

## **FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE HHOHHO REGION, ESWATINI**

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### **Abstract**

Educating learners with diverse educational needs in a mainstream classroom comes with its pros and cons. This study investigated factors affecting teachers' implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini. Three mainstream schools were purposefully selected for this qualitative study. A multiple case study design was employed while focus group discussion, individual interviews and observations were used for generating data. The sample size comprised 21 participants who all took part in the focus group discussions (FGD), while 9 out of the sample size were individually interviewed. Five (5) observations were also conducted. Data were thematically analysed. The results indicated that lack of training amongst most educators was the main factor hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools. It was concluded that educators' inability to identify and handle learners with special needs in mainstream classroom has been a drawback towards achieving the inclusion goal. The study recommends the importance of examining ways in which inclusion can be managed in mainstream secondary schools to ensure that all learners meaningfully participate.

**Keywords:** Eswatini, factors, implementation, inclusive education, mainstream schools, special education needs

### **Introduction**

The introduction of inclusive education in mainstream schools in Eswatini in 2010 brought some glimpse of hope to learners with special educational needs as it meant these learners would have to attend school in their communities. Notwithstanding the Eswatini Government's efforts to ensure that all learners receive meaningful education in schools in their neighbourhood, many teachers in the mainstream schools fail to attend to the learners' diverse educational needs. Literature show that learners with special needs do not perform well in external examinations (Ntinda et al., 2019) which is a drawback towards the success of inclusion. Even so, the main goal for inclusion entails accommodating all learners and ensuring that all learners attain their full potential in education. However, most teachers in mainstream schools think that the implementation of inclusive education affect the academic performance of other learners who do not have disabilities. This is so, since educators in mainstream classrooms tend to shift attention and focus to the learners with disabilities while neglecting the mandate and goal of inclusion which as argued by Matsenjwa et al. (2020) is about attending to individual educational needs of all the learners in the same classroom regardless of how many they are.

Inclusive education is influenced by the human rights movement and is about developing an inclusive community in education (Landsberg, 2019). According to Ngozwane et al. (2018), inclusion is about celebrating differences not limited to gender, nationality, race, age, language, socioeconomic background, ability or disability among many differences. This means inclusion is about regarding differences as a challenge to work on, than a problem. Nxumalo (2016) described inclusion as the importance of equitable access to education that affords all learners free basic education and senior secondary education of real quality as well as lifelong education for all. This implies that inclusion is all about having educators educating learners with educational needs, not limited to physical disabilities in one classroom while attending to individual educational needs to ensure that all the learners benefit in the mainstream classroom and attain their full potential.

In Eswatini, inclusive education was set into motion by The Constitution of Swaziland (2005) article 29.6 which states that, every liSwati child has a right to free education in public schools at least up to the end of primary school. This mandate then propelled the Eswatini government to enact several policies aimed at providing equal education opportunities to all children in the country regardless of either abilities or disabilities. These policies as mentioned by Ntinda et al (2019) are inclusive of The Swaziland National Children's Policy (2009), Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (2006), The Education for All Policy (2010) which commanded the implementation of the Swaziland Education Sector and Training (EDSEC) policy of 2011. The EDSEC goal is to ensure equitable access to inclusive education that affords all learners free basic education and senior secondary education of high quality as well as lifelong education for all EmaSwati citizens.

Currently, the government of Eswatini has instructed all schools to admit all learners including those with special needs in the mainstream schools regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Thwala, 2017). Nonetheless, there seems to be lack of proper and adequate resources as well as relevant quality teaching as mandated by The National Education and Training Sector Policy (2018) to ensure meaningful participation of the diverse populace of learners. Nevertheless, teachers are expected to address the needs for all the learners and ensure meaningful participation to ensure all learners attain their full potential. Conversely, most of the children with special needs are seen not performing well in external examinations (Ntinda et al, 2019) especially in their secondary education even in regular classrooms. Learners with special educational needs are disadvantaged by their disabilities over the other students (Ngozwane et. al, 2018) as they are unable to perform well academically, and this hampers them from attaining their full potential. However, the main goal for inclusive education as mentioned by Schuelka (2018) is to increase social and academic opportunities for both children with and without disabilities. Zwane and Malale (2018) observe that few studies have been conducted in Eswatini in relation to how effectively inclusive education has been rolled out (from policy to practice) in schools, particularly in secondary schools. In addition to that, most teachers have raised some concerns about teaching learners with disabilities and other learning needs (Zwane, 2016). This study, therefore, aimed at unpacking factors that affect teachers to effectively implement the inclusive education programme in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini.

## Literature Review

### *Teachers views towards inclusive education*

In a study on educators' perceptions of inclusive education, Malahlela (2017) revealed that educators had the passion and willingness to implement Inclusive Education as they perceive it as needful. However, in some schools in Eswatini, in-service teachers feel that they received inadequate staff development and training prior to the implementation of inclusive education (Zwane, 2016; Zwane & Malale, 2018). This, therefore, makes it quite impossible for these learners' needs to be attended to when the core implementers of the programme fail to identify the learners with special needs and are uninformed on ways to handle their educational needs.

Resources play a critical role in the implementation of any programme. Calero and Benasco (2015), pointed out that, resources can be in the form of human, physical and financial resources. Teachers form part of the human resource needed for the implementation of inclusive education in schools. If the human resource is not equipped on how to attend to individual needs of the learners with special needs, achieving the inclusion goal would seem impossible. Teachers in schools in the Limpopo Province of South Africa perceive inclusive education as being effective to a lesser extent as it is negatively affected by inadequate training, non-user-friendly school environments to accommodate learners with disabilities, lack of facilities and equipment and higher learner enrolments in mainstream classrooms (Malahlela, 2017).

Shevchenko et al., (2020) observed that competence of educators, formed through training and skills enhancement programmes prepare them to be able to accommodate learners with SEN. In a study by Zwane and Malale (2018), it was observed that Eswatini has enunciated sound policies to allow for effective implementation of IE, but the authors discovered that these efforts are hindered by factors such as non-inclusive curriculum, lack of physical and competent human resources in secondary schools in Eswatini. A study by Maseko and Fakudze (2014) revealed that Eswatini teachers lack a clear knowledge and understanding of what exactly constitutes inclusive education. Zwane and Malale (2018) added that teachers are incompetent even in identifying learners with SEN, which makes it difficult for them to accommodate the learners with special needs in the teaching and learning process. This highlights the importance of teacher capacitation on how to manage inclusion in mainstream schools.

As a result, the inclusion programme is perceived as less effective because even though it is practiced in schools, not all educators are able to identify difficulties and issues related to learners with Special Educational Needs (Mugambi, 2017; Mpu & Adu, 2020; Okech, Yuwono & Abdu 2021). According to Mbelu (2011) some of the challenges that teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education at Umgungundlovu district are linked to different barriers like large class sizes, insufficient time for teachers to cater for the needs of children and lack of teachers' desire to teach those children. Zwane (2016) in a study on teacher training for inclusivity in the Gege branch also highlighted that an un-inclusive curriculum, big numbers of learners, lack of resources and teachers' lack of competency are some of the challenges hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education in some schools in the Gege branch.

This shows that class-sizes play a crucial role towards the success of the implementation of the inclusion programme. A manageable class-size allows teachers to offer individual attention to all learners in the classroom.

Seemingly, limited studies focus on secondary teachers' experiences in handling learners with diverse needs in secondary schools, yet secondary education is believed to be a gatekeeper to success as it ensures access to tertiary, personal development, socioeconomic growth and is also one of the poverty reduction strategies (Pather & Nxumalo, 2013; Hamid, et al., 2015; Kumagai, 2017). This assertion was also mooted by Zwane and Malale (2018) who mention that not many studies have been conducted in Eswatini in relation to how effectively inclusive education has been rolled out (from policy to practice) in schools more especially secondary schools, hence the need to investigate factors affecting secondary school teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools in the Hhohho region in ESwatini.

### ***The theoretical framework***

The theoretical framework used in this study is the bio-ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory is about society as a conglomeration of social systems in the environment interacting during the process of an individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Mpu & Adu, 2020; Rapp & Granados, 2021). The theory conceptualises that child development is nested within five system levels, with the first system being the micro-systems theory, then the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and lastly the chronosystem and how these systems are interwoven (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Mahlo, 2011). Educating a child without considering all these systems would not be effective as they all have an effect even in mental development of every child.

The micro-system in this study, describes the factors within a child's immediate environment such as the schoolteachers, physical learning space, resources, classroom practices and interactions that both support and at times discourage the students with special educational needs in inclusive education classroom settings (Tahir et al., 2019). The meso-system will be used to indicate the nature of collaborations and cooperation between parents, teachers and the multi-disciplinary team to promote the learning of students with disabilities as well as its effects on the implementation of inclusive education (Tahir et al, 2019).

The exo-system in the education system can be used to reflect schools as service delivery agencies, must ensure that their procedures, structures and resources have enabling effects on the implementation of inclusive education as well as the growth of students with special needs. Whereas the macrosystem has to do with factors that exist outside the school's physical environment yet influence the inner systems within the framework and consequently the learner at the centre of the system. According to Mahlo (2011) the macrosystem is about policy formulation and setting guidelines to successfully implement the inclusion policy according to individual needs. Lastly, there is the chronosystem which is about environmental changes in all the systems and their influence on members across time (Evans, 2020). Since inclusion has brought about changes from exclusion practices to create a culture of acceptance for all learners,

those changes come with varied factors that may promote or obstruct the change. In this study it is about teachers' assessment for progress and improvement of the learner with SEN.

This theory is relevant for this study as it aids and highlights the systemic aspects of inclusive education as well as varied factors which impact in the implementation of the change initiatives brought about by the implementation of the inclusion programme in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region.

### ***Objectives of the study***

The principal objective of this study was to highlight factors affecting the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i) Explore teachers' views towards inclusive education in the Hhohho region.
- ii) Investigate teachers' preparedness to implement inclusive education in secondary schools in the Hhohho region.
- iii) Establish resources put in place for the implementation of IE in secondary schools in the Hhohho region.
- iv) Investigate challenges faced by secondary school teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region.
- v) Suggest strategies that can be put in place to improve the implementation of IE in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region.

### **Methodology**

#### ***The research paradigm***

The study used an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach to allow participants to freely express themselves as they voice out what they feel affects the implementation the IE programme, share experiences, feelings and challenges encountered with this programme. A multiple case-study design was adopted. The multiple case study was suitable for this study as it enabled the researchers to collect data from three different schools in the Hhohho region and the findings were compared to check for commonalities.

#### ***Selection of participants***

The target population for this study were teachers from three different mainstream schools in the Hhohho region. These schools were chosen because they use mixed streaming, thus best fit for the study. Non-probability sampling in the form of purposive sampling was used to draw up a sample of 21 participants from the purposefully selected 3 mainstream secondary schools. These teachers we seen best fit to partake in the study since they teach learners of diverse educational needs. As revealed by Saunders et al., (2012), in purposive sampling personal judgment is used by the researcher to choose cases that help achieve the research objectives and target

participants who are particularly informative of the issue being researched. These teachers, therefore, were able to share their experiences in handling learners with diverse needs in one mainstream classroom alongside learners without special needs.

### *Instrumentation*

The study employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), followed by in-depth individual interviews and observations as instruments for generating data. The FGDs were used to obtain data from a group so to obtain varied views, as opined by Gundumogula (2020) that FGDs provide useful information and different insights on a topic at the same time. Three (3) FGDs were conducted; one in each school comprising of (7) participants each making a total of 21 participants. A FGDs interview guide with thirteen (13) semi structured questions was used to collect data from participants.

In-depth individual interviews were conducted thereafter, to acquire in-depth information about factors affecting teachers in the implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. A total of seven (7) participated in in-depth interviews, three (3) from school A, two (2) from school B and two (2) from school C. An interview guide with 16 open-ended questions was used in facilitating the individual interviews. Stewart (2014) concedes that a semi-structured interview with open ended questions as opposed to structured multiple-choice questions with predefined possible answers was good for such qualitative inquiry. The interviews took between 40 to 50 minutes each. Both the FGDs and the in-depth individual interviews were tape recorded.

Non- participant observations were later conducted from 5 participants to complement data from both the FGDs and the in-depth individual interviews. The main aim for conducting the observations was to observe the teachers' behaviour when teaching in mainstream classrooms and to find out if the participants in the study accommodated all the learners in their classrooms. As revealed by The Evaluation Brief (2018), observation involves watching individuals in their natural environment while gathering first-hand information visually and by listening carefully to what is being said. The researchers intended to observe; classroom layout, engagement of learners, teaching methods used, instructional materials used and efforts made in handling learners with diverse needs. The observations ranged between 45 minutes to one hour and a structured observation guide with 10 questions was used.

### *Data analysis*

All the data generated from both the individual interviews and the focus group discussions were thematically analysed following Clark and Braun's (2013) thematic data analysis linear model of six steps which include; familiarisation with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally writing up which involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracted. Pseudonyms were used for identification of the different teachers' names so to avoid mixing up the data. Data collected through observations were then compared with the data from the first two instruments used, to determine if there are different themes identified.

### *Trustworthiness of data*

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility according to Gunawan (2015), addresses the congruence between findings and reality while indicating how one will undertake a member check and was done through triangulating data to be collected in the study. Transferability involves helping the reader transfer the specific knowledge gained from the research findings of one study to other settings (Moon et al, 2016). Transferability was ensured by giving a thick description of research method, sampling, data collection, analysis and presentation of the study findings, as well as the use of peer debriefing. Dependability according to Mohajan (2016) entails consistency of research findings with other studies which was done by keeping all transcripts and voice tapes containing all the raw data. Confirmability, which according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013) entails ensuring that the study findings reflect participants' views, by showing how the data is linked to their sources was ensured in this study through use of verbatim quotes when presenting the study findings.

### *Ethical Issues*

Research ethics according to Akaranga and Makau (2016) are set of principles that guide one's research conduct and practices which aim at protecting the dignity of their research participants when collecting data. In this study, research ethics were upheld as participants were treated in an ethical manner and care was taken to manage potential discomfort since participants were allowed to sign informed consent forms, allowing them the opportunity to withdraw if they want to. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured, as no identity was required but participants were assigned pseudonyms during the interviews.

## **Findings**

The results of the study are presented based on the on factors affecting the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini. The following are some of the factors as perceived by the participants.

### *Teachers' perceptions on inclusive education*

Most participants from the 3 schools viewed inclusive education as needful and a good initiative even though it is confronted with varied factors, thus, requires to be strengthened since it affords all learners equitable access to the general curriculum. The participants from the 3 schools pointed out that inclusion is very important as it aims to prepare the learners with disabilities to live comfortably and independently in the world with people without disabilities. This allows people with and those without disabilities to learn to live and function together.

*Introducing IE was a good initiative by the UN since most persons with disabilities were hidden and isolated from the public eye, so the IE programme was introduced to ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded education and socialise with the rest* (Participant 1, School B).

However, some of the participants mentioned that inclusive education seems to be a waste of time, as there is no time to cater for the individual needs of the diverse learners in the mainstream classrooms. Most participants lamented that not enough preparation and planning was done before the implementation of the inclusion programme which is a drawback towards its success. Two participants in FGD3, made the following submissions:

Participant 6 (from School A) indicated:

*“We really do not have the time to take care of the needs of all these learners in our classrooms as they are filled to the brim and the syllabus is so long and we are even failing to finish it. This programme cannot work for our schools as the teacher-pupil-ratio is so high due to lack of human resource in schools. The government needs to hire more teachers first, before introducing such programmes. Otherwise, the inclusion programme will remain a meaningless buzzword.”*

Participant 12 (from School B) pointed out that:

*“It is impossible for us to give individual attention to 50 learners in one classroom when you also have 200 other learners to attend to in the other classes, yet we all knock-off at 1600 hours every day. I teach five different classes. So, where can I get the time to give individual attention to all these learners? May be this programme works for private primary schools. I am saying this since each teacher is allocated just one classroom with a few learners to teach all the subjects. For us who teach in secondary schools, the inclusion programme will never work because we teach about five classes with an average of 50 learners in each class. So, we proceed with the learners who easily grasp during teaching and learning and ignore the others.”*

#### *Management of inclusive education*

The results highlighted that all the participants from the three schools lamented that they fail to manage an inclusive classroom due to either lack of capacitation or the large numbers of learners in the classrooms. The results revealed that most participants are frustrated as it becomes difficult to handle behavioural problems in the large class-size as well as give individual attention to the learners with SEN. The researchers discovered that most of the participants still used the traditional teaching methods and even when they have identified the learners with SEN, they tend to ignore them as they use the one-size-fit all mentality. One participant had this to say:

*As teachers, we are unable to give individual attention to all the learners in our classrooms since they are so many, yet we need to make sure that we cover everything in the syllabus before external examinations begin. Participant 5 (from School A)*

Another participant added:



*We let the learners with SEN learn to swim on their own or drown, we cannot be in a position to handle them with kids gloves when we are not motivated, and not even recognised when trained in inclusive education. Participant 13 (from School B)*

### *Availability of resources*

The results revealed that there is a huge shortage of both human resources as well physical resources in mainstream secondary schools. The participants pointed out that due to lack of funds, the government is failing to hire psychologists, physiotherapists as well as train teachers on special and inclusive education for all the schools in the country yet that is mandatory if the vision for inclusion is to be realised. The participants further mentioned that the schools fail to provide enough teaching and learning materials for the learners without disabilities let alone to procure assistive devices for the learners with SEN due to inadequate funds. This becomes a drawback towards meaningful participation of the learners with SEN in mainstream schools as they end up not benefitting from the general curriculum without the assistive devices. One participant lamented:

*There are no resources provided by the school to help in meeting the needs of the learners with SEN, and even the MoET is failing the inclusion programme. When we forward requests of assistive devices, the SEN senior inspector would lament of long queues and the government's financial constraints, yet these devices are very expensive. (Participant 21, School C)*

Another participant said:

*There is a need that every school should have a multidisciplinary team so to help in assessing and diagnosing the learners identified by the subject teachers in the mainstream schools. (Participant 1, School C).*

### *Policy and legislation*

Most of the participants revealed that they were not even aware that there are policies put in place to support the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools since they were neither disseminated to them, nor made aware of their existence. The results also highlighted that there were no clear and binding legislations for the improvement of the lives and education of learners with SEN. The lack of clear guidelines on inclusive education, rigid curriculum and non-competency based and long syllabuses were highlighted as other factors affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools. One participant commented:

*It is of no use to introduce a new programme of teaching and learning before reviewing the curriculum as well as the syllabus, because these things are inseparable. If the MoET really wanted to meaningfully include the learners with special needs in the mainstream classrooms, she had to re-evaluate the contents of the curriculum and the syllabuses first to ensure that it is accommodative of the diverse needs of these learners. (Participant 5, School A)*

Another participant added:

*Learners with SEN are not benefitting anything academically in the mainstream classrooms other than socialising with the learners without disabilities. In fact, the learners with SEN were better off in the special schools where they were given individual attention than in the mainstream where they do not benefit anything (Participant 6, School A)*

#### *Lack of user-friendly infrastructure*

The results pointed out that there is lack of user-friendly infrastructure in the mainstream schools to allow independent movement of the learners with SEN within the school premises and even in the playgrounds. The results revealed that there was lack of ramps, handrails and elevators in the school buildings and that is discriminative and non-inclusive to the learners with physical impairment or with mobility challenges as it makes some buildings in the schools inaccessible.

It was highlighted that due to lack of funds, the schools fail to revamp the school infrastructure to be accommodative. Learners with SNE are like visitors in their own schools. One participant argued:

*Accessing some classrooms in the school is a nightmare for even able-bodied persons like us who are now very old and about to retire. There are a lot of stair cases in the school, yet there are no ramps to enable independent movement for wheelchair users. The schools did not prepare for children with diverse disabilities. (Participant 3, School A).*

#### *Lack of parental involvement*

It also emerged from most of the participants in the study that lack of parental involvement is a huge factor that impedes the effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools. The participants pointed out that most parents do not feel comfortable disclosing their children's special educational needs to the teachers as they usually think that if they do so, their children would not be admitted in the local schools or even worse, be discriminated against. It also transpired that most parents dump the learners with SEN in boarding mainstream schools and would not even pay their school fees, since they still have the misconception that learners with SEN are uneducable. The results revealed that parents of learners with SEN are not hands-on in the education of their children as they are not equipped of their role in educating these learners.

### **Discussions**

The findings from the three schools revealed that all the three mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region are confronted with almost the same factors in their effort to implement the inclusion programme.

### *Lack of understanding of inclusive education*

The findings revealed that teachers lack information on what inclusion is all about. Most of the ideas expressed were more of integration than inclusion. Teachers revealed that they just place the learners in the classrooms and let them swim or sink. The researchers discovered that most teachers have little knowledge about inclusive education as it was not well introduced in the mainstream schools. Most teachers seem to practise integration which according to Boitumelo et al., (2018) involves the physical placement of learners with disabilities in regular classrooms only when they can cope with the traditional curriculum with little assistance instead of inclusion. The study findings also revealed that teachers ignore the learners with SEN due to lack of time to attend to individual needs and felt attending to individual needs stalls the progress of attending to the learners without disabilities. It transpired also that teachers are more concerned about finishing the syllabuses as required by inspectorate. The findings correspond with the study by Maseko and Fakudze (2014) which revealed that teachers lack a clear knowledge and understanding of what exactly constitutes inclusive education. This means that there is a need for the Ministry of Education and Training to capacitate all teachers in mainstream secondary schools on what inclusion entails as well as its objectives.

### *Management of inclusive education*

The findings of the study uncovered that failure to manage the inclusion programme is yet another factor affecting the implementation of the inclusion programme. The findings revealed that most teachers did not receive any form of training on inclusive education, thus, are unable even to identify learners with SEN, let alone to manage these learners. The findings are in line with the study by Zwane and Malale (2018) who reported that teachers are incompetent even in identifying learners with SEN and often view the learners with SEN as difficult to handle. Teachers revealed that they are failing the learners with SEN as they find themselves ignoring these learners when teaching since they do not know how to help them. This in turn disadvantages the learners with SEN as most literature has revealed that in most cases, learners with SEN do not perform well in external examinations and consequently drop out of school. These findings are in line with a study conducted in the Gege Branch in Eswatini by Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) which pointed out that most of the teachers who did not have adequate training on handling both learners with and without disabilities in one classroom had negatively affected the performance of the learners with disabilities which was continually perceived poor due to the inadequate teaching abilities and skill of the mainstream schoolteachers.

### *Availability of resources*

Resources can be in form of human, physical and financial (Calero & Benasco, 2015). Lack of resources in mainstream secondary schools in form of teaching and learning materials to be used to meet the individual needs of the learners was reported to be impeding the effective implementation of the inclusion programme in secondary schools in the Hhohho region. Quite a few of the teachers revealed that they hardly bring with

them resources in form of visual aids in the classrooms, so as to aid learners with hearing impairment and those who learn best through visuals. Certainly, the absence of teaching resources, affected the academic performance of learners; particularly those with disabilities. It was also revealed that there was a challenge of inadequate financial resources which makes it difficult for schools to procure the necessary resources such as assistive devices not limited to projectors, note-pads, recorders, digital libraries and/or Braille machines for learners with SEN. Joshi (2021) states that the barrier to inclusion is also attributed to lack of resources which is associated to financial constraints. This speaks volumes about the importance of financial support towards the implementation of the inclusion programmes.

The findings also revealed the importance of providing professional human resources in form of school psychologists, therapists, health personnel and at least one teacher trained in inclusive education in every school as essential towards the effective implementation of inclusive education. The participants in the study highlighted that these professionals would help in the assessment and diagnosis of learners with SEN and would then give the subject teachers feedback on their findings as well as empower the teachers on interventions strategies to handle the learners with SEN in the mainstream classrooms.

#### *Policy and legislation*

It was also revealed in this study that most teachers were not aware of the policies which supported the implementation of inclusive education, let alone knowing if their schools practised inclusion. The teachers even mentioned that they do not think that even the school principals are in possession of such policies as they think they would have shared them with their teachers as they do with the Teaching Service Act. Some teachers who seemed to be informed with inclusion added that though they were aware of inclusion policies, but they felt the policies lacked clear guidelines on how to implement the programme in mainstream schools. These findings correspond with the findings by Malahlela (2017) who reported the challenge of lack of knowledge of inclusive education policies, which underlies teachers' reluctance to implement inclusive education confidently in mainstream schools.

#### *Lack of parental involvement*

Partnering is essential in educating learners with SEN in mainstream schools. All the stakeholders need to take part in the education of learners with SEN. Lack of parental involvement was mentioned as a key factor that hampers the effective implementation of inclusive education yet educating learners with SEN is supposed to be a shared task for its effectiveness. These learners with SEN ought to be put at the centre by both the parents and the teachers who form the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This would enable continuity at home, in terms of the educational interventions initiated by the subject teacher. These findings relate to the findings by Zimba (2011) which revealed that parental involvement was lacking due to poverty, yet parental involvement is one of the essential components in managing inclusive schools.

## Conclusions

The results of the study uncovered that there are various factors affecting the effective implementation of inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini. These factors range from lack of understanding of what inclusion entails, poor management of the inclusion programme, shortage of resources, unclear policies and legislations to lack of parental involvement. Such adversities have resulted to academic non-competence for learners with SEN. The findings revealed that learners with SEN are disadvantaged and unable to meaningfully participate in mainstream classrooms. The findings also revealed lack of parental involvement as another factor affecting the effective implementation of the IE programme in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region of Eswatini. It was also captured that most learners end up dropping out of school as they are not supported in terms of their individual educational needs in the mainstream schools.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the MoET must offer teachers in-service training and workshops regularly as a way of capacitating them about IE. The importance of training parents on how to handle children with different disabilities and how to use assistive devices to be able to support these learners in their educational endeavours is essential. The MoET should consider educating people in the country about the policies that support the inclusion programme as well as disseminate such policies to teachers as core implementers. Teachers, as implementers of the education policies, need to instil the principle of self-love and acceptance among the learners with SEN. The government of Eswatini should consider addressing the teacher-pupil-ratio, large class sizes make it impossible for the teachers to attend to the individual needs of learners with SEN because learners with special needs need individual attention, which is difficult to offer in the large class sizes in mainstream schools, revamp the schools' infrastructures, add more teaching and learning materials as well as procure assistive devices for the learners with SEN to meaningfully participate in the mainstream classrooms.

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