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The practicality of inclusive education in Eswatini primary schools

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Abstract

This study assessed the practical implementation of inclusive education in Eswatini primary schools and the relevant measures necessary to effectively implement inclusive education. The study was anchored on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and employed participatory action research design, a qualitative methodology, and the transformative research paradigm. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the twenty-five participants. Thematic approach was used in presentation of the findings. Content analysis method was used in analysing the data. The findings of the study revealed that Eswatini primary schools are not ready to implement inclusive education. Participants lamented restrictive environment, lack of assistive technology, absence of resource centers, less qualified teachers to handle special needs children, negative attitude from teachers, parents and children, few inspectors and special needs children placed in schools without assessment reports. The study recommends setting up model inclusive schools in each cluster and placing special needs children in these schools while the government upgrades remaining schools to be inclusive. Ministries should also collaborate to make inclusivity practical in schools. Government should establish assessment structures for early identification of disability, improve teacher training, strengthen leadership, and increase inspectors.

Keywords: *inclusive education, disability, practicality, assistive technology, transformative*

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1. Introduction

Every child has the right to learn and access quality education while sharing the same environment and experience with others. It begins with the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society (Ewa & Ewa, 2019). The global acknowledgement that every child has a right to equitable access to high-quality education and international human rights conventions have spurred changes in education towards inclusivity (Madlela, 2022). According to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), inclusive education refers to a system of education that ensures all children regardless of their abilities, disabilities, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic, have access to quality education within the mainstream schools or learning environments (Creto, 2023). However, students with disabilities are less likely to be in school, learners with disabilities make up an estimated 15% of the out-of-school population (Benveniste & Alasuutari, 2023).

First approaches to inclusion pushed forward by parents, emerged in Germany in the 1970s when pilot experiments tried to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream classes (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). In 1994, over 92 government representatives and 25 organisation representatives met in Spain to craft what would be called today the Salamanca statement. They reached a bold new consensus on the education of all children with disabilities, insisting that inclusion should be the standard. They created a framework for the provision of an inclusive learning environment where all children, regardless of disability status, would study together. Since the Salamanca on inclusion in education was adopted in 1994, more efforts on inclusive education are visible in many developing countries. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 4 recognizes the urgent need to provide equitable and inclusive quality education for all; it calls for government to step up efforts to achieve inclusion in education with special emphasis on marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2024). According to the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report published by UNESCO, less than 10% of nations worldwide have legislation that support full inclusion in education (UNESCO, 2020).

According to Future Learn (2021), inclusive education is a teaching model whereby all students, regardless of their ability, learn together in one environment. The major and core aim of inclusive education is to present equal opportunities for learning for both abled and disabled children. Therefore, inclusive education is a process aimed at accommodating children with

disabilities into the educational process and adapting secondary schools to disabled children, which aims at social justice and equality (Akbarovna, 2022). Recognizing that every child has distinct qualities, passions, capacities, and educational requirements, it recognizes that all children are capable of learning. Particular attention is given to students who might otherwise be marginalized, excluded, or perform below expectations (UNESCO, 2023).

According to the UNESCO (2020) report, many nations including developed ones were establishing resource centres for numerous schools and allowing students from special schools to be accommodated in regular settings. Examples of these countries include Malawi, Cuba, and Ukraine. Furthermore, it was stated that regulations requiring children with disabilities to attend school in separate settings exist in 25% of all countries, with the percentage rising to over 40% in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Asia. Meanwhile, many African nations have ratified both the UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC) and the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Despite this, a variety of factors that are equally relevant to Africa explain why there has not been much progress made towards attaining inclusive education (Creto, 2023). Some of these reasons are related to limited funding and resources. Efforts to create accessible learning environments are evident at the policy level across the Eastern and Southern region of Africa (UNICEF, 2023). Surprisingly, according to UNICEF (2023) regional report, despite the supportive legislative environment, persisting inaccessibility of school infrastructure shows gaps in implementation of inclusive education. One of the identified loopholes was the lack of accessible learning environments which remains a key issue across the region.

In Eswatini, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) 2018 policy as amended calls for the promotion of inclusive education throughout the education and training sector (Madlela, 2022). According to the Eswatini Ministry of Education online website, special needs and inclusive education has been introduced in the three teacher training colleges, namely, Ngwane, Nazarene and William Pitcher Teachers College. All graduates from the three colleges are equipped with skills to identify and support learners with special needs in mainstream schools to promote inclusive education. The education ministry in its latest update further report that plans to also set up specialized programmes in special and inclusive education are underway. However, the results of a study conducted by Madlela (2022) revealed that despite Eswatini having the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) 2018 inclusive education policy, most tertiary institutions had made less progress in implementing inclusive

education. Buildings, surroundings, sports fields, and learning material in tertiary institutions did not cater for learners with special needs. The government did not support institutions with resources and did not monitor the implementation of inclusive education. This simply translates to the mere fact that inclusive education is quite a mile away more especially in the practical stage other than policy level. The scenario in tertiary institutions is the same as in primary schools.

According to Schuelka (2018), the barriers to inclusive education include inadequacies in policy and legal support, resources and facilities, specialized staff, teacher training, pedagogical techniques, flexible curricula, supportive leadership, and cultural attitudes. In most settings, there has been a great improvement in formulating the policies to support implementation of inclusive education. However, the gap remains in the practice of the policies. According to UNESCO (2023), there are many aspects to be considered in creating an inclusive learning environment including the development of policy with an inclusive lens, adequate and disaggregated data about learners, curriculum, teacher ability and attitudes, language and communication, assistive technology, physical access including transport, and community and family involvement. Accessible teaching and learning resources including the provision of assistive technologies help improve the learning of many children with disabilities, however, challenges in digital infrastructure remain (UNICEF, 2023). Some countries include capacity building in inclusive education in their teacher training plans as means for supporting inclusive education. In consideration of the multiple requirements for effective inclusive education, the implementation part in some developing countries like Eswatini may remain in limbo in light of some possible challenges. Patterns of educational disadvantages must be tackled in Eswatini, visible drawbacks were shortage in facilities/materials needed for instruction, decline in discipline, difficult in attending to special needs learners in overcrowded classrooms, limiting productivity of schools, teachers, learners, and quality of education (Dlamini & Jedishkem, 2023). There remains a great need to make an evaluation of how practical it can be for a developing country to meet the expected standards for an effective inclusive education system.

The study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SGD) number four which seeks to ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all. This study intends to assess the practicality of inclusive education in primary schools in a developing country like Eswatini. Specifically, it aims to assess the readiness of Eswatini primary schools

on the effective implementation of inclusive education as well as the measures in place to effectively implement inclusive education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was used in this study. Three fundamental concepts that underpin CHAT are people learn by doing, act in groups, and communicate through their actions, people create, use, and modify a wide range of tools for learning and communication; and community is essential to the process of meaning-making and interpretation, which is fundamental to all forms of learning. According to CHAT, the dynamics of motivation, societal structures and norms, and modes of activity performance can all be considered when describing and analyzing human activities (Nickerson, 2023). This theory provides an understanding of how technological developments can mediate teaching for transformational learning. According to Grimalt-Alvaro and Ametller (2021), CHAT is based on the Vygotsky theory of cultural mediation which states that the human (subject) action on part of the world (object) is always mediated by culturally-developed artifacts. The subject, object, and artifacts affect each other, and together they determine the activity which will produce a particular outcome, a transformation of an aspect of the world (Grimalt-Alvaro & Ametller, 2021). This theory asserts that, to effect change in the outcome, there must be some effects on the object, subject, and the artifacts. This theory gave an opportunity to analyze the subjects, objects, and the artifacts before the introduction of inclusive education and after the introduction of inclusive education. The third generation of this theory further considers the community as part the circle which affects the transformational outcome. In this research, the community is involved in the implementation of inclusive education in Eswatini.

This theory was relevant to the study as it provided the capacity to evaluate the critical areas for inclusive education. Inclusive education stood to be a transformational outcome. This theory held the capacity to evaluate the effects that were expected to be introduced on the object, subject, community, and artifacts to the successful transformational outcome. This theory further provided a room to pin-point the gaps on the provision for effective implementation of inclusive education to improve its practicality. It also provided a foundation for evaluating the balance on the provision of the requirements for inclusive education.

2.2. Readiness for Inclusive Education

Finding ways to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities can be challenging, especially in countries with severely limited resources (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). Despite challenges most African countries face, they are doing at least something towards provision of quality education for all. According to the Global Disability Summit (2021), several global developments have been endorsed and ratified by most African countries, such as the education for all campaign measures to implement inclusive education.

Shifts towards inclusive education have been inspired by international protocols on human rights and universal recognition that all children have a right to equal access and quality education (UNICEF Eswatini, 2019). Now, more emphasis is made on integrating students with special needs into public schools through creating special classes for them attached to the mainstream schools. However, inclusive education requires appropriate resources, including specialized instructional materials, cheap writing services, and support personnel (Cox, 2023). To effectively meet the needs of students with disabilities, educators frequently need specialized training and ongoing professional development.

Inclusive school reform in Eswatini is situated within the context of a comprehensive larger school change effort that promises to improve educational outcomes for all learners while providing the necessary support to allow general classrooms to be changed to accommodate a diverse range of learners (Nxumalo, 2020). According to Fadilah et al. (2022), inclusive education that has been implemented to date is still facing various challenges, such as the lack of understanding in some communities about inclusive education, the knowledge and skills of teachers who have not met in providing services to children with special needs, and infrastructure that does not support and facilitate access for children with special needs. Poor task persistence is a major inhibitor of effective learning among disabled students especially those with hearing impairment (Onyishi, 2023). Furthermore, societal attitude towards people living with disabilities, resistant response of the government, inadequate infrastructure, poor funding, and a host of other reasons are the key factors frustrating the implementation of inclusive education, causing the low level of inclusiveness in the developing nations (Sijuola & Davidova, 2022).

According to UNESCO, Eswatini National Education and Training Improvement Programme opts for a gradual implementation of universal mainstreaming, starting with a pilot phase in some schools within each region, since infrastructures, teacher capacity and

curriculum approach still need to be adequately prepared. There is a gap in the implementation of inclusive education in Eswatini, particularly at the mainstream secondary school level due to the absence of an endorsed policy document which should serve as a yardstick in the implementation of inclusive education (Phiri, 2022). According to Madlela (2022), most higher learning institutions have not made much progress in implementing inclusive education. It was disclosed that the government failed to provide institutions with adequate funding and monitoring of the implementation of inclusive education. Institutions' buildings, landscapes, sports fields, and course materials were not designed for students with special needs (Madlela, 2022).

2.3. Measures to Implement Inclusive Education

Successful implementation of inclusive education requires school transformation and system change (Schuelka, 2018). To build equitable and inclusive education systems, analyzing policy issues regarding governance arrangements, resourcing schemes, capacity building, school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation is key (Brussino et al., 2021). Responsible stakeholders are supposed to be ready to put in place a system that will support inclusive education. In support of quality inclusive education, the Future Learn (2021) cites some of the most important aspects on inclusive education which include progressive teacher training and adapted curriculum. Provision of inclusive education requires a fine art specially to deal with the diverse groups. Hence, teacher learning should be an ongoing process; this requires a well-organized system to carry the responsibility. This could be made possible through striving to improve education quality by recommending educators take further higher level studies (Herahap et al., 2020).

The first step in inclusive education implementation is to help schools understand their own challenges, assets, and resources (Schuelka, 2018). Many school systems in developing countries do not have enough financial capita, resources, and teachers trained in special education to properly assimilate disabled children into the mainstream system (Price, 2018). According to Nxumalo (2023), initiatives to build an inclusive education system and mitigate gaps include strengthening institutional arrangements to be able to meet policy demands, capacity building problems, and the provision of assistive devices, such as curricula and assessment. Fadilah et al. (2022) highlight that government needs to provide detailed and

adequate support through the capacity of policy implementers, adequate infrastructure, and improvement of teacher's knowledge and skills.

Measures to implement inclusive education would effect change at almost all levels of society. The UNICEF (2023) identifies three levels where change should take place, that is, school level, community level, and national level. "At the school level, teachers must be trained, buildings must be refurbished, and students must receive accessible learning materials. At the community level, stigma and discrimination must be tackled and individuals need to be educated on the benefit of inclusive education. At the national level, governments must align laws and policies with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and regularly collect and analyses data to ensure children are reached with effective services".

3. Research Methods

The study employed the transformative research paradigm. Transformative researchers generally use both qualitative and quantitative techniques to better understand the disparities in community relationships, support social justice, and ultimately ensure transformative change (Ulz, 2023). In this study, a qualitative design was found most appropriate as it considers attitudes, personal experiences, and personal views and ideas of the participants to achieve its purpose (Rahman, 2020). A qualitative approach enables researchers to get deeper insights, feelings, perceptions, and understanding of their participants. On the other hand, this study also employed participatory approach; it helps the researchers and participants to collaborate in order to understand a certain situation and change it for the better (Onwezen, 2021). Authorization to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Education while all participants signed consent forms before they participated in the study.

Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants, which included regional education inspectors, head teachers, and primary school teachers. The study used semi-structured one-on-one interview guides to five head teachers and two regional education inspectors as participants. Each group was given different interview guide. On the other hand, two separate focus group interviews were conducted with eight teachers as participants from each region. For balanced views, gender parity was observed while considering the knowledge of the participants on inclusive education.

4. Results

This section presents the results of the study. Thematic approach was used in the presentation of the findings while content analysis was used in analysing the data. In collecting the data, a total of twenty-three participants were involved as participants. This included a total of sixteen teachers who were accommodated into two focus groups with code FG1 from the Manzini region and code FG2 representing teachers from schools in the Hhohho region. For more convenience, each teacher was given a code PT1-PT8 in FG1, and PT9-PT16 in FG2. Further, the study included five head teachers with codes HT1-HT5 fairly distributed from each region, and two regional education inspectors with codes RI1-RI2, one from each region. Gender balance was observed in selecting the participant with twelve females to eleven males.

4.1. Eswatini Primary Schools Readiness for Inclusive Education

The data generated revealed that Swazi primary schools are not read to implement inclusive education. Participants cited several challenges. Some of the challenges included restrictive environment on learners on wheelchairs and the blind, inadequately trained teachers, lack of assistive technology, no resource centres for professionals like educational psychologists, teachers are not adequately trained to handle learners with disabilities, special needs children come to school without assessment reports, most teachers have phobia in dealing with learners with special needs, teachers still say negative things about learners with disabilities, learners, parents and teachers have negative attitudes towards learners with disabilities, teachers lack passion to nurse a child with disabilities and classes are too big for teachers to accommodate learners with special needs.

Restrictive environment. All the participants cited the restrictive environment for the learners on wheelchairs and those who are blind.

> *The school environment is restrictive. Most of our classrooms are still having steps, instead of ramps. This restricts the movement of children on wheelchairs. For those who are blind there are no rails. This makes our school unsuitable for an inclusive set up.* FG1
>
> *Infrastructure is still restrictive, no ramps, the school is still having steps. Toilets are not accommodating children on wheelchairs.* HT1

In terms of the infrastructure, most primary schools have not yet changed their environments to accommodate special needs children. Participants blamed this on poor funding

of primary schools by the government. One inspector who participated in the study, however, felt that schools are ready. He said,

> *Schools are being renovated to create an enabling environment. The country has two model schools with good inclusive infrastructure and personnel. Its work in progress.* RI1

Inadequately trained teachers. All the participants were not happy with the training the teachers had to handle learners with special needs. They agreed that those who recently qualified had an opportunity to learn about inclusive education, but they felt that it was not enough. Some of the participants had this to say,

> *In as much as these teachers learnt a module on inclusive education, I feel it is not good enough. I feel teacher training colleges should introduce more modules to cover concepts like sign language and braille. Doing some of these activities while training can assist.* HT1
>
> *To be honest with you, no one in our school can use sign language and braille. I feel we are wasting time for these learners. Lack of knowledge makes us develop negative attitudes towards these learners.* FG1

Poor funding. Another stumbling block hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education was lack of funding to buy necessary resources for inclusive education.

> *The money given to schools is not enough to cover cost required by the schools to make them inclusive. We feel the government was too quick to introduce inclusive education. The government should have introduced it gradual targeting selected schools.* HT3
>
> *Schools lack funding making it difficult for them to properly offer inclusive education. Primary education is funded by the government but doesn't support learners with special needs.* RI1

Lack of assistive technology. From the data generated, the participants cited that some children have no assistive technology to help them in the learning process which poses a big challenge towards inclusive learning. They relayed as follows,

> *Unavailability of assistive devices for learners is also another factor in our primary schools. Our schools lack assistive devices like braille machines, talking calculators, hearing aids…* HT4 FG1

> *Some schools have assistive devices, but they are not enough to meet the needs of all learners. The other challenge even if these devices are there, teachers lack knowledge on how to use them.* RI1

Lack of resource centres in schools. In a normal inclusive school, there must be a resource centre, well equipped and well-staffed with specialists like teachers who can interpret braille, knowledge of sign language, educational psychologists, doctors, nurses, and physiotherapists. In most schools, such centres are not available. Specialists are totally absent.

> *There is no resource centre for professionals like educational psychologists etc…. Special needs children just come to school without being assessed. There are no specialists in the school like EPs, Physiotherapists, nurses, and doctors. Teachers have phobia in dealing with learners with disabilities especially those that are severe.* HT2

Classes are too big for teachers to accommodate learners with special needs. The other challenge raised by the participants hindering effective implementation of inclusive education is big classes. In one school, teacher pupil ratio was 1:80. They wondered how a teacher can accommodate these special needs children. Autistic children were cited as causing disorder in class.

> *Sir I really feel sorry for these teachers. They are expected to handle autistic children with these large classes. Teacher-pupil ratio must be reasonable, at least not more than 45.* HT2
>
> *It is draining to think of teaching learners more than 60 with these special needs children. The government must do something we are suffocating.* FGD 2

Small number of inspectors for special needs children. The number of inspectors for special needs is worrying. They cited it as the reason why they are failing to visit the schools regularly.

> *We wish we can visit schools regularly but unfortunate we are understaffed. Increasing the number of Inspectors to at least four per region can assist to solve this problem. Transport is also a problem.* RI1, RI2
>
> *Inspectors rarely visit our schools. Maybe it is because they are few.* HT4
>
> *As far as I see it is not practical for Swazi primary schools to offer inclusive education. There is still a lot that needs to be done for primary schools to offer*

> *inclusive education. Inclusive education is making it difficult for us to run schools. It is traumatic.* HT1
>
> *It is practical with limitations that can be addressed. These can be systematically addressed. At cluster level we have schools that are already doing well. Therefore, I can say it is not easy but not impossible.* RI1

The excerpts from the participants revealed presumptive notions on the practicality of inclusive education. Teachers and head teachers felt that it is not practical. However, the inspectors who participated in the study felt that it is possible though difficult. They have the hope that if certain issues can be resolved inclusive education is practical in Swazi primary schools. They cited two satellite inclusive schools in the country that are doing well. They even said some are doing well despite the circumstances.

4.2. Suggested Solutions to Effectively Implement Inclusive Education

The participants suggested the improvement of infrastructure, provision of assistive devices, increasing support and leadership towards inclusive education, the improvement of teacher training, and the development of more cluster schools.

Improvement of infrastructure. Based on the data, majority of the participants recommended the improvement of infrastructure in primary schools to accommodate children with disabilities. On their recommendation for infrastructure, they expressed as follows,

> *As teachers we would recommend that government should play a major role in inclusive education. Yes, government has introduced inclusive education lessons at tertiary level, but this is not helping. Government should therefore review this by improving the infrastructure in schools for example building ramps for wheelchairs.* FG1
>
> *Invest in modifying our infrastructures in our primary schools. Currently, these children with disabilities are facing lot of challenges in our schools and they lack the sense of belonging simply because they are not accommodated by the environment we currently have.* FG2

Provision of assistive devices. Provision of assistive devices was another measure recommended to promote the implementation of inclusive education. They were quoted as follows;

> *The government should focus on provision of assistive devices and teaching us on how to use them. This could make the learning and teaching process easy. The learning can improve if learners can be assisted with these assistive devises since most parents cannot afford to buy them.* FG2

Strengthening support and leadership. The participants further recommended the strengthening of support and leadership as a measure to promote inclusive education. This was intended to make a special focus into inclusive education and promote consistent follow-ups and monitoring. They argued that the success of programme lies with the leadership.

> *The government should strengthen the monitoring unit by hiring more special needs inspectors at least 4 per region focusing on different disabilities. Leadership is key to success of inclusion. Head teachers need to be capacitated on leadership for inclusive teaching and learning. Increasing family support for those with children with disabilities (e.g. money for transport, assessment, and intervention fees).* RI1
>
> *Increasing funding to support inclusion. Strengthening collaboration within ministries. Increasing funding for assistive technology. ICT ministry must be robbed in to assist in this regard. The government need to change policies to accommodate people with disabilities.* RI2

Improving teacher training. The participants made further recommendations for bettering teacher preparation based on the data produced. This proposal was made in reaction to the belief that educators lack the necessary expertise to deliver inclusive education.

> *Improving teacher training programmes by adding more courses that address with special needs and extending the amount of time of teaching practice. I also suggest that during teaching practice student teachers should be exposed to children with special needs. They should not meet them when they have qualified.* HT1 RI1

Establishing model cluster schools. Participants suggested setting up a model inclusive schools in each cluster. Ministries were encouraged to collaborate to build schools.

> *Government should at least select a few schools and develop them into proper inclusive schools.* HT3
>
> *At cluster level we have schools that are already doing well. Therefore, I can say it is not easy but not impossible. I can recommend increasing the number of model inclusive schools at cluster level.* RI2

The participants stress that the government of Eswatini need to inject more money into the schools so that inclusive education can be practical.

5. Discussion

5.1 Readiness for Inclusive Education

Based on the data generated from the participants, it is evident that Eswatini primary schools are not ready to implement inclusive education because of the crucial challenges cited. These challenges included the lack of proper infrastructure, lack of teacher training, lack of financial resource, lack of assistive devices, and the shortage of specialised personnel. Similar results were highlighted Madlela (2022) in the tertiary level citing the government's lack of support to institutions through enough resources, and lack of monitoring the implementation of inclusive education. Many school systems in developing countries do not have enough financial capita, resources, and teachers trained in special education to properly assimilate disabled children into the mainstream system (Price, 2018). Similarly, the challenges mentioned by Cox (2023) including lack of resources, and teacher preparation and training are the same challenges identified in this study. The results also align with Sijuola and Davidova (2022) citing government's response, inadequate infrastructure, and poor funding. Hence, it was relatively clear that financial shortcomings and physical resources are the main reasons for the ineffective implementation of inclusive education.

The results also indicated that the country was at least on the positive side when it comes to meeting some of the required criteria for inclusive education. The participants praised the government for coming up with policies on inclusive education. This is one requirement for inclusive education as stated by UNESCO (2023). It is expected of nations to establish an inclusive learning environment, which includes developing policies through an inclusive lens (UNESCO, 2023) although Fadilah et al. (2022) identified shortcomings on the knowledge and skills of teachers in providing services to children with special needs, and infrastructure that

does not support and facilitate access for children with special needs. Although the policy is in place, the results of the study undeniably point out shortcomings on its implementation and the necessary support for the proper implementation. Overall, majority of these challenges are related to the lack of resources since schools also depend on donations and government subsidies.

Based on the CHAT theory, the results indicated gaps on the three principles of the theory, which are the subject, object, and the artifacts. The subject, which are the providers of inclusive education such as the teachers and the government as a major supporter, the theory exposed gaps on the capacity and skills of the teachers and the government's need to improve its support towards inclusive education. The object, which is offering inclusive education, the theory exposed lack of practicality based of the current condition and status of primary schools. While the provision for the required resources for inclusive education is still lacking, one cannot change the object and fail to change the subjects and the artifacts. According to the theory, there is a need for systematic changes to improve the practicality of inclusive education in primary schools of Eswatini.

5.2. Suggested Solutions to Effectively Implement Inclusive Education

Participants suggested the adoption of systems thinking approach for inclusive education (bringing all stakeholders on board). This is in line with the SDG 4, which recognizes the urgent need to provide equitable and inclusive quality education for all, as it calls for government to step up efforts to achieve inclusion in education with special emphasis on marginalized groups (UNESCO, 2024). Participants further recommended improvement of infrastructure, provision of assistive devices, increase financial support towards inclusive education, improvement of teacher training, establish assessment structures for early identification of disability, strengthen leadership and monitor unit in the ministry of education and training. Considering the number of measures which were recommended by the participants, Schuelka (2018) argue that for inclusive education to be implemented successfully, schools must be transformed, and systems must shift.

The recommendations generated from the study were consistent with the findings of Fadilah et al. (2022) emanating from the government's task to provide detailed and adequate support not only on policy formulation but also capacity building and resource generation. Similarly, Herahap et al. (2020) recommend improving education quality by letting teachers

take further higher level studies. At the onset, the recommendation of UNICEF (2023) at the school level, teachers need to be given proper capacity building programmes. To build equitable and inclusive education systems, analyzing policy issues regarding governance arrangements, resourcing schemes, capacity building, school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation is key (Brussino et al., 2021). At the national level, governments must align laws and policies with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and regularly collect and analyse data to ensure children are reached with effective services. The results of the study indicated that changes were needed to be applied at all levels from school level up to ministerial level to improve the practicality of inclusive education in the country. Policy strengthening, formation and implementation of new supporting frameworks for effective inclusive education is mandatory.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that Eswatini primary schools are not ready to implement inclusive education due to several challenges identified by the participants. The schools still have restrictive environments with unwelcoming attitudes of teachers, parents and learners towards children with special needs. Similarly, given the current situation in the schools, this study concludes that special needs children are not getting the maximum benefits from the mainstream schools. Hence, this study recommends the government make a deliberate effort to assist all primary schools by providing the necessary funds to implement necessary changes. To address the issue in the long-run, teacher training institutions should accommodate in their programmes the provisions on special needs education while the government considers introducing inclusive education in one school satellite school per cluster. The Ministry of Education and Training through its inspectorate is encouraged to introduce community education programmes to change the attitudes of community members towards children with disabilities.

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