

# “Schools for children with disabilities should be the last to shut”: Experiences of parents of children with disabilities in Malawi

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# Research objectives

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**Main Objective:** To examine the impact of school closures due to Covid-19 on the education of children with disabilities of primary school going age.

## Specific Research Questions

What were the educational experiences of parents of children with disabilities during school closure?

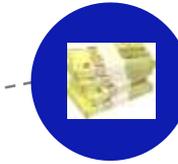
What were the main barriers and concerns raised by parents/caregivers?

How could children with disabilities be better supported during school closures?

# Overview of parents: 99 telephone calls

## Livelihood:

- Agriculture (41%)
- Small business owners (22%).
- service industry workers (24%).
- 13% unspecified



## Income per Month

- <K20,000 = 29%
- K21,000 – K40,000 = 22%
- K41,000 – K100,000 = 32%
- >K101,000 = 17%

## Overview of parent/care giver participants

## Education:

- 44% parents/caregivers completed primary school,
- 38% secondary school
- 12% had completed higher education.
- 6% not educated

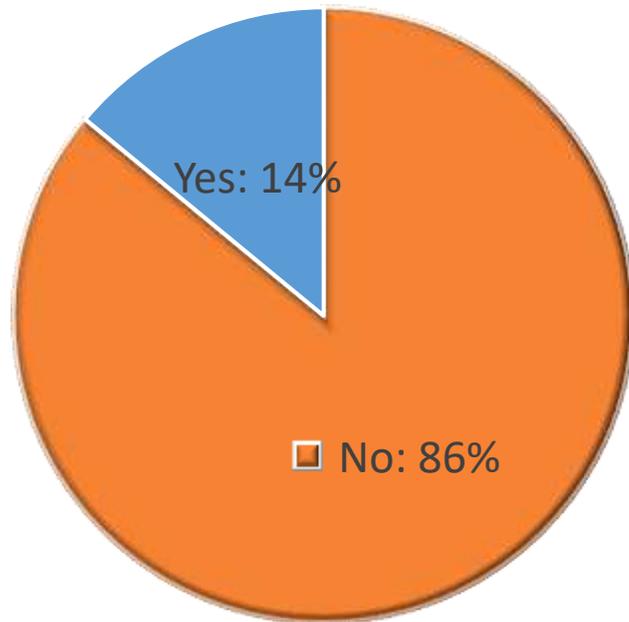


## Participants

- 44% mothers,
- 29% fathers,
- 27% other family members (grandparents, siblings, uncles, guardian).

# Teachers contact with parents/learners during school closure

## Parents' responses

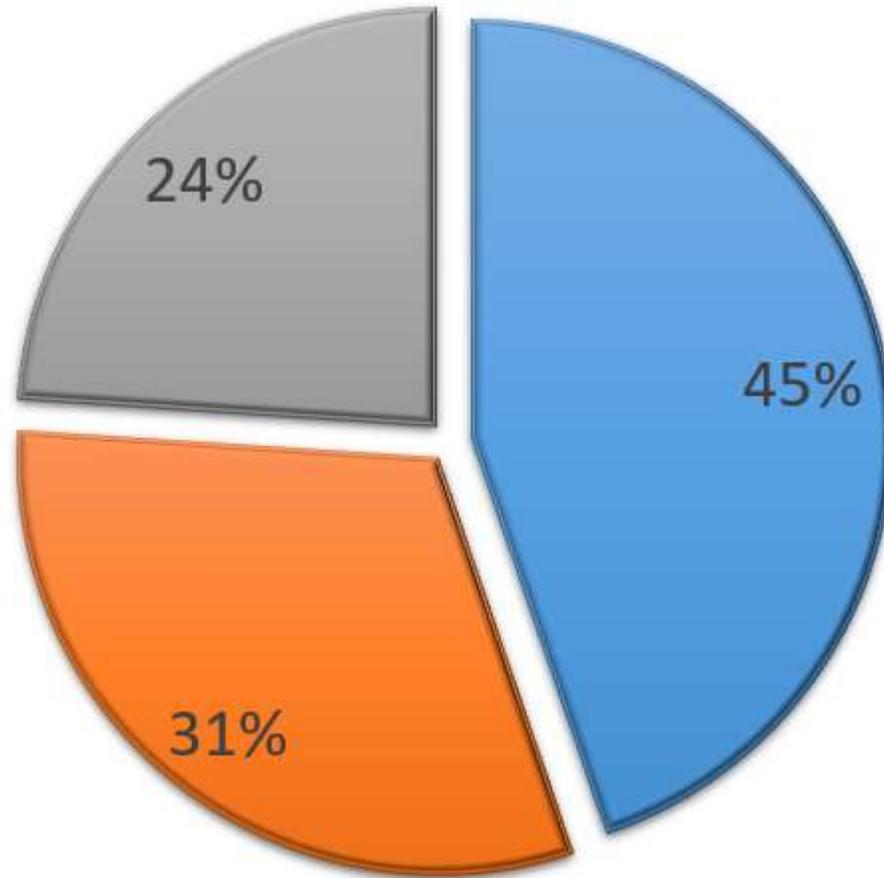


## Nature of contact

- Walk over or via telephone calls/ SMS
- Very sporadic and infrequent contact
- Contacts were based on personal initiative
- Primary aim of contact was to offer social emotional support

# Amount of Time Spent Studying in a Typical Day

99% of Parents were dissatisfied with the education experience of their children with disabilities



## Who supported them

1. Parents
2. Older siblings
3. Extended family members
4. Friends



Less than an hour

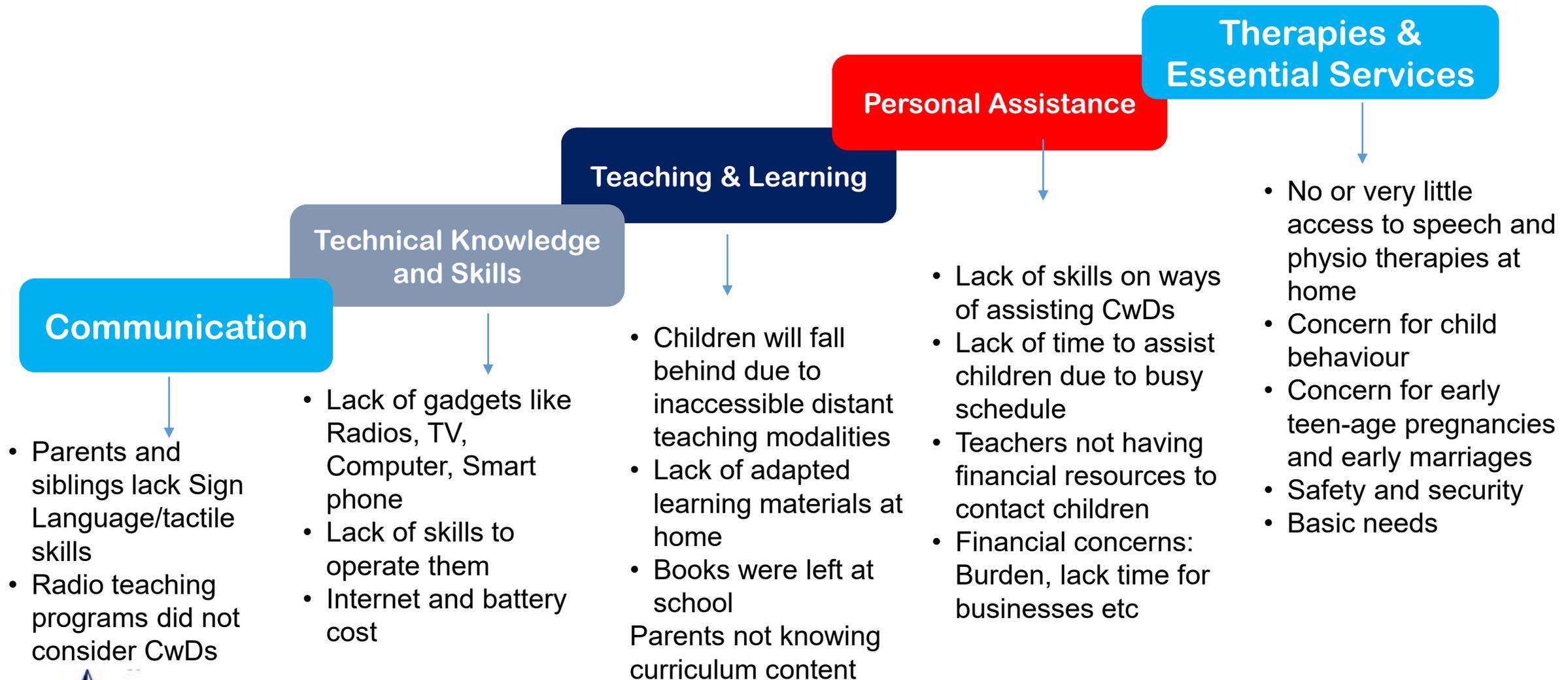


Not at all



More than an hour

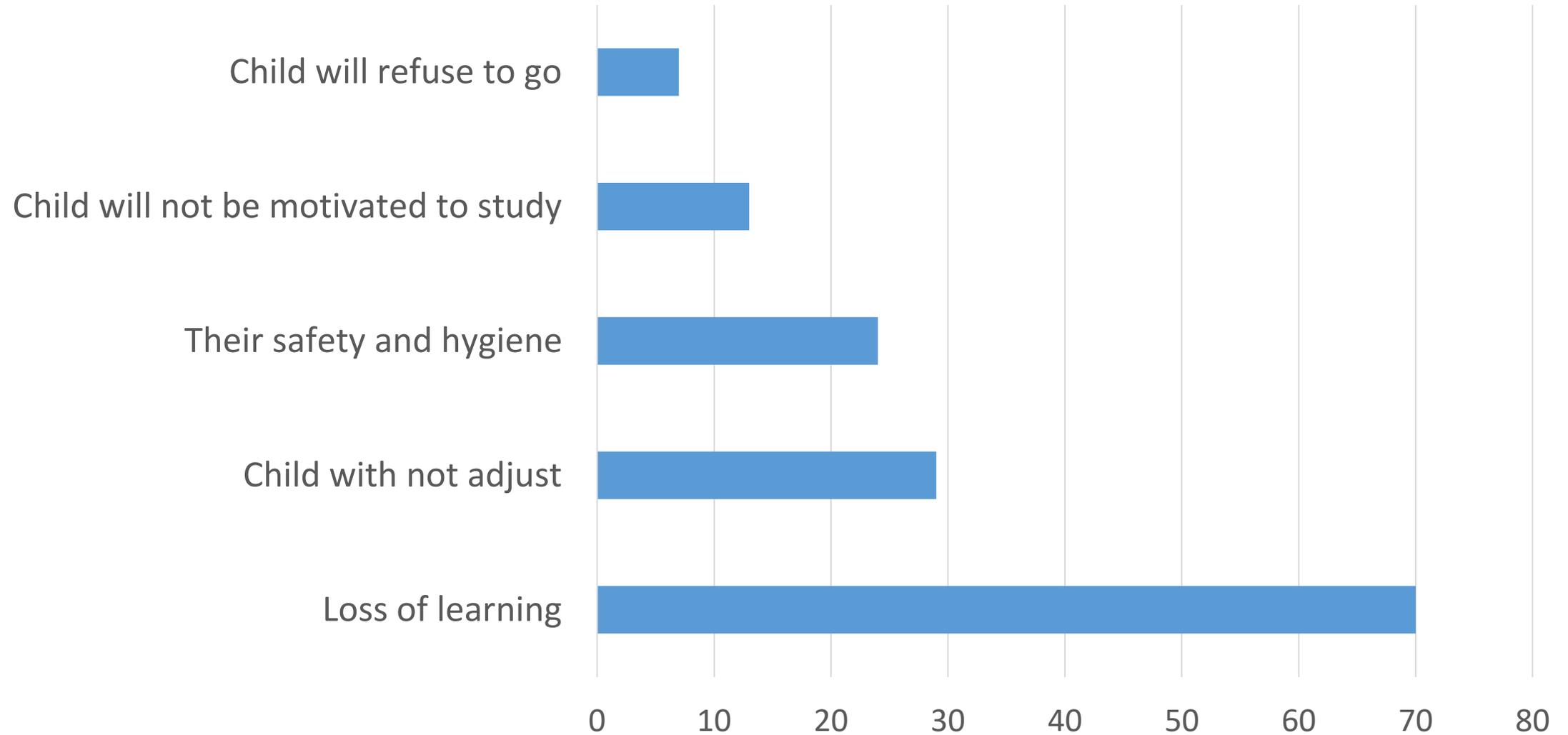
# Parents concerns and challenges for children with disabilities



*Children with disabilities faced significantly more challenges than children without disabilities during closures.*

# Main concerns when schools reopen

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# Parental voices

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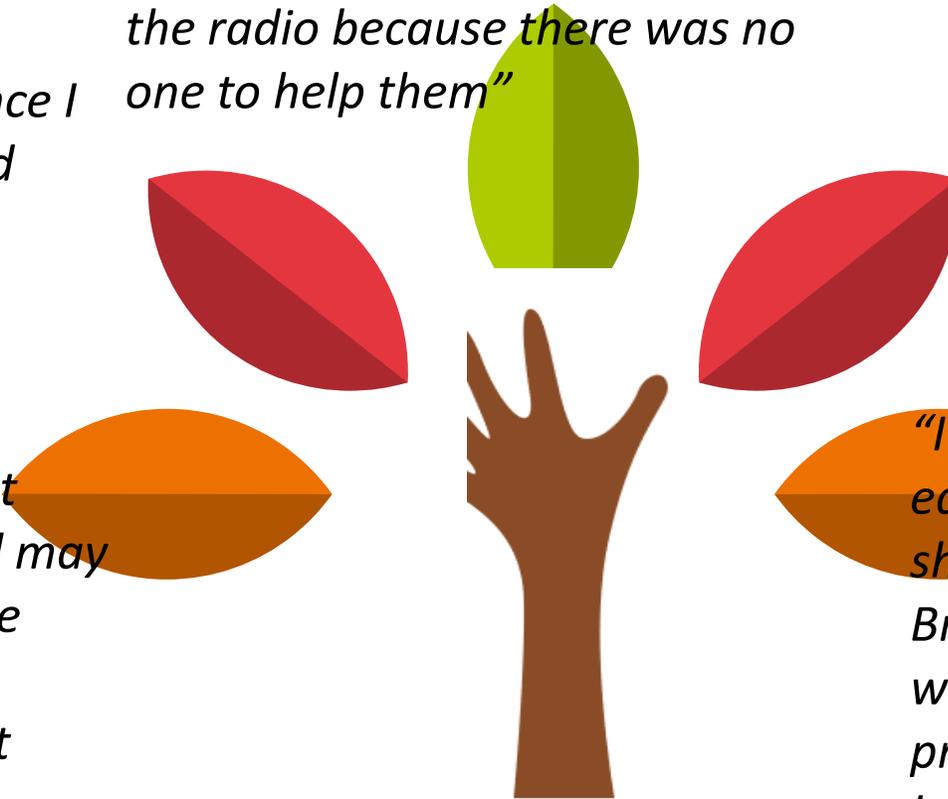
*“I stopped going to sell goods at the market since I could not leave my child alone at home...”*

*“It was hard for children with disabilities to follow lessons on the radio because there was no one to help them”*

*“Our children are just walking around the village with nothing to do”*

*“The child will forget what they learn and may start having intimate relationships with opposite sex and get pregnant.”*

*“I am a barrier to my own daughter's education. I am unable to support her when she is studying because I am unable to read Braille materials. My daughter feels jealous when I am assisting other children who use print. I feel sad whenever I see my daughter looking hurt. It is as if I am not interested in her schoolwork, which is not the case. I wish I knew Braille.”*



**What could be done better next time?**

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## Provide some form of face to-face teaching

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*“Special needs classes should not be closed, because they will not catch up at the same pace as compared to normal students when schools reopen”*

*“It would be better if the children with disabilities could still go to school, maybe twice a week because there are not that many children from his class who got sick”*

*“Requesting government and NGOs to consider establishing small local learning centres or circles in the communities with resources where specialist teachers can be meeting these children and offer educational support”*

# Make educational programs accessible for children with disabilities

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*“When the government is introducing interventions, they should be inclusive on the ground, not just in policy”*

*“TV schools programs should have subtitles or a sign language presenter, and they should also take note that there are special needs children learning through them, because we feel like they were designed for the normal children only”*

*“Children should be given appropriate learning resources when they are coming home like braille books for them to read”*

## Increase investment in technology

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*“There is need to strengthen technology awareness and use amongst parents and their children so that they are able to use them for online teaching and learning”*

*“Need for provision of gadgets like phones and computers, and students, teachers and parents should be taught to learn through them before we are in a situation where schools need to be closed again”*

## Need to support parents through trainings

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*“Training parents on how to teach their children using tactile sign language and other methods at home in order to have collaborative teaching between teachers and parents while the child is at home”*

*“Deliberate effort to encourage parents to actively support learning of their children”*

*“There is a need to financially empower families of children with disabilities through small loans for businesses which in turn they can use to uplift the livelihood of their children and support their education better”*