

DISABILITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: THE STRUGGLE FOR AN INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

Countries such as Zimbabwe and South Africa have made significant strides in promoting human rights and inclusive governance in Southern Africa. However, despite these efforts, people with disabilities continue to face substantial barriers in the workplace, limiting their participation and contribution to society. This study employs a desktop and critical discourse analysis approach to examine the intersection of disability, human rights and governance in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The study critically examines the policy and legislative frameworks governing disability rights in both countries, analysing the extent to which they promote inclusive workplaces. It also discusses the discourses surrounding disability and employment, highlighting the ways in which these discourses shape the experiences of people with disabilities in the workplace. The study finds that despite the existence of progressive policies and laws, persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe and South Africa continue to face significant barriers to employment and workplace inclusion. The study attributes this to inadequate implementation and enforcement of disability rights policies, as well as dominant discourses that perpetuate ableism and stigma. The study recommends that policymakers and practitioners prioritise the implementation and enforcement of disability rights policies and work to challenge and transform dominant discourses that perpetuate ableism and stigma. This includes providing training and support for employers and employees, as well as promoting inclusive workplace practices that value diversity and equal opportunities for all.

Keywords

Disability, human rights, governance, inclusive workplace, Southern Africa, disability rights, employment inclusion.

1. Introduction

Southern Africa is a region characterised by diverse cultures, languages and histories. Zimbabwe and South Africa are two countries in the area that have made significant strides in promoting human rights and inclusive governance. However, despite these efforts, persons with disabilities continue to face substantial barriers in the workplace, limiting their participation and contribution to society (Ncube *et al.*, 2023). Zimbabwe has a population of approximately 14 million people, with an estimated 1.4 million persons with disabilities (ZIMSTAT, 2017). The country has ratified several international and regional instruments on disability rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). However, despite these commitments, persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe continue to face significant challenges in the

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workplace (Mashanyare *et al.*, 2025). For example, a study by the Zimbabwe National Association of the Disabled (ZIMNAD) found that persons with disabilities face significant barriers to employment, including lack of accessibility, stigma and discrimination (ZIMNAD, 2019). Private companies such as Econet Wireless and Old Mutual have made efforts to promote disability inclusion in the workplace, but more needs to be done to address the systemic barriers faced by persons with disabilities (Econet Wireless, 2020; Old Mutual, 2020).

South Africa has a population of approximately 58 million people, with an estimated 1.5 million persons with disabilities (Stats SA, 2019). The country has a strong legislative framework for promoting disability rights, including the Employment Equity Act and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, despite these efforts, persons with disabilities in South Africa continue to face significant challenges in the workplace (Watermeyer, 2013). For example, a study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) found that persons with disabilities in South Africa face significant barriers to employment, including lack of accessibility, stigma and discrimination (Maja *et al.*, 2011). Public companies such as the South African Airways and the South African Police Service have made efforts to promote disability inclusion in the workplace, but more needs to be done to address the systemic barriers faced by persons with disabilities (South African Airways, 2020; South African Police Service, 2020).

Both Zimbabwe and South Africa have ratified several international and regional instruments on disability rights, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Secondly, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and thirdly, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development (2008). At the national level, both countries have implemented policies and laws to promote disability rights, including Zimbabwe's Disability Act and the National Disability Policy. In South Africa, there is the Employment Equity Act and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Despite the abovementioned progressive policies and laws, persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe and South Africa face significant barriers to employment and workplace inclusion. There is a need for research that critically examines the policy and legislative frameworks governing disability rights in Southern Africa and the discourses that shape the experiences of people with disabilities in the workplace. This study aims to address the following research questions:

- What are the policy and legislative frameworks governing disability rights in Zimbabwe and South Africa and how do they promote inclusive workplaces?
- How do dominant discourses surrounding disability and employment shape the experiences of people with disabilities in the workplace?
- What are the implications of these findings for promoting inclusive workplaces in Zimbabwe and South Africa?

This study contributes to the growing body of research on disability rights in Southern Africa and provides insights into how policy and discourse can be used to promote inclusive workplaces. This study is organised into five sections. Section one provides the contextual background and introduction to the study. Section two reviews the literature on disability rights and inclusive workplaces in Southern Africa. Section three outlines the research methodology and design. Section four presents the findings of the study and section five discusses the implications and recommendations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Disability Rights and Inclusive Workplaces in Southern Africa

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has implemented various policies and frameworks to promote gender equality and disability rights. The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development is a key framework that aims to promote gender equality and empower women and girls in the region. Although it does not exclusively focus on disability rights, it provides a foundation for promoting inclusivity and equality (South Africa, 2013; Degener & De Castro, 2022). The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development entered into force on February 22, 2013, obliging member states, including South Africa, to comply with its international commitments. This protocol highlights the importance of addressing the intersectionality of gender and disability in promoting inclusive workplaces (SADC, 2008; Bhattarai *et al.*, 2020).

Zimbabwe has implemented several national laws and policies to promote disability rights, including the Disability Act (Dziva *et al.*, 2018). According to Chengeta and Msipa (2012) and Dziva *et al.* (2018), this act provides a framework for promoting the rights of people with disabilities, including access to education, employment and healthcare. Secondly, the National Disability Policy aims to promote the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities (Rimmerman, 2013). South Africa has also implemented several national laws and policies to promote disability rights, including the Employment Equity Act (Sonday, 2021; Thabethe, 2022). This act aims to promote employment equity and eliminate unfair discrimination in the workplace, including on the grounds of disability (Thabethe, 2022). Secondly, Sonday (2021) asserts that the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlines the government's commitment to promoting the rights of people with disabilities, including in the areas of education, employment and healthcare. Despite the existence of regional and national policies and frameworks, people with disabilities in Southern Africa continue to face significant challenges in the workplace (Coetzee *et al.*, 2017; Ndzwayiba & Ned, 2017). Coetzee *et al.* (2017) further postulate the following as key challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Southern Africa: firstly, people with disabilities often face stigma and discrimination in the workplace, which can limit their opportunities for career advancement and professional development. Secondly, many workplaces in Southern Africa are not accessible to people with disabilities, which can create barriers to employment and participation. Thirdly, people with disabilities may have limited access to education and training opportunities, which can limit their career prospects.

To promote disability inclusion in the workplace, Ndzwayiba and Ned (2017) assert that organisations can take several steps, including, firstly, implementing inclusive recruitment and hiring practices, such as providing reasonable accommodation and using accessible recruitment materials. Secondly, organisations can provide disability awareness training to employees to promote understanding and inclusion of people with disabilities. Thirdly, organisations can create accessible workplaces by providing physical accessibility features, such as ramps and accessible restrooms and providing assistive technologies, such as screen readers and wheelchairs. By promoting disability in the workplace, organisations can benefit from the skills and talents of people with disabilities, while also contributing to a more diverse and inclusive work environment.

2.2. Disability, Employment and Workplace Inclusion in Zimbabwe

Persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe face significant challenges in the workplace, including stigma, discrimination and lack of accessibility. According to a study by the Zimbabwe National Association of the Disabled (ZIMNAD), persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe face barriers to employment, including lack of education and training opportunities, lack of accessibility and negative attitudes towards disability (ZIMNAD, 2019). The experiences of persons with disabilities in the Zimbabwean workplace are shaped by a range of factors, including societal attitudes towards disability, lack of accessibility and limited opportunities for education and training. Many persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe are excluded from the labour market and those who are employed often face significant challenges in the workplace (Mashanyare *et al.*, 2025).

Persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe face a range of challenges and barriers to employment and workplace inclusion, including, firstly, persons with disabilities often face stigma and discrimination in the workplace, which can limit their opportunities for career advancement and professional development (Ncube *et al.*, 2023). Secondly, many workplaces in Zimbabwe are not accessible to persons with disabilities, which can create barriers to employment and participation (ZIMSTAT, 2017). Thirdly, people with disabilities may have limited access to education and training opportunities, which can limit their career prospects (Mutanga, 2024). These challenges and barriers are perpetuated by a range of factors, including negative societal attitudes towards disability, lack of policy implementation and limited resources for promoting disability inclusion (Musengi, 2023).

Despite the challenges and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe, several initiatives and strategies can be used to promote disability inclusion in the workplace. These include, firstly, affirmative action policies can be used to promote the employment and advancement of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Government of Zimbabwe). Secondly, reasonable accommodation can be used to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities and can perform their job duties effectively (International Labour Organisation, 2018). Thirdly, disability awareness training can be used to promote understanding and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Zimbabwe Employers' Confederation (ZEC)). Lastly, creating accessible workplaces can help to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities and ensure that they can participate fully in the workplace (SADC, 2018). By implementing these initiatives and strategies, employers in Zimbabwe can promote disability inclusion and create a more diverse and inclusive work environment.

2.3. Disability, Employment and Workplace Inclusion in South Africa: A Critical Analysis

Persons with disabilities in South Africa face significant challenges in the workplace, including stigma, discrimination and lack of accessibility. According to a study by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), persons with disabilities in South Africa face barriers to employment, including lack of education and training opportunities, lack of accessibility and negative attitudes towards disability (Maja *et al.*, 2011). The experiences of persons with disabilities in the South African workplace are shaped by a range of factors, including societal attitudes towards disability, lack of accessibility and limited opportunities for education and training. Many persons with

disabilities in South Africa are excluded from the labour market and those who are employed often face significant challenges in the workplace (Watermeyer, 2013).

Persons with disabilities in South Africa face a range of challenges and barriers to employment and workplace inclusion, including, firstly, persons with disabilities often face stigma and discrimination in the workplace, which can limit their opportunities for career advancement and professional development (Howell *et al.*, 2019). Secondly, many workplaces in South Africa are not accessible to persons with disabilities, which can create barriers to employment and participation (Department of Labour, 2019). Lastly, persons with disabilities may have limited access to education and training opportunities, which can limit their career prospects (Republic of South Africa, 2015). These challenges and barriers are perpetuated by a range of factors, including negative societal attitudes towards disability, lack of policy implementation and limited resources for promoting disability inclusion (Schneider *et al.*, 2016).

Despite the challenges and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in South Africa, several initiatives and strategies can be used to promote disability inclusion in the workplace. These include, firstly, affirmative action policies that can be used to promote the employment and advancement of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998). Secondly, reasonable accommodation can be used to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to employment opportunities and can perform their job duties effectively (National Development of Health, 2015). Thirdly, disability awareness training can be used to promote understanding and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Disability Framework for Local Government 2016-2026, 2016). Lastly, creating accessible workplaces can help to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities and ensure that they can participate fully in the workplace (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). The South African government has implemented several policies and initiatives to promote disability inclusion in the workplace, including the Employment Equity Act and the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These policies aim to promote the employment and advancement of persons with disabilities and to create a more inclusive and accessible workplace (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019).

2.4. Discourses of Disability and Employment Policy and Practice in Zimbabwe and South Africa

The construction and representation of disability in policy and practice play a significant role in shaping the experiences of persons with disabilities in the workplace. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, disability is often constructed and represented in ways that perpetuate stigma, discrimination and exclusion (Mashanyare *et al.*, 2025). According to a study by Mashanyare *et al.* (2025) and Watermeyer (2013), disability is often constructed as a medical problem, rather than a social and economic issue. This medical model of disability emphasises the individual's impairment and limitations, rather than the social and environmental barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society. In policy and practice, disability is often represented in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes and stigma. For example, disability is often associated with pity, charity and welfare, rather than with rights, empowerment and inclusion (Howell *et al.*, 2019).

The dominant discourses of disability in policy and practice have a significant impact on the experiences of persons with disabilities in the workplace. These discourses can perpetuate stigma, discrimination and exclusion and limit opportunities for persons

with disabilities to participate fully in the workplace (Department of Labour, 2019). According to a study by Watermeyer (2013) and the Republic of South Africa (2015), dominant discourses of disability can lead to internalised ableism, where persons with disabilities internalise negative attitudes and stereotypes about themselves and their abilities. In the workplace, dominant discourses of disability can result in persons with disabilities being excluded from opportunities for career advancement and professional development. They may also experience stigma, discrimination and marginalisation, which can limit their participation and contribution to the workplace (Schneider *et al.*, 2016).

To promote disability inclusion and workplace inclusion, it is essential to challenge and transform dominant discourses of disability in policy and practice. This can be achieved through several strategies, including, firstly, promoting a social model of disability that emphasises the social and environmental barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society (Oliver *et al.*, 2012). Secondly, a rights-based approach to disability policy and practice should be adopted that emphasises the rights and empowerment of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Thirdly, providing disability awareness training to promote understanding and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Disability Framework for Local Government 2016-2026, 2016). Lastly, ensuring the participation and involvement of persons with disabilities in policy and decision-making processes that affect their lives (South African Human Rights Commission, 2019). By challenging and transforming dominant discourses of disability, we can promote a more inclusive and accessible workplace that values the contributions and participation of people with disabilities.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

2.5.1. Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory is a framework that critiques the dominant medical model of disability and instead emphasises the social and environmental barriers that prevent persons with disabilities from fully participating in society (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). This theory recognises that disability is a complex and multifaceted concept that is shaped by a range of social, cultural and economic factors. According to critical disability theory, disability is not solely a medical or individual problem, but rather a societal issue that requires a critical examination of the ways in which society is organised and structured (Oliver *et al.*, 2012). This theory emphasises the importance of promoting disability rights and inclusion and challenging dominant discourses and power structures that perpetuate disability stigma and exclusion.

According to Goodley (2024), critical disability theory is grounded in several key principles. First, this principle emphasises the distinction between impairment and disability and recognises that disability is a product of social and environmental barriers rather than individual limitations. Secondly, this principle emphasises the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and recognising their autonomy and self-determination. Lastly, this principle emphasises the need to examine the power dynamics and relationships that shape society critically and challenge dominant discourses and structures that perpetuate disability exclusion.

In the context of disability and employment, critical disability theory can be used to analyse the ways in which societal barriers and power dynamics limit the opportunities and experiences of persons with disabilities in the workplace (Howell *et al.*, 2019). This

theory can also be used to identify strategies for promoting disability inclusion and workplace inclusion, such as reasonable accommodation and disability awareness training. By using critical disability theory as a framework, researchers and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding disability and employment and develop more effective strategies for promoting disability inclusion and workplace inclusion (Watermeyer, 2013).

2.5.2. Foucauldian Theory

Michel Foucault's Foucauldian theory provides a critical framework for analysing power dynamics and relationships in society (Foucault, 1980). This theory is particularly relevant to the study of disability and employment, as it highlights the ways in which power is exercised and maintained through dominant discourses and practices that shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities. According to Foucault (1977; 1980), power is not held by a single entity or individual but rather is exercised through complex networks and relationships that shape social norms and practices. In the context of disability and employment, Foucauldian theory can be used to analyse the ways in which dominant discourses and practices shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

According to Foucault (1982), Foucauldian theory emphasises the importance of examining the ways in which power is exercised and maintained through, firstly, the ways in which language and knowledge are used to shape social norms and practices. Secondly, the complex networks and relationships that shape social interactions and experiences. Lastly, the ways in which individuals are shaped and constructed through social norms and practices. In the context of disability and employment, Foucauldian theory can be used to analyse the ways in which dominant discourses and practices shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. For example, the medical model of disability can be seen as a dominant discourse that shapes the experiences of individuals with disabilities and perpetuates their exclusion from the workplace (Tremain, 2006).

Foucauldian theory can also be used to identify strategies for challenging and transforming dominant discourses and practices that shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities. For example, the development of counter-discourses and alternative forms of knowledge can be used to challenge dominant discourses and promote more inclusive practices (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). By using Foucauldian theory as a framework, researchers and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex power dynamics and relationships that shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. This can inform the development of more effective strategies for promoting disability inclusion and workplace inclusion.

2.6. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between language, power and social context (Fairclough, 1992). This framework is particularly relevant to the study of disability and employment, as it highlights the ways in which language and discourse shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. According to CDA, language is not a neutral or objective tool, but rather a powerful instrument that shapes social norms and practices (Foucault, 1980). In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to

analyse the ways in which dominant discourses and language practices shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace.

According to van Dijk (1993), CDA emphasises the importance of examining the ways in which discourse shapes social reality, including, firstly, the ways in which language and discourse are used to exercise and maintain power over individuals and groups. Secondly, the ways in which language and discourse shape social norms and practices that perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation. Lastly, the ways in which language and discourse reflect and perpetuate dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to analyse the ways in which dominant discourses and language practices shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. For example, the use of stigmatising language and stereotypes can perpetuate negative attitudes and exclusionary practices towards individuals with disabilities (Galvin, 2003).

CDA can also be used to identify strategies for challenging and transforming dominant discourses and language practices that shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities. For example, the development of alternative discourses and language practices can be used to promote more inclusive and empowering representations of individuals with disabilities (Corker, 2006). By using CDA as a framework, researchers and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which language and discourse shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. This can inform the development of more effective strategies for promoting disability inclusion and workplace inclusion.

The intersectionality of Critical Disability Theory, Foucauldian Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex issues surrounding disability and employment in Southern Africa. By combining these theories, the study can examine the ways in which dominant discourses and power structures shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Critical Disability Theory provides a framework for understanding the social and environmental barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in society. Foucauldian Theory offers a critical perspective on power dynamics and relationships that shape social norms and practices. Critical Discourse Analysis provides a tool for analysing the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality.

The intersectionality of these theories allows for a nuanced understanding of the ways in which disability is constructed and represented in policy and practice. It also highlights the importance of challenging dominant discourses and power structures that perpetuate disability exclusion. By using this intersectional approach, the study can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the struggles faced by individuals with disabilities in the workplace and identify strategies for promoting disability inclusion and workplace inclusion. This framework can inform the development of policies and practices that promote the rights and empowerment of individuals with disabilities in Southern Africa. Ultimately, the intersectionality of Critical Disability Theory, Foucauldian Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis provides a robust framework for analysing the complex issues surrounding disability and employment in Southern Africa and promoting a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

3. Research Methodology and Design

This study employs a qualitative desktop research methodology, utilising CDA to examine the struggle for an inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities in

Southern Africa. This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of existing literature and documents, providing valuable insights into the complex issues surrounding disability and employment in the region. Desktop research involves the analysis of existing data and literature, rather than the collection of new data through primary research methods (Hart, 2018). This approach is beneficial for studies that aim to synthesise existing knowledge and identify gaps in current research. In this study, desktop research allows for a comprehensive review of existing literature on disability and employment in Southern Africa, including academic articles, reports and policy documents.

CDA is a qualitative research method that examines the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality (Fairclough, 1992). This approach is beneficial for analysing the ways in which dominant discourses and power structures shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. In this study, CDA is used to analyse texts and identify themes and patterns that reveal the underlying power dynamics and social norms that shape disability inclusion in Southern Africa. The data sources used in this study include academic articles, reports and policy documents related to disability and employment in Southern Africa. These sources provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of disability in the region and highlight the challenges and opportunities for promoting inclusive workplaces. The use of multiple data sources allows for triangulation of findings, increasing the credibility and validity of the study (Patton, 2014).

While desktop research offers many advantages, it also has several limitations. One of the main limitations is the reliance on existing data and literature, which may be biased or incomplete (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008). To mitigate this limitation, this study uses a systematic and transparent approach to identifying and analysing relevant literature, including explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria. Another limitation of desktop research is the potential for researcher bias in the interpretation of existing data (Mays & Pope, 2000). To address this limitation, this study uses a reflexive approach to data analysis, acknowledging the researcher's own biases and assumptions and taking steps to minimise their impact on the findings.

4. Discussion of Key Findings from Literature

This article identifies four central recurring themes that emerge from the literature and analysis. These themes highlight the complex issues surrounding disability and employment in Southern Africa and provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for promoting inclusive workplaces.

Theme 1: Dominant Discourses and Power Dynamics

The central recurring theme of dominant discourses and power dynamics is a significant finding in the literature on disability, human rights and governance in Southern Africa. This theme highlights the ways in which dominant discourses and power dynamics shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace, perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigma and limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, dominant discourses and power dynamics are seen as key factors in the social construction of disability (Oliver *et al.*, 2012). According to this theory, disability is not solely a medical or individual problem, but rather a societal issue that requires a critical examination of the ways in which society is organised and structured. Dominant discourses and power

dynamics play a significant role in shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities, perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigma and limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement.

Foucauldian (1980) Theory also provides insight into the ways in which dominant discourses and power dynamics shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities. According to Foucault, power is exercised through complex networks and relationships that shape social norms and practices. In the context of disability and employment, dominant discourses and power dynamics can perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigma, limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement. CDA also highlights the importance of examining dominant discourses and power dynamics in shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities (Fairclough, 1992). CDA emphasises the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality, perpetuating dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to examine the ways in which dominant discourses and power dynamics shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities, perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigma.

In the context of Zimbabwe and South Africa, dominant discourses and power dynamics have significant implications for the struggle for an inclusive workplace (Watermeyer, 2013). The legacy of apartheid and colonialism has contributed to the marginalisation and exclusion of individuals with disabilities, perpetuating negative stereotypes and stigma. Dominant discourses and power dynamics continue to shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities in the workplace, limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement. To promote disability inclusion and challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics, it is essential to adopt a critical approach that emphasises the importance of empowerment and inclusion (Goodley, 2024). This involves promoting disability awareness and education, challenging negative stereotypes and stigma and supporting the participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Theme 2: Social and Environmental Barriers

The central recurring theme of social and environmental barriers is a significant finding in the literature on disability, human rights and governance in Southern Africa. This theme highlights the ways in which social and environmental barriers prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in the workplace, perpetuating exclusion and marginalisation. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, social and environmental barriers are seen as key factors in the social construction of disability (Oliver *et al.*, 2012). According to this theory, disability is not solely a medical or individual problem, but rather a societal issue that requires a critical examination of the ways in which society is organised and structured. Social and environmental barriers, such as inaccessible workplaces and a lack of accommodation, play a significant role in shaping the experiences of individuals with disabilities, perpetuating exclusion and marginalisation.

Foucauldian Theory also provides insight into how social and environmental barriers shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities (Foucault, 1980). According to Foucault, power is exercised through complex networks and relationships that shape social norms and practices. In the context of disability and employment, social and environmental barriers can perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation, limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement. CDA also highlights the importance of examining the ways in which social and environmental barriers are

constructed and perpetuated through language and discourse (Fairclough, 1992). CDA emphasises the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality, perpetuating dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to examine the ways in which social and environmental barriers are constructed and perpetuated, limiting opportunities for employment and career advancement.

In the context of Zimbabwe and South Africa, social and environmental barriers have significant implications for the struggle for an inclusive workplace (Howell *et al.*, 2019). The legacy of apartheid and colonialism has contributed to the marginalisation and exclusion of individuals with disabilities, perpetuating social and environmental barriers. Inaccessible workplaces, lack of accommodations and negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities are just a few examples of the social and environmental barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in the workplace. To promote disability inclusion and challenge social and environmental barriers, it is essential to adopt a critical approach that emphasises the importance of accessibility and accommodation (Chataika, 2018). This involves promoting accessible workplaces, providing reasonable accommodation and supporting the participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Theme 3: Human Rights and Governance

The central recurring theme of human rights and governance is a significant finding in the literature on disability, human rights and governance in Southern Africa. This theme highlights the importance of human rights frameworks and governance structures in promoting disability inclusion and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities in the workplace. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, human rights and governance are seen as critical components of promoting disability inclusion and challenging dominant discourses and power dynamics (Degener, 2016). According to this theory, human rights frameworks and governance structures can play a significant role in promoting the rights of individuals with disabilities, challenging dominant discourses and power dynamics and promoting disability inclusion.

Foucauldian Theory also provides insight into how human rights and governance can shape the experiences of individuals with disabilities (Foucault, 1980). According to Foucault, power is exercised through complex networks and relationships that shape social norms and practices. In the context of disability and employment, human rights frameworks and governance structures can perpetuate dominant discourses and power dynamics or challenge them and promote disability inclusion. CDA also highlights the importance of examining the ways in which human rights and governance are constructed and perpetuated through language and discourse (Fairclough, 1992). CDA emphasises the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality, perpetuating dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to examine the ways in which human rights frameworks and governance structures are constructed and perpetuated, promoting or challenging disability inclusion.

In the context of Zimbabwe and South Africa, human rights and governance have significant implications for the struggle for an inclusive workplace (Howell *et al.*, 2019). The UNCRPD provides a framework for promoting disability inclusion and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. However, the implementation of the UNCRPD requires effective governance structures and human rights frameworks that promote disability inclusion and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. To promote

disability inclusion and challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics, it is essential to adopt a critical approach that emphasises the importance of human rights and governance (Watermeyer, 2013). This involves promoting human rights frameworks and governance structures that prioritise disability inclusion, challenging dominant discourses and power dynamics and supporting the participation and inclusion of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Theme 4: Empowerment and Inclusion

The central recurring theme of empowerment and inclusion is a significant finding in the literature on disability, human rights and governance in Southern Africa. This theme highlights the importance of empowering individuals with disabilities and promoting their inclusion in decision-making processes, particularly in the workplace. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, empowerment and inclusion are seen as critical components of promoting disability rights and challenging dominant discourses and power dynamics (Oliver *et al.*, 2012). According to this theory, individuals with disabilities must be empowered to take control of their own lives and make decisions that affect them. Empowerment and inclusion can be achieved through the promotion of disability-led organisations and initiatives, as well as the involvement of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes.

Foucauldian Theory also provides insight into how empowerment and inclusion can challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics (Foucault, 1980). According to Foucault, power is exercised through complex networks and relationships that shape social norms and practices. Empowerment and inclusion can be seen as a way of challenging these power dynamics, promoting counter-discourses and alternative forms of knowledge that prioritise the experiences and perspectives of individuals with disabilities. CDA also highlights the importance of examining the ways in which empowerment and inclusion are constructed and perpetuated through language and discourse (Fairclough, 1992). CDA emphasises the ways in which language and discourse shape social reality, perpetuating dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of disability and employment, CDA can be used to examine the ways in which empowerment and inclusion are constructed and perpetuated, promoting or challenging disability inclusion.

In the context of Zimbabwe and South Africa, empowerment and inclusion have significant implications for the struggle for an inclusive workplace (Chataika, 2018). The promotion of empowerment and inclusion can involve the development of disability-led initiatives and organisations, as well as the involvement of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes. This can help to challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics, promoting disability inclusion and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. To promote empowerment and inclusion, it is essential to adopt a critical approach that emphasises the importance of disability-led initiatives and participatory decision-making processes (Watermeyer, 2013). This involves promoting the involvement of individuals with disabilities in decision-making processes, supporting disability-led organisations and initiatives and challenging dominant discourses and power dynamics that perpetuate exclusion and marginalisation.

5. Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

This article has explored the complex issues surrounding disability and employment in Southern Africa. Through a critical analysis of the literature, four major recurring themes emerged: dominant discourses and power dynamics, social and environmental barriers, human rights and governance and empowerment and inclusion. The theme of dominant discourses and power dynamics highlights the ways in which negative stereotypes and stigma towards individuals with disabilities limit their opportunities for employment and career advancement. The theme of social and environmental barriers emphasises the importance of addressing physical and attitudinal barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in the workplace. The theme of human rights and governance highlights the critical role that human rights frameworks and governance structures play in promoting disability inclusion and protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. Finally, the theme of empowerment and inclusion emphasises the importance of promoting empowerment and inclusion through the implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

The findings from the literature have significant implications for policy and practice in Southern Africa. Policymakers and practitioners must recognise the importance of addressing dominant discourses and power dynamics, as well as social and environmental barriers and promoting human rights and governance. They must also prioritise empowerment and inclusion, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The implications of the findings from the literature are far-reaching. Policymakers and practitioners in Zimbabwe and South Africa must develop and implement policies and practices that promote disability inclusion and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. This includes providing accessible workplaces, reasonable accommodation and disability awareness training. It also involves promoting empowerment and inclusion, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Based on the findings from the literature, several recommendations can be made for policymakers and practitioners in Zimbabwe and South Africa. These include, firstly, developing and implementing policies and practices that promote disability inclusion and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities - secondly, providing accessible workplaces, reasonable accommodation and disability awareness training and thirdly, promoting empowerment and inclusion, ensuring that individuals with disabilities are actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their lives - fourthly, addressing dominant discourses and power dynamics that perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigma towards individuals with disabilities - lastly, effective governance structures should be implemented that monitor and enforce disability rights.

Future research should focus on exploring the experiences of individuals with disabilities in different contexts, including rural and urban areas. It should also examine the impact of different policies and practices on disability inclusion and employment outcomes. Policymakers and practitioners should prioritise the development of inclusive policies and practices that promote disability inclusion and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. In conclusion, the struggle for an inclusive workplace for individuals with disabilities in Southern Africa is complex and multifaceted. Policymakers and practitioners must recognise the importance of addressing dominant discourses and power dynamics, as well as social and environmental barriers and promoting human rights and governance. By prioritising empowerment and inclusion and

developing and implementing inclusive policies and practices, we can promote disability inclusion and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in Southern Africa.

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