

CONCLUSION

A number of countries have adapted their laws, in order to make education more inclusive towards individuals with different needs, but practice is lagging way behind policies: teachers have a hard time in dealing with a diversity of students' needs and performance levels. Lesotho can be commended for overcoming some of these legislative and policy hurdles. For instance, the adoption of the Disability Equity Act in 2020 which seeks to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities is a landmark achievement. As is the adoption of the Inclusive Education Policy however there is a disconnect between policy and what is taking place in classrooms. Lesotho ought to Lesotho have a Special Needs Education Training Manual to ensure consistency and develop universal pre-service and in-service for teachers on the basis of these manuals. This will help teachers understand the principles of inclusive education, to increase their inclusive practices and self-efficacy. This will ultimately improve the quality of education delivered to LSEN.

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Lesotho Council of NGOs POLICY BRIEF

Policy Brief No. 2021/01

November 2021

THE NEED FOR TEACHER PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TRAINING IN LESOTHO'S INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Key Messages

- The obligation to educate all people, including people with disabilities, was proclaimed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948: Everyone has the right to education (United Nations, 1948).
- whilst some teachers agree that they have undergone some form of training in special education the vast majority have not.
- It is recommended that Lesotho have a Special Needs Education Training Manual to ensure consistency and develop universal pre-service training for those entering the teaching fraternity and in-service training for teachers already in service on the basis of these manuals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The obligation to educate all people, including people with disabilities, was proclaimed by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948: Everyone has the right to education (United Nations, 1948). After much lobbying by Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) in the mid-80s, Lesotho finally lay the ground work for a policy to integrate children with disabilities into the mainstream schooling system in 1990 (Stubbs, 2000: 1). These efforts finally matriculated with the Ministry of Education and Training producing and adopting an Inclusive Education Policy in 2018. The policy had been long awaited as available data indicates that "children living with disabilities enrolled in ECCD schools were less than two percent between 2015 and 2017 nationwide" (MoDP: 41). An overarching policy that brings synergy to all policies relating to special needs education and providing quality education to students with such needs was thus in dire need. The former has been achieved however fixes are required in bolstering the quality. A study by the National University of Lesotho as well consultations with teacher formations held by LCN have unearthed inconsistencies in the special-needs education (SNE) training provided to teachers, with some teachers having undergone a training of some form whilst most have not. It is therefore recommended that Lesotho develop a Special Needs Education Training Manual to ensure consistency and then provide universal pre-service training for those entering the teaching fraternity and in-service training for teachers already in service on the basis of these manuals. This should bolster the competency and skill-set of all teachers to deliver quality education to all students including learners with special education needs (LSEN).

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INTRODUCTION

The Feasibility study conducted in 1992 to study the need for an Inclusive Education policy found that about 17% of students in primary school had some sort of disability (hearing, visual, physical or learning impairment (Stubbs, 2000:1). Further, the 2001 Demographic Survey however, found that about 4.2% of Basotho live with some form of disability with children under 15 years of age accounting for a third of the figure (LNFOD: 2020). It is impossible however to ignore the very real shortfalls in the dissemination of Inclusive Education in the country that have persisted despite the adoption of the policy. For instance, the Special Education Unit continues to lack the quantity of personnel required to adequately keep abreast with national quality assurance. Funding deficits have been cited by MoET to account for the implementation shortfalls regarding the Inclusive Education Policy. Indeed, the provision of disability-friendly infrastructure ensuring that schools are accessible to children with disabilities remains vastly inadequate at most schools.

If these claims of financial restraints hampering the provision of Inclusive Education are to be taken at face value, an easier fix for MOET should be to invest in inclusive education-sensitive in-service training programmes. This would make teachers understand the principles of inclusive education, to increase their inclusive practices and self-efficacy when dealing with LSEN children and ultimately make teachers more aware and more competent in dealing with a variety of children with SEN in their classrooms. Quality education rests largely on finding and keeping good teachers" (Bracey, Mason, 2003: i). Equipping the individuals who actually disseminate the education curricula with the skills they need to best disseminate quality education for all children is therefore critical. This is further supported by the Salamanca Statement which posited that "for proper inclusive education of LSEN" one of the conditions necessary for this is

"there should be pre-service and in-service training of regular teachers to adopt inclusive policies in their schools and use child-centred pedagogy" (UNESCO, 1994). In fact, their neglect "may not result in successful academic and social development for LSEN" (Mosia, 2014: 295). Unfortunately, Lesotho seems to be falling desperately behind in this regard as well.

A LACK OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION COMPETENCY IN LESOTHO

Whilst some teachers agree that they have undergone some form of training in special education the vast majority have not. A study by Paseka Andrew Mosia of the National University of Lesotho found that only "one in three" teachers surveyed had had such training. Further findings also suggest that even where such trainings took place they may not have taken into consideration "needs from school contexts", a lack of participation by principals in training which in turn affects their ability to enforce special education adherence in schools and may be "inadequate" (Mosia, 2014: 301). Further "there is also a lack of understanding by teachers and educationalists about what constitutes inclusive education" (292).

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Multiple consultations held by LCN with the major teacher trade union formations in the country supports this theory. In these consultations, the majority of teachers ceded that they had never received special education trainings and that this in turn affected their competency in dealing with SEN students. Indeed, many admitted that in the absence such skills and knowledge they simply improvised when dealing with SEN children which they ceded is inadequate. The lack of universal training for teachers further deteriorates the provision of Inclusive Education in the country in that it is often schools who identify LSEN. Disabilities are wide-ranging, they range from visual, to hearing, to physical and learning impediments. They differ from person to person as well as in severity and it is not uncommon for one to face a combination of infirmities.

This makes special education-sensitive pre-service and in-service training critical. Indeed, "without proper training, teachers' assessment may not give a true picture of special needs in schools" (301). Therefore, without pre-service or in-service training the assessment and identification of LSEN is affected as is their placement and providing education that caters to their specific disability and therefore the quality of education they receive.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

During the last decades, a worldwide movement towards inclusive education has been taking place with the aim of providing equal educational opportunities for all children to reach their academic, emotional, social and physical potentials to the highest levels. However, many of these children still often drop out of the educational system, or underachieve, due to various reasons including learning difficulties and behaviour problems.

(Atabarut, 2010: 6). Teachers lack necessary training and skills to provide appropriate practices for LSEN students. As a result, many students with learning difficulties or challenging behaviour cannot benefit from classroom practices. Consequently, it is crucial for classroom teachers to be prepared to use the most effective methods, strategies, and techniques for in regular classroom settings (6). It is recommended that Lesotho have a Special Needs Education Training Manual to ensure consistency and develop universal pre-service training for those entering the teaching fraternity and in-service training for teachers already in service on the basis of these manuals.