



**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK**

**RESEARCH PROJECT**

**SOCIOECONOMIC BARRIERS FACED BY YOUTHS WITH DISABILITIES IN  
SECURING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES: A STUDY OF LEONARD CHESHIRE  
DISABILITY ZIMBABWE**

**BY**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK IN  
THE FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK**

**SUPERVISED BY**

**MR MAGOCHA**

**JUNE**

**2025**

## **DECLARATION**

I, MARTIN KADSON ZEZAI, B1025206, hereby declare that this project is my original work and that it has not been copied or lifted from any other source without acknowledgement.

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## APPROVAL FORM

I certify that the dissertation meets the preparation guidelines as presented in the faculty guide and instruction for preparing dissertations. Submitted by Martin Kadson Zezai (B1025206) in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this study first and foremost to the Almighty God, without whom I would not have been where I am today. I expressly acknowledge my parents, Kadson and Lillian Zezai, whose inexorable and unwavering support have been the driving force in this academic journey. Your encouragement, guidance and belief in me have shaped this work and inspired me to push beyond my limits. Thank you for being my beacon of hope and pillars of strength from start to finish of this academic pursuit.

## PLAGIARISM REPORT

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**MARKING GUIDE: UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT**

<b>Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>Possible Mark</b>	<b>Actual Mark</b>
Abstract	10	
Background to the study- what is it that has made you choose this particular topic? Include objectives or purpose of the study	20	
Statement of the problem	10	
Research questions	15	
Assumptions	5	
Significance of the study	15	
Limitations of the study	5	
Delimitations of the study	5	
Definition of terms	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	15	

**Comments.....**  
 .....

**Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Introduction- what do you want to write about in this chapter?	5	
Conceptual or theoretical framework	10	
Identification, interpretations and evaluation of relevant literature and citations	40	
Contextualisation of the literature to the problem	10	
Establishing gaps in knowledge and how the research will try to bridge these gaps	10	
Structuring and logical sequencing of ideas	10	
Discursive skills	10	
Summary	5	
Total	100	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	20	

**Comments.....**  
 .....

**Chapter 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Introduction	5	
Research design	10	



What instruments are you using to collect data?	<b>30</b>	
Population, sample and sampling techniques to be used in the study	<b>25</b>	
Procedures for collecting data	<b>15</b>	
Data presentation and analysis procedures	<b>10</b>	
Summary	<b>5</b>	
Total	<b>100</b>	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	<b>25</b>	

**Comments**.....

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#### **Chapter 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Introduction	<b>5</b>	
Data presentation	<b>50</b>	
Is there any attempt to link literature review with new findings	<b>10</b>	
How is the new knowledge trying to fill the gaps identified earlier	<b>10</b>	
Discursive and analytical skills	<b>20</b>	
Summary	<b>5</b>	
Total	<b>100</b>	
<b>Weighted Mark</b>	<b>30</b>	

**Comments**

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#### **Chapter 5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Introduction- focus of the chapter	<b>5</b>	
Summary of the whole project including constraints	<b>25</b>	
Conclusions- have you come up with answers to the problem under study	<b>30</b>	
Recommendations(should be based on findings) Be precise	<b>30</b>	
References	<b>5</b>	
Appendices i.e. copies of instruments used and any other relevant material	<b>5</b>	
Total	<b>100</b>	
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**Comments**

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**SUMMARY:-**

	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b><u>Chapter 1</u></b>		
<b><u>Chapter 2</u></b>		
<b><u>Chapter 3</u></b>		
<b><u>Chapter 4</u></b>		
<b><u>Chapter 5</u></b>		
<b>Total</b>		

## ABSTRACT

*The study explored the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment mainly focusing with Leonard Cheshire Disability Centre in Harare Zimbabwe. The burden of unemployment in Zimbabwe was a major concern worsening youths with disabilities possibilities of securing employment in a harsh economic environment. The critical disability theory mainly informed the study. The study was primarily informed by the pragmatist philosophy being purely qualitative. A case study design was adopted in which the study setting was Leonard Cheshire that is geographically located in the capital city of Zimbabwe, Harare. The target population involved youths with disabilities under the care of Leonard Cheshire Disability Centre and the professional staff at the same institution. The sample of the study included 20 participants (youth with disabilities and professional staff). Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the study participants. Data was generated using interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The primary findings on the factors impeding youths with disabilities from securing employment from the majority of the participants included societal attitudes and stigma, lack of accessibility, limited job opportunities, insufficient support services, and employer inflexibility. It was obtained that the existing disabilities legislative frameworks are not effective towards ensuring accessibility of employment for youths with disabilities. 80% of the study participants highlighted the interventions for ensuring employment opportunities for youths with disabilities as follows; awareness and sensitization campaigns, training and capacity building for employers, enhanced vocational training programs, policy advocacy and accountability, and mentorship programs. The study recommended that Leonard Cheshire together with other relevant stakeholders such as the Council of Social Workers should implement awareness and sensitization campaigns (media, workshops, and community events) that educate the public and employers about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Unemployment has been a challenge for Zimbabwe for the past decades with the burden so high for the youths and being much worse for those youths with disabilities. In that vein, the burden of unemployment presents a range of socioeconomic challenges for youths with disabilities although youths are more educated and less employed (Moyo-Nyede & Mpako, 2023). This study sought to explore the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities. This chapter provided an in-depth background analysis of youths, disability, and unemployment in regard to the implications associated with these variables. The key sections in this chapter include; the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim, research objectives, justification of the study, conceptual framework, and definition of key terms.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The problem of unemployment among youths with disabilities is a multifaceted issue influenced by various socioeconomic factors. Youths with disabilities globally face significantly higher unemployment rates compared to their non-disabled peers, stemming from systemic barriers, discrimination, and limited access to education and resources (Veerabathiran & Thomas, 2025; Rugoho, 2023). Youths with disabilities face a plethora of challenges that worsen their vulnerability after failing to secure employment namely; high unemployment rates, education and training disparities, and social stigma and discrimination (Morwane, Dada, & Bornman, 2021). Notably, South Africa faces significant youth unemployment, exacerbated for those with disabilities (Mseleku, 2022).

In some African countries, the birth of children with disabilities (CWDs) is often associated with cultural beliefs that suggest their mothers may have engaged in relationships with white men or supernatural beings. In certain communities in Zimbabwe, individuals with mental impairments are not recognized as having disabilities; instead, they are referred to as '*vanhu vanorwara nepfungwa*' (people with brain sickness) or '*vanhu vane mamhepo*' (people possessed by the spirit of the winds). This study defines disability in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD 2008). Choruma (2006) notes that individuals with disabilities are frequently further marginalized by environmental factors. Research in social dynamics describes this phenomenon as the "oppressive social milieu" that surrounds disability. Societal attitudes can exacerbate the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, with reactions ranging from horror and fear to distaste and hostility, often manifesting as patronizing behavior. Such attitudes contribute to discrimination and prejudice, which are reinforced by persistent myths and stigmas. Negative perceptions of disabilities remain widespread in Africa. In many regions of Southern Africa, including Zimbabwe, children born with albinism have historically faced fatal outcomes shortly after birth (Machoko, 2013).

About 220 million young people live with disabilities globally reflecting the burden of unemployment based on factors attributed to be impeding their employability (World Health Organization, 2022). The issue of unemployment has become a global challenge that mostly affects low-income countries. ILO (2022) states that about 50% of the youth with disabilities across the world face the burden of unemployment problems as compared to their non-disabled peers. For instance, the Bureau of Labour Statistics (2023) revealed that about 12.6% of individuals with



disabilities in the United States are unemployed. Europe also experiences the same challenge in which youths with disabilities are excluded in terms of gaining employment opportunities. Vutsova, Arabadzhieva, & Angelova (2023) found in their qualitative study that Europe and North America struggle with key barriers to employment for those with disabilities with discrimination, lack of reasonable accommodations, and inadequate access to education and vocational training being the most influencing factors. Various studies obtained that stigma and discrimination are the main factors that prevent youths with disabilities from securing employment as compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Lindsay, Fuentes, Tomas, Hsu, 2023; Barbareschi, Carew, Johnson, Kopi & Holloway, 2021). Similarly, Caminiti (2023) established in his study that the unemployment rate is as high as 80% in some countries in which inadequate laws and policies exacerbate the exclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is extremely high with varying statistics. A recent ZIMSTATS report shows that over 47% of young people aged between 15 and 35 are out of work implying that the majority of youths with disabilities are at a disadvantage if able-bodied individuals are failing to secure employment (Wangotse, 2025). Similarly, the Deaf Zimbabwe Trust's study established that disabled youths are excluded from employment due to societal stigma and lack of accessible job opportunities. This finding resonates with findings from high-income countries across the world in which stigma and discrimination are highlighted as major impeding factors preventing disabled youths from securing employment. South Africa according to Mayers (2014) reported an unemployment rate of 89.9% among youths with disabilities. Fascinating is the fact that policies for disability inclusion exist but significant barriers persist in societies and this demands action from relevant stakeholders such as social workers, and policymakers among

others. On the contrary, India and Japan reported a lower unemployment rate for youth with disabilities standing at 45% and 48.6% respectively.

A review of the literature identifies the key factors affecting youths with disabilities to secure employment to be discrimination and stigma, lack of access to education and training, and inadequate policy implementation (ILO, 2022; Morwane, Dada, & Bordman, 2021). Studies indicate that societal stigma surrounding disabilities leads to negative perceptions, which deter employers from hiring disabled individuals (Mayers et al., 2014; Zimstat, 2024). There is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring how multiple factors, such as gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity, intersect to affect employment outcomes for disabled youths. For example, while research exists in South Africa on gender disparities, similar studies in Zimbabwe and India are scarce.

Several legislative frameworks have been developed, ratified, and signed for implementation to protect the rights of people with disabilities. According to ILO (2022), international guidelines on disabilities include; CRPD (2006), and SDGs (2015-2030), while national policies in Zimbabwe include; the country's Constitution, Zimbabwe Youth Act Chapter 25: 19, and the National Disability Policy. Despite the various policies and frameworks that exist at local, national, and international levels to support the employment of youths with disabilities, significant gaps remain in implementation and effectiveness (ILO, 2022; Wangotse, 2025; Barbareschi et al. 2021). Addressing these gaps requires concerted efforts from governments, organizations, and communities to ensure that policies translate into real opportunities for disabled youths, enabling them to participate fully in the workforce.

On the contrary, there is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring how multiple factors, such as gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity, intersect to affect employment outcomes for disabled youths. For example, while research exists in South Africa on gender disparities, similar studies in Zimbabwe and India are scarce (Morwane et al. 2021). The literature often does not account for regional differences within countries. For instance, while urban areas in India may have better access to resources, rural youths with disabilities experience significantly higher barriers to employment. The quality of data on employment rates and barriers faced by youths with disabilities varies significantly across countries. In the USA, data is more robust and systematically collected compared to Zimbabwe and India, where data may be anecdotal or limited in scope. Additionally, there is a scarcity of longitudinal studies that track the employment outcomes of youths with disabilities over time. This makes it difficult to assess the long-term effectiveness of interventions or policy changes (ILO, 2022). The lack of effective implementation of the Zimbabwe Youth Act highlights how existing policies fail to translate into real employment opportunities for disabled youths (Tome, 2022). Thus, this study explored the factors affecting youths with disabilities to secure employment opportunities in Zimbabwe primarily focusing on Leonard Cheshire.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The issue of unemployment among youths with disabilities is a pressing concern, exacerbated by systemic barriers, discrimination, and limited access to education and resources. Globally, youths with disabilities experience significantly higher unemployment rates than their non-disabled peers, with studies indicating that approximately 50% are unemployed (ILO, 2022). In Zimbabwe, recent data reveals that over 47% of young individuals aged 15 to 35 are unemployed, with disabled

youths facing even greater disadvantages due to societal stigma and lack of accessible job opportunities (Wangotse, 2025). Despite existing policies aimed at promoting disability inclusion, such as the Zimbabwe Youth Act and the National Disability Policy, their effectiveness is undermined by inadequate implementation and pervasive negative attitudes toward disabilities (Deaf Zimbabwe Trust, 2021). Similar challenges are evident in South Africa and India, where discrimination and educational disparities hinder employment outcomes for disabled youths. Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in research exploring how intersecting factors like gender and socioeconomic status impact the employment prospects of disabled youths, particularly in Zimbabwe. This study aims to investigate the barriers to employment faced by youths with disabilities in Zimbabwe, focusing on the experiences of those supported by Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe. Therefore, the research sought to inform more effective policies and interventions that foster equitable employment opportunities for disabled youths.

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

The study aimed to explore the socioeconomic challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities to develop effective intervention strategies to enhance employment prospects for youths with disabilities.

### **1.4 Objectives**

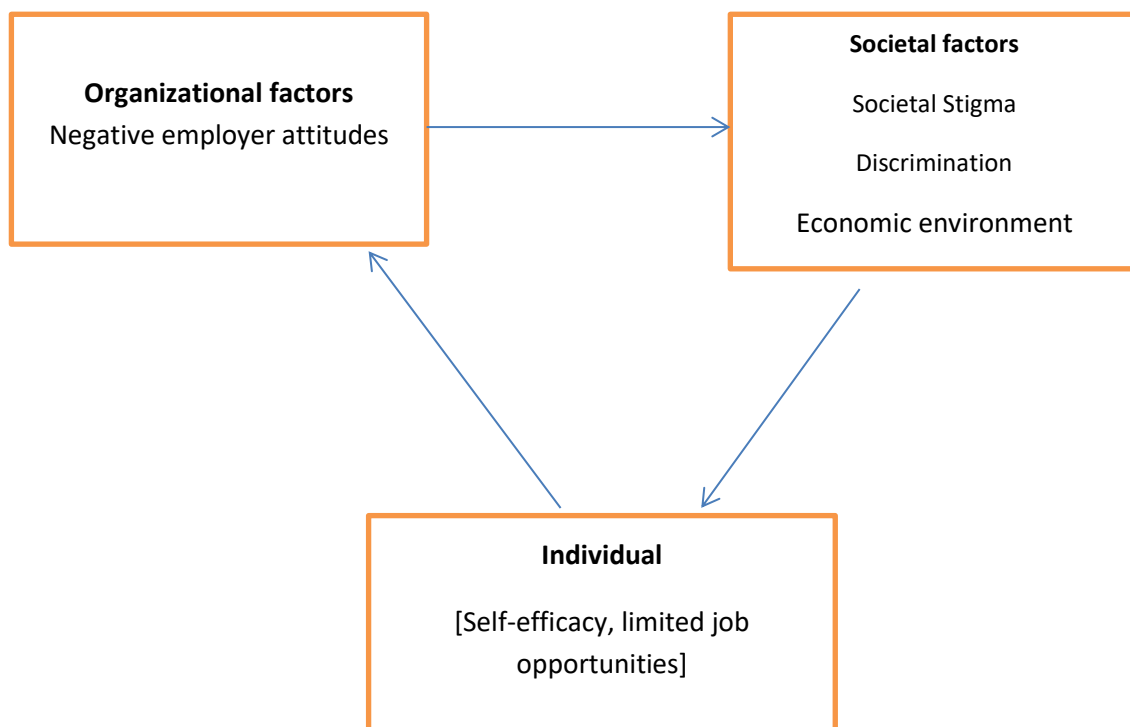
The study focused on attaining the following objectives;

- i. To explore the factors impeding youths with disabilities from accessing employment
- ii. To investigate the perspectives of stakeholders on the effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities in the workforce

- iii. To come up with intervention strategies to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities

## 1.5 Conceptual Framework/Study Hypotheses

The conceptual framework for the study "Socioeconomic Challenges Faced by Youths with Disabilities in Securing Employment Opportunities: A Study of Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe" illustrated the various factors influencing employment outcomes for disabled youths. This framework encompasses individual, organizational, societal, and policy-level dimensions that interact to create barriers or facilitate employment opportunities. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between variables that influence employment opportunities for youths with disabilities in Zimbabwe.



**Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework: Youth with disabilities and unemployment**

As shown in the figure above, The framework highlights the interplay between these factors. For example: negative employer attitudes (organizational) can stem from cultural attitudes (societal), reinforcing barriers to employment. A lack of education and skills (individual) can lead to lower self-efficacy, making job-seeking more challenging. Support services (organizational) can mitigate some of the effects of negative societal perceptions, boosting confidence and job readiness. Thus, this conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment in Zimbabwe. Stakeholders must work collaboratively to enhance individual capabilities, improve organizational practices, shift societal attitudes, and strengthen policy implementation to create equitable employment opportunities for disabled youths.

## **1.6 Justification of the Study**

The carrying out of this study was fundamental given the immense contribution it has based on the following;

### **1.6.1 Body of Knowledge (Existing Literature)**

The research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical data on the specific socioeconomic challenges that youths with disabilities face in Zimbabwe given the harsh economic environment that exists at the moment. This can help fill gaps in knowledge regarding the intersection of disability and employment in the African context. The study through a review of relevant theoretical frameworks may provide new insights and theoretical perspectives on disability and employment challenging the existing theories and models and coming up with more inclusive and robust models that suit modern times. Additionally, the study findings can provide a basis for comparative studies in different regions or countries, enhancing understanding of global disability issues and giving key reflections to recommendations for further studies.

### **1.6.2 Social Policy/Programs**

The research findings can inform policymakers about the specific barriers faced by youths with disabilities, leading to the development of targeted employment policies and programs. Policy development and implementation can be influenced by giving equitable opportunities for youths with disabilities as a vulnerable population in line with Sustainable Development Goals provisions for disability inclusion (Hujo & Carter, 2019). The findings of the study will influence the evaluation of existing social programs and existing gaps aimed at integrating youths with disabilities into the workforce, suggesting improvements based on participant feedback and outcomes. Also, the study can serve as a tool for advocacy groups to push for more inclusive employment practices and better support systems for individuals with disabilities.

### **1.6.3 Community/Study participants (Education 5.0)**

The study will influence and empower community members and participants to advocate for their rights and seek better employment opportunities based on the challenges youths with disabilities face in accessing employment opportunities. The findings from this study will raise awareness within the community about the socioeconomic barriers that impact youths with disabilities, fostering a more inclusive environment. Hence, the study the findings can align with Education 5.0 principles by promoting skills development and innovation that support inclusive employment for youths with disabilities.

### **1.6.4 University (Curriculum, teaching Pedagogy)**

This study will primarily inform curriculum design for schools of Social Work in Zimbabwe and abroad, ensuring that programs include content on disability studies, social inclusion, and employment strategies for marginalized groups. The insights gained from this study will influence

teaching methodologies by emphasizing participatory and inclusive approaches that engage students in understanding disability issues. The study can encourage further research initiatives within the university, promoting a culture of inquiry into social justice and disability rights.

## **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

The study provided definitions for these key terms of the study;

### **Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities are understood by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) [2006] as those persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis as compared to others (Rohwerder, 2015). Thus, the study focused on the systemic barriers that hinder youths with disabilities from full access to employment opportunities.

### **Employment**

The International Labour Organization (2016) defines employment as the situation in which a person of working age has been engaged in a referenced period in any activity meant for the production of goods and services for pay or profit in which the major forms of employment include; employees, self-employed, and family helpers.

### **Youths**

The Zimbabwe Youth Act Chapter 25:19 defines youths as those persons who are between 15 to 35 years of age (Hlungwani, Masuku, & Magidi, 2021). The study focused on youths within this defined range who were at Leonard Cheshire facing employment challenges.



## **1.8 Dissertation Outline**

The dissertation was outlined as follows:

Chapter One:

This chapter introduced the research topic, providing background information and the context for the study. It outlined the background analysis, research problem, study aim, objectives, and questions, conceptual framework, and justification of the study. The key terms in the study were also assigned meanings.

Chapter Two:

In this chapter, relevant literature related to the research topic was reviewed. This includes theoretical frameworks, previous studies, and key concepts. The aim is to identify gaps in the existing literature that the current research addresses.

Chapter Three:

This chapter detailed the research design and methods used to collect and analyze data. It explained the research philosophy, research approach, research design, qualitative or quantitative approaches, sampling techniques, validity and reliability (trustworthiness), data analysis, and limitations. This section justifies the chosen methods and how they align with the research objectives.

Chapter Four:

This chapter presented, interpreted, analyzed, and discussed the findings of the research. It included the presentation of demographic characteristics, and data analysis often using themes or

categories identified during the research process. This section included direct quotes, charts, or tables to illustrate key points.

#### Chapter Five:

The final chapter provided a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations based on the study findings. It addresses the significance of the results, and potential limitations of the study, and offers recommendations for future research. The conclusion summarizes the main points and contributions of the dissertation.

### **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive background analysis of youth with disabilities and the challenges they face in securing employment in Zimbabwe. The next chapter reviewed literature related to the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2. Introduction**

This chapter mainly a review of related literature based on the study objectives. The chapter also analysed the relevant theory that informed the study as well as its relevance to the crux of the study phenomenon. The chapter enabled the identification of knowledge gaps and how this study addressed those gaps. Peer-reviewed articles were analysed in terms of aligning and contrasting studies. Key databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and JSTOR were used in searching for relevant literature for the review.

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is aptly defined as a structured lens in which researchers analyse and interpret to inform a study as well as contextualize study findings. The study was informed by the critical disability theory.

#### **2.1.1 Critical Disability Theory**

The Critical Disability Theory (CDT) was first propounded by Max Horkheimer in 1937 and it is grounded in a critique of conventional views and assumptions of disability which stand to frustrate persons with disabilities and encroach on their human rights (Horkheimer, 1972; Hall, 2019). The CDT concept is hinged upon Devlin & Pothier's (2006, p.2) assertion that "disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to." This position contests able-bodied control and subjugation that originates from confining economic and social gains to persons with disabilities which are then decentralized as privileges to be bargained. Thus, the CDT is a departure from the individual pathology of disability (based on the biomedical

model), and beyond liberalism and a social model of disability. In this regard, the purpose of CDT is to analyze disability as a social, historical, cultural, relative, and political phenomenon. Other scholars have referred to this approach as Critical Disability Studies or (CDS) (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Goodley et al. 2017).

With regards to the current study, the CDT is thus used as a lens to peer through the socio-political and economic impediments which characterize the Zimbabwean society and how they impact persons with disabilities. Gillies (2024) argues that the critical Disability Theory provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment. By focusing on social constructs, stigma, intersectionality, empowerment, and activism, CDT not only illuminates the barriers faced by these individuals but also offers pathways for meaningful change. More so, the theory not only provides a conceptual frame within which to align the miasma of contemporary challenges in Zimbabwe on people with disabilities but it also further buttresses the methodological structure of the study. However, the CDT is not watertight as an analytical tool. A number of challenges have also been identified with the theory.

## **2.1 Factors impeding youths with disabilities from accessing employment**

The transition from education to employment is a critical phase for all youths, but for those with disabilities, this journey is often fraught with unique challenges. Understanding the factors that impede youths with disabilities from accessing employment is essential for developing effective interventions and promoting inclusivity in the workforce. The key factors reviewed under this theme include societal attitudes and stigma, lack of accessibility, limited job opportunities, and insufficient support services.

### **2.1.1 Societal attitudes and stigma**

Societal attitudes and stigma represent a pervasive and deeply entrenched barrier for youths with disabilities seeking employment across the globe. A consistent theme across various geographical contexts is the presence of stigma and negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, which significantly impacts their employment opportunities. Studies from Zimbabwe, South Africa, China, the UK, and America reveal that employers often harbour outdated beliefs about the capabilities and productivity of individuals with disabilities, leading to discriminatory hiring practices (Karki, 2024; Rugoho, 2023; Dube et al. 2021; Mogensen, 2022). For instance, negative beliefs associating disability with witchcraft or curses persist in Zimbabwe, leading to social exclusion and limited opportunities. Similarly, in South Africa, disability-based stigma is a global problem that contributes to high unemployment rates among people with disabilities (Zeyen & Branzei, 2024). On the contrary, despite legislation prohibiting discrimination, negative societal attitudes and prejudices continue to marginalize individuals with disabilities in the labour market.

The literature consistently demonstrates that stigma directly affects employment outcomes for youths with disabilities. Negative attitudes from employers, colleagues, and society at large result in reduced hiring of the youths, lower wages, limited career advancement, and social exclusion (Karki, 2014; Hall, 2019). Additionally, the literature highlights the impact of internalized stigma, where individuals with disabilities internalize negative societal beliefs, leading to reduced self-esteem, self-efficacy, and motivation to seek employment (Rugoho, 2023). In South Africa, research by Swartz et al. (2019) highlights that societal stigma and negative employer perceptions significantly hinder employment opportunities for youths with disabilities. This aligns with findings in Zimbabwe, where a study by Mavindidze (2020) similarly identifies societal attitudes

as a critical barrier. Both countries emphasize the need for awareness campaigns to combat stereotypes and promote inclusivity.

While most studies highlight the prevalence of negative attitudes, some research indicates increasing awareness and support for disability inclusion in certain regions and sectors. In the UK and America, the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), has led to some improvements in attitudes and employment outcomes, although significant disparities persist (William, Corby, & Pauksztat, 2024). More so, some studies suggest that employers who participate in vocational or supported employment programs express more positive attitudes toward workers with disabilities. More research is needed to explore the intersectional nature of stigma and how it interacts with other forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, and classism, to impact employment outcomes for youths with disabilities. Societal attitudes and stigma remain significant impediments for youths with disabilities seeking employment worldwide. While there has been some progress in raising awareness and promoting inclusion, significant disparities persist, and stigma continues to limit opportunities and perpetuate inequality.

### **2.1.2 Lack of accessibility**

The lack of accessibility is a critical and pervasive factor impeding youths with disabilities from securing employment worldwide. A consistent finding across diverse geographical contexts is that inaccessible environments pose a significant barrier to employment for youths with disabilities. This includes physical inaccessibility, digital inaccessibility, and lack of accessible transportation (WHO, 2022). Notably, studies in the UK and America according to Berghs et al. (2022) highlight that inaccessible workplaces and interview processes disadvantage disabled job seekers. Also, in

China and other Asian countries, workplaces, public transportation, and digital platforms are often not designed to be accessible to people with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities (WHO, 2022; Berghs et al. 2022). Inaccessible infrastructure remains a major barrier to employment and self-employment, particularly for individuals with physical disabilities in Zimbabwe. The literature consistently demonstrates that inaccessibility directly impacts employment opportunities for youths with disabilities limited access, reduced job pool, and increased unemployment. On the contrary, in the UK and America, legal frameworks like the ADA and Equality Act have led to some improvements in accessibility, but significant disparities persist. The lack of accessibility remains a critical impediment for youths with disabilities seeking employment worldwide.

However, there are notable differences in the context of governmental support. South Africa has implemented more comprehensive policy frameworks, such as the Employment Equity Act, which aims to promote workplace diversity (Ravjee & Reddy, 2018). In contrast, Zimbabwe's policies are often criticized for lack of enforcement and limited reach, leading to fewer opportunities for youths with disabilities (Chitiyo & Pritchard, 2021). Furthermore, accessibility challenges differ; while South Africa has made strides in physical accessibility, Zimbabwe still faces significant infrastructural barriers that limit access to workplaces. These contrasting contexts underscore the importance of tailored interventions that address specific local challenges while drawing on successful strategies from neighbouring regions.

### **2.1.3 Economic barriers**

Economic barriers significantly impact the ability of youths with disabilities to secure employment. These barriers can include limited job opportunities, inadequate financial support, and insufficient access to vocational training. In South Africa, research indicates that economic

challenges are a primary barrier for youths with disabilities. According to Soudien (2012), the high unemployment rate among disabled youths is exacerbated by limited access to resources and training opportunities. The 2019 National Disability Rights Awareness Month report highlights that many disabled individuals experience financial instability, making it difficult to pursue education and vocational training. Conversely, Rosenberg et al. (2020) conducted a study that found some programs aimed at integrating disabled youths into the workforce have had positive outcomes. These programs often provide financial assistance and training, suggesting that targeted interventions can mitigate economic barriers.

In the UK, economic barriers for disabled youths are similarly pronounced. Barnes (2017) discusses how youths with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing employment due to financial constraints and a lack of tailored support services. The Disability Rights Commission (2018) emphasizes the need for better economic support systems to facilitate job readiness among disabled youths. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the economic landscape presents unique challenges for youths with disabilities. Mushoriwa (2019) notes that high unemployment rates and a struggling economy create a hostile environment for job seekers, particularly those with disabilities. The lack of financial resources limits access to education and vocational training, further entrenching economic barriers.

However, Mupedziswa (2020) provides a contrasting view, stating that community-based initiatives aimed at empowering disabled youths through microfinance have shown promise. These initiatives help address financial constraints, allowing disabled youths to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities, thus highlighting a potential pathway to overcoming economic barriers. Hurst et al. (2021) highlight initiatives that have successfully reduced economic barriers by providing



apprenticeships specifically designed for disabled individuals. Their findings suggest that when financial support is coupled with practical work experience, the employment rates for disabled youths can significantly improve. The literature reveals that economic barriers significantly hinder the employment prospects of youths with disabilities across South Africa, the UK, Zimbabwe, and China.

#### **2.1.4 Institutional barriers**

Institutional barriers significantly impede the ability of youths with disabilities to secure employment. These barriers include inadequate support services, inaccessible work environments, and insufficient policies promoting inclusion. In China, institutional barriers present a multifaceted challenge for disabled youths. Zhang et al. (2020) identify inadequate policies and limited access to resources as significant impediments to employment. Many educational institutions do not offer the necessary accommodations, which limits the potential for disabled youths to gain relevant skills. Conversely, Li and Wang (2021) discuss government initiatives aimed at enhancing employment opportunities for disabled individuals. Their study suggests that while institutional barriers exist, the Chinese government's proactive measures, such as vocational training programs and incentives for employers, can lead to improved employment rates for disabled youths.

In the UK, institutional barriers also play a crucial role in hindering employment for disabled youths. Barnes (2017) discusses how bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of tailored support services prevent disabled individuals from accessing employment opportunities. The UK government has been criticized for insufficient implementation of policies that promote inclusivity. In contrast, Hurst et al. (2021) present findings from successful programs that provide mentorship and training

specifically designed for disabled youths. These programs demonstrate how institutional support can effectively reduce barriers, leading to improved employment outcomes.

In South Africa, institutional barriers are a major concern for youths with disabilities. Soudien (2012) highlights the lack of inclusive policies in educational and vocational training institutions, which often fail to accommodate the needs of disabled students. This neglect results in a lack of preparedness for the job market, contributing to high unemployment rates among disabled youths. Conversely, Rosenberg et al. (2020) found that some organizations are actively working to create inclusive job environments. Their study emphasizes the importance of partnerships between educational institutions and employers to facilitate smoother transitions into the workforce for disabled youths, showcasing a positive shift in institutional attitudes. Mushoriwa (2019) notes that the lack of supportive policies and infrastructure for individuals with disabilities results in widespread unemployment. Educational institutions often lack the resources to provide adequate training, leaving disabled youths ill-equipped for the job market.

#### **2.1.5 Transportation issues**

Transportation issues significantly impact the ability of youths with disabilities to secure employment. Barriers such as inaccessible public transport, high costs, and limited mobility options can hinder their access to job opportunities. In China, transportation barriers pose significant challenges for disabled youths. Zhang et al. (2020) indicate that many cities lack accessible public transport systems, restricting disabled individuals' mobility and job access. However, Li and Wang (2021) discuss government initiatives designed to improve transportation infrastructure for disabled individuals, including the development of accessible public transport

options. Their findings suggest that while challenges remain, proactive governmental policies can enhance mobility for disabled youths, facilitating better employment opportunities.

In the UK, transportation challenges also significantly affect disabled youths. Shaw et al. (2020) note that a lack of accessible public transport prevents disabled individuals from reaching potential workplaces. Rising transportation costs further limit their ability to travel for work. However, contrasting findings by Hurst et al. (2021) examine successful transportation programs that offer subsidized travel for disabled youths. These initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness in improving access to employment, suggesting that targeted government interventions can alleviate transportation-related barriers. Despite the existing research, several gaps remain in the literature on transportation issues affecting youths with disabilities; Most studies provide a snapshot of the current situation without exploring changes over time or the long-term effects of transportation barriers on employment outcomes. Addressing these transportation barriers through improved infrastructure, community initiatives, and supportive policies is essential for enhancing employment outcomes for disabled youths. Further research is needed to fill the identified gaps, particularly in understanding the long-term impacts of transportation issues and the effectiveness of various policy measures.

## **2.2 Perspectives of stakeholders on the effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities**

The effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities is a multifaceted issue that varies significantly between countries, particularly in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Understanding the perspectives of stakeholders such as policymakers, educators, employers, and advocates provides valuable insights into both the successes and challenges

encountered in implementing these policies. This discussion will delve deeper into the views expressed by stakeholders in both nations, highlighting areas of alignment and contrast, as well as the broader implications for improving the inclusion of youths with disabilities.

The perspectives of stakeholders on the effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities reveal both alignment and contrasts between South Africa and Zimbabwe. In South Africa, research by Swartz et al. (2019) indicates that stakeholders generally view policies like the Employment Equity Act as effective in promoting workplace diversity. They argue that these policies have led to increased awareness and some improvement in employment rates among youths with disabilities. However, stakeholders also highlight gaps in implementation and the need for more robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance and effectiveness. However, despite these advancements, stakeholders also express concerns regarding the implementation of such policies. Many point out that while the legislative framework is in place, there are substantial gaps in its execution. For instance, the lack of robust monitoring mechanisms has raised questions about compliance among employers. Stakeholders have noted that without effective oversight and accountability measures, many organizations may merely pay lip service to the principles of inclusivity, failing to make meaningful changes in their hiring practices or workplace accommodations. Moreover, stakeholders emphasize the need for ongoing training and awareness programs aimed at both employers and the general public. These initiatives are crucial for fostering a culture of inclusion, as they help to break down stereotypes and misconceptions about disabilities. As such, while South Africa has made strides in creating policies that support the inclusion of youths with disabilities, the effectiveness of these measures hinges on their implementation and the commitment of all stakeholders involved.

Conversely, in Zimbabwe, a study by Chitiyo & Pritchard (2021) reveals a more critical perspective. Stakeholders express scepticism regarding the enforcement of disability policies, citing bureaucratic challenges and insufficient resources. While policies exist, their impact is often undermined by a lack of political will and public awareness, leading to limited inclusion opportunities for youths with disabilities. These contrasting views underscore the importance of not only having policies in place but also ensuring their effective implementation. Both countries highlight the need for continuous stakeholder engagement and advocacy to enhance the inclusivity of youths with disabilities in the workforce, suggesting that successful policy frameworks require ongoing evaluation and adaptation.

Furthermore, stakeholders in Zimbabwe often highlight a lack of political will as a major barrier to the successful inclusion of youths with disabilities (Gillies, 2024). This lack of commitment from government officials can lead to a situation where policies remain largely theoretical and fail to translate into practical opportunities for employment and social inclusion. In addition, public awareness of disability rights and policies is alarmingly low, which further limits the effectiveness of these initiatives. Dube et al (2021) argue that many employers are either unaware of their obligations under disability legislation or do not fully understand the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities. The consequences of these challenges are profound. Stakeholders report that the limited inclusion opportunities for youths with disabilities in Zimbabwe are not merely a reflection of policy inadequacies but also a broader societal issue that requires a concerted effort to address. Advocacy and stakeholder engagement are essential in this context, as they can help to raise awareness, educate employers, and foster a more inclusive society.

The contrasting perspectives on disability policies in South Africa and Zimbabwe underscore a critical insight: having policies in place is not enough (Morgensen, 2022). The effectiveness of these policies ultimately depends on their implementation and the commitment of various stakeholders to uphold the principles of inclusion. Both countries illustrate that legislative frameworks must be complemented by robust monitoring, public awareness campaigns, and continuous stakeholder engagement to ensure that youths with disabilities can fully participate in society and the workforce. Moreover, the experiences of stakeholders in both nations highlight the necessity for continuous evaluation and adaptation of existing policies. As societal attitudes toward disability evolve and new challenges emerge, policies must be flexible enough to respond to these changes (Zeyen & Branzei, 2024). This adaptability can be achieved through regular consultations with stakeholders, including youths with disabilities themselves, who can provide valuable insights into their experiences and needs.

In both South Africa and Zimbabwe, the role of advocacy cannot be overstated. Stakeholders emphasize the importance of creating coalitions among various groups, including disability organizations, civil society, and the private sector, to promote a unified approach to disability inclusion (Rugoho, 2023). Such coalitions can enhance the visibility of issues faced by youths with disabilities and amplify their voices in policy discussions. Furthermore, effective advocacy can also drive the development of new initiatives aimed at improving the employment prospects of youths with disabilities. For example, programs that provide training and mentorship opportunities can help bridge the gap between education and employment, equipping young people with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce.

## **2.3 Intervention strategies to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities**

The need to develop and implement effective interventions to reduce inequalities in accessing employment for youths with disabilities remains a pressing global challenge. Various countries have adopted different approaches to address this issue, each with its unique contexts, successes, and ongoing challenges.

### **2.3.1 Disability inclusion**

The United Kingdom has long been regarded as a leader in disability rights and inclusion. The Equality Act 2010 provides a comprehensive legal framework that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life, including employment. The UK government has also implemented numerous programs aimed at improving access to employment for youths with disabilities, such as the Access to Work scheme, which provides financial support for workplace accommodations. Stakeholders in the UK emphasize the importance of individualized support tailored to the specific needs of youths with disabilities. Programs that offer mentoring, internships, and skills training have shown positive outcomes in enhancing employability. Importantly, ongoing research and evaluation ensure that these initiatives remain responsive to the changing needs of the workforce and the individuals they aim to support.

China presents a different context, where rapid economic growth has been accompanied by an increasing focus on disability inclusion in the workplace. The Chinese government has made significant strides in developing policies aimed at improving employment access for persons with disabilities (WHO, 2022). For instance, the Employment Promotion Law encourages the hiring of individuals with disabilities through incentives for employers who meet specific hiring quotas.

Despite these legal frameworks, challenges persist. Many youths with disabilities in China still face stigmatization and discrimination in the job market, which can deter employers from hiring them. Additionally, while vocational training programs exist, the quality and accessibility of these programs can vary widely, particularly in rural areas. Stakeholders emphasized the need for comprehensive awareness campaigns to shift public perceptions and encourage employers to create more inclusive workplaces.

Rwanda offers a unique perspective on disability inclusion, particularly in the wake of its post-genocide recovery. The Rwandan government has enacted several policies aimed at integrating persons with disabilities into the workforce (Hall, 2019). Programs like Youth Employment and Skills Development focus on providing vocational training and entrepreneurship support specifically for youths with disabilities. Rwanda's approach emphasizes innovation and community involvement. For example, partnerships with local businesses promote inclusive hiring practices, and training programs are tailored to the specific needs of youths with disabilities. This targeted approach has led to increased employment rates among this demographic, showcasing the potential for effective interventions in contexts marked by socio-economic challenges (Mogensen, 2022).

In South Africa, initiatives like the "National Disability Rights Policy" aim to create inclusive environments through targeted training programs and partnerships with private sectors (Ravjee & Reddy, 2018). Stakeholders emphasized the importance of vocational training and internships, which have shown positive results in enhancing employability among youths with disabilities (Swartz et al., 2019). These programs foster collaboration between government, NGOs, and employers, illustrating a comprehensive approach to inclusion. Conversely, Zimbabwe faces



significant barriers to implementing similar strategies. These initiatives not only focus on skills development but also aim to raise awareness among employers about the benefits of a diverse workforce. Zeyen & Branzen (2024) argue that companies that participate in these programs often report increased productivity and improved workplace morale. However, challenges remain, including the need for more robust implementation strategies and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that policies translate into tangible outcomes for youths with disabilities.

According to Mavindidze (2020), while there are policies aimed at improving employment access, the lack of resources and infrastructure hampers their effectiveness. Interventions tend to be more fragmented, with limited collaboration between stakeholders. Community-based initiatives, such as those by Leonard Cheshire, focus on skills development but often lack the support needed for widespread implementation (Chitiyo & Pritchard, 2021). These contrasting contexts highlight the necessity for Zimbabwe to adopt more integrated strategies, drawing from South Africa's experiences while addressing its unique challenges. Effective intervention strategies must include robust partnerships and resource allocation to create sustainable improvements in employment access for youths with disabilities. Community-based initiatives, such as those led by Leonard Cheshire, focus on skills development but often lack the necessary support for widespread implementation (Chitiyo & Pritchard, 2021). Without strong partnerships between government entities, NGOs, and the private sector, these programs struggle to gain traction. Drawing lessons from South Africa, Zimbabwe could benefit from adopting more integrated strategies that emphasize collaboration and resource allocation to create sustainable improvements in employment access for youths with disabilities.

It is imperative to develop and implement interventions that reduce inequalities in accessing employment for youths with disabilities is a global challenge that requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders. By examining the experiences of South Africa, Zimbabwe, China, Rwanda, and the UK, it becomes clear that successful strategies are often characterized by integrated approaches, public awareness, tailored programs, robust monitoring, and adequate resource allocation. As countries continue to strive for greater inclusion, learning from one another's experiences can provide valuable insights into crafting effective policies and programs. Ultimately, fostering an inclusive workforce not only benefits youths with disabilities but enriches society as a whole, promoting diversity and equal opportunities for all.

### **2.3.2 Employment support services**

Employment support services play a critical role in addressing the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment. These services include vocational training, job placement programs, mentorship, and advocacy initiatives. In the UK, Hurst et al. (2021) discuss the positive impact of mentorship programs that connect disabled youths with industry professionals. Their findings indicate that these relationships enhance job readiness and increase confidence, leading to better employment outcomes. Shaw et al. (2020) also highlight the role of government-funded job placement services that have successfully integrated disabled individuals into the workforce. However, Barnes (2017) points out that many employment support services are underfunded and often lack the resources necessary for effective implementation. This suggests that while programs exist, their capacity to make a significant impact is often limited by financial constraints.

In Zimbabwe, Mupedziswa (2020) highlights community-led initiatives that provide vocational training and job placement support for disabled youths. These grassroots efforts have shown

promise in overcoming barriers that formal systems may not address effectively. Similarly, Mushoriwa (2019) emphasizes the importance of local partnerships in creating employment opportunities tailored to the needs of disabled individuals. In contrast, Chikozho (2021) notes that the overall lack of structured employment support services from the government limits the effectiveness of such community initiatives. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach that includes formal support systems alongside community efforts.

Despite the existing body of research, several gaps remain: many studies provide a snapshot of employment outcomes without examining the long-term impacts of support services on career trajectories. Much of the literature focuses on urban settings, neglecting the unique challenges faced by disabled youths in rural areas, where access to services may be limited. The literature indicates that employment support services are vital in addressing the employment challenges faced by youths with disabilities across the world.

### **2.3.3 Community-based initiatives**

Community-based initiatives play a crucial role in facilitating employment opportunities for youths with disabilities. These initiatives often focus on local resources, support networks, and tailored programs to address specific barriers faced by disabled individuals. In the UK, Shaw et al. (2020) discuss community awareness campaigns aimed at promoting the employment of disabled youths. These initiatives focus on changing public perceptions and increasing employer engagement, demonstrating the effectiveness of local efforts in fostering inclusivity. Hurst et al. (2021) also highlight community-led job fairs that connect disabled individuals with potential employers. Their research indicates that such initiatives can successfully increase employment rates by facilitating direct interaction between job seekers and employers. However, Barnes (2017)

argues that many community initiatives are underfunded and lack the necessary infrastructure to create lasting change. This suggests that while community efforts can be beneficial, they may not be sufficient on their own to address systemic barriers in employment.

In China, Li and Wang (2021) discuss the effectiveness of community organizations that offer training and job placement services for disabled youths. Their findings indicate that these initiatives have improved employment rates and enhanced social inclusion for disabled individuals. Zhang et al. (2020) also highlight successful community-driven efforts that focus on raising awareness and providing support for disabled youths, demonstrating a positive impact on employment outcomes. However, Chen (2022) argues that while community initiatives exist, their impact is often limited by inconsistent support from local governments and a lack of comprehensive policies promoting inclusivity. This inconsistency raises questions about the sustainability and effectiveness of such initiatives. Many studies provide a snapshot of community initiatives without examining their long-term impacts on employment outcomes for disabled youths.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

The chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature that speaks to the study objectives towards informing the study about the literature gaps that need to be addressed. The critical disability theory was evaluated in terms of its relevance to the study. The next chapter provided a description and justification of the study methods that were employed.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter provided an outline and justification of the methods, techniques, and instruments that were used for data collection. The philosophies and approaches to the study were also explained and justified in line with the research problem.

#### **3.1 Research Philosophy**

The study was informed by the pragmatist philosophy. Pragmatism offers a compelling framework for qualitative research, particularly when investigating complex social issues such as the factors affecting youth with disabilities in securing employment. Pragmatism, at its core, is a philosophy that emphasizes practical consequences and real-world applications (Shan, 2023). A qualitative study exploring the factors affecting youth with disabilities in securing employment is inherently complex, involving diverse experiences, perspectives, and contextual influences. The use of pragmatism in this study allowed the researcher to focus on finding new practical solutions, promoted methodological flexibility, and allowed the integration of multiple perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to explore the factors influencing employment opportunities for youths with disabilities. Qualitative research involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data (such as text, video, or audio) to gain a deeper understanding of concepts or opinions. Frankel & Wallen (2016) highlighted several advantages of qualitative research design, including its ability to enhance understanding of the target population and its cost-effectiveness

and straightforward nature. The researcher chose this design as it best facilitates the collection of in-depth information regarding the use of additives and preservatives and their health implications. Creswell & Clark (2018) note that the qualitative approach aims to observe or interpret the environment to develop a theory. However, O’Leary (2014) points out some limitations of qualitative research, such as the inability to generalize findings beyond the sample and the lack of statistical data.

Rahman (2020) emphasizes that qualitative research provides valuable insights into complex phenomena by exploring individuals' experiences, perspectives, and social contexts. It allows researchers to deeply investigate the topic and gather rich, detailed information. Additionally, qualitative research offers flexibility in data collection and analysis methods, valuing participants' voices and perspectives. Conversely, Lenger (2019) argues that qualitative research is limited in generalizability due to its reliance on small samples and specific participant characteristics.

### **3.3 Research Design**

O’Leary (2019) describes a case study as a research strategy and empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. According to Yin (2016), a case study examines an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system, such as a specific setting or context. In this study, a qualitative case study design was employed to gather participants' views on the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment at Leonard Cheshire in Harare. Case studies focus on empirical investigations of knowledge and experiences, involving the collection and analysis of data. Creswell & Clark (2018) further define a case study as a qualitative inquiry where the investigator explores a bounded system over time, utilizing multiple sources of

information, including interviews, observations, and audio-visual materials. This study utilized a single case study approach.

### **3.4 Study Setting**

The study was carried out at Leonard Cheshire in the capital city of Harare Metropolitan province of Zimbabwe. The institution is situated in the capital of Harare. The centre was strategically placed to serve people with disabilities. The key services the institution provides include; support services, employment programs, community engagement, rehabilitation services, and education and training.

### **3.5 Target Population**

The term "population," as defined by Creswell & Clark (2018), refers to all individuals, units, or events considered in a research project. Consequently, a population consists of people or objects with characteristics that interest the researcher (Walliman, 2014). In this study, the population included youths with disabilities under the care of Leonard Cheshire and the professional staff at the organization.

### **3.6 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

A sample is a subset of the population, representing a portion selected for examination. The sample size for this study was determined by the point of data saturation, which indicates when no new information is being discovered. The term "sample size" refers to the number of participants or observations included in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The sample comprised 20 participants, including 14 youths with disabilities and 6 professional staff members from Leonard Cheshire.

### **3.6.1 Sampling techniques**

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select participants for the study.

#### **3.6.1 Purposive Sampling**

Key informants, specifically professional staff from Leonard Cheshire, were selected through purposive sampling. According to Jupp (2006:244), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where the researcher selects individuals based on various factors, such as their expertise in the subject or their willingness to participate. Additionally, 14 youths with disabilities were purposefully chosen to take part in the study.

### **3.7 Data Collection Techniques and Tools**

Data for this study were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

#### **3.7.1 In-depth Interviews**

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews to gather information from the professional staff at Leonard Cheshire. These interviews were carried out personally by the researcher. Smith (2009:115) notes that interviews often hold a significant position as a favoured method among qualitative researchers, making them essential for studies aiming to gain a thorough understanding of subjective meanings, attitudes, and beliefs. They provide an opportunity to explore individual perspectives deeply, understand the personal context of the phenomena being studied, and cover topics in great detail (Creswell, 2018). In this case, in-depth interviews were particularly effective



for capturing participants' feelings. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews, seeking specific information to allow for comparison with data from other interviews.

### **3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed in gathering the views of youths with disabilities at Leonard Cheshire. The researcher personally conducted the discussions with three groups of children each containing four members. A total of 14 youths with disabilities were involved in these discussions. The researcher was the mediator. The use of FGDs according to Braun & Clarke (2023) is that it promoted openness among the FGD participants resulting in the gaining of in-depth insights into the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment.

### **3.8 Research Procedure**

To gain entry at Leonard Cheshire, the researcher used a letter of permission to conduct research from Bindura University of Science Education and this letter worked as an introductory letter. Interviews and FGDs were booked for two weeks before the day of actual data collection. Clearance to conduct the study was sought from Leonard Cheshire beforehand.

### **3.9 Validity and Reliability/trustworthiness**

The study ensured validity through the use of well-developed interviews and FGDs that reflect the key themes related to employment barriers and facilitators. The involvement of experts in disability studies ensured that the questions were relevant and comprehensive. Triangulation was employed also as a way of ensuring internal validity of the findings for example the use of both interviews and FGDs). This helps confirm that the findings are consistent across different methods. Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research findings over time (O'Leary, 2019). Ensuring validity and reliability in this study is essential for generating credible and

trustworthy findings that can inform policy, practice, and advocacy efforts for youths with disabilities. Accurate and reliable data can lead to meaningful insights into their employment challenges, ultimately contributing to more effective interventions and support systems. In a field where misconceptions and stigma often prevail, robust research findings can help influence attitudes and policies, making the study of paramount importance.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

The qualitative data collected through open-ended interviews were presented and analyzed descriptively. Thematic analysis was employed to align with the research questions and objectives. An inductive approach was used, where the collected data informed the themes for analysis. The thematic analysis followed several steps: familiarization with the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the findings. According to Creswell & Clark (2018), thematic analysis provides flexibility in data interpretation, allowing for easy sorting of datasets.

The following steps were followed in doing the reflexive thematic analysis;

1. Familiarization with the Data:

The researchers began by thoroughly familiarizing themselves with the qualitative data, which involved reading and re-reading interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content.

2. Coding:

The researcher systematically assigned codes to relevant segments of the data that pertained to the research questions.

### 3. Theme Development:

Initial codes were grouped into broader themes, which represent higher-order concepts or patterns emerging from the codes.

### 4. Reviewing and Refining Themes:

The researcher reviewed the identified themes for coherence and alignment with the data, refining, revising, and combining themes as necessary to ensure they accurately reflected the observed patterns.

### 5. Defining and Naming Themes:

Each theme was clearly defined and described, with illustrative examples or quotes from the data included to support the interpretations.

### 6. Data Charting:

A data chart or matrix was organized to summarize the identified themes, aiding in visualizing relationships between themes and specific data excerpts.

### 7. Interpretation and Synthesis:

The themes were analyzed concerning the research questions and broader research objectives.

### 8. Reporting:

Finally, the researcher reported the findings of the thematic analysis, presenting the themes alongside supporting evidence in a clear and organized manner. Quotes or excerpts from the data were used to illustrate the themes and provide a rich description of the findings.

### **3.11 Limitations**

The study could have been affected by the limitations below:

#### **3.1.1 Self-Reporting Bias**

Reliance on data that was provided by the participants could have presented bias since the participants could have underreported or over-reported their experiences and feelings concerning unemployment faced by youths with disabilities. The researcher made sure that a positive rapport was established with the participants to ensure a conducive environment that allowed them to freely express their views.

#### **3.1.2 Access to participants**

Access to participants was one of the limitations that were experienced in gathering data for this study. It was not easy for the researcher to have access to these youths with disabilities and the professional staff at the institution. However, the researcher ensured that she secured referrals from professionals who are directly involved with these children resulting in the establishment of adequate and relevant data.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

The chapter outlined and justified the study methodology that was adopted in the study to explore the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment. The key sections involved research design, research methods, data collection instruments, data analysis and ethical considerations. The next chapter provided a presentation, analysis, and discussion of the study findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents, interprets, analyses, and discusses the findings about factors affecting youths with disabilities to secure employment opportunities. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) are thematically analyzed in which direct quotes from the findings are used to support the analysis. Charts and tables are used in the presentation of demographic characteristics. The chapter also discusses the study findings in line with aligning and contrasting literature to highlight gaps that the study recommendations addresses.

## **4.2 Factors impeding youths with disabilities from accessing employment**

The study solicited the factors impeding youth with disabilities from accessing employment in which interviews and FGDs were administered. The major challenges that were obtained from the majority of participants included; societal attitudes and stigma, lack of accessibility, limited job opportunities, insufficient support services, and employer inflexibility.

### **4.2.1 Societal attitudes and stigma**

The study figured out that societal attitudes and stigma are one of the factors impeding youths with disabilities from accessing employment. The majority of the participants highlighted that they experience some form of stigmatization in applying for jobs as well as in attending job interviews. Many participants noted that societal attitudes often view disabilities as a limitation rather than a difference. Some expressed frustration over stereotypes that suggest individuals with disabilities are less capable or require excessive support.

The participants highlighted that;

“Many employers still hold outdated beliefs about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. This stigma can create a significant barrier, as it often leads to assumptions about their productivity and reliability. Our role as social workers is to

advocate for change in these perceptions through community education and awareness campaigns” (Interviewed Professional 1).

“I often feel like I have to prove myself more than my peers without disabilities. It’s exhausting. I have encountered employers who assume I won’t be able to perform tasks without even giving me a chance” (Interviewed Participant 3).

“Many youths reported feeling that job listings often include unwritten criteria that favor non-disabled candidates” (FGD Participant).

The focus group and interviews reveal a complex interplay between societal attitudes, stigma, and the employment experiences of youths with disabilities. There is a clear need for increased awareness, inclusive practices, and supportive resources to enhance their opportunities in the workforce. Key challenges include societal stigma and negative perceptions, which discourage both applicants and employers. The findings of the study emphasize the significant influence of societal attitudes and stigma on the employment prospects of youths with disabilities. Participants reported experiencing stigmatization during job applications and interviews, which aligns with existing literature on the barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in the workforce. The study identified that societal attitudes often perceive disabilities as limitations rather than differences. This aligns with the work of Caminiti (2022) who discusses stigma as a social construct that categorizes individuals based on perceived deficiencies. Caminiti (2022) posits that individuals with disabilities are often viewed through a lens of limitation, leading to discrimination in various areas, including employment. The findings indicate a pressing need for societal change in perceptions of disability. Participants emphasized the importance of advocacy and community education to combat stigma, supporting the work of Hujo & Carter (2019) who argues for increased awareness and inclusive practices. Community education campaigns can play a crucial role in reshaping attitudes and fostering a more inclusive environment for individuals with disabilities. Some studies suggest that workplace diversity initiatives have started to improve perceptions and opportunities for individuals with disabilities (e.g., Friedman & Sykes, 2018).

#### **4.2.2 Lack of accessibility**

The study found out that the most of the participants highlighted that many workplaces are not physically accessible, with obstacles such as stairs, narrow doorways, and inadequate restroom facilities. This can prevent youths with mobility impairments from even entering the workplace or navigating effectively within it. It was also obtained that youths with disabilities often face challenges in accessing reliable transportation. Public transport may not be equipped to accommodate various disabilities, making it difficult to reach job sites. The participants had this to say during the interviews and discussions;

"Many employers still see accessibility as an additional cost rather than a necessary investment. This mindset prevents youths from even getting through the door" (Interview participant 3).

"Online job applications often don't have the necessary accessibility features. We advocate for inclusive design, but many employers are unaware of these requirements" (Interviewed Professional 5).

"I've been to interviews where I couldn't even get into the building because there were no ramps or elevators (FGD Participant 6).

"Many job sites are difficult to navigate. I've had to give up on applying for jobs because I couldn't fill out the forms (FGD Participant 9).

Both professional staff and youths with disabilities highlight the critical role that accessibility plays in employment opportunities. Addressing these concerns through increased awareness, training, and resources is vital to creating a more inclusive job market. Accessibility issues further exacerbate the problem, limiting physical entry to workplaces. Additionally, the lack of tailored vocational training and support services leaves youths ill-prepared for the job market (Chitapi, 2023). Lastly, employer inflexibility regarding accommodations highlights the need for more inclusive hiring practices. Overall, these insights underscore the necessity for systemic change to



foster a more inclusive environment that empowers youths with disabilities to secure meaningful employment. These findings are in congruence with Van Beukering et al. (2021) who concluded that societal stigma remains a significant barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities. Studies have shown that negative perceptions and outdated beliefs about the capabilities of disabled individuals lead to discrimination in hiring practices (Chitapi, 2023; Maunganidze, Machiha, & Mapuranga, 2022). The responses from both professionals and youths emphasize the need for community education and awareness campaigns to combat these stereotypes. Accessibility continues to be a pervasive challenge, as noted in the literature. Many workplaces do not meet basic accessibility standards, which discourages individuals with disabilities from applying for jobs (Black, 2025; Rugoho, 2024; Moyo-Nyede & Mpako, 2023).

While the study highlights the lack of tailored vocational training and support services, some literature points to successful programs that have been implemented in various regions, providing effective support to disabled individuals (Brouwer et al., 2018). This contrast indicates a gap in the availability or awareness of such programs in the specific context of the study, suggesting that more needs to be done to promote existing resources. Therefore, despite that the study captures the perspectives of youths with disabilities, there is a need for more in-depth qualitative research focusing specifically on their experiences in various sectors. Understanding the nuances of their job search processes could provide valuable insights into effective interventions. In the same vein, the study highlights the need for stronger enforcement of existing disability policies. However, there is a gap in evaluating how these policies are implemented in practice across different sectors. Research focusing on policy impact assessment could inform more effective advocacy strategies.

#### **4.2.3 Limited job opportunities**

It was also established in the study that the present economy has limited opportunities resulting in youths with disabilities struggling to make ends meet. Most of the participants highlighted that Zimbabwe has tight opportunities to secure employment in which an exodus migration of qualified professionals from Zimbabwe to greener pastures such as the UK, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. The participants have this to say during the discussions and the interviews;

"The current economic situation in Zimbabwe has severely limited job opportunities, not just for youths with disabilities, but for all young people. This creates a highly competitive environment" (Interviewed Professional 3).

"Employers are often hesitant to invest in training or hiring individuals with disabilities when they feel they can find 'easier' candidates from the remaining pool, which is shrinking due to migration" (Interviewed Professional 6).

"It's tough out there. Even qualified people struggle to find jobs. I feel like my disability adds another layer of difficulty. I see many of my able-bodied friends leaving for countries like the UK and Australia. They have better chances of finding jobs there, which makes me feel stuck here" (FGD Participant 13).

"With so many people competing for so few positions, it's almost impossible to stand out, especially when you have a disability. I wish there were more local initiatives to support hiring people with disabilities. We need jobs that fit our skills and abilities right here at home" (FGD Participant 12).

"There just aren't enough jobs available for us. Even when I apply, I often hear back that they don't have roles that fit my skills or that they're not hiring people with disabilities. It feels like a dead end. Also, I feel that many people think we can't do certain jobs just because of our disabilities. It makes it hard to even get an interview sometimes. Breaking down these stereotypes is important for us" (FGD participant 14).

The findings highlight a critical intersection of economic challenges and employment barriers faced by youths in Zimbabwe, particularly those with disabilities. The economic situation in Zimbabwe has created a scarcity of job opportunities, impacting all young people but disproportionately affecting those with disabilities. This scarcity fosters intense competition among job seekers, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to secure employment. The

personal testimonies from youths with disabilities reflect feelings of frustration and helplessness amongst youths with disabilities. The findings reveal a complex interplay between economic challenges and the specific barriers faced by youths with disabilities in Zimbabwe. This intersection is critical in understanding the broader context of employment for individuals with disabilities, as economic conditions significantly influence their job prospects.

The findings indicate that Zimbabwe's economic situation has led to a scarcity of job opportunities, which affects all young people but disproportionately impacts those with disabilities. This phenomenon aligns with Klasen & Woolard (2009), who highlight that economic downturns exacerbate existing inequalities. In a struggling economy, employers may prioritize hiring individuals who they perceive as lower risk, often sidelining candidates with disabilities. Similarly, the scarcity of jobs fosters intense competition among job seekers, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to secure employment. Mlambo & Moyo (2018) argue that high unemployment rates create a more challenging environment for marginalized groups, including youths with disabilities. As competition increases, those with disabilities may find it even harder to stand out, reinforcing their marginalization in the job market. Based on these findings, it implies there is need for targeted interventions and community support and advocacy.

#### **4.2.4 Employer inflexibility**

The study found out that most of the participants complained about employer inflexibility as a factor that affects youth in securing employment. Many employers maintain traditional hiring criteria that do not account for the unique skills and potential of youths with disabilities. This rigidity can exclude qualified candidates who may not fit conventional molds. The responses

below were captured during data collection in which some of the participants revealed that prevailing factors to securing employment;

“Accessibility is a critical issue. Many workplaces fail to meet basic accessibility standards, which not only limits physical access but also discourages individuals from applying for jobs. Also, the job market is often not accommodating to individuals with disabilities. Many sectors remain closed off due to misconceptions about what these individuals can contribute” (Interviewed Professional 3)

The responses from both professional staff at Leonard Cheshire Disability Centre and youths with disabilities reveal a consensus on the critical barriers impeding employment access. The findings reveal a significant barrier faced by youths with disabilities in the job market: employer inflexibility. This rigidity not only affects hiring practices but also reflects deeper systemic issues within organizational cultures. The study indicates that many employers rely on traditional hiring criteria that do not consider the diverse talents and experiences of candidates with disabilities. This aligns with the observations of Schneider et al. (2020), who argue that conventional hiring practices often prioritize standardized qualifications that can inadvertently exclude qualified candidates. Such exclusion reinforces systemic barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. From the perspective of Critical Disability Theory (CDT), these findings highlight how societal norms shape the understanding of disability and employability. CDT posits that disability is not merely a medical condition but a social construct influenced by cultural and institutional attitudes. The rigidity in hiring practices reflects a societal failure to adapt to the capabilities of disabled individuals, reinforcing the marginalization of this group in the workforce.

Additionally, the findings underscore the urgent need for employers to adopt more flexible and inclusive hiring practices. Recent literature, such as by Friedman & Sykes (2018), advocates for organizations to revise their evaluation methods and focus on competencies rather than

conventional qualifications. This approach not only broadens the talent pool but also fosters a culture of inclusivity. While the findings align with a substantial body of literature emphasizing the need for inclusivity, some research suggests that certain sectors are making progress. For example, McKinsey & Company (2020) indicates that industries increasingly recognize the value of diversity, including disability, in driving innovation and business success. However, participants in this study expressed skepticism regarding the effectiveness of these initiatives, suggesting that systemic change remains inadequate. The reliance on traditional hiring criteria not only limits opportunities for qualified candidates but also reflects broader societal attitudes that need to be challenged. Linking this discussion to Critical Disability Theory reveals how these rigid practices perpetuate the marginalization of individuals with disabilities.

#### **4.3 Stakeholders' perspectives on the effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities in the workforce**

In soliciting views about the effectiveness of the existing disability policies in the country, interviews and FGD responses revealed mixed reactions towards the effectiveness of the existing policies. Through interviews and focus group discussions, several key themes emerged, reflecting both support for existing frameworks and areas needing improvement in which the themes included recognition of policy frameworks, accessibility issues, gaps in implementation, and involvement of disabled persons' organizations. The majority of the study participants revealed that the existing policy frameworks in Zimbabwe are not fully enforced in companies and organizations resulting in limited job opportunities for youths with disabilities. The study found that the major legislative frameworks that safeguard the rights of people with disabilities that were highlighted by the study participants included; the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Section 83; 2013),

the National Disability Policy (June 2021), and the SDGs (2015-2030). During the interviews and the discussions the study participants had this to say;

“Despite having strong legislative frameworks such as the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the National Disability Policy, their recognition alone does not translate into action. Many employers are aware of these policies but fail to implement them effectively, which limits opportunities for youths with disabilities” (Interviewed Professional 2).

“Accessibility remains a significant barrier. Even when policies are in place, many workplaces are not physically accessible, which directly impacts our clients' ability to secure employment. Without proper accommodations, the policies mean little in practical terms. There's a notable gap between policy and practice. Although there are legal frameworks that support inclusion, enforcement is lacking. Many organizations do not adhere to these policies, which perpetuates the cycle of unemployment among youths with disabilities” (Interviewed Professional 4).

“We know there are policies that should protect us, like the Constitution and the National Disability Policy. But in reality, they don't always help us get jobs. It feels like they are just words on paper” (FGD Participant 9).

“I have seen companies that claim to support people with disabilities, but their actions say otherwise. They don't follow the policies, which is frustrating. We need them to take these laws seriously” (FGD Participant 6).

The findings from the interviews and focus group discussions underscore a profound disconnect between the legislative frameworks designed to protect and promote the rights of youths with disabilities in Zimbabwe and their actual implementation in the workplace. Despite the presence of robust policies such as the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the National Disability Policy, the reality is that recognition of these laws does not translate into meaningful action. This indicates a systemic failure where awareness exists but is not accompanied by the necessary commitment to enforce these policies effectively. Accessibility emerges as a critical barrier in this context. Many workplaces, despite existing guidelines, remain physically inaccessible, which directly impacts the employment prospects of individuals with disabilities. This situation highlights the need for organizations to not only acknowledge the importance of inclusivity but also to take actionable steps towards creating an environment that supports all employees. As social work professionals,

we must advocate for the empowerment of youths with disabilities by pushing for the effective implementation of these policies.

The exploration of the effectiveness of existing disability policies in Zimbabwe reveals a complex landscape characterized by both recognition of legislative frameworks and significant gaps in their implementation. The findings from interviews and focus group discussions highlight key themes, including the recognition of policy frameworks, accessibility issues, gaps in enforcement, and the involvement of disabled persons' organizations. The acknowledgement of strong legislative frameworks, such as the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the National Disability Policy, aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of having comprehensive policies to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities (Heyer, 2018). However, the study illustrates that mere recognition does not lead to effective action, a theme echoed in various studies that point to the implementation gap in disability rights legislation (Shakespeare, 2006).

The findings indicate that accessibility remains a significant barrier to employment for youths with disabilities. This aligns with published research that consistently highlights how physical barriers in workplaces limit access and opportunities for disabled individuals (Kaye, 2010; Moyo-Nyede & Mpako, 2023; Hlungwani, Masuku, & Magidi, 2021). Participants' experiences reflect broader realities documented in the literature, emphasizing the need for actionable changes to improve workplace accessibility. The study underscores a widespread sentiment that existing policies are not effectively enforced, which is consistent with findings from other regions where similar legislative frameworks exist but fail to translate into practice (McGowan & Dempsey, 2020). Participants noted that many employers are aware of the policies but fail to implement them, which contrasts with some studies that report increasing corporate social responsibility initiatives aimed

at improving inclusivity (Gonzalez et al., 2018). This discrepancy may reflect differences in industry practices or regional variations in employer attitudes towards disability inclusion. The study highlights the need for a systematic evaluation of the impact of existing policies on employment outcomes for youths with disabilities. There is a gap in longitudinal studies that track the effectiveness of these policies over time, which could provide valuable insights into areas needing reform.

#### **4.4 Intervention strategies to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities**

The study sought the intervention strategies that can be used to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities. From a social work perspective, addressing the employment needs of youths with disabilities, a multifaceted approach is required to foster inclusivity in the workforce and improve the overall well-being of the latter. In line with the study findings, youth with disabilities can have equitable employment opportunities through the implementation of the following interventions; awareness and sensitization campaigns, training and capacity building for employers, enhanced vocational training programs, policy advocacy and accountability, and mentorship programs.

##### **4.4.1 Awareness and sensitization campaigns**



The study found out that the participants suggested the use of awareness and sensitization campaigns as an intervention to overcome stigma and other factors affecting youths with disabilities in accessing employment. One of the participants highlighted that;

“We believe that awareness campaigns are essential in changing societal perceptions about individuals with disabilities. Educating employers and the community at large can break down stereotypes and encourage more inclusive hiring practices. People must understand the capabilities of youths with disabilities” (Interviewed Professional 1).

“I think awareness campaigns are really important. Many people don’t understand what we can do. If employers saw us as capable individuals, they might be more willing to hire us. Also, employers often don’t know how to make their workplaces accessible. If they had proper training on how to support us, it could lead to more job opportunities. It would help them see us as valuable team members” (FGD Participant 7).

The study findings indicate that awareness and sensitization campaigns are crucial intervention strategies in addressing the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment. These campaigns aim to change societal perceptions, reduce stigma, and promote inclusion in the job market (Barbareschi et al. (2021). The findings suggest that awareness campaigns can significantly alter societal views of individuals with disabilities. By educating the public about their capabilities, these initiatives challenge the dominant narratives that position disability as a limitation (WHO, 2022). This aligns with Critical Disability Theory (CDT), which posits that disability should be understood as a social construct rather than merely a medical condition. CDT argues for a shift in perception that recognizes the diverse abilities of individuals with disabilities. The findings indicate that sensitization campaigns can also target employers, encouraging them to adopt inclusive hiring practices (Wangotse, 2025). This aligns with CDT, which calls for systemic changes in how organizations approach disability. By educating employers about the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities, campaigns can foster a more inclusive workforce.

#### 4.4.2 Training and capacity building for employers

The majority of the participants highlighted training and capacity building of the potential employers of youths with disabilities as an effective intervention. Training can be done through seminars, webinars, and conferences, and workshops with stakeholders concerned with disability issues. This participant has this to say;

“Training programs for employers should focus on disability inclusion and how to create accessible workplaces. Many employers genuinely want to help but lack the knowledge on how to accommodate employees with disabilities. Providing them with the right tools can make a significant difference. Mentorship can play a pivotal role in the career development of youths with disabilities. By connecting them with experienced professionals, we can provide guidance, support, and real-world insights that can significantly enhance their confidence and employability” (Interviewed Professional 4).

The study findings indicate that training and capacity building for employers are critical intervention strategies to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment. These initiatives aim to enhance employer understanding, foster inclusive practices, and ultimately create a more equitable job market. The findings suggest that training programs can significantly enhance employers' understanding of disability-related issues, including the capabilities and potential contributions of individuals with disabilities (Rothman, 2014). By providing education on the social model of disability, these programs challenge the traditional medical model, which often views disability as a deficiency (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). This aligns with **Critical Disability Theory (CDT)**, which advocates for recognizing disability as a social construct influenced by societal attitudes and barriers. Additionally, the findings indicate that capacity-building efforts can equip employers with the tools needed to implement inclusive hiring practices. This includes developing flexible job descriptions, creating reasonable accommodations,

and fostering an inclusive workplace culture. CDT emphasizes the importance of systemic change, advocating for practices that recognize the diverse capabilities of individuals with disabilities.

#### **4.4.3 Enhanced vocational training**

It was obtained that enhanced vocational training is important in improving the plight of youths with disabilities in securing employment. Vocational training allows the inculcation of key skills in the youths so that they can become self-reliant and meet the needs of their lives. The study findings indicate that enhanced vocational training for employers is a crucial intervention strategy to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment. This approach not only equips employers with the necessary skills to create inclusive workplaces but also aligns with broader principles of Critical Disability Theory (CDT) [Haegele & Hodge, 2016]. The findings suggest that enhanced vocational training can help employers understand the diverse capabilities of youths with disabilities. By educating employers about the strengths and potential contributions of individuals with disabilities, these programs challenge the traditional views that often regard disability as a limitation. This aligns with CDT, which advocates for recognizing disability as a social construct influenced by societal attitudes and barriers, rather than merely a medical condition.

Notably, as was revealed in the study, vocational training can serve to dismantle stereotypes that portray individuals with disabilities as less capable or more dependent. By linking these findings to Critical Disability Theory, it is evident that vocational training not only seeks to improve employer understanding but also promotes systemic change and fosters inclusive work environments. To maximize their effectiveness, it is essential to implement robust evaluation

mechanisms and adapt strategies based on ongoing feedback, ensuring they align with the needs and experiences of individuals with disabilities.

#### **4.4.4 Policy advocacy and accountability**

The study revealed that policy advocacy and accountability is also another fundamental initiative in addressing the challenges faced by youths with disabilities.

One of the participants revealed that;

“Policies that protect us are great, but they need to be enforced. If companies don’t follow these laws, nothing changes for us. We need advocates who will hold them accountable. Having a mentor who understands our struggles would be amazing. They could help guide us and share their experiences” (FGD Participant 11).

“Our country needs to improve in terms of enforcing and implementing existing disabilities policy frameworks to ensure the rights of people with disabilities are met. This will help in ensuring equitable employment opportunities for all including youths with disabilities” (Interviewed Professional 3).

The study findings emphasize that policy advocacy and accountability are crucial initiatives for addressing the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment. These initiatives aim to create a supportive legislative framework and ensure that existing policies are effectively implemented and monitored. The findings suggest that effective policy advocacy is essential for influencing changes in legislation and organizational practices that affect the employment of youths with disabilities (Hlungwani et al. 2021). Advocacy efforts can help shape policies that promote inclusive hiring practices, reasonable accommodations, and support services. This aligns with CDT, which emphasizes the role of advocacy in challenging systemic barriers and ensuring that the rights of individuals with disabilities are recognized and upheld (WHO, 2022). Additionally, as was revealed in the study, transparency can foster trust and encourage organizations to adopt more inclusive practices. As CDT advocates for the empowerment of

individuals with disabilities, accountability mechanisms can help ensure that their voices are heard and their rights are protected. The findings from the interviews and focus group discussions highlight a critical need for targeted intervention strategies to enhance employment opportunities for youths with disabilities.

On the contrary, the findings suggest that many employers want to help but lack knowledge; however, some studies indicate that a significant number of employers are resistant to change due to entrenched attitudes (Gonzalez et al., 2018). This discrepancy points to the need for targeted interventions that address both knowledge gaps and deeper-rooted biases in employer attitudes. There is a notable gap in longitudinal research tracking the effectiveness of these interventions over time. Understanding how awareness campaigns and training programs influence employment outcomes for youths with disabilities would provide valuable data for refining strategies. In summary, the findings underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive approach to improve employment opportunities for youths with disabilities. Awareness campaigns, employer training, mentorship, and advocacy for policy enforcement are all critical components of this strategy.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

The chapter provided a succinct and comprehensive presentation, interpretation, analysis, and discussion of the study findings that were gathered using interviews and FGDs about the factors affecting youths with disabilities to secure employment. Aligning and contrasting studies were identified and relevant literature was discussed about the main themes. The next chapter presented the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The study explored the factors affecting youths with disabilities in securing employment mainly focusing with Leonard Cheshire Disability Centre in Harare Zimbabwe. This chapter provided

summary of the study, conclusions that were developed based on the study findings, implications of the findings to social work practice, and the recommendations to various stakeholders.

## **5.2 Summary**

The gist of the study was to explore the factors affecting youths with disabilities to secure employment. The burden of unemployment in Zimbabwe was a major concern worsening youths with disabilities possibilities of securing employment in a harsh economic environment. The critical disability theory mainly informed the study while empirical literature was reviewed based on existing findings from peer reviewed journal articles, reports, and other publications such as books.

The study was primarily informed by the pragmatist philosophy being purely qualitative. A case study design was adopted in which the study setting was Leonard Cheshire that is geographically located in the capital city of Zimbabwe, Harare. The target population involved youths with disabilities under the care of Leonard Cheshire Disability Centre and the professional staff at the same institution. The sample of the study included 20 participants (youth with disabilities and professional staff). Purposive sampling was employed in selecting the study participants. Data was generated using interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

The primary findings on the factors impeding youths with disabilities from securing employment from the majority of the participants included societal attitudes and stigma, lack of accessibility, limited job opportunities, insufficient support services, and employer inflexibility. In soliciting views about the effectiveness of the existing disability policies in the country, interviews and FGD responses revealed mixed reactions towards the effectiveness of the existing policies. The majority

(80%) of the study participants revealed that the existing policy frameworks in Zimbabwe are not fully enforced in companies and organizations resulting in limited job opportunities for youths with disabilities. The study sought the intervention strategies that can be used to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities and the majority highlighted these interventions; awareness and sensitization campaigns, training and capacity building for employers, enhanced vocational training programs, policy advocacy and accountability, and mentorship programs.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Based on the findings that were established, the following conclusions were made;

#### **5.3.1 Factors impeding youths with disabilities from accessing employment**

Societal attitudes and stigma emerged as prominent factors that discourage employers from considering youths with disabilities for job opportunities. Many workplaces are not equipped to accommodate individuals with disabilities, which limits their ability to perform effectively. There are limited support services (career counselling, job placement services, and skills training programs) that help youth with disabilities in seeking employment opportunities in Zimbabwe. Many employers are reluctant to adapt roles or provide necessary accommodations for individuals with disabilities. This inflexibility not only limits employment opportunities but also affects job retention.

#### **5.3.2 Stakeholders' perspectives on the effectiveness of existing disability policies in fostering the inclusion of youths with disabilities in the workforce**



Participants' mixed reactions highlight a significant gap between the intention of disability policies and their real-world application. While the existence of these policies demonstrates a commitment to promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities, the lack of effective enforcement raises concerns about their impact on employment outcomes. This disconnect suggests that having a legal framework is insufficient if it is not accompanied by robust mechanisms for monitoring and compliance. The failure to implement existing policies results in a continued cycle of exclusion for youths with disabilities, limiting their access to job opportunities. Participants reported that many employers do not actively seek to hire individuals with disabilities, often due to misconceptions about their capabilities or a lack of awareness regarding the benefits of a diverse workforce.

### **5.3.3 Intervention strategies to address the challenges faced by youths with disabilities in securing employment opportunities**

Educating the public and employers about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, these campaigns can help combat stigma and discrimination, thereby creating a more inclusive environment for job seekers. Training and capacity building fosters a culture of inclusivity within organizations primarily encouraging them to actively seek out and support and employees with disabilities. Tailoring these programs to meet the specific needs of this demographic can provide them with the skills and qualifications necessary to compete in the job market. Effective policies must be enforced to create real change to hold organizations accountable for their commitments to inclusivity.

## **5.4 Implications for Social Work**

The findings carry huge implications to social work practice primarily in the context of supporting youths with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities. In the same vein, social workers play a pivotal role in ensuring inclusion of individuals with disabilities, facilitating access to resources, and promoting systemic change.

#### **5.4.1 Addressing societal attitudes and stigma**

Social workers must actively engage in initiatives aimed at changing societal attitudes towards disabilities. This includes developing and implementing public awareness campaigns that highlight the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. By educating communities and employers about the value of diversity in the workplace, social workers can help dismantle stigma and discrimination. Advocacy efforts should focus on fostering a culture that recognizes the strengths and contributions of youths with disabilities, thereby encouraging employers to consider them for job opportunities.

#### **5.4.2 Promoting accessibility in workplaces**

Social workers can play a vital role in advocating for workplace accessibility. This includes collaborating with employers to assess and improve physical and systemic barriers that hinder the employment of individuals with disabilities. Social workers can provide guidance on creating inclusive environments, emphasizing the importance of reasonable accommodations and flexible work arrangements. By facilitating discussions between employers and employees with disabilities, social workers can help bridge the gap between organizational policies and the needs of individuals.

#### **5.4.3 Enhancing support services**

The limited availability of support services identified in the study highlights a critical area for intervention. Social workers should advocate for the expansion of career counseling, job placement services, and skills training programs tailored specifically for youths with disabilities. By collaborating with educational institutions, NGOs, and government agencies, social workers can help develop programs that equip individuals with the skills and resources necessary to secure and maintain employment. This may also involve providing direct support to youths in navigating job searches and preparing for interviews.

#### **5.4.4 Strengthening policy advocacy**

The study's findings regarding the mixed effectiveness of existing disability policies underscore the need for robust policy advocacy within social work practice. Social workers should actively engage in efforts to hold organizations accountable for enforcing disability policies, advocating for stronger compliance mechanisms. By participating in policy discussions and coalition-building with other stakeholders, social workers can help ensure that the rights of individuals with disabilities are upheld and that policies translate into meaningful action.

#### **5.4.5 Mentorship and Support Networks**

Establishing mentorship programs can be a powerful strategy for supporting youths with disabilities in their career development. Social workers can facilitate connections between youths and professionals in their desired fields, providing guidance, support, and networking opportunities. Mentorship can enhance confidence and provide valuable insights into navigating the workplace, ultimately improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

### **5.5 Recommendations**

The study made the recommendations below;

- Leonard Cheshire together with other relevant stakeholders such as the Council of Social Workers should implement awareness and sensitization campaigns (media, workshops, and community events) that educate the public and employers about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities.
- Social workers should advocate for the implementation of accessibility standards in all workplaces to ensure the employment needs of youths with disabilities are addressed.
- The government should foster a system that encourage employers to adopt inclusive hiring practices through incentives, such as tax breaks or grants for companies that actively recruit individuals with disabilities.
- The Department of Social Development in collaboration with disability centres such as Leonard Cheshire should expand access to career counseling, job placement services, and skills training programs specifically designed for individuals with disabilities.
- The government should prioritize tailored support for improving vocational training programs to meet the specific needs of youths with disabilities, focusing on high-demand sectors.

### **5.6 Areas for Future Study**

Further research can be conducted on;

1. Impact of spearheading mass training of youths with disabilities with vocational skills to improve their employability

### **5.7 Chapter Summary**

The chapter outlined a summary of the study problem, literature review, methodology and the major study findings. The chapter also developed the conclusions to the study based on the study findings, implications of study findings to social work practice, and the study recommendations.

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## APPENDIX A



### DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

### BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL STAFF

#### Introduction

My name is Martin Cardson Zezai, I am a student studying for a BSc in Social Work at Bindura University of Science Education. Currently, I am collecting data for my project. The title of the evaluation is: *An Analysis of the Socio-economic Challenges Faced by Youths with Disabilities in Securing Employment Opportunities: A Study of Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe*. I respect and appreciate your valuable time, but could you please help me but answering the following questions? I can assure you that information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and used only for academic research purposes only.

#### Please note:

- i. No personal information will be collected
- ii. No remuneration will be associated with this exercise

#### Section A: Biographical Information

**Sex:**

.....

**Years of work experience:**

.....

**Highest Professional Qualification:**

.....

**Any other professional certifications related to disability:**

.....

### **Interview Questions**

1. With your experience in working with youth with disabilities, what factors mainly prevent them from securing employment?
2. Please describe the rate at which the youths with disabilities at your institution have been absorbed into the workforce in Zimbabwe.
3. Please explain how the factors you outlined above affect youth with disabilities' emotional state.
4. Please explain existing policies that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the employment sector.
5. Do the existing policies promote equitable employment opportunities for youths with disabilities as compared to non-disabled ones?

6. Which policy gaps on disability in Zimbabwe do you feel need to be addressed about the current economic state?
7. Which intervention strategies can be adopted at the institutional and national levels to address factors that prevent youths with disabilities from securing employment?

[Thank You]

## **APPENDIX B**

### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FOR YOUTHS WITH DISABILITIES**



#### **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

#### **BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (HONOURS) DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK**

##### **FGD Questions:**

1. Please explain the challenges you face in searching for employment in Zimbabwe as a person with disabilities.
2. In attending interviews, are there discriminatory attitudes that you observe among colleagues or interviews at respective institutions?
3. Do you feel any form of support from the national policies on disability that exist?
4. Please explain if there are any support systems that link you with employment opportunities, actually, what are your job search approaches do you use?
5. To what extent are youths with disabilities involved in programmes that aim at empowering youths to gain self-sustenance and employment opportunities in Zimbabwe?
6. What do you think can be done to overcome the challenges you face?
7. Who do you think should be involved in the journey to empower youths with disabilities to have better opportunities when seeking employment in Zimbabwe?


[Thank You for your Cooperation]

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT RESEARCH

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

P. Bag 1020  
BINDURA, Zimbabwe  
Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7621-4  
Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534



BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

Date: 12/05/25

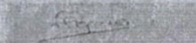
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer, Martin K. Zozai, Student Registration Number B1025206, who is a BSc Social Work student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully



F.E. CHIGONDO  
CHAIRPERSON

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK  
CHAIRPERSON  
11 APR 2025  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES  
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

Leonard Cheshire Disability  
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Linda Moyo, Zimbabwe  
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