

## Applying the socio-cultural and ecological systems theories to inclusive education in a Caribbean context: Lessons Learnt

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### ABSTRACT

The evolution and conceptualization of inclusive education policies and practices have been dynamic in the global sphere. This qualitative case study aimed to explore inclusive education practices and experiences at a private school in the Caribbean by applying aspects of the socio-cultural and ecological systems theory. Data was collected from 27 stakeholders using interviews, focus group discussions, secondary data, and observation and analyzed using a thematic and narrative inductive approach. Findings show a significant cross-influence of the different systems on the learning of children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Emerging from the findings, the Contextual Systemic Inclusive-Education Model (CSIM) is proposed as a framework that schools can use to examine inclusive practices and experiences in their contexts where applicable. A key recommendation is for education systems to evaluate the context in which inclusive education occurs and explore the experiences of key stakeholders at the various levels who should work collaboratively and in synchrony to improve inclusive practices in schools.

**Keywords:** *inclusive education; special needs; educational assistant aides; private school; Jamaica.*

### INTRODUCTION

Though not new, inclusive education has become the buzzword in global educational systems, which UNESCO (2017) viewed as the starting point for developing equitable and more inclusive societies. As such, many scholars have advanced various understandings and approaches to examine inclusive education in schools. Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of the ecology of human development offers a sound theoretical framework for research on the execution of inclusive education (Peck, 1993). In reconceptualizing the ecological systems theory through a theoretical lens, Anderson et al. (2014) argue that the ecological systems theory offers an invaluable framework with which to organize the environmental factors and understand their influence on inclusivity by placing the learner at the center and each contributory factor in relation to the learner's educational ecosystem. Hence, they proposed the ecology of inclusive education as a framework, which may help researchers better understand the factors that influence inclusive education, the relationships and connections they have with one another, and the environments in which they sit. Anderson et al. proposed six systems of inclusive education drawn from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. However, only the five that were used in the study will be discussed below.

This article will explore from empirical research how the ecological systems theory and ecology of inclusive education sit within inclusive education in a Caribbean context. The aim was to apply the ecological systems and the socio-cultural theories to examine inclusive education context, practices, and experiences at a private school in Jamaica. In

this case study, the inclusive classroom represented the micro-system; interactions between home and school represented the meso-system; the school policies, including leadership, represented the exo-system, and ministry/government policies represented the macro-system.

Three research questions guided the process: a) what are the current inclusive education practices at a Jamaican private school, and what factors inform these practices? b) How do stakeholders describe their experiences with the current inclusive education practices in the school? and c) What are stakeholders' views on how the current inclusive practices can be improved? This study also explored a phenomenon that is under-researched in private schools in the Caribbean and Jamaica. Findings will provide a platform or framework that can be used to explore inclusive education practices in other private and public schools in Jamaica from the insights gained, benefit policymakers in program planning for inclusion, and fill the research gap.

### **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

The Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), with inclusive and equitable education at the core of its mandate, states that by 2030, all citizens should be given inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2017, 2020). However, many countries continue to need help to achieve equitable and inclusive educational systems. Lindsay (2007) argues that there is criticism that there is not enough empirical evidence to support its effectiveness, and the variation of services provided, legislation, and unclear definitions are some contributing factors (Lindsay, 2007). Ahmad (2012) acknowledges physical, attitudinal, and communication barriers that negatively affect inclusive education, while Brown (2018) reported training and lack of access to infrastructure, support staff, and funding as significant concerns. Other barriers to effective inclusion, as discussed by Sider et al. (2021), John et al. (2021), and MacCormack et al. (2021), include school leaders' lack of commitment to inclusion, challenges to implementing inclusive programs, issues with community support, attitudes of staff, resources, and parental involvement. In Jamaica, Sherwood (2010) found that negative experiences of students with special education needs being put in low-ability classes lead to teasing, humiliation, and lowered self-esteem. Furthermore, parents, special education teachers, and other relevant stakeholders have been arguing about whether inclusive education can be achieved (Oneyemah & Eesuola, 2022).

Despite the barriers to inclusion, researchers (Hutchinson & Specht, 2020; Miegheem et al., 2018; Bakhri, 2017) argue that there are many benefits to inclusive education, including social relationships and empowerment of children with disabilities, community building, providing more responsiveness and access, unconditional acceptance, creating goals based on individual ability and needs, motivation through peer connections, parent involvement, and promoting an atmosphere of respect and belonging. Earlier studies indicate that inclusive education benefits not just students with special needs but all students (especially social functioning) and even teachers (Horne et al., 2008; Jeong et al., 2014). Decades ago, Chmiliar (2009) found that students preferred placement in inclusive classrooms where they had more friends and experienced less bullying, strong teacher-student relationships, positive feedback received from teachers, and helpful adaptations that were made in the

school. Furthermore, Volker et al. (2023) conclude that inclusion is not a privilege but rather a right. Every student should be allowed to learn and reach their full potential in an environment that promotes community and belonging with appropriate resources and support.

### **THEORY OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS**

#### ***Micro-System***

The microsystem entails the structure that is closest to the child and sits directly around the learner. It contains all the factors that exist within the environments in which the learner directly experiences both formal and informal learning, as well as the social aspects of schooling (Anderson et al., 2014 & Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Anderson et al. (2014) ecology of inclusive education framework suggests that the microsystem includes the teacher or teachers, non-teaching staff, peers, physical learning spaces, classroom cultures and routines, resources, and the playground. In this study, I used the inclusive classroom to represent the micro-system, which was comprised of teachers, students with special needs, their non-disabled peers, educational assistant aides, and parents.

#### ***Meso-System***

The meso-system refers to the connection between the microstructures (e.g., the connection between a child's teacher and a parent or home and school) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system is different from the others in that it promotes the notion that the factors within the micro-system do not do so in isolation. Anderson et al. (2014) posit that the relationships and connections between them are continuously occurring, changing, and evolving; they are never static but rather dynamic influences on the learner sitting at the center of the framework. For children's holistic development, parents are key participants. The involvement of parents is recognized as an essential facet of the education of children with special needs (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2012; Afolabi, 2014). The parents in this study represented the meso system. Genovesi et al. (2022) studied stakeholder experiences in South Africa. They reported that parents explained children's preference with their 'determination to be like everybody else' and equally 'desired to raise their children as usually as possible in inclusive classrooms.

#### ***Exo-System***

The exo-system refers to structures that impact the child's mesosystem and, therefore, have ripple effects on the child, such as community structures and local educational, medical, employment, and communications systems, which influence the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner (1979). In reconceptualizing Bronfenbrenner's theory, Anderson et al. (2014) ecology of inclusive education assert that the exo-system includes school leadership structures, teaching and non-teaching staff, school culture, values and ideology, authority and collaborative patterns (leaders, staff, students, parents, community), support structures, resource allocation, school rituals, school policies and procedures, and the student cohort. School leadership involving the principal, dean of discipline, and coordinators of inclusive programs and existing school policies formed the exo-system in this study.

## ***Macro-System***

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) macro-system refers to those structures that have a cascading influence on the child. However, they are far from the child, e.g., government policies, cultural values, political philosophies, economic patterns, and social conditions (Paquette & Ryan, 2011). The ecology of the inclusive education framework suggests that other factors, such as the education system or systems and current agendas (standardization of student achievement and professional and, where applicable, the curriculum also encompass the macro-system (Anderson et al., 2014). The macro-system envelops the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems. In understanding the macro-system in this case study, national policies on inclusive education, such as the Education Act, the independent school regulation, and those that govern inclusive practices in the school, were examined.

## **THE SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY**

All settings at each level operate within a socio-cultural context. Within this socio-cultural context, many views about special needs exist. Vygotsky believes that disability is a socio-cultural development phenomenon and that disability consists of primary disabilities, which are the organic impairment, and secondary disabilities, which are the distortion of higher psychological functioning due to social factors (Rieber & Carton, 1993). As far as Vygotsky is concerned, disorder or disability is not a tragedy; psychological-physical insufficiency is determined by a specific social setting, arrangement, or aberration, hindering children's normal socialization (Rieber & Carton 1993). The sociocultural theory has several widely recognized strengths such as it emphasizes the broader social, cultural, and historical context of any human activity (Allman, 2020) and the dynamic of a child acquiring knowledge and skills from society and then, in turn, the child shaping their environment (Miller, 2011). For Vygotsky, the outlook on the unique needs of all those involved in the cultural context is essential. Hence, in this study, I obtained views on multiple stakeholders within the context of this school to understand the socio-culture in which inclusive education takes place.

## **METHODOLOGY**

I used a qualitative single case study design with an embedded unit of analysis to examine inclusive education practices and experiences at the school. To understand the realities within the case, a single case study design was beneficial as I spent more time (over five months) in the field (private school) learning about the inclusive practices and participants' experiences within a reasonable time frame. According to Yin (2017), a single case study provides the opportunity for depth and breadth as the researcher is allowed more time in the field learning about the case. This study was guided by a constructivist philosophical worldview, which is typically associated with qualitative approaches (Creswell & Plano Clarke, 2011). Participants' views are shaped by social interaction with others and from their personal experiences. Hence, I used the participants' perspectives to broaden the pattern and, ultimately, broaden understanding.

This research was guided by three main research questions which are:

1. What are the current inclusive education practices at a private school in Jamaica (Kan Prep School)?

2. How do stakeholders describe their experiences with the current practices at the school?
3. What are stakeholders' views on how the current inclusive education practices can be improved?

### ***Selection of the Research Site and Rationale***

I was interested in conducting this research in a private school that practices inclusive education. Before selecting the private school, a detailed list of the large private schools (population of over 900 students) in urban Jamaica was obtained from the Independent School Unit in the Ministry of Education. Subsequently, I contacted all the schools and had a formal discussion with the secretary and principal, and on some occasions visited the schools. Five criteria were established for deciding which school to study. The school that met the most criteria would be selected. The criteria were that the school should:

- (a) Have a student population of 1,000 or more (Ministry of Education, 2020) to allow for the availability of a wider breadth of information for analysis.
- (b) It must be adequately resourced so that it can fund the elements of an inclusive policy.
- (c) Location that the researcher can easily access.
- (d) Working consciousness of the need for inclusive education.
- (e) Currently practices inclusive education with no segregated classrooms or particular education unit attached to the school (This means that all learning takes place in the inclusive classroom)

### ***School Context***

*Type and location* - Private school located in urban Jamaica

*Size* - 11 classrooms in the kindergarten department and 30 classrooms between Grades 1-6.

*Population* – 1002 students, 75 teachers.

*Demographics* – Multicultural with students from Indian, Chinese, Jamaican, and American origins.

*Students with disabilities* - The school supports students with autism, intellectual disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and learning disabilities.

*Socio-economic background* - *The students are from middle to upper-class socio-economic backgrounds.*

### ***Methods***

For the study, purposive sampling was utilized to select the 27 participants within the case (school). Participants include the principal, dean of discipline, guidance counselor, three teachers, six parents of students with and without disabilities, six students with and without disabilities, and three educational assistants. Data collection includes observation, focus group discussion, individual interviews, and secondary data. With access permission



from the Ministry of Education, I examined official policy documents and statistics records such as the Independent School Regulation, the Special Education Policy, the Proficiency Pathway for Primary School Policy, the Private School Census 2019 Document, and the Child Find Project, among others. This was done to gather authentic data on existing policies and broaden my knowledge and understanding of these existing policies and statistics. In addition, it was used to answer some of the questions in the interviews with the principal and guidance counselor and to help me interpret the data. To analyze the data, the first two stages (preparing the data and managing the data) of Creswell's (2014) stages of data analysis and the six phases of thematic analysis (familiarity with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, producing the report) proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Temi, a transcription software, was used to transcribe the data, followed by a thorough review of the recording and transcripts to edit due to nuances in the accents of participants. A descriptive narrative approach was also used to analyze and represent findings. Triangulation, expert collegial audits, intercoder reliability, and member checking were done to ensure trustworthiness.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The UWI Faculty of Medical Sciences Ethics Committee granted clearance to conduct this study. Subsequently, an access letter was given to the school principal informing them of the impending survey. Informed consent, parental consent, and student assent forms were sent to the participants. For anonymity, participant-chosen pseudonyms were used. I explained to the participants during the recruitment process, prior to and during the data collection, that they had the freedom not to participate and that if they chose to participate, they had the liberty to withdraw at any time. Permission to record the interviews was obtained from each participant.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

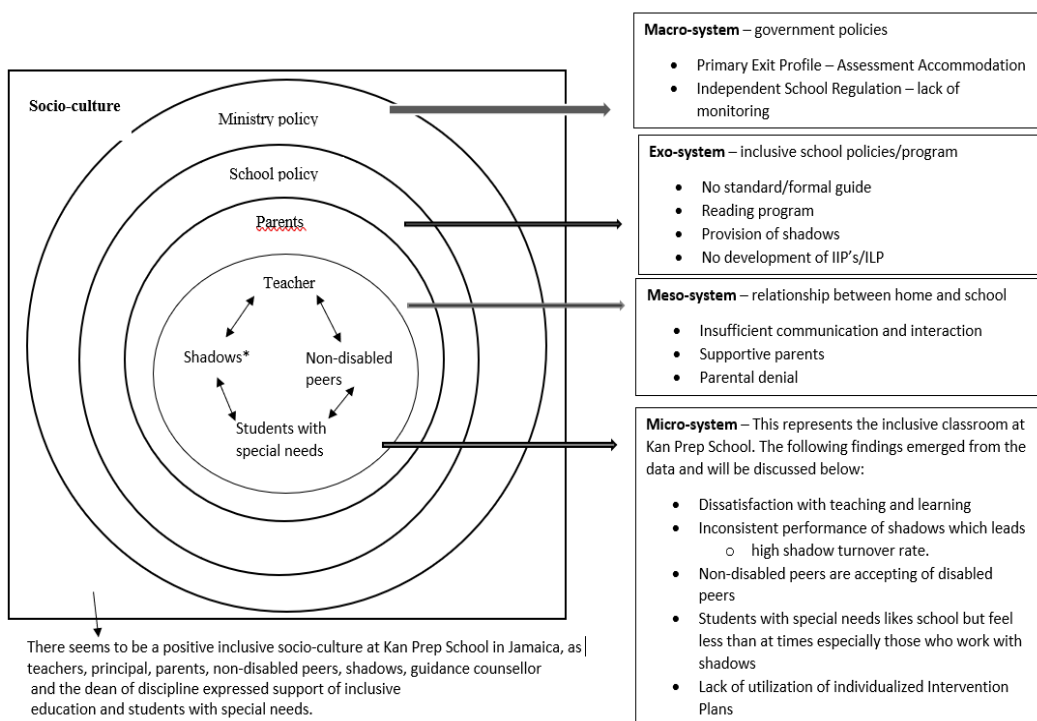
This study only examines one school; hence, the findings are contextual and cannot be generalized. However, findings might be transferable to both public and private schools in Jamaica and the Caribbean.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The primary purpose of the research was to examine inclusive education practices and experiences at Kan Prep School by applying ecological systems and sociocultural theories. The research questions that I sought to answer are: a) what are the current inclusive education practices at a Jamaican private school (Kan Prep School), and what factors inform these practices? b) How do stakeholders describe their experiences with the current inclusive education practices in the school? and c) What are stakeholders' views on how the current inclusive practices can be improved? Key findings include inconsistency in communication and collaboration among stakeholders, strong leadership support of inclusive education, and shadows in the inclusive classroom profoundly influencing the learning outcomes

of students with disabilities. Lack of school policies profoundly influences the inclusive classroom as most of the challenges stakeholders face surround policy. Additional findings in relation to dissatisfaction with the current inclusive practices, staff competence (shadows and teacher training), individualized support given to students with special needs, school and communication between home and school, and resources. Finally, stakeholders suggested several areas that need improvement for successful inclusive education, with staff training, communication, and collaboration as the most crucial. Figure 1 gives a visual representation of the summary of the findings in relation to the ecological system and socio-cultural theory.

*Figure 1: Findings in relation to the ecological systems framework and socio-cultural context*



### ***The Socio-Cultural Context***

Vygotsky argues that the experiences of students with disabilities are influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they operate (Rieber & Carton, 1993). Evidence shows a positive sociocultural context. The participants all stated they support educating students with special needs in inclusive classrooms, except for one non-disabled peer, Rodney, who stated that he only gets worried that one of his classmates with disabilities may chew off his eraser when he loans him his pencil. In the context of Kan Prep School, these findings divert from Vygotsky’s view that it is the view of people within the socio-cultural context of the child with a disability that hinders or stifles their growth and prevents them from reaching the zone of proximal development (Rieber & Carton, 1993). Like other researchers who studied inclusion in Canada, Africa, and Indonesia (Sider et al., 2021; Oneyemah & Eesuola, 2022; Brown, 2018; Bakhri, 2017), factors such as a lack of suitable resources,

teacher competency, educational assistants' competency, and guiding policies influence the learning outcome of students with disabilities at the school. *Dynamic assessment and compensatory strategies are crucial principles of the sociocultural theory* (Rieber & Carton, 1993). Students take national examinations such as Primary Exit Profile (PEP) at the school. However, these examinations are not tailored based on the abilities of the children with special needs, as all children, regardless of abilities, sit the same examination in class and national exams. This practice does not support Vygotsky's call for a dynamic assessment. This finding suggests alternate assessments are not implemented at the school and government levels.

### ***The Macro-System – Ministry Policies***

Government policies on inclusive education formed the macro-system in this study. In other words, the macro system speaks to the influence the Ministry of Education policies have on the inclusive practices at Kan Prep School. Findings from this study support Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that the macro system, though far from the children with disabilities in the inclusive classroom, has a cascading influence on their learning development. The Independent Schools Regulation (1973) and the Education Act (1965) were examined, and neither of the two has any specific regulation governing students with special needs or special education. However, the Independent School Regulation stipulates that visits to private schools should be done by the independent school unit in the Ministry of Education to assess instruction, lesson plans, and physical environment, among others. During the interview with the administration, it was revealed that they have never had a visit from the Independent School Unit. This explains the interconnectedness of the systems proposed in the ecology of inclusion framework (Anderson et al., 2014), in that many factors influence the macro systems, such as global and national context. Government policies have impacted inclusive education policies/practices in the schools under study. For example, private schools are not mandated to follow the guidelines set out by the government; they oversee the registration of these private schools, including Kan Prep School. With government monitoring and mandated inclusive education policies, private schools such as Kan Prep School are able to manage and implement inclusive education independently.

In addition to the lack of enactment of the particular education policy in Jamaica, other government policies have impacted inclusive education at Kan Prep School, such as the implementation of the Primary Exit Profile (PEP), which is a national examination done to enroll from the primary level to high schools. To prepare students for the exam, the Ministry of Education assigned a curriculum specialist who works with the upper grades (4-6) teachers at Kan Prep School. This has resulted in the segregation of students at the Grade 6 level, where students with special needs and other students who are struggling are separated and placed in a classroom by themselves to master skills. Therefore, government policies indirectly influence students' learning in inclusive classrooms and may also affect their emotional and social development.



### ***The Exo-System – School Policies***

School policies at Kan Prep School represented the exo-system in this study. The school administration (Principal, Guidance Counsellor/Clinical Psychologist, and the Dean of Discipline) were interviewed to gather data and understand the inclusive policies and practices of the school. Anderson et al. (2014) argue that factors within the exo-system are concerned with school-wide practices and are the domain of school leadership. Findings from this study support this notion in that there was convincing evidence that the exo-system has an equal influence on the child to that of the meso-system and micro systems. School leadership reported no formal model guiding how inclusive education is practiced at Kan Prep School. It could be interpreted as a “miss and go” arrangement.

In addition, participants corroborated that currently, the school does not mandate the use of Individualized Intervention Plans (IIPs) or Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) in the classrooms, nor are they developed based on challenges with development and teachers’ knowledge of their use as a resource. The lack of individualized instructional support by the classroom teacher was one of the most common complaints by stakeholders. Principals, parents, and the guidance counselor who monitor inclusive education at the school voiced dissatisfaction with the one-on-one support given to children with special needs in the inclusive classroom. Also, parents opined that their children’s needs are not being met adequately in the inclusive classroom. If teachers do not have a guide or the tools from which to work provided by the school, adverse effects are inevitable. Speaking on how inclusive education can be improved at Kan Prep School, the inclusive classroom teachers request round table talks with the administration to discuss matters concerning students with special needs. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to the effects of the exo-system on the child’s development as rippled; however, findings from this study reveal a more prominent and direct influence.

### ***The Meso-System – The Interaction between Home and School.***

In this study, the meso-system represents the role parents play in the education of children in inclusive classrooms. In other words, how parents influence the inclusive classroom at Kan Prep School and the influence the inclusive classroom has on parents of children with and without disabilities in these classrooms, findings from this study reveal a strong shared influence in this system. According to the parents, having a child in an inclusive classroom can sometimes be frustrating. The parents of children with disabilities shared that they are supportive of their children and the teacher; however, they are dissatisfied with the teaching and learning of their children in the inclusive classroom. Parents shared that the teacher could be more effective in meeting their children’s needs, and their experiences with some of the educational assistants are unpleasant and disadvantageous to their children.

Additionally, the parents are advocating for a better communication system between the school and parents regarding their children’s progress and learning plans. They also call for more training of teachers in inclusive classrooms that will equip them with the knowledge and expertise to identify and meet the needs of their children. The principal and other stakeholders confirm that communication and interaction with parents through parental workshops are areas that need improvement. It seems that despite the expressions

of frustration and dissatisfaction, parents support their children in inclusive classrooms as parents and other stakeholders voiced. This is like Genovesi et al. (2022), who state that African parents are mostly supportive of their children in inclusive classrooms. This study shows that the relationship between the home and Kan Prep School influenced children's learning in the inclusive classroom, as parents shared that they reinforce concepts taught at home. It gives credence to Bronfenbrenner (1976) and Anderson et al. (2014), who shared that relationships in these systems influence each other.

### ***Micro System – The Inclusive Classroom***

The inclusive classroom at Kan Prep School forms the microsystem. Findings from this study support the view that the people in this system have a reciprocal influence on each other (Anderson et al., 2014). Evidence revealed dissatisfaction with teaching and learning, lack of competent staff to support the learning of students with disabilities and limited use of differentiated instruction. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the inconsistent performance of students when placed with educational assistants. These views suggest that educational assistants strongly influence the learning of students with special needs. Findings from this study are like those of Hutchinson and Specht (2020), Miegheem et al. (2018), and Bakhri (2017) in that the inclusive classroom fosters positive change and relationships in schools. For example, Mrs. Fry, an inclusive classroom teacher, shared that instructing the students in the inclusive classroom has sensitized her to the challenges families of children with special needs face. During the focus group with the non-disabled peers, one student, Rodney, mentioned that he feels fine working with children with special needs, but he worries about his peers biting his eraser off when he asks to borrow his pencil. It could also be interpreted that several factors related to everyone (training, attributes, efficacy, expectations, etc.) influence their effect on each other within the microsystem, which is the inclusive classroom.

Finally, emerging from this study are findings that suggest that other factors related to the mesosystem and microsystems, such as parent knowledge and parental denial, are factors that may influence the microsystem. Findings suggest contradictions to Bronfenbrenner's (1976) Ecological System theory and ecology of inclusion (Anderson et al., 2014) in that at Kan Prep School, the exo-system (school policies) seemed to have a more direct influence on the inclusive practices which affect students' learning in the classroom. There appears to be a significant cross-over of influences in the systems, with each level having a significant impact regardless of the child's location.

### **IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS**

Several implications of the findings in this study were noted. Firstly, government policy (PEP) has affected inclusiveness in schools. Students stayed together from Grades 1 to 5. Then, students diagnosed with special needs and those with learning challenges are segregated into Grade 6 for instruction in preparation for the Primary Exit Profile (PEP). This may psychologically affect students as they are separated from their peers, contributing to lowered self-esteem and self-worth. Therefore, it is crucial to examine parents, teachers, and the students' impressions about this segregation.

Secondly, IIPs are particularly important in inclusive education to meet students' needs (NCSE, 2011). It is a one-year plan with goals for students and ways to achieve them. Writing it requires a team of professionals (parents, teachers, school leaders, and special educators). At Kan Prep School, there is only one staff member (the clinical psychologist) who is trained to write the IIP at the primary level, thus presenting a burden for practical completion and monitoring of this document for all the students with special needs. In addition, a lack of training in writing and using the IIP may affect the learning outcome of students with SN. Given this deficiency, training for teachers, parents, and administration on understanding the importance and use of the IIP will be crucial to the model development.

The third implication is that school policies have an enormous influence on the education of children in inclusive classrooms at Kan Prep School means that the lack of effective inclusive education policies may hinder students with special needs from maximizing their fullest human potential in inclusive classrooms and cripple effective teaching and practices in the school. Suppose the school needs to implement sustainable and transparent inclusive policies utilizing a collaborative approach. In that case, stakeholders will continue a trial-and-error approach to meeting the needs of the students in inclusive classrooms.

Findings revealed that shadows play a vital role in the learning of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. The training of the shadows is important to successful students' learning outcomes; hence, schools will need to ensure competency and professional development. It is also important for schools to consider the physical placement of shadows as they work with students with SN in the inclusive classroom to prevent the obstruction of learning for other students in the classrooms. Parents should also play a key role in the recruitment of shadows to ensure transparency regarding responsibilities and expectations.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

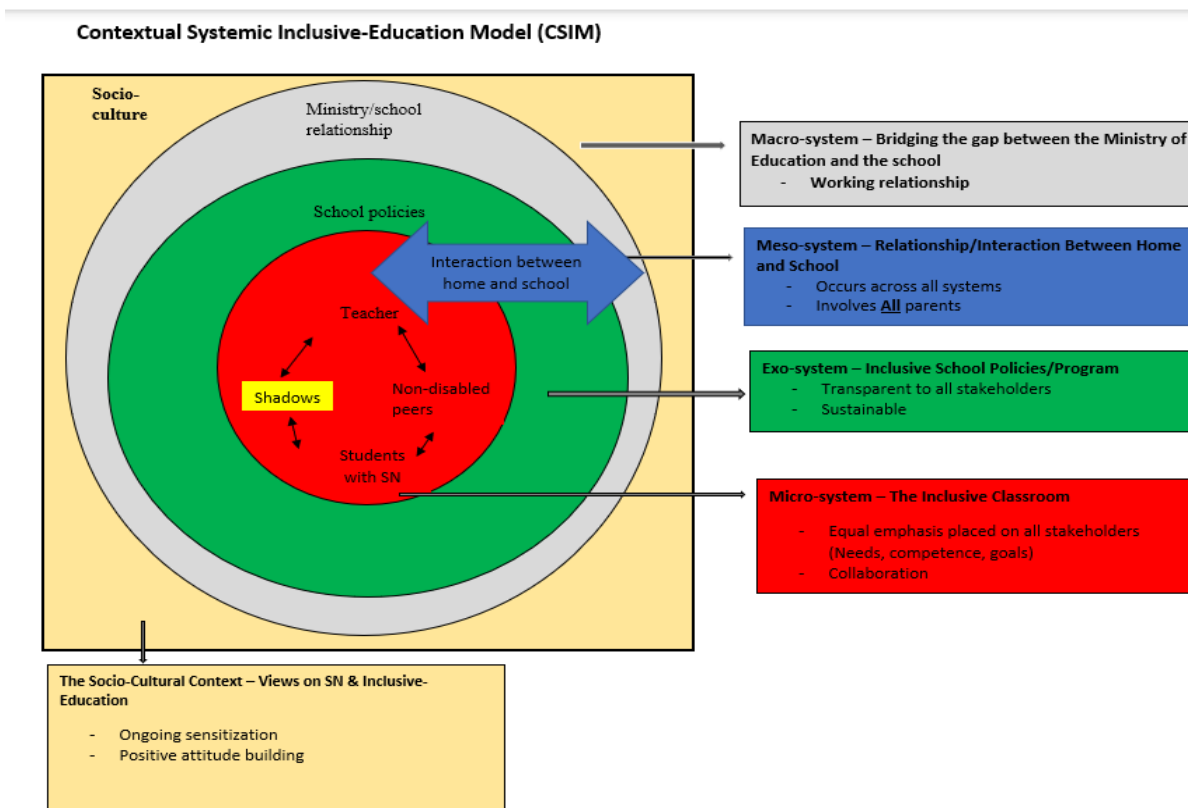
An inclusive education framework or model needs to be included in the school, effectively guiding the inclusive education practice. In addition, given that parents, educational assistants, and teachers were oblivious to the inclusive policies or practices that guide the accommodation and the teaching and learning of students in the inclusive classroom, the model or program structure and implementation that will be used should be transparent and discussed with all key stakeholders. Having examined the current practices and experiences at each level of the ecological systems on inclusive education, I am proposing the Contextual Systemic Inclusive-Education Model (CSIM) as an additional lens through which inclusive education can be examined and conceptualized. The ecology of inclusion framework put forward by Anderson et al. (2014) was conceptually and philosophically developed and is relevant to the conceptualization of inclusive education. However, CSIM is grounded on empirical research findings examining stakeholders' lived experiences and practices with the various systems. It provides the voices of stakeholders on how inclusive education can be improved.

### **THE CSIM MODEL**

The CSIM is grounded on a multifaceted approach to improving the quality of inclusive

education in schools (see Fig. 2). Effective measures are integral not just at the classroom level but all the various levels that play a role in the education of children with special needs. This model also emphasizes the importance of establishing a positive, inclusive culture embedded within the sociocultural context in which these children learn. It underlines that school systems should continuously examine the context in which inclusive education is taking place, as perspectives and needs are dynamic and evolving. No two schools are the same. The micro level (the inclusive classroom) remains at the heart of inclusive education. It should focus on all students and emphasize educational assistants with teachers working collaboratively to meet the needs of all students. Continuous assessment of their needs, competence, and goals should be considered. This model highlights the importance of establishing a positive, inclusive culture embedded within the sociocultural context in which these children learn. For example, the micro level (the inclusive classroom) remains at the heart of inclusive education. It should focus on all students and place greater emphasis on educational assistants, with teachers working collaboratively to meet the needs of all students. Continuous assessment of their needs, competence, and goals should be considered.

Figure 2: The Contextual Systemic Inclusive Education Model (CSIM)



The CSIM model proposes that educational assistants or educational assistants should be at the system’s core, given their vital role in successful inclusive education, rather than having them as part of the support team, as seen in many inclusive frameworks in Canada. This is a key feature not seen in other models and is advanced based on empirical research, which supports the ecology of inclusion of Anderson et al. (2014). Even though Anderson

et al. theorized that support staff should be part of the microsystems, specificity about who they are and the role they should play needs to be added to the ecology of inclusion. This model also proposes that educational assistants should be vital to discussions and decisions about students in inclusive classrooms. It also advances the view that the interaction between home and school (meso-system) takes place across all systems and levels instead of being nested around the micro level (inclusive classroom). It is also imperative that interactions occur with **all** parents, parents of non-disabled peers, and parents of students with SN. They should play a key role in developing and evaluating policies and decisions regarding inclusive education practices.

Additionally, school policies (exo-system) were found to influence inclusive practices in the school directly. Some stakeholders needed to be made aware of the policies guiding how the school supports students in inclusive classrooms. As a result, the CSIM is embracing the notion that sustainable school policies should be developed and transparent to all stakeholders.

Finally, CSIM emphasizes the importance of establishing working relationships with schools and the Ministry of Education to bridge the gap between the macro and exo-systems as well as the mesosystem. Furthermore, the socio-cultural context in which all systems operate must be considered when developing inclusive education policies and implementing inclusive education practices. Ongoing positive attitude building is necessary for successful inclusive education.

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