

Article

# Rethinking Practical Methodologies: The Capability Approach in Conversation with Botho and Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Vocational Education in Botswana

by

Macdelyn Mosalagae  
Lecturer, Dr.  
University of Botswana  
Botswana  
E-mail: mosalagaem@ub.ac.bw

Leslie S. Nthoi  
Emeritus, PhD  
University of Botswana  
Botswana  
E-mail: lnthoi53@gmail.com

---

## Keywords:

Botswana, Botho (Ubuntu), capability approach, inclusion, disabilities, remediation strategies

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31265/hd16c224>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## **Abstract**

The implementation of Botswana's Inclusive Education Policy has encountered numerous inefficiencies and limitations. One of the limitations is the accessibility of vocational institutions to learners with diverse disabilities. In 2012, following the introduction of the Inclusive Education Policy of 2011, the Department of Technical and Vocational Education designated certain brigades (community vocational training centers) and technical colleges to admit learners with different types of disabilities. However, of the 39 vocational institutions, only two enrolled learners with disabilities. While this gesture was significant, existing scholarship in Botswana has primarily focused on policy implementation challenges, with limited attention given to the role of effective methodological strategies in bridging the gap between policy and practice. This study explored practical Afrocentric methodologies that can close the gaps between policy and practice in technical and vocational education.

The paper is a secondary analysis of the empirical findings from a study—*A Capabilities Approach to an African Inclusive Education in Technical Vocational Education Training in Botswana* (2020), which was conducted in two vocational institutions that admitted students with mild intellectual disabilities and hearing impairments. Nineteen one-on-one interviews were conducted from the technical college as well as two interviews with focus groups, each containing seven students drawn from the brigade. Thematic analysis was employed and three themes emerged: resilience, inclusivity, and educational agency. Further interrogation of these three themes revealed a three-way synergy between functionings, inclusive education, and Botho philosophies that was not captured fully in the first analysis.

This re-analysis was undertaken to explore the emergent synergy between the themes, with the aim of refining the methodological lens through which the practical methodologies are understood.

These interwoven values offer a pathway toward educational equity by addressing the capability gaps faced by learners with disabilities. The study indicates that without deliberate instructional and pedagogical support, learners with disabilities risk symbolically 'sitting at the table' without access to the resources that define true

inclusion. The study argues for the strategic integration of the Botho (Ubuntu) philosophy and the capability approach to foster pedagogical innovation and encourage the creative application of assistive teaching technologies and methodologies.

**Keywords:** Botswana, Botho (Ubuntu), capability approach, inclusion, disabilities, remediation strategies

### *About the Authors*

#### *Macdelyn Mosalagae*

Rev. Sr. Dr. Macdelyn Mosalagae serves as a Sister of Calvary and is a Lecturer at the University of Botswana, bringing over thirteen years of extensive experience as a Pedagogical Content Knowledge Specialist. She is the Founder and Director of Calvary Haven - Center of Capabilities and Reformation. Dr. Mosalagae specializes in outcome-based curriculum development, technical vocational education, disabilities, and the capabilities of individuals. She is an independent researcher, publisher, and peer reviewer.

Her educational background encompasses both local (Botswana) and regional studies (South Africa and Zimbabwe), as well as international education (Scotland and Germany). Dr. Mosalagae holds a PhD in Inclusive Education, a Master's degree in Research Policy and Practice, and a Bachelor's degree in Education with a double major in Social Studies and Special Education. She is recognized for her contributions to the establishment of a unit within the Special Needs department in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector.

#### *Leslie S. Nthoi*

Leslie S. Nthoi holds a PhD in social anthropology from the Manchester University(UK). Before joining the University of Botswana as an academic,he worked as a secondary teacher and eventually served as a Secondary School Head in various schools in Botswana.

At the University of Botswana, he was a faculty member in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies for many years. After retiring, Leslie Nthoi pursued and completed a second doctoral degree in Theology at Atlantic International University (AIU).

He has published several books and journal articles on social anthropology and theology. His recent publications include

- The Roman Catholic Theology of Marriage Revisited: An Africanist Perspective (2022)
- Media Portrayal of African Indigenous Healers: Focus on Nollywood (2022)
- Body Hair and the Social Construction of Personhood: A Study of BaKalanga of Northeastern Botswana (2023).

### *Competing Interests*

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

### *Funding*

Neither the authors nor the university received any funding from external agencies.

### *Disclaimer*

The authors bear full responsibility for the findings and content presented in this article. Consequently, the opinions expressed herein are exclusively ours and represent the results of our professional research conducted for this special issue.

## **Introduction**

In Botswana, approximately 4–5% of the student population have a disability (Statistics Botswana, 2022). Their access to education is guided by the Inclusive Education Policy of 2011, which advocates for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream education, where possible, from preschools to vocational colleges and universities (Inclusive Education Policy, 2011). However, participation in mainstream education by these students is very low due to certain barriers. Prominent studies in Botswana have identified several contributing factors, including flawed policy formulation, inadequate resource allocation, weak public engagement strategies, and limited involvement of key stakeholders (Botlhale, 2014; Kaboyakgosi & Marata, 2013; Mosalagae & Bekker, 2021; Nthomang, 2018). Therefore, this study contributes significantly to the academic discourse on policy implementation challenges—a crucial area that has attracted considerable scholarly attention in Botswana. The importance of this research is underscored by the country's complex history, marked by inconsistent government policies and projects, including failure, abandonment, or problematic execution.

While the studies mentioned above provide valuable insights, they often overlook two critical dimensions of policy implementation related to the role of human agency. First, they do not adequately examine how policy outcomes may be influenced by active resistance, sabotage, or derailment by implementers—those tasked with translating policy into practice. Second, they fail to explore how implementers' intentional and strategic use of methodological strategies can positively influence policy success. This study addressed these gaps by highlighting the potential of curriculum and pedagogical strategies employed by implementers to overcome barriers and achieve effective and inclusive policy outcomes. These outcomes include social cohesion, economic empowerment, and reduced unemployment among students with disabilities, particularly if vocational education were to implement inclusive education effectively.

## **Educational and Curriculum Development in Botswana**

Like many developing countries in the Global South, Botswana has committed to excellence in its educational system since gaining independence in 1966. This

unwavering commitment, guided by its evolving national educational policy, has led the country to innovate and adopt effective strategies to enhance the quality of education. Botswana's national education framework, as outlined in the Revised National Policy on Education (RPNE) of 1994, is aligned with global educational philosophies (skill-based learning), trends (contextualized learning), and international protocols (UNESCO's Education for All and Sustainable Development Goal 4). This alignment is not just a formality but a testament to Botswana's aspiration for high educational standards and improved learner outcomes in examinations.

The philosophies of *Kagisano* and *Botho* are deeply intertwined in the development of Botswana's educational policy and curriculum reforms. The first major policy document on education in the postcolonial era was aptly titled Education for Kagisano: *Kagisano ka Thuto*. This title reflects the government's commitment to building a united and socially harmonious nation through education. Kagisano, which means social harmony, has been a guiding principle since the beginning of Botswana's educational reforms following independence. The education system has aimed to promote peaceful coexistence and holistic development throughout its policies and curriculum reforms.

This philosophy ensured that reforms promoted inclusive development. The National Disability Inclusion Initiative advocates for individuals with disabilities to access the general curriculum, particularly those who previously did not have such access (Republic of Botswana, 1994). This access allows for curriculum adaptations tailored to accommodate the specific needs of these students. These adaptations require methodologies that foster individualized instruction to support the potential growth of each learner. In launching Botswana's Inclusive Education Policy in 2012, the Honourable Patrick Masimolole, Assistant Minister of Education and Skills Development, said:

It is evident that new strategies and methods should continue to be explored and adopted to improve current practices and reach out to those still missing in our education system. Against this background, the Ministry/MOESD decided to develop an Inclusive Education Policy. The objective is to close the gaps in the education system to enhance equity pg. 1

Botswana promulgated the Inclusive Education Policy to expand legislation promoting access to the curriculum and to support the ratification of disability laws.

This initiative came after the realization that barriers to the academic success of individuals with disabilities in schools are still prevalent (Díez & Sánchez, 2015; González-Cortés & Roses-Campos, 2016; Moriña et al., 2015). Castellana and Sala (2006) note that one barrier is the use of methodologies that do not allow students to participate fully in the teaching–learning process. They argue that inclusive tools such as cooperative learning, universal design for learning, and differentiated instruction are needed to address this challenge. While inclusive tools seem to offer solutions, policies also need teachers who are able to interpret them effectively, which has been another barrier.

### **Human Agency in Policy Implementation: Focus on Teachers**

Mogale and Malatji (2023) offer a pivotal observation in their study on the challenges of automatic progression in South Africa: ‘Policies do not succeed or fail on their own merits; rather, their progress is dependent upon the process of implementation.’ Since implementation is inherently a human activity, it is critical to examine the attitudes, commitments, and professional competencies of key stakeholders, particularly teachers, who are responsible for executing policy objectives and providing the necessary remediation to bridge learners’ capabilities, learning, and content gaps.

This section foregrounds the role of human agency in educational policy implementation. While resistance or disengagement from implementers can undermine a policy’s success, active and engaged participation can significantly enhance its outcomes. Teachers are central to this dynamic. As Fullan (2007) notes, few educational policies succeed without the active involvement of teachers. Far from being passive recipients of policy directives, teachers interpret, adapt, and implement policies based on their professional judgments and within the unique contexts of their classrooms and schools. As implementers, teachers bridge the gap between policy intentions and the realities of the classroom. For example, in implementing inclusive education, teachers must be flexible and empathetic—qualities that are essential to the nature of an inclusive education.

The importance of teacher agency is well documented in literature. According to Biesta et al. (2015), teacher agency is shaped by both individual professional experience and the environments in which educators operate, influencing their capacity to act purposefully as agents of change. Teachers often initiate bottom-up reforms, tailoring national policies to fit local contexts. For example, Vandeyar (2021) shows how South African teachers appropriated national ICT policies, transforming them to suit their school environments and thus acting as proactive socio-cultural agents. Similarly, Makoelle (2018) highlights how, despite limited resources, teachers in rural South African schools showed remarkable commitment to implementing inclusive education practices. These findings are echoed by Nguyen (2023), who illustrates how Vietnamese teachers adjusted English-medium instruction policies to align with their classroom realities.

While Mogale and Malatji's (2023) study focuses on automatic progression, it offers valuable theoretical insights into human agency. The authors identify negative teacher attitudes and resistance—not policy flaws—as major barriers to successful implementation. This resistance often results in inadequate curriculum support—a point echoed in their earlier work with Modipane (2021), which attributes the policy's failure to 'negative teacher attitudes.' They argue that the absence of contextualized methodologies to address learning and content gaps poses a greater threat to educational quality than the policy itself. Similar findings are reported by Mwandu and Kabeta (2024) in Zambia's Copperbelt region, where teachers were either unwilling or unable to devise effective support strategies to enhance student performance. These studies reinforce the view that the success of a policy depends not only on its design but also on the professional commitment and expertise of its implementers (Makwinja, 2017).

A second insight comes from Mokgwathi et al. (2018), who argue that teacher agency manifests most clearly through the use of targeted remediation strategies that enhance student learning outcomes. Their research highlights the importance of tailored pedagogical interventions in ensuring that policies do not merely exist in theory but translate into meaningful educational experiences for learners. Mogale and Malatji (2023) refer to this process as a mandatory element of students' curriculum support. This concept is a necessary component of remediation strategies

through which teachers mitigate the capability and learning gaps that may adversely affect learners' academic performance. These concepts can be more effective when policy implementation goes hand in hand with critical pedagogical innovations and creative use of available resources. These innovative strategies may include lowering the teacher–learner ratio, reducing class sizes, applying universal design for learning, using differentiated instruction, and providing specialized attention and support for learners with disabilities (Felicia, 2026).

Finally, Mogale and Malatji (2023) introduce the concept of a priori knowledge—teachers' existing understanding of their learners' needs—as crucial to effective support. In the case of automatic progression, this knowledge helps teachers address articulation gaps as students transition from primary to secondary school. In the context of this study, a priori knowledge involves an awareness of learners' disabilities, enabling teachers to customize support strategies as part of a broader, individualized remediation approach.

Taken together, these insights emphasize the need to view teachers not only as policy implementers but as critical actors whose agency, knowledge, and professional capacity are essential to educational reform. Accordingly, this study calls for greater emphasis on capacitating teachers and developing strategic methodologies that empower them to support learners more effectively within inclusive educational frameworks. Inclusive education policy, just like other policies, is developed at national levels and cascaded into institutional practices; however, it is actualized and shaped by the teachers' daily routines and decisions in the classroom.

Emphasizing Lipsky's (2010) notion of 'policy as practice' underscores the pivotal role of teachers as street-level bureaucrats. We corroborate Lipsky's (2010) argument because, by accommodating the diverse needs of learners in inclusive classrooms and modifying their lesson plans, teachers turn the intentions of the policy into reality. Our argument lies in the fact that judging the success of inclusive policy only by how it is designed excludes the importance of supporting teachers in their discretionary practices. Being street-level bureaucrats highlights that inclusive education policy is enacted through teachers' pedagogical choices. Thus, if teachers are to use their discretion effectively, there has to be some form of philosophical and pedagogical

coherence underpinning their foundation. We are of the view that without such a foundation, inclusive policy runs the risk of being implemented through fragmented strategies and methodologies. Hence, there is a need to explore the philosophical and pedagogical foundations, which is discussed in the next section.

## **The Search for a Philosophical and Pedagogical Foundation for Strategies and Methodologies**

The previous section addressed the importance of human agency in the success or failure of educational policy implementation. A key observation from this discussion is Mogale and Malatji's (2023) statement that 'policies do not succeed or fail on their own merits; rather, their progress is dependent upon the process of implementation.' This idea aligns with the argument made by Biesta et al. (2015) that teachers play a crucial role in this dynamic.

The literature reviewed above does not identify or define the philosophical and pedagogical foundation of methodologies that ultimately enhance a seamless implementation process. Establishing such a foundation is essential for ensuring the delivery of an equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education to all learners, including those with disabilities. This section focuses on this gap and justifies the collaborative research we undertook. We aimed to generate appropriate data to assist in identifying and defining an underlying philosophical and pedagogical basis for appropriate curriculum support strategies in Botswana's inclusive schools. This goal was envisaged to be achieved through the assistance of an evaluative framework that champions the need for individual freedoms in decision-making (Walker & Unterhalter, 2013).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The initial study was grounded in the capability approach as articulated by Amartya Sen (1985)—a moral and normative framework concerned with individual well-being and the real opportunities that people have to achieve it. Central to this approach is the question: What inputs—such as policies and methodologies—expand the real freedoms and opportunities (capabilities) of individuals, particularly students with disabilities?

The capability approach evaluates educational interventions based not merely on access but on how effectively they enable individuals to function and flourish. As Walker and Unterhalter (2007) note, the framework ‘stresses that actions should be judged by their effects on individual human beings.’ In this study, the capability approach served to assess how vocational education programs influence the well-being and functioning of students with disabilities. This was consistent with Slee’s (2011) call for a re-conceptualization of the curriculum to move beyond its traditional constraints and toward inclusivity.

The framework also aligned with Hart’s (2012) view that the capability approach has transformative potential in shaping community strategies aimed at helping the next generation to lead flourishing lives. Given its moral orientation and focus on personal development, the approach was particularly well-suited for examining the educational experiences of learners with disabilities in Botswana’s inclusive vocational education system. The re-analysis returned to the data with renewed attention to the dimensions of methodologies and relationality within the Capability Approach, building upon a broader study by Mosalagae (2020).

## **Research Problem Statement**

Methodologies in vocational education remain insufficiently contextualized and underdeveloped, resulting in the exclusion of students with disabilities from capability development. Despite Botswana’s rich cultural values rooted in Botho philosophies (humanness, solidarity, and equity), this population still faces systematic barriers. Current methodologies used in the Botswana Technical Vocational Education Programme (BTEP) fail to translate the intentions of the Inclusive Education Policy into practice. As a result, students with disabilities are ultimately socially excluded and underrepresented in vocational education, and experience higher unemployment rates.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Despite Botswana’s progressive policies, there has been limited scholarly focus on the role of pedagogical interventions and methodologies in addressing problematic

educational policies. Similarly, little attention has been paid to how theoretical frameworks from diverse disciplines intersect to address the educational needs of students who are Deaf and those with mild intellectual disabilities in vocational education.

This paper argues that there is an urgent need for curriculum reform that creates environments in which these learners can identify, explore, and develop their latent talents. To address this gap, the paper interrogates the findings of Mosalagae's (2020) study and investigates how the capability approach, Botho philosophy, and inclusive education values can serve as methodological strategies to rethink, reform, and transform Botswana's education system in ways that promote equity and quality.

### ***Research Objectives***

The paper asks how integrating pedagogical methodologies grounded in inclusive philosophies can foster the genuine inclusion of learners with disabilities in Botswana's public Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system through the following objectives:

- Identify appropriate remediation strategies and pedagogical methodologies that emerge from the interplay between three theoretical frameworks—the capability approach, the sociological concept of disability, and the philosophy of Botho.
- Investigate how these frameworks can be pragmatically adapted to enhance the educational experiences of students who are Deaf and those with mild intellectual disabilities within inclusive vocational education settings.

### **Main Research Question**

How can the capability approach, the African philosophy of Botho (Ubuntu), and the principles of inclusive education synergistically inform context-specific methodologies in vocational education for students who are Deaf and those with mild intellectual disabilities?

## **Sub-Questions**

1. To what extent can effective methodological strategies enhance the genuine inclusion of learners with disabilities in inclusive learning environments, thereby ensuring equitable, inclusive, and high-quality education for all?
2. How can the values of inclusive education be integrated into teaching methodologies to support the capabilities of vocational education students who are Deaf or have mild intellectual disabilities?
3. In what ways do inclusive teaching methodologies impact the overall functioning and capabilities of Deaf students and those with mild intellectual disabilities in vocational education?

## **Significance of the Study**

Although our study contributes to the academic discussion on policy implementation challenges in Botswana, with specific reference to inclusive education, we highlight two issues: the role of human agency in educational policy implementation, and the need for a philosophical and pedagogical basis for curriculum support processes that ensure genuine inclusion of learners with disabilities. The study also informs vocational institutions, policymakers, and educators on how to design empowering environments through realistic and practical teaching strategies.

## **Research Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, which was deemed appropriate due to the interpretive nature of inclusive education research. As Lindsay (2007) argues, inclusive education is not inherently scientific or experimental; therefore, quantitative approaches, which rely on standardized measurements, are often insufficient to capture the complexity of educational realities within their natural institutional settings (Nind et al., 2004).

The present paper builds upon broader findings from a larger research project and aims to deepen that analysis by focusing on specific non-statistical outcomes. This

approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and the values underlying educational practices for students with disabilities.

## **Study Setting**

The study was conducted in two vocational education institutions catering to students with mild intellectual disabilities and Deaf students in Botswana. The institutions represent two districts: one located in the Southeast within an urban city, and the other situated in the Central district in a rural village. The two institutions differ in type. One is a technical college, and technical colleges in Botswana are typically large institutions located in urban or densely populated areas (Mupimpila & Narayana, 2009). Technical colleges offer professional and technician programs. The other institution is a brigade center—a small community-based school offering vocational education at the semi-skilled level, and producing artisans and apprentices (Mupimpila & Narayana, 2009). Both are vocational institutions.

These two institutions were selected as they were the only institutions offering vocational education to students with disabilities in Botswana. The urban technical college admitted students with mild intellectual disabilities, and the rural brigade center enrolled Deaf learners. These two disability groups warranted focused research because they face systematic barriers to inclusion. For example, of the 39 TVET institutions in Botswana, only one technical college and one brigade offer accessible opportunities for these learners. Similar studies in South Africa (Mutanga & Walker, 2017) and Zimbabwe (Chataika & McKenzie, 2013) also indicate that Deaf and intellectually disabled learners are often excluded from vocational education pathways.

## **Study Participants and Sampling Strategy**

The study adopted a purposive, context-specific sampling approach. Participants consisted of 24 students: 14 were Deaf (eight females and six males) and 10 had mild intellectual disabilities (five males and five females).

The first group consisted of both currently enrolled and graduated students. Of the currently enrolled students in the technical college, 10 students matched our

selection criteria. These participants were chosen because the technical college specifically admits students with mild intellectual disabilities. A characteristic list was used to further refine the sample, based on the students' ability to understand both Setswana and English, their ability to communicate well, their chronological age being between 18 and 23 years, and their program of study.

In the brigade center, 14 students with hearing impairment were selected, as this institution admits learners with this specific disability. All were selected for a focus group based on the following criteria: unaided pure tone average of 20 db hearing level, and ability to use basic sign language or augmentative system of language or oral language.

All participants were provided with an information letter outlining the study's objectives. For student participants, especially those categorized as a vulnerable population, informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly observed throughout the study. For Deaf students, a sign language interpreter from their institution assisted by translating the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and the wishes of those who declined to be recorded were fully respected.

## **Data Collection Instruments**

In alignment with the study's qualitative orientation, data were collected through interviews and document reviews, consistent with Creswell's (2013, 2014) recommendations. Two focus group interviews were held with fourteen students in groups of seven each with Deaf students due to the availability of only one sign language interpreter. Nineteen one-on-one interviews were conducted with students with mild intellectual disabilities to accommodate their individual communication needs. Depending on the personalities of individuals (introverts and extroverts), the interviews lasted for between 40 and 60 minutes. I took cognizance of the fact that the students might have difficulties reading the protocols; therefore, they were taken through the information word for word. Once they confirmed that they had understood, they were given the consent forms. Interviews were conducted in the first language (Setswana), as most learners were not conversant with English. I engaged

an independent person who was not familiar with the study to translate the questions into Setswana. This helped me to check whether the meanings and intentions of the questions were aligned with the original English questions. Secondary data were also obtained through the review of relevant policy documents, particularly from the Ministry of Education's repository.

### *Rigor*

In the broader study, credibility was attained through a thorough literature review so that I could account for intricate identifiable aspects of the data that could be understood by anyone outside the research. The literature review also aided in giving meanings for ambiguous data that could not be interpreted in isolation. To ascertain dependability, I used a criterion checklist for the selection of participants, interview guides, and schedules to ensure consistency (Mosalagae, 2020).

Field notes were documented, as well as the processes of data collection and analysis. These were used as an audit trail. For example, semi-structured questionnaires were given to the same sets of students who had also participated in one-on-one interviews and focus groups. The same questions were worded differently and presented on a Likert scale to enable triangulation. Employing these measures corroborated Patton's (2014) opinion that dependability entails documenting research processes in detail and subjecting the documents to scrutiny. For this present study, analytic memos and coding adjustments were documented to ensure transparency and rigor.

### **Ethical Considerations**

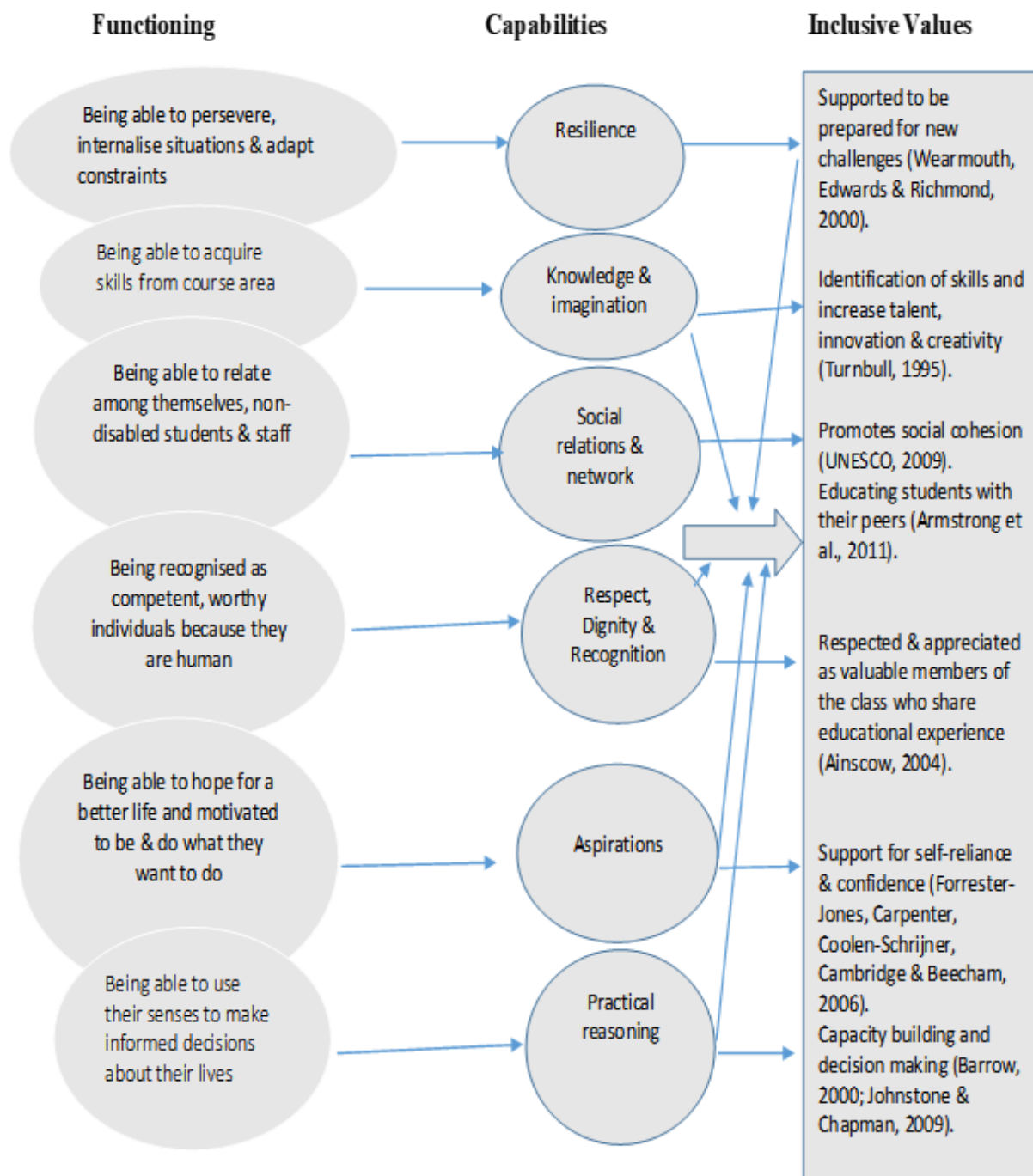
This study utilized secondary data from a previous research project that had been conducted by one of the authors. As such, formal research approval was not required for the current analysis. However, full acknowledgment of the original data's ownership was provided. The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were preserved in accordance with the ethical standards established in the earlier study (Cheong et al., 2023). No individual names from the original data set are disclosed in this paper. The analysis adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure integrity and respect throughout the reflective process.

## **Data Analysis**

Data from the larger study were analyzed using the capability approach's analytical lens, focusing on indicators of capabilities, functionings, and conversion factors. The analysis followed a systematic process involving coding and thematic identification, from which several interpretive claims were constructed. The process of the re-analysis involved revisiting coded data, applying a thematic synthesis, and identifying intersections where themes converged to produce new insights. Thematic synthesis allowed the author to revisit themes that emerged and assisted in exploring overlaps, which ultimately identified the synergistic relationship that emerged. First, the original data were re-coded, and descriptive themes were then developed and analytical themes emerged. The analytical themes were then refined into categories and new relationships appeared.

This paper continues that line of inquiry by theoretically analyzing how the frameworks outlined below collectively inform pedagogical strategies to maximize opportunities for learners to thrive in inclusive settings. We aimed to demonstrate how remediation strategies and methodologies grounded in a strong philosophical foundation, derived from the interaction of diverse theoretical frameworks, can foster an inclusive educational environment where all learners can thrive, including those with disabilities. The relationship that was established between functioning, capabilities, and inclusive values can effectively inform teaching methodologies for students with disabilities. Figure 1 below shows the alignment of the three frameworks.

Figure 1: The Relationship Between the Capability Approach, Botho, and Inclusive Education Values. Adapted from Mosalagae (2020)



## Comparison Result

The contribution of this paper is the comparative analysis of the values underlying the three theoretical frameworks—the capability approach, Botho philosophy, and inclusive education. We discuss the interdisciplinary findings in greater depth to expand their relations and answer the research questions. The comparison demonstrates that meaning is co-constructed through relational dynamics. The

difference between the original findings and the re-analysis lies in the analytic lens applied. Whereas the first analysis emphasized thematic separation, the re-analysis illuminated thematic convergence. This shift does not contradict the original findings but extends them, offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The synergistic relationship substantiates a methodological orientation that privileges relationality and interconnectedness, thereby advancing both empirical insight and theoretical justification.

### ***Botho Principles***

At the heart of Botho is the belief in collective well-being and the interconnectedness of humanity (Ramose, 1999). Principles such as communalism, empathy, community support, and co-dependence reinforce values that are aligned with inclusive education—acceptance, respect, and dignity—as echoed in the capability approach (Mosalagae, 2020). These insights have curricular and pedagogical implications. Educators are encouraged to critically reflect on their teaching practices: *Do classroom activities respect and reflect the cultural and cognitive diversity of learners?* Community-driven methodologies, such as cooperative learning and group-based activities, foster shared responsibility and a sense of belonging.

Inclusive practices, grounded in Botho, support social and emotional well-being (Robeyns, 2017), while the capability approach affirms that well-being is defined by students' freedom to engage (Terzi, 2007; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). A communal ethos in education promotes shared achievement, mutual respect, and collaborative learning, all of which are key to dismantling structural barriers.

### ***Inclusive Education***

Slee (2001) defines inclusive education as ensuring meaningful participation for all learners. The principles of integration, heterogeneity, and social justice are central to this aim and resonate with both Botho (Ramose, 1999) and the capability approach (Robeyns, 2017). Terzi (2008) emphasizes that disability should be understood as the interaction between personal traits and environmental factors—advancing a theory of justice rooted in equal opportunity (Reindal, 2009). This calls for curriculum developers to ask critical questions: *Is the curriculum flexible enough to*

*accommodate learner diversity? Are schools fostering a true sense of belonging, particularly for students with disabilities?*

Adaptive pedagogies, such as differentiation (Tomlinson, 2000, 2004), recognize learners' varying levels of readiness, interests, and needs. Differentiation aligns with the capability approach, which emphasizes expanding real freedoms and valued functionings (Terzi, 2007).

Assistive technologies also play a vital role, offering students alternative ways to access and engage with content. Curriculum planners must assess what technologies are needed to bridge functional limitations.

Visual learning strategies, such as diagrammatic representations, further enhance engagement, support diverse learning styles, and foster agency. These practices collectively advance inclusive values and capabilities while reducing exclusion.

### ***Capability Elements***

The capability approach, anchored in the work of Sen (1985), Nussbaum (2011), and Terzi (2007), frames education as a means of expanding potentialities (capabilities) and real achievements (functionings). In this analysis, *knowledge*, *imagination*, and *aspiration* correspond with inclusive values such as self-reliance and talent development, as well as *Botho* principles of communal support and social development (Mosalagae, 2020). Schools therefore have a critical role in shaping the conditions that enable learners to act with agency. Teachers must actively identify and create environments that promote engagement, expression, and application. This includes fostering peer collaboration, individualized support, and student autonomy—core elements that enable inclusive, capability-expanding practices.

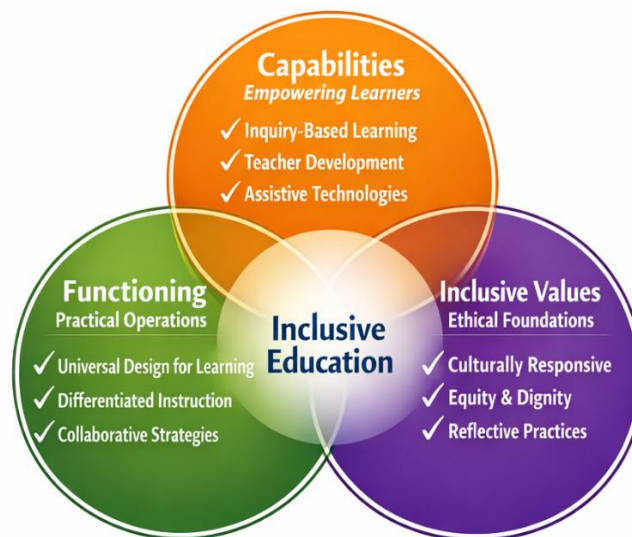
As Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016, p. 132) argue, 'capabilities can be applied in education to guide inclusive practices' that foster both well-being and academic success. The social model of disability supports this by rejecting the 'one-size-fits-all' paradigm and advocating for responsive, difference-conscious educational environments. This educational environment not only means the physical

environment but also classroom methods and pedagogies that are inclusive and empower capabilities.

## Presentation of Themes

The results from this secondary data analysis, where we revisited the original data, uncovered deeper insights within the identified themes. The interplay between the three values generated new findings and three new themes emerged: i) empowering learners, ii) practical operations, and iii) ethical foundation, which are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Inclusive methodologies. AI image generated 28 March 2026



### *Theme 1. Empowering Learners*

Capabilities are the real freedoms and opportunities that individuals must achieve and valued (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). This asks the question whether students with disabilities can convert the acquired capabilities into their real lives. For students with mild intellectual disabilities, empowerment means enabling students to make decisions about their vocational pathways and how they want to learn. Furthermore, empowerment entails supportive structures that allow students to use their abilities

meaningfully. Empowerment relates not only to academics but also to social participation, where learners with mild intellectual disabilities are able to be included in employment, peer groups, or community participation. For Deaf students, the empowerment of learners relates to educational justice, where Deaf learners have the same educational opportunities and can pursue the same functioning as their hearing classmates—not only that, but also cultural recognition where diversity is respected and celebrated. Empowerment means valuing Deaf culture and identity. In practice, a learner is empowered when they can choose and achieve valued outcomes—whether that is mastering a vocational skill, participating in social life, or pursuing higher education.

### *Theme 2. Practical Operations*

Practical operations refers to institutional practices that aid inclusion. These are the mechanism strategies that enable learners to have accessible opportunities—in other words, strategies and supports to actualize learners' functioning. For example, for a learner with mild intellectual disability, capability is to attain vocational independence. In order to achieve this practical operation, their training would need to be structured, teachers and parents would need to collaborate, and learners would need to have peer support. By doing so, they have functionings which will be when they are successfully performing the task and can secure employment. For a Deaf learner, practical operation means when the institutions provide a sign language interpreter and captioned materials. Functioning will be their active participation, gaining confidence, and ultimately making academic progress. In short, capabilities are the freedoms, practical operations are the enablers, and functionings are the achievements. For learners with intellectual disabilities and Deaf learners, empowerment comes when practical operations expand their capability set, allowing them to achieve valued functionings in education and society. For example, learners with mild intellectual disabilities talk of interventions such as peer mentoring and differentiated instructions, and Deaf learners express a desire to have a sign language interpreter.

### ***Theme 3. Ethical Foundations***

As the capabilities approach is a moral framework (Sen, 1999), it is not concerned with looking only at outcome and opportunities but also at how those opportunities are made real for learners. Therefore, for inclusion to be realized, learners need to be looked at from human perspective first that the deficits in them. Therefore, ethical foundations encompass human dignity, respect for diversity, and fairness, and all these values translate to recognizing intellectual disability and Deafness not as 'problems to fix' but as part of human variation. Ethical foundations mean respecting the pace at which each learner learns and the kind of strategies and methods that are appropriate for them. For example, for the learner with a mild intellectual disability, this means respecting their right to learn by being empowered and supported to learn independently and participate in peer groups, and to transition to employment. The ethical foundation applied to Deaf learners means respecting their linguistic rights and deaf culture. Deaf students are empowered to participate fully when interpreters are present to allow communication access in all learning contexts. In this way, the capability approach integrates ethical foundations with inclusive values to create a coherent framework whereby capabilities represent the real freedoms that learners should enjoy, practical operations enact those freedoms, and functionings reflect the lived achievements of empowered learners.

### **Discussion**

Each value is analyzed and discussed to highlight methodologies that TVET can employ to promote participation for learners with disabilities.

### ***Functioning—Practical Operations***

Vocational education programs, especially in technical colleges, follow the BTEP, which is prescribed, rigid, and limited in flexibility. For learners with disabilities in inclusive settings, this rigidity becomes a challenge. The circle above shows methods such as universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, and collaborative strategies. This calls for TVET to develop multiple pathways, such as oral presentations and simulations, to demonstrate competence. Collaborative strategies ensure that individual learners' strengths, such as creativity or theoretical aptitude, are recognized and supported by peers. The implication for TVET is that a 'one-size-

fits-all' curriculum is exclusive, does not meet the needs of learners with disabilities, and needs to be changed.

### ***Capabilities—Empowering Learners***

The capability approach emphasizes what learners are able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). The circle highlights methods such as enquiry-based learning and assistive technologies, which can help learners to solve real-world vocational problems—for example, students pursuing carpentry may be able to solve a community school problem by repairing school desks. The use of assistive technologies means that TVET should incorporate modern and relevant technologies. Examples include adaptive machinery to ensure wider access for learners with different needs, or sign language-integrated interfaces for Deaf learners. The implication for TVET is that vocational education should not only equip learners with technical skills but also empower them with adaptability and problem-solving skills, preparing them for diverse workplaces.

### ***Inclusive Values***

The circle anchors methodologies such as reflective practices, culturally responsive pedagogies, and equity and dignity (Slee, 2022). For example, culturally responsive pedagogy calls on TVET to address the needs of the local community and industries or markets—in a rural brigade, TVET should align its programmes with local community needs or suitable industries. One example could be the teaching of food preservation (e.g., of mopane worms, a local delicacy) within rural brigades. The implication for TVET is that its policies must embed dignity and cultural relevance to ensure a sense of belonging and dignity, rather than focusing only on skills acquisition.

### **Concluding Observations**

The comparative analysis of the capability approach, Botho, and inclusive education highlights strategic and philosophical synergies. These frameworks collectively speak to the need for adaptive, human-centered, and justice-oriented pedagogies. They offer insight into how to restructure inclusive vocational education to better serve students who are Deaf or have mild intellectual disabilities.

In addressing the research question, this section affirms that these theoretical relationships provide a valuable foundation for transforming educational experiences and outcomes for marginalized learners. Remediation strategies from this broad philosophy will enhance all students' learning experiences and outcomes. As the primary implementers of educational policies, teachers must be willing to create innovative pedagogical practices that draw their impetus from the underlying philosophy outlined above. Effective implementation goes hand in hand with critical pedagogical innovations and the creative use of available resources. Botswana can deliver equity, genuine inclusion, and high-quality education for all through strategic collaborative partnerships between the government and teachers.

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between functioning, capabilities, and inclusive values, particularly in the context of methodologies for teaching students with disabilities. The study's findings indicate that these areas are interconnected, thus corroborating the findings of a similar study conducted by Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016). Therefore, the interdisciplinary contributions identified in the primary research have proven significant. Additionally, although we did not intentionally design the questions to triangulate the primary data, unexpected triangulation occurred. The analysis revealed that students' capabilities were enhanced through attendance at TVET programs. Similar indicators of enhanced capabilities were found in the secondary data, underscoring the importance of triangulation in research.

## **Recommendations**

The results from the analysis indicate that strengthening teacher agency through capability- and Botho-aligned strategies can bridge policy–practice gaps in Botswana's TVET system. Therefore, we recommend the following.

- Technical colleges and brigades should have program advisory committees (PACs) that are instrumental in informing program development and the curriculum development group. We therefore recommend professional learning communities (PLCs) in which lecturers can co-design inclusive

strategies, thereby fostering ownership of the curriculum and strengthening their agency.

- Lecturers should receive training that equips them with Botho principles to integrate into classroom cultures. Such culturally sensitive reforms align with Botho strategies.
- The rigidity of the TVET curriculum and assessment, as discussed earlier, needs revision. Thus, we recommend that there should be multiple ways of expressing outcomes that are tailor-made for the Deaf and intellectually disabled students. By doing so, students will have the freedom to demonstrate their competencies, thus aligning with the capability approach.
- Inclusive education policy in TVET remains limited in practice, as students with mild intellectual disabilities and Deaf students are often excluded from mainstream education. This creates a disconnect between policy and reality. We recommend that TVET operational guidelines should be aligned with national inclusive policy to close the policy–practice gap.

This paper has examined the intersection between the capability approach, Botho philosophy, and inclusive education as a basis for rethinking educational methodologies for learners who are Deaf and those with mild intellectual disabilities in Botswana's vocational education system. Central to this analysis is the role of human agency, particularly that of teachers, in shaping the outcomes of educational policy implementation.

Regardless of their merit, educational policies depend on the commitment, interpretation, and professional action of their implementers. As central agents of educational transformation, teachers are uniquely positioned to bring inclusive policies to life. Their agency is expressed not only in delivering curriculum content but also in designing inclusive learning environments that respect, engage, and empower all learners.

To effectively nurture the latent capabilities of students with disabilities, teachers must take deliberate action to identify, support, and develop each learner's potential. This begins with understanding learners' individual strengths, barriers, and aspirations. Teachers must create adaptive and differentiated learning experiences that reflect the heterogeneity of their classrooms and promote equitable participation. This includes the use of assistive technologies, personalized instructional strategies, and community-driven practices that align with inclusive values and the principles of Botho.

Moreover, teachers must become reflective practitioners, constantly evaluating whether their pedagogical choices foster social justice, respect diversity, and expand the real freedoms that learners have reason to value. They must advocate curriculum reforms that prioritize functionings over conformity, and recognize that education is not merely about academic success but also about human flourishing.

Ultimately, the success of inclusive education depends not only on well-designed policies but on the moral and professional agency of teachers who commit to transforming their classrooms into spaces of dignity, belonging, and possibility. By recognizing and cultivating the capabilities of all learners, regardless of disability, teachers act as the bridge between policy intent and educational justice.

## References

- , G., Priestley, M. & Robinson, S. (2015). The role of beliefs in teacher agency. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 21(6), 624–640.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325>
- Botlhale, E. (2014). The case for gender mainstreaming Botswana's privatisation process. *Development Southern Africa*, 31(6), 812–825.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2014.951989>
- Castellana, M. & Sala, I. (2006). The inclusion of students with disabilities in the university. A challenge for Spanish universities in the new European Higher Education Area. *Journal of Psychology, Education and Sports Sciences*, 18, 209–228.
- Chataika, T. & McKenzie, J. (2013). Inclusive education in Southern Africa: Policy and practice. In L. Florian (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of special education* (pp. 221–233). Sage.
- Cheong, H., Lyons, A., Houghton, R. & Majumdar, A. (2023). Secondary qualitative research methodology using online data within the context of social sciences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231180160>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Pearson.
- Dalkilic, M. & Vadeboncoeur, J. A. (2016). Re-framing inclusive education through the capability approach: An elaboration of the model of relational inclusion. *Global Education Review*, 3(3), 122–137.
- Díez, E. & Sánchez, S. (2015). Universal design for learning as a teaching methodology to address diversity in the university. *Aula Abierta*, 43(1), 87–93.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aula.2014.12.002>
- Felicia, G. (2026). *Inclusive education strategies: Empowering learners with disabilities*. Dyslexic Help. <https://dyslexichelp.org/what-strategies-do-you-use-to-include-learners-with-disabilities/>
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

- González-Cortés, E. & Roses-Campos, S. (2016). Invisible barriers? Attitudes of university students toward their peers with disabilities. *Revista Complutense de Educación*, 27(1), 57–74. [https://doi.org/10.5209/rev\\_RCED.2016.v27.n1.45702](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_RCED.2016.v27.n1.45702)
- Hart, C. S. (2012). *Aspirations, education and social justice—Applying Sen and Bourdieu*. Bloomsbury.
- Kaboyakgosi, G. & Marata, K., P., (2013). An analysis of Botswana's implementation challenges. *PULA: Botswana Journal of African Studies*, 27(2), 310-324. <https://journals.ub.bw/index.php/pula/article/view/529>
- Lindsay, G. (2007). Annual review: Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709906X156881>
- Lipsky, M. (2010). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services* (30th anniversary expanded edition). Russell Sage Foundation.
- Makoelle, T. M. (2018). *Inclusive teaching in South Africa*. African Sun Media.
- Makwinja, V. M. (2017). Rethinking education in Botswana: A need to overhaul the Botswana education system. *Journal of International Education Research*, 13(2), 45-58. <https://doi.org/10.19030/jier.v13i2.10075>
- Microsoft Copilot. (2026). *Three-synergy Venn diagram for inclusive education* [AI-generated image]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com>
- Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoEDS). (2013). *Inclusive Education Policy (2011)*. Gaborone: Government Printers
- Mogale, M. L. & Malatji, K. S. (2023). Conceptualizing learner progression policy and practice: Towards a curriculum support model in South African schools. *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 9(2), 89–101.
- Mokgwathi, T. S., Mogotsi, B. M. & Otlhomile, B. E. (2018). Using reading and writing Lab to remediate effects of automatic progression: A case study. In *12<sup>th</sup> Annual RASA Conference: Literacy and Inclusivity* (p. 28). Unisa
- Moriña, A., Cortés, M. D. & Molina, V. M. (2015). What if we could imagine the ideal faculty? Proposals for improvement by university students with disabilities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 91–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.09.008>
- Mosalagae, M. (2020). *A capabilities approach to an African inclusive education in technical vocational education in Botswana* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of the Witwatersrand.

- <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/b5c9bbbed-4956-49cf-811c-5a758ca9962e/content>
- Mosalagae, M. & Bekker, T. L. (2021). Education of students with intellectual disabilities at Technical Vocational Education and Training institutions in Botswana: Inclusion or exclusion?. *African journal of disability*, 10, 790. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v10i0.790>
- Mupimpila, C. & Narayana, N. (2009). The role of vocational education and technical training in economic growth: a case of Botswana. *International Journal of Education Economics and Development*, 1(1), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEED.2009.028935>
- Mutanga, O. & Walker, M. (2017). Exploring experiences of students with disabilities in South African higher education: A capabilities approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(8), 1358–1374.
- Mwandu, D. K. & Kabeta, R. M. (2024) The effects of 100% grade seven progression rate. Policy on learners in secondary schools in Kitwe District, Zambia. *Mulungushi University Multidisciplinary Journal*, 5(1), 37–50. <https://research.mu.ac.zm/research/index.php/mu/article/view/150>
- Nind, M., Benjamin, S., Sheehy, K., Collins, J. & Hall, K. (2004). Methodological challenges in researching inclusive school cultures. *Educational Review*, 56(3), 260–269. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013191042000201172>
- Nthomang, K. (2018). Botswana's Ipelegeng programme design and implementation: Reduction or perpetuation/entrenchment of poverty. *Asian Journal of Social Science Studies*, 3(3), 27–38. <https://doi.org/10.20849/ajsss.v3i3.445>
- Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating capabilities*. The Belknap Press. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674061200>
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: integrating theory and practice*. Sage.
- Ramose, M. B. (1999). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books.
- Reindal, S. M. (2009). Disability, capability, and special education: Towards a capability-based theory. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 24(2), 155–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856250902793610>
- Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice. The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0130>

- Sen, A. K. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *Journal of Philosophy*, 82(4), 169–221. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2026184>
- Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Knopf
- Slee, R. (2001). 'Inclusion in practice': Does practise make perfect? *Educational Review*, 53(2), 113–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910120055543>
- Slee, R. (2011). *The Irregular School*. Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203831564>
- Slee, R. (2022). *Ethics and inclusive education. Inclusive learning and educational equity*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-97435-0>
- Statistics Botswana. (2022). *Education Statistics 2012*.  
<https://www.statsbots.org.bw/education-statistics-2012>
- Terzi, L. (2007). Capability and educational equality: The just distribution of resources to students with disabilities and special educational needs. *Journal of Philosophy in Education*, 41(4), 757–773. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9752.2007.00589.x>
- Terzi, L. (2008). *Justice and equality in education: A capability perspective on disability and special educational needs*. Continuum.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2000). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2004). Differentiation in diverse settings. *School Administrator*, 61(7), 28–33.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243278.locale=en>
- Vandeyar, S. (2021). Born-free learner identities: Changing teacher beliefs to initiate appropriate educational change. *South African Journal of Education*, 41(Suppl. 2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41ns2a2106>
- Walker, M. & Unterhalter, E. (2007). The capability approach: Its potential for work in education. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice education* (pp. 1-18). Palgrave Macmillan.  
[https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604810\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604810_1)