

School Leadership Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Educational Practices: The Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon

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Abstract: Purpose: This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon.

Methodology: A case study methodology was applied in conjunction with a qualitative research design. Semi-structured School Administrators Interview Forms were used to collect study data through interviews. Twenty school administrators were chosen for the study group using a deliberate sampling technique. A theme content analysis conducted inductively was used to analyze the data.

Findings: Results established lack of funding; adverse attitude and conduct; inadequate facilities; ineffective communication between the home and the school; adapting the curriculum to meet a range of leaning needs as the major challenges school leadership faced in the implementation of inclusive educational leadership practices. The findings documented developing an all-school commitment inclusive education; Parental Involvement in Making Decisions; Changing educational institutions to ensure inclusivity; Creating a Common Vision for Inclusive Education; Maintaining High Standards for Students with Disabilities; Pedagogical leadership techniques; modifying the curriculum to account for differences and professional development.

Unique contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study recommended Professional Development; Establishing an Inclusive vision for the school; Establishing an Inclusive vision for the school; Designing Effective Policies and Reforms; Provision of Resources and Funding and parental involvement.

Keywords: Inclusive educational practices, School Leadership, Challenges, Implementation.

Introduction and Background

In order to promote equity and give every student equal access to learning opportunities, school leadership is essential. The senior leadership teams of school principals must spearhead the entire school's transition to inclusion. Principals not only set the tone and direction for their schools and

play a key role in advancing equity and equality within them, but they also greatly influence the way in which vulnerable student populations, like those with special needs and disabilities, are taught. Principals have the power to significantly improve these students' learning outcomes by fostering an equitable environment. But managing an inclusive school can be difficult given the shifting dynamics, which could make problems worse for kids with different needs.

School leaders play the most significant part in the success of inclusive education (schools). The active participation and engagement of the principal is essential to the implementation of changes, enhancement of services, or establishment of new initiatives. It is the responsibility of school leaders to facilitate change and motivate employees to embrace new behaviors and perspectives that support inclusivity. The principal of a school has a major impact on fostering an environment that supports learning for all students, including those with disabilities, according to Dyal et al. (1996). They added that the school principal's attitude, duties, relationships, and vision all actively support an inclusive environment.

According to Cohen (2015), a school principal is the primary change agent in the school because they are the main person who helps to develop and market an effective inclusion program. Special needs students attend inclusive schools, where they are allowed to socialize and engage with their peers in regular classroom settings (Jackson et al., 2000; Hussain, 2017). According to Jackson et al. (2000), the process of developing a new kind of education by integrating students with disabilities into ordinary school classes by using the inclusion method is known as inclusive education. In particular, all students gain from individualized teaching strategies that take into account their particular learning styles and needs as well as from meaningful, demanding, and pertinent educational components.

Humpfry and Symes (2014) state that for inclusive education to be implemented, all staff members must have a common understanding of what inclusion entails as well as shared expectations for inclusion, which the school administration must endorse (Horrocks et al., 2008). When creating leadership strategies that promote inclusion, leaders in inclusive education must have a thorough understanding of the local context as well as the viewpoints of the students. As a result, school administrators' special education expertise and knowledge are essential and should influence every decision they make (Dotger & Coughlin, 2018). Increased efforts are required to guarantee that every student, particularly those in the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, has complete access to high-quality education. Key competencies that allow them to continue their education and facilitate their transition into the workforce must be mastered by all of her students. Long-term, this lowers the chance of social exclusion even more.

Establishing and maintaining inclusive environments that promote learning for all students is one of the most significant challenges facing the educational field. Ensuring that every person has an equal opportunity to advance their education globally is fraught with difficulties (UNESCO, 2019). According to Hoppey and McLeskey (2013), although policies advocate for inclusive education, principals still face difficulties in accomplishing this goal. They recommended that in order to achieve that objective, principals of schools ought to be held responsible for encouraging inclusive practices in addition to overseeing and organizing their institutions. To make sure that their schools are able to provide teachers and other professional educators with the professional support they need, principals must also assume a variety of responsibilities. The abilities, know-how, and character traits necessary for effective leadership must be possessed by inclusive school leaders. Without the guidance and support of principals, schools will struggle to adhere to the stringent requirements of providing a variety of services to meet the needs of various student groups. Hence, in order to effectively support teachers and the greater school community, inclusive schools must adhere to certain requirements, which principals need to be aware of. Strong, inclusive leadership practices from school leadership can help achieve the goal of more easily creating inclusive environments for all learners. Although teachers need to be ready for the wide range of students in today's classrooms, principals in charge of special education programs have extra work ahead of them.

This study's main goal is to find out the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon. The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the difficulties school leadership faces in the implementation of inclusive educational practices in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon.
2. To offer suggestions on inclusive educational practices that school leadership should implement in order to promote inclusive education in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon.

Literature Review

Leadership for Inclusion

Education leaders are beginning to see inclusion as a significant challenge. In light of ongoing diversity, schools will need to be able to thrive in an uncertain environment, adjust to a wider range of students, and have a greater capacity for group problem solving (Leithwood et al., 1999). Fullan (2001) outlines five interdependent elements that are essential for proficient leadership during periods of transition: ethical intention, comprehension of the change procedure, fostering connections, generation and dissemination of knowledge, and establishing coherence. Sergiovanni (1992) also highlights the difficulty posed by a diverse student body and contends that the way school leadership is currently approached may be impeding efforts to make improvements. In his creation of "a comprehensive approach to school administration and diversity," Riehl (2000) gives special consideration to the responsibilities held by principals. She comes to the conclusion that there are three main tasks that school leaders should focus on: creating new definitions of diversity, encouraging inclusive practices in the classroom, and strengthening ties between the school and the community. She goes on to consider how these tasks can be accomplished and how the concept of practice, in this case discursive practice, can help us comprehend the role of school principals in greater detail. This highlights the need for a more optimistic perspective on the possibility of inclusive transformational developments involving school principals. "Administrators' efforts in the tasks of sense making, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school, may indeed foster a new form of practice," the author writes, "when combined with an unwavering dedication to social justice, voice, and equity."

According to research (Kugelmass, 2003; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004), school administrators play a crucial role in effectively forming inclusive education. According to some research (Cambron-McCabe, 2006; Marshall & Oliva, 2006), developing leaders that support social justice and inclusion is one strategy for fostering inclusive education in schools. Angelides (2011) highlights the importance of transformational leadership and situates it within the framework of transformational models of leadership, wherein principals impact and modify the school's culture (Bass, 1999). This is thought to be supporting distributed leadership, a kind of power dynamics in schools that amplifies the authority and impact of individuals or groups (Arrowsmith, 2007). An inclusive leadership model (Oskarsdottir et al., 2020) states that implementing instructional leadership, changing and enhancing the school culture, and involving staff in decision-making are all essential elements of distributed leadership that support effective inclusive leadership.

The foundation of the inclusive leadership model is the idea that every individual has a right to the most fundamental human rights. According to Ryan (2006), inclusive leadership encourages behaviors and attitudes that intentionally work to remove obstacles for those who may face prejudice and social exclusion. In addition to steering clear of the traditional hierarchical management style, inclusive leaders encourage community involvement in the day-to-day operations of the educational institution. In many societies, traditional hierarchical power structures discourage inclusion. To create policies, curricula, and interventions that benefit all children, communities must be given the authority to do so through inclusive leaders (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). Building the policies, procedures, curricular approaches, and interventions required for their school community is made possible for leaders by assembling a flexible and responsive team around a common vision (Bourke & Dillon, 2018).

In order to improve schools, inclusive leadership requires, according to Burke and Titus (2020), the development of a collaborative, intentional process that involves all relevant parties, brings together people with a variety of backgrounds and specialties, and has access to numerous resources. "Advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policymaking strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches" are a few of the inclusive practices (Ryan,2006). The majority of inclusive leaders understand and accept the necessity of implementing big systemic changes. Such transformations require empathic and visionary leaders to navigate the collaborative planning required to address the interconnected needs of financial, human resource, technological, and pedagogical supports (Devecchi & Nevin, 2010).

Effective, inclusive leadership in the field of education, according to James et al. (2020), also necessitates having the knowledge and discernment to assess the attitudes and systems that make up an educational system and to question practices and policies to make sure they are not harmful, biased, or exclusive of children. Student outcomes, school culture, and teacher effectiveness are all impacted by this kind of leadership. Inclusion requires a constant search for the most effective ways to meet the diverse needs of children and their educational experiences. An inclusive leader must convey to stakeholders and community members the school's leadership team's plan for addressing the changing needs of the community and the importance of inclusion (Normore, 2010). Inclusion requires a constant search for the most effective ways to meet the diverse needs of children and their educational experiences. A school's leadership team's strategy for meeting the community's evolving needs and the significance of inclusion must be communicated to stakeholders and members of the community by an inclusive leader (Moya et al., 2020).

Four essential areas for inclusive leadership development are identified by the Inclusive Leadership Handbook (2016):

- Developing awareness of oneself. Self-aware leaders challenge stereotypes, engage in self-reflection and mindfulness, own up to their mistakes, and display vulnerability.
- Adhering to a common goal. Together with other stakeholders, inclusive leaders co-create and embody a shared vision.
- Establishing connections with coworkers and locals. Building relationships involves avoiding deficit thinking and fostering a sense of purpose and belonging in a secure setting.
- Implementing and overseeing change. In addition to delegating tasks to others and developing plans for managing the intricacies of diverse projects, leaders also empower people.

According to the Inclusive School Network (2019), no single model adequately captures the essence of an inclusive school. An inclusive leader understands the importance of staying curious, flexible, and committed to improving every student's learning and performance. Using a variety of tactics and working together to overcome obstacles will provide the foundation for ongoing success in creating an inclusive school. Leaders who are starting big change projects in their schools must communicate their vision for an inclusive environment in a clear and consistent manner. Leaders must also facilitate communication, supply resources, and foster skill development in order to give others the support they need to comprehend this vision. Without constant assistance, people could find it difficult to adopt an inclusive mindset and make changes to their current behaviors (Garrison-Wade et al, 2007). A more democratic, sustainable, and peaceful society can only be created via education, which is a fundamental human right. In order to fulfill UN Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2016) by 2030, we need inclusive education leaders who are ready to put laws and policies into place.

Challenges faced by School Leadership in the implementation of Inclusive Education Practices.

Establishing and maintaining inclusive learning environments that facilitate learning for all students is one of the major challenges facing education today. The extent to which staff training produces qualified personnel—that is, teachers and administrators who are highly trained and competent—determines the extent to which students can receive adequate training. Any administrator can see how there is a direct correlation between student learning outcomes and teacher quantity and quality. However, many students receiving special education do not have access to highly qualified or competent special education teachers due to a severe shortage of fully licensed special education teachers (Boe & Cook, 2006). The Council for Exceptional Children (2001) endorsed a report written by the President's Commission on Special Education Requirements, which revealed that the most pressing problems facing special education systems and educators are unclear and conflicting responsibilities, an excessive amount of paperwork, a lack of administrative and district support, significant teacher isolation, a lack of attention to better learning outcomes, an increase in demand for highly qualified specialists, inadequately qualified general and specialist teachers, and fragmented licensing systems. York-Barr et al. (2005) state that "if an emerging crisis in special education is not addressed, it will result in lower quality services and lower educational outcomes for children," they go into detail about the issue. The incapacity of school administrators to effectively serve every student is made worse by their lack of specialized training (Garrison-Wade, 2005; Goor, et al., 1997).

It can be easier to create inclusive environments for all students when school administrators exhibit strong and inclusive leadership practices. While the sheer diversity of today's student body demands preparation on the part of all teachers, school administrators also confront unique difficulties when implementing special education programs. Sindelar et al. (2006) claim that integrating students with disabilities into general education is a challenging and intricate reform. Due to its complexity, school administrators might not fully understand or support inclusion, and educators may occasionally misunderstand it and oppose it.

According to Praisner (2003), administrative training programs gave school administrators the foundational knowledge that special education teachers thought was necessary for implementing inclusion. Additionally, she discovered that while behavior management, special education law, and disability characteristics can all be effectively covered in preparatory programs, there aren't any particular themes that stand in for real inclusionary strategies and procedures. Furthermore, a lot of administrators don't know about the legal aspects of special education, particularly the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compliance and procedural requirements (Rhys, 1996; Nardone, 1999). Despite the expectation that school administrators should be familiar with special education laws and policies, many of them have received little to no special education training as part of their leadership preparation training. (Anderson, 1999; Garrison-Wade, 2005). Many school administrators discover that they must instead depend on employees of the central government. In a similar vein, Patterson et al., (2000) came to the conclusion that school administrators lack the necessary training to oversee special education, so the issue extends beyond the availability and caliber of teachers to include adequately qualified administrative personnel.

When parents and teachers have unfavorable beliefs about the capacity of children with disabilities to learn, there are particular difficulties that come with it. These obstacles can be addressed by publishing encouraging stories of disabled children succeeding in inclusive education and later in life, as well as by increasing community awareness of human rights. Additional strategies that could be employed include encouraging teachers to use critical pedagogy and action research, as well as helping disabled children communicate their goals and take part in planning processes (Croft, 2010).

Lack of funding is a significant obstacle for inclusive education in Cameroon. According to UNESCO (2009), one of the biggest obstacles to implementing inclusion is money. To meet the needs of the students, special education classrooms and additional specialists are needed when

teaching children with disabilities. Many schools lack the extra funding necessary to coordinate services and give each child individualized support, particularly in these hard times. Thus, inadequate funding may make it more difficult for professionals and classroom teachers to continue their professional development and stay up to date on the latest techniques. However, Cortiella (2009) contends that a serious lack of educational resources including a dearth of modern teaching and learning materials as well as inadequate facilities, a shortage of teachers, and a lack of professionally trained and qualified staff are major obstacles. Once more, adopting this fantastic feature of education may be hampered by policy makers who are unfamiliar with the idea of inclusive education (Ainscow & Booth, 2005). The lack of strong policies to support the implementation of inclusive education programs is another problem with this aspect of education in Cameroon. In order to support inclusive education, policymakers frequently adopt a no-chalet position.

DeMatthews et al. (2020) assert that establishing a more inclusive system and raising the performance of all learners depend heavily on the principal's leadership. From an educational leadership perspective, much research has been done on the impact of school leadership on learning outcomes and academic progress, focusing on the experiences of students with disabilities (Leaver et al., 2019; Mbiti et al., 2019; Day et al., 2016). The literature currently in publication has shown that transformational, distributed, and didactic leadership models are the most appropriate for addressing the challenges related to inclusive education (Honingh & Hooge, 2014; Kugelmass & Ainscow 2004; Goddard, et al. 2015).

Pedagogical leadership is considered essential in acting as a mediator between teachers and school administrators to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education (Slater, 2012). Pedagogical leadership is considered essential in acting as a mediator between teachers and school administrators to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education (Slater, 2012). In order to help educators deliver instructional programs that meet the needs of diverse students with disabilities, researchers who support this framework point out that instructional leadership is crucial (Voltz & Collins, 2010). Additionally, research indicates that encouraging shared leadership in the context of inclusive education through cooperation (Spillane, 2008), community service, and developing others is pertinent (Mullick, et al., 2012). The insufficient training of school leaders, who are crucial in addressing inclusive education in schools, is another major factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of interventions to make education more inclusive, as is being recognized by international research (Esposito, et al., 2019; Poon-McBrayer, 2017). Esposito et al. (2019) list the following three ways that the principal's role has evolved: 1. He must be able to advocate for inclusive schools that are "fair and socially just"; 2. They need to be sufficiently knowledgeable in the area of "special education"; and 3. Teachers need to be able to adapt their pedagogies and curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse student body in the classroom. In order to guarantee high-quality services for every student, school administrators face the challenge of encouraging cooperation amongst the various actors in the school community (Bai and Martins, 2015). Building school leaders' capacity is a critical component of implementing an inclusive education system that will last, according to Liasidou (2015). The author makes the case that creating inclusive learning communities requires improving the knowledge and abilities of school leaders to bring about change.

School leadership practices to foster Inclusive Educational Practices

Principals are essential to the development of inclusive schools that improve the academic performance of students with disabilities, according to McLeskey et al. (2014). A growing corpus of research highlights the efforts made by principals to establish the frameworks required to develop and encourage inclusive practices in their educational institutions. According to some studies, creating and maintaining inclusive schools requires distributed and shared leadership among parents, teachers, and principals (Billingsley, 2012; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013).

These days, principal leadership is concentrated on projects that help students learn by building a learning culture and a robust instructional leadership program (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). While there

are many duties that principals must perform in order to manage and oversee educational establishments, the focus is primarily on their roles as instructional leaders and the skills and knowledge they require to facilitate the learning of all students in inclusive settings. In order to "align the school's academic mission with strategy and action," principals are expected to be goal-oriented and strategically oriented in their role as instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2009). To lead successful inclusive schools, principals must understand the needs of students with disabilities and recognize that these needs "vary greatly even within the same disability population and at different stages of their education" (Hehir, 2005).

Leadership in schools must understand the needs of students with disabilities and recognize that these needs are unique. Therefore, in order to meet these needs, instructional leadership will insist that opportunities be given to the students inside the general education curriculum. In light of the varied needs of these students, principals must also exercise distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) and collaborative leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010) to ensure that the necessary resources are available to meet the needs of all students with disabilities.

Good principals focus their curriculum efforts on establishing high standards for all students in their schools and encourage teachers to help students with disabilities meet content standards (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Students will perform better when there is accountability, high expectations, and clear standards for accomplishment, according to Lee et al. (1999). Since academic objectives are given top priority in high-achieving schools, principals are expected to set high standards for achievement, as noted by Robinson et al. (2008). According to Lee et al. (1999), students who receive both a strong social support system and a rigorous academic curriculum at school succeed more. Setting high standards for all students, especially those with disabilities, is therefore a crucial aspect of inclusive education (Waldron et al., 2011). Therefore, principal leadership should set high standards for all students by questioning the status quo and elevating expectations for achievement for all students with disabilities.

A safe, orderly, and protective learning environment must be established by the principal in collaboration with the faculty, staff, and students (Robinson et al., 2008). Eliminating disruptions that may impair students' ability to learn is made easier by encouraging good student behavior (Hattie, 2009). According to research, principals can address disruptive issues, enhance behavior management, and increase achievement by implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) (Sugai et al., 2012). The purpose of SWPBS is to identify issues and prioritize group interventions in classrooms and schools in order to prevent problematic behavior.

According to Robinson et al. (2008), principal leadership for inclusion encourages the use of effective teaching strategies and establishes performance standards that are specific to high-quality instruction. In order to support effective instruction, educators must become knowledgeable about and employ the teaching strategies that, according to research, have the greatest impact on improving student learning (Deshler & Cornett, 2012). Principals must support effective teaching practices that improve student learning and be aware of the needs of students with disabilities (Cook & Smith, 2012). Differentiated instruction should be encouraged in schools, as Tomlinson (2008) suggests, with the goal of assisting students who are not progressing at a sufficient rate in a curriculum based on standards. Principals need to be aware of the efficient teaching strategies that educators employ to give students with disabilities specialized, in-depth instruction.

According to Robinson et al. (2008), principals must guarantee that a system is in place to track students' progress and that the information is meaningful to teachers and helpful for enhancing instruction in order to practice effective principal leadership for inclusion. Systems for monitoring are used to link student performance data to changes in instruction that enhance learning. Teachers must also possess the knowledge and expertise to use data to assess the effectiveness of their instruction or interventions and adjust their lesson plans to enhance student performance, according to the monitoring system (Batsche, 2014).

Teachers need to create a professional learning community (PLC), a reliable environment where they can work together to solve problems, exchange resources, and enhance student learning, in

order to foster leadership for inclusion (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). By fostering teacher leadership and setting clear expectations for collaboration, principal leadership helps to facilitate these relationships (Brownell et al., 2012). In order to ensure that staff members have the time, availability, and preparedness to plan for the needs of students with disabilities and engage in collaborative instruction, such as co-teaching, leaders must set up the procedures and timetables. Collaboration will require teachers to monitor students' progress continuously in order to assess the degree to which students with disabilities are moving toward short-term curriculum goals and long-term achievement standards (Brownell et al., 2012).

This article discusses school leadership, concentrating on the difficulties encountered when implementing inclusive educational practices. The aim of this study is to explore the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive educational practices and offer suggestions on best practices to address such challenges. The following research questions form the basis of this investigation:

1. What are the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive educational practices?
2. What inclusive educational practices must school administrators implement in order to support inclusive educational practices?

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical underpinnings come from Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory and Sherman and Wood's seminal Liberal Equal Opportunity Theory (1982). As stated by Orodho (2009), the liberal equal opportunity theory holds that all people ought to have equal access to education. According to this theory, each person possesses a certain set of abilities from birth. According to this theory, education systems should be designed to remove all barriers that prevent students with intellectual disabilities from realizing their innate talents, including those based on socioeconomic, sociocultural, geographic, and school-related factors, since disability is not an incapacity. Providing special needs students with an education will expedite their social advancement because education is a powerful equalizer and enhances their life chances (Orodho, 2009). According to the theory, opportunities should be given for people to advance through all educational levels with admission based on individual ability rather than a student's disability.

This study was also made use of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework. According to Swart and Pettipher (2011), the first system in this theory is the "micro-system," which is a pattern of roles, activities, and interpersonal interactions between people and the systems in which they actively participate, like their families, schools, or peers. According to Swart and Pettipher (2011), the first system in this theory is the "micro-system," which is a pattern of roles, activities, and interpersonal interactions between people and the systems in which they actively participate, like their families, schools, or peers. Using this theory for the study has the advantage that Bronfenbrenner developed his ideas about "proximal processes," which are reciprocal in the development of an individual and other important processes, before he finalized his theory (Rosa & Tuge, 2013). This is consistent with the various structures and factors that have an impact on their development, including their upbringing, parents, peers, teachers, school rules, and the society at large. As he considered changes over time, both within an individual and in the environments in which that individual is found, Bronfenbrenner added the chronosystem last among the systems in this theory to explore how these changes may affect an individual's developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Education would therefore, at the very least, bring about economic equality by enabling all classes, races, and genders to profit monetarily from high academic achievement. The theories go on to say that equal educational opportunities for all citizens promote social mobility. Numerous economists have debated the inclusive education policy, which has been promoted by numerous governments and calls for drastic changes to the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and student grouping in schools. Stronger programs were definitely made possible by leadership from the United Nations

(UN), nearly all governments' commitment to EFA, the Salamanca Statement, and the Framework for Action. Every effort has been made to support the inclusion of children with disabilities by local authorities, parent-teacher associations, associations of individuals with disabilities, churches, and community leaders working in tandem with the government and local educational professionals. By identifying the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive education practices in schools in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon, it is hoped that these schools will be able to remove or drastically reduce obstacles to these children's education.

Methodology

In order to examine the difficulties faced by school administrators in implementing inclusive teaching methods in secondary schools in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon, this study used a qualitative research design. The study's design was a case study. According to Creswell (2013), it is "a qualitative approach in which the investigator uses detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information to explore a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time." The utilization of the case study in qualitative research proved advantageous as it provided the researcher with an enhanced comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation and the most effective means of extracting the necessary data. Creswell (1998) states that a specific case is defined by the following four steps: case identification, case boundaries (time or location), multiple data sources, and a comprehensive report detailing the setting and content. Thus, a case study can be thought of as an in-depth investigation of a specific person or situation. The principals of secondary schools in Cameroon's Mezam Division, North West Region, were the subject of this study. The study targeted the principals to elicit data on the challenges they face in the implementation of inclusive educational practices in their schools. The participants were selected using two sampling techniques such as convenience and purposive sampling. Twenty (20) principals from particular secondary schools where inclusive education is implemented were chosen by the researcher. It was believed that the principals had the information and experience relevant to my research on inclusive education leadership. The researcher in this study employed theme analysis to examine the collected data. The data was analyzed using seven steps (Creswell, 2009). They were as follows: preparing transcripts and field notes; reviewing all the information; The processes of theme generation and identification, theme representation, data coding, data visualization and display, and data interpretation.

Research Findings and Discussions

This section presents major findings and themes based on the collected qualitative data.

School leadership challenges in the implementation of Inclusive Education Practices.

The first research question explored the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive educational practices?

Lack of funding

Lack of funding is the first theme linked to the difficulties school leadership faces in implementing inclusive educational practices. Although it is uncommon, adequate funding is a requirement for inclusion. Inadequate facilities, highly qualified and experienced instructors and other staff members, instructional resources, and overall support are frequently lacking in schools. Governments must take funding into account when implementing inclusive education. The majority of attendees emphasized that " *One of the biggest obstacles to inclusive education is funding.*" Governments must take funding into account when implementing inclusive education. The majority of attendees emphasized that " *A significant obstacle to inclusive education is funding.*" The results of the study are consistent with earlier research that emphasized the value of financing inclusive education as a means of achieving inclusion (UNESCO, 2003). One of the participants said, " *Centralized policy and funding approaches to education are a major barrier to implementing financing reforms that support the implementation of inclusive education.*" The results of Chireshe (2008), which identified funding as a significant obstacle for African governments implementing inclusive education, lend support to this.

Adverse Attitude and Conduct

The second theme linked to the difficulties school leadership faces implementing inclusive educational practices is a negative mindset and demeanor regarding inclusion. According to the results, the majority of principals voiced concerns about unfavorable attitudes and behaviors. According to principals, while some educators believe that integrating special needs students into the mainstream classroom could negatively impact the education of other students, others are open to the idea as long as they receive the necessary support right away. According to a principal, *"teachers feel that special schools, where they are supposed to receive a higher quality and level of support than that provided within mainstream schools, would be a better place for them to receive care."* The research of Hwang and Evans (2011), who investigated general education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, provides substantial support for these conclusions. The study found that 55.16% of participants opposed the use of inclusion models in general education classrooms. If these educators are unwilling to adapt their best practices to fit the unique needs of these students, student achievement will suffer. The present study's results are consistent with the research conducted by Forlin et al. (2008), which highlights the role of teachers' attitudes in impeding inclusive education.

Inadequate Facilities

The third theme regarding the challenges principal leadership faces in implementing inclusive educational practices is the lack of facilities that support inclusion. Infrastructure, facilities, and assistive technology are necessary for the effective accommodation of students with special educational needs. The principals bemoaned the absence of amenities that promote inclusivity. The majority of educational systems around the world, according to Causton and Theoharis (2013), are still working toward and confronting the difficulty of integrating students with special needs into regular classrooms. Research indicates that one of the main challenges to implementing effective inclusion is the lack of necessary resources, including materials and facilities (Beyene & Tizazu 2010).

Unqualified Instructors

The fourth theme that school administrators see as a barrier to implementing inclusive teaching practices is inexperienced teachers. The most crucial human resource for inclusive educational practice is the teacher. The attitudes, skills, and training of the teachers may pose serious obstacles to inclusive education. Concerns were voiced by the participants, including *"The teachers lack the necessary training to instruct students with special needs."* Therefore, not all educators possess the necessary abilities or the right mindset to work with students who have special needs. The results of this inquiry are supported by the findings of McCray and McHatton's (2007) study, which identified teacher preparation as a major impediment to inclusion. They urge educators to become more involved in the learning and success of students with disabilities. The results of this study, which pointed to teacher incompetence as an inclusion barrier, are in line with Weiner's (2003) research findings. She also suggested that teachers be given the opportunity to internalize inclusion and make a commitment to its practices during their teacher preparation.

Ineffective communication between the home and the school

The fifth theme that principal leadership has identified as a challenge in implementing inclusive educational practices is cooperation between families and schools. In order to support children's and adolescents' healthy development and academic success, families and schools are two crucial stakeholders. As a result, it's critical that the two actors collaborate effectively. Participants reported that there was very little cooperation between the schools and families. *"Communication issues, unsatisfactory parenting styles, and a lack of hope for the child's future"* were mentioned by principals. The results of this study align with previous research conducted by Beecher and Buzhardt (2016), which indicated a lack of collaboration between families and schools and promoted family-school cooperation as a vital element of inclusive school success.

Adapting the curriculum to meet a range of learning needs

The sixth theme linked to the challenges school leadership faces in the implementation of inclusive educational practices is that of adapting the curriculum to meet a range of learning needs. This need doesn't seem to be sufficiently addressed by educator training programs, which stresses out teachers and hinders the progress of students with disabilities. It is the duty of educators to design flexible, inclusive lesson plans that take into account the diversity of our young students. Participants reported “*teachers do not recognize that each learner is unique and therefore each has a unique feature of learning needs.*” Another stated “*adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of diverse students seems to be the biggest problems faced by teachers in my school.*” The results of this research are consistent with Chataika et al., (2012) who stated that one of the problems impeding inclusive educational practice is the incapacity of educators to modify the curriculum to accommodate a variety of learning needs. Engelbrecht (2006) provides additional support for this, describing how teacher preparation programs fail to prioritize these needs, causing stress for educators and impeding the development of students with disabilities. This is also consistent with the findings of Engelbrecht et al., (2016) who concluded that there are a number of reasons why students with disabilities are not attending school, but the primary one is that mainstream schools are not meeting their needs.

he focus of the second research question was on the inclusive teaching strategies that school administrators must implement in order to support inclusive educational practices. The themes that followed provided recommendations for inclusive educational practices that school administrators could use to advance inclusive education in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon.

Developing an All-School Commitment to Inclusive Education

The first theme that aligns with inclusive educational practices and is mandated by principal leadership to advance inclusive education is establishing a school-wide commitment to inclusive schools. The participants stressed the significance of the principal's role in fostering a school-wide commitment to building an inclusive school that can successfully meet the needs of students with disabilities. The principals talked about how they work together with teachers, students, and parents to develop a shared objective while encouraging the school-wide commitment needed for the goal to be approved. According to these findings, principals who successfully create inclusive school relationships are more likely to cultivate positive relationships and earn the trust of teachers and parents, according to a study by Hoppey & McLeskey (2013). Developing positive relationships with teachers through "(a) displaying trust in teachers; (b) listening to their ideas, concerns, and problems; and (c) treating staff fairly" was the principals' top priority, according to Hoppey and McLeskey's (2013).

Parental Involvement in Making Decisions

The second inclusive educational practice theme that principal leadership needs to support in order to advance inclusive education is parental involvement in decision-making. Principals believe that parental involvement in decision-making is essential to advancing inclusive education. Principals gave examples of how to include parents in the group that created and disseminated an inclusive school vision. Parents were actively involved on leadership teams at the district and school levels, according to Ryndak et al., (2007) findings about a district-wide initiative to support the development of inclusive schools. Parents, support staff, teachers, and administrators from the district and school made up the leadership teams. Teams regularly convened to determine and remove obstacles to successful inclusive practices, offer assistance in the creation of inclusive programs for the entire school, and involve teachers in professional development pertaining to inclusive practices.

Changing educational institutions to ensure inclusivity

The third theme is redesigning schools for inclusive education. It is imperative that school administrators support inclusive educational practices. The participants described various strategies they use to restructure their schools for inclusive education in light of the findings. " *I frequently*

take part in initiatives aimed at challenging the perceptions of school personnel and other stakeholders about students with disabilities." said one participant in recall. "Changing the curriculum and instructional practices to meet the needs of the students" was the way another participant put it. The majority of participants discussed "changing the school culture to redesign the school." McLeskey & Waldron (2006); Ryndak et al. (2007) provide evidence in support of the aforementioned conclusions, demonstrating the critical leadership roles that principal leadership should play in school change initiatives by assisting in the development and implementation of inclusive program plans. These leadership responsibilities include the following: (a) creating inclusion planning teams; (b) assessing how schools currently handle struggling and disabled students; (c) creating inclusion plans; (d) going over and revising inclusion plans with school personnel and other stakeholders; (e) setting up professional development; (f) putting significant changes into place regarding the organization of schools, the roles of teachers, and their curricula; and (g) assessing inclusive programs and making necessary adjustments to create inclusive schools. This is due to the abundance of data demonstrating that most schools require a substantial redesign or systemic adjustment to effectively establish an inclusive school, and the principal is frequently the most important school leader during this transition. The results are corroborated by additional research by Waldron et al. (2011), which shows that systemic changes in schools and school culture which are required as inclusive schools are developed will not occur or be sustained over time without the principal's active support and leadership.

Creating a Common Vision for Inclusive Education

To foster inclusive education, school leadership must address the fourth theme of inclusive educational practices, which is developing a shared vision for inclusive schools. A few attendees emphasized the significance of "having a common vision and highlighting the principal's role in constructing that vision." "In order to make the school a welcoming place for these kids, I have set rules." said one participant. The majority of research on inclusive education have as a common theme the importance of emphasizing inclusion and students with disabilities as part of a larger goal. Various research works have emphasized the crucial function of the principal in recognizing the necessity of a shared vision concerning inclusion and students with disabilities, as well as in advocating for inclusion as an essential educational principle (Burstein et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2000; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Waldron et al., 2011). In a case study that looked at six inclusive schools, Guzman (1997) discovered that principals worked with staff to develop a shared school vision that "included a belief in the right of all students to learn, a belief that inclusive classrooms are beneficial for all students, and a commitment to ensuring optimal academic success for all students."

Maintaining High Standards for Students with Disabilities

Setting high standards for students with disabilities is the fifth inclusive educational practice theme that school leadership must support in order to advance inclusive education. "a concentration on curriculum initiatives that aim to set high standards for every student and motivate educators to assist students with disabilities in meeting the requirements," according to research findings, is what the participants expressed. According to research, making sure all students, including those with disabilities, receive high expectations is another crucial aspect of inclusive schools (Dyson, et al., 2004; Waldron et al., 2011). According to research, making sure all students, including those with disabilities, receive high expectations is another crucial aspect of inclusive schools (Dyson, et al., 2004; Waldron et al., 2011). For example, in order to determine the unique elements that contributed to the success of these schools, In twelve of England's top-performing inclusive schools, case studies were conducted by Dyson et al., (2004). Academic press, or "strong achievement orientation," was one factor that became apparent. High standards were held by the staff members in these settings for all students, including those with disabilities, and they were put into practice by providing a range of strategies to increase achievement.

Pedagogical leadership techniques

Instructional leadership is the sixth theme pertaining to inclusive educational practices that school leadership must support in order to advance inclusive education. The principals' conclusions about the best ways to advance inclusive educational practices and improve students' achievement levels led them to place a strong emphasis on instructional leadership. As they put it, "*Leadership should be concentrated on initiatives that enhance learning via effective educational programs.*" Pietsch et al. (2016), who discovered that both transformational and instructional leadership significantly improved teamwork, corroborate the results of this study. Empirical research carried out in conventional schools indicates that the instructional leadership style is particularly successful when it comes to lesson development. According to a meta-analysis conducted by Robinson, et al., (2008), which included 22 empirical studies, instructional leadership had an impact on student outcomes that was roughly four times greater than that of transformational leadership.

Modifying the curriculum to account for differences

Adapting the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of all learners is the seventh theme related to the inclusive educational practices that school leadership should enforce in order to foster inclusive education. The participants all expressed a great desire for educators to modify the curriculum to suit a variety of learning needs. This is in line with the findings of Engelbrecht et al., (2016), who stated that there are a variety of reasons why disabled students do not attend school, but that the primary one is that their needs are not met in regular classrooms. The participants argued that it is our duty as educators to design flexible, inclusive lesson plans that take into account the diversity of the students in our care. They advocated for strategies for adapting the curriculum like differentiation; flexible grouping; multicultural perspectives; individual education plan and assessment adaptation. This is consistent with the results of the development model by combining the theories Jung and Guskey (2007), who conducted classroom action research by applying differentiated instruction learning in accommodating students' diversity and its impact on inclusiveness, participation, motivation showed learning gain, improvement scoring, value-added learning, and educational growth.

Professional Development

Professional development is the eighth theme related to inclusive educational practices that school leadership needs to support inclusive education. Every participant mentioned how implementing inclusive education is impacted by a lack of professional development. They added that several of them are out of touch with the most recent advancements in inclusive teaching methods. All of them expressed hope that training programs would provide them the information, abilities, and know-how necessary to lead inclusive schools. The results of this study are related to Lessing and de Wit's (2007) findings, which supported the requirement for professional development training for the implementation of inclusive education.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Traditionally, inclusive education has concentrated on special education, making sure that kids with disabilities receive the assistance they require to learn and develop while being included in mainstream classrooms. The concept of inclusive education has, however, evolved in recent years to include a more comprehensive definition that pledges to "address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes." (UNESCO, 2019). This study's primary goal was to investigate the difficulties encountered by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive education practices in Mezam Division, North West Region, Cameroon. The following conclusions seek to answer the critical research questions used to elicit data for this study. The analysis of the first research question which investigated the challenges faced by school leadership in the implementation of inclusive educational practices, revealed school leadership faces many challenges in the implementation of inclusive educational practices. These challenges are: lack of funding; adverse attitude and conduct; inadequate facilities; ineffective communication between the home and the school; adapting the curriculum to meet a

range of leaning needs. Results of the second research question, which focused on the inclusive educational practices needed by school leadership to promote inclusive educational practices, documented the following themes: developing an all-school commitment inclusive education; Parental Involvement in Making Decisions; Changing educational institutions to ensure inclusivity; Creating a Common Vision for Inclusive Education; Maintaining High Standards for Students with Disabilities; Pedagogical leadership techniques; modifying the curriculum to account for differences and professional development. The results indicate that inclusive educational practices have garnered significant attention in schools, primarily due to their ability to improve education services for all students, including those with disabilities. However, there are a number of obstacles that Mezam's schools must overcome in order to adopt inclusive educational practices. These obstacles can be addressed by creating a training program for educators and school administrators, spreading knowledge about inclusive education throughout the community, and educating people about inclusive education. These actions can assist Mezam schools in implementing inclusive education practices and providing all students, including those with special needs, with improved academic services.

Policy Implications

Professional Development

Professional development is one of these resources, helping staff members and teachers gain a deeper understanding of who they are as they work toward becoming more inclusive. In order to support all children's learning needs, professional development can also offer the resources needed to create more inclusive policies, practices, curricula, and overall learning environments. Teachers and school administrators alike require training on how to incorporate more inclusive practices into their curricula and methods of instruction. Giving instructors and staff the support systems and training they need to handle these changes is crucial, as education is changing all the time and there is a growing need to modify learning environments to best fit students.

Establishing an Inclusive vision for the school

The vision for an inclusive environment must be communicated consistently and clearly by leaders starting large-scale change projects in their schools. Through communication, the provision of resources, and the development of skills, leaders must also give others the support they need to comprehend this vision. It could be difficult for people to adopt an inclusive mindset and alter long-standing behaviors without constant support.

Designing Effective Policies and Reforms

To implement inclusive education effectively, it is necessary to design effective policies and reforms regarding practices. Effective implementation of inclusive education practices in Cameroon requires school leadership to acquire comprehensive knowledge about the necessity, significance, and prerequisites. Also, it is recommended that the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education spread the word about the value and efficacy of integrating inclusive education practices in classrooms. By employing educators who are competent, seasoned, and informed about inclusive education, the ministry can introduce inclusive education into public schools. With this, the school may be able to better serve students with disabilities and successfully adopt inclusive education practices.

Provision of Resources and Funding

In order to provide classrooms with more resources for both teaching and learning, the government ought to think about taking more money out of the education budget. To ensure that students understand a concept, teachers should have the necessary tools at their disposal. Furthermore, it is imperative that students have access to a variety of teaching and learning resources that can augment their comprehension of a subject. In order to improve accessibility for students with learning disabilities who may also have physical challenges, the government should think about making improvements to the physical amenities found in schools, such as restrooms, playgrounds,

and ramps. This would make it easier for those with physical disabilities to move around the school grounds, improving their environment.

Modification of the Curriculum

The Cameroonian government ought to think about granting more flexibility to the current secondary school curriculum in order to better serve a diverse range of students. This would imply that students following that curriculum would succeed regardless of ability. It would also imply that in order to accommodate the students with learning disabilities, the relevant examination bodies would have to modify the exams and the procedures.

Parental Involvement

In order to effectively implement inclusive education practices, parents must be involved in helping students who face obstacles to learning in the classroom. Parent-teacher learner workshops should be established, and the school should conduct sufficient training and capacity-building initiatives to enlighten parents and spark conversation about what inclusion actually entails. When putting the policy into practice, parents and students should both be taken into account. It is important to inform and invite these groups to fully participate in the implementation of policy. Parents need to be considered genuine partners. Together with the teachers who are more frequently involved in the classroom experience, their input could be taken into account when creating learning programs for the students. They could also assume accountability for establishing a conducive learning environment at home.

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