Examining the Role of Educational Management in Promoting Inclusive Education Practices: A Study of Selected Schools in Lusaka District

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Abstract: This mixed methods study investigates how educational management influences the implementation of inclusive education practices in six selected schools in Lusaka District (two public, two private, two community). Data were collected via questionnaires (n = 180 teachers/support staff), semi-structured interviews with school leaders and educational managers (n = 12), classroom observations, and document analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively; qualitative data were thematically coded. Findings indicate that leadership vision, resource allocation, professional development, and stakeholder engagement significantly affect the uptake of inclusive practices (differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, collaborative teaching, use of assistive technologies, positive behavioral supports, and family/community engagement). However, constraints—insufficient resources, large classes, limited teacher training, infrastructural barriers, and weakened monitoring—limit effective implementation, especially in community schools. The paper recommends strengthening managerial capacity, targeted resource mobilization, systematic professional development, and institutionalized monitoring to advance inclusive education in Lusaka and similar contexts.

Keywords: inclusive education, educational management, leadership, Lusaka District, school governance, teacher training

1. **Introduction**

    Inclusive education—ensuring equitable access and participation for learners with diverse needs—has become central to national and international education agendas (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). School leadership and educational management are repeatedly identified as pivotal to translating policy into practice (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008). In Zambia, inclusive education policy frameworks exist, yet uneven implementation persists at school level (Ministry of General Education, 2018). This study examines how educational management practices influence the promotion and sustainability of inclusive education in selected Lusaka District schools, comparing public, private, and community contexts.

1.1 Background of the study

Effective educational management involves strategic vision, resource stewardship, personnel development, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring (Bush, 2011). Inclusive education requires these capacities plus flexibility to adapt curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy to diverse learners (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011). Studies show leadership commitment and capacity influence teacher attitudes and inclusive practices (Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2015; Ahsan, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012). However, contextual constraints—financial, infrastructural, cultural—shape outcomes, particularly in low resource settings (Mittler, 2012). Lusaka District, with varied school types and socio-economic profiles, offers a useful context to investigate managerial roles in inclusion.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite supportive policies, many schools in Zambia have limited inclusive practice due to resource shortfalls, insufficient teacher preparation, weak monitoring, and leadership gaps (Chama, 2019; Mwansa & Banda, 2021). There is limited empirical evidence on specific educational management behaviors that enable or constrain inclusion at school level in Lusaka. Understanding these dynamics is essential to design interventions that strengthen schools' ability to include learners with diverse needs.

1.3 Objectives of the study

Primary objective: To examine the role of educational management in promoting inclusive education practices in selected Lusaka District schools. Specific objectives: (1) identify inclusive practices currently implemented; (2) analyze management practices that support inclusion; (3) document barriers managers face; (4) recommend strategies for improving management support for inclusion.

1.4 Research questions

1. What inclusive education practices are implemented in the selected schools?
2. How does educational management support the implementation of inclusive education?
3. What challenges do educational managers face in promoting inclusion?
4. What strategies can strengthen educational management to enhance inclusive practice?

Literature review

2.1 Conceptual framework

The study adopts a systems-informed conceptual framework linking leadership vision, resource management, professional development, school culture, and monitoring to inclusive practice outcomes (Ainscow, 2005; Senge, 1990). Educational management acts as the integrative mechanism that aligns inputs (policy, resources, staff capacity) with processes (pedagogy, support services) to yield inclusive outputs (participation, learning, wellbeing).

2.2 Theories on educational management and leadership

Classical, human relations, transformational, distributed leadership, and systems theories each provide insight. While classical theory stresses structure and accountability (Taylor, 1911; Fayol, 1949), human relations underscores relationships and motivation (Mayo, 1933). Transformational leadership inspires change and inclusion (Bass, 1985), and distributed leadership aligns with collaborative responsibility for inclusion (Spillane, 2006). Systems theory emphasizes interdependence across school subsystems, essential for coordinated inclusion (Senge, 1990).

2.3 Inclusive education practices

Core practices include curriculum adaptation (Tomlinson, 2015), differentiated instruction, collaborative/co-teaching models (Friend & Cook, 2013), assistive technologies (Alper & Raharinirina, 2006; Alnahdi, 2019), positive behavioral supports (Sugai & Horner, 2002), and family/community engagement (Epstein, 2011). Successful implementation depends on management actions: policy enactment, resource allocation, teacher professional development, and monitoring (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2010).

2.4 Empirical evidence and gaps

International and regional studies confirm leadership's centrality to inclusion (Sharma et al., 2015; Ahsan et al., 2012). In Zambia, research highlights teacher preparedness gaps and resource constraints (Chikunda, 2012; Mwansa & Banda, 2021), but detailed analyses of managerial behaviors across school types in urban contexts are scarce. This study addresses that gap by examining managerial roles and comparing public, private, and community schools.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

A convergent mixed methods design combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, observations, and document review to provide triangulated evidence.

3.2 Study sites and sample

Six schools in Lusaka District were purposively selected: Public School 1, Public School 2, Private School 1, Private School 2, Community School 1, Community School 2 (see Table 1). Participants included 180 teachers/support staff (30 per school) who completed questionnaires, 12 school leaders/educational managers who participated in interviews, and observational sampling across classrooms (n = 24 observation sessions).

Table 1. Profile of selected schools

School	School type	Teachers (sampled)	Total teachers (school)	Learners	Inclusive policy	Special needs facilities
Public School 1	Public	30	25*	450	Yes	Limited
Public School 2	Public	30	22*	400	Yes	None
Private School 1	Private	30	18*	350	Yes	Moderate
Private School 2	Private	30	20*	375	Yes	Moderate
Community School 1	Community	30	15*	300	No	None
Community School 2	Community	30	17*	320	Yes	Limited

Note: Sampled teacher counts reflect questionnaire respondents (30 per school) to achieve n = 180. School staffing column shows approximate total school teachers for contextual reference (estimated).

3.3 **Data collection instruments and procedures**

• Questionnaire: structured items (Likert scale) on inclusive practices, management support, training, resources, and challenges.
• Interviews: semi-structured guide with principals and district managers exploring leadership vision, resource mobilization, capacity building, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement.
• Observations: checklist capturing evidence of differentiated instruction, assistive device use, classroom adaptations, collaborative teaching, and participation.
• Document analysis: school policies, minutes, training records, and infrastructure inventories.

3.4 **Data analysis**

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS and summarized using frequencies, percentages, and means. Qualitative interview and observation data were transcribed and coded thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Integration of quantitative and qualitative results occurred during interpretation.

3.5 **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval and district permissions were obtained. Participants provided informed consent. Data were anonymized and stored securely.

4. **Findings**

4.1 **Inclusive education practices implemented**

Questionnaire and observation results indicated varying implementation (Table 2). Differentiated instruction was most common; assistive technology and physical adaptations were least frequent.

Table 2. Implementation of inclusive education practices (teachers, n = 180)

Inclusive practice	% Teachers reporting use	Observed frequency
Differentiated instruction	75%	Moderate
Assistive technology	40%	Low
Classroom physical adaptations	35%	Low
Learner support services	50%	Moderate
Collaborative teaching	45%	Low–Moderate
Positive Behavioral Supports	48%	Moderate

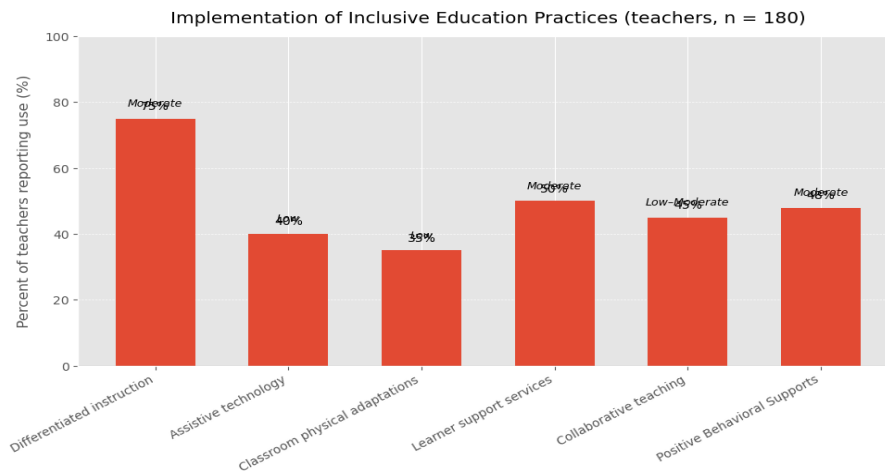### 4.2 **Educational management practices observed**

Management practices—leadership supportiveness, inclusive policy implementation, staff training frequency, parental involvement, and resource allocation—differed by school type (Table 3). Private schools scored higher on average than public and community schools.

Table 3. Average management practice scores by school type (scale 1–5)

Practice	Public (avg)	Private (avg)	Community (avg)
Leadership supportiveness	4.2	4.5	3.6
Inclusive policy implementation	3.8	4.3	3.0
Staff training frequency	3.5	4.0	2.8
Parental involvement	3.0	3.8	2.5
Resource allocation for inclusion	3.2	4.1	2.7

4.3 Inclusive education practices implementation — teacher reports vs. observations
Figure 1 (grouped bars) illustrates teacher reported use and observed relative frequency for key practices (differentiated instruction highest; assistive tech and adaptations low). Qualitative comments revealed teachers often improvise low cost adaptations when resources are limited.

4.4 **Challenges faced by schools**
Interviews and questionnaires identified primary challenges (Table 4).

Table 4. Challenges hindering inclusive education (frequency of mention; respondents = 192 including leaders)

Challenge	% respondents mentioning
Lack of adequate resources (materials, assistive devices)	80%
Inadequate staff training	70%
Large class sizes	65%
Negative attitudes/resistance to inclusion	50%
Poor infrastructure (ramps, accessible toilets)	45%

Leaders emphasized that while policies exist, inadequate budgets and competing priorities limit practical implementation.

4.5 **Role of leadership actions**
Leaders reported multiple supportive actions: advocacy for policy (5/6 leaders), facilitating staff training (4/6), engaging parents/community (4/6), mobilizing resources (3/6), and monitoring/evaluation (3/6). Interviews underscored the central role of principals as advocates and coordinators; however, many leaders lacked systematic M&E tools and sustained funding mechanisms.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of findings

The study confirms leadership and management are critical enablers for inclusive education. Where leaders articulated inclusion visions, prioritized training, and secured resources (more evident in private schools), practice was stronger. Differentiated instruction—requiring pedagogical adaptability rather than high capital inputs—was widely used, suggesting teachers adopt inclusive techniques when supported. Low uptake of assistive technologies and physical adaptations reflects resource and infrastructure constraints, echoing prior Zambian and regional studies (Alnahdi, 2019; Mittler, 2012).

5.2 Management styles and inclusion

Transformational and distributed leadership behaviors—vision setting, teacher empowerment, shared responsibility—were associated with more inclusive practices (Leithwood et al., 2008; Spillane, 2006). Conversely, rigid hierarchical management and limited stakeholder engagement hindered adaptation and teacher innovation.

5.3 Capacity building and monitoring

Regular, targeted professional development emerged as a key managerial lever. Managers who organized in-service training and peer learning reported improved teacher confidence. Monitoring and data use were weak across schools; strengthening simple, school-level monitoring systems can guide resource prioritization and demonstrate impact.

5.4 Equity across school types

Community schools, often with the least resources, showed the weakest implementation. Equity focused support (targeted funding, partnerships, district facilitation) is necessary to avoid deepening disparities.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Educational management significantly shapes inclusive education outcomes. Leadership vision, resource management, capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and monitoring are pivotal. However, resource limitations, insufficient training, large classes, and infrastructural deficits constrain practice—especially in community schools. Policy alone is insufficient without managerial capacity and resources to operationalize inclusion.

6.2 Limitations

The purposive selection of six schools in Lusaka limits generalizability. Self-reported data may contain social desirability bias. Nevertheless, the mixed methods approach provides robust, contextually rich insights.

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Appendixes available on request.

Author declaration

I declare that this manuscript is my original work and has not been previously submitted for publication elsewhere.