knowledge based research, since they would understand the background and rationale of any outcomes. Both the research process and programs resulting from such a research would speak to the society’s belief systems. For example, under the Zimbabwean belief systems, many people understand that every disability has causation and the cause must be addressed first before anything else has to be done. If developed properly, such a research tool would therefore be a tool of choice for aspiring research scholars in the field of disability studies, regardless of the society they will be dealing with. I recommend that more work be done to develop such a tool that could be used universally and/or concurrently with other tools.

**Recommendation 3: Need for civic education in Zimbabwe**

Sometimes it is easy to blame society for actions it undertakes unintentionally. Just as it is important for a nation to pay attention to the education of its citizens regardless of their social or political orientation, it is equally important that governments provide civic education for their people. Civic education is a vehicle through which a nation conscientizes itself of intended programs and objectives. It should go beyond ‘voter education’ as is used by many countries to persuade the population to support one doctrine against another. It must be truly civic education that looks into issues objectively and with the needs of the nation as its driving force. It is a non-partisan obligation of government systems and the population at large to promote this type of education. It was unbelievable during this research how some participants, with all the exposure to
education they had, are still looking down on their natural normal belief systems in preference to foreign acquired systems that they did not understand fully either. One major reason is that the Zimbabwe civic education system does not emphasise on indigenous culture, even though a substantial percentage of the population covertly pay attention to their natural belief systems. The population needs to be educated that *disability is not a personal choice but disabling someone is.* There are many occasions where people disable other people without realising that they are doing so. For example the administration of Kudzidza Ishungu University (Chapter 6) that does not have and has never enrolled a single disabled person of whatever disability. This university professes that students living with disabilities have no interest in applying to their institution. What the administration fails to realise is that their university is not ready to receive a disabled student because of unfriendly infrastructures and facilities, lack of lecturers who are qualified and with interest in disability education, lack of articulated policies by the university itself regarding education of disabled students and the nonchalant attitude of its administration. What is needed for such a university is proper civic education that clearly shows why it is important to take every citizen on board, when it comes to education. It was evident during this research that there is a huge gap between the actions of policy makers and administrators in education, and the rightful expectations of people living with disabilities for their education and employment.

It is, therefore, recommended that the government initiates and encourages civic education for its people especially regarding the education of marginalised people who include orphans, widows, women in general, poor people, the elderly and disabled people in particular. Society has to realise that every member of society is a potential member of
the disabled community. Civic education would prepare every citizen for this eventuality, and at the same time, help citizens to understand and celebrate disability because it will always be with us in one form or another. That way, the massive projects advocated for here, in these recommendations, will be well understood and well received by the population. Above all, proper and well-structured detailed civic education that includes an awareness of indigenous culture will make it easier at the implementation stages of education programs concerning disabled students for the government. This education can be initiated at grassroots levels by organising it at village level and build the program up to national levels. Civic education will help society reflect on its own belief system and re-examine those components of the system that have become obsolete because of prevailing circumstances. It is not all traditional culture that is still relevant in today’s understanding of disability but it is important to marry the two components, indigenous culture and modernity, by drawing out a matrix from the best of each. It will also help society to collectively understand the pros and cons of its indigenous belief system and adopt better attitudes for its disabled communities.

Recommendation 4: Zimbabwe sign language to be introduced as a credit subject.

Language is a special vehicle for communication. It is what creates social environments for all living things. Bees, ants and animals have their ways of communication which, because it is beyond our own comprehension we call it instinct. Animals have a language that if we cared to understand we could also communicate with them. In most cases animals learn our languages better and faster than we learn theirs. Dogs, for example, learn faster in understanding human beings’ language. This is why they are useful for home security, crime detection and prevention etc. It is only because
they make an effort to learn. I do not rule out the incentives we give them for them to master the skills we want them to. This is all a way of bridging language barriers. Some countries, such as Canada, encourage dual language proficiency for its citizens with special awards and advantages for those who attain that standard. There must be a reason for that. Canada, without this consideration, will be a very divided country along language lines. One cannot over emphasise the importance of language for education, employment and social interactions.

In Zimbabwe, and in many other parts of the world, there is a language that is not getting its fair share of attention from both government and society. That language is the language that is used by people who are deaf, that for a lack of a better term, we call ‘sign’ language. A true integration into society for people living with this disability can only come if the society makes an effort to learn deaf people’s language just as animals make an effort to learn our languages.

The education system can be a barrier to proper and true integration of disabled and non-disabled members of a society. One of Brenda Jo Brueggemann’s participants, Ellen, when asked where all the current categories and classifications that characterize “deafness” so variously now have come from, she responds:

I think the boundary is made up by society, the educational system. “The deaf can’t function in the hearing world. They’re stuck and they have to go to a deaf residential school.” [She was imitating hearing educators here.] I think that kind of thing has set up a boundary.... I wish that the deaf and hearing worlds were mixed from the beginning that hearing people could talk and

My fourth recommendation would encourage the Government of Zimbabwe to take bold steps and introduce Zimbabwe sign language as a compulsory language for all primary and secondary (up to Form 4) students. Within a few years, the Zimbabwean society will start appreciating that these ‘disabled’ people are normal and can be communicated with easily. It will also empower the disabled people knowing that they are not misunderstood or misrepresented when society ‘speaks’ their language. This calls for massive investment in education by training or retraining teachers, developing curricula, structuring examinations to make the language just as important as any other language. Where, for example, a language qualification is needed for further education or employment, it should suffice to offer Zimbabwe sign language as a language one has credit for. This will make Zimbabwe a unique country in the field of disability.

It has to be noted also that the introduction of compulsory sign language learning is not only beneficial to the disabled children but also to those who are non-disabled. It gives them an extra language for effective communication with all members of the society. Linton (1998, p. 61) commenting further on the advantages for non-disabled children in learning sign language says:

The benefits for the nondisabled children are not solely that they learn tolerance and acceptance ... the benefits are broader than the moral lessons such exposure can offer. For instance, when nondeaf children learn sign language, they are not only exposed to a second [additional] language, rare
these days in most elementary schools but come to understand something about language itself and how it functions in human experience.

I take my recommendation beyond elementary school to high school level so that there will be real noticeable impact on how the Zimbabwean society interacts with its deaf community. That way the social impact of stigma will be greatly reduced.

**Recommendation 5: Business beneficiaries to pay levy.**

The top four recommendations call for huge investments into the systems. Government will be forced to invest heavily, not only into manpower but in financial terms as well. This type of sacrifice will not be new to Zimbabwe because it already proved that without, the interference of the outside world such as that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, that ‘bribed’ the young enthusiastic government out of its working social program, it can do it. The IMF introduced Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) to hoodwink the government of Zimbabwe whose socialist agenda they did not like. SAPs killed the country’s popular initiatives and forced the country into the abyss of poverty it has suffered as a consequence. This must be a good lesson for both the current and future administrators of Zimbabwe. External funding, while I think it is a right for developing countries to get this funding, which in reality is a compensation of the daylight robbery of colonialism, should not be the only source of government funding. Government should still expect and accept this aid from other sources that will allow this expansion.

There are companies, individuals and organisations in the country that stand to benefit from such expansions in education and healthcare that must show appreciation of
opportunities created for them to make wealth by paying a non-taxable levy towards these expansions and their maintenance. Companies or individuals who benefit directly such as those who sell uniforms, supply food for schools, sell textbooks and writing books, banks, NGOs should contribute substantially to this development from their earnings. Government needs to create regulations that will make such contributions transparent, mandatory, and free from being corrupted.

**Recommendation 6: Revamp the rural structures to accommodate disabled students’ interests**

It is a big concern, but not unwarranted, that disabled students who graduate at high school level, and do not make it either to further education or employment just vanish off the radar of the Zimbabwe government structures. Most of these students, given the harsh nature of urban life and without gainful employment, end up living in their rural homes. Apparently this research was informed that the majority of people living with disabilities are in rural areas. While it is considered belonging to a particular village as a source of pride, it is equally disheartening to note that these villages have suffered perpetual neglect from the time of colonisation to the present-day independent Zimbabwe. Rural areas have become important only during the times of canvassing for national votes. At political levels, rural areas are over represented. Office bearers include the headman and chief at the traditional level, the district administrator and counsellor at the local level and a member of parliament, a governor and senator as local representatives at national level. It is observed, however, that this massive representation of people in rural areas at all these levels does not match the services they get. There are no centres that can help those marginalised and poor people get the help they may
require. There are no established structures where disabled school leavers could go and register for further education or training. Social services are glaringly absent despite the multiple political offices in the area. The recommended structures could be responsible for collecting data for disabled people in rural areas from village to village as articulated clearly by Shamiso Muchemwa, an officer in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. This detailed data so collected, could then be used for planning purposes and in turn, justifies provisions of extension services and improvement of infrastructures in rural areas. After high school, the disabled child in the rural area needs supportive structures and system to be in place for him/her to have a meaningful progression with education. It is, therefore, recommended that government instruct its already established structures to take up this extra responsibility and provide services for disabled people in rural areas. That way, even the civic education programs recommended here will be easy to implement. Rural areas in Zimbabwe are the areas where indigenous culture is well-practiced and civic education on disability issues would be a worthwhile undertaking by government and other civic organisations.

**Recommendation 7: Improvement of national politics.**

The political environment of any nation has profound effects on how the nation can function. It is a vehicle through which national confidence is built, clarity of policy is articulated and order and discipline among citizens is achieved. A society cannot come to a consensus in any project if its political leadership is in disarray. It is important to create a political system with an ‘ear’ on the ground and a listening attitude generally. Opposition politics is good and healthy as long as it does not have an agenda of being disruptive and ‘blind’ to constraints that a government might have. Opposition should
behave responsibly, noting that, they could be the next government and they will be judged by their rhetoric, if that is not translated into action. The same applies to the ruling parties who should see opposition parties as facilitators and not hindrances in the way they govern the country. Together both the ruling parties and their opposition parties should see each other’s roles as that of providing checks and balances for each other. It is not a competition where a winner ‘takes all’ but a celebrated accomplishment for the whole nation. This cooperation is vital when such programs as expansion of education provision, increasing access to education for marginalised groups, and disabled people in particular, together with improving health provisions and infrastructures is to be initiated. Crafting of legislations, drawing up of regulations, development, and implementation of civic education, especially for indigenous knowledges, will have to be considered as a collective responsibility by all politicians.

It is, therefore, recommended that the current mistrust among government and opposition parties (as at the time of publishing this research), be removed for the country to move forward. Every responsible politician should ask himself or herself how they are contributing to their marginalised citizenry and those who live with disabilities in particular. They can start from collecting data from village to village of all disabled people and the type of disability, recommend the types of intervention required in each area or district, and put their heads together in government to come up with a comprehensive program for the education and wellbeing of disabled people. Because this kind of intervention will call for huge financing, the politicians should guard against corrupt practices and should teach their own consciences that depriving their disadvantaged citizens is unjust, uncalled for, and for a lack of a better word, evil.
At independence in the 80’s, Zimbabwe embarked on a spirited drive to cast the social and welfare net as wide as was feasible at the time. The country experienced unprecedented improvements in its social services. All of a sudden, education became accessible, affordable and a source of satisfaction that independence was indeed with the population that had suffered so many educational bottlenecks for so long. Primary education was made free and compulsory; more schools were built especially in the rural areas with the help and cooperation of local communities. In areas where it was felt that the building of additional schools or classroom at an established school was going to take long, government came up with a brilliant plan called ‘hot seating’. This plan was such that one school acted like two or three schools where one ‘school’ used the morning session and a second ‘school’ with its own set of pupils and teachers would use the same facilities in the afternoon. It was a beautiful stopgap measure that improved access to education without being too heavy on funding for infrastructural facilities. In some cases a third ‘school’ would also be run in the evening that targeted those citizens who had missed a chance to get educated, to go back to school. This evening school was mainly organised by volunteer professionals who saw it as a calling, to raise the education levels of their fellow community members.

It was not only the education sector that registered gigantic progress but the health sector was also equally impressive. Rural clinics ‘mushroomed’, training of medical staff was expanded and those with lesser medical qualifications were encouraged and expected to upgrade their qualifications by going back for extra training so as to qualify for higher grades in the service. Primary free health care was introduced, and the national health
status became an envy of many countries. The national university (University of Zimbabwe), which to this day is renowned internationally for producing good doctors and specialists, also developed systems that made it possible to support efforts of the government in meeting health provisions for its people.

There was, however, one area that seems to have been overlooked in both the education drive and health drive that was that of people living with disabilities. The new infrastructure did not address the needs of these people. While it was free primary education for all, without further considerations for the majority of disabled pupils, tuition fees is not the only financial constraint they have. As indicated and reported in this research, most disabled people are from very poor backgrounds, and would have needed more than just the help with school fees to benefit from the government’s noble drive.

Hence, this recommendation is for government to go back to its original thinking and objectives, to the values it held during the formative stages of this nation, and be clear and emphatic on how the lives and education of people living with disabilities, particularly, is going to be handled. Disabled people will need assistance with assistive devices, health bills that could be beyond primary care, conducive educational environment where the school, the buildings and classroom facilities such as desks and laboratory tables are accessible to them. For higher and further education, where free education may not be sustainable for all students, government can arrange for a soft loan system where disabled students will start paying back as soon as they get employed at the end of their education, a system that is not alien to Zimbabwe. The only addition to this recommendation is that government takes an active role in monitoring the educational progress of disabled students and assists in finding employment for them.
Conclusion

Such a fascinating encounter is very difficult to conclude. There is always the feeling that there is more to say and do. While it is true that my research had some limitations because of resources (the main excuse forwarded everywhere for matters concerning disabilities!) and the requirement of this academic program, the resources allocated would not allow me to go any further or any deeper within this dissertation.

A number of lessons have been derived from this journey. The most important lesson here is that disability issues in Zimbabwe suffer serious and challenging differing and competing challenges of conceptions of disability. The introduction of foreign religions such as Christianity and all that it entails, into a culturally rich indigenous society, with its own strong but different belief systems, has exacerbated the problems of people living with disabilities in Zimbabwe. Traditionally, mothers are held responsible for bearing disabled children and in most cases they suffer untold consequences for this responsibility. It is common that, in some circumstances, fathers have deserted their families at the introduction of a disabled child in a family. Disabled children themselves have and are continuing to suffer the most. Traditionally, most of them should not have made it to adulthood because they were supposed to be put down at birth. This belief seems to take center stage in most decisions that concern disabled children. A disabled child in a family may be considered a curse or punishment from the powers above for sins of commission or omission the family would have done. While such children’s lives would have been eliminated at birth, the current Zimbabwe laws would consider that as infanticide and that is how they manage to survive. But, they survive in a society that sees them as a source of its misery, in education systems that do not value them that much, in
an economy that sees their employment, regardless of their educational qualifications, as unnecessary and cumbersome. They continue to meet physical, psychological, and emotional barriers for whatever they wish to do.

Colonial education while it seemed good for disabled people, the deep down covert intention of the missionaries was not good at all. They were just preparing these young minds for menial jobs by preparing them as perpetual laborers with no gainful employment. Families who felt that their disabled children were a curse, therefore unwanted in the home, found a ‘dumping’ place in the name of mission schools who they believed should care for such people, a feeling that unfortunately, is still prevalent to this day for some parents of disabled children.

In my recommendations on giving disabled people a fair chance of employment, I am aware that it might take long for society to take on board suggestions made in this research by both some participants and myself. It is almost universally expected that disabled people are not employable even if they have the prerequisite qualifications. Surprisingly, even in institutions of higher learning, such as universities, disability issues are either ‘trashed’ away or considered unimportant and therefore a waste of resources. The government of Zimbabwe has no official policy covering employment opportunities for disabled people in its own departments even, that which prepares examinations for disabled people. The lived experiences that these people may bring into the system are significantly marginalized. Titchkosky (2009, p. 41) makes a very pertinent observation of how disability is stigmatized, even in institutions that offer disability studies. She says:

From my personal experience as an academic, I know that there are otherwise politically astute academics who are not aware that it is illegal [she must be
referencing the Western world!] to decide against hiring a disabled person solely on the grounds that the institution would have to provide some sort of “reasonable accommodation.” Insofar as disabled people are still discriminated against in practical matters such as hiring and promotion, imagine the status or stigma of an academic field dedicated to disability.

The paradox of it all is that contrary to societal unfounded belief that disabled people want to live on ‘hand-outs’ and not work; Oliver and Barnes (1998) found this not to be generally true. They say:

There is also evidence that unemployed disabled workers want paid work. Prescott Clarke (1990), for example found that 22 per cent of ‘occupationally handicapped’ but ‘economically active’ men and women want to work. These rates were almost twice as high as those for economically active men and women in the general population (p. 43).

The focus of this research was on access to higher and further education for physically disabled students who would have made it to high school. The question is how accessible is higher education for these students? If not, what are the possible constraints? As I prepared for this research I have to confess, I thought it was one of those ‘normal’ research findings ‘in fulfillment of the requirements of my program’ for the degree. I was wrong. This research was an ‘eye’ opener. There was much to unveil beneath traditional and indigenous belief systems of the Zimbabwe people. The belief of ancestral powers determining worldly encounters is real and strong although not many people would admit that in public. Even some, who profess Christianity as their calling, attend to the
requirement of their vertical and horizontal belief systems when confronted with the arrival of a disabled child in the family. This is what leads me to recommend the development of the indigenous knowledge model of disability for such a research.

This model would be a model of choice when researching among people who are deeply rooted in their indigenous belief systems. It would recognize that below the ‘surface’ there are other forces that have implications on what happens ‘above’ the surface. It is apparent that indigenous belief systems affect even policy makers who, one would have thought, would not pay attention to such belief systems. My interviews proved that wrong. “What can a disabled person do Mr Manyimo given that vadzimu (ancestors) have already condemned him at birth? Why are you people wasting money like that?” This was a shocker I got from a senior civil servant who even refused to be interviewed. Then one wonders what policy, for the advancement of disabled students, will come from such people given their attitudes. The proposed indigenous model, once developed, would be a way of recognizing that we cannot, and we should not, make sweeping generalizations regarding the education or otherwise of people living with disabilities. We should also realize and note that, not all disabled people are condemned at birth in the Zimbabwean traditional culture, not all disabled children are a result of a curse or misfortune, and the belief system has it that some disabled children are introduced to a family as a gift. They can turn out to be spiritual leaders although they cannot be political leaders of choice. They can develop to be divine healers as a calling from the higher spiritual powers. This model allows us to put on all those ‘lenses’ when articulating matters that impinge on belief systems. Disability is indeed one of those matters. It is important to give voices to those who are usually voiceless. There is always
a missing piece of the puzzle when it comes to research on disability by non-disabled people who do not have lived experiences. Johnstone (2001, p. 116) informs us that:

Representing the views of disabled has often been difficult. Information and data on disabled people have formed the basis for numerous statistical reports. ... These stories and reports have been influential in generating a collective recognition of disabled people as victims of both internalised and externally generated oppression; but they have not been told by disabled people themselves. Their lives have been interpreted, retold and packaged for the consumption of a society that still sees disability as a kind of personal tragedy, in which the able-bodied majority have custody of the lives of the people with disabilities.

This profusion of able-bodied anthropology, as Johnson puts it, has prompted an inevitable reaction from some disabled researchers. Linton (1998, pp. 101-102) states:

The glut of this one-way attitude research prompted one of my friends (a disabled woman), while we were sitting in the audience at a conference presentation to whisper to me ‘I’m tired of hearing how they feel about us. Why doesn’t anybody ask how we feel about them?’

Thus, the recommendations made here have been carefully thought out and more importantly, are derived from the voices of the people who are directly affected. I hope it will not be just another academic exercise but something that forms a milestone in the education of disabled people in Zimbabwe. As shown here, much of the responsibility for a way forward is put on the government of Zimbabwe to take serious initiatives. We
(myself and my respondents) are asking for a revamping of the education system that it openly accept that disabled people have a place and a right to fair and full participation in education. Employment opportunities should be fair and non-discriminatory. Zimbabwe sign language should be introduced to all students from primary level to high school (Form 4) as a credit subject to help with integration of all citizens. Attention needs also to be paid for the development of rural areas so that facilities in these areas are suitable and accessible for disabled people who at present just ‘melt’ into the unknown as one participant put it. To achieve all this there is need for civic education and a political good will that is lacking now.

It would be naive to think that researching in this field is an easy chore. It is not. There are so many forces that work against the researcher. Without proper understanding of the indigenous culture of the population where the research is being carried out, the use of an indigenous knowledge base will be very limited and results may be superficial. I would go as far as to say that good knowledge of the indigenous culture is a prerequisite for undertaking such a research using indigenous knowledge as a model or research tool. It is evident that more work needs to be done to develop such a tool. For a system that promotes ‘majority’ against ‘minority’ and prioritizes according to this division, disabled people will always remain an oppressed sector of the population. Research in disability is about researching oppression and it is evident throughout my narrative that, ‘my heart’ is with the disabled students’ plight. They are indeed an oppressed minority whether intended or not. Their circumstances with regards to education, in Zimbabwe in this case, clearly show that they are relegated to second-class citizens by their own government systems and their communities, because of a natural happening that happened to them.
that they have no control over. Davis (2006, p. 312) cites Barnes (1996, p. 110) who argues that:

If disability is about researching oppression, and I would argue that it is, then researchers should not be professing ‘mythical independence’ to disabled people but joining them in their struggles to confront and overcome this oppression. Researchers should be espousing commitment not value freedom, engagement not objectivity, and solidarity not independence. There is no independent haven or middle of the ground when researching oppression: academics and researchers can only be with the oppressors or the oppressed.

I share with Barnes’ sentiments here and that marked my driving force in coming up with this valuable piece of literature. As for future research plans, I am thinking of developing an indigenous knowledge model that I could use for a longitudinal ethnographical research where I would follow particular students, parents, officers over time and assess the impact if any, of these interventions until disabled students access or fail to access higher education through applying this model. I hope to share this valuable piece of research with all those who cherish fairness and regard all people as humans, regardless of their different uncontrollable circumstances. One thing we all should take note of, disabled or not, is that disability is not a personal choice but disabling someone is. Intriguing, is it not? This is certainly food for thought.

**Directions for Further Research**

The discovery of possible influences of indigenous culture in the education of disabled children in Zimbabwe, as clearly demonstrated by this study, is worth pursuing further. Indigenous knowledge, especially through the ingrained belief systems of
indigenous Zimbabwean people, showed that more work needs to be done to exploit this rather untapped reservoir of knowledge affecting disabled people. As recommended above, in recommendation 2, there is need to conduct further research into the possible influence indigenous knowledges have especially in the education of disabled people in Africa. Coming up with an indigenous model of disability will go a long way in influencing how we do research in disability, especially in education, for communities with deep-rooted indigenous beliefs.

When an indigenous knowledge model of disability has been developed and tested, it will be important to conduct further research, preferably a longitudinal research, to understand more about possible constraints in the education of disabled people. Relying on foreign methods of research does not seem to give authentic findings. This current study has demonstrated the potential of incorporating indigenous culture into sociological research, especially in Africa, where indigenous belief systems play a big role in the lives of disabled people.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Zimbabwe languages map

Appendix 2: Approval: Ministry of Higher & Tertiary Education

REFERENCE:
MINISTRY OF HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION
P.O. Box CY 7732
Causeway
HARARE

REF: D/11/3

6 April 2010

Mr Energy Lee Manyimo
University of Toronto

Dear Mr Energy Lee Manyimo

APPROVAL OF APPLICATION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH ON: ACCESS TO HIGHER AND TERTIARY EDUCATION FOR DISABLED ‘O’ LEVEL GRADUATES IN ZIMBABWE: MR E.L. MANYIMO CANDIDATE FOR PHD

I refer to your e-mail communication dated 9 March 2010 requesting for approval to carry out research on “Access to Higher and Tertiary Education for Disabled ‘O’ Level Graduates in Zimbabwe”.

The Head of Ministry hereby grants you permission to interview personnel in higher and tertiary education institutions and Head Office for relevant information regarding your study.

It is hoped that once completed your research will benefit the Ministry. Accordingly, we would appreciate that you supply the Office of the Permanent Secretary with a final copy of your study, which may also be relevant for our strategic planning processes.

Yours faithfully

J. Mugabe (Mr)
Director – Projects and Research
for: PERMANENT SECRETARY

Ref: C/426/3
Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture
P.O Box CY 121
Causeway
Zimbabwe
19 May, 2010

Mr Energy L. Manyimo
(I.D. 63-435040 E 12)

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH

Reference is made to your application to carry out research in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture.

Permission is hereby granted for you to carry out the research. You are allowed to interview Ministry officials, school administrators and others as you carry out the research on disabled people.

You are required to report first to the Provincial Education Directors who will assist you to gain entry into the schools you want to involve in your research.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Ministry since it is instrumental in the development of education in Zimbabwe.

T. C. Machingaidze
Director: Policy Planning, Research and Development
For: SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION, SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE
Appendix 4: Approval: Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture - Harare Region

May 31, 2010

Energy L Manyimo
138 Twickenham Drive
Mt Pleasant
elmanyimo@yahoo.com Tel. 0916127179

The Provincial Education Director
Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture
Harare Province

Dear sir,

Re: Permission to carryout research in your Province.

Attached please find a letter from your Ministry Head Office giving me general permission to conduct research in the Ministry. The letter further advises me to liaise with you for further authority and detailed requests which are pertinent to your province. My intended research is for access to higher and tertiary education for physically disabled form 4 graduates who are still under 30 years old regardless of whether they proceeded to further education or not. I am currently studying at the University of Toronto in a PhD program with special emphasis on education of disabled people. I am planning to conduct my research work as soon as this authority is granted.

My interventions will be in the form of semi-structured one-on-one audio recorded interviews of not more than 2 hours each. The participants will not be subjected to any physical or psychological test except that they be registered as physically disabled. I will also be interested in conducting interviews with some heads of high schools in your province.

If granted the authority, I would ask for the following information from you:

- To provide me with a record of physically disabled form 4 graduates who were registered in your province and are still under the age of 30 years old.
- To provide me with names of schools where they attended secondary education and the year they completed as form 4 graduates.
- These students’ dates of birth, last known addresses, last known telephone numbers or email addresses (any mode possible for contacting them).
- Any relevant policy documents and/or guidelines regarding education of disabled people in Zimbabwe or in your province specifically.
Names of other key Provincial personnel in your province responsible for disabled students policy implementation who I can interview.

I will also appreciate if you can provide me with a day to day contact person with your authority to assist me with logistics and information.

Looking forward to seeing you soon. I would appreciate it if I can get the said information, especially the names and addresses of the students as soon as possible so that I can send them invitation letters for interviews which I plan to start by mid-June. You can send the information via my email address elmanyimo@yahoo.com or call me to come and collect the information on 0916127179.

Thank you

Energy L Manyimo: PhD Candidate
University of Toronto, Canada.
Communications should be addressed to:

THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR

Telephone: 792671-9
Fax: 796135/79254
Email: mosesnym@zol.co.zw

ZIMBABWE

Ref. C/377/1

Ministry of Education, Sport,
Arts and Culture
Harare Provincial Education Office
P.O. Box CY 1343
Causeway
Zimbabwe

01 JUN 2000

L. L. MANDIMO

138 TWILLENHAM
DRIVE MT PLEASANT

REQUEST TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN SOME SELECTED SCHOOLS

TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN
HAZARDE PROVINCE ON PHYSICALLY DISABILITIES FORM 4 GRADUATES

Reference is made to your letter dated 21/05/2010

Please be advised that the Provincial Education Director grants you authority to carry out research on the above topic. You are required to supply Provincial Office with a copy of your research findings.

W. A. KOMBES

PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR
HARARE PROVINCE
Appendix 5: Approval: Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts & Culture - Matabeleland South (Gwanda)

Ministry of Education Sport and Culture
P. Bag 5824
Gwanda
Zimbabwe

04 June 2010

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN MATABELELAND SOUTH SCHOOLS:
MR. E.L. MANYIMO

Bearer Mr. Energy L. Manyimo has been authorized to carry out research in schools in Matabeleland South Province on the 'Education of Physical Disabled Students'.

Please give him all the assistance you can.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
P. B. 5824, GWANDA
ZIMBABWE

S.M. Salome
A/DEPUTY PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DIRECTOR – MATABELELAND SOUTH PROVINCE
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter to Disabled Graduates

June, 2010

The struggle of the struggling: Access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

My name is Energy Manyimo. I am currently a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am currently conducting research on access to higher education for disabled people in Zimbabwe which is part of the requirements for the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). The aim of the research is to ascertain how the education system and the Zimbabwean society deal with issues pertaining to access to higher education for disabled people. The purpose of this letter is to request you to participate in this research. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix B: Recruitment letter to Administrators

June, 2010

The struggle of the struggling: Access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear

My name is Energy Manyimo. I am currently a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am currently conducting research on access to higher education for disabled people in Zimbabwe which is part of the requirements for the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). The aim of the research is to ascertain how the education system and the Zimbabwean society deal with issues pertaining to access to higher education for disabled people. The purpose of this letter is to request you to participate in this research. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
138 Twickenham Drive Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel. 884632.
Appendix C: Recruitment letter to Policy makers

June, 2010

The struggle of the struggling: Access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear

My name is Energy Manyimo. I am currently a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am currently conducting research on access to higher education for disabled people in Zimbabwe which is part of the requirements for the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). The aim of the research is to ascertain how the education system and the Zimbabwean society deal with issues pertaining to access to higher education for disabled people. The purpose of this letter is to request you to participate in this research. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
138 Twickenham Drive Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe. Tel. 884632.
Appendix D: Recruitment letter to Cultural Experts

June, 2010

The struggle of the struggling: Access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear

My name is Energy Manyimo. I am currently a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am currently conducting research on access to higher education for disabled people in Zimbabwe which is part of the requirements for the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). The aim of the research is to ascertain how the education system and the Zimbabwean society deal with issues pertaining to access to higher education for disabled people. The purpose of this letter is to request you to participate in this research. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Tel. 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix E: Recruitment letter to Associations

June, 2010

The struggle of the struggling: Access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear

My name is Energy Manyimo. I am currently a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. I am currently conducting research on access to higher education for disabled people in Zimbabwe which is part of the requirements for the completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree (PhD). The aim of the research is to ascertain how the education system and the Zimbabwean society deal with issues pertaining to access to higher education for disabled people. The purpose of this letter is to request you to participate in this research. Participation is completely voluntary, and, should you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Tel. 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix F: Consent Form – For Disabled Graduates

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

I _______________________________ have read the letter explaining the project and agree to participate in the above named research project that will be conducted by Energy Manyimo, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study if I so decide at any time or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. I understand that the participation in the study will involve an interview about access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. I understand that these interviews will be recorded and later transcribed by him.

Through this letter, a copy of which I will keep, I am giving Energy Manyimo consent to use the interview transcriptions or interview notes and any other relevant information for his doctoral dissertation and publications. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used when reporting the findings.

Participant Signature __________________________

Researcher ___________________________

Date _______________________________

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky +1 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Tel. 0916 127 179 (Harare) or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix G: Consent Form – For Policy Makers

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

I _______________________________ have read the letter explaining the project and agree to participate in the above named research project that will be conducted by Energy Manyimo, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study if I so decide at any time or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. I understand that the participation in the study will involve an interview about access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. I understand that these interviews will be recorded and later transcribed by him.

Through this letter, a copy of which I will keep, I am giving Energy consent to use the interview transcriptions or interview notes and any other relevant information for his doctoral dissertation and publications. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used when reporting the findings.

Participant ____________________________
Researcher ____________________________
Date _________________________________

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Tel 0916 127 179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix H: Consent Form– For Administrators

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

I ____________________ have read the letter explaining the project and agree to participate in the above named research project that will be conducted by Energy Manyimo, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study if I so decide at any time or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. I understand that the participation in the study will involve an interview concerning access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. I understand also that these interviews will be recorded and later transcribed by him.

Through this letter, a copy of which I will keep, I am giving Energy consent to use the interview transcriptions or interview notes and any other relevant information for his doctoral dissertation and publications. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used when reporting the findings.

Participant __________________________
Researcher ___________________________
Date _________________________________

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix I: Consent Form – For Cultural Experts

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

I ____________________ ________________________have read the letter explaining the project and agree to participate in the above named research project that will be conducted by Energy Manyimo, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study if I so decide at any time or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. I understand that the participation in the study will involve an interview concerning access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. I understand also that these interviews will be recorded and later transcribed by him.

Through this letter, a copy of which I will keep, I am giving Energy consent to use the interview transcriptions or interview notes and any other relevant information for his doctoral dissertation and publications. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used when reporting the findings.

Participant __________________________

Researcher ___________________________

Date _________________________________

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix J: Consent Form – For Associations

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

I ____________________ ________________________ have read the letter explaining the project and agree to participate in the above named research project that will be conducted by Energy Manyimo, a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study if I so decide at any time or decline to answer questions without any negative consequences. I understand that the participation in the study will involve an interview concerning access to higher education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe. I understand also that these interviews will be recorded and later transcribed by him.

Through this letter, a copy of which I will keep, I am giving Energy consent to use the interview transcriptions or interview notes and any other relevant information for his doctoral dissertation and publications. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential and that a pseudonym will be used when reporting the findings.

Participant __________________________
Researcher __________________________
Date _________________________________

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Energy Manyimo
Appendix K: Information & Consent Form for Disabled Graduates

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research which aims at examining why so many disabled high school graduates do not get access to proceed to higher education. As a participant in this research I will arrange for an interview with you which will last not more than two hours at a place and time which will be mutually convenient where you feel free and safe. During this interview we will discuss your experiences at school, at home and within the community where you live. You will be free to give as much information as you want and can choose not to answer any questions you may not be comfortable with.

Also note that the interview will be audio recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcribed data when that has been done. It is important to note that you are free to withdraw from the whole process at any stage of the project if you so wish. There will be no negative consequences for such a withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained at all levels and to enhance this, pseudonyms will be used for the transcripts and any reports or documents generated from this data. I will be the only person with access to raw data.

Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:
   1. Can you tell me about yourself, your interests, and your aspirations?
   2. How has school life been for you leading to your graduation at form 4 level?
   3. Can you tell me more about your family and your life at home?

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:
   Your colleagues may be able to deduce which quotations are yours based on the small sample since each participant interviewed will receive a summary report of the research findings.
   Any disclosures compelling me by law to break confidentiality.
   Correspondence by post and email is not absolutely secure, although infringement is highly unlikely.

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are:
   1. The interview may give you an opportunity to reflect on your own life experiences and plans for the future.
   2. The interview may provide an opportunity to highlight your innovative and effective ideas, and/ or spark ideas for change.
   3. You may increase your awareness of some of the challenges of life as a disabled person.
4. The outcome may benefit other people who may be in similar circumstances to yours.

A potential harm is that you may be disappointed in the findings or become frustrated by the barriers to effecting changes you may have advocated for. This can be mitigated through suggestions for improvements I may be able to make.

Please complete, sign and return the consent section attached and return it to me and keep the other copy for your records.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely

Energy L Manyimo
Appendix L: Information & Consent Form for Policy Makers

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research which aims at examining why so many disabled high school graduates do not get access to proceed to higher education. As a participant in this research I will arrange for an interview with you which will last not more than two hours at a place and time which will be mutually convenient where you feel free and safe. During this interview we will discuss your experiences as a policy maker with issues concerning education of disabled students in your ministry. These issues may include how students are categorized as disabled, the enrolment policy for higher and tertiary education and curricula considerations. You will be free to give as much information as you want and can choose not to answer any questions you may not be comfortable with. In addition, I may ask you for documents from which regulations and policy may be derived.

Also note that the interview will be audio recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcribed data when that has been done. It is important to note that you are free to withdraw from the whole process at any stage of the project if you so wish. There will be no negative consequences for such a withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained at all levels and to enhance this, pseudonyms will be used for the transcripts and any reports or documents generated from this data. I will be the only person with access to raw data.

Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:
1. How do you determine disabilities in your students in your education system?
2. Do you have any statistics on disabled children in your education system?
3. What does your ministry policy say regarding accessibility of education for disabled people?

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:
Your colleagues may be able to deduce which quotations are yours based on the small sample since each participant interviewed will receive a summary report of the research findings. Any disclosures compelling me by law to break confidentiality. Correspondence by post and email is not absolutely secure, although infringement is highly unlikely.

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are:
1. The interview may give you an opportunity to reflect on your role as an education policy maker for the government of Zimbabwe and plans for the future concerning disabled students.
2. The interview may provide an opportunity to highlight your innovative and effective ideas, and/or spark ideas for change.
3. The outcome may benefit other people who may be in similar circumstances to yours.

A potential harm is that you may be disappointed in the findings or become frustrated by the barriers to effecting changes you may have advocated for. This can be mitigated through suggestions for improvements I may be able to make.

Please complete, sign and return the consent section attached and return it to me and keep the other copy for your records.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr. Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me, Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely

Energy L Manyimo
Appendix M: Information & Consent Form for Cultural Experts

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research which aims at examining why so many disabled high school graduates do not get access to proceed to higher education. As a participant in this research I will arrange for an interview with you which will last not more than two hours at a place and time which will be mutually convenient where you feel free and safe. During this interview we will discuss your experiences as an indigenous cultural expert with issues concerning disabled people. These issues may include your understanding of how society views disability, what expectations indigenous society has on disabled people, the education of disabled people before, during and after the colonial era, and the role of indigenous culture in disability issues. You will be free to give as much information as you want and can choose not to answer any questions you may not be comfortable with.

Also note that the interview will be audio recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcribed data when that has been done. It is important to note that you are free to withdraw from the whole process at any stage of the project if you so wish. There will be no negative consequences for such a withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained at all levels and to enhance this, pseudonyms will be used for the transcripts and any reports or documents generated from this data. I will be the only person with access to raw data.

Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:
1. In typical Zimbabwe cultural setting, can you explain how disability issues are handled by the community?
2. Do traditional leaders have a say in matters concerning disabilities, if so, what are their roles?
3. How does the indigenous community view disability now after independence, and how was it in the past before colonialism?

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:
- Your colleagues may be able to deduce which quotations are yours based on the small sample since each participant interviewed will receive a summary report of the research findings.
- Any disclosures compelling me by law to break confidentiality.
- Correspondence by post and email is not absolutely secure, although infringement is highly unlikely.

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are:
4. The interview may give you an opportunity to reflect on your role as an indigenous cultural expert for ways of promoting indigenous culture in Zimbabwe.

5. The interview may provide an opportunity to highlight your innovative and effective ideas, and/or spark ideas for change for Zimbabwe society.

6. The outcome may benefit other people who may be in similar circumstances to yours.

A potential harm is that you may be disappointed in the findings or become frustrated by the barriers to effecting changes you may have advocated for. This can be mitigated through suggestions for improvements I may be able to make.

Please complete, sign and return the consent section attached and return it to me and keep the other copy for your records.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca.

Sincerely

Energy L Manyimo
Appendix N: Information & Consent Form for Administrators.

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research which aims at examining why so many disabled high school graduates do not get access to proceed to higher education. As a participant in this research I will arrange for an interview with you which will last not more than two hours at a place and time which will be mutually convenient where you feel free and safe. During this interview we will discuss your experiences as a school administrator with issues concerning disabled students in your institution including policy matters, curricula and any constraints your institution may have. You will be free to give as much information as you want and can choose not to answer any questions you may not be comfortable with.

Also note that the interview will be audio recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcribed data when that has been done. It is important to note that you are free to withdraw from the whole process at any stage of the project if you so wish. There will be no negative consequences for such a withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained at all levels and to enhance this, pseudonyms will be used for the transcripts and any reports or documents generated from this data. I will be the only person with access to raw data.

Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:

1. Do you have or have had any disabled students in you institution?
2. What has been your experience with physically disabled students in your institution?
3. Do you have any special regulations for dealing with cases of disability – such as enrolling, subjects to take, extra-curricular activities etc?

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:

Your colleagues may be able to deduce which quotations are yours based on the small sample since each participant interviewed will receive a summary report of the research findings.

Any disclosures compelling me by law to break confidentiality.

Correspondence by post and email is not absolutely secure, although infringement is highly unlikely.

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are:

7. The interview may give you an opportunity to reflect on your role as an administrator in your institution and plans for the future concerning disabled students
8. The interview may provide an opportunity to highlight your innovative and effective ideas, and/or spark ideas for change.
9. The outcome may benefit other people who may be in similar circumstances to yours.

A potential harm is that you may be disappointed in the findings or become frustrated by the barriers to effecting changes you may have advocated for. This can be mitigated through suggestions for improvements I may be able to make.

Please complete, sign and return the consent section attached and return it to me and keep the other copy for your records.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely

Energy L Manyimo
Appendix O: Information & Consent Form for Associations

The Struggle of the Struggling: Access to higher Education for physically disabled people in Zimbabwe

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research which aims at examining why so many disabled high school graduates do not get access to proceed to higher education. As a participant in this research I will arrange for an interview with you which will last not more than two hours at a place and time which will be mutually convenient where you feel free and safe. During this interview we will discuss your experiences as a school administrator with issues concerning disabled students in your institution including policy matters, curricula and any constraints your institution may have. You will be free to give as much information as you want and can choose not to answer any questions you may not be comfortable with.

Also note that the interview will be audio recorded and you will be given a copy of the transcribed data when that has been done. It is important to note that you are free to withdraw from the whole process at any stage of the project if you so wish. There will be no negative consequences for such a withdrawal. Confidentiality will be maintained at all levels and to enhance this, pseudonyms will be used for the transcripts and any reports or documents generated from this data. I will be the only person with access to raw data.

Examples of questions that I have in mind but may or may not ask depending on priorities which emerge and how the dialogue evolves are:

1. Do you have or have had any disabled students in you institution?
2. What has been your experience with physically disabled students in your institution?
3. Do you have any special regulations for dealing with cases of disability – such as enrolling, subjects to take, extra-curricular activities etc?

Potential limitations in my ability to guarantee anonymity are:

Your colleagues may be able to deduce which quotations are yours based on the small sample since each participant interviewed will receive a summary report of the research findings.

Any disclosures compelling me by law to break confidentiality.

Correspondence by post and email is not absolutely secure, although infringement is highly unlikely.

Potential benefits which you might derive from participating are:

10. The interview may give you an opportunity to reflect on your role as an administrator in your institution and plans for the future concerning disabled students
11. The interview may provide an opportunity to highlight your innovative and effective ideas, and/or spark ideas for change.
12. The outcome may benefit other people who may be in similar circumstances to yours.

A potential harm is that you may be disappointed in the findings or become frustrated by the barriers to effecting changes you may have advocated for. This can be mitigated through suggestions for improvements I may be able to make.

Please complete, sign and return the consent section attached and return it to me and keep the other copy for your records.

Should you have any concerns about the research, you may at any time contact my supervisor Dr Tanya Titchkosky, Tel. 416-978-0451 tanya.titchkosky@utoronto.ca or me Energy Manyimo at Cell 0916127179 or email, energy.manyimo@utoronto.ca

Sincerely

Energy L Manyimo
Appendix P: Interview Leading Questions

Research Questions – ‘Disabled’ high school graduates

1. Can you tell me about yourself, your interests, and your aspirations?
2. How has school life been for you leading to your graduation at form 4 level?
3. How has it been since graduating at form 4 level to this day
4. Tell me more about your family and your life at home
5. How does the community in general interact with you?

Research Questions - Parents or guardians of Participants

Note: Only one member will be interviewed if available with the consent of the child.

1. Can you tell me about your family? i.e. family members, general living conditions, priorities etc.
2. Have you or any member of your family ever sort help from traditional healers?
3. What aspirations do you have for your child(ren)?
4. Given the condition of your child, has the school made a difference in his/her life
5. How does the community react towards your child’s impairment?

Research Questions – Education Administrators (Universities and Colleges)

1. Do you have or have had any disabled students in you institution?
2. Do you have special regulations for dealing with cases of disability – such as enrolling, subjects to take, extracurricular activities etc?

Research Questions - Policy makers (Ministry officials)

1. How do you determine disabilities in your students in your education system?
2. Do you have any statistics on disabled children in your education system?
3. What steps have been taken so far to improve access to higher education for people living with physical disabilities?
4. How does our cultural practices in Zimbabwe affect the education of disabled people, particularly their accessing higher education after form 4?
5. If there is negative effect, how can this be rectified?

Research Questions - Cultural experts

1. In typical Zimbabwe culture can you explain how disability issues are handled by the community?
2. Do traditional leaders have a say in matters concerning disabilities, if so, what are their roles?
3. How does the indigenous community view disability now and how was it in the past?
4. How does our cultural practices in Zimbabwe affect the education of disabled
people, particularly their accessing higher education after form 4?
5. If there is negative effect, how can this be rectified?

Research Questions - Associations

1. What are the main objectives of the existence of your association?
2. In what way do you think you are making a difference in as far as disabled students get education in the first place and access higher education?
3. How does your organization fit into the national education system?
4. What role do you see indigenous culture with particular reference to disability play in the education of physically disabled children in this country?
Appendix Q: Questionnaire Information

Survey questionnaire for disabled students to include the following *(designed as a short form)*

Personal Information
1. Name
2. Gender
3. Marital status
4. Number of children in the family (him/her and the other siblings)
5. Rank in the birth order. First, second, third….last etc
6. Age range Under 20, 21-25, 26-30. (none of them will be more than 30 years old)
7. Living with family or not
8. Highest education level attained
9. Why did you not go further
10. Current occupation (if any)
11. Ambition
12. Best moments at school
13. Worst moments at school
14. Best moments at home after leaving school
15. Worst moment at home after leaving school
16. Do you have your own children?
17. If so, what are your plans for them
18. What are your constraints?

Family information
1. Family name
2. Did you grow up with both your parents? If not please explain
3. Highest educational level of either parent or guardian
4. Gross family income (if any & if known)
5. Religion
Appendix R: Questionnaire for disabled graduates.

INFORMATION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE INTERVIEWEE

1. Personal Information

Surname __________________ First Name __________________ Other ___________

Gender Female/Male (Circle one)

2. Family

How many children are you in your family? ..................... (Girls.............and Boys..........)

What is your rank in birth order? (1st, 2nd,......7th, last)

Are you living with your family now? Yes/No (Please explain why)

Did you grow up with your parents? Yes/No (If not or partial please explain)

What is the highest level of education of the people who looked after you to the time you did form 4?

Do you know roughly the gross income of the family? (Please make a good guess if you are not sure).

Do you and your family belong to any particular religion?

3. Education

What is the highest level of education you achieved? ......................................................

Is this the highest you aspired for? Yes/No (Please explain why).
4. **Life Experiences**

What is your current occupation (if any)? ........................................If not, why not?

Do you have any occupation ambition in life?

What were your best moments at school?

What were your worst moments at school?

What are your best experiences at home?

What are your worst experiences at home?

What are the best moments you have experienced from the community other than your family?

What are the worst moments you have experienced from the community other than your family?

5. **Other Information**

Is there anything you would like to highlight which is not covered above?