

General Impediments to Implementing of Research Recommendations on Inclusivity of Physically Disabled in Church

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Abstract- *The implementation of research recommendations on inclusivity for physically challenged individuals within church contexts remains limited, despite increasing awareness and theological emphasis on love, justice, and equality. This study explores the general impediments that hinder churches from translating research-based recommendations into practical, sustainable inclusion. The objectives of the study are; church and inclusivity of the physically challenged, church's attitude towards the physically challenged, and general impediments to the implementation of research recommendations on inclusivity of the physically challenged. The target population includes church leaders, volunteers, and policy makers of various denominations. Qualitative thematic analysis was the main method adopted in analyzing data. Findings reveal that institutional barriers, such as lack of clear inclusion policies, minimal leadership commitment, and inadequate training, prevent the integration of inclusive practices into church structures. Financial constraints also emerge as a major obstacle, as many churches cite limited resources for accessibility modifications like ramps, assistive technologies, or transportation support. The study concludes that addressing these impediments requires a holistic approach—integrating leadership commitment, policy development, disability education, financial prioritization, and collaboration with disability advocates. Strengthening these areas will enable churches to move from intention to action, creating inclusive and spiritually empowering environments for physically challenged individuals.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Despite the recognition of societal inclusion as a human right, persons with disabilities face many barriers preventing their participation in mainstream Christian denominations. This includes their

participation in spiritual and religious activities (Hodge & Reynolds, Citation2019). More noteworthy is their exclusion from Christian congregations (Leshota, Citation2015; McMahan-Panther & Bornman, Citation2021), considering the Church's responsibility to address the rights of persons with disabilities (among other marginalized groups), and to promote their inclusion and participation (White, Citation2017). In this review, *the Church* collectively refers to mainstream Christian denominations within umbrella bodies and affiliate organizations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, is a landmark civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities, ensuring they have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else.

While many churches have made progress toward being more accessible to the physically challenged, some remain inaccessible, making it difficult for people with disabilities to participate in religious practices. In the United States, several factors impede the full inclusivity of physically challenged individuals in churches, including limited accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), societal attitudes, and a lack of understanding and adaptation within some congregations. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law protecting the rights of disabled people and ensuring their access in public places. However, when it comes to churches, ADA protections are limited (Braun Ability,2025).

Many Africans misunderstand and mistake disability to be a result of perversity, sin, delayed or neglected

repentance or witchcraft. Unfortunately, even if all disabilities had these causes, excluding PWDs from Church life and services cannot be justified (Tagwirei 2024). The question is, how will the Church accommodate disabilities when one of its presently exclusive groups of incumbent pastors, elders, deacons, department leaders and followers have an accident, are injured, or lose their legs and become wheelchair bound? It is likely that, unless we redefine and address (dis)abilities today, inclusivity may remain a pipe dream in ecclesiology and Church leadership. Impairments such as injury or illness can cause loss or differences in physiological and psychological functionality, or limit opportunities to interact with others because of cultural, hermeneutical, theological, attitudinal and environmental barriers. Studies on disability (Okoli 2016, White 2017; Whitley 2023) suggest that the most prevalent types of disabilities relate to hearing, speaking, visual, physical or mental impairments, as well as autism and albinism.

What are barriers that impede disability access and inclusion in faith communities? Churches commonly refer to tangible barriers such as architectural and financial issues. However, more common impediments are those related to social constraints such as lack of awareness and knowledge, limited attitudes and fears, and discomfort and avoidance. There are many reasons why people with disabilities perceive the church as not being particularly welcoming to them. First and foremost are uninterrogated theological assumptions linking sin, the lack of faith, and disability, and about healing and curing of disability—all of which combine to undergird the biases, fears, and stigmatizations inhibiting the formation of a more disability-welcoming church (Yong, 2007). Then, even given the extensive history of the church's charitable services to people with disabilities, these have more often than not perpetuated paternalistic postures and practices toward such groups of people. As a result, the "disabled" are not seen first and foremost as people created in the image of God but as "burdens" to be carried. In addition to these historic tendencies are specifically contemporary challenges. Insofar as the employment provisions of the ADA do not require religious organizations to exempt potential hires or employees from subscribing or conforming

to their tenets of faith, to that same degree the criteria for discrimination functions first at the religious rather than disability level.

Religious beliefs on disability became more apparent after the declaration year of the disabled by the UN in the year 1981. The leading Islamic theology in the religious beliefs on disability was postulated by the works of Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites in the years after 1980. Their major investigation was to try and answer the question that; if Allah was almighty and merciful, why then did suffering, impairments and disability exist. Theologically, the concept of theodicy attempts to explain that disability, impairment exist because of evil and as a result of leaving in an imperfect world. This religious belief forms the core religious belief as pertained to impairments and disability in Africa and Kenya in particular.

While it is indisputable the Christians throughout the ages have sought to serve their retarded brethren in some manner or other, "there has never been a cohesive or explicit moral notion as to how they should be cared for or how aggressively we should address the issue of their presence among us" (Stanley Hauerwas, 1982). Were those with disabilities to experience true belonging in their churches they would feel not only cared for but also needed, an indispensable part of active church life. Religious communities have the potential to combat the societal ill of isolation and contribute to well-being in physically challenged. The Americans with Disabilities Act, Title III mandates for public accommodation do not apply to religious entities (though local building codes may). Therefore, the prerogative for providing physical accommodations rests on the religious organization itself. Similarly, the prerogative for eliminating the social barriers to belonging also rests with communities of faith (ADA National Network, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread advocacy for inclusivity and equal participation within religious communities, individuals with physical disabilities often face significant barriers to full involvement in church life. These impediments ranging from physical inaccessibility of worship spaces, lack of appropriate

accommodations during services, social stigma, and limited representation in leadership roles continue to hinder the integration of persons with disabilities in many church settings. While theological doctrines may affirm the inherent dignity and value of all individuals, there remains a gap between doctrine and practice. This disconnect raises critical questions about the church's role in promoting inclusion and the practical measures being taken or neglected to ensure that physically challenged members can fully participate in spiritual, social, and leadership aspects of church life. Addressing this problem is essential to examine the general impediments to inclusivity of physically challenged in church.

1.3. The following are the objectives of the study;

1. To examine the church and inclusivity of physically challenged in church,
2. To establish the research recommendations towards inclusivity of physically challenged,
3. To examine the general impediments to implementing of research recommendations on inclusivity of the physically challenged.

1.4. Research questions

1. How does church respond to inclusivity of the physically challenged individuals?
2. What are the research recommendations towards inclusivity of physically challenged in church?
3. What are the general impediments to implementing of research recommendations on inclusivity of the physically challenged?

1.5. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the general impediments to implementing research recommendations on inclusivity of physically challenged in church

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings of study is both timely and necessary, as it addresses a critical yet often overlooked aspect of church life the inclusion of physically challenged individuals. First, this study holds significant value for various stakeholders within the Christian community and beyond. The study brings attention to the lived realities of physically challenged individuals, whose spiritual needs and right to full participation in church life are often marginalized. By

identifying and analyzing the specific impediments they face, this research promotes awareness and encourages empathy among church members, leaders, and policymakers.

Second, for church leadership, the findings will provide evidence-based insights that can inform the development of inclusive programs, policies, and physical infrastructure. This is vital for ensuring that church environments align with biblical principles of love, justice, and inclusivity.

Thirdly, For theologians and scholars, the study offers a platform to engage more deeply with disability theology, encouraging interpretations of scripture that affirm the dignity and spiritual gifts of people with disabilities.

Lastly, For advocates and organizations focused on disability rights, the research supports broader inclusion efforts by highlighting the role religious institutions play in either reinforcing or dismantling societal barriers. For physically challenged individuals and their families, the study validates their experiences and strengthens their call for equal participation, fostering a greater sense of belonging and spiritual empowerment.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this study the data was collected using interviews schedules, and group discussions. The interview schedule was used to collect information from the church leaders, and policy makers. The open ended questions in each interview schedule were used to gather information related to church and inclusivity of physically challenged individuals, the research recommendations towards inclusivity of physically challenged in church, and the general impediments to implementing of research recommendations on inclusivity of the physically challenged. Validity was established through discussions with experts. To ensure reliability of interview schedule, the researcher personally led the respondents through the areas to be covered during piloting. The interview schedule was systematically modified as the interview progressed during try-out. The study utilized qualitative thematic analysis in analysing the qualitative data.

III. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Data obtained from the data collection instruments were systematically analyzed and presented as follows:

Research Question 1

What is the response of church and inclusivity of physically challenged individuals? The study aimed at examining the response of the church and inclusivity of the physically challenged individuals. The study findings were presented as follows; adaptation of physical facilities; accessibility to pathways and pavements; design for ramps

Adaptation of physical facilities

Physical accessibility strengthens the role by promoting inclusivity and allowing individuals of all abilities to engage fully in the faith community. This level of accessibility not only reflects the church's commitment to inclusivity and equal participation but also creates a welcoming environment for all individuals, regardless of their abilities (Smith, 2018). Research shows that physical accessibility is a key factor in fostering the full participation of individuals with disabilities in various communal activities, including church services (Brown & Johnson, 2017).

The study has also found out that; Physical accessibility also extends to creating sensory-friendly environments for individuals with sensory processing challenges. Adjustments such as dimmed lighting and quiet spaces can significantly enhance the worship experience for these individuals (Hellen Otieno, O.I, 2023). By creating such spaces, churches signal their commitment to addressing the varied needs of their congregation and promoting diversity (Peters, 2015). Moreover, churches that prioritize physical accessibility fulfill their legal and moral obligations under equality and non-discrimination laws. The legal requirements for accessibility not only align with ethical principles but also encourage greater inclusivity within faith communities (Jones & Smith, 2020)

Although there is physical accessibility in charismatic churches, but the physically challenged often lack full access to corporate worship and

participation in their faith communities. This is seen in many church leaders who experience uncertainty about the steps they should take to remove barriers and widen the welcome for members of their community who are impacted by disability. One respondent stated that, even when congregations have worked to make their sanctuaries accessible, it is not uncommon to find areas such as the pulpit, altar, choir loft, or youth room that still possess significant barriers. Pastors and worship leaders still perpetuate unrealistic images of people with disabilities as pitiful or inspirational, and language offensive to people with disabilities is used uncritically, leading to what Brett Webb-Mitchell calls "the betrayal of people with disabilities" (Webb-Mitchell, 1994)

Second, While many people with disabilities have found welcome in religious communities, others still wait outside the gates. While valuing the engagement that religious communities have made so far in relation to issues of accessibility, it is also important to recognize that access to the physical and conversational space of worship is only a first step in a project of accessibility. It is good to "first do no harm," but this must not be the only step toward full inclusion.

By removing architectural barriers such as steps, narrow doorways, and uneven surfaces, charismatic churches demonstrate their dedication to creating spaces where individuals with mobility impairments can move freely and comfortably (Olivia Kanaga, O.I, 2023). The provision of wheelchair ramps, accessible parking, and elevators empowers individuals with disabilities to navigate the church independently, thereby ensuring their dignity and autonomy (Ngugi, 2016). Furthermore, accessible restrooms, equipped with proper grab bars and ample space, ensure comfort for all congregants (Josephat Sunguti, O.I, 2023). These considerations benefit not only individuals with disabilities but also their families and caregivers, allowing for greater participation in church activities (Olson, 2019).

It is my claim that taking disability seriously means opening the entire breadth of the tradition to an "accessibility audit." Not only does such an examination highlight potential barriers challenges of scripture and metaphor, for example but it also

suggests new theological possibilities in which disability is not simply a consumer or an evaluator of tradition but rather a constructive element that offers new options for theological reflection (Webb-Mitchell, 1994). In other words, analysis from the perspective(s) of disability not only offers corrective guidelines to established theologies but also itself raises new theological possibilities. There is much to examine, and much to be gained. This means that it is time for religion to attend seriously to the insights of disability.

Third, rather than being a structure for empowerment, the church has more often supported the societal structures and attitudes that have treated physically challenged as objects of pity and paternalism. For many disabled persons the church has been a “city on a hill”—physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable (Nancy L. Eiesland, 1994). The existence of institutional and mental barriers inside religious communities is one of the main obstacles the Church faces in its efforts to assist those with physical impairments. Even though many churches have made progress towards inclusion, physical accessibility is still a problem in a lot of them. In addition to making, it’s difficult to enter physically; this lack of accessible infrastructure gives the subliminal message that members of the disabled community are not completely accepted in church life.

Lastly, Physical barriers limit the movement of individuals who use a wheelchair or other mobility supports. This could look like a building only accessible via stairs, a polling place with doors too narrow for a wheelchair to fit, or medical equipment that only can be used by a person who can walk or stand (Kett, M. (2018).

Theological Foundation for Inclusivity of physically challenged

The Bible emphasizes the equal worth of all people before God. Scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 12:22-26 highlight that “those parts of the body that seem weaker are indispensable,” implying that every member of the faith community, regardless of ability, has a vital role to play. The example of Jesus Christ, who welcomed and healed the disabled, further

reinforces the Christian obligation to embrace inclusivity as a form of living out the Gospel.

Research notes that, embracing a theology of disability means listening to and learning from the lived experiences of people with disabilities. The church’s commitment to this theology is a testament to its belief in a God who transcends limited human categories and whose Kingdom is marked by radical inclusion and justice.

Theological Reflections

Disability is not merely a medical or psychological condition; it is an experience shaped by social, cultural, spiritual and environmental factors. It is the Church’s responsibility to identify and dismantle barriers that prevent full participation in spiritual and community life. Research states that, thinking theologically about the issues is crucial for the church’s ministry. As we have seen, in the Christian tradition, all individuals are seen as created in the image of God. This is foundational for understanding the inherent dignity and worth of every person (Genesis 1:27). The Church recognises that disability is part of the human experience and that every member of the Body of Christ has a unique role to play (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Some key theological areas to consider include the following:

Creation and the Imago Dei

According to Scripture, all humans are made in the image and likeness of God (Imago Dei), a belief that gives profound value to every life (Genesis 1:27). This theological assertion grounds a Christian understanding of personhood and establishes the intrinsic worth of each individual.

Sin, Suffering, and Disability

Jesus Himself directly refuted the idea that disability was caused by individual sin (John 9:1-3). However, we recognise that people with disabilities have been made to believe the opposite. Disability is not the product of sin. All of us are affected by sin (Romans 3:23).

Accessibility, Inclusion and Belonging

The findings in the light of these biblical and theological reflections, it is clear that the Church must commit to removing physical,

communicational, spiritual and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being full participation in church life. An inclusive Church is one where people with disabilities participate fully in worship, sacraments, fellowship, and leadership (1 Corinthians 12:22-25). To make this a reality we will need to make permanent changes to our buildings, our processes and our attitudes. Building genuine community involves recognising and nurturing the gifts that each person brings to the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8).

Finally, the Church's commitment to the theology of disability is an ongoing journey of growth and understanding. It requires humility, a willingness to learn, and a readiness to be changed by the encounters with all members of the family of God. As we move forward, may our actions and words reflect the inclusive love of Christ, in whom we are all made whole. In this spirit, the Church of Scotland acknowledges its role in leading by example, fostering communities where everyone is recognised as integral to the life of the Church, and where the diversity of God's creation is not only accepted but celebrated as a reflection of the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Attitudinal inclusivity for physically challenged

The attitudes of congregants and church leadership significantly influence the experiences of individuals with disabilities in charismatic churches. Attitudinal inclusivity, which extends beyond physical accessibility, is a critical factor in fostering an environment where people with disabilities are recognized as valued and contributing members of the community (Fridah Akaliche, O.I, 2023). Research supports the notion that congregational attitudes shape the overall experience for individuals with disabilities, affecting their sense of belonging and empowerment (Brooks, 2016). This inclusivity involves not only acceptance but also active support and respect for the inherent worth and contributions of individuals with disabilities (Griffin & Bowers, 2017).

Research supports the notion that Stigma, pity, and misconceptions about disability remain major obstacles within many congregations. Some church members may unconsciously marginalize or exclude

the physically challenged due to ignorance or prejudice. To counter this, churches need to promote disability awareness programs, sermons emphasizing inclusion, and sensitivity training for clergy and volunteers. Inclusion must be a mindset — not merely a structural adjustment.

Findings of the study found out that, Churches that embody attitudinal inclusivity also cultivate supportive networks within the congregation. These networks provide a safe space where individuals with disabilities feel comfortable seeking assistance and forming meaningful relationships (Consepter Rhoda, O.I, 2023). Inclusive attitudes create a ripple effect, as leadership that embraces inclusivity can inspire the entire congregation to follow suit, promoting a culture of acceptance and understanding (Barasa & Ouma, 2023). In turn, this inclusive culture leads to spiritual growth for all members, fostering unity, shared values, and deeper communal bonds (Ominde Ouma, O.I, 2023).

A new movement among Christian churches is to reach out and create relationships with people with disabilities through celebration of the gift of life and to include all persons in individual faith communities (Clapton, 1997). However, in order to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, faith communities must remove not only architectural and communication barriers, but also attitudinal ones. Research has indicated that the reversal of feeling inferior and shame is a critical spiritual issue that must be resolved if people with disabilities are to live well with their disability (Clarke & Cardman, 2002).

Participation and Leadership for inclusivity of the physically challenged

Inclusion goes beyond physical presence; it involves meaningful participation. The physically challenged should be encouraged to serve in various church ministries and leadership roles. Their perspectives enrich decision-making and model the church's commitment to equality and diversity. Policies that promote representation and participation can ensure that inclusivity becomes a sustained practice, not a token gesture.

Supportive leadership demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity and directly influences the church's

overall culture of acceptance and respect. Research has shown that church leadership, through their attitudes, actions, and policies, sets the tone for congregational behavior, thereby fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Wilson Amwoma, O.I, 2023). When leadership actively engages with individuals with disabilities and works to meet their needs, they contribute to creating a welcoming environment where everyone can fully participate (Tobias, 2016). Supportive leaders prioritize accessibility improvements, ensuring that physical barriers such as steps and narrow doorways are addressed. This is crucial in enabling individuals with disabilities to access church services and events, reflecting the church's commitment to inclusivity (Kellen Musisi, O.I, 2023). Leaders who engage in open dialogue with individuals with disabilities not only gain insights into their challenges but also cultivate a culture of empathy within the church. According to McNair (2018), leadership that listens and responds to the concerns of individuals with disabilities fosters stronger relationships and a deeper sense of community.

Research Question 2

Research recommendations towards inclusivity of physically challenged in church?

The study sought to find out research recommendations towards inclusivity of physically challenged in church?

Awareness campaigns to promote inclusion

A welcoming attitude from both congregants and leaders promotes a culture where people with disabilities are encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of church life, from worship to social activities (Jackline Auma, O.I, 2023). This inclusivity is linked to the broader concept of social empowerment, as positive attitudes foster leadership opportunities and facilitate meaningful participation in church events (Davis & Stevenson, 2018). Attitudinal inclusivity helps dismantle stereotypes and promotes a more accurate understanding of disabilities, encouraging a shift in congregational perspectives (Emmanuel Ingyesi, O.I, 2023).

In addition to mainstream services, one respondent explained that, some people with disabilities may require access to specific measures, such as

rehabilitation, support services, or training. Rehabilitation – including assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and white canes – improves functioning and independence. A range of well-regulated assistance and support services in the community can meet needs for care, enabling people to live independently and to participate in the economic, social, and cultural lives of their communities. Vocational rehabilitation and training can open labour market opportunities. While there is a need for more services, there is also a need for better, more accessible, flexible, integrated, and well-coordinated multidisciplinary services, particularly at times of transition such as between child and adult services. Existing programmes and services need to be reviewed to assess their performance and make changes to improve their coverage, effectiveness, and efficiency. The changes should be based on sound evidence, appropriate in terms of culture and other local contexts, and tested locally.

Providing disability awareness training for church staff and leadership further equips them to create a welcoming atmosphere. Supportive leaders actively encourage individuals with disabilities to participate in various church activities, from worship services to leadership roles (Wilson Amwoma, O.I, 2023). By allocating resources for programs and services tailored to the needs of individuals with disabilities, leadership shows a tangible commitment to their inclusion (Smith & Rivera, 2017).

Inclusive language is another vital component of education and awareness campaigns. Educating congregants to avoid derogatory or disrespectful language when discussing disabilities fosters a more respectful and welcoming church environment (Patrick Juma, O.I, 2023). These efforts align with inclusive practices that extend to all aspects of church life, from worship services to social programs. According to McClure (2019), providing accessible information and resources about disabilities allows the entire congregation to engage in meaningful discussions about inclusion, further enhancing the church's suitability for individuals with disabilities. Guest speakers and workshops on disability-related topics are effective tools for raising awareness. Hearing directly from individuals with disabilities and their families through testimonies fosters a

deeper understanding and connection within the congregation (Simon Mahero, O.I, 2023). These educational events can also prompt congregants to participate in disability-related community initiatives, demonstrating the church's broader commitment to social justice and inclusion (Johnson, 2021).

Policy enforcement

People with disabilities often have unique insights about their disability and their situation. In formulating and implementing policies, laws, and services, people with disabilities should be consulted and actively involved. Disabled people's organizations may need capacity-building and support to empower people with disabilities and advocate for their needs. When suitably developed and funded, they can also play a role in service delivery – for example, in information provision, peer support, and independent living. One respondent argued that, at an individual level, persons with disabilities are entitled to control over their lives and therefore need to be consulted on issues that concern them directly – whether in health, education, rehabilitation, or community living. Supported decision-making may be necessary to enable some individuals to communicate their needs and choices.

Research has shown that church leadership, through their attitudes, actions, and policies, sets the tone for congregational behavior, thereby fostering an inclusive atmosphere (Wilson Amwoma, O.I, 2023). When leadership actively engages with individuals with disabilities and works to meet their needs, they contribute to creating a welcoming environment where everyone can fully participate (Tobias, 2016).

Supportive leaders prioritize accessibility improvements, ensuring that physical barriers such as steps and narrow doorways are addressed. This is crucial in enabling individuals with disabilities to access church services and events, reflecting the church's commitment to inclusivity (Kellen Musisi, O.I, 2023). Leaders who engage in open dialogue with individuals with disabilities not only gain insights into their challenges but also cultivate a culture of empathy within the church. According to McNair (2018), leadership that listens and responds to the concerns of individuals with disabilities fosters

stronger relationships and a deeper sense of community.

Moreover, enforcement requires continuous training and awareness creation among clergy, staff, and volunteers. Other findings indicated that, Policies must be supported by education that challenges stigma and fosters understanding of disability rights and inclusion. Disciplinary measures should also be in place for non-compliance, just as churches enforce financial or ethical standards. Transparent reporting mechanisms—such as annual inclusion audits or accessibility reviews—can help track progress and maintain momentum.

Ultimately, enforcing disability inclusion policies reflects the church's moral and theological commitment to justice, compassion, and equality. When policies are backed by consistent monitoring, training, and accountability, churches can move beyond rhetoric to embody the inclusive love of Christ, ensuring that every member, regardless of ability, is valued and empowered to serve.

Investment in disability friendly infrastructure

A major component of disability-friendly infrastructure is physical accessibility. Churches must ensure that all members can freely and safely enter, move within, and use the premises. This includes the construction of ramps or lifts for wheelchair users, the widening of doorways, and the installation of handrails along stairways. Pathways leading to the church should be smooth, well-paved, and free of obstacles to facilitate movement. Inside the sanctuary, designated seating areas should accommodate wheelchairs and mobility aids without segregating those who use them. Accessible restrooms, with properly designed grab bars, sinks, and sufficient turning space, are equally crucial. These infrastructural modifications demonstrate respect for the rights and comfort of persons with disabilities and foster a sense of belonging

Disability organizations provide specialized knowledge in accessibility and accommodations, which helps churches navigate the challenges associated with inclusivity. Mwembi (2023) emphasizes that partnering with these organizations gives churches access to valuable resources such as

training materials, guidelines on accessibility, and information about disability rights. These resources are critical in helping churches create more inclusive environments, as they allow for the proper accommodation of individuals with disabilities (Smith, 2018).

The connection between churches and disability organizations also fosters a network of support. According to Okoli (2020), collaborative efforts allow churches to receive valuable feedback and insights from individuals, families, and advocates. Joint awareness campaigns can be organized to promote empathy and understanding toward people with disabilities (Ingyesi, 2023). Such campaigns not only shift attitudes within the congregation but also foster a more inclusive and supportive community.

Investment in disability-friendly infrastructure is an essential step toward realizing true inclusivity within the church. While many congregations proclaim openness and welcome to all believers, persons with physical disabilities often face exclusion due to inaccessible buildings, worship spaces, and facilities. A church that lacks ramps, accessible restrooms, proper seating arrangements, or assistive technology inadvertently alienates members who wish to participate fully in spiritual and community life. Therefore, intentional investment in infrastructure that accommodates all abilities is both a moral and practical necessity, reflecting the church's commitment to equality, dignity, and love for all.

Training sessions and workshops, conducted in partnership with disability organizations, are effective tools for educating church leaders, volunteers, and congregants about disability inclusion. These sessions can teach respectful communication and foster understanding of how to support individuals with disabilities (Mwembi, 2023). Smith (2018) argues that such training is essential for changing perceptions and encouraging inclusive behaviour in faith communities.

In addition to physical adjustments, technological and communication infrastructure should be considered. Churches can invest in assistive technologies such as hearing loops, microphones, and visual projection

systems for those with hearing or visual impairments. Printed materials and digital content—like hymnals, announcements, or sermon notes—should be available in accessible formats, including large print, Braille, or audio versions. For congregants with cognitive or learning disabilities, simplified and clear communication during services can enhance understanding and participation. The use of sign language interpreters or captioning during sermons and events further promotes inclusivity for the deaf community.

Collaborative efforts can also lead to the development of inclusive policies and programs within the church, ensuring that individuals with diverse abilities are considered in the church's activities and leadership roles. Disability organizations provide vital feedback that helps churches tailor their programs to be inclusive, thus fostering broader societal change (Okoli, 2020).

Research question 3

The general impediments to implementing research recommendation on inclusivity of physically challenged in church?

The researcher sought to find out the general impediments to implementing research recommendation on inclusivity of physically challenged in church

In a response one respondent noted that institutional barriers, such as lack of clear inclusion policies prevent the integration of inclusive practices into church structures. Though African-led engagement with persons with disabilities (PWDs) within varying African churches has been an ongoing project since the 1990s, recent developments in the study of PWDs remain notably absent from mainstream African, religious, or disabilities studies. Calling attention to the interrelation between these three important scholarly fields can help scholars and PWDs alike to conceptualize of the treatment of PWDs in Africa and, more specifically, their role in the Christian Church on the continent. Despite the recognition of social inclusion as a human right, persons with disabilities continually encounter barriers that prevent them from participating meaningfully in all areas of community life (Carroll et al., 2018; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Minimal leadership commitment

Minimal leadership commitment is one of the most significant barriers to disability inclusion in the church. In a focused group discussion, policy makers alluded that “When church leaders do not actively champion inclusion, the issue is perceived as low priority, resulting in little to no investment in accessible infrastructure, inclusive programs, or training for staff and volunteers” The response continued to say, Without strong leadership advocacy, disability inclusion is often seen as optional rather than a biblical and moral responsibility.. This lack of commitment further leads to inadequate policy development, poor enforcement of existing inclusion strategies, and minimal allocation of resources. It also discourages the congregation from embracing inclusive attitudes, as members typically follow the example set by their leaders. Moreover, leaders who lack awareness or sensitivity to the experiences of people with disabilities may unintentionally reinforce stigma and exclusion. Therefore, leadership commitment is essential for setting vision, mobilizing support, influencing attitudes, and implementing practical changes. Without it, efforts toward disability inclusion remain fragmented, superficial, or completely absent. When leadership actively engages with individuals with disabilities and works to meet their needs, they contribute to creating a welcoming environment where everyone can fully participate (Tobias, 2016). Supportive leaders prioritize accessibility improvements, ensuring that physical barriers such as steps and narrow doorways are addressed. This is crucial in enabling individuals with disabilities to access church services and events, reflecting the church's commitment to inclusivity (Kellen Musisi, O.I, 2023). Leaders who engage in open dialogue with individuals with disabilities not only gain insights into their challenges but also cultivate a culture of empathy within the church. According to McNair (2018), leadership that listens and responds to the concerns of individuals with disabilities fosters stronger relationships and a deeper sense of community.

Financial constraints

The researcher sought to find out whether financial support in church is an impediment to implementation of research recommendations.

Financial constraints also emerge as a major obstacle, as many churches cite limited resources for accessibility modifications like ramps, assistive technologies, or transportation support. One church leader stated categorically that, this challenge is particularly evident in churches that rely heavily on offerings, donations, or small congregational budgets, which often prioritize essential operational expenses such as utilities, pastoral support, and ministry activities. As a result, accessibility improvements are frequently viewed as secondary or optional rather than urgent. Physical accessibility also extends to creating sensory-friendly environments for individuals with sensory processing challenges. Adjustments such as dimmed lighting and quiet spaces can significantly enhance the worship experience for these individuals (Hellen Otieno, O.I, 2023). This perception leads to a cycle where the physical and structural needs of persons with disabilities remain unaddressed, reinforcing their exclusion. In many cases, church leaders acknowledge the importance of inclusion but argue that without external funding or government support, they are unable to implement costly modifications. For example, constructing ramps, widening doorways, paving pathways, or installing accessible toilets may require significant financial investment that exceeds what most congregations can afford.

One respondent argued that, “moreover, the cost of assistive technologies—such as hearing aids, braille materials, sign language interpretation services, projectors with large print displays, or sound amplification systems—creates an additional financial burden”. These technologies enhance participation and meaningful engagement for persons with disabilities during worship and church programs, yet they are often absent due to limited funding.

Another respondent stated that in rural or low-income communities, churches may not even be aware of where to access affordable assistive devices or how to maintain them. Transportation support presents another major financial challenge. Many persons with physical disabilities depend on accessible transportation to attend church services, and without church-sponsored mobility support or subsidies, regular attendance becomes difficult or impossible.

When transportation services are outsourced, costs rise even higher, leaving churches unable to sustain such programs. Consequently, persons with disabilities either stay at home or only attend special events, leading to further social isolation.

In addition to the direct costs of modifications, one respondent explained “there are hidden financial barriers associated with planning, training, and maintenance. Inclusive design requires professional input from engineers, disability experts, or architects, which adds consultancy expenses that many churches cannot cover. After construction, accessibility features require upkeep; ramps must be repaired, elevators need servicing, and assistive equipment requires replacement over time. Without consistent financial capacity, churches hesitate to invest in features they fear they cannot maintain. This leads to a short-term mindset that ignores long-term benefits of inclusion, such as expanded membership, stronger community engagement, and enhanced moral leadership.

One respondent said, financial constraints are often rooted in broader structural issues within church governance. In many denominations, budget decisions are centralized at higher administrative levels, leaving local churches with little autonomy to allocate funds for accessibility projects. Even when church leaders are willing to prioritize inclusion, they may have to compete with other projects—such as new buildings, musical equipment, or outreach programs—making it difficult to secure approval. Additionally, donors often prefer to support visible or spiritual projects (e.g., evangelism, church planting) rather than accessibility improvements, which they may not immediately recognize as ministry work. This lack of donor prioritization further delays inclusion initiatives.

Policy makers disagreed with some response by stating that, financial constraints are not just about a lack of money; they also reflect a lack of strategic planning and resource mobilization. Some churches have successfully implemented low-cost or phased accessibility solutions by partnering with NGOs, community groups, or government programs. Others have raised funds through targeted campaigns, grants, or corporate sponsorships. This shows that when

inclusion is viewed as a mission priority, churches can find creative ways to overcome financial barriers. However, in many churches, the absence of financial planning for disability inclusion signals deeper attitudinal issues—where accessibility is perceived as an optional luxury rather than a fundamental right.

Lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms
Lack of monitoring and accountability mechanisms also emerges as a major impediment to the implementation of research recommendations for disability inclusion in churches. Even when churches receive or develop recommendations aimed at improving accessibility, participation, and support for persons with disabilities, there is often no structured system to ensure that these recommendations are actually put into practice.

In many cases, disability inclusion policies exist only on paper or in formal reports, but there is no follow-up to track progress, evaluate impact, or correct non-compliance. Without clear timelines, performance indicators, or responsible persons assigned to each recommendation, implementation becomes inconsistent and largely dependent on individual goodwill rather than institutional commitment. This lack of structure creates a gap between intention and action, allowing churches to verbally support disability inclusion while doing little to create real change

Communication gaps
Communication gaps as a general impediment to implementation to inclusivity of research recommendations for physically challenged. Effective communication is vital in translating research recommendations into practical actions. However, communication gaps at various levels of church structures significantly hinder the implementation of inclusivity measures for physically challenged individuals.

One respondent said, one major source of communication breakdown occurs between researchers and church leadership. Many churches receive research findings in academic language or lengthy reports that are not simplified or contextualized for practical use. As a result, church leaders may misunderstand key recommendations or

overlook critical details about accessibility, support systems, or inclusive practices. In some cases, recommendations remain in written form and are never discussed in meetings or planning sessions.

A new movement among Christian churches is to reach out and create relationships with people with disabilities through celebration of the gift of life and to include all persons in individual faith communities (Clapton, 1997). However, in order to be inclusive of persons with disabilities, faith communities must remove not only architectural and communication barriers, but also attitudinal ones. Research has indicated that the reversal of feeling inferior and shame is a critical spiritual issue that must be resolved if people with disabilities are to live well with their disability (Clarke & Cardman, 2002).

One respondent stated that, Internal communication within church leadership structures is another significant barrier. Many churches operate with hierarchical systems where information flows slowly or selectively. Research recommendations shared with top-level leaders may not reach committee members, ministry leaders, or volunteers who are responsible for daily implementation. Some leaders may also assume that others are already handling inclusivity issues, leading to confusion, duplication of tasks, or complete neglect of responsibilities. Poor coordination between departments—such as finance, infrastructure, and pastoral care—means that inclusion initiatives are discussed but not acted upon due to lack of clarity on roles. In addition, there is often no formal communication strategy or policy to ensure that inclusivity goals are consistently communicated across all ministries, leading to fragmented efforts. When communication is informal or verbal only, important details are forgotten or distorted, weakening follow-up and accountability.

Another response in Communication gaps also affect awareness and training. In many churches, leaders and members are not adequately informed about the rights and needs of persons with physical disabilities. Limited awareness creates misconceptions, such as assuming that accessibility is only about ramps or that disability inclusion is optional. Without clear information, churches may not understand how inclusivity aligns with biblical values, legal

frameworks, or research-based best practices. This lack of knowledge results in resistance to change or complacency. Additionally, research recommendations often emphasize the need for ongoing sensitization and training, but without clear communication and organized workshops, volunteers and ushers may not know how to interact respectfully and supportively with physically challenged congregants. As a result, even well-designed policies fail during implementation because frontline church workers are uninformed or unprepared.

Another dimension of communication barriers involves external partnerships. Implementation of research recommendations often requires collaboration with disability experts, government agencies, or NGOs. However, many churches do not actively seek or maintain communication with these stakeholders. The absence of communication means that churches miss out on guidance, funding opportunities, or technical support that could facilitate inclusion. Conversely, when churches do not communicate their needs or challenges, external partners cannot offer relevant support. This leads to isolation and stagnation in implementing inclusive initiatives.

Finally, communication gaps lead to a lack of monitoring and feedback. After attempting to implement recommendations, churches rarely communicate progress or challenges to researchers or disability groups. Without feedback loops, there is no opportunity for improvement or adjustment of strategies. Furthermore, persons with disabilities themselves may feel unheard when their complaints or suggestions are not acknowledged. This discourages participation and trust, reinforcing exclusion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Historically, societal attitudes toward disability have often been marred by misconceptions, stigma, and undervaluation. The church is certainly not immune to this. These attitudes, stemming from a lack of understanding and empathy, continuously fail to recognize the full scope of the image of God in every person. Understanding disability within the framework of the image of God has profound

implications for Christian ethics and community life. It calls for a response that upholds the dignity of individuals with disabilities, recognizing them as equal and integral members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:22-24). This perspective demands more than mere inclusion; it requires active engagement, accommodation, and affirmation of the unique ways people with disabilities embody God's image. Furthermore, it challenges the church to be a place where societal misconceptions about disability are dismantled and where the full, diverse expression of God's image is celebrated. A Christian approach to dignity and disability recognizes the full value of each member of the body of Christ as a necessary and vital part. Within a biblical framework, individuals with disabilities are not merely objects of ministry but are vital participants in the ministry of God's community. This understanding calls for a transformative view that recognizes and celebrates the unique reflection of God's image in every person. It is a call to action for both individuals and communities to actively affirm and uphold the dignity of all, creating a society that mirrors the inclusive and diverse nature of the Kingdom of God. By doing so, we honor not only each individual but also the God in whose image we are all made.

V. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

First, for a church to become truly inclusive of physically challenged persons, inclusion must not be treated as a side activity or charity initiative—it must be embedded into the system of how the church operates. One of the most strategic ways to achieve this is by integrating inclusion into leadership selection, volunteer recruitment, and orientation. Leadership and volunteer teams shape the culture, policies, relationships, and practical actions within the church. If they do not understand inclusion, prioritize accessibility, or value persons with disabilities as equal members of the Body of Christ, then implementation of any inclusion recommendations will fail.

Second, Leaders shape attitudes and policies. Church leaders should set the tone for the entire congregation. If leaders openly value persons with disabilities, include them in decision-making, and treat accessibility as a moral and spiritual mandate,

the congregation will follow. Conversely, if leaders are indifferent or uninformed, stigma, exclusion, and inaction will persist. Many churches begin inclusion efforts when a compassionate leader is in office, but these efforts die out when leadership changes. Making inclusion part of the official leadership criteria ensures continuity, stability, and long-term transformation beyond individual personalities.

Third, Volunteers should not only be non-disabled persons. Church should actively encourage and empower people with disabilities to volunteer and lead. This promotes representation, challenges stereotypes, and enriches ministry with lived experience. A volunteer with perfect technical skills but a discriminatory attitude can cause harm. Recruit volunteers who are teachable, compassionate, and willing to learn about diversity and inclusion.

Fourth, nothing builds empathy faster than listening to the experiences of those affected. Let leaders and volunteers hear directly from people with disabilities about barriers they face in church and how inclusion feels. The strongest sign of genuine inclusion is representation. Encourage and support physically challenged individuals to take on leadership and committee roles—not just advisory roles, but decision-making positions.

Lastly, The church should adopt a formal Accessibility & Inclusion Policy, conduct an audited accessibility plan within three months, and implement prioritized low-cost fixes within six months while securing a dedicated budget and building partnerships to support medium and long-term universal design upgrades. Persons with disabilities must be included at every decision point and progress must be measured and reported publicly.

Church inclusion will not happen by accident—it must be intentionally led, modeled, and sustained. By making inclusion a criterion in leadership and volunteer selection, the church ensures that those who shape policy and practice are committed to accessibility and equity. By providing a short but powerful induction on disability inclusion, the church equips every leader and volunteer with the

knowledge, attitude, and skills required to welcome and support persons with physical challenges.

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