



Amplifying Voices: Participatory Case Study for Learners with Visual Impairments' Inclusion in Lesotho Rural School

Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea & Fumane Portia Khanare

To cite this article: Mamochana Anacletta Ramatea & Fumane Portia Khanare (14 Jan 2026): Amplifying Voices: Participatory Case Study for Learners with Visual Impairments' Inclusion in Lesotho Rural School, International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, DOI: [10.1080/1034912X.2025.2607457](https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2025.2607457)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2025.2607457>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 14 Jan 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 92



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Amplifying Voices: Participatory Case Study for Learners with Visual Impairments' Inclusion in Lesotho Rural School

Mamochana Anacletha Ramatea ^a and Fumane Portia Khanare ^b

^aDepartment of Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education, University of Zululand, Kwazulu-Natal, KwaDlangezwa, South Africa; ^bEducational Psychology Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The effective inclusion of learners with visual impairments (LVIs) has become a crucial issue since the implementation of inclusive education policies in Lesotho. Despite the mandate for all teachers to support the inclusion of LVIs, challenges remain, leading to unmet educational needs for these learners. This article details a study that investigates the obstacles teachers face in including LVIs in a rural secondary school in Lesotho. The study, guided by principles of equity and accessibility, utilised a participatory case study approach involving ten teachers. Through focus group discussions and photovoice methods, guided by the Inclusive Special Education Theory (ISET), the study explored teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding LVIs' inclusion. Based on the perception of participating teachers, the findings indicate that inclusion efforts are hindered by gaps in Lesotho's inclusive education policy, notably the lack of specific guidance on teacher preparedness, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, there is a deficiency in understanding and effectively implementing the policy. The research suggests capitalising on teachers' resilience and integrating ISET to challenge misconceptions about rural inadequacy. By recognising and leveraging existing strengths within rural settings, the study aims to enhance the successful inclusion of all learners, with a particular focus on LVIs.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 July 2024
Accepted 20 October 2025

KEYWORDS

Equality; inclusive special education; learners with visual impairment; Lesotho rural school

Introduction

Providing equal and quality basic education to all learners has become a commonly accepted view of fundamental human rights globally (Landsberg & Kruger, 2011). Hence, Lesotho's Ministry of Education and Training (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2008) guarantees the right to basic education for all learners through the culmination of the Lesotho Education Act 3 (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2010). Section 4 of the Act reaffirms the impetus of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United, Nations [UN], 2006), which was adopted on 13 December 2006, to ensure the full inclusion of all learners, including Learners with visual impairments (LVIs).

CONTACT Fumane Portia Khanare  fkhanare@uwc.ac.za

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

The inclusion of LVIs has been a topical issue in Lesotho aimed at supporting the broader principles of inclusive philosophy as outlined by the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy [LIEP], 2018), which indicates that all learners, with and without disabilities, should be educated together. While the LIEP has clear directions and intentions towards the full inclusion of all learners, the inclusion and access of LVIs to education are often hindered by factors such as a lack of resources in rural areas and negative stereotypes towards rurality and disability (Mosia, 2019). These challenges may impede the teachers responsible for facilitating LVIs' inclusion and discourage LVIs from accessing quality education and striving to their full potential (Haidari et al., 2020).

Consistent with the goals of full inclusion as emphasised by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006), the successful inclusion of LVIs requires policies that ensure equality, equity, and access to education. Therefore, it is not surprising that managing the inclusion of LVIs and enabling their educational success feature as main objectives of the inclusive educational policy in Lesotho (Johnstone, 2017).

Lesotho's Inclusive Education Mandates and Principles

The provision of quality education for all learners, including those with visual impairments (LVIs), necessitates the involvement of all stakeholders, despite any challenges encountered (Rapp & Granados, 2021). From an individual perspective, the effective inclusion of LVIs is instrumental in achieving optimal educational outcomes and inclusive educational goals. High educational standards for all learners are typically the result of the effective implementation of inclusive education policies and practices.

To achieve its inclusive education mandates and principles, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho aligns its principles with United Nations on the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UN, 2006). This ensures that people with disabilities receive quality education without discrimination, based on the principle of equal opportunity (UN, 2006). For example, Article 24 of the CRPD mandates that all stakeholders ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and throughout life (UN, 2006). Article 24 has five goals that incorporate various, yet interconnected, aspects of inclusive education. Specifically, goals two and three emphasise that stakeholders must ensure:

Effective support measures are provided in environments that maximise the academic and social development of people with disabilities to their fullest potential (UN, 2006).

This aligns with the objectives of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP), which the MoET launched in 2018 (LIEP, 2018). This policy enshrines the right to education for all learners, including those with visual impairments in rural areas and schools, as outlined in the international framework and the Lesotho Education Act of 2010. One of the goals of LIEP is to 'introduce acceptance among learners irrespective of their diverse educational needs' (LIEP, 2018, p. 6). Additionally, the policy is based on the principle of an inclusive learning environment (MoET, 2010). Specifically, Chapter 3, Section 3.1, details the operationalisation of LIEP (2018), highlighting the different aspects of an inclusive school that emphasise an enabling teaching and learning environment.

Ensuring equal access to quality education for all learners, including LVIs in rural areas who are often marginalised, is a key focus. This study aligns with the inclusion

mandate by engaging educational stakeholders and facilitators, such as teachers, in the inclusion of LVIs. Despite the positive intentions and directives of inclusive education policies in Lesotho, the benefits of inclusive education have not yet been fully realised. For instance, the acceptance of inclusive practices has not been effectively implemented in rural schools, indicating a need for the more effective inclusion of LVIs.

Effective Inclusion of Learners with Visual Impairments in a Rural context

The Lesotho Education Act 3 (MoET, 2010) mandates that all learners, including those with visual impairments (LVIs), must have equal access to education. Efforts have been made to ensure relevant and accessible learning environments and equal educational opportunities for all learners, aiming for successful inclusion (LIEP, 2018). According to the Education Act and the Inclusive Education Policy (2018), it is crucial to minimise factors associated with the lack of resources in rural areas and the poor implementation of inclusive educational policies, as these contribute to challenges in the effective inclusion of LVIs.

Since the effective inclusion of all learners, including LVIs is considered as a solution to overcome barriers identified within the segregated educational practices identified prior to the adoption of inclusive education system (Nilholm, 2021), Francisco et al. (2020) suggest that the provision of education to LVIs should be drawn from special school practices as a designed instruction to meet their special educational needs. Isomöttönen et al. (2019) as well indicate that rural schools which enrolled LVIs should be regarded as enabling spaces where their diverse educational needs are effectively addressed. Rutherford (2015) supports this view, emphasising that the arrangement of the school learning environment must be thoughtfully considered to facilitate the successful inclusion of LVIs, enabling them to learn effectively.

Furthermore, ALSadoon (2017) asserts that enabling successful inclusion promotes learners' success and access to learning. This study, therefore, argues that while it may be impossible to eliminate the negative impacts of the inclusion of LVIs, the focus should be on diminishing these negative factors to enhance successful inclusion and achieve positive outcomes for LVIs.

Research in rural contexts has shown that teachers' preparedness, inclusive policy implementation, and institutional support are critical determinants of the effective inclusion of all learners (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019, Ramatea & Govender, 2025; Sepadi, 2025). However, despite inclusive education policy mandates in Lesotho such as the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2016–2026, the Inclusive Education Policy of 2018, and the country's commitments to the Education for All (EFA) goals and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) the practical implementation of inclusive education remains limited, particularly in rural schools.

Although these policies emphasise equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, their translation into classroom practice has been hindered by inadequate teacher preparation, insufficient learning materials, and poor infrastructure (Sepadi, 2025). As a result, many learners with special educational needs, especially those with visual impairments (LVIs) in rural areas, continue to experience limited access to tailored instruction due to inadequate

teacher training and ambiguous implementation guidelines. By situating this study within Inclusive Special Education Theory, the paper highlights the persistent gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, offering a framework for interpreting teachers' experiences, identifying barriers to inclusion, and proposing actionable strategies to enhance the inclusion of learners with visual impairments in rural schools.

Relevance of the Inclusive Special Education Framework (ISE) to Reinforce Teachers' Voices

This study is anchored in Inclusive Special Education Theory, which emphasises the rights of all learners, including those with visual impairments (LVIs), to equitable access, participation, and learning within mainstream educational settings (Hornby, 2014). The Inclusive Special Education (ISET) framework highlights the importance of adapting curriculum, teaching strategies, and learning environments to meet diverse learner needs, rather than expecting learners to conform to standard instructional practices. This framework is undeniably better equipped to achieve the objectives outlined in the inclusive education policy.

By amalgamating philosophies, policies, and practices from both inclusive and special education realms, ISET offers a cohesive vision for quality education accessible to all learners (Garcia & Toledo, 2020). Moreover, since special schools offered a range of teaching practices specifically designed for the needs of individuals with special educational needs and disabilities" (Francisco et al., 2020, p. 98) that are implemented by empowered teachers, and mainstream schools practiced inclusive education; welcome, acknowledge, value and practice acceptance of all learners by educating them together and produce a high quality education, ISET is of advantage to promote in the implementation of established inclusive educational practices through collaborative efforts between special schools and mainstream institutions.

These advantages underscore ISET's role in ensuring an effective education system that addresses the diverse needs of all learners, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities. To comprehend how the education system can effectively yield superior educational outcomes for all learners, particularly considering the vulnerabilities identified in studies regarding Learners with Visual Impairments (LVIs) within rural school environments (Nilholm, 2021; Rapp & Granados, 2021; Shareefa, 2016), it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of individual voices. Hence, this study adopts ISET, which prioritises all learners' educational needs and recognises the inclusion of all voices, with particular emphasis on the experiences and insights of teachers regarding the inclusion of LVIs.

Collaboration emerges as a fundamental element within the philosophy and practices of the inclusive special education theory (Hornby, 2014, p. 16). Effectively integrating LVIs into inclusive environments necessitates collective and collaborative support (Haidari et al., 2020). This underscores the potential of rural schools, where LVIs are often enrolled, to harness human and non-human resources along with tailored programs and strategies to meet their needs. As individuals requiring specialised attention, LVIs are deemed the collective responsibility of education practitioners and teachers as facilitators. Thus, the adoption of ISET enables a deeper exploration

and understanding of teachers' experiences and perspectives on LVIs' inclusion, particularly within the context of Lesotho's rural schools, where teachers play a pivotal role in managing the inclusion of LVIs.

Research Problem

Despite the existence of numerous international policy frameworks and guidelines advocating for inclusive education, comprising the inclusion of LVIs, research indicates that learners with disabilities in Lesotho's rural context continue to face various challenges. These challenges include difficulties in gaining acceptance in mainstream schools (Nel et al., 2016), negative stereotypes towards rural areas and disabilities (Mosia, 2019), and consequent impacts on the quality of education provided in these settings (Shikalepo, 2020). The rural context often exacerbates these challenges due to a perceived lack of resources (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), resulting in many learners, including LVIs, either not attending school or not receiving a quality education. The scarcity of resources further complicates the task of teachers in effectively supporting the inclusion of LVIs. Tseeke (2021) argues that although inclusive education policies in Lesotho aim to ensure access to education for all learners, there remains a conspicuous absence of clear directives on how to facilitate the inclusion of LVIs, particularly regarding teachers' readiness. This points to a deficiency in guidance within the policy framework about the effective inclusion of LVIs into the educational system.

While these challenges persist within the Lesotho policy context, the fundamental question arises as to whether the inclusion of LVIs in rural school settings is indeed being realised. Given the paramount importance of learners' access to education within the framework of inclusive education, it becomes imperative to heed the voices of school-teachers advocating for the inclusion of LVIs. In this regard, teachers can be viewed as pivotal 'agents of change' (Bourn, 2016, p. 63). Consequently, involving teachers as problem solvers capable of affecting change within their own communities becomes central to the objectives of this study.

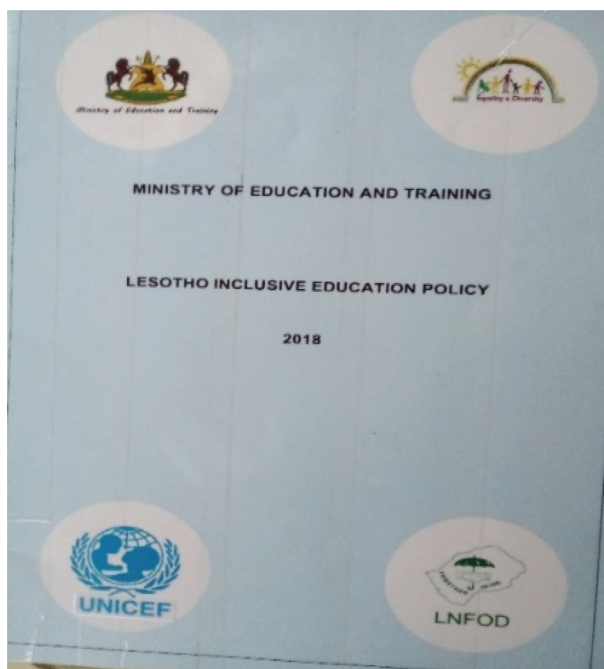
Research Design

This qualitative study utilised a participatory case study research design to investigate the implementation of inclusive practices for LVIs in rural secondary schools in Lesotho. The choice of this design was influenced by its effectiveness in facilitating rural participants to re-engage and explore issues affecting their communities (Mouton, 2017). The selected design facilitated collaborative engagement between the researchers and participants through focus group discussions and photovoice methods to elucidate teachers' experiences in managing the inclusion of LVIs. Eligible participants were chosen using purposive sampling based on the knowledge, skills, and experiences of teaching in rural schools where LVIs are enrolled. Table 1 shows biographic information of the ten purposively chosen secondary school teachers in Lesotho.

Subsequent discussions were conducted through photographic reflection, fostering critical dialogue and enhancing communication skills among participants. To explore strategies for facilitating the inclusion of LVIs, participants were prompted to capture photographs based on a guiding question such as 'Which factors can assist in the

Table 1. Teachers participants' biographic information.

ACRONYMS	AGE	SEX	EXPERIENCE LEVEL	LEVEL OF STUDY
Participant 1	41	F	14 years	B.Ed.
Participant 2	48	F	10 years	B.Ed.
Participant 3	38	M	8 years	B.Ed.(Inclusive education)
Participant 4	45	F	12 years	HONs (Inclusive education)
Participant 5	44	M	10 years	B.Ed.
Participant 6	42	M	13 years	DIPLOMA (Special education)
Participants 7	45	F	16 years	B.Ed.
Participant 8	46	F	11 years	B.Ed.
Participant 9	40	F	10 years	B.Ed.
Participant 10	38	M	9 years	B.Ed.

**Figure 1.** Group A's photograph showing ineffective inclusive education policy implementation.

inclusion of LVIs?' Each group of five teachers produced a photograph (see [Figure 1](#) and [2](#)), providing valuable insights into their perspectives on enhancing the inclusion of LVIs. The combined use of photovoice and focus group discussion methods enhanced the credibility of the study.

Following data collection, all focus group discussions and photovoice sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcription was undertaken by the researcher and cross-checked by a research assistant to ensure accuracy. This process of back-translation was employed for a sample of transcripts to safeguard meaning equivalence and minimise loss of cultural nuances. This step was critical in maintaining the authenticity of participants' voices (McMullin, 2021).

Once transcription and translation were completed, the transcripts were for systematic coding. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases,

guided the analytic process. Initial coding was inductive, allowing codes to emerge from significant statements in the data. To enhance dependability, coding was reviewed by two independent researchers, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. Codes were then clustered into categories and subthemes, which were subsequently refined into overarching themes aligned with the study objectives.

By explicating this process of transcription, translation, and coding, the study ensured transparency and methodological rigour. These steps not only safeguarded the accuracy of the data but also strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings, thereby contributing meaningfully to the credibility of the research outcomes.

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases, guided the analytic process. The procedures listed below show how the data were analysed.

Familiarisation with the data

The researchers read the transcripts to understand their content and context, taking notes on recurring ideas, potential themes, and patterns.

Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding was inductive, allowing the researcher to identify segments of data and commence coding by labelling meaningful segments. To enhance dependability (Zia et al., 2023), coding was reviewed by two independent researchers, and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

Identifying themes

Codes were then clustered into categories and subthemes using colour codes to identify those that were closely related or represent similar ideas and which were subsequently refined into overarching themes aligned with the study objectives.

Reviewing Themes

Researchers revisit the themes against the data set to ensure that each theme is supported by the data and accurately reflects the content.

Defining and naming themes

Researchers reviewed the themes and defined them to provide clear definitions and descriptions for each theme and outlining what to include and what not to include. These themes were pre-assigned based on participating teachers' experiences with LVIs' inclusion in rural schools.

Table 2. Two themes and corresponding sub-themes that emerged during participants' focus group discussions and photographs interpretation.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. Challenges faced by teachers in the inclusion of learners with visual impairments (LVIs)	(i) Lack of awareness and clear direction for policy implementation (ii) Insufficient teacher preparedness
2. Impact of inclusive principles on teachers' preparedness in the inclusion of learners with visual impairments (LVIs)	The need to enhance successful inclusion of Learners with visual impairments (LVIs)

Writing up

At this stage, the researchers compiled a comprehensive write-up of the codes and themes, underlying concepts, and findings extracted from the data and discussed each theme in detail, providing illustrative quotes from the data to support interpretations.

By explicating the process of transcription and coding, the study ensured transparency and methodological rigour. These steps not only safeguarded the accuracy of the data but also strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings, thereby contributing meaningfully to the credibility of the research outcomes.

Research Ethics

This paper strictly adheres to ethical guidelines as it stems from a research project involving human participants. Recognising the paramount importance of research ethics in safeguarding participants from potential harm (Resnik & Shamoo, 2015), particularly in studies involving human subjects, all ethical protocols were overseen by the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education review committee. To uphold principles of human dignity, rights, confidentiality, and privacy, ethical clearance was obtained with reference number UFS-HSD2021/1375/21, serving as tangible evidence of compliance with ethical standards.

Research Findings

The thematic analysis of data yielded two main themes, as shown in Table 2: Challenges faced by teachers in the inclusion of LVIs and the impact of inclusive principles on teachers' preparedness in the inclusion of learners with visual impairments. In connection to these themes, three sub-themes emerged, included lack of awareness and clear direction for policy implementation, insufficient teachers' preparedness, and the need to enhance successful inclusion of LVIs.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Inclusion of Learners with Visual Impairments (LVIs)

Despite the efforts of the Lesotho government, facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), to implement inclusive educational policies aimed at providing quality education for all learners, there remains a gap between policy objectives and effective implementation in rural schools. During photovoice reflective sessions, participants acknowledged the importance of creating a more inclusive learning environment for all learners, particularly those with visual impairments (LVIs), as outlined in the policy

guidelines. However, they also highlighted significant challenges faced by teachers in achieving this goal. The following two prominent sub-themes emerged from the participants' responses regarding the management of LVIs' inclusion:

- Lack of Awareness and Clear Direction for Policy Implementation
- Insufficient Teachers' Preparedness

Lack of Awareness and Clear Direction for Policy Implementation

The lack of awareness and clear direction for policy implementation reflects a persistent gap between policy formulation and practical execution at both institutional and practitioner levels. This challenge often results in inconsistent understanding and varied interpretations of policy intentions among teachers, leading to confusion, weak accountability, and fragmented implementation efforts. Participants consistently emphasised that inadequate guidance and limited communication hindered coherent and effective policy enactment across schools. The following excerpts illustrate how these challenges manifest in their experiences:

The inclusive education policy in Lesotho, illustrated in [Figure 1](#), aims to ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of impairments, cultural background, religion, or geographic location. However, we have noticed the inadequacy of governmental support, particularly from the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), in effectively guiding our schools on policy implementation. This persistent lack of guidance significantly undermines the policy's efficacy and hinders us in fostering the inclusion of learners, including learners with visual impairments (LVIs) (Participant 2, Group A stated).

Participants further lamented the mere documentation of the policy without substantive efforts to facilitate its execution. One participant remarked on the government's passive role, stating, '... Our government only documented the policy on paper and does not even make an effort to assist us in ensuring effective inclusion of these learners' (Participant 4).

This sentiment was echoed by another participant, emphasising the stark disparity between policy rhetoric and practical implementation within their educational landscape. Teachers, despite being tasked with the responsibility of ensuring inclusive practices, grapple with the absence of clear directives. Participant 1 underscored this predicament, stating, 'Inclusion is merely a policy on paper; its implementation remains elusive. Teachers, including qualified special education professionals, lack clear guidance on the requisite actions here in our country' (Participant 1).

This lack of clarity and support from the MoET impedes teachers' ability to implement inclusive practices effectively. Mosia's (2019) study corroborates these challenges, attributing the struggles faced by rural schools in accommodating LVIs to deficiencies within the Lesotho inclusive education policy. The policy fails to furnish clear directives necessary for accommodating the special educational needs of these learners. These findings align with Landsberg, Kruger, and Swart's (2019) observations, highlighting the impediments faced by underqualified teachers in translating policy provisions into actionable practices. Consequently, the absence of comprehensive guidance exacerbates the implementation gap, hindering the realisation of inclusive education goals.



Figure 2. Group B's photographs indicate a lack of teachers' preparedness.

Insufficient Teachers' Preparedness

Another outstanding issue, revealing the challenges in managing the inclusion of LVIs, applies to the lack of teachers' preparedness. Lack of Teachers' Preparedness reflects the systemic neglect by government structures in ensuring that they are adequately trained and supported to accommodate learners with visual impairments (LVIs). Participants' responses show how insufficient investment in teacher development, particularly the absence of continuous professional training and targeted workshops, has weakened teachers' readiness and efficacy in inclusive classrooms. This lack of institutional support results in educators feeling ill-equipped to address the unique learning needs of LVIs, leading to inconsistencies in instructional delivery and limited learner participation. One participant highlighted this shortfall by indicating that,

Despite our school's commitment to inclusive practices, neither I nor any of my colleagues have received formal training or workshops on assisting LVIs. The limited guidance we receive comes from qualified colleagues who are often overlooked and undervalued by the government (Participant 8 in group B).

Moreover, participants lamented the marginalisation of specialised educators, particularly those qualified to teach LVIs. Participant 3 articulated this sentiment, noting how qualified teachers with expertise in addressing the unique needs of LVIs are disregarded within the education system. This disregard is exacerbated by governmental policies, such as the 2016 directive shifting teachers' salary structures away from qualifications towards promotion-based criteria.

Our picture here (see [Figure 2](#)) gives expression to qualified teachers, which means that we are all qualified, but very unfortunately potential skills of those qualified to teach LVIs are ignored (Participant 3 indicated).

While the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho apparently aims to foster quality education for all learners, the challenges underscore systemic flaws in the implementation of inclusive education policies, as shown in [Figure 1](#). The above excerpts underscore the government's indifference towards acknowledging and harnessing the potential of teachers, especially qualified special education practitioners, in facilitating the inclusion of LVIs in rural schools.

Interestingly, while prevailing literature highlights the scarcity of qualified educators in rural settings due to resource constraints (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Sefotho, 2018), participants' responses emphasised the pivotal role of specialised teachers in fostering inclusive practices. Their accounts reveal that recognising, valuing, and supporting the expertise of special education teachers and ensuring that their voices are heard is critical for implementing effective inclusion strategies. The participants' responses suggest that targeted support for these educators, including professional development, continuous training, and clear policy guidance, is essential for creating equitable learning environments, particularly for learners with visual impairments (LVIs). Prioritising the empowerment and support of specialised educators thus holds significant promise for enhancing inclusion and ensuring that inclusive practices are consistently and effectively implemented across schools.

Impact of Inclusive Principles on Teachers' Preparedness for LVIs' Inclusion

According to Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it is essential to ensure effective inclusion of all learners in accommodating environments (UN, 2006). Consequently, the implementation of inclusive education policies in Lesotho schools mandates the preparation of teachers as facilitators for the inclusion of learners with visual impairments (LVIs) (LIEP, 2018). Although participants attempted to address the issues identified in the previous section, the need to enhance the successful inclusion of LVIs emerged as a significant concern.

The Need to Enhance the Successful Inclusion of LVIs

Participants' responses during focus group discussions revealed that the inclusion of LVIs is not effective due to challenges faced by teachers, as outlined previously. The need to enhance the successful inclusion of Learners with visual impairments (LVIs) emphasises the pressing necessity for complete improvements in teacher preparation and support mechanisms to foster genuine inclusion. The participants' discussions revealed that while teachers acknowledge the importance of inclusive education, many feel inadequately equipped to meet the diverse needs of LVIs. This highlights the need for structured professional development and continuous training. Strengthening these areas would not only build teachers' competence and confidence but also ensure that inclusive education moves beyond policy platitudes to meaningful practice, where teachers are empowered through clear directives and guidelines on how to facilitate learning for LVIs effectively. Regarding this sub-theme, some participating teachers mentioned the following:

Enabling inclusion of LVIs in our school is indeed problematic to teachers, especially those who are not trained or lack the skills of assisting them like myself. I, therefore, think that to successfully enable the fruitful inclusion of these learners, it is better to be empowered by being given clear directives and guidelines on how to facilitate (Participant 7).

That is true! The only thing that we know is that we must facilitate inclusion of these learners, as said in the inclusive education policies and guidelines, but there are no clear mandates of how to go about the whole process. So, I think it will be very important if there are clear guidelines to go about the whole process. This indeed will be good for our school so that all teachers are enabled to become true agents, meaning they must all be empowered (Participant 10).

Participants further responded to a question during focus group discussions about what needs to be done to enhance the successful inclusion of LVIs. They indicated that collective efforts are necessary to enable the inclusion of LVIs within their rural schools. The collective efforts approach is supported by Sefotho (2018) as an effective method for empowering educators in rural schools. The following views from participants highlighted the need for empowerment and collaboration to overcome ineffective efforts:

Based on the inclusive education principles, to manage inclusive education demands everyone's attention, to participate (Participant 5).

I think the more effort we as facilitators engage in for the inclusion of these learners, working collaboratively will enable us to draw from one another's expertise. However, there is also a need for proper training for us to cope with creating the learning environment to properly meet LVIs' educational needs (Participant 9).

I agree with the sentiments from my colleagues here. Working collaboratively with very skilful educators and drawing from their potential will help us manage the inclusion of LVIs and overcome their learning challenges. I therefore believe that it will be very important if their skills and knowledge are profitably used to benefit us, so that we are all given the opportunity through training. This is a need in our school that all teachers must become true agents, meaning they have to be all empowered (Participant 6).

The above responses indicate that while participants emphasised teachers' collaborative work and becoming true agents, this suggests active participation of rural agencies in enhancing LVIs' inclusion. Harnessing rural agencies can be highly effective when there is an understanding that enhancing LVIs' inclusion in rural schools and communities involves enabling rural people or agents to take control of their destiny. Hornby (2020) supports the improvement of enabling inclusion of all learners, including LVIs, through the merging of special and mainstream schools' practices to allow teachers' collaborative work to meet the desired goals.

Discussion of the Findings

The above findings were grouped into two interconnected themes namely, challenges faced by teachers and the impact of inclusive principles on teachers' preparedness in managing inclusion of LVIs. The first theme highlights that teachers in rural schools often face barriers related to a lack of awareness, unclear policy guidance, and limited resources. The findings in this theme reveal that the presence and empowerment of specialised teachers can mitigate challenges arising from unclear policies and limited resources.

A lack of clarity in policy implementation not only affects day-to-day classroom strategies but also undermines educators' confidence in supporting learners with diverse needs. Previous research on inclusion of LVIs in rural contexts supports these findings, highlighting that teachers frequently perceive inclusive policies as abstract and difficult to operationalise without structured support and training (Ngubane, 2018; Zwane & Malale, 2018). This gap literature highlights a significant challenge where these learners may experience exclusion or inequitable learning opportunities, and teachers may feel ill-prepared to meet diverse classroom needs.

The participants' responses indicated that addressing these kinds of challenges requires the Ministry of Education and Training in Lesotho to focus on upgrading educational systems, policies, and practices to recognise, value, and empower teachers' expertise. Valuing teachers' expertise aligns with Hornby's (2020) theoretical framework, which emphasises the adaptation of education systems to empower teachers for effective inclusion. Empowerment involves acknowledging teachers' abilities, skills, and knowledge, thereby enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the management of LVIs' inclusion in their schools.

Adding to the resourcefulness of teachers as proposed by the findings in the second theme of this study, and driven by Hornby's (2014) perspective, collaboration emerged as a crucial approach for LVIs' successful inclusion. Participants identified collaboration as a crucial strategy, demonstrating that inclusive practices are most effective when teachers share knowledge, skills, and resources. These findings align with Hornby's perspective that collaborative approaches between special and mainstream educators can strengthen inclusive practices. While inclusion is recognised in policy, its impact is often limited unless there is collective support at all levels of the education system. Participants stressed that working together as a team directly contributes to learners' success, suggesting that professional development, mentoring, and access to assistive technologies should be prioritised to support teachers' capacity to implement inclusive strategies effectively.

While the participants were asked about what they think needs to be done to enhance LVIs' successful inclusion, their responses underscore the role of rural agency in enhancing LVIs' inclusion. Participants convey that when they work together as a team in sharing knowledge and skills, their learners' inclusion becomes a success. This aligns with (Biddle & Azano, 2016) assertion that empowering rural agents to take ownership of inclusion initiatives ensures strategies that are contextually relevant to the specific needs of LVIs. The findings in this study therefore suggest that by integrating collaborative approaches within rural schools, there can be an improvement in creating enabling environments where LVIs are supported academically and socially.

Considering these themes, it is evident that effective inclusion of LVIs in rural schools depends on a combination of teacher empowerment, collaborative practices, and the strategic enhancement of inclusive education policies and practices. This integrated approach informs actionable recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Training, including capacity-building initiatives, resource provision, policy clarity, and fostering collaborative engagement, all of which are essential for realising equitable and meaningful inclusion of LVIs across rural educational contexts.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine how teachers managed the inclusion of learners with visual impairments (LVIs) in rural schools. Through focus group discussions and photographic interpretation with a sample of ten participants, it became evident that the challenges encountered by teachers in managing the inclusion of these learners involved a lack of awareness, clear direction for policy implementation, and insufficient teachers' preparedness. At the same time, the study demonstrates that empowering teachers, fostering collaborative practices, and harnessing local agencies are pivotal enablers for successful inclusion. Aligning with Hornby's (2020) theoretical framework, the study underscores the importance of valuing educators' expertise and enabling them to actively contribute to inclusive practices. Practical implications include the need for targeted professional development, clear and actionable policy directives, provision of assistive resources, and structured platforms for collaboration among teachers. By addressing these areas, the Ministry of Education and Training can create a supportive and sustainable inclusive education system, ensuring that LVIs have equitable access to quality learning opportunities and thrive academically and socially. Overall, the study emphasises that inclusion is not merely a policy ideal but a collaborative, contextually grounded process that requires systemic support, teacher empowerment, and promotion of rural agencies.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge the support and contribution from participants and their passion for this study.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Mamochana Anacleeta Ramatea  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6424-2143>

Fumane Portia Khanare  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1707-9179>

References

- ALSadoon, D. M. (2017). New strategies to develop effective learning environments that support learners: Real practical cases. *World Journal of Research and Review*, 5(2), 25–28.
- Biddle, C., & Azano, A. P. (2016). Constructing and reconstructing the “rural school problem” a century of rural education research. *Review of Research in Education*, 40(1), 298–325. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16667700>
- Bourn, D. (2016). Teachers as agents of social change. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 7(3), 63–77. <https://doi.org/10.18546/IJDEGL.07.3.05>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptualize and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196>
- Du Plessis, P., & Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for the rural schools' challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39ns1a1774>

- Francisco, M. P. B., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and special education. *Education Sciences*, 238(9), 238. www.mdpi.com/journal/education
- Garcia, M. M., & Toledo, L. D. (2020). The elements of an inclusive educational system as seen from the perspective of teachers. *Psicologia Escolar e Educacional*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-35392020220328>
- Haidari, S. M., Karakus, F., & K, K. (2020). Safe learning environment perception scale (SLEPS): A validity and reliability study. *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education*, 6(3), 444–460. <https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.550393>
- Hornby, G. (2014). *Inclusive special education: Evidence-based practices for children with special needs and disabilities*. Springer.
- Hornby, G. (2020). *The necessity of coexistence of equity and excellence in inclusive and special education*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.03.1231>
- Isomöttönen, V., Daniels, M., Cajander, A., Pears, A., & McDermott, R. (2019). Searching for global employability: Can students capitalize on enabling learning environments? *ACM Transactions on Computing Education*, 19(2), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3277568>
- Johnstone, K. (2017). *Special education teachers' experiences and perceptions of instructing students with learning disabilities* [Doctoral Dissertation]. Walden University.
- Landsberg, E. I., & Kruger, D. (2011). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective* (2nd ed.). Van Schaik.
- Landsberg, E., Kruger, D., & Swart, E. (2019). *Addressing barriers to learning: A South African perspective*. Van Schaik.
- Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy. (2018). *Morija: Morija Printing Works (Pty). Ltd.*
- McMullin, C. (2021). Transcription and qualitative methods: Implications for third sector research. *Voluntas*, 34(1), 140–153. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00400-3>
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2008). *Lesotho curriculum and assessment policy*. Morija Printing Works (Pty).
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). (2010). *Education Act of 2010*. Ministry of Education and Training.
- Mosia, P. A. (2019). Towards an ideal framework of education support services for learners with special educational needs at the basic education level in Lesotho. In *Student Support towards Self-directed learning in open and distributed environment* (pp. 59–77). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9316-4.ch003>
- Mouton, J. (2017). *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies: A South African guide and resource book*. Van Schaik Publishers.
- Nel, N. M. T., N, L. D., Engelbrecht, P., & Nel, M. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of education support structures in the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. *Koer-Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 81(3), 17–30. <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.81.3.2249>
- Ngubane, P. R. (2018). *The experiences of educators in implementing inclusive education in rural schools*. University of Pretoria (South Africa).
- Nilholm, C. (2021). Research about inclusive education in 2020-how can we improve our theories to change practice? *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(3), 358–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1754547>
- Ramatea, M. A., & Govender, S. (2025). Exploring teachers' readiness for inclusive education in a Lesotho rural school: Agentic capability theory analysis. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 7(s1), a06. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijer-2025.vol7.s1.06>
- Rapp, A. N., & Granados, A. C. (2021). Understanding inclusive education- a theoretical contribution from system theory and the constructionist perspective. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28(4), 423–439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1946725>
- Resnik, D. B., & Shamoo, A. (2015). *Responsible conduct of research* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Rutherford, J. (2015). Creating physical learning environments that enable effective learning and teaching. *Education in Practice*, 2(1), 5–9.

- Sefotho, M. M. (2018). Disability and inclusive employment through the lens of educational psychology. In I. Eloff & E. Swart (Eds.), *Understanding educational psychology* (pp. 296–300). Juta and Company (PTY) Ltd.
- Sepadi, M. D. (2025). Teachers' understanding of implementing inclusion in mainstream classrooms in rural areas. *Education Sciences*, 15(7), 889. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15070889>
- Shareefa, M. (2016). Institutional and teacher readiness for inclusive education in schools of Hithadhoo, Addu, Maldives: A study of the perceptions of teachers. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 5(7), 6–14.
- Shikalepo, E. E. (2020). Challenges facing learning at rural schools: A review of related literature. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 4(5), 211–218.
- Tseeke, M. (2021). Teachers perceived self-efficacy in responding to the needs of learners with visual impairment in Lesotho. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2), S1–S12. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41ns2a1920>
- United, Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. United Nations.
- Zia Ul Haq, K., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A. & Akhter, S. (2023). Cunity academic works criteria for assessing and ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. How does access to this work benefit you? *Let Us Know! International Journal of Business Reflections*, 4(2), 141–173.
- Zwane, S. L., & Malale, M. M. (2018). Investigating barriers teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education in high schools in the Gege branch, Swaziland. *African Journal of Disability*, 7(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v7i0.391>