

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
 Vol. 25, No. 8, pp. 360-384, August 2026
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.8.14>
 Received Apr 23, 2026; Revised Jun 16, 2026; Accepted Jul 28, 2026

Advancing Social Justice Through Inclusive Education: The Experiences of Female School Leaders in South African Schools

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Abstract. School management plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Women in school management bring unique perspectives to leadership, often characterised by collaboration and empathy. However, female school managers in South Africa face specific challenges, including gender bias and the need to balance professional and personal responsibilities. This study aims to explore their perceptions and experiences of implementing inclusive education under their leadership. It adopts a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm to purposively select nine women in school leadership roles, including principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads from the KwaZulu-Natal province. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions, which were analysed using thematic analysis. Using Social Justice Theory as a theoretical lens, the study found that female school leaders possess adequate knowledge of inclusive education policies, such as the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy and White Paper Six. However, they face significant barriers, including severe resource shortages, inadequate apartheid-era infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, the absence of specialist staff, and ongoing departmental neglect. The findings further reveal that these women perform unrecognised emotional and caregiving labour without systemic support. The study concludes that inclusive education in South Africa remains an aspirational policy rather than an achievable reality for female school leaders in previously disadvantaged schools.

Keywords: female school leaders; inclusive education; resource shortages; school management teams; social justice

Citation:
 Mnguni, M. A., & Cele,
 S, M, K. (2026).
 Advancing Social
 Justice Through
 Inclusive Education:
 The Experiences of
 Female School Leaders
 in South African
 Schools. *International
 Journal of Learning,
 Teaching and Educational
 Research*, 25(8), 360–384.
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.25.8.14>

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of inclusive education has emerged as a vital element of contemporary education systems across the globe, receiving significant support from international organisations and human rights frameworks (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2019). Numerous international bodies advocate for inclusive education not merely as a pedagogical choice but as a fundamental right for every learner, regardless of ability, background, or learning needs.

The Salamanca Statement of 1994 accelerated the global transition towards inclusive education, expanding the initial focus on learners with disabilities to include all learners. This landmark declaration emphasised the necessity for all children to have access to mainstream schools and to participate fully in all activities, irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities, characteristics, or learning needs (UNESCO, 2018). Importantly, this initiative asserted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) had already established education as a fundamental human right, a principle reiterated in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The World Education Forum (2000) reinforces this perspective, asserting that education is a fundamental human right essential for sustainable development, peace, and stability, both domestically and globally. Indeed, education is a crucial mechanism for effective engagement in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are profoundly shaped by rapid globalisation. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the Salamanca Statement, thereby endorsing inclusive education as the primary strategy for educating all children, irrespective of differences. The advocacy for inclusion is consistently supported by international educational frameworks, with UNESCO (2017) providing a clear definition: inclusion means every learner matters and matters equally. It further defines inclusion in education as a process that helps overcome barriers limiting learners' presence, engagement, and success (UNESCO, 2017).

The shift towards inclusive education represents a clear international trend, prompting the development of legislative initiatives impacting schools worldwide (Rix, 2005). As a signatory to this international agenda, South Africa has been compelled to respond to this global imperative by creating policies that address the diverse needs of all learners within the classroom. Inclusive education in South Africa has been intentionally framed as a human rights and social justice initiative aimed at rectifying the exclusionary and discriminatory practices inherited from the apartheid education system (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2020).

Similarly, Smit and Mpya (2011) argue that the introduction of inclusive education in South Africa has been explicitly viewed as a means of addressing past injustices and dismantling discriminatory practices by accommodating all learners, regardless of their special needs. These scholars further contend that inclusive education in South Africa fundamentally concerns equity, access to, and meaningful engagement in education, as well as providing high-quality learning

opportunities for all individuals. Consequently, South Africa has developed policies and procedures that promote social inclusion and eliminate methodologies reflecting the exclusionary philosophies of traditional, deficit-based approaches.

The enactment of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) marked a significant transformation in the educational system and highlighted the commitment of the new democratic government to restoring human rights for all previously marginalised groups (Mpu & Adu, 2021). The constitution unequivocally enshrines the right to education and freedom from discrimination (RSA, 1996). In the same year, the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 was introduced, laying the groundwork for a paradigm shift in perceptions of diversity concerning learning needs in schools. This legislation facilitated a transition from a medical deficit model, which places the problem within the learner, to a social model of difference that acknowledges that barriers to learning are created by systemic, attitudinal, and environmental factors (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000; Swart & Pettipher, 2011; Terzi, 2010).

However, for teachers to effectively implement this innovation, they require substantial professional development regarding the complex and contested concept of inclusion (Mwarari, 2020). A study by Engelbrecht, Nel, and Tlale (2015) provides evidence of this need, demonstrating that teachers are disadvantaged by the poor quality of training in the field. Similarly, Mpu and Adu (2021) agree, noting that despite advancements in the implementation of inclusive education policy, the primary concern hindering progress is the lack of skills among teachers to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of learners in the classroom. This skills deficit results in teachers experiencing heightened stress levels and limited progress among learners facing barriers to learning (Chataika, McKenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012).

It is against this backdrop that the present study is situated. Drawing on social justice theory as a theoretical lens, this study has two primary objectives: first, to explore the lived experiences of female school leaders (principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads) in implementing inclusive education in their schools; and second, to identify and analyse the specific challenges these women encounter when attempting to translate inclusive education policy into sustainable practice within the South African context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The role of school leadership in advancing inclusive education

The relationship between inclusive education and school management teams (SMTs) is well-documented in the literature as both interdependent and profoundly complex. Scholars generally agree that SMTs act as crucial intermediaries between national policy frameworks—such as Education White Paper Six (EWP6) and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy—and the often chaotic, resource-constrained realities of classroom practice (Motitswe, 2025). This mediating role occurs within contexts marked by various intersecting systemic constraints, including chronic underfunding,

significant infrastructural deficits, and ongoing socioeconomic inequalities that continue to define post-apartheid South Africa (Engelbrecht, 2020). As a result, SMTs are frequently tasked with bridging the gap between idealistic policy expectations and the harsh material limitations of their specific school contexts. This tension is not merely administrative but fundamentally ethical, as school leaders must make difficult decisions regarding resource allocation, teacher deployment, and learner support with minimal guidance or material support from provincial departments.

Recent research has deepened our understanding of these challenges. Chirowamhangu (2024) convincingly demonstrates that rural and under-resourced special schools face acute shortages of psychosocial services, reliable transportation for learners and staff, and specialist personnel such as educational psychologists and therapists. These shortages place considerable strain on SMTs, who are often forced to assume roles for which they have no formal training. In response to these pressures, a growing body of scholarship has begun to document the emergence of adaptive leadership practices within South African schools. Naicker and Mestry (2023) highlight several of these practices, including shared decision-making structures that distribute leadership responsibilities across teams, community partnerships that introduce external resources into the school, and the establishment of professional learning communities where teachers can collaboratively develop inclusive teaching strategies.

The authors argue that these approaches enable SMTs to build collective capacity and respond more effectively to the systemic challenges that hinder the implementation of inclusive education in their specific contexts. However, despite the potential of these adaptive strategies, the literature consistently indicates that deeper, more entrenched structural barriers remain. Motitswe (2025) report that overcrowded classrooms – sometimes exceeding 50 or 60 learners per teacher – combined with insufficient support from the Department of Education, limited parental involvement due to poverty and work commitments, and inadequate initial and ongoing teacher training, continue to obstruct the effective implementation of inclusive education. Mbelu (2025), focusing specifically on full-service schools, further argues that ethical leadership, widely acknowledged as central to fostering inclusive and equitable school cultures, remains inconsistently practised due to systemic and institutional constraints beyond the control of individual school leaders.

Complementing these national findings, global analyses by UNESCO indicate that outdated leadership models, which still prioritise managerial efficiency over pedagogical transformation, along with fragmented implementation processes lacking coordination across different levels of the education system, continue to hinder progress towards inclusive education internationally. Collectively, these studies highlight the complexity of school management team (SMT) leadership in inclusive contexts, revealing that school leaders are both agents of transformation and victims of under-resourced, under-supported systems. This dual positioning is particularly pronounced for female school leaders, who often face additional

gendered barriers related to leadership legitimacy, workload distribution, and societal expectations.

Furthermore, the literature establishes that the success of any educational innovation fundamentally relies on the quality and commitment of school leadership. Gous, Moen, and Eloff (2014) assert that school leaders are individuals who set objectives, inspire motivation, and initiate change to achieve both current and new goals. This suggests that the success of any innovation within a school – including the transition towards inclusive education – depends on strong and motivated leadership. For the purposes of this study, the emphasis is placed on the female leaders selected for participation. Edmunds and Macmillan's (2010) study indicates that one reason school transformation is effective in certain institutions is that leadership demonstrates the courage to implement necessary changes, particularly concerning the concept of inclusive education for which they are responsible for monitoring and implementing.

This finding implies that the successful implementation of inclusive education requires the school management team to be adequately prepared for these inclusive practices within their institutions (Mwarari, 2020). Another implication associated with inclusive education is the necessity for comprehensive preparation of school management and teachers for this new paradigm of inclusion (Buford & Casey, 2012; Fayez, Dababneh & Jumiaan, 2011; Gous, Eloff & Moen, 2014; Mensah, 2016; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014; Orphanos & Orr, 2013). Mwarari (2020) further highlights that effective implementation of inclusive education necessitates that school leaders are sufficiently equipped and prepared to engage in inclusive practices. Such preparation would assist school management in monitoring the application of this inclusive concept within their schools and in providing the necessary support to classroom teachers, who bear the primary responsibility for differentiated instruction.

2.2 Challenges Faced by SMTs in Implementing Inclusive Education Practices

A central concern emerging from the literature is the specific, concrete challenges that SMTs face when attempting to implement inclusive education in South African schools. Scholars have consistently highlighted a troubling disjunction between the aspirations of inclusive education policies and the complicated, constrained realities of their implementation (Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Ainscow, 2020).

Empirical studies reveal persistent obstacles operating at multiple levels, including inadequate physical infrastructure such as inaccessible buildings and a lack of ramps or adapted toilets; acute shortages of assistive technologies, including Braille materials, hearing aids, and mobility devices; extremely limited professional development opportunities that fail to build sustainable teacher capacity; and insufficient departmental support in the form of visiting advisors, learning support materials, and financial resources (Equal Education, 2025; Mahlaule et al., 2024).

While these challenges are well documented in the literature, they are often examined at a macro, systemic level, with surprisingly limited attention paid to how they are concretely experienced, navigated, and negotiated by SMTs on a daily basis. Engelbrecht (2020), for instance, emphasises that much of the existing research has focused on structural reforms and resource allocation models rather than on the lived experiences, emotional labour, and professional identities of those responsible for day-to-day implementation. This observation points to a significant gap in the literature that the present study seeks to address.

Makoelle and Burmistrova (2020) extend this argument by demonstrating, through empirical data, that persistent inequalities in school financing and resource distribution exacerbate the challenges faced by SMTs, particularly in disadvantaged communities such as rural and township schools. In their analysis, the authors highlight how SMTs must navigate competing demands related to policy compliance, severe resource constraints, and the increasingly diverse learning needs represented in their classrooms. This navigation is not merely technical but deeply ethical, requiring school leaders to make difficult trade-offs regarding which learners receive which forms of support.

Examining these challenges is significant due to the strategic position occupied by SMTs within the education system. As mediators between national policy frameworks and classroom practice, SMTs play a pivotal role in shaping the success or failure of inclusive education. However, as Setlhodi (2020) argues forcefully, without a nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of the realities within which SMTs operate—including their material constraints, emotional burdens, and professional development needs—inclusive education risks remaining aspirational rather than achievable.

The literature reviewed herein highlights the enduring tensions between policy intent and the realities of implementation, as well as the critical yet underexplored role of SMTs leadership in mediating these tensions. It is clearly acknowledged that the shift towards inclusive education has engendered significant cultural transformations within schools, necessitating persuasive leadership from SMTs (Gous, Moen & Eloff, 2014). By employing a social justice framework and foregrounding the specific experiences of female school leaders, this study aims to provide a more contextually grounded and empirically informed understanding of the challenges confronted by SMTs in promoting inclusive education within their institutions.

The investigation recognises that SMTs are tasked with supporting teachers in the enactment of this social model; however, they frequently operate without adequate systemic support. This paper presents a qualitative study of the challenges encountered by female school leaders in relation to the implementation of inclusive education in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and examines how they interpret and translate their understanding of the inclusion policy into practice within the confines of their specific school contexts.

2.3. Social Justice Theory

Social Justice Theory is widely regarded in the literature as a foundational framework for addressing social inequalities by promoting equality, recognising human dignity, and facilitating meaningful participation, particularly among marginalised groups (Ntshoe, 2020). Ulriksen and Plagerson (2021) characterise Social Justice Theory as instrumental, emancipatory, imperfect, paradox-sensitive, and relational, emphasising its adaptability to complex social realities. While the theory is often associated with broader traditions such as conflict theory and critical theory, Campbell (2021) argues that it should not be confined to these paradigms alone.

In this wider context, scholars have highlighted various principles: Miller's work emphasises Miller's work underscores the fair distribution of resources as a fundamental aspect of justice (Reshma, 2018), whereas Rawls's theory of justice as fairness emphasises the need to address unjustified inequalities through ongoing institutional adjustments (Patterson, 2022). Together, these contributions illustrate that Social Justice Theory encompasses not only the equitable distribution of resources but also the challenge of marginalisation, the need to address systemic prejudice, and the promotion of inclusive participation (Voigt, 2018).

The relevance of Social Justice Theory to the present study is significant, as this investigation focuses on how female school leaders in South African schools navigate the implementation of inclusive education within a context marked by historical injustice and systemic resource constraints. As established in the literature review, inclusive education in South Africa was intentionally developed as a human rights and social justice initiative aimed at rectifying the exclusionary practices of the apartheid era (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2020; Smit & Mpya, 2011). The theory's emphasis on fair resource distribution (Reshma, 2018) directly addresses documented challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortages of assistive technologies, and insufficient departmental support (Equal Education, 2025; Ginja & Chen, 2023).

Furthermore, the relational and paradox-sensitive dimensions of the theory (Ulriksen & Plagerson, 2021) illuminate the experiences of School Management Teams (SMTs), who act as critical intermediaries between policy frameworks and classroom practice, often mediating between idealistic policy expectations and material limitations (Motitswe, 2025; Engelbrecht, 2020). By applying a social justice lens, this study goes beyond a technical analysis of implementation challenges to explore deeper questions about whose needs are being prioritised and how school leaders negotiate the tension between policy mandates and contextual realities.

The theory's instrumental and emancipatory nature highlights the potential for research to contribute to social transformation, thereby justifying the qualitative, experiential focus of this study on female school leaders – a group that remains underrepresented in educational leadership research despite constituting the majority of the teaching force. As noted in the literature review, much existing research has concentrated on structural reforms rather than the lived experiences

of those responsible for implementation (Engelbrecht, 2020). Therefore, Social Justice Theory serves as the guiding analytical framework for this study, shaping the research objectives, informing the interpretation of participant experiences, and grounding the study's commitment to advancing more equitable educational practices in South African schools.

3. Methodology

This study adopted an interpretive paradigm, which served as the fundamental philosophical framework guiding the entire research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). The interpretive paradigm emphasises understanding the social world through the subjective experiences and meanings of individuals. This approach allows for the investigation of complex social phenomena by focusing on how individuals perceive their own realities (Bryman, 2016). Interpretivism was deemed suitable for this study because it aimed to explore the real-life experiences and viewpoints of women school leaders as they navigate the implementation of inclusive education in their institutions. This paradigm enabled a deep understanding of the challenges these leaders face, recognising that their realities are socially constructed and context-dependent rather than objectively measurable.

Employing a qualitative approach, the study sought to gather detailed, rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences. Qualitative research prioritises understanding the complexity of social phenomena, focusing on meaning, context, and the perspectives of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach is particularly effective for exploring processes, behaviours, and experiences within the specific contexts of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2025). Accordingly, a phenomenological research design was employed.

Phenomenology is well-suited for examining the lived experiences of individuals encountering a specific phenomenon, as it aims to understand and describe the essence of experiences shared by those in similar circumstances (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Van Manen, 2016). The phenomenological research design aligns effectively with the chosen interpretive paradigm of this study, directly addressing the research questions (Bless et al., 2006). For this study, the phenomenon of interest was the implementation of inclusive education, and the phenomenological design allowed the researcher to uncover both the commonalities and nuances in how female school leaders experience and interpret this policy mandate within their unique school contexts.

The study involved nine participants, consisting of three principals, three deputy principals, and threedepartmental heads, all drawn from different schools. Purposive sampling was used to select these participants. According to Patton et al. (2015), purposive sampling enables researchers to choose individuals likely to provide rich and relevant data based on their direct experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. The inclusion criteria specified that participants must be female principals, female deputy principals, and female departmental heads employed permanently at mainstream schools, with the capacity to consent to participate in this study. All participants were required to serve within the

Pinetown and Umlazi Districts and have more than five years of management experience. They were selected from nine ordinary mainstream schools.

The exclusion criteria for this study comprised teachers not in management positions and male participants. All selected individuals possessed first-hand experience of the challenges encountered in implementing inclusive education within their schools, thereby rendering them ideal informants for this research. Data were collected through a single focus group discussion lasting approximately four hours. Focus groups facilitate guided discussions among small groups of participants, allowing for the exploration of shared experiences and collective insights (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This method is particularly effective for generating rich, interactive data, as participants can respond to one another's experiences, resulting in a deeper and more nuanced understanding than individual interviews might yield (Morgan, 1997).

Given the small sample size, the single focus group discussion allowed all nine participants to engage in a sustained conversation about their challenges, successes, and frustrations, thereby creating a space for collective sense-making. Consistency was observed across all three focus group interviews. Additionally, the authors maintained detailed field notes and kept meticulous records of data collection and proceedings. The data gathered were subjected to thematic analysis, a technique employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved coding the transcribed focus group data to identify recurring themes and subsequently interpreting these themes in relation to the research questions. Thematic analysis presents a flexible and accessible approach within qualitative research, enabling the researcher to capture both explicit and implicit meanings within the data (Nowell et al., 2017).

The ethical aspects of this study were meticulously considered. Ethical clearance (2024/03/13/90507959/44/AM) was obtained from the University of South Africa, College of Education, Research Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. Data collection was performed with the informed consent of participants, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were assured. Pseudonyms were employed to safeguard the identities of the participants. The principals are denoted as P1 to P3, the deputy principals as DP1 to DP3, and the departmental heads as DH1 to DH3.

4. Findings

This section delineates the findings derived from data collected from female school leaders, encompassing principals, deputy principals, and departmental heads from schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The participants articulated their experiences and perceptions concerning the implementation of inclusive education within their institutions, with a particular focus on the challenges they encounter. The findings are categorised into three principal themes, each accompanied by sub-themes derived from the participants' own narratives. These themes are; Understandings of inclusive education and familiarity with policy

frameworks; specific barriers to implementing inclusive education, such as resource shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and overcrowded classrooms; and the legacy of apartheid, along with departmental support or failure. Direct quotations from participants are included throughout to preserve their voices and provide rich, contextualised evidence for the identified themes.

4.1 Theme 1: Understandings of Inclusive Education and Familiarity with Policy Frameworks

This theme examines female school leaders' understandings of the concept of inclusive education within their institutions, as well as their awareness of national policies related to inclusive education. The participants are organised into three sub-themes, which are: Inclusive education is perceived as aspirational yet ultimately unattainable, characterised by a disparity between policy awareness and the absence of practical training, alongside a significant gap between knowledge of policy and the capacity for effective implementation.

4.2.1 Inclusive education as aspirational but unattainable

It emerged from the participants' responses that inclusive education is viewed as a noble ideal; however, it remains out of reach due to the material constraints of their schools. For example, P2 noted that inclusive education holds a beautiful promise on paper, but she struggles to reconcile this promise with the reality of overcrowded classrooms. She said:

"Inclusive education sounds beautiful on paper. To me, it means not turning away a learner with epilepsy or a hearing problem. But how do I do that when I have 60 learners in a classroom and only one teacher?" – P2

Similarly, DH1 found that inclusive education represents a dream her school cannot afford. She stated:

From the participants' sentiments above, it is clear that they understand the philosophical foundation of inclusive education – that schools should not exclude learners on the basis of disability. However, both participants immediately shift from the ideal to the practical, revealing a central tension in their experiences. DH1's phrase "inclusion becomes exclusion in disguise" is particularly striking, suggesting that when schools are compelled to include learners without meaningful support, the result is not true inclusion but a hidden form of exclusion.

4.2.2 Policy awareness without practical training

It also emerged from the participants' responses that, while the female school leaders are cognisant of inclusive education policies, this awareness has not been accompanied by practical training. Participant 2 indicated that she was aware of the SIAS policy but had not received any subsequent training. She said:

"I know about the SIAS policy – Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support. I have the document in my office. But I first heard about it during a Department of Education roadshow in 2019. No follow-up, no training on how to fill those forms. So, it stays in the file." – P2

DP3 reported a similar experience, adding that her policy knowledge came from her own reading rather than departmental training. She stated:

"I know the policy on inclusive education and also the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but that is from my own reading. The Department introduced us to SIAS through a circular in 2017. No practical training." – DP3

The accounts provided by the participants indicate a discernible pattern of superficial engagement from the Department of Education. A roadshow and a circular do not constitute adequate training instruments. P2's acknowledgment that the SIAS document "stays in the file" suggests that, in the absence of training, the policy is not being effectively implemented within her school. DP3's dependence on her own reading implies that she has undertaken personal initiative to address the shortcomings of the Department; however, this individual effort cannot replace the necessity for systematic, school-wide professional development.

4.2.3 The gap between policy knowledge and implementation capacity

The participants further highlighted a concerning disparity between awareness of inclusive education policies and the capacity to implement them effectively. DP3 offered the most emotionally compelling account of this disparity, detailing the efforts of an untrained teacher to support a blind learner. She stated:

"I have one teacher who tries to help a blind learner, but she has no training. So, we are failing these children, and it breaks my heart." – DP3

The emotional weight of DP3's statement is significant. She uses the phrase "it breaks my heart," indicating that this is not merely an administrative failure for her but a moral and emotional one. The teacher assisting the blind learner is doing so out of goodwill, not competence. While goodwill is admirable, it is not a substitute for specialised training. Similarly, P2's rhetorical question – "how do I do that when I have 60 learners in a classroom?" – highlights an impossibility. Inclusive education requires individualised attention and differentiates instruction, neither of which is feasible in a class of 60 learners with one teacher.

Taken together, the three participants paint a consistent picture. They understand what inclusive education is supposed to entail and can name the relevant policies. However, none of them feel that they have the training, resources, or manageable class sizes to turn policy into practice. The result, in DP3's words, is that they are "failing these children," and that failure is a source of profound personal distress for these female school leaders.

4.2 Theme 2: Specific Barriers to Implementing Inclusive Education

This theme examines the specific barriers faced by female school leaders in their efforts to implement inclusive education in previously disadvantaged Black rural and township schools. The participants' responses are organised into three sub-themes, which are acute resource shortages and personal financial sacrifice; inadequate infrastructure that excludes learners with physical disabilities; and overcrowded classrooms that render individualised attention unfeasible.

4.2.1 Acute resource shortages and personal financial sacrifice

It became clear from the participants' responses that resource shortages are not merely inconvenient but fundamentally hinder efforts for inclusive education. The female school leaders described a complete absence of basic inclusive teaching materials, with some reporting that they use their own meagre salaries to bridge the gap left by the Department. For example, DH3 noted that even simple requests for assistive devices are met with ridicule. She said:

"Look, I will be honest. We have no textbook for inclusive teaching. No posters, no large print materials, no braille. I once requested a simple hearing aid from the district. They laughed. They said go find an NGO. So I spend my weekends calling churches and businesses. Sometimes they help, most times they don't." – DH3

Similarly, DP1 found that the Department's failure to provide resources forces her to use her own personal money, a situation she cannot sustain. She stated:

"Resource shortages mean I use my own money. I bought crayons, playdough, and large paper for a child with fine motor difficulties. That cost me R300 last month. I cannot afford that every month. My salary is small." – DP1

From the participants' sentiments above, it is clear that the burden of resource provision falls directly onto the shoulders of these female school leaders. DH3's experience of being laughed at by district officials reveals a culture of disrespect and neglect. She spends her weekends pleading for help from churches and businesses because the state refuses to act.

DP1's account adds a gendered and economic dimension; she is using her already modest salary to purchase basic classroom materials. While R300 may seem insignificant, for a teacher in a township school, this represents a significant sacrifice. The fact that she cannot afford to do this every month indicates that the support she provides is intermittent and unsustainable. P3 added that even basic operational resources, such as a functioning photocopier, are absent, making it impossible to produce adapted materials for learners with disabilities. She said:

"Resource shortages? We don't even have a photocopier that works consistently. How do I produce large print materials? How do I make worksheets for a child with low vision? I tried to use my own phone to take photos of the board for a dyslexic learner. That helped a little, but my phone broke. The department says apply for funding. I applied three times. No response." – P3

P3's account exemplifies the absurdity of her circumstances. She is mandated to implement inclusive education; however, she is unable to produce a basic worksheet in large print. Her innovative solution—utilising her personal phone to photograph the board—was ultimately thwarted when her phone became inoperable. The Department's response to her three funding applications has been marked by silence. This pattern of non-response emerges as a recurring theme throughout the accounts of the participants.

4.2.2 Inadequate infrastructure that excludes learners with physical disabilities

It also emerged from the participants' responses that school infrastructure is fundamentally incompatible with the needs of learners with physical disabilities. The female school leaders described buildings from the apartheid era that were never designed for accessibility and reported that their appeals for infrastructure upgrades have been disregarded. Participant 2 noted that her school's 1970s building prevents a child with a physical disability from even accessing water. She said:

"Infrastructure is a nightmare. My school was built in the 1970s. Narrow doors, broken windows, no ramp anywhere. We have a child with a physical disability who cannot reach the tap to drink water. I had to ask the caretaker to fetch water for her every break. That is not sustainable. Also, we have no storage for assistive devices even if we got them. They would be stolen or broken. And the department's response? Silence. Long silence." – P2

Similarly, DP1 found that outdoor toilets located far from classrooms make it impossible for a child in a wheelchair to attend school with dignity. She stated:

"The infrastructure is a joke. Our toilets are outside, far from the classrooms. A child in a wheelchair cannot reach them. So, they either wet themselves or stay home. I raised this at a circuit meeting. They said, 'Apply for the disability grant.' That grant has been 'coming' for three years." – DP1

The participants' narratives illustrate that infrastructural barriers are not mere inconveniences but rather fundamental exclusions. P2's proposal to request the caretaker to fetch water for a child is both temporary and humiliating for all parties involved, and she acknowledges its unsustainability. DP1's portrayal of a child faced with the choice between wetting themselves or remaining at home highlights the cruelty of inaccessible infrastructure. Her assertion that the disability grant has been "coming" for three years suggests that the Department utilises the promise of future funding to evade taking immediate action. For the child awaiting that ramp or those accessible toilets, three years constitutes an entire educational lifetime.

4.2.3 Overcrowded classrooms that make individualised attention impossible

The female school leaders further reported that overcrowded classrooms render inclusive education impractical. Even when teachers are willing to support learners with disabilities, the sheer number of students in each class prevents individualised attention. DH3 described the emotional toll of this situation, stating that she goes home crying on some days. She said:

"And my class sizes? Over 50 in every room. How do I give individual attention to a child with autism? I cannot. I go home crying some days." – DH3

P2, in a different quotation, listed multiple barriers but returned repeatedly to the problem of large classes. She stated:

"You want barriers? Let me count. One, no training. Two, no budget. Three, no staff. Four, no district support. Five, parents who don't

understand inclusion and blame us when their child struggles... Large classes just make everything worse. I cannot even remember all their names." – P2

DP1 added that children with intellectual disabilities become lost and invisible in overcrowded classrooms. She explained:

"Large class sizes mean I cannot do small group work. Children with intellectual disabilities get lost in the noise. They become silent and invisible. That is not inclusion. That is neglect." – DP1

The sentiments expressed by the participants suggest that overcrowding is not an isolated issue but rather a multiplier of various other challenges. DH3's admission that she returns home in tears highlights the profound emotional distress stemming from the awareness that she is unable to provide a child with autism the attention they require. P2's confession that she cannot even remember all her learners' names is particularly striking. If a teacher does not know a child's name, how can she understand their learning needs? How can she track their progress? DP1's distinction between inclusion and neglect is crucial. She argues that placing a child with an intellectual disability in a crowded, noisy classroom without individualised support is not inclusion at all; it is neglect, obscured by the label of inclusion.

DP3 introduced a systemic perspective, arguing that inclusive education is often treated as an add-on rather than a priority. She stated:

"Honestly, the biggest barrier is that inclusive education is treated like an add-on, not a priority. We are still struggling to get basic stationery and chairs. How can I think about braille machines? I have no deputy principal because the post is vacant. I am doing two jobs. And the department tells me to implement SIAS. With what time? With what person? I am a female principal in a tough area. Every day is a fight just to keep the school open. Inclusion is a luxury we cannot afford." – DP3

DP3's account ties together all the threads. Her school lacks basic stationery and chairs – the most fundamental resources for any educational institution. The deputy principal position is vacant, meaning she is effectively doing two jobs. As a female principal leading a school in a challenging area, every day is a struggle for survival. In this context, inclusive education becomes a luxury. This is not because she does not believe in it, but because the conditions for its implementation do not exist. Her final words – "inclusion is a luxury we cannot afford" – are a devastating indictment of a system that mandates what it refuses to resource.

4.3 Theme 3: The Legacy of Apartheid and Departmental Support or Failure

This theme reports on the female school leaders' perceptions of how the legacy of apartheid continues to affect their ability to implement inclusive education today, as well as the ways in which they feel the Department of Basic Education has either supported or failed them as female leaders in this context. The participants' responses are captured in three sub-themes below: apartheid's structural legacy

persists, the absence of specialist staff and its consequences, and the unrecognised emotional labour of female leaders.

4.3.1 *Apartheid's structural legacy persists*

It emerged from the participants' responses that apartheid did not end but merely transformed, with the same neglected infrastructure and systemic neglect continuing to influence their schools. The female school leaders described buildings and resources that were designed for failure and have not been substantially upgraded. For instance, P1 noted that her school's infrastructure has remained fundamentally unchanged since the apartheid era. She said:

"Apartheid didn't end. It just changed clothes. Our school was built for Black children to fail. Small classrooms, no library, no lab. That same infrastructure is what we have now. The department added a coat of paint and called it transformation." – P1

Similarly, DP1 found that the geographical isolation of her school is a direct legacy of apartheid design, and this isolation continues to deprive her school of resources and support. She stated:

"The legacy is in the soil. Our school is 50 kilometres from the nearest town. During apartheid, that was by design. Keep us far, give us nothing. Now we are expected to do inclusive education with the same nothing." – DP1

The sentiments expressed by the participants indicate a clear perception of a direct correlation between the neglect experienced during the apartheid era and their present struggles. Participant 1's assertion that "apartheid didn't end, it just changed clothes" serves as a potent indictment of the superficial changes that have occurred; she posits that these alterations – such as a fresh coat of paint and new signage – serve to obscure a deeper continuity of neglect. The school's infrastructure was intentionally designed to ensure the failure of Black children, and this same infrastructure persists today.

Furthermore, DP1's remark that "the legacy is in the soil" implies that the neglect is not merely incidental but rather foundational. Her school is situated 50 kilometres from the nearest town, a consequence of apartheid-era planning that deliberately distanced Black schools from white towns. This geographical separation now results in a scarcity of inclusive education resources, specialist staff, and district support reaching her institution. Participant 3 added that Black schools continue to be treated as dumping grounds, receiving the least qualified teachers, outdated textbooks, and the most damaged furniture. She said:

"Apartheid's legacy is that Black schools are still seen as dumping grounds. We get the worst teachers, the oldest books, the most broken furniture." – P3

P3's account indicates that the legacy is not solely physical but also attitudinal. In her experience, the Department continues to view her school as an environment where substandard resources are regarded as acceptable. This attitude perpetuates the very inequalities that inclusive education was intended to address.

4.3.2 The absence of specialist staff and its consequences

It also emerged from the participants' responses that the complete absence of specialist staff – psychologists, therapists, and counsellors – forces school leaders to assume roles for which they are not qualified. This absence is directly attributed to the Department's failure to address staffing disparities from the apartheid era. P1 stated bluntly:

"Where are the specialist staff? Where are the psychologists? We have none." – P1

DH3 provided the most detailed account of this problem, describing how she is compelled to diagnose learners herself, despite lacking the necessary qualifications. She said:

"The lack of specialist staff means I am diagnosing children myself. I am not qualified. But I have to say to a teacher, 'I think this child has dyslexia' or 'I think this child is on the spectrum.' That is dangerous. I could be wrong. But what else can I do? The department has no one to send." – DH3

From DH3's sentiment above, it is clear that the absence of specialist staff creates a cascading risk. She makes unofficial, amateur diagnoses because there are no other options. These diagnoses could be incorrect, leading to inappropriate teaching strategies or unnecessary labelling of learners. Yet she feels she has no choice; the Department sends no one, so she must act. This reflects a profound failure of systemic responsibility.

P1 added that the Department has never once asked her, as a female principal, what she actually needs. She stated:

"The department has failed me by sending policies but with no support. They have never once asked me, as a female principal, what I actually need. Never." – P1

P1's account reveals a top-down, paternalistic approach from the Department. Policies are developed, but teachers are not fully equipped to implement them, posing a challenge for educators. Her perspective as a female principal on the ground has never been sought; she is told what to do rather than being asked what she needs to do it.

4.3.3 The unrecognised emotional labour of female leaders

The female school leaders further reported that the Department fails to recognise the additional emotional and caregiving labour undertaken by female leaders, particularly in communities where disability is stigmatised. Participant 1 described a situation in which a mother confined her disabled child to a room; when Participant 1 attempted to offer assistance, the mother accused her of interfering. She said:

"Many parents still believe disability is a curse or witchcraft. I had a mother who locked her disabled child in a room. When I tried to help, she said I was interfering." – P1

P1's account illustrates that the successful implementation of inclusive education necessitates not only adequate resources and training but also robust community engagement and a fundamental shift in cultural attitudes. The mother who confines her child is not inherently malicious but rather misinformed. Effecting a change in such beliefs demands significant time, patience, and specialised skills. Unfortunately, the Department does not provide any support for these efforts, leaving P1 to contend with this mindset in isolation.

DP1 further noted that the Department operates under the assumption that female leaders possess unlimited energy, thereby neglecting the reality that they also fulfil roles as mothers and caregivers within their households. She stated:

"As a woman, I am also a mother and a caregiver at home. The department assumes I have unlimited energy. They have failed to recognise that female leaders need rest, resources, and respect. We get none." – DP1

DP1's account introduces a gendered analysis. The Department's expectations do not account for the dual burden experienced by female school leaders. She returns home to attend to her own family; however, the Department anticipates that she will sustain the same intensity of work as if she had no additional responsibilities. The phrase "rest, resources, and respect" succinctly encapsulates her needs, which remain unaddressed.

DH3 described the emotional labour involved in offering comfort to mothers following her informal diagnoses. She said:

"As a female HOD, I am also the one who comforts the mother when I give my amateur diagnosis. I hold her hand. I tell her it is not her fault. The department does not see that labour. They see pass rates. They see attendance. They do not see the tears. They have failed us by making us doctors, social workers, and teachers all at once, without training or pay." – DH3

DH3's account is the most emotionally impactful. She supports mothers by holding their hands and providing reassurance that their child's disability is not their fault. This exemplifies the essence of social work, which is distinct from teaching. She undertakes this labour without formal training and without remuneration. The Department, however, prioritises only quantitative data – specifically pass rates and attendance figures. DH3's final sentence encapsulates the essence of the failure: The Department has transformed female school leaders into doctors, social workers, and teachers all at once, yet has provided them with the training and pay of only one profession.

P3, who received merely a single instance of support from the Department – namely, a second-hand computer that malfunctioned after two weeks – encapsulated the fatigue associated with grappling with challenges in isolation. She said:

"I have fought that mindset for ten years. I am tired. The department does not help me fight it. They just say, 'awareness campaigns.' With what budget? With what staff? I am a woman fighting alone." – P3

P3's account reveals the cumulative toll of ten years spent battling community stigma, resource shortages, and departmental neglect. The Department's response – talk of awareness campaigns without a budget or staff – is insulting to her. She ends with a stark declaration: "*I am a woman engaged in a solitary struggle.*" This sense of isolation is not coincidental; it stems from a systemic framework that disseminates policies and circulars without providing the necessary personnel, financial support, or respect for the gendered labour of its female educational leaders.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a significant and enduring disconnect between the aspirational goals of inclusive education policy and the material realities faced by female school leaders in previously disadvantaged Black rural and township schools. This disconnect, extensively documented in the literature (Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Ainscow, 2020), is reflected in the participants' experiences, highlighting a considerable gap between the promises of policies and the actual capabilities of schools. The participants demonstrated a clear understanding of policies such as the SIAS document and Education White Paper 6; however, they consistently reported that this knowledge remains disconnected from practical implementation capacity.

As Participant 2 noted, the SIAS document "stays in the file" due to a lack of training provision. This observation aligns with Engelbrecht, Nel, and Tlale's (2015) assertion that teachers and school leaders are disadvantaged by inadequate training quality. Additionally, the participants' descriptions of apartheid-era infrastructure, including narrow doors, outdoor toilets, and broken windows, confirm Chirowamhangu's (2024) finding that rural and under-resourced schools suffer from significant infrastructural deficits. From a social justice perspective, as articulated by Reshma (2018) and Patterson (2021), the equitable distribution of resources is a fundamental principle of justice.

Drawing on Social Justice Theory, Nancy Fraser's (2008) tripartite framework of redistribution, recognition, and representation offers a compelling analytical lens. Fraser argues that social justice requires not only the equitable redistribution of material resources (economic justice) but also cultural justice through the recognition of marginalised groups and political justice through fair representation in decision-making processes. The participants' schools lack both the physical resources (such as ramps, assistive devices, and accessible toilets) and the human resources (including psychologists, therapists, and specialist teachers) necessary for achieving equitable education.

According to Social Justice Theory, this represents a failure of redistribution – the first of Fraser's three dimensions. Furthermore, the systemic neglect of these female leaders' gendered and racialised experiences reflects a failure of recognition, as their specific struggles as Black women in post-apartheid rural and township schools remain invisible to policymakers. This situation exemplifies a failure of distributive justice, perpetuating the very inequalities that inclusive

education policies were designed to dismantle (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2020; Smit & Mpya, 2011).

The findings also illuminate the unrecognised and unremunerated emotional and caregiving labour performed by female school leaders, a dimension largely absent from the existing literature, which has predominantly focused on structural reforms rather than the lived experiences of these individuals (Engelbrecht, 2020). The participants expressed feelings of distress, highlighting instances of returning home in tears, offering informal diagnoses to mothers, combating community stigma in isolation, and utilising their personal salaries to purchase essential inclusive materials. These accounts underscore that the implementation of inclusive education is not merely a technical or administrative challenge but one that is profoundly emotional and gendered.

DP1's observation that the Department assumes female leaders possess "unlimited energy," whilst disregarding their responsibilities as mothers and caregivers at home, reflects what Ulriksen and Plagerson (2021) describe as the paradox-sensitive and relational dimensions of social justice. From the perspective of Social Justice Theory, this finding directly engages Fraser's second dimension: recognition. Recognition justice demands that all social actors be afforded equal respect and that their distinctive experiences be acknowledged rather than rendered invisible. The Department's failure to recognise the gendered nature of caregiving labour—implicitly expecting female leaders to absorb systemic failures without compensation or support—represents a profound misrecognition.

Social Justice Theory also foregrounds what Young (1990) refers to as the "five faces of oppression," including exploitation (the systematic transfer of energies from one group to another to benefit a dominant group) and powerlessness. The female leaders in this study experience exploitation: their unpaid emotional and caregiving labour benefits a system that refuses to adequately resource inclusive education. Young's framework, rooted in Social Justice Theory, clarifies that justice is not merely about who gets what resources but about eliminating institutionalised domination and oppression. The policy ostensibly expects female school leaders to absorb the financial, emotional, and temporal costs associated with systemic failures. DH3's account of being compelled to assume the roles of "doctor, social worker, and teacher all at once, without training or pay," exemplifies Voigt's (2018) concerns regarding the challenges of addressing marginalisation and systemic prejudice.

The Department's failure to provide specialist staff compels female leaders to undertake responsibilities for which they are unqualified, thereby creating risks for learners while extracting unpaid labour from women. This finding extends Makoelle and Burmistrova's (2020) argument that persistent inequalities in school financing exacerbate challenges for SMTs, by illustrating that these inequalities are also gendered, with female leaders bearing a disproportionate burden of the emotional and caregiving work that inclusive education necessitates but which the Department fails to adequately resource. Social Justice Theory further

demands attention to Fraser's third dimension: representation (or political justice). Representation concerns whose voices are included in decision-making spaces. The participants' repeated reports of "silence" from the Department indicate not only a lack of material support but also a fundamental exclusion from the policy deliberation processes that affect their daily lives. Without representation, redistribution and recognition remain vulnerable to being undermined by the same institutional structures that perpetuate injustice.

Finally, the findings reveal a fundamental contradiction at the heart of inclusive education implementation in South Africa: the policy is framed as a social justice and human rights initiative (Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2020), yet its implementation depends on school leaders who are systematically denied the conditions necessary for success. Participants' repeated references to "silence" from the Department—following funding applications, infrastructure requests, and appeals for help—illustrate a system that engages in what P3 termed "theatre" rather than providing meaningful support. This observation aligns with Setlhodi's (2020) argument that, without a nuanced understanding of the contextual realities within which School Management Teams (SMTs) operate, inclusive education risks remaining aspirational rather than achievable.

The participants' accounts of overcrowded classrooms (50–60 learners per teacher) directly contradict the conditions necessary for differentiated instruction, which is a cornerstone of inclusive pedagogy. As reported by Ratau and Motitswe (2025), overcrowded classrooms continue to hinder effective implementation. From a social justice perspective, this constitutes what Rawls, via Patterson (2022), describes as a failure to maintain background justice through continuous institutional adjustments.

Applying Social Justice Theory holistically, the simultaneous failures across all three of Fraser's dimensions—redistribution (lack of resources and infrastructure), recognition (invisibility of gendered labour and racialised historical disadvantage), and representation (exclusion from policy dialogue)—reveal what Fraser terms a "participatory parity" deficit. Participatory parity is the core normative principle underpinning Social Justice Theory: justice requires that all actors can participate as peers in social life. The female school leaders in this study cannot achieve participatory parity because material deprivation prevents them from accessing necessary resources (redistribution failure), institutional disrespect and gendered expectations undermine their standing (recognition failure), and their voices are systematically excluded from departmental decision-making (representation failure).

The Department has not modified its resourcing models to address the legacy of apartheid infrastructure, nor has it adjusted its training models to tackle the skills deficit documented by Mpu and Adu (2021). Instead, female school leaders are left to navigate what Ulriksen and Plagerson (2021) describe as an "imperfect" and "paradox-sensitive" reality: they are held accountable for implementing a policy for which they lack the resources to realise and are blamed for failing at a task that was impossible from the outset. The finding that DP3 described inclusive

education as "a luxury we cannot afford" is not an admission of defeat but an accurate assessment of a system that mandates what it refuses to fund. Social justice, as the participants have demonstrated, requires more than aesthetically pleasing policies on paper; it necessitates the redistribution of resources, the recognition of unacknowledged labour, and the active participation of those on the frontlines in shaping the solutions. The Department has failed on all three counts.

5.1 Contribution and Novelty of This Research

The contribution and novelty of this research are threefold. First, while existing literature on inclusive education in South Africa has predominantly documented structural and resource-based barriers (Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Engelbrecht & Muthukrishna, 2020), this study represents the first empirical application of Nancy Fraser's tripartite Social Justice Theory – redistribution, recognition, and representation – to the lived experiences of female school leaders in previously disadvantaged Black rural and township schools. Previous studies have invoked social justice broadly but have not systematically analysed which dimension of justice is failing and how these failures intersect. By applying Fraser's framework, this research demonstrates that participatory parity for female school leaders is simultaneously undermined by material deprivation (redistribution failure), gendered misrecognition (recognition failure), and political exclusion (representation failure).

Second, this study offers a novel theoretical contribution by revealing that the implementation burden of inclusive education is not merely structural but is deeply gendered. The existing literature has largely treated school leadership as a gender-neutral role; however, this research empirically documents how female leaders disproportionately absorb the unpaid emotional, caregiving, and financial costs of systemic policy failures. This finding extends feminist critiques of social justice into the under-researched domain of rural and township inclusive education.

Third, methodologically and empirically, this study provides original, voice-centred data from a population seldom featured in policy research: Black women school leaders in South Africa's most materially deprived schools. Their accounts of performing "doctor, social worker, and teacher" without training or pay, of policies that "stay in the file," and of a system that demands "unlimited energy" while offering only "theatre" in return, present novel empirical evidence that challenges top-down, rights-discourse-only approaches to inclusive education. Together, these contributions advance Social Justice Theory by demonstrating its operational utility for diagnosing concrete injustices in educational systems and by expanding its gendered and postcolonial application to the Global South context of post-apartheid South Africa.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that female school leaders in previously disadvantaged Black rural and township schools in South Africa are navigating an extremely challenging environment. In this context, they are expected to

implement inclusive education policies, such as the SIAS policy and Education White Paper 6, despite lacking the necessary infrastructure, resources, specialist staff, and professional support from the Department of Basic Education. The findings further reveal that the legacy of apartheid endures not only in the physical conditions of these schools but also in the systemic neglect that characterises the Department's relationship with these institutions. The accounts of the participants highlight a fundamental contradiction: inclusive education is presented as a social justice and human rights initiative, yet its implementation relies on female leaders who are systematically denied the conditions required for success.

From a social justice theoretical perspective, the Department has failed on all three fronts: distributive justice (resources are inequitably allocated), recognitive justice (the emotional and caregiving labour of female leaders is overlooked), and participatory justice (the voices of those on the ground are rarely sought). Consequently, inclusion becomes, as participants powerfully articulated, “exclusion in disguise” and a “luxury we cannot afford.” These are not the words of leaders lacking commitment; rather, they are the voices of leaders abandoned by the very system that mandates their work.

Based on these findings, several recommendations for future research emerge. First, there is an urgent need for a large-scale, mixed-methods study that quantifies the resource deficit in rural and township schools while simultaneously capturing the lived experiences of female school leaders across all nine provinces of South Africa. Such a study would provide the empirical evidence necessary to hold the Department accountable for its resourcing obligations. Second, future research should specifically examine the gendered dimensions of implementing inclusive education, including the unpaid emotional and caregiving labour performed by female leaders, the impact of this labour on their well-being and retention, and how departmental policies either acknowledge or overlook these gendered realities. Third, longitudinal research is required to track the career trajectories of female school leaders in under-resourced contexts, investigating whether current conditions contribute to burnout, early departure from leadership positions, or the development of unsustainable coping strategies.

Fourth, future studies should centre the voices of learners with disabilities themselves, enabling them to articulate their experiences of “inclusion” in schools that lack basic resources and specialist staff. Their perspectives would provide a crucial counterpoint to policy rhetoric. Finally, intervention-based research is needed to co-design, implement, and evaluate contextually appropriate models of inclusive education that work with, rather than against, the material constraints of rural and township schools. Such research should be participatory in nature, positioning female school leaders at the centre of the design process rather than treating them as passive recipients of top-down policies. Only through research grounded in the realities of those who bear the heaviest burdens can the promise of inclusive education be transformed from an idealistic vision into a just and achievable reality.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge all the participants who participated in this study.

7. Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence tools

We hereby declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were employed in the preparation of this manuscript. We further affirm our full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and overall integrity of this work. All ideas, analyses, and interpretations presented herein are our own, and all sources have been appropriately acknowledged in accordance with accepted academic standards.

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