

PROPOSED METHODS FOR THE INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL IN WARREN PARK-MABELREIGN DISTRICT, HARARE

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Abstract

This study investigate strategies for implementing the policy of inclusion in the Warren Park-Mabelreign District, Harare. The aim is to explore how schools can bridge the gap between inclusive education policy and practice. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, the study employs a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through interviews with the school head, deputy head and five teachers, as well as focus group discussions with 10 prefects. Findings reveal that the inclusion of learners with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBDs) is hindered by aggressive and violent behaviour, inadequate teacher training, academic challenges, limited parental support, withdrawal, peer conflict and social rejection. Participants suggested strategies such as personalised learning through reduced class sizes and additional support staff, parental involvement, teacher training, active learning, assigning leadership roles, guidance and counselling and awareness programmes. The study recommends continuous professional development for teachers in positive behaviour support, classroom management and inclusive practices. It also recommends strengthening guidance and

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counselling services, enhancing parental involvement and providing leadership opportunities for learners with EBDs to promote self-esteem, responsibility and social integration.

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INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of learners with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBDs) has become a critical concern in contemporary education, driven by the global commitment to inclusive education. Inclusive education, grounded in international human rights frameworks, promotes equity, access and meaningful participation for all learners, including those with EBDs. The Salamanca Statement of 1994 places the responsibility for inclusive education onto governments and their educational organisations (Rapp and Corral-Granados, 2024). This Statement was strengthened by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 24, which advocates for inclusive education at all levels and by Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030. These international frameworks emphasize principles of non-discrimination and systematic reform. Despite these commitments, effective inclusion of these learners with EBDs remains a major challenge in mainstream classrooms.

At the international level, there is still limited evidence on effective methods for their inclusion. Isaak, Kleinert and Wilde (2022) observe that few studies have examined learning strategies for learners with special educational needs in primary schools,

particularly those with EBDs. In practice, schools are required to implement inclusive education policies, yet many lack practical strategies to support learners with EBDs effectively. As a result, inclusion often remains a policy intention rather than a classroom reality, placing these learners at risk of academic underachievement and social exclusion. Therefore, the central problem of this study is the persistent disconnect between inclusive education policy and its practical implementation in supporting learners with EBDs. This study seeks to identify and examine strategies that can be used to include learners with EBDs, with specific reference to a school in the Warren Park-Mabelreign District in Harare. The aim is to generate practical, context-relevant approaches that strengthen inclusion and improve learning outcomes for learners with EBDs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What challenges do schools face in implementing the inclusion policy in regard to learners with EBDs?
2. Which methods can be used to bridge the gap between the inclusion policy and practice on learners with EBDs?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that conceptualises the inclusion of learners with EBDs as a dynamic process influenced by the interaction between inclusive education policy, implementing challenges and support methods used in the school. The Salamanca Statement (1994) advocates for *Education for All* and promotes the development of inclusive communities within mainstream education systems (Corcoaran and Keneva, 2023). In line with this, learners with EBDs are expected to participate meaningfully in mainstream schools alongside their

peers. However, challenges such as aggressive and violent behaviour, lack of teacher training, academic challenges, lack of parental support, withdrawal and social rejection hinder their inclusion. To cover this gap there is need for teacher professional development, parental involvement, personalised learning, active learning approaches, guidance and counselling services, awareness programmes and leadership opportunities for learners with EBDs. The effective implementation of these methods enhances positive behaviour, academic engagement, self-esteem, participation and social integration, thereby promoting successful inclusion of learners with EBDs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Self-determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000) is a widely used framework for understanding human motivation. The SDT examines human motivation and personality and emphasizes individuals' inherent tendencies toward personal development and psychological fulfilment (Ryan and Deci, 2016). It specifically argues that for healthy development to unfold, individuals require support for basic psychological needs. These are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the sense of having control over one's own actions, competence reflects the need to feel effective and successful in one's activities, while relatedness captures the desire to feel connected and cared for by others (Deci *et al.*, 2017).

The three psychological needs do not operate in isolation, but rather interdependently and should thus be considered in combination rather than separately (Guay, 2022). Guay *et al.* (2020) state that competence and relatedness could also be supported respectively by an adequate structure and a high degree of

involvement. Inclusion of learners with EBDs can be necessitated if a learner experiences these three needs. Wang *et al.* (2017) illustrate what a classroom could look and feel like when autonomy, competence and relatedness, are met. Teachers should be able to meet their learners with EBDs' three psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness and create interesting and challenging lessons that are relevant to their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EBDs are mental health and behavioural conditions that affect children's emotional functioning, behaviour and educational participation. Ogundele (2018) notes that EBDs manifest in various forms, including disruptive behaviour disorders, anxiety disorders, depression and autism spectrum disorders and may be categorised as internalising or externalising problems. Kim, Moon and Kang. (2023) argue that conditions such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, psychotic disorders and obsessive-compulsive disorder should be understood as EBDs rather than mere misbehaviour. Learners with EBDs often exhibit persistent patterns of disruptive behaviour, emotional dysregulation and social withdrawal which negatively affect both their learning outcomes and classroom participation (Enem, 2025). Although EBDs are grouped under one category, learners present different needs and challenges.

Lane, Werby and Baron-Arwood (2005) note that learners with EBDs vary considerably in their emotional, behavioural and academic needs. Some exhibit externalising behaviours such as aggression and disruption, while others display internalising characteristics such as anxiety, withdrawal and poor

concentration. Smith, Thompson and Maynard. (2022) further note that some learners may demonstrate both forms of behaviour simultaneously, making intervention more complex. This calls for the need for individualised and comprehensive support systems in order to facilitate their inclusion in mainstream primary schools.

Research consistently demonstrates that learners with EBDs face significant academic, behavioural and social challenges. High rates of disruptive and noisy behaviour, poor interactions with teachers and peers, social skill deficits and unmet psychological needs are also common experiences among them (Garwood, 2017). They frequently struggle with social interactions, experience conflicts with peers and teachers and exhibit disruptive behaviours that interfere with learning. Studies conducted in the United States of America support these findings. In Sweden, Gidlund (2018) reports that learners with EBDs commonly display aggression, attention difficulties, immaturity and disruptive conduct. McGuire and Meadan (2022) reveal that students with EBDs often demonstrate challenging behaviours and delays in social skills development which can hinder their ability to build relationships with peers and teachers.

Mooney and Ryan (2021) found that students experience a combination of academic and social-emotional-behavioural deficits in comparison to their peers. In Texas, US, research has consistently demonstrated that students with EBDs are at high risk for academic underachievement (Maggin, Werby and Gilmour, 2016). Although mainstream teachers attempt to socially include learners with EBDs, the study found that they frequently face barriers related to limited collaboration with special educators and

a lack of professional development opportunities. These challenges faced by teachers is evidence that teachers need more support and training to implement inclusive education policies effectively. Research suggests the need for more training and support for teachers in the classrooms (Gilmour and Wehby, 2020).

The successful inclusion of learners with EBDs depends largely on teachers' ability to manage diverse behavioural and emotional needs. However, research across different regions indicates that many teachers experience challenges in implementing inclusive education. Gilmour and Wehby (*ibid.*) found that mainstream teachers often encounter difficulties related to limited collaboration with special educators and inadequate professional development opportunities.

Similar findings were reported in Asia, where teachers cited disruptive behaviour, insufficient training and limited institutional support as major barriers to inclusion (Kaji and Dutta, 2026). Zahid, Jamal, Nawaz (2023) observe that teachers often possess limited knowledge of EBDs and lack specialised skills needed to support learners effectively. These findings suggest that teacher preparedness remains a critical factor influencing the implementation of inclusive education policies. Several studies emphasize the importance of collaborative and supportive strategies in promoting the inclusion of learners with EBDs. Sandamali and Herath (2024) emphasize that parents are essential elements in the educational process because they provide teachers with feedback pertaining to their children's behaviour outside the school environment. Agustin (2025) argues that collaboration

among teachers, parents, counsellors and school administrators enhances the support available to learners with EBDs.

Research further suggests that professional development, positive behaviour support systems, guidance and counselling services and access to specialised personnel can improve inclusion outcomes (Dewi, Supena, Bintoro *et al.*, 2025). Providing learners with disabilities opportunities to participate actively in school decision-making and leadership roles can strengthen their sense of identity, belonging and inclusion (DeMatthews *et al.*, 2020). These studies indicate that successful inclusion requires multiple strategies and a coordinated effort involving multiple stakeholders rather than relying solely on classroom teachers.

In Africa, studies reveal similar challenges in the inclusion of learners with EBDs. In Kenya, Mboya, Odongo and Omoke (2016) identify truancy, impulsivity, ADHD, lack of trained personnel and large class sizes as major barriers affecting learners with EBDs. Mboya *et al.* (2016) established from the teachers that pupils in most schools were so many that giving individual attention was a problem. Likewise, South African studies report disruptive behaviour, attention-seeking tendencies, disorganised schoolwork and intense emotional reactions among learners with EBDs (Nunan and Ntombela, 2019). To address these challenges, Ngoma (2020) recommends continuous professional development focused on inclusive pedagogies and behaviour management strategies. These findings suggest that while inclusive education policies have been adopted across many African countries, schools continue to face practical challenges in translating policy into effective classroom practice.

In Zimbabwe, research indicates that learners with EBDs encounter numerous barriers to successful inclusion. Chitiyo and Dzenga (2021) and Siziba and Kaputa (2022) reveal that many schools lack specialised personnel, psychological services, guidance and counselling support and adequate learning resources needed to support learners with EBDs. Furthermore, UNICEF (2022) reports that mental health issues among children remain underreported and stigmatised, limiting early identification and intervention. Chitiyo *et al.* (2014) found that some teachers continue to view physical punishment as an effective method of managing behavioural difficulties, despite the principles of inclusive education. These findings suggest that a significant gap remains between the policy of inclusion and actual classroom practice in Zimbabwean schools. While existing studies have identified challenges affecting the inclusion of learners with EBDs, limited research has focused on practical strategies that schools can adopt to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Therefore, there is need to explore approaches that can strengthen the implementation of inclusive education for learners with EBDs in mainstream primary schools so as to bridge the gap between policy and practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study is guided by an interpretivist paradigm and adopts a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions and practices within their natural settings (Creswell and Poth, 2018). A case study design is used to provide an in-depth understanding of inclusive education practices within a real-life school context. Case study research enables a comprehensive examination of complex phenomena within their natural environment, allowing for detailed and

contextualised insights (Sithole, 2025). Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those with relevant experience were included. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed strategies such as triangulation of data sources, detailed documentation of the research process and careful interpretation of participants' responses. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study to protect the integrity, dignity and rights of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and participation was voluntary without any form of coercion. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that no real names were used during data collection or reporting (Subedi, 2025).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved transcribing interviews and focus group discussions, coding responses and identifying emerging patterns and themes related to inclusive practices and behavioural support strategies. Thematic analysis is widely recognised as an effective method for identifying recurring patterns in qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from the data generated were:

- challenges faced in implementing the policy of inclusion for learners with EBDs.
- methods that can be used to close the gap between policy and inclusion of learners with EBDs.

THEME 1: CHALLENGES FACED IN IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY OF INCLUSION FOR LEARNERS WITH EBDs

Under the first theme, challenges faced in implementing the policy of inclusion for learners with EBDs included aggressive and violent behaviour, lack of adequate teacher training, academic challenges, lack of parental support, withdrawal, peer conflict and social rejection.

AGGRESSIVE VIOLENT AND DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Participants highlighted that learners with EBDs often display externalising behaviours such as aggressive, violent and disruptive behaviours that significantly interfere with teaching, learning and the general order of the school. These behaviours were described as overwhelming and unmanageable by many participants. For instance, the school head, S/HB recounted a situation where a learner became violent. S/HB exclaimed, *"Breaking spectacles for the teacher, pushing another learner to the wall!"*, emphasizing the severe nature of the aggression. T4B also expressed concern, stating,

"She grabbed even stones which we use as counters. She is a girl and is very aggressive and wild."

T4B was describing the unpredictable behaviour and intensity of some students' actions.

Participants highlighted that learners with EBDs often display aggressive, violent and disruptive behaviours that interfere with teaching, learning and the school order. These behaviours were described as overwhelming and difficult to manage, indicating gaps in learner management systems. S/HB reported a learner *"breaking spectacles for the teacher, pushing another learner to the wall,"* while T4B described a learner who grabbed stones and behaved

aggressively. Such accounts show the intensity and unpredictability of these behaviours. Gidlund (2018) notes that learners with EBDs often exhibit externalising behaviours such as aggression and disruptive conduct.

LACK OF ADEQUATE TEACHER TRAINING

Many teachers expressed feeling unprepared and not equipped to support these learners effectively. T2B openly admitted,

“We lack required knowledge on how to deal with learners with EBDs, we feel we need further training.”

T2B and T4B acknowledged that some teachers do not understand these learners with EBDs. Teachers were, therefore, showed their great need for training.

Teachers’ lack of training to support learners with EBDs emerged as a significant barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. Participants indicated that they needed more knowledge and skills to effectively manage behaviour and support learning in inclusive classrooms. For example, T2B stated, “*We lack the required knowledge on how to deal with learners with EBDs,*” showing a critical gap in professional development. Literature reveals that teachers often have limited knowledge of EBDs, lack specialised training and receive minimal institutional support (Zahid *et al.*, 2023). Dewi *et al.* (2025) emphasize the importance of continuous professional development and support systems. From a Self-determination Theory perspective, this limitation reduces teachers’ ability to support learners’ needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Inadequate training weakens both classroom management and learner engagement. Therefore, strengthening teacher capacity is essential for effective inclusion.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

Teachers noted serious academic challenges faced by learners with EBDs caused by limited concentration and a general lack of interest in schoolwork. They lack writing and reading skills. T1B described the situation,

“Worst challenge is their writing skill and reading skill, they are not really into learning.”

Teachers indicated that these learners struggle to stay focused and produce work that has no coherence. T4B highlighted,

“Their attention span is very short, the work will be having no order and poor writing.”

According to teachers, their classroom performance is very poor because they do not understand when the teacher is teaching. These insights reflect how EBDs hinder academic progress of the affected learners.

Teachers revealed academic challenges among learners with EBDs, especially in reading, writing and engagement with learning tasks. Some learners are reluctant to read or write and when they do, their work is often poorly structured. T1B’s statement, *“writing and reading skills are the worst challenges”*, highlight the extent of academic difficulties in learners with EBDs. They struggle to meet expected academic standards of reading and writing. Gilmour *et al.* (2019) argue that inadequate support for learners with EBDs contributes to poor academic outcomes. These challenges may be intensified by teachers’ limited training in addressing the needs of learners with EBDs. This indicates a gap between inclusive education policy and classroom practice.

LACK OF PARENTAL SUPPORT

School administration and teachers identified lack of parental support as a hindrance to inclusion practices. Administrators revealed that parents delay in accepting the EBDs of their children. S/HB explained,

“Parents sometimes deny that their child has a problem, they take time to understand.”

As a result of this denial, they can ask the school head to their children to another class, blaming the teachers who tell them about EBDs of their children. T1B echoed,

“Then they say can the school head change my child, the teacher is saying my child is insane.”

Other parents as well advise teachers to beat learners with EBDs thinking they exhibit unacceptable behaviour willingly, not accepting that it is a disability. T5B shared,

“Parents do not support. If you tell the parent, the parent will say beat.”

Such attitudes of parents make teachers fail to create an inclusive supportive environment.

Administrators and teachers complained about parents being in a state of denial that their children have EBDs. This results in parents ignoring cases of EBDs in their children and do not seek help for their children. Most of their parents are in denial. If teachers tell them about their children, they deny as if they do not know and blame the teacher, claiming that the the teacher is saying their child was insane. Parental involvement and communication are often inadequate, limiting holistic support for learners (Siziba and Kaputa, 2022). The mental health of children in Zimbabwe remains under-reported, stigmatised and poorly understood (UNICEF, 2022). Denial of parents need to be addressed so that they cooperate.

WITHDRAWAL

Participants highlighted the emotional and social challenges experienced by learners with EBDs, noting challenges of internalising behaviours. Some learners become withdrawn and fearful, avoiding interaction and participation. As T1B observed,

“Some they get withdrawn, especially those with internalising issues of being very quiet, especially if the teachers become harsh to them, they fear that they can be beaten by the teacher.”

They become very quiet that it becomes difficult for the teacher to talk to concerned learner. T3B pointed out more severe internalised behaviours,

“Some of them they need help even for *wiwi* and I have to take him for *wiwi*. They don’t talk, so for me, inclusion aaaaaa!!!”

Apart from wetting themselves, some of them fail even to eat their food. T3B stated,

“Some of them even their food, if you don’t check and tell them to eat, they do not eat.”

The teacher has to check if they brought food and then make them to eat.

The findings reveal that some learners with EBDs exhibit internalising behaviours such as withdrawal, fearfulness, silence and avoidance of classroom participation, which making it difficult for teachers and peers to know exactly how to handle them. Teachers explained that these learners become extremely quiet, avoid communication and required assistance even with basic self-care activities. T1B explained that some learners become withdrawn when teachers are harsh because they fear punishment. These findings support Enem (2025), who notes that learners with EBDs often display emotional dysregulation and social withdrawal that negatively affect learning and classroom functioning. Some teachers become harsh and beat learners and

this brings fear to learners with EBDs and they become withdrawn. Chitiyo *et al.* (2014) found that some teachers continue to view physical punishment as an effective method of managing behavioural difficulties. Every learner needs a supportive environment according to the SDT. Guay *et al.* (2020) state that competence and relatedness could also be supported by an adequate structure and a high degree of involvement, respectively. Withdrawn learners may struggle to participate socially and academically in inclusive classrooms, showing the need for supportive teacher-learner relationships.

PEER CONFLICT AND SOCIAL REJECTION

Peer conflict and social rejection emerged as significant issues contributing to the gap between the policy of inclusion of learners with EBDs and practice. Prefects reported that learners with EBDs often display disrespectful, uncooperative and sometimes threatening behaviour, which strains peer relationships. P1B expressed frustration, saying,

“They don’t listen, we can’t do anything to them.”

P3B added,

“They threaten us and say I won’t do this because you are younger than me.”

They explained how learners with EBDs despise their age and authority. Prefects added that these learners also take advantage of their disability which leads to peers to disliking them. P7B reported,

“They take advantage of their challenges and say ‘I am more prioritised than you’,”

This suggests that some learners with EBDs may manipulate their condition to avoid responsibility.

Peer conflict and social rejection emerged as significant challenges affecting the inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. Prefects reported that some learners with EBDs displayed disrespectful, uncooperative and threatening behaviours that strained relationships with peers and reduced cooperation within the school environment. Learners with EBDs were described as refusing to follow instructions from prefects and undermining their authority due to age differences. Some prefects also felt that learners with EBDs took advantage of the special attention they received, leading to resentment from peers. McGuire and Meadan (2022) reveal that students with EBDs often demonstrate challenging behaviours and delays in social skills development which can hinder their ability to build relationships with peers and teachers. The behavioural difficulties among learners with EBDs contribute to peer rejection and negatively affect their social inclusion in mainstream schools.

THEME 2: METHODS THAT CAN BE USED TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICY OF INCLUSION OF LEARNERS WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS

Under the second theme, methods that can be used to implement the policy of inclusion were personalised learning through reduced class sizes and additional support staff, parental involvement, teacher training, active learning, assigning leadership roles, guidance and counselling and awareness programmes.

PERSONALISED LEARNING THROUGH REDUCED CLASS SIZES AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT STAFF

Having smaller class sizes were identified as essential for providing individualised attention and reducing overload by administrators and teachers. S/HB pointed out,

“With such cases, the teacher needs to handle a very small class such that attention will be easy to give to such learners.”

Teachers also suggested the use of assistant teachers to help manage the class while the other teacher is teaching. T5B suggested,

“Use of assistant teachers because in a class of fifty learners, it is difficult for one teacher to manage behaviour.”

T4B said,

“Class sizes should be reduced as well so as to have room for individual attention.”

Reduced class sizes and assistant teachers will help teachers to handle learners at individual level.

Participants highlighted reduced class sizes and assistant teachers as important measures for supporting inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. Administrators explained that smaller classes make it easier to provide individualised attention and effectively manage learner behaviour. Teachers highlighted the importance of assistant teachers in supporting classroom management and helping teachers attend to learners at an individual level. Mboya *et al.* (2016) identify large class sizes as major barriers affecting learners with EBDs, and established from the teachers that pupils in most schools were so many that giving individual attention was a problem. With reduced class sizes and assistant teachers helping in classroom management, inclusion of learners with EBDs will not be difficult.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

School administrators and teachers emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with parents. S/HB stated,

“Parental involvement is needed because some problems can be solved through parental involvement.”

Without support from parents, learners lack values. Parents, therefore, have a very important role to play. S/HB noted,

“Parenting, if it lacks installation of values, norms, the child becomes empty.

D/HB demanded,

“We need parents to cooperate with us.”

Teachers demanded parents to be part of the solution and to come out of denial. T5B added,

“Also advocacy so that parents will come out of denial that is, calling parents and teaching them.”

This came as a result of the challenges that they face of parents’ denial of their children’s EBDs.

Administrators and teachers emphasized the importance of parental involvement in supporting learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. School administrators and teachers explained that collaboration with parents helps reinforce values, norms and positive behaviour among learners. Participants also highlighted the need for parents to cooperate with schools and accept their children’s challenges instead of remaining in denial. Teachers felt that parental support was essential in addressing behavioural difficulties and improving learner outcomes. Parental involvement and communication are often inadequate, limiting holistic support for learners (Siziba and Kaputa, 2022). The findings suggest that effective inclusion requires strong partnerships between schools and families in supporting learners’ behavioural and emotional development.

TEACHER TRAINING

Educators expressed a strong need for training in order to address behavioural challenges with learners with EBDs effectively. This includes training on identifying EBDs and managing behaviour

positively since they had faced serious issues of a learner who was destroying school property. They suggested regular training for effective identification and handling of learners with EBDs. School administration opted for ongoing training. D/HB said,

“We need constant training of teachers.:

S/HB also added,

“Schools need to have very qualified personnel.”

Participants emphasized the need for teacher training to improve the identification and management of learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. Educators explained that they faced serious behavioural challenges, including learners destroying school property and, therefore, required skills in positive behaviour management and effective support strategies. School administrators also highlighted the importance of continuous professional development and qualified personnel in schools. Zahid *et al.* (2023) note that teachers often have limited knowledge about EBDs, lack specialised training and receive minimal institutional support. Ngoma (2020) recommends continuous professional development focused on inclusive pedagogies and behaviour management strategies. On-going teacher training is essential for strengthening inclusive practices and improving support for learners with EBDs.

ACTIVE LEARNING

The use of engaging learner-centred visual methods and hands-on practical activities emerged as one of the strategies which can be used to support the inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream classrooms. Teachers emphasized that such learners respond more positively to colourful, hands-on and stimulating materials. They

highlighted the need for attractive multimedia-rich resources to capture attention and improve comprehension. T1B explained,

“If they see colourful things, they tend to pay attention to that. They can write some sentences when they see attractive things. We can also make use of mobiles like television, projectors, just like any other children [who] learn from seeing.”

Teachers suggested that using practical subjects can help learners with EBDs. Practical subjects will help them divert their energy to something else, r that to bullying others and making noise. T4B stated,

“They need hands-on practical subjects.”

Participants indicated that active learning strategies such as visual methods, learner-centred approaches and hands-on practical activities can enhance the inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream classrooms. Teachers explained that learners with EBDs respond positively to colourful, attractive and multimedia-rich materials that capture their attention and improve participation. Participants also highlighted the importance of role play, practical subjects and other hands-on activities in helping learners remain engaged and channel their energy productively. Dewi *et al.* (2025) note that teachers emphasize the need for specialised teaching strategies to effectively implement inclusive education. Many schools lack essential resources, including specialised materials and support services, which are crucial for accommodating learners with EBDs (Chitiyo and Dzenga, 2021). This request from teachers indicates that schools lack necessary resources that can help in the inclusion of learners with EBDs to promote active learning.

ASSIGNING ROLES AND LEADERSHIP POSITION

Teachers and prefects suggested assigning roles and providing leadership opportunities for learners with EBDs as a powerful inclusion strategy that could be used in mainstream schools. Teachers emphasized the issue of assigning them roles so that they can learn to be responsible even though they complained that it can be difficult because of large classes. T2B suggested,

“Assign roles but the problem is of large classes.”

Prefects think if learners with EBDs can be given positions like them and other leadership roles, it can work. For instance, P3B suggested,

“They should be given positions like captain or prefect.”

P7B emphasized,

“They should be given important roles to play.”

P8B added,

“They should also be promoted to be prefects.”

Participants thought when learners with EBDs are trusted with leadership roles, they are more likely to exhibit disciplined behaviour and gain respect from peers.

Participants believed that when learners with EBDs are entrusted with positions such as prefects, captains, or other leadership roles, they are more likely to demonstrate disciplined behaviour and gain respect from their peers. These opportunities shift attention from learners' behavioural difficulties to their strengths and capabilities, thereby enhancing their participation in school life. Providing learners with disabilities opportunities to participate actively in school decision-making and leadership roles can strengthen their sense of identity, belonging and inclusion (DeMatthews *et al.*, 2020). The SDT posits that individuals are more motivated and engaged when their needs for autonomy,

competence and relatedness are satisfied. By examining the SDT by Ryan and Deci (2020), allowing learners with EBDs to take on meaningful responsibilities, schools provide opportunities for them to exercise autonomy, demonstrate competence and develop relatedness with others, thereby supporting their inclusion within mainstream school environments.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Guidance and counselling emerged as vital in effectively including learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. School administrators emphasized the need for child study assessments that are followed by professional counselling. S/HB stated,

“Child study is needed first in order to identify their problems. After child study, when problems have been identified, there is need for professional counselling.”

Participants also highlighted the importance of creating safe spaces where learners with EBDs can express their emotions and receive targeted support. As participant P5B noted,

“Counselling where they will be able to express what they feel.”

There was a shared understanding of the need for emotional outlets through counselling.

Guidance and counselling was highlighted as important strategies for bridging the gap between policy and inclusion of learners with EBDs. School administrators emphasized the need for child study assessments to identify learners' problems and provide individualised counselling support. Participants also stressed the importance of creating safe spaces where learners with EBDs can express their emotions and receive help in understanding and regulating their behaviour. Lack of specialised staff, such as guidance counsellors, special needs assistants and psychological

services, limits support for learners with EBDs (Siziba and Kaputa, 2022). The findings suggest that guidance and counselling are essential for promoting the emotional well-being and successful inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream schools.

AWARENESS

Prefects suggested awareness and peer sensitisation as essential in promoting successful inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream settings. They emphasized the need to educate peers to have understanding, empathy and acceptance. P1B echoed,

“Tell others to accommodate them. Awareness.”

PB6 stressed the need for learners to be practically guided so that they may not misinterpret the behaviour of learners with EBDs. P6B demanded,

“We should be taught how to talk, play and help learners with EBDs.”

Participants highlighted awareness and peer sensitisation as important strategies for promoting the successful inclusion of learners with EBDs in mainstream schools. Prefects emphasized the need to educate peers so that they develop understanding, empathy and acceptance towards learners with EBDs. Participants also noted that learners should be guided on how to communicate, play and assist peers with EBDs in order to reduce misunderstanding and negative attitudes. McGuire and Meadan (2022) reveal that learners with EBDs often experience difficulties in developing social skills and building positive relationships with peers. The findings suggest that awareness programmes may help improve peer relationships and promote social inclusion for learners with EBDs.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that effective inclusion of learners with EBDs is hindered by several challenges in mainstream schools. These challenges include aggressive and violent behaviour, inadequate teacher training, academic difficulties, limited parental support, withdrawal, peer conflicts and social rejection. The study concludes that successful inclusion of learners with EBDs requires supportive, learner-centred and collaborative approaches that address both the educational and social-emotional needs of learners. Models suggested were personalised learning, parental involvement, teacher training, active learning, assigning roles and leadership positions, guidance and counselling and awareness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should provide continuous professional development programmes that equip teachers with skills in positive behaviour support, classroom management and inclusive teaching practices for learners with EBDs.
- Schools should discourage harsh disciplinary practices and promote supportive, empathetic and restorative approaches when dealing with learners with EBDs.
- Schools should enhance guidance and counselling services through trained personnel who can provide emotional, behavioural and academic support to learners with EBDs.
- Schools should strengthen partnerships with parents through regular meetings, consultations and collaborative intervention plans to support learners both at home and at school.

- Schools should provide learners with EBDs opportunities to participate in leadership roles and school activities to enhance self-esteem, responsibility and social integration.

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