Exploring the understanding of enabling environment for Learners with Special Educational Needs in rural primary schools in Lesotho

Mathabo Lebona
Unity English School, Lesotho
Corresponding author: lelecha.lebona@gmail.com

 Abstract—This study focused on understanding how to enhance learners with special educational needs in rural primary schools in Lesotho. It employed the qualitative case study within an interpretative research paradigm. Data were collected through focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Thirteen participants were purposively selected from two rural primary schools (School A and School B). School A consisted of seven participants. School B comprised six participants and two from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in the Special Education Unit (SEU), all in all, fifteen participants contributed to this study. The participants were chosen as those with three years or more in teaching LSEN and specialists in special education. The participants comprised two males and thirteen females aged between 30 and 62. The findings suggested that participants understood the enabling environment for LSENs in rural primary schools in Lesotho. These could be explained by a safe, comfortable, healthy, inclusive setting for playing activities, developing learners' self-confidence and self-esteem, quality education, user-friendly, barrier-free, supportive, and conducive environments where quality education is provided to all learners, regardless of their differences Therefore, the study helps in identifying the challenges that learners with SEN in rural areas face and how these challenges can be addressed.

Keywords: Enabling learning environment, Inclusive Education, Learners with Special Educational Needs, Rural schools
_____

I. INTRODUCTION

EXTENDING access to education is part of a worldwide agenda (Farooq, 2012). The history of special education is identified with learners with disabilities who had been poorly served (Kauffman, Kauffman, Anastasiou, Badar, Jason, & Andrew, 2016). The reviewed literature depicts the inappropriate treatment of learners with disabilities in special classrooms, and appropriate education only occurs in general education classrooms (Kauffman et al., 2016; Khanare, 2012). Traditionally, children with disabilities were not included in the school system; they were kept indoors, and ultimately, they were socially excluded from formal education, depriving them of their social and economic freedom (Matlosa & Matobo, 2007; De Leeuw, De Boer & Minnaert, 2017). It is important to note that ignoring these realities can undermine the meaning of disability (Kauffman et al., 2016), which is inconsistent with the laws and regulations governing special education, and this impedes the world's initiatives toward effectively educating learners with special needs (Bateman, 2017). Educational inclusion should embrace an appropriate setting where effective instruction is imparted through relevant and meaningful tasks to the learners' future (Kauffman et al., 2016).

Essentially, paradigms have been developed to embrace the integration of quality education to serve all learners' needs, thereby socially accommodating learners with special educational needs (LSEN) (Khoaeane, 2012; Mateusi, Khoaeane & Naong, 2014). Several educational, human rights, and human development policies have been promulgated by the United Nations and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to promote inclusive education (Mosia, 2014). These policies unanimously recommend incorporating learners with disabilities into mainstream schools (Mosia, 2014). The researcher asserts that this enables such learners to achieve their educational goals. Mosia (2014) argues that teachers in schools offering inclusive education should be trained to diversify their teaching approaches. Mateusi et al. (2014) emphasised the view that genuine inclusion of learners with disabilities should manifest in general education, with the support of school administrators, teachers, all staff – members, learners, parents, psychologist/social workers, school boards, education officials', community members, counsellors, local business leaders, chiefs and the government, etc.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho introduced free and compulsory elementary education for all learners from the age of six (Lesotho Education Act, 2010). The rationale for this initiative was to facilitate the integration of learners with special educational needs into the mainstream educational system. Integrating these learners into mainstream education might be interpreted as inclusive education. Tshifura (2012) asserted that inclusive education is not simply about including learners with special educational needs. Still, it also involves creating equal educational opportunities for marginalised groups with limited resources or no access to schooling. Many scholars have indicated that schools in rural areas still fail to respond adequately to the needs of children experiencing learning barriers (Khanare & de Lange, 2017).
Several challenges confront learners with special educational needs, preventing them from realising their full potential. These challenges

include poor resource allocation, infrastructural underdevelopment, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of trained teachers (Lebona, 2013). These challenges prevent the implementation of policies that appeal to all learners' physical and psychological statuses (Lebona, 2013). This situation calls for creating an enabling learning environment, which constitutes an integral component of the overall efforts made by most countries to provide quality education and increase equal access to education by all learners (Kamper, 2008). This probably vindicates Khoaeane's (2012) conclusion that implementing inclusive education in Lesotho may not achieve its predetermined goals and objectives if the conditions in providing primary education continue to deteriorate. Against this background, the researcher intends to explore the environmental challenges impeding the implementation of inclusive education in rural primary schools in Lesotho. Learners with special educational needs face challenges in different rural primary schools in Lesotho. Research has established that inappropriate learning environments, compounded by a lack of infrastructure, poor resource allocation, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of training on the part of teachers, limit the implementation of inclusive education (Mosia, 2014; Seotsanyane & Matheolane, 2010). Polat (2011) found that the unavailability of resources directly affects the emotional, behavioural, and academic achievement of learners with special educational needs. These challenges exacerbate the underachievement and school dropout rates among learners (Machakaire, 2017).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Gade (2011), Ubuntu appeared in African writing for the first time in 1846 at a conference held in Durban in 1990. As early as 1994, Nelson Mandela stressed the need for understanding rather than retaliation. He advocated for Ubuntu rather than victimization. These views encompass some of Ubuntu's distinctive characteristics and objectives. According to Bolden (2014), the origins of the concept of Ubuntu can be traced to the Bantu peoples of Southern Africa. However, the philosophy has permeated across much of the African continent. It is perhaps best understood as a social philosophy based on principles of care and commonality, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness, which express the fundamental inter-connectedness of human existence. It has been described as a philosophy of peace (Broodryk, 2006). It is perhaps the best-known guiding concept of the African Renaissance. It was spearheaded by post-colonial and post-Apartheid South African leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Thabo Mbeki, who called on Africans to re-engage with African values. Ubuntu is a Zulu/Xhosa word that parallels many other African languages. The term can be the Nguni expression 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu', which means a person is a person through other people (Bolden, 2014). This study's focus on lobbying support for learners with special educational needs is clearly in sync with this concept. Ubuntu is relevant to the study and can be used to enhance the provision of an effective strategy to implement inclusive education that supports learners with disabilities, particularly in rural primary schools in Lesotho. Finally, Ubuntu Theory is positioned in this study to influence the development of rural schools in line with inclusive education.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore an understanding of an enabling environment for Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSENs) in rural primary schools in Lesotho. This study was guided by the following research question: How could an enabling environment for LSENs be understood in rural primary schools in Lesotho?

IV. METHODS

Research approach
This study adopted a qualitative approach, which is located within the interpretive paradigm. It employed a case study as a research design. Maree (2017) suggests that the research design involves selecting participants, determining the data-gathering methods, and specifying the data analysis process. This plan or strategy moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to the practical details of the research process. Mohlouoa (2014) describes a research design as a logical procedure or a master plan that guides light on how research should be constructed. The choice of research design is based on the researchers' ontological and epistemological perspective - research skills and practices that influence how the researcher collects data. This study is conducted using an exploratory case study. According to Maree (2017), exploratory case study is the preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are posed. One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, which enables participants to share their stories about enhancing an environment that enables LSEN in rural primary schools in Lesotho. Another important feature of case-study research is that it tends to be research–centered, often involving observation of participants and attempting to provide a holistic portrayal and understanding of the research setting (Cousin, 2005). Maree (2017) asserted that exploratory research aims to identify key issues and variables and better understand a phenomenon, a group of people, or a social setting. Exploratory research does not always depart from a fixed theoretical framework but often works towards building a new understanding. Exploratory research is conducted to gain insight into a solution, phenomenon, community, or individual (Blaikie, 2000). The need for such a study could arise from a lack of basic information on a new area of interest.

Participants
Participants were teachers purposively selected from mainstream schools who had taught LSEN for over three years. Their age ranged from 30 to 62 years old. The researcher used purposive sampling procedures to recruit participants in this study. According to Maree (2017), purposive sampling in education typically involves selecting individuals or schools to provide rich information based on a specific purpose. Creswell (2014) further highlighted that participants are deliberately chosen in purposive sampling because of their relevant knowledge. A sample is a process of selecting a subject from a larger population (Maphoke, 2017). Two primary schools and two Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) officials were purposively selected. Since the MoET introduced Free Primary and compulsory education in schools in 2,000, the government has expected that every child, irrespective of disability, should attend school and have at least basic education (Lesotho Education Act, 2010). Therefore, the study's research sample comprises fifteen participants: six teachers, one principal from School A, five teachers, one principal from School B, and two officials from the Ministry of Education and Training. Since sampling should meet specific criteria, the two schools were selected on the following bases: All participants were chosen purposively, including teachers from the mainstream schools who taught LSEN for over three years. Teachers were chosen because they have been trained in special education and have taught in rural primary schools for over three years' experience teaching LSEN from grades 1 to 6.

Instruments
This study collected qualitative data through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in two rural schools in Lesotho. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2018), FGDs referred to carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. Furthermore, data are collected through group interaction on a topic predetermined to create a tolerant environment that may encourage participants to share their perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes, and concerns without pressurizing participants to vote or reach a consensus (De Vos et al., 2017; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Two FGDs were involved in this study: Focus Group Discussions 1 (FGDs 1, School A) and Focus Group Discussions 2 (FGDs 2, School B). Participants were required to answer questions related to enhancing an enabling

environment for LSEN in rural primary schools in Lesotho. The FGDs were scheduled from 45-60 minutes, and discussions were taped audio records with the participants' permission. The FGDS were conducted freely, openly, and relaxed, allowing participants to express themselves naturally in the discussions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as an additional data collection method alongside the FGDs to understand better each participant's beliefs and perceptions of the study. This method of data collection gave the researcher and participants much more flexibility. The researcher can follow up on interesting avenues in the interview, and the participant can provide a fuller picture (De Vos et al., 2018).

Procedure

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of the Free State. Before conducting the research in Maseru, Lesotho, permission was sought from both the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and the selected school principals. Approval from the Ministry and Training (Special Education Unit) and rural primary schools had been granted to conduct this study in Maseru District in Lesotho. Written individual consent forms were signed by participants, ensuring their participation in the study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The participants were informed about voluntary participation and had the right and freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to do so. The discussions were taped and recorded with participants' agreements.

Data analysis

This study used Thematic Analysis to analyze the qualitative data. Nowell, Narris, White, and Moules (2017) referred to thematic analysis as a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning, coding, and classifying data. This analysis was deemed suitable as it allowed the researcher to collect data on social reality while also aligning with the research questions and aims of the study. The researcher followed steps toward coherently presenting the study's findings to ensure clarity. These were cleaning data, transcribing from the audio–recorder, solving data, coding, analyzing, and interpreting data. Transcripts, conversations, and audio tapes were studied in detail to gain a sense of subtle non-verbal communication or to understand the interaction in its natural context (De Vos et al., 2017). The developed patterns and themes were used to report the participants' experiences. The participants' anonymity was protected by using pseudonyms to present the results.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's data revealed that safety, comfort, health, and inclusivity within the learning environment are essential elements that enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs. This was based on an overview of one theme named.

Understanding an enabling environment for LSEN
Safety

The participants' transcripts in focus group discussions revealed that safety within the learning environment is the necessary element that helps enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs. Participants recognised that a safe and comfortable space contributes to the holistic development of all learners and ensures the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of learners with disabilities. One participant from FGD B states this:

"An enabling environment is a safe……. It is welcoming and user friendly to every learner" (FGD B, Participant 2).

Establishing a safe learning environment upfront is extremely important. A teacher should be able to create the best or worst memories of learning and shape the learner's direction in formal and informal learning opportunities. Similarly, schools are essential settings for development. The extract of one participant from FGD A added this:

"This is a place where every learner learns without obstacles that hinder the person's learning environment and ensures that the learner is free from any form of discrimination in accessing education" (FGD A, Participant 4).

Thamane (2014) affirmed that Schools are essential settings for development. Therefore, effective schools create solid conditions for learning. Schools should be an environment where learners feel physically and emotionally safe, connected to, and supported by their teachers and the school community (Osher et al., 2014). This statement aligns with the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (MoET, 2018). MoET (2018) has made provisions for free and compulsory primary education for all in a conducive and non-discriminatory environment that results in a healthy learning atmosphere.

Comfortable

The participants' transcripts in FGDs revealed that comfort within the learning environment is the necessary element that helps enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs.

"An enabling environment is a comfortable place….." (FGA, Participant 1).

Healthy

The participants' transcripts in focus group discussions revealed that health and inclusivity within the learning environment are the necessary elements that help enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs. The extract of one participant from FGD A clarifies this:

"For the importance of a healthy environment, each learner should be catered for holistically. For instance, all learners should receive learning that develops them psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically" (FGD A, Participant 4).

Another participant from the group states this:

"An enabling and healthy environment motivates all learners. Praises and feedback are significant because they encourage LSENs' self-esteem and increase their self-confidence to participate in the classroom" (FGD A, Participant 1).

The findings show the importance of a healthy enabling environment for LSENs, such as having equal education that benefits all to reach their potential.

Setting for playing activities

The participants declared that an enabling environment should be a place that allows for the implementation of an established set of rules related to playtime activities for learners with special educational needs. Two participants from these FGDs illustrated this point as follows:

"An enabling environment is a barrier-free space for everyone in the learning place. Therefore, teachers need to establish discipline and rules that govern conduct during lessons in the classroom situation and during playtime" (FGD A, Participant 6).

"The teacher-learner ratio should be appropriate to allow the teacher to help individual learners appropriately. There should be enough space for the teacher to move freely to adequately attend to every learner, including learners with special educational needs" (FGD B, Participant 3).

The participants declared that an enabling environment should be a place that allows for the implementation of an established set of rules related to playtime activities for learners with special educational needs. Chidindi (2012) pointed out that creating an enabling learning environment is the foundation of the transformation process because individuals are inspired and encouraged. An enabling environment is a place that develops learners in terms of their intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing.

"Each learner should be catered to holistically; for instance, all learners who receive teaching should develop them psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. The learning environment should be friendly to all learners" (FGA, Participant 4).

This highlighted that an enabling environment should be understood as providing equal and quality EFA. This aligns with Landsberg Kruger and Swart's (2011) assertion that an enabling environment promotes quality EFA.

Boosting learners' self-esteem

"*An enabling environment motivates all learners. Praises and feedback motivate and boost learners' self-esteem and increase their confidence to contribute in class*" (FGD A, Participant 4).

The participants clearly understood what constitutes an enabling environment, as they described it as a place where LSENs feel at home, at peace, and where they enjoy the same privileges as their nondisabled counterparts. Chidindi (2012) pointed out that creating an enabling learning environment is the foundation of educational transformation because individuals are inspired and encouraged.

Increasing self-confidence

Based on the responses cited above, it is evident that the participants had a clear understanding of what constitutes an enabling environment. They described it as a place where learners with special educational needs feel comfortable, peaceful, and free from discrimination. Chidindi (2012) pointed out that creating an enabling learning environment is the foundation of educational transformation because individuals are inspired and encouraged. Participants in the following utterances further reveal this:

"*An enabling environment is a place free of all learning obstacles. It is a learning situation in which everybody involved is free*" (FGD A, Participant 3).

Participant 3 further pointed out that:

"*All parties involved – teachers, parents, and authorities should work towards uprooting intolerance to create a humane environment*" (Participant 3).

It is clearly understood that an enabling environment is essential since it helps to know the learners' strengths, which helps them build their self-esteem. Parents are key to supporting teachers and learners because they know their children best. According to Gavalda and Qinyi (2012), parental involvement has not been identified as a benefit to improving the learner's academic work but also providing parents with a sense of ownership and satisfaction in implementing inclusive education.

Inclusivity for all learners

The transcripts from participants who engaged in focus group discussions revealed that inclusivity within the learning environment is a necessary element that helps to enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs. They mentioned that it should be a place where LSEN is treated equally, enjoying the same privileges as their nondisabled counterparts. The statements of three participants could illustrate these: the extracts from three participants said these:

"*An inclusive environment is friendly and barrier-free, a place where every learner studies without any disturbance hindering his/her learning progress*" (Participant 1).

"*Learners should be treated equally. There should be no discrimination. When learners with disabilities have done wrong, they should be treated the same way as other learners without disabilities. The same measures should be applied to the learner without recognising their disabilities. For instance, when extra-mural activities occur, every learner should participate irrespective of their disability*" (FGD B, Participant 5).

Another participant from FGD B outlined:

"*Learners with special educational needs should be educated with their counterparts without disabilities since they are like other children and equally can learn. They should not be discriminated against by their peers without disabilities, who should have a humane approach to LSEN. The values of Ubuntu should be inculcated in them by teachers and parents*" (FGD B, Participant 1).

Literature reported that inclusive education has gained importance in recent years, and its understanding increased, and reform acknowledging and supporting diversity amongst all learners (Education Act, 2010; MoET, 2018). This also reflects the Government's commitment to providing equal, quality, and relevant education for all citizens of Lesotho as guided by the protocols and conversions in primary education (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2015; Mosia, 2014).

Responses from participants in the FGDs indicated that quality education for all learners could contribute to creating an enabling environment for learners with special educational needs in rural primary schools. Participants highlighted that an enabling environment should be understood as a place providing quality education for all. The extract from one participant stated this:

"*Learners with Special Educational needs also deserve quality education to achieve their dreams*" (Participant 1).

This is in line with the assertion by Landsberg, Kruger, and Swart (2011) that an enabling environment promotes quality education for all by enforcing established rules, regulations, procedures, and existing conditions to provide and facilitate the smooth and continuous inclusion of all citizens and civil society organisations in the process of policy formulation and the development of all learners irrespective of their disabilities.

User-friendly and barrier-free Environment

Participants' responses from FGDs reported that being user-friendly and barrier-free should be comprehended as a component of an enabling environment at rural primary schools, which helped learning and teaching for all, including the LSENs' surroundings. Two participants illustrated these:

"*There is a need to have a user-friendly, safe, and inclusive environment that enables learning in all aspects of education, including the surroundings of the learners with special educational needs*" (FGD B, Participant O3).

"*The environment is free of learning obstacles, and every learner can move at their own pace. In the end, that particular learner can acquire knowledge according to the goals of both the learner and the teacher. This is where different learners' needs in an inclusive class are catered for and met*" (FGD B, Participant O1).

"*An enabling environment is tailor-made to suit every learner in the teaching and learning environment. It is inclusive, welcoming, and safe*"(FGD B, Participant O3).

One of the elements of an inclusive, user-friendly, and barrier-free environment that aligns with the teachers' roles and responsibilities in mainstream schools is creating inclusive–friendly classrooms and providing care and support to all learners (Winter & O'Raw, 2010).

Supportive

The participants' responses in the FGDs suggest that support could create an enabling environment, leading to a productive learning atmosphere where all learners can learn happily, freely, and in a conducive environment with quality education. Participants mentioned that LSENs learn and develop best in a caring and supportive environment that could respond to their needs. This should recognise the LSENs' strengths and weaknesses to provide appropriate support. The extract of one participant declared this:

"*An enabling environment supports and extends children's development and learning. It is characterised by caring and support, which ensure physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social development*" (Participant O2).

Another participant further said the following:

"*An enabling environment ensures access to quality education; promotes equal involvement and the participation of learners with disabilities within the learning environment in the society and promotes the relaxation and cooperation within the school and the community*" (Participant O2).

Similarly, participant 6 from FGD A supported those mentioned above. However, all learners with disabilities and without disabilities have the right to learn and develop in a structured and supportive environment (Department of Education [DOE], 2001). Education Act (2010) posited that learners are provided with opportunities and facilities to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy, normal manner and the conditions of freedom and dignity.

Conducive

The participants expressed their understanding of their view of an enabling environment. These participants perceived an enabling environment as a place where learners learn successfully, freely, and happily. The extracts of two participants state this:

"*An enabling environment is conducive, and it helps develop and support education. It is a learning place where all learners learn successfully to suit their needs*" (Participant O3).

"*The teaching and learning activities allow learners to enjoy the school environment. It should be enabled for every learner without any obstacles. The environment should be free, happy, useful, inclusive, bully-free, and disciplined. People should treat everyone with respect and dignity*" (Participant O1).

These findings align with previous studies that reported an enabling learning environment is free from physical intimidation and emotional anger (Chidindi, 2012; Hornby, 2015; MoET, 2018). Education Act (2010) stipulates that learners are provided with opportunities and facilities to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and normal manner and the conditions of freedom and dignity.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study focused on understanding an enabling environment for learners with special educational needs in rural primary schools in Lesotho. The findings revealed that safety, comfort, health, and inclusivity within the learning atmosphere enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with disabilities. The findings suggest that comfort is linked to the physical environment, which plays a role in the holistic development of all learners while ensuring the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of learners with disabilities. The study revealed that health and inclusivity within the learning environment are the necessary elements that help to enhance an enabling learning and teaching environment for all learners, including those with special educational needs. Inclusion in general education is beneficial for all students. It is when an enabling environment allows productive learning, where all learners learn happily in a free, conducive, and healthy environment. It ensures quality education and equal involvement of all learners. Setting for player activities: The study revealed that playing together as a team of learners brings up a holistic approach to an enabling environment for everyone. An enabling environment is understood as providing equal and quality EFA. Developing learners' self-confidence: Providing a user-friendly environment in rural primary schools in Lesotho, with relevant resources available to each learner, can benefit all learners. This can help each individual achieve their potential and build positive self-esteem. The study revealed that there is a need for Special Education teachers for them to fill the gap. Self-esteem tops the list to enhance learners' learning styles. Self-esteem plays a major role as an enabling environment. It is essential since it helps to know their strengths, which helps them to build their self-esteem, and parents are the key role players in supporting teachers and learners because they know the life history of their children. The participants' responses highlighted that an enabling environment should be understood as providing equal and quality EFA and enabling an environment that promotes EFA by enforcing established rules, regulations, procedures, and existing conditions to facilitate the smooth and continuous inclusion of all citizens. Quality education further refers to when disadvantaged learners with barriers to education are equally considered in education and ensures quality and equal involvement to all learners. In the education sector, a user-friendly environment should enable learning in all aspects of education. The study revealed that the learners should be provided with opportunities and facilities to develop holistically in conditions of freedom and dignity while working as a team with their counterparts in the mainstream, parents, government, and community support. The discovery has been made that when there is a conducive environment for all learners, learners learn happily in a free, enabling, and healthy environment. Participants recognized that a safe and comfortable space contributes to the holistic development of all learners and ensures the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of all learners with disabilities. They indicated that an enabling environment should be a place for implementing established rules related to playtime activities for Learners with Special Educational Needs, particularly in rural primary schools. The findings attest to productive learning, where all learners can learn happily in a healthy, free, and conducive environment. The findings further indicate that all learners' equal access to quality education should be considered as a factor that constitutes an understanding of an enabling environment for learners with special educational needs. Some participants emphasized that an enabling environment should be a non-discriminatory scope (MoET, 2018) where teachers' workloads are sustainable and further revealed that an enabling learning environment should be understood as that which promotes equal and quality education for all by enforcing established rules, regulations, procedures and existing conditions that should provide and facilitate the smooth and continuous inclusion of all citizens and civil society organisations in the procedures and existing conditions that should provide and facilitate the smooth and continuous inclusion of all citizens; and civil society organisations in the process of policy creation and development for all learners irrespective of their disabilities. The findings further demonstrate that an enabling environment allows for productive learning. It ensures the quality and equal involvement of all learners. Mateusi et al. (2014) argue that inclusive schooling involves the development of a classroom that caters to all children. Inclusive education is when disadvantaged learners with learning barriers are considered equal in education along with other learners (Mateusi et al., 2014).

The study concludes that more attention and resources must be directed toward supporting learners with special educational needs in rural primary schools in Lesotho. The study found gaps in the understanding and implementing of an enabling environment for such learners, which resulted in challenges in their education and social integration. The study emphasises the significance of teacher training, awareness-raising, and providing adequate resources to support learners with special educational needs in rural areas. The study's findings indicate that a collaborative approach between schools, parents, and relevant stakeholders could effectively address the challenges faced by learners with special educational needs in rural primary schools in Lesotho. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of providing an enabling environment for learners with special educational needs in rural areas and the need for policies and practices to be tailored to support their education and social integration. This study recommended that further studies should be explored on the experiences of parents' LSENs in rural schools and how to overcome the LSENs who experience barriers to learning. The study should further explore enhancing the needs of LSENs irrespective of their learning styles and diverse disabilities at schools.

REFERENCES

Bateman, B. D. (2017). Individual education programs for children with disabilities. In J. M. Kauffman, D. P. Hallanham & P. C. Pullen (Eds.). *Handbook of special education*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J: Prentice Hall.

Blaikie, N. (2000). *Designing social research: The logic of anticipation* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity.

Bolden, R. (2014), Ubuntu. University of Exeter Business School, UK. In C. David & B. M. Mary (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Action Research*. London: Sage Publication.

Broodryk, J. (2006). The philosophy of ubuntu: to improve business success. *Management Today, 22*(6), 20-22. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC70315.

Chidindi, J. (2012). *Quality of teaching and learning in resource quandary. The case of a University of Zimbabwe* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Oslo, Norway.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research Methods in Education* (7th ed.). London: Routledge.

Cousin, G. (2005). Case study research, *Journal of geography in higher education, 29*(3), 421-427. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098260500290967.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: A qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks. CA: Sage Publications.

De Leeuw, R., Boer, A., & Minnaert, A. (2017August). Voices and Preferred Solutions of Socially Excluded Students in Primary Schools. In ECER 2017, *European Conference on Educational Research.*

De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C. B., & Delport, C. S. L. (2018). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions* (14th ed.). Hatfield: Pretoria.

Department of Education (DOE). (2001). *Education White Paper 6. Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system.* Pretoria, South Africa: Government Printers.

Farooq, M. S. (2012). Problems faced by students with special needs in ordinary Pakistan schools. University of the Punjab, Pakistan, *Journal of Quality of Quality and Technology Management*, 3(1), 13-27. Retrieved from http://pu.edu.pk.

Gabdrakhmanova, R. G., & Guseva, T. S. (2016). Conditions of social-pedagogical maintenance of bilingual children in educational institutions, *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, *11*(14), 6373-6380. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1115701.pdf.

Gade, C. B. N. (2012). What is Ubuntu? Different interpretations among South Africans of African descent, *South African Journal of Philosophy*, *31*(3), 484-503. https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2012.10751789.

Gavalda, J. M., & Qinyi, T. (2012). Improving the process of inclusive education in children with ASD in mainstream schools. *Social Behavioural Science*, *46*, 4072-4076. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.06.200.

Kamper, G. D. (2008). A profile of effective leadership in some South African high-poverty schools, *South African Journal of Education, 28*(1), 1-18. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC32156.

Kauffman, J. M., Anastasiou, D., Badar, J., Jason C., & Andrew L. W. (2016). Inclusive Education Moving Forward. In J. P. Bakken & F. E. Obiakor (Eds). *General and Special Education Inclusion in an Age of Change: Roles of Professionals Involved* (Vol. 32, pp. 153-178). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Khanare, F. P. & de Lange, N. (2017). We are never invited: School children using collage to envision care and support in rural schools, *South African Journal of Education*, *37*(1), 1-11. http://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n1a1271.

Khanare, F. P. (2012). School children affected by HIV in rural South Africa: Schools as environments that enable or limit coping, *African Journal of Aids Research, 11*(3), 251-259. https://doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2012.734985.

Khoaeane, T. J. (2012). *Challenges facing teachers with regard to the implementation of inclusive education in the Maseru District of Lesotho* (Unpublished Master's thesis), Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein, Bloemfontein.

Landsberg, E., Krüger, D., & Swart, E. (2011). *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A South African Perspective*. Van Schaik.Publishers: Pretoria.

Lebona, T. G. (2013). *The implementation of inclusive education in primary schools in the Lejweleputswa Education District* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Central University of Technology. Bloemfontein.

Lesotho Education Act. (2010). *Lesotho Government Gazette Extraordinary*. Published by the Authority of His Majesty the King.

Maphoke, B. M. (2017). *The role of School Management teams and parents in learner achievement* (Unpublished Master's thesis). University of Pretoria, Pretoria.

Maree, K. (2017). *First steps in research* (2nd ed.). Van Schaik Publishers: Pretoria.

Mateusi, C., Khoaeane, J., & Naong, M. (2014). Challenges of inclusive education: Lesotho case study, *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, *6*(2), 263-273. https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2014.11890138.

Matlosa, L., & Matobo, T. (2007). The education system in Lesotho: Social inclusion and exclusion of visually impaired and hearing-impaired persons in the institutions of higher learning, *Review of Southern African Studies, 5*(2), 191-211. Retrieved from https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk.

Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2018). *Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy*. Printed by Morija Printing Works (Pty)Ltd.

Mohlouoa, M. M. N. (2014). *Factors influencing the dropout rate in primary schools in the Teyateyaneng region, Lesotho* (Unpublished master's thesis), University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Mosia, P. A. (2014). Threats to inclusive education in Lesotho: An overview of Policy and implementation challenges. *Africa Education Review, 11*(3), 292-310. : https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2014.934989.

Mosia, P. A. (2017). *Access to higher education for students with disabilities in Lesotho* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1–13 http://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847.

Osher D., & Kendziora, K. (2010). Building Conditions for learning and Healthy Adolescent Development; Strategic approaches. In B. Doll, W. Pfohl & J. Yoon (Eds.). *Handbook of Youth Prevention Science.* New York: Rutledge.

Polat, F. (2011). Inclusion in education: A step towards social justice, *International Journal of Educational Development*, *31*(1), 50-58. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.06.009.

Salie, M., Moletsane, M., & Mukuna, K (2020). Case-study of isiXhosa-speaking Foundation Phase learners who experience barriers to learning in an English Medium disadvantaged Western Cape school. *South African Journal of Education*, *40*(2), 1-9. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n2a1455.

Seotsanyane, M., & Matheolane R. (2010). Lesotho education systems: Prospects and problems. In C. C. Wolhuter & H. D. Herman (Eds.). *Educational reform in Southern Africa: Prospects for the new millennium.* Potchefstroom: Wolhuter. South Africa.

Thamane, M. (2014). Editorial: Schools as enabling environments. *South African Journal of Education*, *34*(4), 1-6. http://doi.org/10.15700/201412052055.

Tshifura, A. R. (2012). *Managing inclusive education in primary schools of the Tshinane Circuit in Limpopo Province* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of South Africa, Pretoria.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2015). *Monitoring Report–Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges.* Paris: United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2015). *Annual Report 2015. Highlights results achieved for and with children and young people across the full continuum of humanitarian action and development work*. Retrieved from https://policycommons.net/artifacts/421804/unicef-annual-report-2015/1392836/on15Nov2023.CID:20.500.12592/1g3z66.