

**Bongani Motsa**

# Teachers' Strategies in including Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Mainstream Schools in Eswatini

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**TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN INCLUDING LEARNERS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS IN  
MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS IN ESWATINI**

BY

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A PROJECT SUBMITTED

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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OF

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EDUCATION RESEARCH AND STATISTICS

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter discussed the background of Autism spectrum disorder. The statement of the problem which led to this study is also briefly stated. Also, the purpose of the study, research objectives and research questions, scope of the study and the significance of the study has been highlighted. The definitions of important terms, limitations and delimitations of the study have also been included.

#### 1.1 Background and setting

Eswatini (Former Swaziland) is one of the smallest countries in Africa with 1.2 million people, with a population inhabiting 17364 KM<sup>2</sup>. The prevalence of ASD in 2017 reached 0.43% as asserted by (TME Education 2022). Although that does not imply that it is Eswatini only who suffers from Autism. The data that has been aforementioned reflects the society attitude towards ASD. Therefore their negative perception may results to insufficient communication in legislative, medical and even at educational level. What is happening in the country has triggered the current study to bring full awareness especially in the educational fraternity. Targeting the youth at grass root level as well as teachers who lack the expertise will be fully be oriented through this study. Many parents in Eswatini still are not fully oriented on ASD henceforth still do not admit that their children might be suffering from ASD (TME Education, 2022).

According to Dlamini (2022), the Kingdom of Eswatini, which is located in the southern African region, there is a need to build capacity in autism spectrum disorder (ASD) among social services, health and educational personnel, the government and society at large. Persons living with ASD and their families face multiple challenges and vulnerabilities owing to a lack of knowledge and an insufficiently responsive system of support. At the family level, ASD has been misunderstood as “kutsakatsa” (the use of witchcraft on someone), whereas at the community level, it has been labeled as a “bad omen” (p 2).

With reference to Centres for Diseases Control & Preventions (2022), ASD is developmental disability caused by differences in the brain. So spectrum means many disorders or variety of impairments. Some individuals with ASD have known differences like genetic condition.

Scientists believe that there are a multiple causes of ASD that act together to change the most common ways people develop. Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neuro-developmental disorder that typically affects a person's ability to communicate and interact socially with others (Centers for Disease Control and Preventions, 2015). American Psychiatric Association (2022), ASD involves differences in an individual's social communication and interaction, restricted and repetitive behaviors and or interests, with symptoms being present across numerous contexts.

An exciting review, by Elsabbagh et al. (2012) identified a worldwide prevalence of ASD at 62 in 10 000. The World Health Organization (2013) estimated that globally, one in every 160 persons is living with autism. There are no universal estimates of the prevalence of ASD in Africa; however, varying studies indicate a range of estimates. Whilst Maphalala and Mathabela (2022) opined that, Eswatini has adopted and ratified the United Nations Convention of the rights of people living with disabilities in which ASD is categorized as disability. Disability is any physical, sensory, neurological, cognitive or psychiatric condition that has an impact on a person's lifestyle or everyday functioning. Eswatini Census (2017) revealed that the population of people between 9-19years living with disabilities stands at 25983 including but not limited to physical, communication, learning, intellectual and hearing impairments. Autism Spectrum Disorder is one of the conditions that is considered disabling in the country (Ibid).

The kingdom of Eswatini then introduced Free Primary Education (FPE), where many learners, including those with various impairments such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) gained access to education, thus leading to mainstreaming in 2012. Consequently, tertiary institutions such as the Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU) realized the need to introduce programs such as Special and Inclusive Education (SIE), in 2014, in which teachers are trained on ways of taking good care of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Thwala, 2018). Fakudze (2012) states that teachers should know that they are dealing with learners with different learning capabilities and should respect that every learner is unique and should be treated equitably. Individual differences should be recognized and celebrated as part of the inclusion process. Certain adaptations need to be made for smooth inclusion of learners with ASD. However, the majority of teachers were not trained to handle learners with disabilities, thus their presence brought confusion on how to teach them (Mthupha, 2018).



Hence all occurring of the above events protrudes from the revised Education Sector Policy by Howard, which stipulates and underpins that education should be free, inclusive and compulsory to all Emaswati. It further alludes that “The whole education sector should be made of more effective through the use of inclusive methods of teaching and through more flexible approach to learning” p. 33. Therefore inclusive education demands all learners be put in one classroom whether with disabilities or any kind of impairments (EDSC policy, 2018).

Autism Eswatini (2017) had revealed that Eswatini is still at an initial awareness stage pertaining the issues of autism. A majority of people including the teachers and parents do not know about Autism or they actually do not understand ASD and it is highly stigmatized. The organization further posited that this ignorance could not be limited to teachers and parents, however the legislature and leadership, and other health practioners. Thus the plight of people living with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Eswatini and Africa cannot be over emphasized. Only Thwala (2018) in Eswatini who did a qualitative study on ASD, creating awareness to teachers of the existence of the impairment among students. She successfully sampled 36 participants using purposive sampling. The conclusions were that teachers are not trained to handle students with ASD, and they were not aware on how to teach in an inclusive classroom environment. This current study will provide answers on how teachers could teach in inclusive classroom settings.

## **1.2 Causes of ASD**

The real cause of autism is not yet known. The confusion and uncertainty over this issue has led to the consideration of many possible causes. According to Mayo Clinic (2018) ,The real cause of autism is not yet known. For the complexity of the disorder and its symptoms they actually vary across cultures and its severity (Ibid). Both genetics and environmental factors are presumed to be major causes of ASD. With genetics , several different genes appear to be involved in casing ASD. Children with ASD are associated with genetic disorder such as rett syndrome or they become fragile X syndrome (Moyo Clinic, 2018). However other children could be genetic mutations which increase the risk of autism spectrum disorder. They further asserted that other genes may affect brain development or the way other brain cells communicate. Genetic mutations maybe inherited or may occur spontaneously (Moyo Clinic, 2018). The environmental factors on the other hand are triggered by viral infections, medications and air pollutants which may be inhaled (Ibid).

National Autistic Society (2022) opined that the causes of autism are still being looked into. This assertion is in agreement with the findings of Mayo clinic, when they revealed that the causes of autism are still unknown. They alluded that ASD is caused by a multiple of genes , not a single gene. Statistically, one percent of the world's population has autism. In developed countries like the United States of America, 1 in 68 births are children with ASD. That resembles a tenfold rise in the past 40 years. The autism rates in USA are ranging from 121 cases in 10000 people in Arizona and Missouri, 60 cases in 10000 people in Alabama and 42 cases in 10000 people in Florida, (Thwala, 2018).

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Eswatini has adopted inclusive education in its education system. The Eswatini Education Sector Policy (EDESEC) of 2018 states that there must be a provision for an equitable and inclusive education system that affords all learners access to free education of real quality. This should be followed by the opportunity to continue with life-long education and training, so enhancing their personal development and contributing to Eswatini's cultural development, socio-economic growth and competitiveness. The EDESEC policy (2018) seeks to ensure that all the needs of learners are met - whatever their gender, life circumstance, state of health, disability, stage of development, capacity to learn, level of achievement, financial or any other circumstance. This has resulted to some schools in the country including autistic learners in the mainstream classrooms.

Free Primary Education has led to the influx of learners with vast differences, some of which have special needs like ASD, yet most of the teachers are not trained on how to handle learners of this nature. Consequently, in most cases, the teachers who are without proper training develop a negative attitude towards these learners thus making the teaching and learning of the learners ineffective. It is pivotal for the researcher to conduct a study of this magnitude because most of the learners, including those with special needs such as ASD, have difficulty performing well in regular classrooms. To solicit teaching strategies effective in teaching learners with autism, the researcher will liaise with trained teachers at a special schools in Eswatini ,as they are few. Hence there is a need to explore strategies that teachers could use to include learners with autism spectrum disorder in the mainstream classrooms.