Creative Education, 2026, 17(11), 2154-2179
https://www.scirp.org/journal/ce
ISSN Online: 2151-4771
ISSN Print: 2151-4755

Educators' Perceptions of Inclusive Education Policies and Administrative Strategies in the Planning and Management of Secondary Schools

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How to cite this paper: Aloovi, O. A. (2026). Educators' Perceptions of Inclusive Education Policies and Administrative Strategies in the Planning and Management of Secondary Schools. *Creative Education, 17,* 2154-2179.
https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2026.1711120

Received: September 27, 2026
Accepted: November 17, 2026
Published: November 20, 2026

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Abstract

Inclusive education requires more than the adoption of policy frameworks; it also depends on how schools interpret policy expectations and translate them into administrative and classroom practices. This study examined educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, Namibia. Specifically, it explored educators' perceptions, identified challenges affecting implementation and considered contextually appropriate strategies for strengthening inclusive education. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, the study adopted a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative case study design. Ten participants, comprising two school principals, four heads of departments and four teachers, were purposively selected from two secondary schools. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. The findings indicate that participants generally supported inclusive education and recognised its importance in promoting fairness and equitable learning opportunities. However, positive attitudes did not always translate into consistent implementation, partly because of perceived gaps in practical policy understanding, professional development, resource provision and administrative follow-through. Participants also identified infrastructure and classroom-capacity constraints, limited specialist support, negative social attitudes and challenges in family engagement. Proposed strategies include integrating inclusion into school development planning, strengthening practice-oriented professional learning, improving needs-based resource allocation, formalising collaborative practices and developing partnerships with families and support organisations. The study concludes that ef-

fective implementation requires coordinated action across classroom, school-management and wider education-system levels. Its findings provide context-specific insights for strengthening inclusive education practices in the participating schools, although they are not intended for statistical generalisation.

Keywords

Inclusive Education, Educators' Perceptions, School Leadership, Administrative Strategies, Secondary Schools, Namibia

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an essential component of equitable and quality education, emphasising the removal of barriers that restrict learners' access, participation and achievement, irrespective of disability or other learning needs (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2006). Sustainable Development Goal 4 reinforces this commitment by advocating inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). However, achieving meaningful inclusion requires more than policy adoption; it depends on effective school leadership, appropriate resource allocation, professional development and administrative practices that translate policy commitments into everyday educational activities (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013; UNESCO, 2020, 2024). These requirements are particularly important in secondary schools, where curriculum demands and subject specialisation may complicate collaborative planning and inclusive teaching (Koutsouris et al., 2024).

In Namibia, the *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* provides a national framework for identifying and addressing barriers to learning and participation (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Nevertheless, the effective implementation of this policy depends partly on educators' understanding of its provisions and the support provided by school management. Previous studies have examined teachers' attitudes towards learners with special educational needs in Namibia (Jatileni et al., 2024), challenges affecting inclusive education in selected secondary schools in the Omaheke Region (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020), and the policy's response to gender-nonconforming learners (Haitembu & Maarman, 2023). Research conducted in other contexts has similarly highlighted the challenges associated with educators' preparedness, institutional support and the practical implementation of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2023; Motitswe, 2025). Furthermore, effective educational leadership is recognised as important for establishing shared priorities, fostering collaboration and strengthening staff capacity to implement inclusive practices (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024; Bilbokaitė et al., 2024). Despite these contributions, further context-specific evidence is needed to establish how educators in mainstream secondary schools perceive the relationship between inclusive education policies and administrative

strategies.

This study addresses this gap by examining educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, Namibia. Specifically, it examines educators' perceptions of existing policies and administrative practices, identifies the challenges experienced in implementing inclusive education, and determines contextually appropriate strategies for strengthening its planning and management. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, the study considers how classroom experiences, school leadership, institutional support, family relationships and wider policy expectations interact to shape inclusive education practices (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009; de Souza, 2024). By connecting national policy expectations with educators' experiences, the study seeks to contribute context-specific evidence that can inform school-level planning, professional development, resource allocation and collaborative learner-support arrangements, thereby supporting more effective and equitable inclusive education practices (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013; UNESCO, 2020, 2024).

2. Background of the Study

Inclusive education is a global priority for promoting equitable access to quality education and meaningful participation for all learners, irrespective of disability, learning difficulties or other barriers (UNESCO, 2020). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises inclusive education as a fundamental right, while Sustainable Development Goal 4 promotes inclusive and equitable quality education (United Nations, 2006; United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Achieving inclusion requires systemic changes supported by effective leadership, professional development, appropriate resource allocation and inclusive administrative practices (UNESCO, 2020, 2024). Across Africa, barriers involving accessible infrastructure, learning resources, educator preparedness and specialised support may constrain implementation (UNICEF, 2023). These challenges highlight the importance of coordinated school management, continuous professional development and collaboration among educators, families and education authorities (UNESCO, 2020, 2024). In secondary schools, subject specialisation and curriculum demands may further complicate collaborative planning and inclusive teaching (Koutsouris et al., 2024).

In Namibia, the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education provides a framework for identifying and addressing barriers to learning and participation (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). However, effective implementation depends on educators' interpretation of policy requirements and the administrative support provided by school management. Jatileni et al. (2024) identified variations in Namibian teachers' attitudes towards educating learners with special educational needs, highlighting the importance of educators' perceptions and preparedness. Similarly, Ambili et al. (2024) examined accessibility, resources and educational

support in a resource-school context in the Oshana Region. Although these studies offer valuable insights, they do not fully establish how educators in mainstream secondary schools understand inclusive education policies or experience administrative strategies supporting implementation. Evidence from resource schools and broader regional studies may not adequately explain school-specific practices in planning, resource allocation, professional development and learner support (Ambili et al., 2024; Jatileni et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2020).

Against this background, the study examines educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, Namibia. It explores how educators understand policy requirements, perceive the administrative strategies supporting implementation and identify institutional challenges affecting inclusive practices. By investigating the relationship between national policy expectations and school-level experiences, the study seeks to identify areas requiring improved planning, resource allocation, professional development and learner-support arrangements (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013; UNESCO, 2020). The findings may inform context-responsive administrative strategies and strengthen school management practices, contributing to more effective implementation of inclusive education and equitable learning opportunities for all learners (Koutsouris et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024).

3. Problem Statement

Inclusive education promotes equitable access, participation and quality learning for all learners. Effective implementation requires educational policies to be translated into school-level practices through appropriate planning, educational leadership, professional development and resource allocation (UNESCO, 2020, 2024). In Namibia, the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education provides a framework for addressing barriers to learning and participation (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Ideally, secondary schools should integrate these policy provisions into their planning and management practices to ensure that all learners receive appropriate educational support.

Despite the policy framework, the extent to which inclusive education requirements are reflected in secondary-school planning and management remains insufficiently established in the study context. Existing Namibian research has examined teachers' attitudes towards learners with special educational needs (Jatileni et al., 2024) and educators' preparedness to address gender diversity in inclusive education (Haitembu & Maarman, 2023). International literature also emphasises the importance of leadership, collaboration and professional development in supporting inclusive practices (UNESCO, 2024). However, these studies do not adequately establish how educators in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, perceive the alignment between inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in secondary schools.

The specific research gap concerns the limited context-specific evidence on ed-

ucators' perceptions of how inclusive education policies relate to school planning and management, particularly regarding leadership, resource allocation, professional development and learner-support arrangements in Circuit 4, Khomas Region. Without such evidence, it is difficult to determine which administrative practices educators consider supportive and which areas may require improvement. This limits the ability of school managers and education stakeholders to make informed decisions about strengthening policy implementation and inclusive educational practices. Therefore, this study investigates educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region.

4. Research Objectives

- Examine educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and the administrative strategies employed in planning and managing inclusive education in secondary schools in Circuit 4.
- Identify the key challenges educators experience in implementing inclusive education policies and associated administrative strategies in secondary schools in Circuit 4.
- Determine contextually appropriate strategies for strengthening the planning, management and implementation of inclusive education in secondary schools in Circuit 4.

5. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

5.1. Conceptualising Inclusive Education and Its Policy Foundations

Inclusive education has evolved from mainstream placement of learners with disabilities to promoting participation, belonging and equitable learning for all. UNESCO (2020) emphasises identifying and removing barriers to access, participation and learning, including inaccessible environments, inflexible curricula and discriminatory attitudes. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016) distinguishes inclusion from integration, requiring educational systems to accommodate learner diversity. These principles align with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning (United Nations General Assembly, 2015; UNESCO, 2020). UNESCO (2024) further highlights educational leadership in creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments. Inclusion therefore requires systemic transformation rather than merely enrolling diverse learners in mainstream schools.

Internationally, Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obliges states to provide inclusive education, reasonable accommodation and appropriate support (United Nations, 2006). General Comment No. 4 emphasises transforming educational content, teaching methods, structures and strategies to meet diverse learning needs (United Nations Committee on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). UNESCO (2020) identifies intersecting exclusion factors, including poverty, disability, language, geographical location and social disadvantage. In Namibia, the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education establishes the national framework for addressing barriers to learning and participation (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Jatileni et al. (2024), studying 300 teachers across four educational regions, identified differences in cognitive, behavioural and affective attitudes towards teaching learners with special educational needs. Their findings caution against equating positive beliefs with emotional readiness or implementation preparedness, while leaving questions about school-level policy interpretation and administrative support.

School leadership and administrative practices are essential for translating inclusive education policies into effective institutional arrangements. UNESCO (2024) highlights setting expectations, focusing on learning, fostering collaboration and developing people as important leadership dimensions. UNESCO (2020) similarly stresses transforming school cultures, teaching practices, institutional support and resource allocation to promote inclusion. This study therefore examines educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies, school management responsibilities and administrative strategies within secondary schools. It considers how policy requirements are understood and experienced in institutional contexts without assuming uniform implementation or consistently inadequate support (Jatileni et al., 2024; Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013; UNESCO, 2020, 2024). The study connects international rights-based principles and Namibia's national policy framework with educators' experiences of school-level planning, management and inclusive practice.

5.2. Educators' Perceptions, Attitudes and Preparedness for Inclusive Education

Educators' perceptions of inclusive education influence how they interpret policy requirements, understand learner diversity and adapt teaching to promote equitable participation and achievement (UNESCO, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025). Their attitudes, expectations, professional knowledge and confidence are important for creating inclusive learning environments (Ainscow, 2005; De Boer et al., 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025). However, perceptions vary according to professional experiences, beliefs about learners' abilities and understanding of responsibilities, making their examination essential for understanding how policies translate into classroom practices (Florian, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). In Namibia, Jatileni et al. (2024), studying 300 teachers across the Omusati, Oshana, Kunene and Khomas regions, found differences in the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of attitudes towards learners with special educational needs. These findings demonstrate that accepting inclusion in principle does not necessarily translate into emotional readiness or practical preparedness (Jatileni et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2020). Educators' confidence, concerns and experiences

must therefore be considered alongside their general support for inclusion (De Boer et al., 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025).

Professional preparedness encompasses knowledge of inclusive education policies, competence in adapting instruction and assessment, confidence in managing diverse classrooms and the ability to collaborate with other professionals. The OECD (2025) indicates that teachers' self-efficacy varies across inclusive teaching tasks, with some feeling more confident collaborating with support personnel than adapting standardised assessments or explaining inclusion-related legislation. Thus, general teaching experience does not necessarily provide all the competencies required for inclusive practice (Florian, 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025). Initial teacher education and continuing professional development are essential for strengthening inclusive pedagogical knowledge, reflective practice and responsiveness to individual learning needs (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025; UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, opportunities to apply these competencies in supportive school environments can strengthen educators' confidence and willingness to implement inclusive approaches (Jatileni et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2020).

Nevertheless, educators' attitudes alone cannot guarantee effective inclusive classroom practices. Implementation also depends on institutional conditions, including leadership support, class sizes, learning resources, specialist assistance and opportunities for collaborative planning (UNESCO, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025). Inadequate support may prevent educators who favour inclusion from adapting teaching and assessment effectively, whereas relevant training, supportive professional relationships and school-level assistance can strengthen their capacity to implement inclusive practices (Florian, 2019; Jatileni et al., 2024; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2019; Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2025). Accordingly, this study examines educators' perceptions, attitudes and preparedness in relation to their professional experiences and institutional environments, recognising that positive attitudes do not automatically translate into effective implementation of inclusive education policies.

5.3. School Leadership and Administrative Strategies for Implementing Inclusive Education

School leadership is central to translating inclusive education policies into institutional priorities, operational plans and everyday practices. Effective implementation requires school leaders to move beyond formal compliance with policy documents and establish clear expectations for equitable participation, learner support and inclusive teaching. UNESCO (2024) identifies setting a shared vision, maintaining a focus on learning, fostering collaboration and developing staff capacity as important dimensions of effective educational leadership. In a similar

vein, Bilbokaitė et al. (2024) emphasise that inclusive education involves sustained institutional change requiring deliberate leadership and the coordination of educational support. These perspectives suggest that school management should incorporate inclusion into school development plans, allocate responsibilities to educators and support staff, identify resource requirements, and establish arrangements for monitoring progress. In Namibia, the Sector Policy on Inclusive Education places responsibility on schools and teachers to create supportive learning environments and provide educational assistance in response to learners' diverse needs (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013).

A further consideration is the extent to which school leaders involve educators in decision-making and implementation. Inclusive education is unlikely to become embedded in school practice when planning remains exclusively the responsibility of principals or senior management. Carrington et al. (2024), drawing on interviews with school leaders and teachers in Australian schools, illustrate how professional learning can support inclusive practice and how teachers without formal leadership titles can exercise leadership through their work with colleagues. Similarly, Bilbokaitė et al. (2024) identify teamwork, community cooperation and networking as positive experiences in managing inclusive education, while insufficient collaboration and partnership can impede progress. UNESCO (2024) also highlights the importance of shared leadership, professional learning communities and collaborative planning. Together, these findings underscore the value of involving educators in identifying barriers, developing school-based responses, clarifying staff responsibilities and reviewing the effectiveness of interventions. Meaningful participation can strengthen shared responsibility for inclusion and ensure that administrative decisions reflect the practical experiences of those implementing policies in classrooms.

The development of an inclusive school culture also depends on communication, accountability and the quality of relationships among school leaders, educators, learners, families and external support services. School management can promote such a culture by communicating inclusion-related expectations clearly, encouraging respectful attitudes towards learner diversity, coordinating support services and providing opportunities for staff to discuss implementation challenges. Bilbokaitė et al. (2024) found that school leaders associated successful inclusion with teamwork, effective educational assistance and collaboration with families and other partners; however, inadequate staffing, limited financial resources and infrastructure constraints complicated institutional change. Namibia's inclusive education policy similarly emphasises cooperation among teachers, school management and parents, alongside the monitoring and documentation of learner support and progress (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). UNESCO (2024) further argues that leadership effectiveness depends not only on individual capabilities but also on the organisational and contextual conditions within which leaders operate. Consequently, accountability arrangements should assess whether planned support is provided, barriers are addressed and learners'

participation is improving, rather than merely confirming that policies and plans exist.

Nevertheless, school leadership can either enable or constrain inclusive education, depending on how institutional priorities are interpreted and resources are managed. Leaders who establish shared goals, encourage educator participation and provide opportunities for professional development can help translate policy commitments into consistent school practices (Carrington et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024). By contrast, weak coordination, limited staff capacity, inadequate resources and insufficient collaboration can widen the gap between policy intentions and classroom implementation (Bilbokaitė et al., 2024; Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). These challenges are particularly important when considering whether educators receive practical guidance, sufficient support and a meaningful role in planning and evaluating inclusive practices. The present study therefore examines school leadership not simply as an administrative function, but as a set of practices through which inclusive education policies are interpreted, communicated, resourced and monitored in secondary schools. This focus provides a basis for understanding how management decisions and institutional conditions shape educators' experiences of implementing inclusion.

5.4. Institutional Resources, Professional Development and Learner-Support Systems

The implementation of inclusive education depends on schools' ability to mobilise appropriate human, financial and material resources, including accessible infrastructure, adapted learning materials, assistive technologies and specialised support personnel (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2006). Namibia's Sector Policy on Inclusive Education emphasises developing human and instructional resources and strengthening educational support services (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Continuing professional development is equally important for strengthening educators' inclusive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, accessible assessment and classroom management (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), 2019; UNESCO, 2020). Effective educational leadership further requires staff development aligned with educators' needs and school priorities (UNESCO, 2024). Professional development should therefore be examined in terms of its relevance, practical application and contribution to inclusive teaching.

Accessible infrastructure, appropriate assistive technologies and coordinated learner-support systems are essential for meaningful participation. Assistive products such as Braille resources, hearing assistance and communication technologies can address individual learning needs, although affordability and availability remain concerns in many settings (World Health Organization (WHO), & United Nations Children's Fund (UNCF), 2022). Inaccessible environments and inadequate learning materials may restrict participation (UNESCO, 2020), highlighting the importance of strengthening disability-inclusive education systems (UNICEF,

2023). Effective support also requires collaboration among educators, school management, parents and specialists, supported by appropriate planning, budgeting and resource allocation (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013; UNESCO, 2024). UNICEF (2026) further emphasises sustained commitment, system reform and adequate resourcing. Accordingly, this study examines how secondary schools provide professional development, allocate resources and coordinate learner support, allowing educators' experiences to establish the effectiveness of existing arrangements.

5.5. Policy Implementation Gaps and Barriers to Inclusive School Management

The implementation of inclusive education depends on translating policy commitments into coordinated school-level practices through clear responsibilities, adequate funding, teacher support and effective monitoring (UNESCO, 2020; United Nations, 2006; UNESCO, 2024). Across sub-Saharan Africa, unclear policies, insufficient teacher training, limited resources and inadequate institutional support remain barriers, although committed educators and non-governmental organisations can facilitate inclusion (UNESCO, 2024). Similarly, SADC research identifies inaccessible infrastructure, limited instructional materials, inflexible curricula and insufficient educator competencies as recurring challenges (Mbazi et al., 2025). These findings demonstrate that implementation barriers extend beyond educators' attitudes and abilities to include administrative arrangements and institutional capacity. However, regional findings should inform, rather than determine, conclusions about individual schools.

In Namibia, research has examined implementation challenges in selected Omaheke secondary schools (Mokaleng & Möwes, 2020), policy gaps concerning gender-nonconforming learners and the influence of cultural and religious beliefs, inadequate training and limited information on policy interpretation (Haitembu & Maarman, 2023), and teachers' cognitive, affective and behavioural attitudes towards learners with special educational needs (Jatileni et al., 2024). Nevertheless, limited evidence establishes how educators in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, experience the relationship between inclusive education policy and school administrative strategies. Further investigation is needed into how school managers communicate policy requirements, coordinate with education authorities, allocate responsibilities, monitor implementation and organise learner-support services. Addressing this context-specific gap aligns with UNESCO's (2020) emphasis on stronger implementation and monitoring as well as focusing on practical support for educators, without assuming that all schools experience identical barriers (Genovesi et al., 2025).

5.6. Context-Responsive Strategies for Strengthening Inclusive Education

Strengthening inclusive education requires context-responsive strategies that re-

flect schools' needs, resources and organisational conditions. UNESCO (2020) emphasises coordinated changes to teaching, assessment, school environments and education-system practices, while UNESCO (2024) highlights collaborative leadership, shared priorities and staff development. Namibia's Sector Policy on Inclusive Education promotes institutional development, teacher education, support services, community involvement and monitoring (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Accordingly, school improvement planning should establish clear objectives, responsibilities, resource priorities and monitoring mechanisms informed by educators' experiences and learners' needs. Professional development initiatives, including workshops, peer mentoring, collaborative lesson planning and professional learning communities, can strengthen inclusive pedagogical practices when supported by relevant training and opportunities to apply new knowledge (UNESCO, 2020, 2024; Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). Resource prioritisation should also address accessible learning materials, assistive technologies and specialist support according to identified needs rather than assumed shortages (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2018; Ambili et al., 2024).

Sustainable inclusion further requires family engagement, collaboration with external support services and systematic monitoring of learners' progress. Namibia's policy advocates learning-support teams, teacher-parent collaboration and documented monitoring of learners' support needs (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013), while UNESCO (2024) emphasises parental and community participation in school governance. Haitembu and Maarman (2023) demonstrate how cultural beliefs, information gaps and educators' preparation can influence policy interpretation, reinforcing the need for accessible communication and meaningful family participation. For secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, these perspectives provide a foundation for examining collaborative leadership, professional development, resource allocation and learner-support arrangements (UNESCO, 2020, 2024; Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). However, the availability, implementation and effectiveness of these strategies cannot be assumed. The present study therefore investigates educators' perceptions of their feasibility, the administrative conditions that support or constrain implementation, and contextually appropriate improvements grounded in their experiences.

5.7. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, which explains how individuals' experiences and practices are shaped by interactions with their immediate environments and wider institutional and societal contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Tudge et al., 2009). The theory is appropriate for examining educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies because policy implementation is influenced by classroom experiences, school management practices, institutional support and national educational pri-

orities. The microsystem represents educators' interactions with learners and colleagues; the mesosystem concerns collaboration among educators, school management, families and support personnel; the exosystem encompasses administrative decisions, resource allocation and professional development; the macrosystem represents Namibia's inclusive education policy and broader societal values; and the chronosystem captures changes in policies and institutional practices over time. The framework is relevant to inclusive education research, as demonstrated by de Souza (2024), who applied a bioecological perspective to examine policy-practice disparities in secondary schools.

The framework will guide the formulation of research questions, the analysis of educators' accounts and the interpretation of emerging themes. It will enable the study to connect educators' perceptions and experiences with administrative practices, resource availability, professional preparedness and wider policy expectations (de Souza, 2024; Tudge et al., 2009). By examining these interconnected influences, the study can identify factors that educators perceive as supporting or constraining inclusive school planning and management, without assuming beforehand that particular barriers exist. The theory will thus provide a coherent basis for developing context-responsive recommendations for strengthening inclusive education implementation in secondary schools.

6. Research Methodology

This study adopted a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative approach to examine educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, Namibia. Constructivism recognises that individuals develop meanings through their experiences and interactions within particular social contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This orientation was appropriate because the study sought to understand how educators interpret inclusive education policies, experience administrative practices and perceive the factors shaping implementation within their schools. A qualitative case study design enabled an in-depth examination of these experiences in their institutional context, consistent with the value of case studies for investigating contemporary phenomena in real-world settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study population comprised 45 educators from two selected secondary schools in Circuit 4. Ten participants were purposively selected: two school principals, four heads of departments and four teachers. Selection was based on participants' roles, relevant professional experience and involvement in inclusive education. Purposive sampling was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to obtain information-rich accounts from individuals familiar with school-level planning and policy implementation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample provided perspectives from both management and classroom practice, although the findings are intended to offer contextual insight rather than statistical generalisation.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on educators' interpretations of inclusive education policies, administrative practices, institutional support and perceived implementation challenges. This approach allowed participants to explain their experiences while enabling the researcher to explore issues emerging during interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview data were transcribed with verbatim and analysed thematically using NVivo to support data organisation and coding. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), the analysis involved familiarisation with transcripts, initial coding, developing and reviewing themes, and interpreting patterns in relation to the research objectives. The analysis remained open to unexpected findings rather than assuming that particular barriers existed.

To strengthen methodological rigour, the researcher should document the analytical process, support interpretations with participants' accounts and reflect on how their own position may influence interpretation. These practices are consistent with reflexive thematic analysis and established guidance for reporting interview-based qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Tong et al., 2007). Ethical reporting should also specify the relevant institutional approval and school permissions, informed consent, confidentiality and secure handling of interview data, as applicable to the procedures actually followed.

7. Findings and Discussion

The study's findings are organised according to the three research objectives: examining educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies; identifying the challenges experienced in implementing these policies and strategies; and determining contextually appropriate strategies for strengthening their implementation. Closely related findings are integrated to demonstrate the connections between policy understanding, professional capacity, leadership, resources and community participation.

The findings are based on participants' accounts of their experiences and perceptions. They should therefore be interpreted as reported experiences rather than as an independent assessment of school facilities, policy compliance or learner outcomes. The discussion compares these accounts with relevant Namibian policy and recent regional and international literature to identify areas of convergence, divergence and practical significance.

7.1. Educators' Perceptions of Inclusive Education Policies and Administrative Strategies

7.1.1. Support for Inclusive Education and Uneven Understanding of Policy Implementation

The findings indicate that participants generally supported inclusive education, associating it with fairness, equal educational opportunities and the participation of learners with diverse needs in mainstream schools. However, this positive orientation did not necessarily translate into a sufficiently clear understanding of

how inclusive education policies should be implemented in everyday teaching and school management. Participants described familiarity with the broad principles of inclusion but expressed uncertainty about practical requirements, including adapting teaching approaches, responding to individual learning barriers and sustaining learner participation.

Participants further indicated that the availability of an inclusive education policy did not guarantee a comprehensive understanding of its provisions. The language used in policy documents, limited practical training and insufficient guidance on responding to specific learning needs were perceived as factors that complicated implementation. Some participants described educators' knowledge as largely theoretical, with classroom decisions often relying on individual experience rather than clearly understood and consistently applied procedures.

These findings suggest a gap between policy awareness and policy enactment. Namibia's *Sector Policy on Inclusive Education* establishes the national commitment to inclusion, but the experiences reported in this study indicate that translating this commitment into consistent school-level practice remains challenging (Ministry of Education, Republic of Namibia, 2013). The existence of a policy is therefore necessary but insufficient: educators also require opportunities to interpret their requirements, relate them to classroom situations and understand how administrative arrangements should support implementation.

This finding is consistent with Tah's (2025) study in Cameroon, which identified differences in teachers' understandings of inclusive education alongside policy and organisational challenges. Similarly, Motitswe (2025) found that teachers in South Africa experienced difficulties responding to learners with barriers to learning, partly because of limited preparation and support. The convergence across these studies suggests that the gap between policy commitments and implementation is not unique to the Namibian context.

Nevertheless, the comparison also raises an important conceptual issue. Inclusive education should not be understood exclusively as placing learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It also involves identifying and reducing barriers that restrict participation and learning. UNESCO (2020) emphasises that inclusion requires education systems to address exclusionary conditions rather than merely providing access to school. Consequently, policy familiarisation in the study context should extend beyond explaining policy provisions to helping educators examine classroom practices, school routines and administrative decisions that may unintentionally restrict participation.

The findings therefore indicate that strengthening implementation requires a closer relationship between policy communication, practical professional learning and school-level guidance. However, because the evidence is based on participants' accounts, it does not establish that all educators in the circuit have limited policy knowledge or that the policy itself is inherently inadequate. Rather, it identifies perceived difficulties in interpreting and applying policy within the schools represented in the study.

7.1.2. Positive Attitudes, Leadership Support and the Conditions for Inclusive Practice

Although participants generally valued inclusive education, they reported that their ability to translate these values into practice was affected by large classes, limited teaching materials, inadequate specialist support and competing academic priorities. Participants recognised the importance of responding to learners' diverse needs but indicated that conventional teaching practices could prevail when educators lacked the preparation, time or resources required to adapt instruction. The findings therefore reveal a tension between educators' commitment to inclusion and their perceived capacity to implement it consistently.

This tension is significant because positive attitudes alone do not establish that inclusive education is being achieved. Educators may endorse equity while continuing to experience practical difficulties in adapting teaching, organising classroom support and responding to different learning needs. Genovesi et al. (2025), in their systematic review of qualitative studies conducted in African countries, found that educators employed a range of teaching adaptations and support strategies, but these efforts were constrained by limited resources and training. Their findings reinforce the distinction between educators' willingness to support inclusion and the institutional conditions needed to sustain it.

Participants also perceived school leadership as influential in shaping implementation. Leadership support was associated with clear expectations, opportunities for collaboration, guidance, monitoring and feedback. However, participants described limitations in the consistency of these activities, particularly where school leaders had competing administrative responsibilities or where examination performance received considerable attention. These accounts suggest that inclusive education may be recognised as a school priority without always being sufficiently embedded in routine management and instructional planning.

The findings align with the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report on leadership, which identifies setting expectations, focusing on learning, fostering collaboration and developing people as important dimensions of effective educational leadership (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024). Applied to inclusive education, these dimensions imply that school leaders need to do more than communicate support for inclusion. They must also create conditions in which educators can collaborate, access professional support and review the effectiveness of their teaching approaches.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as demonstrating that school leadership alone determines implementation. Leadership operates within wider institutional and resource conditions. School leaders may be willing to prioritise inclusion but have limited authority, funding or specialist support to address structural barriers. The implication is that responsibility should be shared between school management and the wider education system rather than placed exclusively on individual educators or school leaders.

The research findings suggest that inclusive education is understood positively at the level of principle, but its practical realisation depends on the interaction

between educator preparedness, leadership support and the conditions under which teaching takes place. This finding addresses the first research objective by demonstrating that perceptions of policy and administrative strategies are shaped not only by policy awareness but also by educators' experiences of implementation support.

7.2. Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education Policies and Administrative Strategies

7.2.1. Interrelated Resource, Infrastructure and Classroom-Capacity Constraints

Participants identified inadequate funding, limited teaching and learning materials, insufficient assistive resources, overcrowded classrooms and inaccessible school facilities as significant challenges to implementing inclusive education. The reported infrastructure concerns included the absence of ramps and accessible toilets, as well as classroom arrangements that could restrict access for learners with mobility difficulties. Participants also indicated that limited access to appropriate furniture and adaptable learning materials reduced their capacity to respond to diverse learning needs.

These findings demonstrate that implementation challenges extend beyond educators' knowledge and attitudes. Inclusive teaching requires learning environments in which learners can access facilities, participate in classroom activities and use appropriate materials. When physical environments are inaccessible or suitable resources are unavailable, educators may struggle to implement inclusive approaches even when they recognise their importance.

The findings correspond with UNICEF's (2023) regional mapping of disability-inclusive education in Eastern and Southern Africa, which examined policy and practice gaps affecting access to inclusive quality education. They also reflect Motitswe's (2025) findings on the difficulties teachers experience in responding to barriers to learning in South African schools. Together, these studies support the argument that inclusive education requires coordinated attention to infrastructure, teaching resources, classroom conditions and institutional support.

However, resource constraints should not be treated as a complete explanation for every difficulty in implementation. The availability of resources is important, but the way resources are prioritised, distributed and used also matters. A school may have some resources without necessarily directing them towards the barriers that most restrict learner participation. Conversely, some accessibility improvements and instructional adaptations may be possible even where substantial additional funding is not immediately available. The central issue is therefore both the adequacy of resources and the extent to which planning and allocation respond to identified learner needs.

The findings also suggest that inclusive education should not be framed as an additional responsibility that individual teachers must fulfil without institutional assistance. The physical and material barriers described by participants require responses from school management, regional education authorities and other re-

sponsible stakeholders. School-level planning should identify accessibility and resource needs, while education authorities should consider these needs in budgeting, infrastructure improvement and resource allocation.

An important limitation is that the study did not include an independent accessibility audit, a review of school budgets or an inventory of available assistive resources. Accordingly, the findings establish that participants perceived resource and infrastructure constraints as barriers; they do not independently establish the scale of shortages or the adequacy of funding across all schools in the circuit.

7.2.2. Limited Practical Professional Development and Inconsistent Administrative Follow-Through

Participants described professional development opportunities as insufficiently regular, practical or accessible. They indicated that some educators relied largely on personal experience when addressing diverse learning needs and that occasional seminars did not always provide the continuing guidance required to adapt teaching and assessment. Participants also identified time and cost as barriers to attending training, particularly when professional development required travel away from school.

The findings suggest that the challenge concerns not only whether training is provided but also whether it develops practical competence. Policy briefings may increase awareness of inclusive education without necessarily equipping educators to adapt lessons, make learning materials accessible, differentiate assessment or organise classroom support. Participants' accounts therefore point to the need for professional learning that connects policy expectations with the realities of teaching.

Evidence from the meta-analysis by Donath et al. (2023) strengthens this interpretation. Examining 342 studies, the researchers found that professional development had positive but varying effects on teachers' knowledge, skills and beliefs about inclusive education, as well as on student behaviour. The reported effects were largest for teacher knowledge, followed by skills, with smaller effects for beliefs. These results support professional development as an important implementation strategy, while also cautioning against assuming that training alone will resolve systemic barriers.

The present findings therefore support a sustained approach to professional learning rather than reliance on isolated workshops. Practical training should be complemented by mentoring, collaborative lesson planning and opportunities to discuss implementation difficulties. Such arrangements could help educators connect new knowledge with the situations they encounter in their classrooms. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of any particular training model would need to be evaluated rather than assumed.

Participants also identified inconsistent monitoring, follow-up and feedback as administrative challenges. Their accounts suggested that inclusion was not always embedded in routine planning and review, with implementation sometimes depending on individual educators' initiative. Competing responsibilities were per-

ceived to limit the time available for school leaders to observe practice, provide guidance and follow up on agreed actions.

This finding is consistent with the wider argument that effective leadership requires more than formal endorsement of educational priorities. UNESCO's 2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report highlights the importance of coherent leadership that establishes expectations, fosters collaboration and develops staff (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2024). In the context of this study, those functions imply that inclusive education should be reflected in school plans, collaborative activities and regular review processes.

However, monitoring should not be interpreted simply as checking whether educators comply with policy requirements. If monitoring is not accompanied by constructive feedback and access to support, it may identify implementation difficulties without resolving them. A more developmental approach would enable school leaders and educators to identify barriers, consider practical responses and review progress collaboratively.

The findings thus reveal a relationship between professional development and administrative follow-through. Training may have limited practical value if educators receive no subsequent guidance, while monitoring may be ineffective if educators lack the skills and resources required to respond to feedback. These challenges are best understood as interconnected rather than separate problems. The study establishes participants' perceptions of inconsistent support and follow-up, but it does not independently verify the frequency or formal adequacy of monitoring across all schools in the circuit.

7.2.3. Social Attitudes, Cultural Understandings and Family Engagement

Participants identified stigma, misconceptions about disability and limited family engagement as additional barriers to inclusive education. Their accounts suggested that negative beliefs about disability could discourage some families from seeking support or participating in school-based initiatives. Participants also indicated that prejudicial attitudes could occur within school communities, including among learners and staff, thereby making complicating efforts to create an environment in which learner diversity was accepted.

These findings suggest that inclusion is not solely a pedagogical or administrative issue; it is also influenced by relationships and social attitudes. Even where schools seek to provide inclusive learning opportunities, negative perceptions of disability may affect how learners are treated, whether families feel comfortable engaging with schools and whether support needs are openly discussed.

Tah's (2025) study in Cameroon similarly identified societal barriers alongside policy, organisational and teacher-related challenges. UNICEF's (2023) regional analysis also situates disability-inclusive education within broader questions of access, participation and the support required to make inclusion meaningful. These sources reinforce the view that school-level efforts need to consider the social conditions that influence learners' experiences.

At the same time, the findings require careful interpretation. Participants' accounts of misconceptions among some families should not be generalised to all parents or cultural communities. Nor can the study determine the reasons for limited family engagement from educators' accounts alone. Parents and community members may experience practical, social or institutional barriers to participation that were not directly investigated in the reported findings. Consequently, limited engagement should not automatically be interpreted as a lack of concern for learners.

The practical implication is that schools need constructive and respectful approaches to family engagement. Information sessions, open communication and collaboration with relevant community stakeholders may help address misconceptions and strengthen shared responsibility for learner participation. Such approaches should treat families as partners in decision-making rather than as obstacles to implementation. They should also recognise that building trust is a continuing process rather than an outcome that can be achieved through one-off awareness campaigns.

Taken together, the findings indicate that implementation challenges are interconnected. Resource constraints can limit educators' practical options; inadequate professional development can reduce confidence in adapting teaching; inconsistent administrative follow-through can weaken support; and negative social attitudes can undermine participation. Addressing these challenges therefore requires a coordinated response rather than isolated interventions directed at individual teachers.

7.3. Contextually Appropriate Strategies to Strengthen Planning, Management and Implementation

7.3.1. Integrating Inclusive Education into Leadership, School Planning and Monitoring

Participants recommended more active leadership support to translate inclusive education policies into everyday practice. Their accounts emphasised the importance of clear expectations, practical guidance, supervision, collaboration and consistent follow-up. The findings suggest that school leaders should ensure that inclusive education is not treated as a general policy statement but is incorporated into routine school planning and management.

A practical implication is for schools to include inclusive education priorities in their annual and operational plans. These priorities could include identifying barriers to learner participation, assigning responsibilities, scheduling collaborative planning, documenting resource requirements and reviewing progress during management or departmental meetings. Such arrangements could help make inclusion of shared institutional responsibility rather than leaving implementation to individual educators.

This approach is consistent with UNESCO's (2024) emphasis on educational leadership that establishes expectations, fosters collaboration and develops people. However, leadership expectations must be matched by adequate support and

realistic responsibilities. If school leaders are expected to monitor inclusion without sufficient time, resources or access to specialist advice, implementation may remain inconsistent despite formal commitments.

Monitoring should therefore be developmental and evidence informed. Rather than focusing exclusively on compliance, school leaders could use review processes to identify what is working, where learners experience barriers and what support educators require. Feedback could inform subsequent planning and help schools assess whether agreed actions are being implemented. Education authorities would also need to provide guidance and follow-up where barriers exceed the capacity of individual schools.

These strategies are implications drawn from participants' reported experiences; they were not interventions tested by the study. Their effectiveness would need to be assessed through subsequent implementation and evaluation.

7.3.2. Providing Sustained, Practice-Oriented Professional Learning and Peer Support

Participants recommended continuing professional development to strengthen educators' ability to implement inclusive teaching and assessment. Their accounts point to the value of practical workshops, mentoring, peer support and opportunities to share classroom experiences. The emphasis is on professional learning that helps educators address specific challenges rather than training that concentrates solely on explaining policy documents.

A contextually responsive programme could combine structured workshops with school-based mentoring, collaborative lesson planning and peer discussion. Topics could include adapting learning materials, differentiating teaching, designing inclusive assessments, organising classroom participation and responding to diverse learning needs. Professional learning should be informed by educators identified needs and by the conditions in which they work.

Donath et al. (2023) provide empirical support for investing in professional development, while also demonstrating that effects vary across outcomes. Their meta-analysis indicates that training can improve knowledge and skills, but it does not suggest that professional development by itself can overcome inadequate infrastructure, limited resources or weak administrative support. The findings of this study reinforce that qualification: training should be linked to opportunities to practice new approaches and receive follow-up guidance.

Genovesi et al. (2025) further suggest that inclusive strategies used in African classrooms need to be examined in relation to their cultural and educational contexts. This is important because approaches imported from other settings may not automatically respond to local classroom conditions. Professional learning should therefore encourage educators to adapt evidence-informed approaches to the needs of their learners, while avoiding practices that unintentionally separate or stigmatise learners who require additional support.

Peer collaboration is also a potentially useful strategy because it can build on expertise already present within schools. Structured opportunities to exchange

ideas and discuss challenges may help reduce professional isolation and strengthen collective problem-solving. However, peer support should complement, rather than replace, formal professional development, specialist services and adequate resources.

7.3.3. Strengthening Resource Planning and Equitable Access to Learning Environments

Participants' accounts suggest a need for more systematic planning to identify and prioritise the resources required for inclusive education. Schools could document barriers associated with physical accessibility, classroom arrangements, teaching materials, furniture and assistive resources. These records could then inform school-level priorities, budget submissions and requests for support from the relevant education authorities.

This approach would connect resource allocation to specific barriers affecting participation rather than relying exclusively on general allocations. It could also help clarify responsibilities for procurement, maintenance and accessibility improvements. Where major infrastructure changes cannot be implemented immediately, schools could identify reasonable interim adjustments that improve access while preserving learners' safety, dignity and participation.

UNICEF's (2023) regional mapping provides a relevant policy context for examining the gaps between disability-inclusive education commitments and practical provision in Eastern and Southern Africa. UNESCO (2020) likewise emphasises that education systems need to address the barriers that prevent learners from participating fully. In relation to the present findings, these perspectives support planning that considers the interaction between physical access, teaching resources and classroom practice.

Nevertheless, resource planning should not be reduced to compiling lists of shortages. Schools and education authorities also need to consider how available resources are used, which barriers most urgently affect learners and whether planned expenditure is likely to improve access and participation. Prioritisation should be informed by documented needs and, where possible, by consultation with learners and families.

These proposals are derived from participants' reported experiences. The study did not compare alternative funding models, establish the cost of addressing accessibility barriers or evaluate the effectiveness of particular resource-allocation strategies. Further assessment would therefore be required to determine the most feasible and effective interventions for the schools concerned.

7.3.4. Building Partnerships with Families, Communities and Support Organisations

Participants recommended strengthening relationships with parents, community leaders, non-governmental organisations and local authorities. They viewed such partnerships as potential means of addressing misconceptions, improving family engagement and accessing additional support. These suggestions indicate that

schools may benefit from treating inclusive education as a shared responsibility that extends beyond the classroom.

Possible approaches include organising parent information sessions, establishing regular communication channels, involving families in discussions about learner support and collaborating with community stakeholders to promote acceptance of learner diversity. Partnerships with relevant organisations may also help schools identify available training, support services and resources. Such collaboration should be guided by clearly defined responsibilities and by respect for the knowledge and experiences of learners and their families.

The findings are consistent with the broader emphasis on social participation and supportive environments in inclusive education literature (UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF, 2023). However, partnership-building should not assume that families are unwilling to support inclusion. Schools should seek to understand the circumstances affecting engagement and create accessible, respectful opportunities for participation.

It is also important to recognise that community engagement cannot substitute for the responsibilities of education authorities to provide appropriate policy guidance, resources and support. Family and community partnerships can strengthen implementation, but they cannot independently resolve structural barriers such as inaccessible buildings or inadequate funding. They should therefore form part of a coordinated approach involving schools, families, communities and the wider education system.

7.3.5. Formalising Collaborative Practice within Schools

The findings indicate that informal peer support and teamwork are already used by educators to respond to implementation difficulties. These practices represent a potential foundation for strengthening inclusive education, particularly where formal support opportunities are limited. Participants' experiences suggest that educators can benefit from sharing strategies, discussing challenges and jointly considering ways to adapt teaching.

School leaders could build on this existing collaboration by allocating time for joint lesson planning, peer discussion and the development of adaptable teaching materials. Professional learning meetings could provide opportunities to consider anonymised classroom situations, identify common barriers and share practical responses. These activities should be organised in ways that protect learners' privacy and promote constructive professional dialogue.

Formalising collaboration may help ensure that useful practices are shared rather than remaining dependent on individual educators. It could also connect professional learning to school planning and monitoring, allowing educators to discuss progress and identify additional support needs. This recommendation complements the emphasis on collaboration and staff development in UNESCO's (2024) leadership report.

Nevertheless, collaboration should not be presented as a substitute for specialist support, professional development or appropriate resources. Its value lies in

strengthening collective capacity and making better use of existing expertise while wider institutional needs are addressed.

8. Conclusion

This study examined educators' perceptions of inclusive education policies and administrative strategies in the planning and management of secondary schools in Circuit 4, Khomas Region, Namibia. The findings reveal that educators generally support inclusive education and recognise its importance in promoting fairness and equitable learning opportunities. However, positive attitudes do not always translate into consistent implementation because educators differ in their practical understanding and application of inclusive education policies. Implementation is further affected by large classes, inadequate teaching and learning resources, inaccessible infrastructure, limited specialist support and insufficient practical professional development. Inconsistent administrative monitoring, negative social attitudes and challenges in family engagement also constrain inclusive practices. These findings suggest that inclusive education cannot be strengthened through policy awareness alone. Effective implementation requires coordinated efforts to address the pedagogical, administrative and institutional conditions affecting schools.

School leadership plays an important role in translating inclusive education policies into practical school-level activities. Schools should integrate inclusion into development plans, clarify staff responsibilities and strengthen monitoring through constructive feedback. Continuous, practice-oriented professional development, mentoring and peer collaboration can help educators respond more effectively to diverse learner needs. Need-based resource allocation and improvements in school accessibility are also essential for creating supportive learning environments. Furthermore, partnerships among schools, families, communities and relevant support organisations can strengthen the implementation of inclusive education. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory highlights the importance of addressing the interconnected influences of classroom practices, school management, family involvement and the wider education system.

The findings provide context-specific insights into inclusive education in the two participating secondary schools but should not be statistically generalised because the study involved only ten purposively selected participants. The reliance on participants' accounts also means that the findings were not independently verified through accessibility audits, resource inventories or budget reviews. Future research could involve more schools and include learners, parents and education officials to provide a broader understanding of implementation. Observations, document analysis and school accessibility assessments could also help establish how policies are translated into practice. Overall, sustainable inclusive education requires alignment between policy expectations, educator capacity, school leadership, adequate resources and collaborative support. The central challenge is therefore to move beyond general commitment to inclusion and establish practical, coordinated and sustainable arrangements that support diverse learners.

Author Contributions

The author contributed to the conceptualisation and design of the study, development and refinement of the research methodology, review of relevant literature, and development of data collection instruments. The author was also involved in data collection, analysis, interpretation and validation of the findings. Furthermore, the author contributed to the preparation, writing and critical revision of the manuscript, including strengthening its theoretical and practical implications. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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