



Devising Strategies for Inclusively Managing a Selected Primary School in Eswatini

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Abstract: *The Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini 2019 introduced a Standards for Inclusive Education Policy, which all public schools had to adhere to. In response to the policy, this study sought to develop strategies for inclusive management by a school principal, aimed at aiding primary school principals in leading their schools in a manner that promotes inclusivity. To achieve this goal, a qualitative case study design of one primary school was employed, utilising a purposive sampling approach to select the principal and three senior teachers as participants. Recorded semi-structured interviews were conducted for all the participants, and the data obtained was analysed using thematic analysis. The study identified several strategies for fostering an inclusive educational environment, including adjusting teaching methods, training principals in special education needs, and allocating budget resources to accommodate learners with diverse special needs. Furthermore, the study emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts between all school stakeholders and, the admittance of all children regardless of disabilities. Based on the findings, an inclusive education model will assist the principal in employing inclusive management. A quantitative study encompassing a broader range of schools from all regions of Eswatini is recommended to facilitate the generalisation of these findings to all schools.*

Keywords: *Inclusive education, Inclusive management, Inclusive strategies, Special needs, Universal Design for Learning, Multiple means*

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1. Introduction

The literature on inclusive education emphasizes that managing schools inclusively is fundamental to upholding the human rights of all learners. Inclusively managing a school signifies a situation whereby the different backgrounds and abilities of learners are considered by creating an educational environment in the school that accommodates the diversity of learners (Hattie, 2017). Inclusive education represents not just a policy directive but a comprehensive framework that recognises and values the diversity among learners. As argued by Klaus and Matthews (2019), inclusion extends beyond mere physical integration within educational settings; it involves the cultivation of an environment where every learner is

regarded as valuable and supported in their educational endeavours. This perspective aligns with UNESCO (2020), which posits that inclusive education must be responsive to the individual needs of learners, thereby fostering a sense of belonging for all.

In the context of Eswatini, school principals encounter a range of challenges as they implement inclusive education practices. Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) highlight systemic barriers such as a lack of adequate teacher training, insufficient resources, and prevailing societal attitudes that may resist inclusive methodologies. Such barriers can result in the marginalisation of learners with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups in educational environments. Effective implementation of inclusive

education necessitates not only robust policies and frameworks but also a dedication to professional development and capacity building among educators (Black & Simon, 2014).

Central to the operationalisation of inclusive education is the role of school leadership. Research indicates that successful school principals exhibit transformational leadership qualities, which foster collaboration and community involvement (Thompson, 2015). By articulating a shared vision for inclusivity and engaging various stakeholders—such as teachers, parents, and community members—principals can create a culture of acceptance and support. Transformational leaders are adept at navigating the complexities associated with educational change, empowering staff to embrace inclusive practices, and facilitating the necessary adaptations within the educational system.

Moreover, literature underscores the imperative of establishing comprehensive support systems that enable school principals to effectively implement inclusive education. The National Disability Plan of Action (2024-2028) asserts that adequate resource allocation, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities are crucial for enhancing inclusion within primary education. Collaborations among government entities, non-governmental organisations, and local communities can cultivate a supportive network for schools aiming to adopt inclusive practices.

1.1 Problem statement

This literature review highlights the dual need to address both policy frameworks and practical implementation strategies regarding inclusive education. While a foundation for inclusion exists at the policy level, the primary challenge lies in translating these policies into effective practices at the school level. Insights drawn from existing research provide a foundation for this study, aiming to identify specific strategies that assist school principals in overcoming obstacles to inclusive education. Hence, the main study question is, “What are the strategies for managing inclusively at a selected primary school in Eswatini?”

The following sub-research questions guide this study:

1. How is inclusive education managed in the selected primary school?
2. What are the challenges faced by the selected primary school in managing inclusively?
3. How can the inclusive management of the selected primary school be improved?

In summary, the effective management of inclusive education necessitates a multifaceted approach that integrates elements of leadership, collaborative practices, and sufficient resource allocation. By engaging with the existing body of literature, this study aspires to provide further insights into the strategies that may enhance the management of inclusive education in primary schools across Eswatini. The researcher used the findings of the study to develop a model of managing the involved school inclusively and other schools with the same context.

1.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes the creation of educational environments that cater to all learners (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). UDL encompasses three key principles: multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of action and expression (National Center on Universal Design for Learning, 2014).

Multiple means of engagement encourage the use of various methods to captivate and motivate learners throughout the educational process. Educators acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of their learners to foster an inclusive environment (CAST, 2018). Multiple means of representation involve presenting information through different formats, allowing educators to utilise a range of content delivery methods, such as text, audio, visual materials, interactive simulations, and hands-on experiences (Meyer, Rose & Gordon, 2014). Finally, the principle of multiple means of action and expression allows learners various options for demonstrating their understanding. This flexibility enables learners to choose how they express their knowledge, leading to a deeper comprehension of the material (CAST, 2018).

2. Literature Review

The literature highlights the importance of managing schools inclusively as a fundamental means of respecting the human rights of all learners. This section reviews the existing body of work related to inclusive management in schools, particularly focusing on the implementation of inclusive education at the primary level in Eswatini.

2.1 Managing Inclusive Education in Primary Schools

The implementation of inclusive education in Eswatini has not met initial expectations, reflecting a myriad of challenges that extend beyond the control of individual school principals. Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) assert

that a significant number of primary schools in Eswatini are inadequately prepared to embrace inclusive practices. Supporting this assertion, Shongwe (2022) conducted a qualitative study assessing government support for a primary school, revealing that regular schools in the country are failing to adequately educate learners with disabilities, thereby infringing upon their right to education. The findings indicated that government support did not align with the minimum standards outlined in the Suitability, Availability, and Equitability (SAVE) Framework, underscoring the lack of preparedness of schools to educate this disadvantaged subgroup. Furthermore, the government grants intended for the school did not address the specific needs of learners with disabilities, and the school had not actively sought assistance to mitigate these deficiencies.

2.2 Barriers Impacting Effective Implementation and Management of Inclusive Education

School principals in Eswatini are confronted with significant challenges in the implementation of inclusive education. Despite the existence of government policies aimed at promoting inclusion, the primary school infrastructure, including buildings, surrounding areas, and recreational facilities—remains largely unmodified to accommodate learners with disabilities (Shongwe, 2021). Additionally, the learning materials available in primary schools are insufficiently tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners with special requirements (Adebayo & Ngwenya, 2015), while the curriculum itself exhibits inflexibility, hampering inclusive practices (Madlala, 2022; Gama & Thwala, 2016).

Tirana (2017) underscores the necessity for comprehensive reforms within schools to address the diverse needs of all learners effectively. Bell and Stevenson (2015) identify competence—defined as the capacity to implement policies, solve arising problems, and set and achieve objectives—as a crucial factor in the successful implementation of inclusive education. They contend that achieving policy objectives is largely contingent upon the structure, operations, and ethos of the schools themselves. Thus, it is imperative for educational institutions to proactively adapt their methodologies and procedures to enhance accessibility for all learners, ensuring compliance with legal mandates. Such strategic adjustments necessitate considerable financial investment, the establishment of a supportive environment, ethical considerations, and the promotion of cooperative relationships among individuals and organizations across public and societal spheres.

2.3 Strategies for Overcoming Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

The literature identifies a range of effective strategies to mitigate the challenges faced by school principals in implementing and managing inclusive education within primary schools. According to Maguvhe and Mutambo (2023), the Ministry of Education must prioritize the development of inclusive pedagogies and curricula that cater to the needs of all learners while ensuring appropriate classroom adaptations. Gözler, Öztürk, and Karnas (2023) advocate for regular teacher training, aimed at updating educators on current innovations in inclusive education, alongside ensuring that school facilities are suitable for the education of children with disabilities.

Moreover, Gözler et al. (2023) recommend that all schools achieve compliance with inclusive education standards and that school principals foster collaboration among staff. They encourage involving parents by assigning them roles within the school that promote active contributions to their children's education. Additionally, Shongwe (2022) and Makoelle and Thwala (2022) propose that teacher training institutions emphasize inclusive methodologies during teaching practice and model inclusive teaching strategies to pre-service teachers.

For effective implementation of inclusive education, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) must prioritize comprehensive training for both principals and teachers on special education needs. Furthermore, a critical review and increase in budget allocations for inclusive education are essential. It is imperative for the government to allocate customised resources to address the specific needs of individual schools. A collective effort involving all stakeholders—encompassing government entities, NGOs, educators, learners, parents, and communities—is needed to facilitate open dialogues and achieve quality education and enrollment targets for children with disabilities across educational institutions in Eswatini.

In summary, this literature review identifies the systemic barriers to implementing inclusive education in Eswatini and underscores the need for comprehensive strategies aimed at overcoming these challenges. The insights gathered will inform the current research study and assist in identifying actionable strategies for effective management of inclusive education within primary schools.

3. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in this study, detailing the research approach and design, sampling

strategy, data collection and analysis methods, and considerations regarding trustworthiness and ethics.

3.1 Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach was utilised for this study, which aims to gather and analyse non-numerical (descriptive) data to gain a deeper understanding of individuals' social realities, including their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative method was chosen due to its capacity to provide rich descriptions of complex phenomena, track unique or unexpected events, illuminate the experiences and interpretations of participants with varying stakes and roles, and embrace diverse perspectives without discrimination.

A case study design was specifically employed to facilitate an in-depth investigation of the challenges faced by school principals in implementing inclusive education. According to Gillham (2013), case study design allows for the collection of various types of evidence from real-world settings to answer research questions. This design was particularly suitable for this study as it fostered a direct, one-on-one interaction between the researcher and participants, enabling the acquisition of concrete, contextual knowledge about the specific challenges within the educational setting. Furthermore, it provided an opportunity to explore key characteristics, meanings, and implications relevant to the case of inclusive education implementation.

3.2 Sampling

In this study, purposive sampling was adopted to select participants based on specific criteria designed to identify individuals with rich information regarding the research topic. Creswell (2018) underscores that sampling involves selecting a subset of a population to represent the broader group in research. The principal and three senior teachers from the selected primary school were identified and invited to participate due to their extensive engagement and experience in school operations and inclusive education. Their insights were deemed valuable, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with implementing inclusive education within the primary school context.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, which facilitates the integration of open-ended questions within a predetermined thematic framework (Smith, 2019). The choice of semi-structured interviews was advantageous, as it allowed the researcher to probe participants' responses for greater clarity and depth, which is crucial in qualitative research (Burrow, Steber, Kreiling,

& Coleman, 2018). An interview guide was developed containing open-ended questions specifically tailored to address the research sub-questions.

Interviews were conducted on the school premises and recorded to enable the researcher to focus attentively on participants' responses. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, aligning main themes with the sub-research questions to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and challenges.

3.4 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

Ethical considerations were meticulously addressed throughout the research process. Following the guidelines provided by Widdowson (2011), the researcher obtained the necessary permissions from the Ministry of Education and Training, as well as consent from the principal to conduct the study within the school setting. Participants were informed of their voluntary involvement and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, confidentiality was prioritised; participants' identities and the identity of the school were protected by assigning pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher took measures to confirm that data collection addressed the study's objectives effectively, as suggested by Yin (2016). To enhance confirmability, participant responses were summarised and reviewed to confirm that they accurately reflected the participants' perspectives. Additionally, the researcher provided a thick description of the study's methodology, thereby contributing to transparency and rigor in the research process, as advocated by Haq, Rasheed, Rashid, and Akhter (2023).

In conclusion, this methodology section provides a comprehensive overview of the qualitative approach adopted in this research study. It highlights the steps taken to ensure ethical conduct, trustworthiness, and rigorous data collection and analysis, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by school principals in the successful implementation of inclusive education in primary schools.

4. Results and Discussion

The study aimed to explore effective strategies for managing inclusively at a selected primary school in Eswatini, guided by the primary research question: "*What are the strategies for managing inclusively at a selected primary school in Eswatini?*" To dissect this overarching inquiry using themes, two sub-questions were addressed:

1. *What challenges does the selected primary school face in managing inclusively? And*
2. *How can the management of inclusivity at the school be improved?*

The findings are presented thematically, reflecting the responses of participants denoted by acronyms: Principal (PR),

Teacher 1 (T1), and

Teacher 2 (T2).

4.1 Challenges of Managing Inclusively

The analysis identified several challenges under the theme of managing inclusively, detailed as follows:

a) Overcrowded Classrooms

Participants reported that large class sizes posed significant challenges to provide individualized attention to each learner. The literature supports this assertion, indicating that principals often lack the necessary training to effectively implement inclusive education (Shongwe, 2021). T1 noted, "Classrooms are overcrowded because of the free primary education, and the teacher-learner ratio doesn't allow for inclusion."

b) Curriculum Limitations

A major concern highlighted was that the existing curriculum did not accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities. Gözler et al. (2023) emphasize the necessity for schools to comply with inclusive education standards, urging principals to foster collaboration among the staff. The principal remarked, "Our curriculum does not cater to some of these learners; it still needs to be modified to embrace inclusion."

c) Insufficient Inspectorate Support

The findings revealed a lack of engagement from the inspectors for Special and Inclusive Education, who have rarely visited the school to provide support. The principal expressed frustration, stating, "The government has introduced inspectors to assist schools in the transition process, but inspectors for Special and Inclusive Education only visited our school once since 2010. There is literally no support from the government."

d) Lack of Teacher Capacitation

Participants indicated a glaring absence of professional development regarding inclusive education before its implementation. According to Madlela (2022), the Eswatini government has not provided necessary training or support to educators. T2 emphasized, "The principals

and teachers were never capacitated on issues of inclusion in schools before the programme started."

e) Inadequate Resources and Funding

The study highlighted insufficient resources allocated by the Ministry of Education and Training, hampering the school's ability to meet diverse learners' needs. Shongwe (2022) states that government grants fail to account for learners with disabilities. The principal commented, "Resources are insufficient. There is no proper infrastructure to cater for inclusion, and instructional materials and teaching aids are also not sufficient."

4.2 Mitigating Challenges for Managing Schools Inclusively

The participants offered insights into potential strategies for overcoming the identified challenges, presented as follows:

a) Capacitation of Principal and Teachers

The need for comprehensive training for both principals and teachers on inclusive practices was emphasized. Aligning with findings from Madlela (2022) and Gama and Thwala (2016), most educators in Eswatini lack adequate training to effectively support learners with varying needs. A senior teacher stated, "We are not conversant about inclusive education; hence, we find ourselves following the traditional way of teaching. We have to be capacitated through in-service workshops."

b) Provision of Financial and Material Resources

The study found that financial and material resources are vital for successful inclusion, necessitating government intervention. The literature further supports the notion that government financial backing is essential for the provision of adequate teaching materials (Arduin, 2015). The principal noted, "We have each day as it comes because there are no resources to meet the daily challenges encountered."

c) Infrastructure Development and Adaptation

Participants highlighted the need for infrastructure improvements to accommodate learners with special needs. Shongwe's model underscores the importance of creating inclusive physical environments (Art Beyond Sight, 2014). The principal advocated, "The government should adjust school buildings in mainstream schools to accommodate learners with disabilities, such as those using wheelchairs."

d) Curriculum Adjustment

The current curriculum remains predominantly traditional and does not sufficiently address the needs of learners with special requirements. This finding aligns with Shongwe

(2022), which indicates difficulties faced by teachers when the curriculum is not tailored for inclusivity. A senior teacher remarked, "Government just announced that schools should allow learners with disabilities without adjusting the curriculum."

4.3 Conclusion

The findings reveal a nuanced landscape of challenges and opportunities within the context of inclusive education at the selected primary school in Eswatini. Addressing the identified challenges through enhanced professional development, resource allocation, and curriculum modification will be essential in establishing an equitable learning environment for all learners. The research underscores the necessity for collective efforts from the government, educational authorities, and school communities to foster effective inclusive practices.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The first focus of this study was to identify the challenges associated with managing an inclusive educational environment within the school. The findings revealed that the school faces significant difficulties due to large class sizes, which impede teachers' ability to provide adequate attention to learners with special needs. Moreover, it was determined that the curriculum requires adjustments by both governmental authorities and educators to effectively accommodate all learners. Additionally, it was noted that inspectors from the Special and Inclusive Education division infrequently visit the school, thereby limiting the guidance available on inclusion-related issues. The lack of training prior to the introduction of inclusive education by the Ministry of Education and Training has contributed to teachers' deficiencies in addressing inclusion matters. Furthermore, the school is constrained by insufficient resources and funding necessary to support inclusive practices.

Secondly, the study explored potential strategies for mitigating the challenges surrounding inclusion within the

school. It was identified that both teachers and the principal require further professional development regarding inclusive education, which could be facilitated by collaboration between the school and the Ministry of Education and Training. The school bears the responsibility of modifying its physical infrastructure to accommodate individuals with special needs, with support from governmental resources and external donors. Additionally, teachers must adapt the curriculum when preparing lessons to address the diverse needs of all learners, while concurrently advocating for necessary curriculum adjustments at the national level by the Ministry of Education and Training.

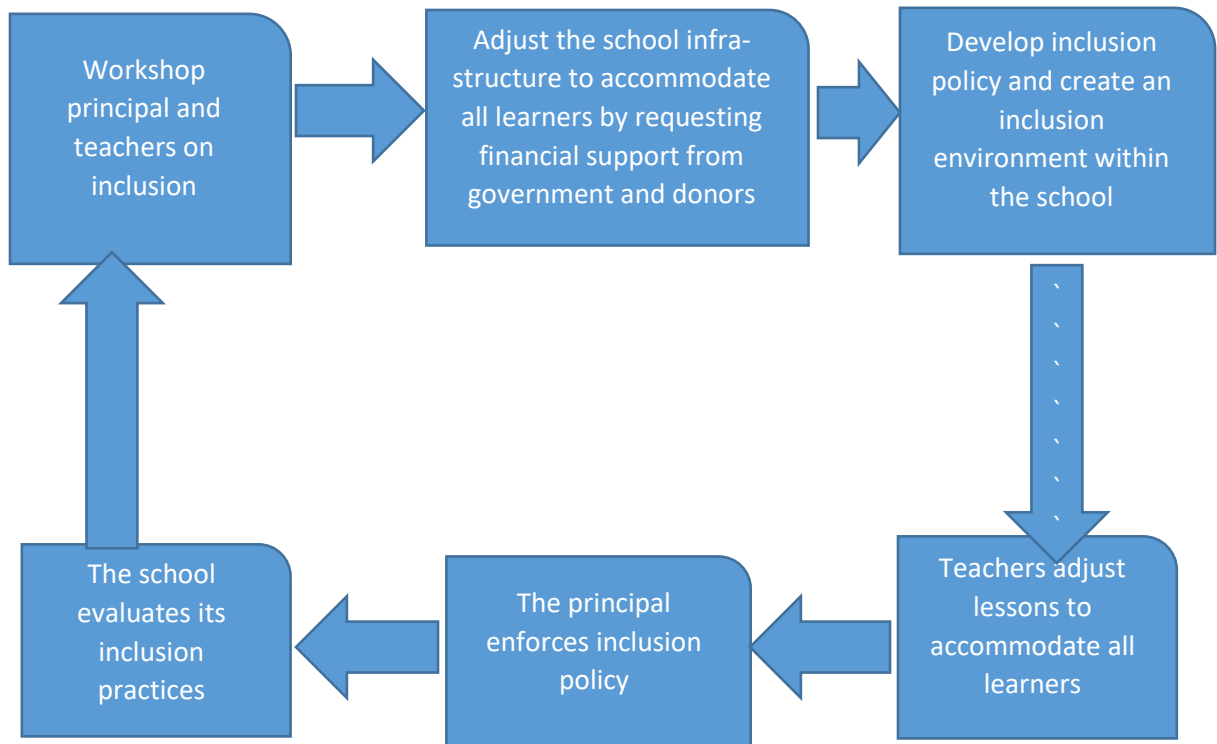
5.2 Recommendations

The research considered the findings of the study to make the following recommendations:

1. Given the expressed concerns regarding capacity among the principal and teachers, both the government and the school should organise workshops and in-service training focused on the effective management of inclusion.
2. The inadequacies of the school infrastructure present significant challenges for the implementation of inclusive education; therefore, a collaborative effort between the government and relevant stakeholders is essential to facilitate necessary adaptations.
3. The existing curriculum should be redesigned to better accommodate learners with special needs, as the current framework does not sufficiently support their requirements.
4. Moving forward, the government should prioritize an assessment of available resources and preparedness prior to the implementation of new educational programs.

The researcher recommended the model below for mitigating challenges in managing the selected school inclusively

Model for mitigating challenges in managing the selected school inclusively



Future research study

The same study should be conducted quantitatively to involve many schools in all four regions of Eswatini.

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