THE IMPACT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA ON EDUCATION IN LESOTHO'S INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract:
Trauma at a young age can significantly affect a child's learning ability in an inclusive educational setting, leading to symptoms like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. This article investigates the effects of early childhood trauma on education in mainstream primary schools in Lesotho and proposes potential solutions to address the challenges. Data from focus group discussions of nine teachers revealed a lack of professional training to address trauma-affected children effectively. Despite acknowledging the need for resources, inadequate assistance from the school administration hindered their integration of traumatised learners. Potential solutions to address the challenges include specialised teacher training, a secure learning environment, a social-emotional curriculum, and collaboration with community support systems. The study also recommends increased resources and cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Health. It also recommends conducting a national study on early childhood trauma to inform the effective implementation of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) in 2018 and the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) in 2021.

Keywords: childhood trauma, trauma training, learner relationships

1. Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in nations' economic, social, and cultural development, which is recognised globally. In line with this understanding, the government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education and Training, is committed to providing inclusive,

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high-quality, and equitable education for all learners. This commitment is reflected in the adoption and implementation of various global educational policy frameworks. Lesotho has embraced the Education for All (EFA) Goals since 1990, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, the Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) pillars in 2005, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, along with numerous other international conventions (Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2012).

The government of Lesotho views education as a Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP) rather than a justifiable right, as outlined in Chapter III, Section 28 of the Constitution (Lesotho Constitution, 19193). To support educational initiatives, various legal documents have been established. A significant development is the Education Act of 2010, which aims to ensure the provision of quality education for all learners, including those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Ministry of Education and Training, Education Act,2010). In addition to the Education Act, several official documents have been created to enhance access to quality education. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) for 2005-2015 was designed to implement essential educational frameworks and emphasised the importance of developing a Special Education Policy. This policy is necessary for the Special Education Unit (SEU) to fulfil its mandate effectively. The current Education Sector Plan (ESP) (Ministry of Education and Training, 2016-2026) emphasises the development and implementation of an Inclusive Education Policy. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has developed guidelines for teachers to assist them in engaging with and supporting LSEN in the classroom (MoET,2011).

Previous policies failed to adequately support learners affected by trauma. In response, the Ministry introduced the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) in 2018 and the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) in 2021. The LIEP ensures that all learners with special educational needs, including those impacted by trauma, can fully engage in the school system, preparing them for independent living and positive contributions to society. To facilitate this, the Ministry will implement restructuring processes (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Meanwhile, the LBECP focuses on providing learners with the knowledge, skills, ethics, and values necessary for success, aiming to help them realise their full potential (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). This article explores early childhood trauma and its negative impact on education in mainstream primary schools in Lesotho, along with potential solutions.

2. Significance of the Study

A study titled "Impact of Early Childhood Trauma on Education in Lesotho's Inclusive Schools and Possible Solutions" addresses a significant issue within the country's education system. Children who experience early trauma often encounter barriers to learning in inclusive classrooms, highlighting the necessity for targeted interventions that can enhance their educational outcomes. Given the high rates of child abuse and neglect

in Lesotho, children's cognitive and emotional development can be severely affected, making the learning process particularly challenging (Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Health, 2020). This study investigates the ramifications of early trauma on children in inclusive settings, where they may also contend with disabilities. It aims to identify effective support strategies, such as trauma-informed practices and educator training (Liasidou, 2022; Berger & Martin, 2019). The findings could inform policy reforms within Lesotho's education system, focusing on early childhood development and improving access to mental health care in schools, thereby contributing to the ongoing research concerning trauma, disability, and education in a context with previously limited data.

3. Research Questions

1) In what ways does early life trauma influence children's academic performance and social relationships in inclusive schools in Lesotho?
2) What strategies can educators and policymakers adopt to support learners affected by trauma in these schools?

4. Literature Review

4.1 The Impact of Trauma on Children's Development

Danese and Baldwin (2017) highlight that children who experience trauma are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This finding is supported by Bissir Nia *et al.* (2019), who note that trauma can lead to emotional distress and is linked to psychotic disorders and various physical health issues, including obesity and heart disease. Furthermore, trauma can significantly affect brain development, impacting cognitive functions and overall health (Kaliman *et al.*, 2022). It may impair reasoning and executive functioning, disrupt attachment, and contribute to issues with behavioural control (Cavanaugh, 2016; Sorrels, 2018). Consequently, children who have experienced trauma often struggle to socialise and form relationships (Nicholson, Perez, & Kurts, 2019). The long-term consequences of trauma can include chronic health conditions, difficulties in relationships, and sleep disturbances (Perry & Szalavits, 2018). Many survivors may turn to substance use as a coping mechanism, which can hinder their creativity and problem-solving skills, ultimately affecting their academic performance (Cole *et al.*, 2013).

4.2 Academic Difficulties: Challenges Faced by Learners with Trauma

Academic success depends on a learner's ability to regulate emotions and maintain focus. However, learners who have experienced trauma often struggle with concentration, making engagement in the classroom challenging (Berardi & Morton, 2019). Elevated levels of norepinephrine and cortisol can lead to increased emotional and cognitive stress,

resulting in various social and physiological difficulties (Everly & Lating, 2012). Emotional dysregulation may also cause learners to withdraw and struggle with social interactions, ultimately impacting their academic performance. Traumatised individuals often prioritise survival over learning, which can lead to lower grades, increased absenteeism, and higher dropout rates (Souers & Hall, 2016). Developmental delays can further hold back educational advancement (Steiner, 2016). In addition, trauma can adversely affect language skills and communication abilities, contributing to social withdrawal and challenges with impulse control (Cole *et al.*, 2013).

4.3 Emotional Development

Emotional development involves the ability to identify and manage emotions and behaviours. It affects how individuals perceive themselves, others, and their surroundings (National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), 2010). Children who have experienced trauma often struggle with emotional regulation, leading to unpredictable reactions such as trembling, anger, or avoidance. This poses challenges for educators and caregivers (Trauma, 2017). Traumatised learners frequently experience persistent fear, reacting instinctively to threats by either fighting or freezing (Van der Kolk, 2014). Unresolved trauma can prevent individuals from recognising when danger has passed, and feelings of helplessness may elicit physical responses (Hughey, 2016). Additionally, traumatic events can lead to flashbacks and nightmares that endure for years (Stress Stop, 2017).

4.4 The Role of Teachers in Supporting Traumatized Learners

Teachers are essential in helping traumatised children navigate their education. They must implement trauma-informed practices to reduce the negative effects of trauma (Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators, 2016). This includes providing choices to foster a sense of control and creating a safe environment for open discussions. Key roles for teachers include recognising emotional needs, building trusting relationships, and promoting resilience. Their support contributes significantly to learners' well-being and academic success (Berger *et al.*, 2021; Luthar & Mendes, 2020). Teachers also have responsibilities outside the classroom, such as communicating with caregivers and facilitating referrals for additional support, while creating routines that promote emotional awareness within the classroom (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016; Brunzell *et al.*, 2015).

4.5 The Role of Families in Supporting Learners with Trauma

Families play a vital role in the recovery of individuals who have experienced trauma, providing emotional support, validation, and a sense of safety. Interventions involving families, such as psychoeducation and family therapy, are effective in reducing trauma symptoms and enhancing family functioning (Carr *et al.*, 2019). However, not all families can offer the necessary support, and poor environments combined with a lack of

resources can hinder a child's success in school and mental health development (Carr, 2019).

4.6 Causes of Trauma

Sexual abuse significantly traumatises individuals, especially when it occurs during childhood or adolescence (Oddone-Paolucci *et al.*, 2017). Its effects can include depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other emotional issues (Fergusson *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, family conflict and dysfunction—manifesting as parental disputes or abuse—can create stressful environments, increasing trauma risk for children (Hutt, 2014). Trauma from war affects both military personnel and civilians, potentially leading to anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Porter & Haslam, 2005). The severity of this trauma often correlates with an individual's proximity to conflict and its duration. Exposure to war can also contribute to physical health problems, further complicating the psychological effects (Steel *et al.*, 2009).

5. Conceptual Framework

The study is grounded on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development, which connects psychological and educational theories to early educational curricula (Harkonen, 2007). This model asserts that an individual's development is shaped by interconnected environmental systems, ranging from immediate environments like family to broader societal structures such as culture. These systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem—impact behaviour in different ways, with the microsystem exerting the most significant influence due to direct interactions. At the heart of this theory is the developing child, with all interactions within these systems aimed at supporting them in the classroom. The model emphasises the importance of effective communication and collaboration between educators and parents to enhance the child's well-being. A thorough understanding of students' familial contexts, including social and economic factors, is essential. Strong relationships between parents and teachers can profoundly impact a child's development, while active engagement and meaningful experiences are crucial for promoting positive growth (Sincero, 2012). We, therefore, find this theory relevant for understanding the impact of early childhood trauma on education in inclusive schools in Lesotho, since it emphasises the interrelation of family, community, and educational institutions.

6. Research Design and Methodology

The study adopts a constructivist research perspective aimed at understanding how educators perceive the impact of early childhood trauma on education within inclusive schools in Lesotho, as well as potential remedies. It is essential to focus on teachers' subjective perceptions of reality and the meaning they derive from their experiences

when interacting with traumatised learners in an inclusive setting (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). This framework is utilised to elucidate educators' viewpoints on the effects of trauma and to identify potential interventions that could help address the significant challenges these learners face in their educational journey

The research employs a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions, skills, experiences, and knowledge of participating teachers who have an extensive understanding of the challenges faced by trauma-affected learners in educational environments. The qualitative phenomenological approach is an effective tool for educational research, allowing researchers to uncover the profound significance of individual participants' experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). These participants are equipped to identify potential solutions to support this disadvantaged group (Aspers & Corte, 2021). The study aims to investigate multiple strategies to help teachers working with traumatised students implement policies that prioritise learner welfare and rights. Additionally, the study utilises a descriptive case study approach. According to Kekeya (2019), this methodology focuses on a specific organisation, group, or unit, providing valuable insights into that particular context. Kumantongo and Muzata (2021) further explain that case studies can be classified as descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory. Relevant data collection methods typically include interviews, observations, and document analysis. This study aims to examine the impact of early childhood trauma on education in Lesotho's inclusive schools and explore possible solutions. A descriptive case study is particularly suitable in this context, as it investigates phenomena that is significant to the researchers within a defined setting (Zainal, 2007). This descriptive case study methodology is appropriate for this research as it encourages active participation from teachers. By adopting this approach, the study fosters rich interaction between participants and researchers, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of inclusive education in Lesotho's schools. Consequently, it enables participants to share their diverse experiences and perspectives, highlighting the challenges faced by traumatised learners as well as potential solutions to these issues.

6.1 Selection of participants

To recruit individuals with significant knowledge and experience in teaching learners who have experienced trauma in inclusive settings, particularly in early childhood education, we employed purposive convenience sampling techniques. We selected nine practising teachers, all of whom held a Bachelor of Education in Primary Education and were enrolled part-time in an Honours program at an institution of higher learning in Lesotho. The teachers were specifically chosen based on their experience in teaching learners with trauma, ensuring that only those with relevant backgrounds participated in this study. Their contributions are highly valued. The study included both male and female participants to provide a diverse range of perspectives and insights (Maree, 2017). The case selection procedure was essential for generating meaningful findings that could contribute to broader discussions on inclusive education in similar contexts.

6.2 Data Collection

Focus group discussions served as the primary method of data collection in this study, involving nine teachers who were pursuing a Bachelor of Education-Primary degree while part-time studying for an Honours degree in Lesotho. The participants were selected from three different districts to ensure a diverse array of perspectives on teaching learners impacted by trauma. The study sought to capture variations in teaching contexts, challenges, and strategies that influence teachers' perceptions of the effects of early childhood trauma on education in inclusive schools, as well as to explore potential solutions. As noted by Colom (2021), focus group discussions (FGDs) facilitate participants in sharing their experiences related to the research topic. In this paper, FGDs provided a platform for teachers to exchange their insights on the effects of childhood trauma on education and discuss possible solutions, emphasising the importance of collaborative dialogue in promoting inclusive practices across various educational settings.

6.3 Data Analysis

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) emphasise that qualitative researchers should analyse data based on participants' perceptions of their experiences to identify patterns, themes, and categories. In this study, the researcher examined audio recordings to gain insight into the participants' experiences. The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns in qualitative data. This process involved systematically reviewing the data to develop meaningful interpretations and using initial codes to identify common themes. The coding was performed manually, and the identified codes were then organised into overarching themes. Thematic analysis was applied to explore teachers' experiences in teaching traumatised students, the impact on their learning, and potential solutions.

6.4 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were fundamental to this study. Participants provided informed consent through a detailed consent letter, ensuring that their participation was voluntary. Confidentiality was maintained, and anonymity was ensured in reporting the findings by using pseudonyms (T1–T9).

7. Results and Discussions

7.1. Impact of Early Life Trauma on Academic Performance and Social Relationships in Lesotho's Inclusive Schools

This section examines how early life trauma affects children's academic performance and social relationships in inclusive schools.

7.1.1 Learning Difficulties Associated with Early Life Trauma

Teachers indicated that trauma has a profound impact on students' learning:

"Trauma can lead to hypervigilance, which makes it challenging for students to concentrate and follow instructions due to a heightened sense of threat." (T1)

"Students who have experienced trauma often exhibit mood swings, irritability, and withdrawal, complicating their emotional regulation and hindering their learning." (T2)

"Children affected by trauma may find it difficult to trust others and build healthy peer connections, resulting in social isolation or aggressive behaviours." (T3)

The study revealed that trauma can lead learners to become hypervigilant, emotionally dysregulated, and distracted, which in turn makes it difficult for them to follow directions. This is consistent with the findings of Berardi and Morton (2017), who observed that emotional dysregulation can lead to disengagement and social difficulties, ultimately undermining academic achievement. Furthermore, trauma can trigger mood swings, outbursts of anger, and withdrawal, all of which impede the learning process. Van der Kolk (2014) emphasised that trauma affects not only psychological well-being but also the body and brain, influencing behaviour and interpersonal relationships. It can create obstacles in trusting adults and developing healthy peer connections, resulting in feelings of isolation and aggressive behaviour (Cook *et al.*, 2005). These findings further reinforce Berardi and Morton's conclusions regarding the negative impact of emotional dysregulation on academic success.

7.1.2 Challenges Teachers Encountered in Accommodating Traumatized Learners

When accommodating learners who have experienced trauma, teachers expressed various concerns about the behavioural issues these students display in the classroom. Here are their views:

"Children who have gone through trauma may withdraw from school due to issues such as school phobia, shyness, anxiety, social isolation, or even repetitive movements like hand flapping. This creates challenges for teachers who may not fully understand their needs." (T4)

"These learners can be disruptive, displaying behaviours like leaving their seats, shouting out during class, throwing tantrums, using profanity, screaming, or refusing to follow directions. Their learning is hindered because, as a teacher, I feel ill-equipped to manage them due to a lack of training." (T5)

"Certain behaviours can become violent and pose safety risks, such as head banging, kicking, biting, punching, fighting, running away, and damaging equipment or furnishings." (T6)

"Children who have experienced trauma may also develop a negative self-image, which can negatively impact their confidence and motivation to learn." (T7)

The findings underscore the significant impact of trauma on children's school experiences. learners may withdraw due to anxiety or social isolation, and they may also exhibit sensory-related behaviours that impede their learning. Research by Perry and Daniels (2016) indicates that trauma can severely affect a learner's ability to function in the classroom, emphasising the necessity for trauma-informed teaching practices. Educators who lack training in trauma-informed classroom management face considerable challenges. An interdisciplinary review by Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019) highlights the urgent need for improved training, given the limited empirical basis for trauma-informed teaching methods. Moreover, learners who have experienced trauma can demonstrate disruptive or aggressive behaviours that create safety risks. Research by Yule, Houston, and Grych (2019) reveals that children exposed to violence are more likely to develop behavioural issues. They stress the importance of identifying protective factors to develop effective prevention strategies. In summary, there is a pressing need for enhanced teacher training and support systems to adequately address the needs of traumatised learners while ensuring a safe learning environment.

7.1.3 The Impact of Limited Resources on Traumatized Learners

"Limited funding can prevent schools from hiring specialist counsellors or therapists who provide individual or group therapy for students experiencing trauma. As a result, these pupils may receive inadequate emotional support." (T8)

"Additionally, a lack of resources can hinder educators from accessing comprehensive training on trauma-informed practices. This makes it difficult for them to recognise the signs of trauma and implement effective strategies in the classroom." (T9)

"Without sufficient resources to develop personalised learning plans, trauma-affected learners may not receive the necessary adjustments or accommodations to address their specific needs, leading to academic challenges." (T1)

"Families experiencing trauma or lacking access to community resources may struggle to provide their children with the emotional support necessary to cope with the symptoms of their trauma. This can negatively impact the children's academic performance." (T2)

"Learners who have experienced trauma may also miss out on the counselling or therapy they need to manage their emotional distress. If schools or communities lack enough mental health professionals, it can impair these students' ability to concentrate in class." (T3)

Research findings indicate that resource limitations significantly affect the education of traumatised learners by restricting access to essential support networks. This creates barriers to learning due to inadequate specialised interventions and exacerbates existing challenges related to emotional regulation, concentration, and memory, all of which can be influenced by traumatic experiences. A qualitative study by Al-Hroub and Al-Hroub (2024) underscores the urgent need for support networks and specialised interventions to address the unique challenges faced by trauma-affected learners, highlighting the necessity for adequate support systems in educational settings.

7.1.4 Challenges Faced by Untrained Teachers

"One of the significant issues that teachers face is the lack of psychological preparation to support traumatised learners. Working with these learners can take a psychological toll on educators, as their experiences often remind teachers of disturbing situations." (T4)

"Due to a limited understanding of trauma, I occasionally misinterpret the behaviours of students who have experienced trauma. We have not received training to identify pupils who have faced such challenges. As a result, emotional burnout and teacher stress become prevalent issues." (T5)

Research indicates that untrained teachers confront difficulties such as inadequate psychological preparation, misinterpretation of trauma-related behaviours, emotional burnout, and lack of support systems when dealing with traumatised children. These challenges lead to emotional distress, anxiety, and fatigue, ultimately compromising teachers' well-being and classroom effectiveness. Studies have shown that educators who lack training in trauma-informed practices are more vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue, which can result in emotional exhaustion and decreased performance in the classroom. This finding is supported by Bissir Nia *et al.* (2019), who note that trauma can lead to emotional distress and is linked to psychotic disorders and various physical health issues, including obesity and heart.

7.2 Possible Remedies to Address the Impact of Early Childhood Trauma in Lesotho's Inclusive Schools

To address the question of potential solutions for the impact of early childhood trauma in Lesotho's inclusive schools, two key sub-themes were identified:

7.2.1 Trauma-Informed Practices for Early Childhood Teachers

"It is essential for relevant departments, including the Ministry of Education and Training, to integrate trauma-informed practices within educational settings. This includes creating a secure and supportive classroom environment, fostering trusting relationships with learners, and employing calming strategies." (T6)

"One effective strategy may involve collaborating with mental health professionals to provide individual or group therapy for learners who require additional support. The Ministry of Health can play a significant role in this initiative." (T7)

"I recommend that the Ministry of Education and Training offer comprehensive training for teachers on understanding childhood trauma, its impact on learning, and effective strategies to support children who have experienced trauma." (T8)

"As teachers, one approach we can take is to create tailored learning plans for learners with traumatic experiences. These plans should include accommodations for their individual needs and learning styles. However, it is important to acknowledge that this work could be exhausting, given the overcrowded classrooms in Lesotho." (T9)

The findings indicate that the Ministry of Education and Training should implement trauma-informed practices into the educational system, such as creating safe and supportive environments, building trusting relationships, and employing calming strategies. Many teachers are often unaware of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) and require training for its implementation. To better serve diverse learners, the Ministry should enhance teacher training and school infrastructure (Khumalo & Mosia, 2023). Morena and Nkoane (2021) emphasise the necessity of providing adequate support and resources to students with unique educational needs through trauma-informed approaches. Lephoto and Mochekele (2024) argue for restoring a peaceful culture in Lesotho through education, utilising traditional Basotho values and trauma-informed techniques to create a safe and supportive learning environment.

The study further revealed that schools should collaborate with mental health professionals to provide therapy to students who need additional support. The Ministry of Health can significantly contribute to addressing trauma-related issues in education. Additionally, it is crucial for teachers to receive thorough training on childhood trauma and to conduct effective interventions to assist affected students. While developing customised learning plans for students who have experienced trauma is essential, it may be challenging to implement this strategy within Lesotho's crowded classroom settings. The LIEP of 2018 emphasises the need for teacher training in supporting diverse learners, especially those impacted by trauma. However, research has indicated that many teachers are unaware of this policy and lack training in its application (Ministry of

Education and Training, 2018). This highlights the need for the Ministry to facilitate comprehensive teacher training programs focused on childhood trauma and effective support strategies.

7.2.2 The Role of Parents and the Community in Early Childhood Education for Learners Who Have Experienced Trauma

"To address the socioeconomic factors contributing to trauma, such as poverty, violence, and lack of access to healthcare, I believe schools should collaborate with community organisations that support diverse learners." (T1)

"Trauma professionals can provide training and support groups for parents, helping them develop techniques to assist their traumatised children." (T2)

Research indicates that schools should partner with community organizations to support students who have experienced trauma, particularly those affected by poverty, violence, and limited access to healthcare. The Lesotho Child Counselling Unit (2001), established in collaboration with Sentebale and Article 25, offers trauma therapy and legal advocacy for children and families dealing with abuse. Additionally, the unit conducts community training to raise awareness about trafficking and the importance of prevention and treatment. The findings align with UNESCO (2023), which highlights the Ministry of Education and Training in Lesotho's efforts to seek an implementing partner (IP) to enhance community engagement for promoting a safe and healthy school environment. This partnership aims to strengthen the connections between schools and health facilities, thereby improving students' access to essential health services. These initiatives underscore the significance of collaboration among schools, community organizations, and mental health professionals in supporting traumatised students in Lesotho.

7.2.3 Strategies for Equipping Teachers

"It is essential to provide teachers with professional development and trauma training programs to alleviate the devastating situations we are currently facing." (T3)

"I recommend that the Ministry of Education and Training support schools in collaborating with school counsellors and psychologists, as they can assist both students and teachers." (T4)

The study emphasises the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers that focuses on trauma-informed practices. This includes training on classroom management strategies, emotional resilience, and understanding behaviours associated

with trauma. Additionally, implementing peer support initiatives, mental health awareness campaigns, crisis response strategies, and partnerships with school psychologists and counsellors are crucial for creating safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. Khumalo (2024) underscores that educators must receive continuous training in trauma-informed methods to effectively support learners with diverse needs, including those who have experienced trauma. This ongoing training should focus on developing emotional resilience, employing suitable classroom management strategies, and understanding trauma-related behaviours. Teachers who participate in this type of professional development will be better equipped to handle the complexities of working with students who have faced trauma and to foster supportive learning environments.

7.3 Policies Monitoring and Evaluation

"To ensure the successful implementation of the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP), established in 2018, and the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP), introduced in 2021, I propose that the Ministry of Education and Training intensively monitor these policies' implementation and develop an evaluation tool. This tool will help identify any gaps that have not been addressed." (T5)

"It is essential to advocate for policies that prioritise early childhood development and trauma-informed practices within the education system." (T6)

According to recent findings, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) should conduct an external evaluation of both the LIEP and the LBECP to ensure their effective implementation. The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) (2020) highlights the importance of creating an inclusive education action plan to address any identified gaps and enhance policy effectiveness. A strong emphasis on early childhood development and trauma-informed practices is critical, alongside the provision of a high-quality, inclusive, and equitable curriculum that meets the needs of the 21st century. By focusing on these areas, the MoET can improve the educational experience for all students while ensuring that policies are thoughtfully crafted and effectively enforced.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explores the impact of early childhood trauma on education in Lesotho's inclusive schools and presents possible solutions. It reveals that teachers face significant challenges in integrating traumatised learners into classrooms due to a shortage of trauma specialists and a lack of necessary skills. Participants identified these obstacles as major barriers to including traumatised students in schools. To address these challenges,

teachers suggested solutions from the Ministry of Education and Training, such as enhanced teacher training, the provision of resources in schools, and collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Health to support both traumatised learners and the teachers who work with them. Additionally, teachers emphasised the importance of professional trauma knowledge in collaborating with parents, the community, and schools. The results highlight the critical role of educators in implementing the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) and the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (LIEP) to ensure their successful execution. Teachers serve as essential change agents within their communities and the educational system.

This perspective aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development, which posits that various interconnected environmental systems, including social and familial structures, influence an individual's development. These systems are divided into several categories: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Due to its close connections with significant individuals, the microsystem exerts the most influence. This means that educators, the Ministries of Health and Education and Training, and local communities—including parents and trauma specialists—are vital resources for supporting the integration of traumatised students into inclusive environments.

Participants also acknowledged the limitations they face when addressing the needs of traumatised learners, such as a lack of psychological preparedness, misunderstandings of trauma-related behaviours, emotional burnout, and insufficient support systems. They stressed the need for trauma-informed classroom management strategies, school resources, and parental involvement. In light of these challenges, the article recommends comprehensive training and support programs for educators in inclusive education to better integrate traumatised learners. These programs should address the individual needs of teachers and enhance their skills in inclusive practices. It is also crucial to empower the Ministries of Education and Training and Health to assist teachers dealing with trauma-related issues. Collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to address the large number of students who do not attend school. The article encourages rural school administrators to shift their mindset from viewing these areas as lacking resources to recognising the capabilities of local educators and stakeholders. By leveraging these skills, teachers can help ensure the success and sustainability of inclusive education initiatives.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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