



Inclusive education policies versus implementation challenges in the Southern Africa development community Countries: A scoping review

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Abstract—The Salamanca framework of Action of 1994 and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006 guide SADC member states in formulating inclusive education policies in mainstream and inclusive schools. However, the literature on policies versus implementation remains unclear. This scoping review maps the literature on the common inclusive education policies versus implementation challenges in inclusive education in the SADC countries and how these challenges exclude students with special learning needs. The study employed a mixed approach and case study design to explore the inclusive education policies versus their implementation challenges in the SADC region. A search was conducted through Google Scholar, Science Direct, Research Gate, and PubMed for studies published between 1994 and 2025. The study adopted Boolean operators and proximity operators. Data extraction focuses on the author(s), year of publication, country, research approach, design, data collection methods, analysis, and the key findings. It adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA-SCR) extension for Scoping Reviews. A total of ninety studies were identified from the search strategies and databases. Inclusion and exclusion criteria screened the studies; forty-eight were irrelevant, and forty were relevant to this scoping review. A total of forty-two studies were included. Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Namibia, Zambia, and Malawi have published numerous studies on inclusive education compared to other countries in the SADC region. This study found that SADC countries have common inclusive education challenges, such as inadequate instructional materials, inaccessible infrastructures, rigid curricula, negative attitudes of teachers and administrators towards inclusive education and disabilities, and teachers having insufficient knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive schools. The study recommends that all SADC countries consider reviewing their inclusive education policies to address the implementation challenges.

Keywords: Implementation challenges, Inclusive education, Inclusive education policies, Learners with special learning needs, Scoping Review

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I. INTRODUCTION

THIS scoping review aims to map the literature on common inclusive education policies versus implementation challenges of inclusive education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, formed in 1992, and how these challenges lead to the exclusion of learners with special learning needs. The formulation of SADC lies in its predecessor, the Southern African Development and Co-ordination Conference (SADCC), formed in 1980. The original members of SADCC were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. Namibia joined in 1990, South Africa in 1994, Mauritius in 1996, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and Seychelles joined in 1997 (Gottschalk, 2013).

Inclusive education is a philosophy designed to facilitate the learning success of all learners by providing reasonable accommodation to learners with special learning needs to enhance access, participation, and engagement in the learning process (Ainscow, 2020). Inclusive education is provided to several learners, including those with sensorial impairments like hearing and visual, from nomadic families, refugees, learners with chronic illness, children from extreme poverty, children living far from schools, and those who conflict with the law (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 2021).

The implementation of inclusive education in Africa and the world results from calls from international legal frameworks and member states to formulate inclusive education policies. First and foremost is the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which emphasises the rights of all children to quality education at all levels without discrimination (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2009). From the same perspective, the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990 focused on providing education to all children and made primary education compulsory for all (UNESCO, 1990). The Salamanca Statements and Frameworks of Actions (1994) called on inclusive education through its explicit directive that member states, should ensure that all children regardless of their learning needs either due to physical, intellectual, sensory, social, emotional, linguistic or geographical conditions are enrolled in the nearby schools (UNESCO, 1994; UNESCO, 2009).

The Salamanca Framework of Actions guides member states to formulate inclusive education policies, accounting for individual differences and offering support services. Furthermore, it guides schools to consider the integration of curricula, accessible infrastructures, inclusive instructions, assessment pedagogies, and modification of curricula (UNESCO, 1994). It also focuses on recruiting and training special education teachers to teach learners with special educational needs in an inclusive school.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) of 2006 affirmed the rights of learners with disabilities to be educated through inclusive education (Aziz & Khairuddin, 2021). The UNCRPD (2005) came up with three major features of inclusive education: (i) whole system approach, (ii) whole educational environment approach, and (iii) whole person approach.

Whole system approach

The UNCRPD's Whole System Approach, as one of the features of inclusive education, emphasises reforms in systems, policies, curriculum, training of teachers, and construction of disability-friendly learning environments (Slee, 2011). This feature also recommends systemic changes that include policy frameworks, school administration, resource allocations, school visions, and missions that embrace inclusive teaching and inclusion (Florian, 2014).

Whole educational environment approach

This feature transforms the pedagogical, mental, social, and psychological environments that support all learners (Loreman, 2014). The target is to use the social model of disability to enhance engagement and participation of learners with special needs in the learning process (Florian, 2014).

Whole-person approach

This feature focuses on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of teachers, administrators, and the non-disabled learners in a school towards disability and inclusion (Loreman, 2014; Shakespeare, 2010).

Additionally, the recent Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, specifically Goal 4, focus on building and setting up educational facilities that are learner-friendly, disability and gender sensitive, and provide proactive learning environments for all (Mabele, 2020; Johnson, 2016).

Based on the 1994 Salamanca frameworks of Action Directives and the UNRPD of 2006, all 16 SADC member states formulated inclusive education policies and laws on implementing inclusive education. Table 1 below summarises the policies, strategies, and implementation gaps in the SADC countries.

Table 1: Policies and strategies, and the implementation gaps in the SADC countries

Country	Year	Overall policy/strategy Goal	Implementation Gap	Source of information	Year	Challenges	Recommendations	
Malawi	2016	To increase access to equitable and relevant quality education for all learners, ensuring that students with disabilities and other marginalized groups receive the support they need to thrive in mainstream schools.	Inadequate instructional materials in schools. Inaccessible infrastructure like classrooms, toilets for wheelchair users, e.g. physically impaired students. Lack of or inadequate qualified teachers to teach inclusive classrooms. The country focuses on the international framework on inclusion (theories) rather than the contextual situations (practical), resulting in poor pre-service teacher preparation, modifications of curriculum, and the building of proactive, needs-centred classrooms. The policy ignores the essence of mainstream pedagogical competencies, hence difficult for Malawi to implement inclusive education that ensures epistemological inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools.	Chiwaya et al. (2023) De Souza (2022) Piringu & Mwila (2025) De Souza (2022) Chirwa et al. (2021)	1996 2013	To guide the provision of education for all Zambians so that they can pursue knowledge and skills, defend democratic ideals and accept and value other persons irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity, origin, or any other discriminatory characteristics.	Learners with disabilities are placed within mainstream classrooms without support because teachers lack the skills to teach and have negative attitudes. Instructional materials for learners with disabilities are a common practice. Schools lack specialized learning resources for both teachers and pupils in inclusive classrooms.	Simui & Muzata (2021) ngulube et al. (2020)
				Seychelles	2015	To ensure that all learners, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, have an equal opportunity to succeed. Built on principles of equity, accessibility and quality education for all with emphasis on rights-based approach and early intervention.	Use of teachers' teacher-centred teaching and assessment strategies. The Ministry of Education is underperforming as it is not giving adequate support to teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms Instructional materials are neither inclusive and also adequate.	Anyanwu & Bibi (2023)
				Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	2016	To increase participation and reduce exclusion from mainstream education, ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable children (street children, girls, ethnic minorities, children from poor families, displaced children and those with disability have access to education.	The existing problem is training teachers to teach an inclusive classroom. Infrastructure is not user-friendly; they lack electricity, a lack of technological infrastructure like computers with captions, lack of sanitary services. The national budget for inclusive education is limited, which leads to a lack of instructional materials.	Tshiuzza et al. (2018)
Tanzania	2009	To ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities. The emphasis is to eliminate barriers to learning, promote inclusive teaching practices and foster collaboration among stakeholders to create more accessible education.	Lack of pre-service and in-service training of teachers on inclusive education. A rigid curriculum that is not modified to the learning needs of all learners. Inadequate instructional materials, i.e. text textbooks, charts and diagrams in accessible format. Lack/ inadequate/ insufficient support services. Large class size. Unfriendly learning environment due to the absence of ramps and emergency signals.	Revelian & Tibategeza (2022) Charles&Otieno (2023) Losioki & Ngwoko (2024) Madagascar Chekwaze& Juma (2024) URT (2017)	2009	To promote access to quality, inclusive education, social participation and respect for the rights of children with disabilities	Poor condition of school buildings, which results in overcrowding (large class size) Poorly designed infrastructure that does not cater to the needs of all learners. Inadequate instructional materials in inclusive schools.	Rohen (2012)
				Zimbabwe	1996	To ensure that all learners, especially marginalized groups and those with disabilities, have access to high-quality education in mainstream	Lack of commitment by policymakers. They use disability Act of 1996, and other circulars from the Ministry of Education. They are yet to formulate a	Chataika & Mutepa (2007)

schools. The emphasis is on the educational environment that values diversity to foster respect and inclusivity.

strategy or policy that directly touches students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are exposed to the full national curriculum due to the absence of early identification.

Unequal distribution of infrastructure resources between urban and rural inclusive education schools, i.e. in rural areas, infrastructure is very poor. Lack of assistive devices and specialized equipment to support children with diverse needs. Teachers lack professional development and training in inclusive education practice.

An existing gap between the commitment made on financing of inclusive education and the practices. This leads to a lack of instructional materials and an unfriendly learning environment. Inadequate qualified teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms.

Lack of necessary instructional materials and user user-friendly learning environment for learners with special needs. Negative attitude of teachers and administrators towards children with disabilities.

Inadequate teachers to teach in inclusive classrooms. Some teachers do not use the inclusive education assessment practices.

Insufficient instructional materials. Inaccessible infrastructures. Ill-prepared and disempowered teachers.

Pakombwele et al. (2024)

Mangena & Chidakwa (2024)

Antonio et al. (2021)

Madlela (2022)
Dlamini & Khoza (2022)

Khumalo&Mosia(2023).

Mateusi et al. (2014)

in this study as it reminds policymakers of the essential components to consider when planning learner-centred inclusive education policies. It guides policymakers to consider the views of school administrators, supervisors, and teachers, the primary curriculum implementation agents at the school level. From the same perspective, learners who are the consumers of knowledge and skills have their needs; hence, their voices need to be heard and considered for better planning. The framework guides the researchers to consider and conceptualise the terms: Inclusive education policies, inclusive education, and special learning needs that compose the topic under study. It enabled the researchers to zero in on literature from specific contexts such as inclusive and mainstream schools in the SADC countries.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study analyses the common implementation challenges in inclusive education in SADC countries. It explores how the inclusive education challenges in the SADC countries exclude learners with special needs in education.

IV. METHODS

Research approach

This study involved studies that adopted quantitative, qualitative, mixed, systematic, and Scoping methodologies. Quantitative aspects are essential based on the topic because some studies targeted influencing the government and policymakers through numbers. Some studies were on the attitudes and feelings of teachers and school administrators towards inclusive education and disabilities in their respective schools, where descriptions and words helped to capture the extreme cases. In some cases where both numbers and descriptions were needed, mixed paradigms were considered. Literature on inclusive education policies and their implementation exists in individual SADC member countries, so systematic reviews helped to give their explanatory views. On the other hand, literature on inclusive education policies and their implementation in the SADC region is scant, as per the background information, so scoping reviews brought about the exploratory perspectives useful for mapping and establishing the existing literature on the topic under study.

Research design

This study employed the exploratory case study design, in which the researchers examined inclusive education policies, their implementations, and challenges (Creswell, 2014). This study includes mainstream and inclusive schools in the SADC region. The exploration study is relevant because the reviewed literature revealed a dearth of information about the phenomenon under study (Yin, 2018). However, it was library work; the reviewed literature was scanned from within the SADC region, a factor that left relevant information from outside the region.

Data collection instruments

The study adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-SCR) checklist with 20-22 items. The PRISMA-SCR maps the existing literature, identifies gaps, and clarifies key concepts related to the topic under study (policy versus implementation gaps in inclusive education in the SADC countries (Tricco et al., 2018). PRISMA-ScR systematically ensures that authors report essential components such as the rationale, objectives, inclusion criteria, search strategy, and data charting methods. This promotes reproducibility and allows readers to assess the methodological rigor (Tricco et al., 2018). By following the guidelines, researchers disclose their scoping review process transparently, which helps identify potential biases and understand the review's scope and limitations (Peters et al., 2018). It supports the effective mapping of existing literature, especially in fields where evidence is emerging or fragmented, by ensuring comprehensive documentation of search strategies and inclusion criteria (Peters et al., 2018). In practice, PRISMA-ScR enables the researchers to focus on eligibility criteria and

Despite the well-formulated inclusive education policies that embrace inclusion, studies summarised in Table 1 above have shown some implementation challenges ranging from inadequate instructional materials, inaccessible infrastructures, inadequate qualified teachers, large class sizes as well as rigid and content laden curricula (Sheetheni, 2021; URT, 2017; Charles & Otieno, 2023; Chirwa et al., 2021). It is against this background that the undertaking of this study was inspired to explore common challenges SADC member countries face in implementing inclusive education and how those challenges exclude learners with special learning needs.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical background

Population, Concepts and Context (PCC)

The Population, Concepts, and Context (PCC) framework guided researchers to understand key items necessary to formulate objectives. Tricco et al. (2018) assert that the PCC framework ensures that reviews are focused and comprehensive. PCC framework helped the researchers define relevant articles, population, scope of the study, relate it to the intervention made, and the study's geographical, cultural, organizational, and political settings (Peters et al., 2018; Tricco et al., 2018). Peters et al. (2020) conclude that the PCC framework guides scoping reviews to include relevant literature and search strategies that enhance the utility of the findings. Table 2 below shows the PCC framework that guided the formulation of research objectives.

Table 2: Population, Concepts, and Context (PCC) framework

Component of the framework	Focus
Population (P)	Policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and learners with special learning needs
Concepts (C)	Inclusive education policies, inclusive education, and special learning needs
Context (C)	Inclusive and mainstream schools in the SADC countries

Relevance of the Population, Concepts, and Context (PCC) framework to the study

The Population, Concepts and Context (PCC) framework is relevant

information sources, systematic search strategy documentation, data charting and synthesis methods, and then discussion of the findings in the context of the study. Adherence to this framework results in a transparent, replicable, and high-quality scoping review that can reliably inform future research, policy, and practice (Tricco et al., 2018).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This study's inclusion and exclusion criteria emanate from the topic and the developed objectives. Studies involved in this study were ensured to meet the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria

- Studies about the implementation of inclusive education.
- Studies about inclusive education policies/strategies.
- Studies conducted within the SADC countries.
- Studies conducted between 1994 and 2025
- Studies written and published in English.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies mention other concepts outside the implementation of inclusive education or inclusive education policies.
- Studies conducted in countries outside SADC.
- Studies written and published in a language other than English.

Data bases

Literature was searched using Google Scholar, Research Gate, Science Direct, and PubMed databases. Time Scope ranged from 1994 to date because the Salamanca Framework of Actions of 1994 and UNCRPD of 2006 resulted in formulating policies and implementing inclusive education in the SADC countries.

Search string/query/phase

The searching strategies or search string include Boolean operators (AND, OR and NOT) and the proximity operators (SAME and NEAR). Key words involved include: "Inclusive education policy AND inclusive implementation of inclusive education", "Inclusive education strategy AND inclusion", "Inclusive education strategy NEAR inclusive education policy", "Challenges of implementing inclusive education OR exclusion within inclusive practices in schools", "policy versus implementation gaps in inclusive education. SAME issues within the implementation of inclusive education."

Data extraction

The reviewed articles, theses, and reports were recorded in a template considering the author (s), title, year of publication, country, research approach, research design, data collection methods/instruments, analysis, and key findings. Inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection of topics, and this review was conducted between January 2025 and May 2026.

Quality assessment/assurance of studies involved

The 42 studies were critically reviewed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP). In scoping reviews, CASP screens and appraises the studies to ensure they meet quality standards (CASP, 2018; Armstrong et al., 2011). In this study, CASP helped the researchers to contextualise and appraise findings (Peters et al., 2018). CASP checked whether the reviewed studies met the following:

- The title touches the elements and phrases present in the topic under study.
- The study is either qualitative, mixed, quantitative, systematic, or a scoping review.
- How the primary or secondary data was obtained
- A well-defined data analysis protocol
- Key findings of the study.

Table 3. Summary of studies from the databases and search results

Data Base	Search Results	Irrelevant Studies	Relevant Studies
Google scholar	33	08	25
Research gate	20	10	10
Science direct	25	20	05
PubMed	12	10	02

Total	90	48	42
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Data analysis

The researchers used Mendeley and an Excel sheet as reference managers to import references from databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, Science Direct, and PubMed. Mendeley was used to collect background information and conceptualise variables of the topic under study (inclusive education, inclusive education policies). Mendeley was useful as it managed many references and removed the duplicates for easy screening (Bouter et al., 2016; Thomson & Thomas, 2017). Excel was used to organise the extracted data on inclusive education policies and their implementation challenges in the SADC region (Thomas et al., 2010). However, all studies were analysed narratively, and the findings from each objective are presented below.

Ethical considerations

Though this study synthesised publicly available information that did not require formal ethical approval, ethical considerations were followed to ensure that the research process upholds integrity, respect for intellectual properties, and transparency. Citations and acknowledgements were made to credit the original researchers (Moher et al., 2015). Authors disclosed conflicts of interest that they interpreted the findings without undue influence (Suri, 2020). For the grey literature and unpublished data, authors protected confidentiality and privacy by acknowledging the original authors and their respective organisations.

V. RESULTS

Study selection

The selection of studies to be included in this study emanated from the topic, objectives, and search protocols. A total of ninety studies were identified. After a thorough screening using inclusion and exclusion criteria, forty-eight studies were found irrelevant, and forty-two studies were found relevant for Scopus review as they met the set criteria.

Characteristics of included studies

Forty-two studies were eligible for inclusion. The study characteristics were centred on the country where the study was conducted, the number of studies, and the methodologies used. Table 5 summarises the studies included in this scoping review.

Table 4: Summary of studies included

Country	No of studies	%	Methodology					
			Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Systematic	Scoping	Theoretical
Mozambique	02	4.761	00	02	00	00	00	00
Malawi	04	9.523	00	03	01	00	00	00
Mauritius	02	4.761	01	01	00	00	00	00
South Africa	04	9.523	00	03	00	00	01	00
Zimbabwe	06	14.285	00	05	01	00	00	00
Botswana	02	4.761	01	01	00	00	00	00
Zambia	04	9.523	00	01	03	00	00	00
Tanzania	05	11.904	00	02	02	01	00	00
Namibia	05	11.904	01	04	00	00	00	00
Seychelles	01	2.380	00	00	01	00	00	00
Democratic Republic of Congo	01	2.380	00	01	00	00	00	00
Eswatini	02	4.761	00	02	00	00	00	00
Angola	01	2.380	00	01	00	00	00	00
Lesotho	03	7.142	01	02	00	00	00	00
Total	42	100	04	28	08	01	01	00

Table 4 shows that Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia have more studies on the policy versus implementation of inclusive education in the SADC, with almost 66.662%.

Common implementation challenges that exist in inclusive education in SADC countries

To find common implementation gaps, the researchers reviewed and analysed studies on inclusive education policies and the implementation challenges from the SADC countries. For example, studies conducted in Malawi revealed that despite the presence of good and vibrant policies, schools face inadequate instructional materials (Chiwanga et al., 2023; Chirwa et al., 2021) and inaccessible infrastructures and teachers' lack of skills to teach inclusive schools (Piringu & Mwila, 2025).

Similarly, Abdoula-Dhuny (2021) mentioned that teachers' training on inclusive education and teaching strategies is still lacking. Mateus et al. (2014) from Lesotho, Mokalleng and Möwes (2020) from Namibia, Franco (2023) from Mozambique, Mkhonta-Khoza and Dhlamini (2022) from Eswatini, and Muzata et al. (2021) from Zambia mentioned the same implementation gaps.

Studies have also shown that teachers and school administrators often have negative attitudes towards disabilities and inclusion. These include Charles and Otieno (2023) from Tanzania, Adu (2021) from South Africa, Ray and Zaveri (2024) from Mauritius, Antonio (2021) from Angola, and Mokalleng and Möwes (2020) from Namibia.

Inaccessible infrastructure as an implementation gap was mentioned by Chiwaya et al. (2023) from Malawi, Chapman and Johnstone (2009) from Lesotho, Sheethani (2021) from Namibia, Losioki and Ngowoko (2024) from Tanzania, Mphwina (2022) from South Africa, and Juma (2024) from Tanzania.

A rigid curriculum for learners with disabilities and other learning needs was mentioned as a gap by many authors. For example, Mphwina (2022) from South Africa, Legodi-Rakgalakane and Mokhampanyane (2020) from South Africa, Muzata et al. (2021) from Zambia, and Mkhonta-Khoza and Dhlamini (2022) from Eswatini.

Ngulube et al. (2020) from Zambia, Mpu and Adu (2021) from South Africa, Hlalywayo-Mapolisa (2020) from Zimbabwe, and Martinez Madrid (2015) from Namibia also mentioned the lack of specialised support services and facilities as a challenge.

Based on the above findings, inadequate instructional materials, insufficient training of teachers to teach inclusive schools, negative attitudes of teachers and school administration towards inclusive education and disabilities, inaccessible infrastructures, rigid curriculum, and lack of specialised support services are the common gaps when it comes to the implementation of inclusive education in SADC countries.

Challenges affecting the exclusion of learners with special needs from education in SADC countries

The reviewed literature found that each mentioned challenge has its modality of excluding learners with special learning needs in either mainstream or inclusive schools. For example, inadequate instructional materials such as braille, sign language resources, charts, maps, diagrams, and graphic organisers limit learners' ability to participate fully in the learning process (Charles & Otieno, 2023; Chekwaze & Juma, 2024; Chabaya & Ganga, 2010). Similarly, inadequate instructional materials hamper effective teaching and prevent learners with disabilities from engaging meaningfully in learning (Mphahlele & Makhubela, 2018).

The second challenge that brings about the gap between inclusive education policies and their implementation is the inaccessibility of infrastructure. When school facilities lack accessible classrooms, toilets, ramps, elevators, and dining halls, learners with physical disabilities find it difficult to access learning environments. These environmental barriers lead to physical isolation, which in turn leads to social and psychological problems because a learner with a disability may develop a feeling of not being valued and accepted (Tshiuza et al., 2018; Martinez Madrid, 2015; Mlambo & van der Linde, 2018).

The third challenge is the negative attitudes of teachers and school administrators towards inclusion and disability. Mlambo and van der Linde (2018) assert that negative attitudes are due to a lack of knowledge and existing misconceptions that reduce expectations, which lead to reduced support for learners with disabilities. This creates a

discriminatory environment that discourages learners with disabilities from participating in the learning process (Mkhonta-Khoza & Dlamini, 2022).

Fourth, a rigid curriculum significantly excludes learners with special learning needs, especially when it is standardised and does not accommodate diverse learning needs (Mphahlele & Makhubela, 2018). Failure to access the content due to a lack of flexibility and modifications hinders learners who require differentiated instructions from accessing it (Mlambo & van der Linde, 2018; Revelian, & Tibategeza, 2022; Sheethani, 2021; Abdoula-Dhuny, 2021).

Additionally, inclusive education is effective when learners with special learning needs have access to specialised support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, counselling, and assistive technologies. The reviewed studies show that most schools lack these services, which results in more dropouts and disengagement of learners with disabilities in the learning process (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018).

VI. DISCUSSION

The literature review involved an extensive search of studies concerning inclusive education policies versus their implementation gaps in the SADC countries. The review aligned with the objectives: (i) analyse the common implementation challenges in inclusive education in the SADC countries, (ii) examine how the inclusive education challenges in the SADC countries exclude learners with special learning needs. The PCC framework guided the formulation of research objectives. In the same perspective, PRISMA-SCR was used to map the relevant literature, existing gaps between the inclusive education policies and their implementation, and the identified key concepts per the topic under study from SADC Countries. PCC and PRISMA-SCR guided the establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria that led to the identification and eligibility of 42 studies in this study. The review points out the common implementation gaps and challenges that exist in inclusive education in SADC countries, which are described as inadequate instructional materials, inaccessible infrastructure, teachers' having inadequate skills and knowledge to teach inclusive classrooms, rigid and content-driven curricula, and inadequate necessary support services in both mainstream and inclusive schools (Chiwanga et al., 2023; Abdoula-Dhuny, 2021; Franco, 2023; Muzata et al., 2021).

The findings show that implementing inclusive education has challenges because SADC member countries contradict the directives of UNCRPD, especially Article 4, which requires systemic changes, transformation of the pedagogical environment, and social and psychological environments. To enhance access and participation of learners with special learning needs in the learning process (Florian, 2014; Loreman, 2014). The findings imply that almost all SADC countries have implementation issues and challenges that inhibit the participation of learners with special learning needs in the learning processes.

Concerning objective two, the findings of this study show that inadequate instructional materials limit learners with special learning needs and disabilities from participating in the learning process in inclusive classrooms/schools, and it often discourages and disorganises teachers when they fail to concretise abstract concepts. Inaccessible infrastructures due to a lack of ramps and accessible classrooms cause social and psychological problems when learners with special learning needs, due to physical impairment, are inhibited from reaching their potential. Rigid curriculum and lack of specialised services in schools marginalise those who need differentiated and supportive instruction.

These combined challenges foster an environment where learners with disabilities are excluded, as they perpetuate educational inequalities in mainstream and inclusive schools. The findings of this study contradict the overall goals of inclusive education policies. For example, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology-Malawi (2016) exclusively intended to make learning environments accessible. They also intended to provide sufficient relevant support services in inclusive and mainstream schools. Likewise, the Ministry of Education,

URT (2017) intended to train teachers in inclusive teaching strategies and provide adequate instructional materials to enable teachers to meet the learning needs of all learners in both mainstream and inclusive schools.

Although most reviewed studies indicated challenges in implementing inclusive education in the SADC countries, the study has also revealed that policies have issues. These findings opened a door for a researcher to delve into policies to check on the components and objectives of inclusive education policy from each SADC member country. For example, Chirwa et al. (2021) state that inclusive education policy in Malawi ignored the essence of equipping teachers with inclusive teaching strategies. Similarly, Piringu and Mwila (2025) assert that the inclusive education policy in Malawi is based on international frameworks rather than the contextual situation, which implies that the policy is more theoretical.

Anyanwu and Bibi (2023) argue that the inclusive education policy in Seychelles does not state anything about monitoring and evaluation processes or the roles of the Ministry of Education in the implementation process of inclusive education. All the above findings show that within the SADC region, implementing inclusive education has issues ranging from poorly designed policies and real situations to inadequate teacher training.

VII. CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that the SADC countries face common challenges when implementing inclusive education. The findings indicate that countries face inadequate instructional materials, inaccessible infrastructures, teachers with insufficient knowledge and skills to teach inclusive classrooms, rigid curricula, and negative attitudes of teachers and school administrators towards inclusive education and disabilities. The study concludes that implementation issues are partly because of the poorly designed inclusive education policies and insufficient knowledge among policymakers and implementers. Evidence indicates that the observed common implementation issues distract learners with special learning needs and their teachers, and above all, they exclude and frustrate learners with special learning needs.

The study highlights significant implications for inclusive education policy formulation and implementation. It reveals that poorly formulated inclusive education policies lead to implementation challenges. The findings highlighted common challenges in implementing inclusive education, which means the SADC member countries have similar inclusive education issues and perspectives towards inclusive education. The literature obtained from this review is helpful to policymakers in SADC countries and teachers who are curriculum implementers in classrooms.

VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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