Pondering Collaborative School Board Roles in Alleviating Dropout among Learners with Physical Disabilities in Schools

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ABSTRACT

The present paper explores collaborative school board roles in alleviating dropout among Children with Physical Disabilities (CwPDs) in primary schools in Lesotho. An interpretive approach with a qualitative case study design provided insight into how school board members interpret and understand their roles and responsibilities and shed light on school boards' strategies to alleviate dropout of CwPDs. In-depth individual interviews were conducted to obtain rich and accurate data from 10 participants from two purposively selected mainstream primary schools. Bronfenbrenners' bio-ecological systems theory and Telford's collaborative leadership theory were used in the study. Through a process of thematic analysis, apparent themes emerged. Findings reveal that many school board members lack the necessary knowledge and skills to address the needs of CwPDs. The research concludes that CwPDs drop out of school because of poor infrastructure, ineffective collaboration, and unclear school policies. It is recommended that through forging collaboration between school board members and other role players, a transformation of policies, in-service training for school boards, and raising disability awareness and dropout among CwPDs can be better alleviated.

KEYWORDS

Children with physical disabilities; collaboration; dropout rate; mainstream schools; school boards.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the proclamation 'Every individual has a right to education' was made in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights released in 1948 (UN, 2018), there has been a need for countries around the world to make education free, essential and compulsory to their citizens, without discrimination. Education is indispensable for improving households' living standards and developing countries' socio-economies. It is supposed to combat malnutrition and hunger (Nicola et al., 2020; Shale, 2015; Yamba, 2017).

Physical disability is defined as an impairment in basic and instrumental activities of daily living and impaired mobility (Steptoe & Di Gessa, 2021). This disability causes disturbances in bodily functions, including body movement, vision, hearing, and speech (Fitriah, 2021). Children with physical disabilities in Lesotho who receive primary education are lucky and privileged. The Government of Lesotho implemented the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy in 2000. It developed a compulsory primary education law in 2010, which was done to ensure that each Mosotho child with learning and a mental and physical disability could access and complete a seven-year free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary education cycle (Mosia, 2017; Mosia & Phasha, 2018; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2015).

The country also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018; Monyane, 2020; Mosia, 2017; Mosola, 2020). Despite these gains, there is growing evidence that the sub-Saharan Africa region where Lesotho is situated is worst affected by high dropout rates of primary-school-age CwPDs. Lesotho is no exception to this reality (Kremte, 2019; McLeod, 2014; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2015; UNESCO, 2017).

According to Shale (2015), due to various reasons, there is an annual cumulative loss of 10% of CwPDs between the ages of six to ten in education before children reach the end of the upper primary cycle (Grade 7), representing a severe decline in the Lesotho education system. Lesotho National Federation of Organizations of the Disabled (LNFOD, 2016) reveals that although both physically disabled learners are at risk of dropping out of primary schools, physically disabled girls have a higher likelihood of dropping out of primary schools coming as a direct result of poor planning for CwPDs in Lesotho.

While focusing on Lesotho schools, the well-trusted disability policy-oriented responses have been deemed ineffective in producing positive solutions to school problems. These dropouts frustrate families and society, threatening the right to Education for All (EFA). In light of primary school CwPDs dropping out each year, it is emphasised once again that schools must not only be the venues for academic learning but also be supportive centres for the provision of safety, where CwPDs can feel welcomed, relaxed and at ease to learn.

Parent and community involvement in school boards has become increasingly significant in public schools (Blackmore et al., 2022). Galetuke (2017) even posits that formal training of newly elected school boards is needed to ensure the provision of educational support services and appropriate resources. In this paper, we argue that the most effective means of alleviating

dropout of CwPDs is for regular primary schools to have school boards that are committed to a collaborative ethic for schools.

Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The literature in the background of the study reflects a high dropout rate of CwPDs between the ages of six and ten each year for various reasons. Based on this, the paper will ponder collaborative school board roles in alleviating dropout among CwPDs in Lesotho primary schools.

Two key research questions underpin this paper:

- What are school boards' duties and responsibilities in alleviating dropout among learners with physical disabilities in Lesotho primary schools
- What are the challenges experienced by school board members in allaying dropouts among children with physical disabilities in Lesotho schools?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is illuminated by two theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) and Telford's collaborative leadership theory (1996). Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on the interconnections and relationships between people, their physical environment, and their development in a natural milieu (Donald et al., 2010; El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). From the ecological perspective, the links between the school as a system and other systems such as immediate families, churches and community are vital when children have physical disabilities.

The child's development is optimised when expectations at home, school and within the community reinforce one another. In general, the ultimate impact of the school, peers, teachers, and local community depends on the strengths and capabilities among settings and not on the characteristics of each. In this study, schools are seen as social environments that provide efficient and practical education to CwPDs (Mohangi, 2015). Therefore, school board members (principals, teachers, parents, chiefs, school and the proprietors) significantly contribute to CwPDs' growth and development. The saying goes, 'It takes a village to raise a child'.

Telford's (1996) collaborative leadership theory reflects that roles and responsibilities are shared through 'agreed-upon political behaviour' in the school (Mohangi & Archer, 2015; Serpieri & Vatrella, 2017). The political elements of collaborative leadership behaviour centre on negotiation, compromise discussions and reaching an agreement in a climate of openness (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2013), implying that disagreements are expected in the value-laden and social context of the school. The theory is based on the belief that coordination and planning of internal and well-defined policies and programmes and the support of staff cohesion are made through clear, well-communicated and shared processes that promote a positive school climate (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2013).

In short, the roles and responsibilities for alleviating dropout of CwPDs should be shared through clear communication by all relevant members of the school. Various scholars agree that effective communication is essential to maintain healthy relationships, promoting motivation

and performing tasks (Kayumbu, 2017; Padayachee, 2021). Therefore, effective communication serves the purpose it was intended or built for (Alawamleh et al., 2022). To this, collaborative leadership becomes the most dominant thing that school boards can do to shift away from the traditional support approach to a new social model of support, where everybody is responsible for the learners' challenges (Mohangi, 2015).

We found these two theories to be appropriate theoretical frameworks for this paper because well-defined policies and programmes and staff cohesion should be the top priority in a conducive school environment to promote a positive school outcome.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the National Center of Education Statistics [NCES] (2021), an estimated 10.7% of all children with disabilities, including CwPDs, dropped out of schools in the United States of America [USA] in 2019. It was established that out of anecdotal statistics [10.7%] of dropouts, the average dropout rate of CwPDs of primary school age (6 to 11 years) was 6.6% in 2016-2019, in contrast with 6.4% in 2008 (Fodo, 2020; Jamal, 2021; Monyane, 2020; NCES, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). Literature shows that this was twice as high as in countries like Madagascar, where four out of every 10 CwPDs drop out of primary school before finishing their studies (UNICEF, 2021), leaving the schools classified as 'large' to lose their status.

A report by the United Nations Children's Fund [hereafter, UNICEF] (2023) reveals that the prevalence of physical disability and a dropout rate of CwPDs seemed to be highest in countries such as Turkey and Syria, affected by earthquakes, conflict and fragility. For instance, in the south-east of Turkey, the prevalence of physical disability and dropout got high after 80 278 were injured by a devastating earthquake in 2023, where over 1 360 CwPDs have been identified (UNICEF, 2023) and access to quality education was hampered. In these countries, the gap is not as comprehensive as in Pakistan, where CwPDs are eight times more likely to be out of school as compared to their peers without disabilities as of the year 2020-2021 (Abbasi, 2021).

In Lesotho, grade repetition and dropout of CwPDs occur most often among those in the fourth grade, with as many as 14.5% of enrolled CwPDs not continuing to Grade 5 and 5.7% dropping out in 2011 (UN, 2015). The tragedy is that many of these CwPDs drop out of primary school before transitioning to Grade 8, while others stay at home (Monyane, 2020), reducing educational support services. Evidence from many studies revealed many of the challenges facing CwPDs in Lesotho are disability, truancy, poor academic performance and level of literacy, poverty, an attitude of teachers towards CwPDs and a newly introduced curriculum; geographical location and lack of educational opportunities, among others (Aguilar, 2017; Berondo & Dela Fuente, 2021; LNFOD, 2016; Mokotso, 2020; Shale, 2015).

Research further shows that among the other irking factors that put CwPDs at risk of absconding from school include lack of funding which leads to a shortage of teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms (Mohale, 2020; Mosia, 2017) and unqualified

teachers that comprise of an inclusive curriculum (Makwembere, 2021; Matobako, 2021). In concurrence with the above authors, Makuyana (2022) explained that mainstream schools do not have enough resource support for disabled learners; this leaves parents with no option but to withdraw their children from school. To this end, the emergence of social factors such as COVID-19 also worsened the school attendance ratio amongst CwPDs (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2019-2020; Shuja et al., 2022) and made the cohort more vulnerable to dropping out.

Given the literature mentioned above, it is clear that more CwPDs are out of primary schools in both developed and developing countries, such as Lesotho and school boards are blamed when these children drop out under their leadership. This problematic situation calls for urgent action for schools in many countries to rise and curb it.

Despite the challenges experienced by many countries concerning alleviating dropouts amongst CwPDs, intervention measures have been implemented to address this issue. In India and Great Britain, many poorly equipped rural schools that were near each other worked together, and their idea was to pool their limited resources for improved education of learners, including CwPDs (Padayachee, 2021). Literature also shows that South Africa has successfully used a systematic multi-stakeholder local community-based intervention approach to incorporate disability into mainstream policies and laws that guide staffing, planning, mobilisation of other resources and budgeting for social factors such as HIV/AIDS, COVID-19 among others (Makuyana, 2022).

The implication, therefore, is that the school boards need a paradigm shift towards collaboration to alleviate various forms of discrimination and other challenges that CwPDs face in schools. Together, they can guarantee that the programmes developed for each CwPD reflects their needs.

RESEARCH DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm and approach

The study adopted an interpretive paradigm (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), a qualitative research approach, to explore collaborative school board roles in mitigating dropout among CwPDs in Lesotho primary schools. The study adopted the paradigm because it allowed us to focus on the meaning (Nieuwenhuis, 2016) aimed at understanding participants' experiences and circumstances.

Research design

The case study design was used in this research to explore real-life, in-depth social behaviour, a contemporary bounded system or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection (Yazan, 2015). A case study design is usually used in qualitative research, and it enabled us to explore the school board's role in alleviating dropouts of learners with physical disabilities within some specific context (Rashid et al., 2019).

Context of the study and sampling procedure

Lesotho, a small mountainous country landlocked by South Africa, is known for its long history of providing primary education. However, a significant number of the population of CwPDs is side-lined and suffer discrimination in primary schools despite the presence of school boards. In addition, nearly 40% of children with disabilities aged 5–10, mainly those in rural areas, are not enrolled (Kremte, 2019). Lesotho is also marked by low socio-economic performance compared to other African countries.

The study was conducted in two primary schools in St Bernadette Centre in the Maseru district, Lesotho. The context within which research is achieved is crucial in qualitative research because it influences meanings constructed by research participants on an issue under study (Albusaidi, 2019). We selected the participating primary schools because they enrolled CwPDs and possessed experience in providing care and support to children with disabilities. These two primary schools were also convenient since they are in the same district where the first researcher stayed. The participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling. The total sample consisted of ten members of the school boards, two of the following from each school board: principals, teachers, parents, chiefs and representatives from church (proprietors).

To describe the participants and the schools' characteristics in the study, we used the tables below to reveal the characteristics of the school board (SB) involved.

Table 1.

School A characteristics of the School Board (SB) involved in the study

Characteristics of SBs	Principal	Teacher	Parent	Gazette chief	Proprietor (church rep.)
Gender	male	male	female	male	male
Age	52	37	45	50	44
Qualifications	PTC, B Ed.	DEP, B Ed, B Ed Hons	0	Junior certificate	B Com
Years of experience as an SB	21	4	6	15	4
Current position	Secretary	member	member	member	Chairperson
Experience in current position	10	4	6	4	4
Training workshops attended	18	9	0	5	4
Skills to deal with CwPDs	no	yes	no	no	no
Knowledge of policies on disability	yes	yes	no	no	no

Table 2.

School B characteristics of the School Board (SB) involved in the study

Characteristics of SBs	Principal	Teacher	Parent	Gazette chief	Proprietor (church rep.)
Gender	female	male	Female	male	female
Age	59	38	45	60	48
Qualifications	PTC, DPE, B Ed, B Ed Hons	DEP, ACE, B Ed.	Catering certificate	COSC	Dip in Agriculture
Years of experience as an SB	20	3	3	25	6
Current position	Secretary	member	member	member	Chairperson
Experience in current position	20	3	3	4	5
Training workshops attended	15	7	0	10	2
Skills to deal with CWPDs	yes	no	no	no	no
Knowledge of policies on disabilities	yes	yes	no	no	no

Abbreviations: PTC. = Primary Teachers' Certificate; DPE. = Diploma in Primary Education; B Ed. = Bachelor of Education; B Ed Hons. = Bachelor of Education Honours; DEP. = Diploma of Professional Studies; B Com. = Bachelor of Commerce; ACE. = Advanced Certificate in Education; COSC. = Cambridge Overseas School Certificate; Dip in Agriculture. = Diploma in Agriculture.

Data collection tools and procedure

We generated and collected data through semi-structured individual interviews with school board members, which allowed open-ended responses (Cohen et al., 2018). The semi-structured interview consisted of several key questions that helped define the area to be explored but also allowed the interviewer and the participants to diverge from pursuing an idea or a response in more detail (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). It was, therefore, easy for the researcher to facilitate the interview and to ask follow-up questions to get rich information and avoid bias.

All interviews were audio-taped after obtaining permission from each participant, and their responses were written down verbatim. An audio-tape recorder ensured the original data provided a complete and thorough verbal record (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes each. This qualitative data collection method was used to collect in-depth data regarding collaborative school board roles in mitigating dropout among CwPDs. Nieuwenhuis (2016) correctly observes that naturalistic conversations (interviews) between an interviewer and participants provide a detailed description of practices and experiences from the participants' perspectives.

Data analysis

We employed thematic data analysis using a coding method. Thematic analysis is a method that allows the identification and organisation of data and offers insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2014; Keevash et al., 2018). Commonalities and patterns were clustered into three themes. Authenticity, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability strategies were used to validate the findings.

Ethical considerations

Before conducting the research, the University of the Free State permitted data gathering. The Ministry of Education and Training granted access to targeted schools in the Maseru district office in 2019. Participants were presented with a consent letter and were briefed on the implications of the consent letter. Participants' names have not been recorded anywhere, and none of the responses can be connected to any particular participant. The anonymous data collected by participants could also be used for other purposes. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. All information and findings of the study are kept entirely confidential and will be disclosed at any time only to those with the authority to request it.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study ponders collaborative school boards' roles in alleviating dropouts among learners with physical disabilities in Lesotho primary schools by answering two research questions that guide the study. The research questions are:

- What are the school board's duties and responsibilities in alleviating dropout among learners with physical disabilities in Lesotho primary schools?
- What are the challenges experienced by school board members in allaying dropout among children with physical disabilities in Lesotho schools?

In this section, patterns which emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the raw data have coalesced into themes and sub-themes to answer these two questions under these themes: Collaborative school board roles in alleviating dropout as revealed in their duties and responsibilities and unveiling the obstacles and challenges in the allaying of dropout of children with physical disabilities. Pseudonyms are used for participants in the reporting of the results below. For example, participants' comments are coded as follows: Participant 1= P1, Participant 2 = P2.

Theme 1: Collaborative school board roles in mitigating dropout as revealed in their duties and responsibilities

Development of learners' intrapersonal skills (self-concept and confidence)

During the interviews, different views on the roles of school boards within mainstream schools emerged. Most school board members noted that they work collaboratively to assist CwPDs in developing self-esteem, self-concept and confidence in school. The participants revealed the development of intrapersonal skills.

P1 has this to say on this point:

> "When CwPDs have positive attitude, they see themselves as strong, competent and in control of their lives. But all of this becomes much possible if we as school board members become the problem solvers, motivators and their comforters, as a sign that we are playing a positive role in their lives."

To add to the above, P6 highlighted that:

> "If CwPDs are performing well and us as school board members give them awards and tell them that we do acknowledge that, they become happy and proud. They show more interest in their academic work, and this is a sign that they are having self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence."

P8 added:

> "When CwPDs have stress and grievances from their homes and sometimes being denied justice and be discriminated by their peers, we provide them with counselling. Counselling helps CwPDs to accept themselves and feel valued."

This finding concurs with the study of Mosia (2017) and Mosia and Phasha (2018), which show that children with disabilities' needs are unique, and school managers need to make CwPDs feel part of the school to improve their self-esteem. P1, P2 and P3 also admitted that as school boards, they become problem solvers, motivators, comforters and counsellors of CwPDs when they have grievances.

School boards as advocates (keeping children with physical disabilities at the centre)

The findings in this study reveal that collaboration of school board members is required for good practices such as 'keeping CwPDs at the centre'. Many participants were clear that keeping CwPDs at the centre meant they understood, listened to and respected their feelings, wishes and needs as individuals. As a result, school boards are considered advocates of CwPDs' holistic well-being. The data show that 'keeping CwPDs at the centre' means focusing on listening to CwPDs' voices.

P6 responded:

> "… we are careful about "keeping our CwPDs at the centre". This practice is done by listening to their voices, showing respect to them as individuals and taking the personal interest or feeling in them."

Another participant (P5) indicated that:

> "…CwPDs feel happy and special when they are listened to, and, in return, they work very hard to earn good marks in the classroom, make all people around them happy. CwPDs always have experiences that expand once they are given a chance to talk about them."

The above response resonates with Butler et al.'s (2021) study that negotiation or communication with students and improved understanding of their needs is critically important, especially at this early stage in learning. All participants had positive views on accepting CwPDs in their schools based on the interviews. P5 and P6 discussed the need to listen to CwPDs' voices

to make them feel special and happy. It is clear that when CwPDs are heard, they are motivated, encouraged and comforted.

Providing care and spiritual support

The data show that participants inspired and taught CwPDs to pray and read the scriptures daily. They advised CwPDs to adopt prayer as a pillar to support themselves in the school, hopefully in confronting any challenges in their lives. In this regard, participants' responses were as follows.

P8 noted that:

> "CwPDs are now encouraged and know that prayer is a vital weapon that can battle the challenges they have in their lives."

Another participant (P7) said:

"We have instilled into CwPDs values such as hope, discipline and respect of a prayer."

P10 commented on the role of school boards as follows:

"We teach CwPDs how to pray and read the scriptures daily."

> Galetuke (2017) and Van Zyl (2013) agree that when some members from other schools and the parents are involved in the school governing body, they can bring fresh ideas and other forms of support (spiritual or emotional support) to learners because some members elected on the school board are already specialists and experts in Bible study. P8 and P10 identified a school as a place where school boards can engage CwPDs in spiritual activities such as reading Bible and praying. P7 hoped that teaching CwPDs the word of God would instil hope and discipline and help them adapt to the new school environment.

School boards' involvement of other professionals

In mitigating the dropout of CwPDs in schools, it is required that school boards work together with other professionals, such as community-based experts or practitioners, to achieve a common goal and for referrals. The school board's relationship with other professionals is essential in bringing about positive outcomes for CwPDs as 'it takes the whole village to raise a child'.

P1 stated that:

> "...I am very keen to help teachers master their duty of helping CwPDs by involving psychological counsellors who keep on nursing emotional problems that CwPDs and teachers. This will help CwPDs to be confident and accept their disability."

P8 noted that:

> "CwPDs needed medical check-ups from time to time. Our main task is to work together with doctors and the therapists. They help with activities such as medical supervision, evaluating the motor functioning, preparing CwPDs for self-care activities and staff training."

The finding resonates with the study by Kipfer (2015) on educational assistants supporting inclusive education in secondary schools: *"When CwPDs are admitted in Ontario schools, they*

are often referred for a psycho-educational assessment by the special education services and school boards."

In the interviews, all participants indicated that they work with doctors and therapists to help CwPDs who need check-ups and other support). The Governing bodies or school boards can even create a space for social cohesion by roping the local authority like councillors, political leaders, union leaders, traditional leaders, pastors, social workers and the community at large to come to the board to assist the school in improving the state of affairs for the benefit of the learners.

Theme 2: Unveiling the obstacles and challenges in the mitigation of dropout of children with physical disabilities

Challenges mentioned by most of the participants were social problems, scholastic problems and barriers in the education system itself. Most of the participating school board members noted that the dropout rate is high. The following sections discuss the main contributing factors as considered by participants.

Extreme hunger and poverty of children with physical disabilities

The findings obtained through individual interviews reveal that hunger and poverty are the leading causes of dropout among CwPDs.

P1 noted:

> *"The rate of dropout among CwPDs is very high due to hunger and high poverty in the school, but we try our best to control it when CwPDs are still in our school, and it is costly to assist them once they have dropped out."*

P2 expressed a similar opinion regarding poverty. He revealed that:

> *"It was quite sad to see that most of our CwPDs come to school with empty stomachs, and I decided to come to school with extra food for them."*

The study by Kali (2020) shows that despite adopting the Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, and Agenda 2063, Lesotho remains on the list of developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most interviewed participants disclosed that CwPDs are forced to stop education due to starvation. What has become clear is that CwPDs have basic needs, and school board members weave the strand of support collaboratively in various ways, including providing proper food and stable relationships, to mention a few.

Discriminated against, labelled, rejected and stereotyped in the school

The interviews with participants reveal that CwPDs face other challenges at school, such as discrimination, labelling, rejection and stereotyping.

P3 said:

> *"Most of the time, CwPDs develop poor self-concept when they are discriminated [against], labelled, rejected and stereotyped in the school."*

This finding resonates with Mosia's (2017) study, which shows that CwPDs are victims of discrimination and bullying. It also emerged from the participants' responses that school board

members face challenges like fear and isolation by teachers when performing functions such as assisting CwPDs.

P4 revealed that:

> *"When we are dealing with issues relating to CwPDs, we are isolated and rejected by other stakeholders (teachers)."*

He further said:

> *"We fear to make decisions."*

It is clear from participant responses that CwPDs are discriminated against by their peers and rejected in school activities because of their disability. On the other hand, P4 said that school board members are scared to help CwPDs due to fear of discrimination.

Lack of support from the Department of Education in finding measures to mitigate dropout

Another challenge raised by participating school board members was the lack of support from the DoE and facing school board members when helping CwPDs.

P9 had this to say:

> *"…the government does not extend its financial support in preparation of full and effective participation of CwPDs in our school; also, there is very little communication and ineffective collaboration between the school board and the government, and this is a challenge to us."*

The participant elaborated further:

> *"Apart from lack of collaboration between school boards and the DoE, CwPDs drop out because of poor infrastructures and unclear policies in the schools."*

P10 explained that:

> *"Government delay to give our school the textbooks. It is difficult for CwPDs to cope at school. For example, Grade 7s have spent many years without textbooks."*

P4 highlighted that:

> *"…effective communication and collaboration is needed to address the challenges in the schools."*

Some authors suggest that effective communication among school board members is essential as it involves goal-setting, problem-solving and decision-making (Harris, 2014; Matobako, 2021; Padayachee, 2021; Vatrella, 2015). Nevertheless, the study by Kheswa (2017) revealed that working with authoritarian principals is a major debilitating factor because there is no effective communication. Therefore, more structures and opportunities should be created to enable effective communication and teamwork among various role-players (Basson & Mestry, 2019).

Based on the interviews, all the participants demonstrated the urgent need for the DoE to have trained school boards to help CwPDs.

P3 noted:

"I think we need training workshops once we are elected to acquire skills and knowledge and be conscientious about the policies and intervention programmes that can help to mitigate dropout among CwPDs."

Apart from the need for a necessary training aide for CwPDs, participants also expressed the need for raising disability awareness campaigns.

P3 commented that:

"We [the school board] have to work as a team to raise disability awareness campaigns in our school and the community as well. Parents need to be taught to admit that their CwPDs have disabilities, [and that it is] not a shame in the family, so that they cannot hide them."

This study reveals that school board members should work with the DoE and act in the best interest of CwPDs. It should also be ensured that all CwPDs access quality education to actualise their full potential.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to explore the collaborative roles of school boards in mitigating dropout among CwPDs in Lesotho primary schools. Findings reveal that collaboration is essential for mitigating dropout among CwPDs. It was found that when school board members work in isolation, they fail to foster resilience and help CwPDs develop self-esteem, self-concept and confidence in primary school; thus, dropout persists. This study highlights that school board members act as advocates, counsellors, motivators and problem solvers when providing opportunities for CwPDs to discuss their demands and feelings. School boards must be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge by the DoE.

Most participant responses reveal a high dropout rate due to poverty and hunger, with most CwPDs coming to school with empty stomachs. The support activities of school boards, such as donating food to CwPDs, have dominated and been socialised into a system of '*Ubuntu*' culture- the Nguni Bantu term meaning 'humanity.' A study by Feldman et al. (2017, p.45) makes the same point that '...there is a complexity of intertwined factors such as poverty, which propel students towards dropping out'. Communication plays a significant role in enhancing collaboration between school board members, the DoE and other stakeholders to perform their functions, such as ensuring that the dropping out of CwPDs is mitigated. Effective communication can create an inclusive school environment, leading to effective and efficient primary schools.

The following recommendations are provided to strengthen the authentic collaboration of school board members in mitigating dropout among CwPDs in Lesotho primary schools:

- All the school board members should work together as a team to assist CwPDs in developing intrapersonal skills such as self-esteem, self-concept and confidence in the school through counselling, meaning that school board members will have to

- understand, listen and respect the feelings, wishes and needs of CwPDs; this makes them advocates for the holistic well-being of CwPDs.
- The DoE needs to extend its financial support in preparation for the full and effective participation of CwPDs in schools by supplying bursaries to CwPDs so that more significant numbers of them can transit to secondary school.
- It is crucial that disability awareness campaigns are conducted, where CwPDs are taken out to interact with other people and to be recognised in schools and the community. Parents need to be taught to admit that their CwPDs have disabilities and not to be ashamed to hide them.
- Given the increasing dropout rates among CwPDs, it is recommended that school boards be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge by DoE school boards for CwPDs to feel connected to their schools.

Limitations of the Study

In terms of the challenges that the researchers met during the fieldwork, this research was conducted under time and resource constraints. There was a lot of data collected from the participants that the researchers had to minimise without deleting essential issues. One participant, who is a teacher in School B, was uncooperative. Meeting some participants was tough because they were very busy, but the researchers had to be patient until all the interview questions were answered. The findings of this study cannot be generalised to other districts of Lesotho except where it was conducted. It was limited to two selected primary schools in the Maseru district.

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