

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



MJSSH
Muallim Journal of
Social Science and Humanities

THE IMPACT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION ON STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF BATTICALOA DISTRICT IN SRI LANKA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33306/mjssh/264>

Abstract

The study aims to explore the strengths and obstacles encountered in implementing Inclusive Education (IE) within government schools in the Batticaloa district. The research utilised a qualitative approach through multiple case studies. Conveniently, five government schools practising IE in the Batticaloa district were selected. Participants were purposefully chosen and included five Assistant Directors of Special Education/In-Service Advisors Special Education (ADs/ISAs SE), five principals, five class teachers, ten subject teachers, and five parents of students with SENs. The interview schedules were used to collect information from ADs/ISAs SE, school principals, class teachers, and parents. At the same time, focus group discussions were conducted with subject teachers of inclusive classrooms. Observations were also made in the selected inclusive schools. Data analysis involved narrative analyses, which included coding, categorising, and theming. The study revealed that information provision, collaborative efforts of stakeholders, peer and teacher-student interactions, principal and teacher competencies, teaching methods, curriculum adaptation, assessment, and student accomplishments were found to strengthen IE practices. However, challenges were identified, such as the absence of school-level IE policies, safe and accessible physical infrastructure, Individualised Educational Plan (IEP) implementation, and resource allocation. Therefore, school-level IE policies should be developed to facilitate IE practices, improve the physical features of schools for easy accessibility for children with SENs, and improve the links for funding and resources in IE practices in government schools of Batticaloa district were recommended based on the findings.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; SENs; Regular Classroom; Individualised Educational Plans; Inclusive Education.

Received 16nd August 2023, revised 25th September 2023, accepted 17nd October 2023

Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) has become the most popular approach to education worldwide. It is based on the principle that all children, regardless of their abilities, should have the opportunity to learn and participate in mainstream classrooms. IE is a child's right, not a privilege (Mag et al., 2017)¹. A proper IE is essential because every child is unique and different. Children with Special Educational Needs (SENs) have different abilities and learn in different ways and at different paces. IE practices vary from country to country. Countries with advanced education systems have developed more comprehensive IE systems. Developing countries, such as Sri Lanka, are at various stages of establishing IE systems. However, Sri Lanka has begun implementing IE to some degree (UNICEF, 2013)². Children with SENs who have been involved in the inclusive model have been academically, socially, and emotionally successful. In Sri Lanka, there is good interaction among students, apart from teacher-student interactions (Alwis, 2005)³.

In Sri Lanka, students with SENs can receive education in government schools through inclusion in mainstream classrooms. There are 88,740 mentally and physically disabled children between the ages of 5 and 19 years in Sri Lanka, and 62% of them receive education through IE (Ellepola, 2016)⁴. However, the Disability Organizations Joint Front (2017) has reported gaps in IE practices and facilities for people with disabilities in the Sri Lankan education system (Carraro, 2017)⁵.

Batticaloa District was one of the districts affected by the 30-year civil war and natural disasters such as the tsunami, cyclones, and floods. This has resulted in a higher rate of poverty and malnutrition in the district. In particular, a considerable number of children with special needs are living in Batticaloa District. Although educational authorities have insisted that teachers adhere to IE practices in their classrooms, it is important to identify the challenges and barriers to implementing IE practices in schools. Therefore, the researchers of this study investigated the strengths and challenges of IE practices in government schools in Batticaloa District.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the strengths and challenges of implementing IE in government schools in the Batticaloa District. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were established:

- a) To identify and assess the strengths of IE practices in government schools in the Batticaloa District.
- b) To determine and analyze the challenges faced in implementing IE practices in government schools in the Batticaloa District.

Literature Review

The concept of IE has been a global endeavor, with numerous countries and organizations striving to provide education for every child. However, a significant challenge in achieving the goal of 'education for all' has been the prevalence of disabled children worldwide. Approximately 10% of the global population is estimated to be affected by disabilities (Aruna & Lal, 2016)⁶. Considering this, IE practices are crucial in ensuring that children with disabilities receive an education. IE is characterized by the idea that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, attend their local schools and are warmly welcomed into age-appropriate, regular classes. They are provided with the necessary support to learn, contribute, and actively participate in all aspects of school life. IE focuses on how we structure and create our schools, classrooms, programs, and activities to enable all students to learn and engage together (Ellepola, 2016)⁴.

The Sessional Paper - 1943 instituted universal compulsory education to educate all Sri Lankan students, including those with Special Educational Needs (SENs). A new philosophy and initiatives were added to the Sri Lankan educational system during the era of Dr. C. W. W. Kannangara, the country's first Minister of Education and the first Chairman of the Special Committee on Education, constituted in 1943. Moreover, The Rehabilitation of the Visually Handicapped Trust Fund Act (No. 9 of 1992) establishes a trust fund to help visually impaired people. The trust fund provides educational and vocational training opportunities, employment assistance, housing assistance for education and training, and other welfare programs (Parliament of Sri Lanka, 1992)⁷.

Sri Lanka signed the Salamanca Convention in 1994. Afterward, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) conducted a training program for stakeholders about IE in Sri Lanka (Rajapakse, 1995)⁸. The Presidential Task Force on Education - 1997, in their proposals, referred to as General Education Reforms (1997), urged the need to implement a policy of mainstreaming where all children can study in the normal classrooms of regular schools (Dhanapala, 2009)⁹. Also, the inclusion of children with disabilities in the ordinary classroom was introduced in the general education reforms of 1997 (National Education Commission, 1997)¹⁰. Moreover, The National Disability Policy (2003) provides the most comprehensive, progressive, and holistic framework in Sri Lanka for equality and opportunity for people with disabilities. This policy promotes Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) and partnership with NGOs. Accordingly, this policy emphasized provisions of IE in the Sri Lankan school system (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2003)¹¹. "Developing inclusive policies and methods for youth participation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF) will lead to active commitment of youth and their contribution to justice and settlement (United Nations in Sri Lanka, 2017)¹². These provisions have supported educating people with disabilities at the national level in Sri Lanka." Even though 19,207 special needs children are currently unable to receive an education while living at home, there are 104 national schools and 606 Provincial Council schools with Special Education Units (Wijesinghe, 2019)¹³. Also, data specify that 8.7% of the population in Sri Lanka has a disability, which amounts to about 1,844,000 individuals (ESCAP, 2019)¹⁴. These statistics highlight the necessity of proper IE for students with SENs in the Sri Lankan education system.

Liyanage (2013)¹⁵ studied Sri Lanka's education policy, highlighting significant achievements and ongoing challenges. The implementation of the free education policy in 1947, along with the introduction of Sinhala and Tamil as mediums of instruction, enabled Sri Lanka to

attain universal primary education by 1964, along with a 92% literacy rate, gender parity, and the successful accomplishment of the third Millennium Development Goal to eliminate disparities in educational enrollment.

However, the current education system in Sri Lanka faces several substantial challenges. These include poor educational quality, a curriculum that does not align with labor market demands, inadequate teacher training, and inefficient administration. The challenges extend beyond limited government expenditure on education and encompass factors such as the absence of a clear national or state educational policy, haphazard policy changes implemented by political leaders across regimes, the politicization of teacher and administrative staff recruitment processes, insufficient teacher training, and recent educational reforms influenced primarily by foreign donor agencies rather than the actual needs of the country. These factors have been identified by moderate education experts, researchers, and policymakers in Sri Lanka as key contributors to the decline in the quality of the education system. Furthermore, these challenges could disrupt the practice of IE in the country.

The study conducted by Alwis (2012)¹⁶ shows that regular class teachers have not changed their teaching procedures or processes to provide appropriate instructions for all students in an inclusive classroom. Moreover, "the local resources and opportunities for people with disabilities are limited, and the analysis points to the importance of coordination, attitudes, and mutual support rituals by villagers in promoting community mobilization" (Masateru, 2014)¹⁷. According to Abeywickrama et al. (2014)¹⁸, the current practices in Sri Lankan education for children with disabilities did not meet global recommendations. There is a need to design culturally compatible IE models and to achieve a paradigm shift within all communities toward inclusion. Moreover, Higashida et al. (2016)¹⁹ studied the educational opportunities of children with disabilities and their post-school life in rural Sri Lanka. The research was implemented with multiple sectors in a rural area of the North Central Province. As a result, inadequate educational opportunities among children with disabilities and barriers to post-school social participation in rural Sri Lanka are revealed. According to the above studies, inappropriate instructional methods, inadequate resources, lack of attitude, and inadequate opportunity for educating students with SENs are the main challenges concerning IE and special needs education in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, there is a need for an appropriate inclusion model in Sri Lanka to overcome the most vulnerable challenge of inclusive practices in the country.

Theoretical framework of the study

This study emphasizes the Social Model of Disability (SMD). The SMD is a more suitable theory for this research, which focuses on identifying strengths and obstacles encountered in the implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) within government schools in Sri Lanka. Oliver (2023)²⁰ has been instrumental in introducing the SMD. The SMD posits that disability is a social construct rather than a medical condition. This means that disability is not caused by an individual's impairment, but by the barriers that society places in their way. If society were structured and designed to be accessible for people with disabilities, these individuals would not face restrictions in full participation in the world around them. It is society's failure to provide appropriate services and ensure that the needs of disabled people are adequately considered in societal organization that

results in disability. (Goering, 2015; Buder & Perry, 2023; Oliver 2023)^{21,22,20}. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the study.

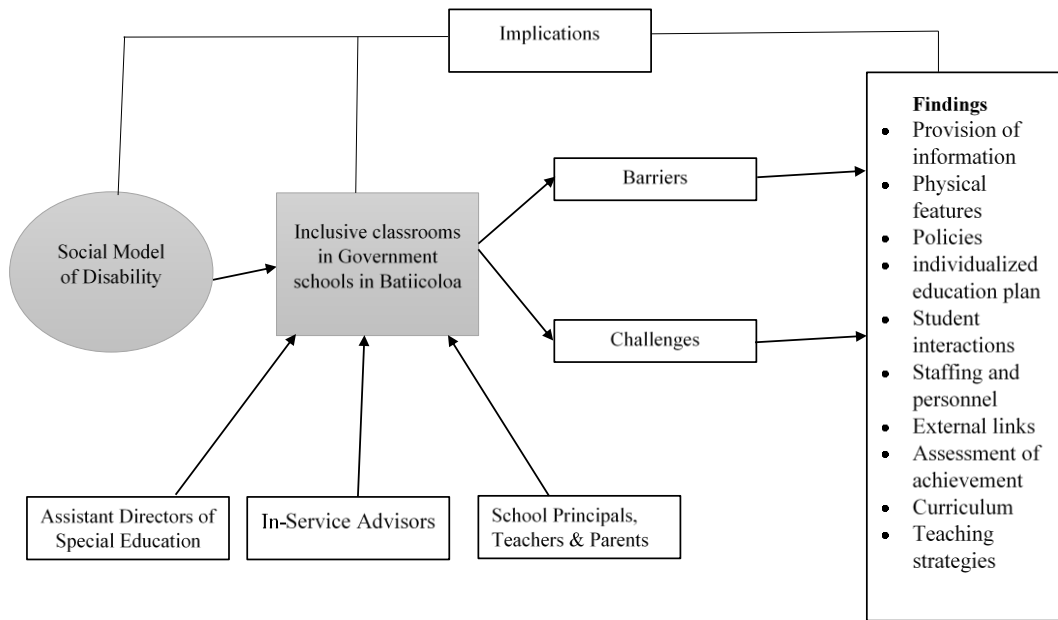


Figure 1. Theoretical framework of the study

Methodology

The study employed a case study research design with a qualitative approach. The participants were purposefully selected, including five government schools. The participant groups consisted of five Assistant Directors of Special Education/In-Service Advisors Special Education (ADs/ISAsSE), five principals, five class teachers, ten subject teachers, and five parents of students with special educational needs (SENs). This study utilized ten themes and categories proposed by Winter and O’Raw, (2010)²³ to structure the analysis. Data collection was conducted through interviews and observation, and a narrative analysis technique was employed for data analysis. To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher implemented several measures to ensure the data's accuracy, credibility, and dependability. In addition to ensuring methodological rigour, the researcher of this study upheld ethical principles. In pursuing ethical research, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their identities were protected through pseudonymization.

Population of the Study

Table 1 shows the Schools and Population Distribution in Batticaloa District. The table "Schools and Population Distribution in Batticaloa District" provides information about the number of schools, inclusive schools, students with SENs, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of inclusive classrooms, principals, ADs/ISAs SE, and parents of students with SENs in each zone of Batticaloa District. There is a total of 361 schools in Batticaloa District, of which 174 are inclusive schools. There are 247 students with SENs in the district, and they are supported by 231 inclusive

class teachers and subject teachers of inclusive classrooms. There are 174 principals, 5 ADs/ISAs SE, and 234 parents of students with SENs in the district. The table shows that the number of schools, inclusive schools, students with SENs, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of inclusive classrooms, principals, ADs/ISAs SE, and parents of students with SENs varies across the different zones of Batticaloa District. For example, Batticaloa Central has the highest number of schools (76), inclusive schools (31), students with SENs (52), inclusive class teachers (50), subject teachers of inclusive classrooms (232), principals (31), and parents of students with SENs (49). On the other hand, Paddiruppu has the lowest number of schools (69), inclusive schools (28), students with SENs (35), inclusive class teachers (32), subject teachers of inclusive classrooms (186), principals (28), and parents of students with SENs (33).

Table 1
Schools and Population Distribution in Batticaloa District

Zones	Total Schools	Inclusive Schools	Students with SENs	Inclusive Class Teachers	Subject Teachers of Inclusive Classroom	Principals of the School	ADs/ISAs SE	Parents of Students with SENs
Batticaloa Central	76	31	52	50	232	31	1	49
Batticaloa West	68	25	34	29	179	25	1	30
Batticaloa	65	41	54	51	257	41	1	52
Kalkudah	83	49	72	69	302	49	1	70
Paddiruppu	69	28	35	32	186	28	1	33
Total	361	174	247	231	1,156	174	05	234

Source: Provincial Department of Education (2019)²⁴

The table provides information about the number of schools, inclusive schools, students with SENs, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of inclusive classrooms, principals, ADs/ISAs SE, and parents of students with SENs in each zone of Batticaloa District. There are a total of 361 schools in Batticaloa District, of which 174 are inclusive schools. There are 247 students with SENs in the district, and they are supported by 231 inclusive class teachers and subject teachers of inclusive classrooms. There are 174 principals, 5 ADs/ISAs SE, and 234 parents of students with SENs in the district. The table shows that the number of schools, inclusive schools, students with SENs, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of inclusive classrooms, principals, ADs/ISAs SE, and parents of students with SENs varies across the different zones of Batticaloa District. For example, Batticaloa Central has the highest number of schools (76), inclusive schools (31), students with SENs (52), inclusive class teachers (50), subject teachers of inclusive classrooms (232), principals (31), and parents of students with SENs (49). On the other hand, Paddiruppu has the lowest number of schools (69), inclusive schools (28), students with SENs (35), inclusive class

teachers (32), subject teachers of inclusive classrooms (186), principals (28), and parents of students with SENs (33).

Participants of the Study

Table 2 provides information about the study's participants, including the number of inclusive schools, inclusive classroom teachers, subject teachers in inclusive classrooms, school principals, and Assistant Directors/Inclusive School Advisors in the Batticaloa District. A total of 5 inclusive schools, 5 inclusive classroom teachers, 10 subject teachers working in inclusive classrooms, 5 school principals, and 5 Assistant Directors/Inclusive School Advisors participated in the study. These participants were selected from all five zones within the Batticaloa District. In each zone, one inclusive school, one inclusive classroom teacher, two subject teachers for inclusive classrooms, one principal, and one Assistant Director/Inclusive School Advisor took part in the research.

Table 2
Participants of the Study

Zones	Inclusive School	Inclusive Classroom Teachers	Subject Teachers of Inclusive Classroom	Principals of the School	ADs/ISAs SE
Batticaloa Central	1	1	2	1	1
Batticaloa West	1	1	2	1	1
Batticaloa	1	1	2	1	1
Kalkudah	1	1	2	1	1
Paddiruppu	1	1	2	1	1
Total	5	5	10	5	5

Findings and Discussions

RO1: To identify and assess the strengths of IE practices in government schools in the Batticaloa District.

Analysis of data revealed the following strengths related to the IE practices in the government schools in the districts:

- The practices of communication of stakeholders and collaboration with stakeholders
- The peer interaction and teacher-student interaction
- Staffing and Personnel (competencies) for IE Practices:
- Links for the Health Services in IE Practices
- Link with Parents in IE Practices
- Assessment of Achievement in IE Practices
- Provisions for Teaching Strategies in IE Practices

The practices of communication of stakeholders and collaboration with stakeholders: All five schools have the practices of communicating with and collaborating with stakeholders for the IE practices, which are measures for providing information for IE practices in the government schools of the Batticaloa district. For instance, Arul (ISA SE) from case A said, *"...I have an administrative structure for IE, which supports communication for IE practices..."* Janu (class teacher) from school case C said, *"...conducts meetings with the subject teachers..."* *"...I work with the principal, teachers, peers, parents, so forth. for IE..."*, and Valli (subject teacher) from school case E mentioned, *"...collaborative works support to the IE practices..."*. Furthermore, the observation data analysis shows (school case B) *that teachers communicate with the stakeholders about Balu because they are aware of the SENs of Balu and take measures to include him.* Similarly, a study by Adams et al. (2018)²⁵ recommended that a successful inclusive classroom requires communicative and collaborative interaction among stakeholders. Also, the present study's findings may support the successful IE practices of the government school in the Batticaloa district.

Peer interaction and teacher-student interaction: Peer interaction and teacher-student interaction are practised in the IE practices of all five schools, and it shows the measures of student interaction in the IE practices of the government schools of the Batticaloa district. For instance, Kumari (ISA SE) from case C stated, *"...I enhance the peer interaction because it supports the improvement of academic achievement of students with SENs..."* Kumar (principal) from school case B mentioned, *"...I often highlight the importance of teacher-student interaction in the IE practices..."* Shaanthi (class teacher) from school case B stated, *"...I often attach Balu with regular students, and it supports to improve the peer interaction of Balu..."* and Valli (subject teacher from school case E mentioned, *"...I highlight the ability of Amal and its supports to improve peer interaction..."*. Moreover, observation data analysis (school case A) illustrates *that students without SENs are inclined towards supporting Balu in the classroom and the school. During the interval, students without SENs socialise with Balu, play together, and support him in every way he needs support.* A study revealed that the greatest influence on the educational and social outcomes of students with SENs is the behaviour and interaction practices of the classroom teacher (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017)²⁶. Additionally, Rasmitadila and Boeriswati (2017)²⁷ discovered similar outcomes, noting that peer instructional interaction enhances academic skills, fosters social interactions, and strengthens friendships. These findings align closely with the results of the current study, suggesting that such student interaction practices can potentially enhance the implementation of IE in government schools in the Batticaloa district.

Staffing and Personnel (competencies) for IE Practices: Inclusive school principals, class teachers, and subject teachers of the inclusive classes have competencies with the IE practices of students with SENs. For illustration, Abdullah (ISA SE) from case D mentioned, *"...I organise workshops for teachers on IE practices in this zone..."* Kamalan (principal) from school case E stated, *"...I do work to help teachers improve their competencies on how to teach students with SENs..."* Janu (class teacher) from school case C said, *"...I have learned about IE..."* *"...I am ready to teach students with SENs..."* and Kala (subject teacher) from school case E stated, *"...I get soul satisfaction by developing Amal..."*. Moreover, observation data analysis (school case C) illustrates *that the teachers' attitude is more positive about the inclusion of Kokila in this school.* Kusuma and Ramadevi (2013)²⁸ revealed that with more confident and skilled teachers, the IE programme will positively impact the community's awareness.

Moreover, Black and Simon (2014)²⁹ revealed that Inclusive practice needs to be conceptualised as a collective endeavour that requires leadership that plans and aligns developmental supports to sustain organisational learning and commitment to inclusive educational practices. Above mentioned studies highlight the importance of principal and teachers' competencies to improve the impact of IE practices on students with SENs. Also, the findings of the present study are similar to those mentioned above, and they can support the IE practices of government schools of the Batticaloa district.

Links for the Health Services in IE Practices: Figure 2 shows the measures taken by the stakeholders in cases of A-E under the category of external links for the health services in IE practices.

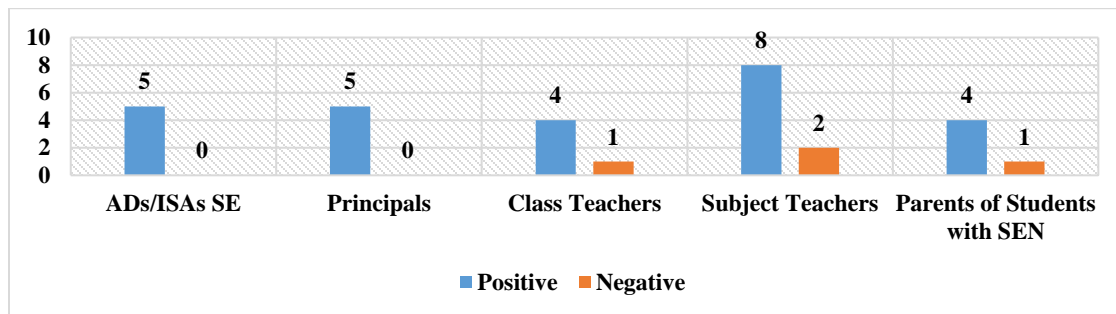


Figure 2: Links for the Health Services in IE Practices

According to Figure 2, all five ADs/ISAs SE, five inclusive school principals, four inclusive classes teachers, eight subject teachers of the inclusive classes, and four parents of students with SENs have responded about the measures taken for the IE practices by links for health services in IE practices in their classrooms and schools. However, there is an inclusive class teacher, two subject teachers of inclusive classes, and a parent of a student with SENs who negatively responded about the links for health services for the IE practices. For instance, Paarvathi (ISA SE) from case E stated, “...the teaching hospital of Batticaloa provides health services for students with SENs at the district level...” and Badurudeen (principal) from school case D said, “...students with SENs get health services from teaching hospital of Batticaloa...”. Furthermore, observation data analysis (school case A) illustrates that *Maala's parent has contact with the school, and she has a diagnosis report of Maala.*

The Teaching Hospital of Batticaloa has taken several actions to provide health services for students with SENs in government schools in the Batticaloa district to improve the links between health services and IE practices in these schools. A study by Ioannidi and Gogaki (2020)³⁰ revealed collaboration of the health service providers' support to the learning of students with SENs in IE practices. These findings have similarities, and the present study's findings indicate that the links with health services may support the improvement of learning outcomes of the students with SENs in the IE practices of government schools in Batticaloa district.

Link with Parents in IE Practices: Figure 3 shows the measures of stakeholders in cases of A-E under the category of external links with parents of students with SENs in IE practices.

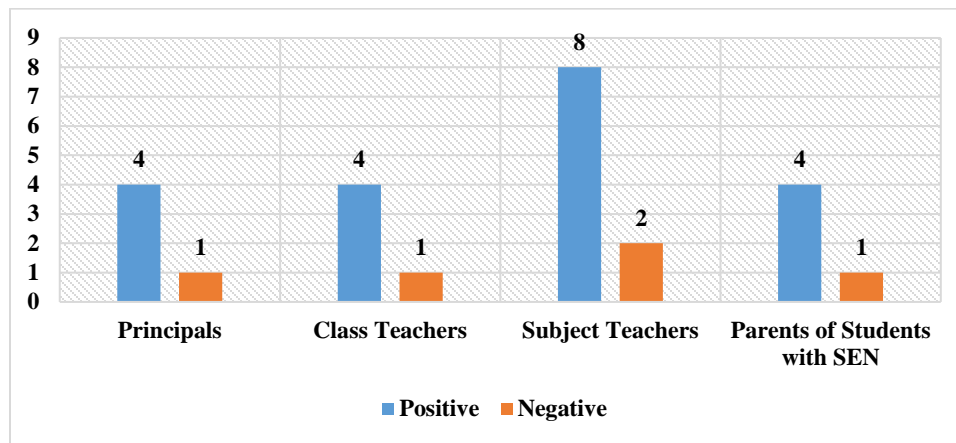


Figure 3: Link with Parents in IE Practices

As depicted in Figure 3, the survey involved the participation of four inclusive school principals, four inclusive class teachers, eight subject teachers in inclusive classrooms, and four parents of students with SENs who provided their responses regarding the provisions for establishing links with the parents of SENs students within the context of IE practices within the schools. Parents of students with SENs have a link with the school community for educating their children with SENs in the IE practices. For instance, Kumar (principal) from case B stated, “...parents are working with us for improving the IE practices in this school...”, and it was observed in school case E, “...Anula visits the school and also she has a diagnosis report of the Amal...”. A study by Afolabi (2014)³¹ revealed a significant and substantial connection between parental involvement and the academic achievement of students with SENs in the context of IE practices. The outcomes of this research, as well as the findings of the current study, exhibit similarities, underscoring the importance of parental involvement as a valuable metric for evaluating the efficacy of IE practices in government schools within the Batticaloa District. However, an inclusive school principal, an inclusive class teacher, two subject teachers of the inclusive classes and a parent of a student with SENs negatively responded about the links with parents of students with SENs in the IE practices, which may hinder the IE practices of the schools.

Assessment of Achievement in IE Practices: Figure 4 shows stakeholders' responses in cases of A-E under the theme of Assessment of Achievement in IE Practices. According to Figure 4, all five ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of the inclusive classes, and parents of students with SENs have responded about the provisions they have undertaken for the assessment and achievement in IE practices. Also, their provisions support the development of students with SENs academically and socially in the IE practices of the schools. Also, five inclusive school principals positively responded to the social development of students with SENs, and four inclusive school principals positively expressed provisions for the social development of the students with SENs in the IE practices of the schools.

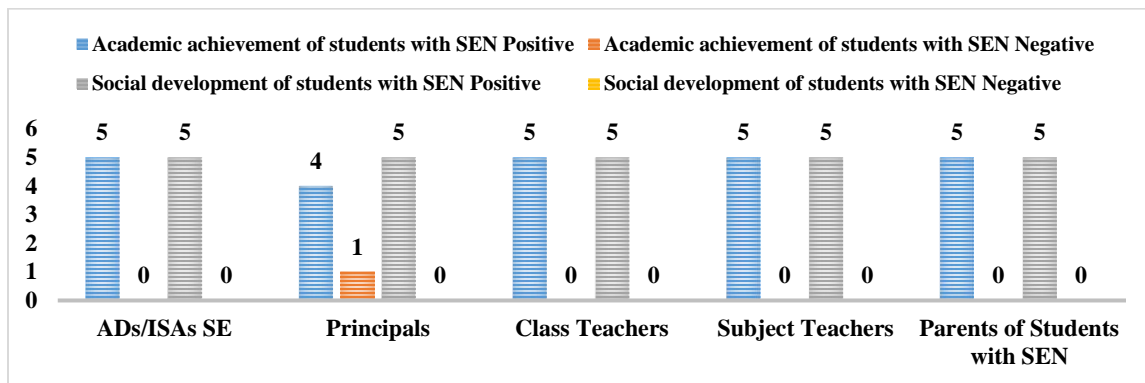


Figure 4: Responses of Stakeholders on Assessment of Achievement in IE Practices

These situations show that the measures of stakeholders improve the academic and social development of the students with SENs in the Batticaloa district. For instance, Kumari (ISA SE) from case C stated, “...I highlight the academic achievement of students with SENs during the workshops...” and Kumar (principal) from school case B said, “...I monitor the academic development of students with SENs in this school...”, Janu (class teacher) from school case C stated, “...I conduct evening classes for Kokile and as a result, she takes high marks for History which is my subject...”, and Rathai (parent) from case B said, “...I work with the school to improve Balu’s education...”.

Moreover, it was observed Amal in school case E, *Amal equally participates in curricular and extra-curricular activities with other students without SENs in the classroom. Amal participates in classroom assessments with other students without any challenges. Amal gets high marks in the classroom like other students without SENs. Furthermore, Amal participates in drawing activities, creating things, and playing a role like other people in the classroom.* However, an inclusive school principal expressed the poor academic achievements of students with SENs in their school, highlighting the lack of measures for the academic achievement of students with SENs in the IE practices of the school. For example, principal school D mentioned, “...it is difficult to develop Hushna (student) academically...”.

All ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers of the inclusive classes, and parents of students with SENs have responded about the provisions which they have undertaken for the academic and social achievements of students with SENs, and it is a measure to the assessment and achievement in IE practices. A similar finding revealed that students with SENs learn some academic skills in IE (Suleymanov, 2014)³².

The findings of a study conducted by Dawkins (2010)³³ supported using inclusive teaching methodologies, showing that they could improve academic achievement outcomes in certain subject areas for high school students with SENs within an urban North Carolina school district. Furthermore, a study conducted by Mortimore and Zsolnai (2015)³⁴ emphasised that students with SENs are exposed to the same social and cultural influences as any other child, and these factors also shape their social and emotional development. These findings closely align with the outcomes of the present study, reinforcing the idea that the assessment and academic achievement of students with SENs in the context of IE practices demonstrate the success of government schools in the Batticaloa District.

The analysis indicates that ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive school principals, inclusive class teachers, and subject teachers within inclusive classrooms have taken measures to enhance the curriculum in implementing IE practices in government schools located in the Batticaloa District. For example, Abdullah (ISA SE) from case D mentioned, "...I conduct workshops for teachers on curricula adaptation, and teachers do the adaptation in regular curriculum..." Kana (principal) from the school case said, "...I provide support teachers to do the curricular adaptation; it should develop according to the SENs of a student..." Janu (class teacher) from school case C stated, "...I do change the contents according to the SENs of Kokila and give additional time if it is necessary..." and Rathai (parent) from case B mentioned, "...class teacher and subject teachers of the Balu's classroom take special care in his learning and do changes in teaching...". Further, in school case B, teachers changed teaching-learning techniques, accommodated Balu in the assessment procedure, etc. According to a study by Oglu (2015)³⁵, they encounter several difficult problems, one of which is the appropriate and successful curriculum modification.

Additionally, Adewumi et al. (2017)³⁶ urge that teachers receive sufficient training in curriculum adaptation so that all teachers can accommodate students with special education needs. These findings run counter to the results of the current study. Moreover, measures taken by stakeholders in line with the curriculum adaptation can enhance the IE practices of the students with SENs in the government schools in the Batticaloa district.

Provisions for Teaching Strategies in IE Practices: Figure 5 illustrates stakeholders' positive and negative responses in cases of A to E under the theme of teaching strategies in IE Practices. As illustrated in Figure 5, all five ADs/ISAs SE, all five inclusive school principals, all five inclusive class teachers, eight of the subject teachers in inclusive classes, and four parents of students with SENs provided positive responses regarding the measures implemented to enhance teaching strategies within the context of IE practices for students with SENs in the schools.

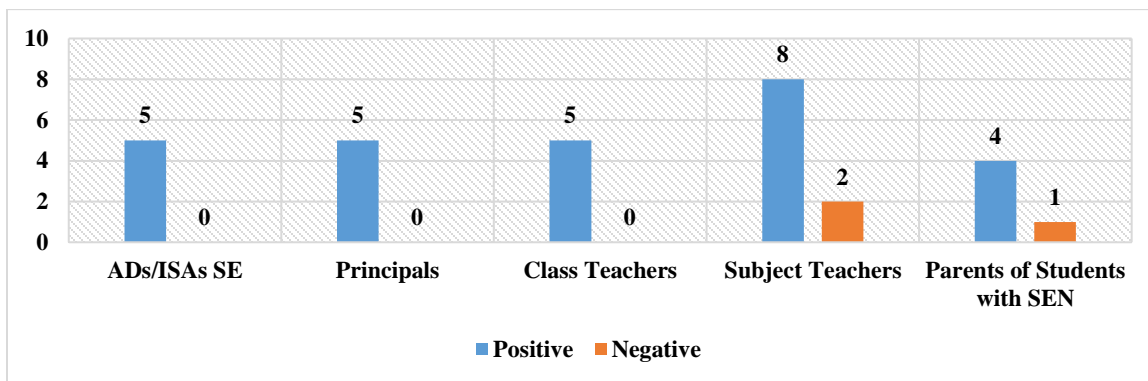


Figure 5: Provisions for Teaching Strategies in IE Practices

This consensus underscores the commitment to providing provisions for the successful implementation of IE practices for students with SENs in the schools of the Batticaloa district. For example, Babu (ISA SE) from case B stated, "... I conduct workshops to regular and specially trained teachers on teaching-learning strategies in IE classrooms..." Badurudeen (principal) from school case D said, "...I have used various strategies to improve the teaching-learning strategies of teachers in this school..." and Sarasvathi (class teacher) from school case E said, "...I make groups and motivate peers to support Balu in my classroom...". Also, it was observed in case

school C that *the science teacher of the class went closer to Kokila and spoke loudly in the classroom*. However, two subject teachers of the inclusive classes and a parent of a student with SENs negatively responded about the teaching strategies in the IE practices. For example, Mumthas (parent) from case D stated, “*...I am not happy with teachers’ measure in teaching-learning of Hushna (student) in the IE classroom...*”

A study conducted by Sakarneh and Nair (2004)³⁷ found that effective teaching-learning strategies are characterised by the efficient use of time, fostering positive relationships with students, delivering constructive feedback, achieving a high rate of student success, and offering support for all students, including those with and without disabilities, within the context of IE practices. These findings underscore the importance of these strategies in promoting successful and inclusive learning environments for all students.

RO2: To determine and analyze the challenges faced in implementing IE practices in government schools in the Batticaloa District.

Analysis of data revealed the following strengths related to the IE practices in the government schools in the districts:

- Physical Features for IE Practices
- Policies for Inclusive Education Practices
- Individual Education Plan
- External Links for IE Practices

Physical Features for IE Practices: According to the analysis, the lack of a safe and accessible environment for students with SENs hinders the enhancement of the IE practices of students with SENs in the government schools of Batticaloa District. For example, Kumari (ISA SE) from case C stated, “*...there are challenges in developing a safe environment for students with SENs...*” Kamalan (principal) from school case E said, “*...students with SENs face challenges in getting access here...*” Janu (class teacher) from school case C stated, “*...there are not any physical arrangements for students with SENs in this school...*”, and Anula (parent) from school case E said, “*...lack of accessible environment for students with SENs in the school...*”. Furthermore, it was observed in school case C that *the school does not have a safe and accessible environment for students with SENs for IE practices*.

Similar findings were made by Ackah-Jnr and Danso (2019)³⁸, who found that most “inclusive schools” had subpar physical environments that were less suitable for most physical activities, such as sports, and less accessible for kids with physical and other sensory-motor disabilities. Also, Debele (2017)³⁹ revealed that schools’ physical environments were not accessible to implement IE. Hence, the accessibility issue should be given adequate attention. The present study’s finding is confirmed, and it can hinder the IE practices of students with SENs in the government schools of Batticaloa District.

Policies for Inclusive Education Practices: One of the obstacles to improving the IE practices of the government schools in the Batticaloa District is the need for an inclusive school policy for kids with special education needs. For instance, Abdullah (ISA SE) from case D said, “*...We do not have a specific inclusive policy, and it hinders the IE in schools...*” *The principal from school case*

B mentioned, “...lack of IE policies for IE practices makes hinder in IE practices...” and Sarasvathi (class teacher) from school case E mentioned, “...lack of IE policies for IE practices make hinder in IE practices...”. Similar results indicate a likely relationship between the obstacles and the inadequate policy procedures surrounding the introduction of IE in Kenyan schools (Ileri et al., 2020)⁴⁰. According to Ahmad and May (2018)⁴¹, IE is currently struggling with issues related to policy implementation, creating an unfavourable climate for practice. The points mentioned above confirm the results of this study, and the absence of inclusive policies may hamper the Batticaloa district's government schools' use of IE.

Individual Education Plan: The lack of IEP for students with SENs and the IEP team for preparation of the IEP for students with SENs can hinder the improvement of the IE practices of students with SENs in the government schools of Batticaloa. For instance, Arul (ISA SE) from case A stated that “...the IEP\ is not available for students with SENs it may challenge the improvement of students with SENs...” Kamalan (principal) from school case E stated, “...IEP\ team is not working for students with SENs...” Shaanthy (class teacher) from Case B said, “...absence of IEP for Balu may hinder his IE...” and Komathi (parent) from Case A stated, “...I do not have an idea about the IEP team...”. Moreover, I was observed in school case A; the IEP for Maala is not available in the school, no pieces of evidence for the IEP team in the schools and the educational zone.

A study by Timothy and Agbenyega (2018)⁴² identified stakeholders involved in IE, specifically those practising IEP for students with SENs, and continuous professional learning as key elements for implementing IEP in Australian schools. This finding emphasises the importance of implementing IEP to support students with SENs and enhance their inclusion within the school environment. However, it is worth noting that this finding contrasts with the results of the present study in the government schools of the Batticaloa district. In the context of the present study, the lack of IEP is suggested to be a potential hindrance to the effective implementation of IE practices for students with SENs in these schools. The specific challenges and circumstances in the Batticaloa district may require different approaches to address the needs of students with SENs in inclusive settings.

External Links for IE Practices: Figure 6 illustrates stakeholders' positive and negative responses in cases of A-E under the theme of External Links for IE practices.

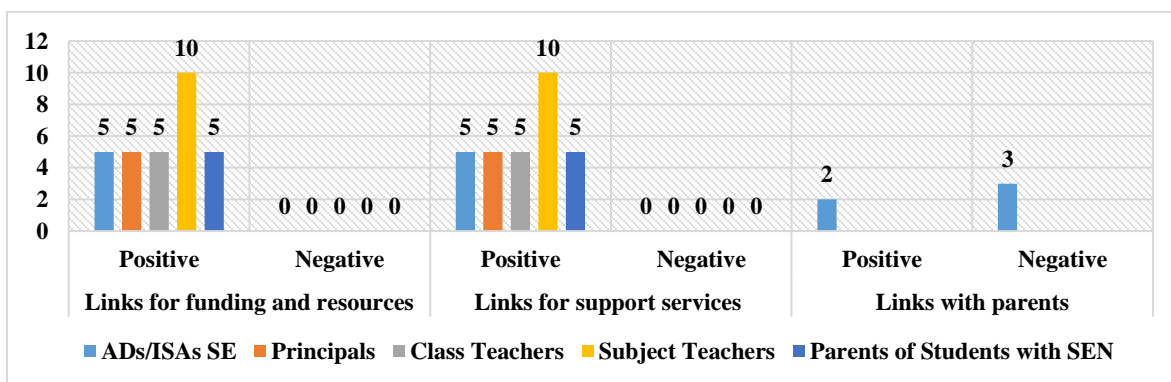


Figure 6: Responses of Stakeholders on External Links for IE practices

Based on Figure 6, all participants, including ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive school principals, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers in inclusive classes, and parents of students with SENs, provided negative responses concerning the availability of funding and resources in the context of IE practices, as well as support services for students with SENs. Additionally, three ADs/ISAs SE expressed negative responses regarding the connection with parents for IE practices involving students with SENs in their respective educational zones. For example, ISA SE from case A stated, "...lack of fund allocation and resources for IE practices..." Babu (ISA SE) from case B said, "...NGOs support students with SENs, but it is not long term..." "...SSO supports but not all students with SENs in this zone..." and Abdullah from case D mentioned, "...believes and the myth of the community hinder the IE of students with SENs..."

The availability of links for funding and resources in IE practices and support services for students with SENs presents significant challenges for enhancing IE practices. For example, Komathi, a parent from case A, expressed, "...I do not receive any financial assistance or resources for Maala's IE practices," while Rathai, a parent from case B, mentioned, "...the lack of support services hinders Balu's education." A study by Ahmad and May (2018)⁴¹ highlighted that various issues, such as resource shortages, fund allocation, support services, and other related services, pose obstacles to IE practices in India. Likewise, the absence of external links for funding resources and support services may hinder the implementation of IE practices in government schools within the Batticaloa District.

Furthermore, ADs/ISAs SE have observed a connection deficiency between parents and the school community in the context of IE practices. It is important to note that parental involvement has been associated with positive outcomes for learners with exceptional needs in inclusive settings, as indicated by a finding from Afolabi et al. (2013)⁴³. The findings of the present study and the study mentioned above have contradictions, and they can pose a fundamental challenge to the outcome of the IE practices in the government schools of Batticaloa District. However, two ADs/ISAs SE have responded about the provision for links with parents of students with SENs in the improvement of the IE practices. Also, this position can support improving the collaboration between educational administration and parents for the IE practices of students with SENs.

Strengths and Challenges in Practicing Inclusive Education in Batticaloa District

Based on the analysis of data, the strengths and challenges of practicing inclusive education in the Batticaloa District are as follows:

Strengths:

- a) **Established Communication and Collaboration:** All five schools have established effective communication and collaboration practices with stakeholders for Inclusive Education (IE). This collaborative approach facilitates the provision of information in IE, demonstrating a strong foundation for collaboration within government schools in the Batticaloa district.
- b) **Competent School Staff:** Inclusive school principals, class teachers, and subject teachers in Inclusive Classes exhibit competencies related to IE practices for students with Special Educational Needs (SENs). Their competence supports the improvement of IE in government schools in the Batticaloa district.

- c) **Health Services Provision:** The Teaching Hospital of Batticaloa has successfully implemented provisions to provide health services for students with SENs in all five schools. This demonstrates a strong link between health services and IE practices.
- d) **Parental Involvement:** Most parents of students with SENs actively participate in the school community to support their children's education within IE practices. This high level of parental involvement benefits students with SENs in government schools in the Batticaloa district.
- e) **Measures for Student Achievement:** ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive school principals, inclusive class teachers, subject teachers in inclusive classes, and parents of students with SENs have taken effective measures to enhance the academic and social achievements of students with SENs. These efforts contribute to the assessment and overall achievement of these students in IE practices within government schools in the Batticaloa District.
- f) **Curriculum and Teaching Strategies:** There is a strong emphasis on curriculum practices and teaching strategies within IE. ADs/ISAs SE, inclusive school principals, inclusive class teachers, and subject teachers in inclusive classrooms have implemented effective measures to improve the curriculum and teaching strategies within IE.

Challenges:

- a) **Lack of Safe and Accessible Environment:** A significant challenge faced by all five schools is the absence of a safe and accessible environment for students with SENs. This limitation hinders the enhancement of IE practices for these students.
- b) **IEP and Policy Issues:** The absence of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with SENs, unprepared IEP teams, and the lack of an inclusive school policy for IE practices in all five schools present substantial challenges to the successful implementation of IE in government schools in the Batticaloa district.
- c) **Resource and Funding Shortages:** All five schools encounter challenges related to the absence of links for funding and resources in IE practices, as well as links for support services for students with SENs. These resource and funding challenges significantly impact the improvement of IE practices for students with SENs.
- d) **Parent-AD/ISA SE Relationships:** The relationship between parents of students with SENs and Assistant Directors/Inclusive School Advisors (ADs/ISAs SE) is crucial for IE practices. However, three schools experience a lack of links between parents and ADs/ISAs SE, posing a fundamental challenge to IE practices in government schools in the Batticaloa district.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of information from the participants of the study, the researchers propose the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Planning:

1. **Develop National-Level IE Policy:** The Ministry of Education should formulate a comprehensive Inclusive Education (IE) policy at the national level. This policy should provide clear guidelines regarding the responsibilities of stakeholders, professional development, and the allocation of funding for government schools across the country.

2. **Universal Design for Safe Environment:** The Provincial/Zonal Education Department should implement Universal Design principles to create safe and accessible environments in inclusive schools throughout the Batticaloa District. It will help ensure that all students, including those with special educational needs (SEN), can fully participate in their educational experiences.
3. **Establish District-Level IEP Teams:** To address the absence of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students with SEN, the Provincial/Zonal Education Department should establish district-level IEP teams responsible for developing tailored plans for students in need.
4. **Professional Development and Awareness Programs:** The Provincial/Zonal Education Department should organize professional development programs for Assistant Directors of Special Education/In-Service Advisors Special Education (ADs/ISAs SE), principals, and teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in IE practices. Additionally, community-level awareness programs should be conducted to educate community members about the importance of IE.
5. **Funding Allocation and Support Services:** The Provincial/Zonal Education Department must establish a transparent mechanism for allocating funds and resources for IE practices in government schools. It is also crucial to ensure the availability of support services for students with SEN within the context of IE practices.

Recommendations for Stakeholders:

- **School Vision and Mission:** Inclusive school principals should develop clear vision and mission statements that prioritize and promote IE practices within their schools. These statements can guide the school's approach to inclusion.
- **School-Level IE Policy:** Inclusive school principals should create a school-level policy that enhances IE practices within their institutions. This policy should outline specific strategies and initiatives to support inclusion.
- **School Enrolment Policy and Code of Behavior:** Inclusive school principals should establish a comprehensive school enrolment policy and codes of behaviour that consider the unique needs of students with SEN, ensuring that they receive the support and accommodations necessary to reach their full potential.
- **Community and Parental Involvement:** Inclusive school principals should actively work to improve community and parental involvement in IE practices. Building a strong connection between the school and parents and engaging the community is crucial for developing an inclusive school culture.
- **Universal Design for Teaching:** Inclusive class teachers and subject teachers in inclusive classrooms should adopt Universal Design for Teaching principles. This approach ensures that their teaching methods are accessible and effective for all students, including those with SEN.
- **Alignment with Best Practices:** The statutes of Inclusive Education practices in all five schools in the Batticaloa District should be reviewed and modified to align fully with best practices in Inclusive Education, particularly focusing on the ten themes explored in this study.

Conclusion

The study highlighted strengths and challenges in implementing Inclusive Education practices in government schools in the Batticaloa District. Notably, effective communication and collaboration practices, the competence of key stakeholders, support from the Teaching Hospital of Batticaloa, and active parental involvement were identified as strengths that contribute to improving IE practices. Additionally, curriculum practices and teaching strategies played a crucial role in advancing IE practices within the schools. However, challenges such as the absence of an inclusive school policy, the lack of a safe and accessible environment for students with SEN, the unavailability of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and IEP teams, and the inadequate provision of funding, resources, and support services hindered the enhancement of IE practices. The limited connection between parents and ADs/ISAs SE presented another obstacle to the success of IE practices. To address these challenges, the study offers a set of recommendations at both the planning and stakeholder levels. These recommendations include the development of a national IE policy, the implementation of Universal Design for safe environments, the establishment of district-level IEP teams, professional development, and awareness programs, as well as funding allocation and support services. Stakeholders, particularly inclusive school principals and teachers are encouraged to create a clear vision and mission, develop school-level policies, and foster community and parental involvement. Adopting Universal Design for Teaching is also recommended to ensure that teaching strategies are inclusive and accessible to all students. The study underscores the importance of addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations to improve the quality of Inclusive Education practices in government schools throughout the Batticaloa District, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for students with SEN. However, the study has limitations as it exclusively focused on selecting Tamil medium schools from the Batticaloa district and employed a qualitative approach. Consequently, the findings and recommendations may lack potential generalizability to other regions or types of schools, including private schools, due to the exclusive use of the qualitative research approach.

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