

**THE INCLUSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS  
(SEN) STUDENTS IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)  
MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

by

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## **Declaration**

I, Simone Maylin Bock, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled: *The inclusion of SEN students in United Arab Emirates (UAE) mainstream schools: An exploratory study* is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Mrs. S. M. Bock

29 May 2015

DATE

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## **Abstract**

Inclusive education within the United Arab Emirates has started to gain momentum and the roles of teachers have become more challenging. This study investigated teacher views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools. A qualitative exploratory research design was employed and the social constructivist theory was used as a framework for the research. Purposive sampling was employed, and a total of seven teachers and four parents participated in the study. Thematic analysis was used and findings suggested that UAE teachers experienced various challenges due to the inclusion of SEN students into their schools. Some of the challenges included: lack of professional development, lack of managerial support, parental demands, cultural barriers and the lack of collaborative opportunities. The study recommended varied professional development workshops aimed at developing an understanding of SEN and inclusion within the UAE context.

**Keywords:** Inclusion, mainstream schools, social constructivist theory, special educational needs, United Arab Emirates.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Salamanca Declaration of 1994, a UNESCO initiative, promoted the idea of an '*education for all*' and moved inclusion education to the forefront of international education settings. The declaration stipulated, that inclusive education meant including all children, in all classroom and extracurricular activities. This implied that all children were provided with an equal opportunity to reach their maximum potential regardless of their origin, abilities or disabilities, and regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or linguistic differences. The declaration further stated that children with special educational needs should have access to regular schools (Meynert, 2014).

In addition, UNESCO (2000) maintained that the right to education should not be restricted and should be offered to all students' regardless of their abilities or disabilities, strengths, weaknesses, race or gender. Chakraborti-Ghosh, Orellana and Jones (2014) also emphasised the fact that students should not be separated due to physical and or mental disabilities, thereby guaranteeing the right of education for every child. In the past, segregation of special needs students was considered the better alternative, as it provided opportunities for special educational needs (SEN) students and normally developed students in their own educational settings (Dhaoui, 2008).

According to Gaad (2004), research suggests that civil rights movements challenged the dual education system, advocating for an inclusive model. As a result, SEN and inclusion in education has been gaining momentum across the globe, and this inclusive approach relies predominantly on the cooperation and collaboration between various educational stakeholders (Foreman, 2008). The author highlights the fact that there are still a number of challenges in achieving a successful inclusive model (Foreman, 2008).

Billingsley (2003) asserts that one of the challenges in relation to inclusive education focuses on the development of a qualified and sustainable workforce, in that unqualified teachers may threaten the quality of education that SEN students will receive. In this regard, the author stressed the importance of creating a supportive working environment, where teachers were committed to inclusive education.

An additional challenge as highlighted by Hwang and Evans (2011) drew attention to teacher attitudes regarding inclusion and their willingness to embrace the notion. In addition, Kinsella and Senior (cited in Banks & McCoy, 2011) mentioned that inclusive education does not solely focus on the individual student, but stressed that teachers played an integral part in creating a positive environment, during the delivery of an inclusive curriculum.

An inclusive approach could also prove challenging for schools attempting to follow the model, whilst aiming to maintain high academic standards (Dhaoui, 2008). Kyriacou (1998) supports this viewpoint, mentioning that inclusive education alters teacher responsibilities and the need to cope with change, could result in teachers experiencing stress. In addition, Miller, Brownell and Smith (1999) stated that when teachers are unable to cope with the demands of an inclusive model, due to the unmanageable workload, they are more likely to leave the teaching profession.

In the United Arab Emirates, the concept of inclusive education, as a means to include all students with SEN into regular schools, began to emerge in the late 1970's. In 1979, the country established some programmes that supported the teaching of students with SEN. This initiative was inaugurated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) who started the first special education classes (Alahbabi, 2009).

The philosophy surrounding inclusive education across schools in the UAE was envisioned by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, president of the UAE and was later changed to Federal Law in 2006. This law addressed the rights of individuals with special needs and stipulated that

'special needs in themselves were not an obstruction to joining or getting admission into an educational institution, no matter whether it is a public or private institution' (UAE MOE, 2006:7). The law highlighted the belief in equality, thereby providing opportunities for individuals with special needs to develop to their full capacity.

Although there had been interest in developing inclusive programmes, very few attempts were made to integrate students with special needs into the regular schools (MOE-Special Education Department, 2002). Those attempts were mainly as a result of parental petitions. Barrell (2009) asserted that the education of students with SEN was the primary responsibility of those in educational organisations.

Alahbabi (2009) maintained that the framework of inclusion in the UAE was primarily based on a design of separate classes. To support the vision of the country's leaders, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) launched an SEN policy encouraging schools to follow an inclusive model, as part of the school wide reform agenda. This legislative step was further supported by the international philosophy on inclusion, where students with special needs were being educated in regular classrooms with their peers.

The difficulties surrounding SEN in the UAE continues to be a subject of public and cultural debate, in that policymakers were currently determining processes to include all students. Gaad and Khan (2007) maintained that the current policy surrounding inclusion in UAE schools, posed many challenges for teachers. Studies have highlighted various teacher concerns related to the inclusion of SEN students in the UAE, such as time taken away from other students and the lack of professional development (Al Zyoudi, Sartwai & Dodin, 2010).

In light of the above, Rose (2001) maintained that the way teachers react and behave could have a great impact on the success or failure of inclusion programmes. For inclusion to be effective, it is generally agreed that the school personnel, who would be most responsible for its success, should be receptive to the principles and demands of an inclusion policy.

As the UAE attempts to implement the new inclusion policy and since teachers play a significant role in the education of students, it may be worthwhile to investigate teacher views regarding the new inclusion policy. The study therefore explored teacher views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students in UAE schools.

## **1.2 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The UAE is a Middle Eastern country and neighbours Saudi Arabia and Oman. Its rapid development was initially due to the discovery of oil, thereby providing the necessary funding for an improved infrastructure and basic services (Gaad et al., 2006). The main religion practiced in the UAE is Islam and although the language of instruction in government schools was predominantly Arabic, the new reform agenda encouraged a dual medium approach. The core curriculum subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) are currently taught in English, and additional subjects (Islamic, Arabic, Social Studies) are taught in Arabic.

The growing economy enabled the UAE to employ a large expatriate population, hailing from various parts of the world (Gaad et al., 2006). Most of the teachers that are hired are expected to have a minimum of two years teaching experience and should be proficient in teaching English, Mathematics or Science. The current recruitment criteria do not require teachers to have a background, knowledge or experience in SEN (Carson, 2013).

## **1.3 RATIONALE/AIM OF THE STUDY**

As mentioned earlier, current research focuses on students reaching their full potential and procedural changes, rather than the contexts, capacities or capabilities of schools and the staff implementing these changes. If inclusion referred to equal opportunities regardless of differences (physical, intellectual, social or linguistic), the situation could be overwhelming for teachers attempting to implement an inclusive model in the UAE.

As a researcher working in the UAE for over 8 years, my current role as an Education Advisor is to advise English and Arab medium teachers on ways to improve their teaching practice. Teachers are expected to improve their pedagogy within the classroom, introduce 21st century skills and plan high quality lessons. These elements are aimed at successfully implementing the New School Model reform agenda as directed by ADEC (2009).

Part of my role is to monitor teachers on a regular basis, and I often question whether the current model of inclusion places additional strain on teachers, when they are not suitably qualified to cater to the varying needs. Chaplain (1995) argued that the integration of SEN students into mainstream schools could be stressful for teachers, because they would require training and a specific skill set in order to deal with these students. The increased responsibility, without the necessary professional development could result in teachers feeling overwhelmed and as a result, they become more stressed (Paulse, 2005). Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore teacher views on the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Three research questions guided this study and were addressed during the data collection and analysis phase:

- What are teachers' views on working with SEN students in the UAE?
- What challenges do teachers' experience when working with SEN students in UAE schools?
- What are parents' views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students in UAE schools?

## 1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW

The qualitative research tradition of answering how and why questions, and the epistemological perspective of constructivism, assuming that knowledge is created and shared through the interaction and interpretations people have of themselves and others, underpin this research (Le Compte & Shensul, 2010). The social constructivist approach further suggested that learning was not fixed, but influenced by culture and context. Social constructivist theory clearly draws attention to the social, cultural and historical influences on individual development (Daniels, 2001). Exploratory research was used in order to make sense of the views represented in the study (Wisker, 2008). In this instance, the investigation was conducted in a school in the UAE that is currently following an inclusion model. The study investigated the views and experiences of teachers working with SEN students in order to gain an understanding of their daily experiences. Parental views were also considered.

The study adopted purposive sampling as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). In this regard, information rich participants were purposefully selected to participate in this study.

In this study the data collection methods consisted of, individual semi structured interviews, a focus group session and observations. Wisker (2008:191) maintained that in using all three qualitative research methods, one could enhance the research study by 'capturing peoples' opinions, feelings, practice, their experience and the kind of atmosphere and contexts in which individuals act and respond'.

Thematic analysis was adopted in order to analyse the data gathered during the study. This method allowed the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns or relevant themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the data collection and analysis process, the study adopted the strategies as mentioned by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), in order to ensure trustworthiness, and to avoid any biases.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

There is currently very limited literature pertaining to SEN and inclusion, primarily due to the UAE's short history, having only reached independence since 1972 (Alhahbabi, 2009). This lack of research illustrated a need to undertake this study.

According to Bradshaw, Tenant and Lydiatt (2004), the UAE education system is relatively new in comparison to other countries and school systems vary in regards to the level of support they are able to offer SEN students. It was therefore important to investigate teachers' and parental views and experience regarding the new movement towards inclusion.

If one was to work towards an inclusive education system, it was important to document and evaluate the current practise in schools (Meynert, 2014). Gaining teacher and parent views surrounding their daily teaching of SEN students may influence future policy regarding inclusion.

The study could provide UAE school leaders with a better insight into teachers' experiences with SEN students, as they attempted to follow the inclusion model. School leaders could possibly draw on the findings from this study, in order to be more strategic, when implementing future education reform initiatives.

## **1.7 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 provided the introduction and research context for the study. The rationale, aim of the study and main research questions were presented, followed by a brief description of the research design. The significance for undertaking the study was highlighted, ending with a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 2 explored the diverse views and definitions of inclusion and its relevance within an educational setting. Principles and successful inclusion methods were highlighted, followed by a discussion on teacher attitudes regarding inclusion. The challenges and effects of stress during the implementation of an inclusion model were explored and various capacity

building strategies were presented. Parental views, teacher support programmes as well as the advantages and disadvantages of an inclusive model were explored. Lastly, inclusion in relation to educational reform was addressed.

Chapter 3 highlighted the role of social constructivism within an educational context. The philosophy behind constructivism was mentioned, followed by various theorist views and definitions related to social constructivism. The rationale for using social constructivism as a teaching method was explained followed by an explanation of the role that leaders, teachers and professional learning communities played within an education context.

Chapter 4 detailed the research design, the methods of data collection and the way in which data was analysed.

Chapter 5 presented the research findings for the research questions, and discussed these findings in relation to the literature presented in chapter 2 and 3.

Chapter 6 delineated the main conclusions, limitations and implications of the work.

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

This chapter commenced with an introduction and background for the study, in order to gain a better understanding of the research context. The rationale and aim of the study was clarified and the main research questions were presented. An overview of the research design was highlighted as well as the significance for undertaking the research study. In the next chapter a literature review surrounding inclusion within an educational setting will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **INCLUSION IN EDUCATION**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to explore the views and definitions surrounding inclusion, followed by teacher and parental attitudes and views regarding this process. Challenges within an inclusive model will be discussed, as well as the role of stress within an inclusive setting. Strategies for building capacity and teacher support programmes for SEN will be addressed, followed a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of an inclusive model. Lastly, inclusion as it relates to educational reform will be addressed.

#### **2.2 DEFINITIONS AND VIEWS OF INCLUSION**

Inclusive education is defined as ‘the practice of including everyone – irrespective of talent, disability, socioeconomic background, or cultural origin – in supportive mainstream schools and classrooms where all students’ needs are met’ (Stainback & Stainback, cited in Eloff, Swart & Engelbrecht, 2002:83).

Inclusion further seeks to establish collaborative, supportive, and nurturing communities that are based on providing all students with the necessary services and opportunities they need to succeed, whilst respecting and learning from each other’s individual differences (Salend, 2005).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) believes that the term inclusion means that every individual with disabilities should be served in general education classrooms and community settings that are supported by trained and skilled personnel (CEC Ethics and Standards, 2009).

In light of the above definitions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) describes inclusive education as a consistent, whole school approach, that strives to accommodate student

diversity by developing educational strategies, partnerships, and structures within a respective school.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) are of the view that inclusion requires the reorganisation of mainstream schooling systems, in order to accommodate the needs of individual student's, regardless of their ability or disability.

Furthermore, Ballard (1997) maintains that inclusive education consists of the following factors:

- education being non-discriminatory with reference to disability, culture or gender;
- providing opportunities for all students to participate in a given community;
- students having equal rights to access a curriculum; and
- emphasising and supporting diversity within education.

Moreover, inclusive education supports diversity, by being receptive to new ideas, thereby empowering school communities to celebrate differences (Barton, 1997).

According to Barratt (2005), inclusive schools often take on a variety of forms namely:

- Integration: children from special schools or units integrate into mainstream schools for certain lessons.
- Supported Inclusion: as above, however, a support teacher is supplied for the child while in the mainstream school.
- Full Inclusion: a full-time mainstream placement without a support teacher.

With reference to the views surrounding inclusion, the United Kingdom's 'Disability Discrimination Act' (1995) states that the country will strive to raise the education standards of children with SEN, thereby declaring it unlawful for educational institutions to discriminate against disabled students (Barratt, 2005).

In contrast, Idol (2006) highlighted some concerns regarding the implementation of inclusive education. These concerns include: how to modify the curriculum and instruction; how to coordinate what is taught in the resource and regular classroom; how to make decisions based on whether or not students should be taught in mainstream schools; and how best to organise collaboration between SEN specialists and generalist teachers.

Sailor (cited in Toson, 2013), researched six principles as a framework to guide the implementation of an inclusive model, namely; the general education of students are driven by a curriculum; all resources are utilised to support the development of students; a school-based committee is available to support students with individual needs; the parental community forms part of the school-based committee; and a district support team is available to support school implementation.

Significantly, Capper and Frattura (2009) assert that it is essential for school leaders attempting to follow an integrated system, to have a sound understanding of the way in which the curriculum, teaching practices, leadership practices, and school structures would need to be modified, in order to meet the needs of all students. In addition, the authors highlight that an inclusive system necessitates that teachers are responsible for all students, regardless of their ability. Furthermore, it is essential that schools utilise resources and staff effectively, in order to support an inclusive model (Capper & Frattura, 2009).

Ainscow (2005) highlights the importance of fostering a collaborative culture amongst educators when attempting to develop an inclusive school environment. The author is of the viewpoint that inclusion is a process that aims to remove student barriers, with the intention to raise the achievement of all students. In addition, Kozleski (2009) asserts that inclusive education focuses on all students and stresses that teachers and parents should play an active role within the school. Worthy of note, Sailor (cited in Toson, 2013) contends that schools should refrain from diagnosing and labelling students with special needs, and instead work collaboratively to plan professional development workshops, in order to meet the needs of every student.

With reference to the UAE, the concept of inclusion is not as developed as it is in the United States and other countries, that have decades of experience in the field of inclusion (Alhahbabi, 2009). Though there has been an interest in developing inclusion programmes in order to integrate SEN students into mainstream schools, only a few attempts have been made to integrate these students (Ministry of Education/Special Education Department, 2002).

Most parents in the UAE are of the view that the best way to educate an SEN child is by means of a special education programme, hence the reason why the concept of inclusion does not have the same level of support in the UAE as it does in other countries (Alhahbabi, 2009). In addition, Almanal (2002) makes mention of the fact that parents in the UAE reject the rationale behind inclusion, because they believe that the special education centre is best suited for SEN students.

According to a study conducted by Alhahbabi (2009), there have been no attempts made in the UAE, to evaluate the attitudes, views and behaviours of teachers towards the inclusion of SEN students into general schools. In addition, the author stresses that the lack of teacher feedback prior to the implementation of an inclusion policy, could present various challenges for those attempting to achieve a successful inclusion programme.

Regarding a suitable curriculum to support SEN students, Gaad, Arif and Scott (2006) identified a 'misalignment' within the current UAE education system. The authors maintained that teachers should not only have the knowledge pertaining to the content they need to deliver, but also have an understanding of the context in which they find themselves in.

In addition, Arif and Gaad (2008) stressed the importance for teacher training, in order to deliver a meaningful curriculum, best suited to the needs of the students. The authors also mention that 'a pro-inclusion culture needs to be created in both schools and teacher education institutions in the UAE, if the inclusion of students with disabilities is to be effectively achieved' (Arif & Gaad, 2008:98).

Finally, Levin (1997:390) emphasises the fact that 'inclusion should not be viewed as an add-on to a conventional school. Full inclusion must be embedded deeply in the very foundation of the school, in its missions, its belief system, and its daily activities, rather than an appendage that is added on to a conventional school.'

In consideration of the above, it is evident that there is a significant research gap in the field of SEN in the UAE context. Gaad et al., (2006) highlights the need for more research and data related to SEN in order to evaluate current practices in UAE schools.

### **2.3 PRINCIPLES AND SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION**

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) (2010) mention that there are various principles and different ways to enrich the learning for all students in order to achieve a successful inclusive model. One of the key principles as highlighted by Ainscow et al., (2006) speaks of exploration opportunities within an inclusive classroom. This exploration requires that all teachers make explicit the values, their meanings and implications that they wish to see enacted during the teaching and learning process.

The Department of Education and Science (DoES) (2007) highlight measures to enhance effective teaching of students in inclusive settings. For the purposes of this study, these measures are particularly significant given that they have identified a range of effective teaching strategies, which bear relevance to the UAE education context. This relevance stems from the fact that ADEC is currently mandating teachers to follow similar strategies in order to enrich teaching and learning. These measures are represented in the table below:

Table 2.1 below illustrates measures to enhance the effective teaching of students in inclusive settings.

- a variety of teaching strategies and approaches
- clear learning objectives outlined at the beginning of the lesson, reference made to them during the lesson, and a review with the students of what has been learned occurs at the end of the lesson
- formative assessment strategies for identifying the students' progress that are used to help inform teaching approaches
- the content of lessons is matched to the needs of the students and to their levels of ability
- multi-sensory approaches to learning and teaching
- materials, including concrete materials, are appropriate to the needs, ages, interests, and aptitudes of the students
- deviations from lesson plans when unexpected learning opportunities arise do not result in the loss of the original objectives of the lesson
- appropriate time is allowed for practise, reinforcement, and application of new knowledge and skills in practical situations
- students are reinforced and affirmed for knowledge and skills learned
- opportunities are in place throughout the curriculum to enable students to develop language and communication skills (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- opportunities are taken throughout the curriculum to develop personal and social skills
- students are encouraged to explore links with other areas of the curriculum
- homework is designed to consolidate and extend, promote independent learning, to monitor individual students' and class progress, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning

(Source: Department of Education and Science, 2007:105)

**Table 2.1 Measures to enhance effective teaching**

As part of ADEC's reform agenda, teachers are encouraged to employ a variety of teaching methods; assessment strategies; differentiated instruction; and the use of multi-sensory approaches in order to support student learning. For the purpose of this study, it could be implied that the above mentioned measures could be explored by teachers; in order to enhance their lessons and it could further serve as a yardstick to gauge whether teachers are meeting the needs of their individual students.

With reference to successful inclusion, McLaughlin and Williams (2000) assert that schools working towards an inclusive model are committed to high levels of learning for all students. These schools have the relevant specialists and/or support staff who strive to develop effective and collaborative support systems for teachers, students and parents. Similarly, the NCSE (2010) mention that all members of the school community could be involved in the inclusive process, by seeking to answer the key question of, 'how are we doing?'

This type of question encourages members of the school community to think about setting appropriate goals, and to evaluate what planning needs to take place, in order to ensure a successful inclusion programme (NCSE, 2010). In addition, inclusive schools also use a variety of resources in order to support the learning of SEN students within the classroom (NCSE, 2010)

Lastly, Wood (1998) suggests that when schools plan and manage a successful inclusion programme, teachers tend to generally move from an attitude of scepticism to wanting to collaborate as part of a team.

Since teachers are central pillars within an education system, it is crucial to explore their views and attitudes surrounding inclusion (Anati, 2013). Teacher attitudes with reference to inclusion will be explored in the next section.

## **2.4 TEACHER ATTITUDES REGARDING INCLUSION**

### **2.4.1 General teacher attitudes regarding inclusion**

According to attitude theorist Katz (1960), an individual's attitude can serve various functions namely; (a) to help the individual get what they want and avoid what they do not want; (b) to help individuals avoid internal conflict or

anxiety; (c) helps to integrate complex sources of information; and (d) helps individuals to reflect on their value system. In large educational organisations, teacher attitudes play a role in the way pertinent information is processed and perceived and as a result, the job role may appear to be more or less manageable (Sansosti, 2008).

According to Leatherman and Niemeyer (2007:24), 'teachers form attitudes toward children with disabilities, and ultimately toward inclusion, based on a child's characteristics, the factors in the classroom, and their previous experiences'. Therefore, according to Anati (2013), teacher's attitudes are vital to the success of an inclusion policy.

Carrington (1999) is of the viewpoint that teacher attitudes can have an effect on schools attempting to follow an inclusive approach. In addition, the author highlights the social constructivist view, whereby teachers possess their own perspectives regarding inclusion, and this in turn can influence the way in which they implement inclusion targets. Moreover, the teacher's belief system, values and attitude can affect the way in which they interact with SEN students (Carrington, 1999).

According to Subban and Sharma (2006), although teachers generally held positive views regarding inclusion, some teachers were sceptical regarding their ability to work with these students in the mainstream classroom. Similarly, Hwang and Evans (2011) make mentions of the fact that general education teachers are favourably disposed towards the theory behind inclusion, however, they are more concerned about the practical implementation of an inclusive model.

Another study conducted by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) revealed that positive teacher views regarding inclusion were restricted to teachers having adequate resources and professional training, in order to equip teachers with the necessary skills to work with SEN students. However, teacher willingness appears to vary according to the type and severity of disability, and the resources provided to support inclusion (Hwang & Evans, 2011).

Sansosti (2008) highlighted the fact that teachers experienced a lack of support during the implementation of an inclusive programme. In this study teachers recommended that class sizes be reduced, thereby making it more manageable for them to meet inclusive demands. Additionally the author maintained that teachers were more likely to support the part time integration of SEN students, rather than the integration of these students on a more full time basis.

Significantly, Villa, Thousand, Meyers and Nevin (1996) were of the view that administrative support and collaboration were powerful predictors of favourable attitudes towards full inclusion.

Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, and Saumell (1996), assert that teachers are concerned with the fact that policymakers are removed from the classroom environment, and are therefore oblivious to the day-to-day operations within an inclusive classroom. In addition, Hwang (2010) highlights that it is imperative for policymakers and school administration to collaborate with teachers in order to foster positive teacher attitudes towards full inclusion. Furthermore, Wood (1998) is of the view that collaboration between teachers is necessary during the implementation of an inclusive programme; however this process may lead to role ambiguities amongst teachers, thereby creating further barriers for inclusion.

Additionally Vaughn et al., (1996) mention that teachers are also concerned about an inclusive model and extra workload being enforced upon them without any consultation. Significantly, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) echoed this view, mentioning that teachers are of the notion that inclusion increases teacher workload and has an impact on the overall academic achievement of all students. In addition, teachers also disclosed their concerns regarding the safety of all students, stressing the anxiety that they face when dealing with challenging or unfamiliar situations within an inclusive environment (Vaughn et al., 1996).

Lastly, inclusive education has provided many opportunities for teachers to adapt their instructional methods in order to cater for the diverse needs of

students, however, teacher responsibilities have increased in recent years, as they attempt to educate and include SEN students in mainstream schools (Choate, 1993). Significantly, Ainscow (1994) asserts that inclusion can potentially unsettle teachers, thereby affecting the extent to which teachers are willing to implement policies related to inclusion or overall school reform.

In light of the above, it is apparent that teacher attitudes can contribute to the successful implementation of an inclusive programme. With reference to this study, the attitudes of UAE teachers are therefore central to the successful implementation of the new inclusion policy. In the next section, UAE teacher attitudes regarding will be discussed in more detail.

#### **2.4.2 UAE teacher attitudes regarding inclusion**

A study conducted in the UAE revealed that primary school teachers are more positive regarding the inclusion of SEN students in comparison to high school teachers. In the study, high school teachers mention, that teaching a curriculum to SEN students can be challenging and create problems for other students in the classroom (Alahbabi, 2009).

Similarly, Gaad and Khan (2007) assert, that the inclusion of SEN students is both disruptive and challenging for teachers because they do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to implement strategies to cater for SEN students. In addition, the authors make mention of the fact that teachers are less confident about the academic ability of SEN students and their capacity to master the regular curriculum content. Moreover, teachers in the UAE are not skilled to adapt the lessons or resources, in order to meet the varying needs of SEN students (Gaad & Khan, 2007).

According to Anati (2013), teachers highlighted that UAE schools do not make sufficient allowances for special equipment or resources to support SEN; schools do not hire special education personnel; teachers lack professional development and training with regards to SEN; there is a lack of clear guidelines or policies regarding inclusion; and administrators are not knowledgeable or supportive during the implementation of an inclusive model. In addition, Cook, Semmel and Gerber (1999) maintain that administrators

may be more optimistic regarding the implementation of an inclusive model, due to the fact that they are not directly involved in the daily management of the inclusive classroom.

Significantly, Anati (2013) asserts that teacher concerns surrounding inclusion in UAE schools is justifiable, based on the fact that inclusion is a relatively new educational concept for this country. In light of the above, teachers working in UAE are of the view that the education system does not follow a consistent inclusive model across schools, therefore creating challenges for the successful and sustainable implementation of this new initiative (Caruana, 2011).

## **2.5 CHALLENGES DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN INCLUSIVE MODEL**

One of challenges that individuals experience during any change process could be related to additional pressure when attempting to implement change, thus resulting in stress for the individual (Kyriacou, 2001). In recent years, the term stressor was employed to describe a stimulus that triggers a stress response. At present, researchers have expressed various views regarding the definition of stress (Selye, 1976; Kyriacou, 2001; Hussein, 2010), to establish whether stress is largely an external response that physically affects the individual or; an internal reaction to a stressor, or both (O' Driscoll & Beehr, 2000).

The word stress originates from the Latin expression 'strictus', meaning taut or stiffly strung, according to Van Wyk (cited in Olivier & Venter, 2003). Olivier and Venter (2003) define stress in concurrence with Seyle's (1976) definition, highlighting that stress is a physiological response to a stressful situation.

Accordingly, stress is defined as 'a bodily response that results when demands are placed on the body'. These demands could be in the form of environmental conditions, or as a result of individuals placing demands upon themselves, in an attempt to accomplish their personal goals (Olivier & Venter, 2003).

Brown and Uehara (1999) view teacher stress as a range of unpleasant emotions, namely, tension, frustration, anxiety, anger, and depression that result from working in the teaching profession. Similarly, teacher stress has been viewed as the interaction that occurs between teachers and a demanding teaching environment that results in physiological and psychological distress (Forlin, Douglas & Hattie, 1996).

Some of the main stressors within the teaching profession includes; work overload, role ambiguity, pressures within the teachers' role, the lack of resources, poor working conditions, lack of recognition, low salaries, lack of involvement in decision-making, ineffective communication, conflict with colleagues, and student misbehaviour (Kim, Lee & Kim, 2009).

According to Wilson (2002), there has been a growing concern regarding high levels of work-related stress, job dissatisfaction and psychological distress within the teaching profession. These factors play a vital role with regards to teacher well-being, and their willingness to remain within the profession.

The changing nature of the organisation may become increasingly stressful, and could result in a lack of control at work, longer hours, job insecurity, increased time pressure, lack of support, poor feedback, isolation, role conflict, and work-life balance issues (Griffiths, 1998).

Pettegrew and Wolf (cited in Sprenger, 2011) make mention two of types of stress that can ultimately have an effect on teachers. The first type refers to task-based stress that is associated with specific tasks that teachers are expected to execute within their teaching role. The second type refers to role-based stress, focussing on the teachers expectation of their role and how these integrated with the responsibilities needed to perform their role successfully.

Ultimately, Pontage and Evans (cited in Thompson, Murphy & Stradling, 1994) assert that there is a need to alter the traditional view of stress that solely focuses on problems located within the individual. The authors argue that stress can also occur as a result of ineffective work environments, systems and practices within organisations.

In light of the above, challenges related to the work environment will be explored in the next section.

## **2.5.1 Organisational factors**

### *2.5.1.1 Organisational structure*

Karasek (1979: 287) developed a job strain model, stating that psychological strain within the organisation results from the 'joint effects of the demands of a work situation and the range of decision-making freedom (discretion) available to the worker facing those demands'. Similarly Cartwright and Cooper (1997) are of the view that psychological strain is as a result of the management style that is adopted within an organisation. The bureaucratic nature of most organisations allows employees little opportunity to contribute towards decision making.

### *2.5.1.2 Stressors and work*

According to Hussein (2010), work-related stress within education can range from unspecified roles, high self-expectation, the inability to influence decisions, conflict with management, poor communication and role conflict. Furthermore, the author asserts that an increase in work-related responsibilities can result in individuals feeling undervalued.

Hastings and Bham (2003) mention that the work environment can also include various physical stressors such as, overcrowded classrooms, administrative pressures and lack of managerial support, thus resulting in role ambiguity.

Teachers experience various work-related stress as a result of time pressures, heavy workloads, poor student behaviour, poor relationships with administration, challenging relationships with colleagues, lack of training and lack of resources (Kyriacou, 1998).

Paulse (2005) is of the view that some of the major challenges within the education sector relates to the increase in teacher responsibility, without the necessary facility upgrades or professional development, in order to assist

teachers to cope with the new demands. This can result in teachers feeling threatened and overwhelmed, and as a result, they become more stressed.

With regards to the increase in teacher responsibility, significant changes have recently taken place within the educational sector. These changes include the integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms (Travers, 2001). In addition, Chaplain (1995) argues that the integration of students with special needs into mainstream classrooms may be stressful for teachers.

#### *2.5.1.3 Administrative support*

Several research studies on teacher stress have indicated that administrative demands due to excessive paperwork and increasing time pressures are having a negative effect on teachers, thus adding to their level of stress (Black, 2003; Dibbon, 2004; Van Der Klink, Blonk, Schene & Van Dijk, 2001).

Studies suggest that teachers who feel that they have support from school management are less likely to experience burnout than those in less supportive environments (Bacharach, Bainberger & Mitchell, 1990; Travers & Cooper, 1993).

With reference to the above, the new inclusion policy within the UAE education sector requires the support of the school leadership team, in order to ensure that teachers are provided with the necessary assistance, in their attempt to provide instruction to SEN students.

Leithwood (1999) states that when teachers do not have an input in decisions that concern their job role within the school, they tend to feel unsupported. In addition, the author asserts that exhaustion can occur when teachers feel that school management expectations are unrealistic. According to Shain (2001), school principals play a key role with regards to teacher well-being, in that their management style has an influence on the teachers' physical or mental health, as well as their ability to perform their role effectively.

#### *2.5.1.4 Lack of influence*

Various researchers have expressed that teachers feel that they lacked control over decision-making, due to the hierarchical structure that exists within various school environments (Dinham, 1993; Kyriacou, 2001; Pithers & Soden, 1999). In addition, Cheek and Miller (1983) are of the view that not being involved in decision making is the most prominent source of stress that leads to individuals developing a low self esteem.

#### *2.5.1.5 Social support from peers and others*

Tracy and Whittaker (1990) view social support as the means by which individuals are able to assist one another. Furthermore, studies have shown that employees, who receive support from others, are more likely to experience reduced strain and burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Moreover, King and Peart (1992) maintain that teachers, who have established sound relationships with their peers, tend to be more satisfied within their teaching role.

With reference to the above, Guglielmi and Tatrow (1998) stress the importance of establishing and maintaining supportive relationships within the workplace, in order to prevent the development of stress and subsequent illness.

### **2.5.2 Individual factors**

#### *2.5.2.1 Work overload*

Seyle (1976) is of the view that a certain level of arousal is needed in order to perform optimally. However, when the arousal exceeds one's ability to meet certain demands, a feeling of burnout is experienced. In contrast, when employees are not challenged within their work role, they may feel undervalued, bored and experience low morale.

Studies relating to stress reveal that an increase in workload and poor communication are significant causes of teacher stress and this result in feelings of worry and helplessness (Wilson, 2002).

In recent years, working conditions for teachers have become more difficult. Teachers are faced with students who are less ready to learn; students who arrive at school having had minimal hours of sleep; and those that have less structure within their homes, resulting in teachers feeling overloaded (McCarthy & Lambert, 2006). In addition, most students come from home environments where English is not their native language.

McCarthy and Lambert (2006) are of the view that all of these combined factors have made teaching more stressful than it has ever been. With reference to education in UAE government schools, most students are not native English speakers as Arabic is their first language. Language may be an additional stressor for teachers attempting to implement an inclusive model during an educational reform, which may result in possible work overload (Ibrahim, Al-Kaabi & El-Zaatari, 2013).

#### *2.5.2.2 Role overload*

Pithers and Fogarty (1995) highlight that role overload within the teaching profession is regarded as one of the main and most common sources of stress. Similarly, this role overload exists when the role expectations are greater than the individual's capability to execute the task (Conley & Woosley, 2000).

#### *2.5.2.3 Role ambiguity*

According to Spector (2000), role ambiguity refers to the extent to which the employees lack clarity about task demands, or their role within the organisation. In addition, William and Alliger (1994) assert that role attributes have a different effect on different individuals. Some individuals are willing to accept roles because they provide certain benefits such as status, and an increase in self-esteem. In contrast, when individuals are unable to perform their expected roles, or when they do not have clear guidelines regarding their responsibility, they are more likely to experience stress, become disgruntled and perform less effectively (Lee & Schular, 1980).

Moreover, Idris (2011) states, that when the individual's goals, roles and performance criteria are ambiguous, these ambiguities may be perceived as threatening, leaving the individual feeling strained. Significantly, Kyriacou (1998) is of the view that changing the roles and responsibilities of teachers working with SEN students and their need to cope with these changes are seen as major sources of teacher stress.

#### *2.5.2.4 Role conflict*

Role conflict refers to incompatible expectations and demands that are associated with one's professional role (Ashforth & Lee, 1990). Furthermore, extra duties that are not perceived to be part of one's job responsibilities can lead to stress and role conflict (Sutherland & Cooper, 2000). Thus, Cartwright and Cooper (1997) are of the view that people who are more flexible, experience less role conflict than those who are inflexible.

#### *2.5.2.5 Self-efficacy*

Bandura (1986) defines self-efficacy as the self-evaluation process of one's ability to successfully execute a course of action, in order to reach a desired outcome. In addition, self-efficacy is vital when individuals evaluate environmental demands. Environmental demands can be evaluated as either a threat or a challenge, and individuals with high self-efficacy are likely to view these demands as a challenge (Chemers, Hu & Garcia, 2001).

In light of the above, the assumption is that stress plays a role within various organisations undergoing change. In the next section the effects of stress within an inclusive environment will be explored.

## **2.6 THE EFFECTS OF STRESS WITHIN AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

According to Kyriacou (2001), teacher stress can result in anger, anxiety, depression and physiological changes due to the demands placed on teachers. Additionally, Guglielmi and Tatrow (1998) found that teachers suffering from stress are more likely to experience problems such as

alienation, apathy and absenteeism that can ultimately have an effect on student achievement. Moreover, teacher stress affects the learning environment and hinders the achievement of educational targets within the organisation. Within organisations, the effects of stress can result in a significant loss of experienced teachers due to resignation (Paulse, 2005).

Engelbrecht, Swart and Eloff (2001) maintain that the increase in the number of SEN students in mainstream classes and the limited teacher experience with regards to inclusion is a growing concern. Students with special needs, namely; intellectual, physical, emotional, and those experiencing social difficulties, place additional demands on the workload of teachers (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2001).

Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) highlight that teachers' who work with SEN students are at a greater risk of leaving the teaching profession, due to the demanding nature of the job. Similarly, Doorn (2003) mentions that teachers are challenged with added workload pressures, by continually adapting and modifying programmes, in order to meet the needs of SEN students and their parents.

A study conducted by Valeo and Bunch (1998), with particular focus on the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream classes, reveals that teachers feel that the time spent with SEN students, is at the detriment of other students.

Some of the challenges include; limited time to work individually with students, and teachers lack of experience and expertise within the field of special education. These teachers highlight the fact that they experience difficulty when attempting to modify and produce suitable lessons for SEN students. Embich (2001) is of the view that role ambiguity within inclusive schools, leads to increased exhaustion for teachers. Additionally, Valeo and Bunch (1998) suggests that adequate training and preparation to integrate SEN students into mainstream schools is necessary in order to improve the teachers understanding of their role.

In light of the above, researchers generally are of the view that a certain amount of stress is normal, however, prolonged stress can lead to physical, psychological or behavioural problems (O'Driscoll & Cooper, 2002).

### **2.6.1 Physiological effects of stress**

According to De Kooker (2008), when individuals stress, various physiological changes occur. The actual or perceived threat activates the system in the brain in order to respond accordingly to these threats. Furthermore, a South African study on stress and health reveals that some of the physical effects that teacher's experience include, headaches, muscular tension, and physical pain (Jackson & Rothman, 2005).

### **2.6.2 Psychological and behavioural effects of stress**

Bunting (2000) states that stress can affect the psychological well-being of individuals. Some of the common symptoms include passivity, reduced productivity, anxiety, aggression, frustration and depression. Similarly Sutton (1984) mentions that individuals can develop negative affect towards their job or life.

According to Sprenger (2011), when individuals stress, they exhibit unhealthy behaviours such as smoking, drinking excessively, over or under eating or abusing drugs, in order to relieve the stress. These individuals also try to avoid the problem by watching television or filling their schedules. Other negative behaviours include; violent outbursts, withdrawal from family or friends and excessive sleeping.

### **2.6.3 Burnout**

Burnout due to ongoing stress is regarded as one of the main challenges within the teaching profession (Kim, Lee & Kim, 2009). According to Blasé (1982), burnout is the emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that arises due to job-related stress.

Furthermore, Sprenger (2011) asserts that if stress is left unresolved for a period of time, overload and burnout may occur; thus the individual is left feeling emotionally shattered, de-motivated, depressed and lacking enthusiasm to carry out their job effectively. In addition, Schamer and Jackson (1996) are of the view that burnout can cause teachers to lose their optimism and purpose for teaching, thus causing teachers to develop negative feelings towards their students' and the overall teaching profession. Friedman (2000) highlights that the main components of teacher burnout are exhaustion and poor job satisfaction. Furthermore, the author maintains that burnout can lead to teachers experiencing feelings of professional failure. Additionally, Hastings, Horne and Mitchell (2004), explain that burnout does not only effect work performance, but it also has an effect on the individual's personal and social relationships.

With reference to the above, Billingsley (2003) mentions that burnout can be reduced through administrative and collegial support, in order to improve teacher retention. In addition, stress management courses and opportunities for peer collaboration can significantly reduce burnout (Cooley & Yovanoff, 1996).

## **2.7 STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN AN INCLUSIVE MODEL**

According to Newman, King and Youngs (2000), capacity is defined as the potential to fulfil a function. Furthermore, the authors mention that school capacity is viewed as a collective process involving all stakeholders, and is aimed at improving the achievement of all students. Moreover, Newman et al., (2000) assert that implementing an inclusive model requires a sound understanding of SEN and inclusion, in order to develop strategies for capacity building.

Mattos (2011) asserts that if the capacity within an education system is inadequate, it may be increased by improving staff performance, the addition of appropriate resources and restructuring the organisation.

With reference to the UAE, it may be argued that building teacher capacity is essential, since SEN and inclusion is an underdeveloped notion with the current education reform. Century (1999) suggests that capacity building within schools consists of four dimensions namely; individual capacity, instructional capacity, organisational capacity and material capacity. For the purposes of this study, the author adopted the work of Century (1999) as it relates to the UAE education context. The four dimensions will now be discussed in more detail and relevant links to the UAE context will be discussed.

## **2.7.1 Four dimensions of capacity building**

### *2.7.1.1 Individual capacity*

Individual capacity is fundamental to the success of an education reform and is further described as the educators' knowledge, skills and disposition that are developed over a period of time. Teachers' knowledge is improved when they become more familiar with the reform expectations and seek professional development opportunities to improve their practice. Teachers' skill development is enhanced when they apply new knowledge, and this in turn can lead to improved student attainment and overall teacher performance.

In the UAE, the current reform agenda stipulates that teachers need to become familiar with the expectations surrounding the inclusion of SEN students. Teachers are therefore expected to follow policy guidelines; enhance their teaching practices to suit the needs of SEN students; and attend professional development workshops that aim to provide teachers with strategies applicable to an inclusive environment. Significantly, the teacher's disposition and willingness to implement new directives is central to the success of any reform (O'Day, Goertz & Floden, 1995).

### *2.7.1.2 Instructional capacity*

Instructional capacity is driven by two aspects; namely content development and process development. Content development refers to the curriculum or policies within an education system and process development refers to school

wide procedures aimed at developing the innovation of individuals within the organisation (Century, 1999). Both aspects of instructional capacity is relevant to the UAE context in that teachers are required to plan lessons that cater for all student needs and in so doing, teachers make a contribution to school wide initiatives related to inclusion.

#### *2.7.1.3 Organisational capacity*

Organisational capacity is strengthened by developing a collaborative professional culture within the school or wider community. School leaders play a vital role in establishing a professional culture of high expectation, whereby staff work collaboratively within the school, in order to achieve a shared goal. The capacity within the organisation is further enhanced when individuals collaborate with district officials and other external organisations (Century, 1999). In the UAE, school leaders, teachers and parents are invited to attend professional development workshops related to SEN and inclusion. These workshops aim to familiarise all stakeholders with the current expectations as mandated by ADEC.

#### *2.7.1.4 Material capacity*

The material capacity of a school is developed through curriculum implementation, increased staffing, and other resources aimed at sustainable capacity building (Century, 1999). Teachers in UAE schools are tasked with implementing a curriculum and make use of resources that cater to the needs of all students. In addition, ADEC encourages all school leaders to upskill and develop staff in order to ensure effective implementation of the inclusion policy.

In relation to the above, Newman, King and Youngs (2000) highlight the importance of developing human beings as resources, because they are central to the implementation of reform initiatives.

The next section addresses leadership as a means to address capacity building within an education setting.

### **2.7.2 Leadership and capacity building**

According to Newman, King and Youngs (2000), it is essential for school leaders to build capacity when implementing new initiatives. This is further supported by Leithwood and Day (2007), who stress that during capacity building, the role of the school leader is to identify the schools vision and align staff goals around the respective vision. In addition, the authors maintain that staff motivation during new initiatives are central to a sustainable capacity building process.

Florian, Hange and Copland (2000) assert that leadership at a district level can support capacity building within schools, by evaluating the effectiveness of reform implementation, quality assurance of curriculum implementation, providing professional development workshops and by fostering working relationships with teachers, parents and other external organisations.

Mittler (1994) is of the view that the successful implementation of an inclusive model will depend on school leaders radically reforming the existing schooling system, by adapting the curriculum in order to meet student needs.

It is this evident that school leaders play a crucial role in driving new initiatives within their respective schools. It is also apparent that school leaders need to offer the necessary support and guidance when staff attempt to implement new directives.

## **2.8 PARENTAL VIEWS REGARDING INCLUSION**

A considerable body of literature have explored parental roles regarding the inclusion of SEN students, with particular focus on parental satisfaction with school services (Sansosti, 2008). In general, parents are satisfied with the education their children receive within an inclusive setting (DiPietro, Luiselli, Campbell, Cannon, Ellis & Taras, 2002). A qualitative research study by Green and Shinn (1994) indicated that parental satisfaction was not necessarily related to academic results, instead parents revealed that they valued the extra support or individual attention their child received during inclusion. In addition, the study revealed that almost ninety percent of the

parents saw a change in their child's self-esteem or an improvement in their attitude; whilst only a third of the parents mentioned an improvement in skills.

Although parents displayed a limited reliance on data for evaluating their child's progress, many reported they were interested in getting specific feedback regarding overall progress. Significantly, the study revealed that parental assessment of the appropriateness of their child's placement was influenced by the views of the educator (Green & Shinn, 1994). This being said, parents were more in favour of having their child included in a mainstream classroom, if the teacher was in favour of the transition (Green & Shinn, 1994).

Since parents are viewed as key stakeholders regarding decision making within an education reform, particularly at it relates to the implementation of an inclusive model; their views are central to evaluating the effectiveness of the inclusion model (Hunt & Goetz, 2004).

Within the UAE context, Arab societies have little experience and are provided little guidance in dealing with the phenomenon of childhood disability (Alhahbabi, 2009). A noteworthy feature within the UAE is the hierarchical distinctions between males, females and family tribes (Stang Dahl, 1997). As a result of these distinctions, gender roles are clearly defined, with particular reference to child rearing. The overall responsibility of rearing a child with SEN lies with the mother, as are concerns regarding education, religion and cultural values (Bouhdiba, 1997). In the UAE, the social stigma related to children with disabilities and SEN are rife, consequently these children are devalued significantly (Crabtree, 2007).

According to Crabtree (2007), until recently, the home is still regarded as a suitable place for children with special needs rather than a schooling environment or a special educational institution. The author maintains that parents are more concerned that institutions do not provide adequate support and services, in order to cater to the individual and specific needs of their children. One of the reasons parents are reluctant to move their children into mainstream classrooms, is based on the fact that they do not trust the general

education teachers to be qualified to educate and manage their children (Alhahbabi, 2009).

With reference to the above, Crabtree (2007) maintains that in the UAE, the social inclusion of SEN students into the education system is still at a rudimentary level and the ultimate goal for most parents, is for their children to be accepted within the community. The author is of the view that although education is valued, it is still unreachable for most of the special needs population within the UAE.

## **2.9 TEACHER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR SEN**

Idol (2006) researched various collaborative teacher support programmes aimed to assist teachers working with SEN students namely; consulting teacher services, cooperative teaching in the classroom, supportive resource programmes, and instructional assistants. These programmes will now be discussed in more detail.

### **2.9.1 Consulting teacher model**

The consulting teacher model is a service offered to classroom teachers, where a special education consultant works in collaboration with the classroom teacher. The role of the teacher is to teach the class and the consultant works directly with the teacher in developing a plan for targeted SEN students (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 2000).

### **2.9.2 Cooperative teaching model**

The cooperative teaching model is a method where special education and classroom teachers work in partnership, in the same classroom, presenting a variety of co teaching strategies, in order to support all students (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989). According to Idol et al., (2000), the cooperative teaching model is a complementary extension of the consulting teacher model.

### **2.9.3 Supportive resource programmes**

The supportive resource programme approach is described in terms of a resources room setting, in a given school, where students have the opportunity to receive specialised support on a scheduled basis. The majority of these students instruction is received in the mainstream classroom (Wiederholt & Chamberlain, 1989).

During this programme, teachers working in the resource room and classroom teachers work collaboratively, to design curricula and resource material, aimed at supporting the needs of individual students. The overall objective of the supportive resource programme is to scaffold instruction for SEN students, in an attempt to transfer what they have learned to the mainstream classroom.

### **2.9.4 Instructional assistants**

Instructional assistants are a type of service offered to schools to support an inclusive model. The role of the instructional assistant is to accompany SEN students throughout the school day. According to Idol (2006), this method of service delivery is favoured by most educators, especially in schools that are less familiar with an inclusive approach. The author further mentions that the service of the instructional assistant is usually funded by special education divisions, who strive to provide individualised assistance for SEN students.

An analysis of the above mentioned teacher support programmes, suggests that teachers may require support during the implementation of new inclusion initiatives. It is further apparent, that school leaders could explore a variety of support programmes as they attempt to build the capacity of their staff. In the context of the UAE, it could be argued that a lack of teacher support programmes may hinder the successful implementation of inclusion.

## **2.10 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF INCLUSION**

According to Willis (2007:16), an advantage of inclusion is that it is beneficial for both students and teachers because teachers 'experience positive changes in their tolerance, flexibility, and responsibility'.

Additionally, Stainback and Stainback (1990) highlight that inclusion is a suitable instructional model because most SEN students are accepted and supported by their peers and the wider school community, whilst having their educational needs met.

Proponents of inclusion have argued that inclusion can result in both social and academic gains and SEN students are better equipped to integrate into their communities (Begeny & Martins, 2007). Other arguments suggest that moving towards an inclusive approach leads to an increase in student attainment, the development of teacher skills and a more receptive attitude towards SEN students (Begeny & Martens, 2007). In contrast, one of the disadvantages of an inclusive approach as highlighted by Meynert (2014) lies in the difficulty of mixing students of varying abilities into one setting. The author asserts that SEN students could experience a sense of failure if they are unable to cope with curriculum demands.

According to Sklaroff (1994), another disadvantage centres around behaviour management issues that could arise within an inclusive setting, thus presenting more challenges for teachers within the classroom. The author further asserts that SEN students could 'monopolise an inordinate amount of time and resources', thereby placing additional stress on teachers (Sklaroff, 1994:7).

Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1995) highlight that teachers generally take more time to produce lesson plans that are best suited to cater to the needs of SEN students. Similarly, Sant'ana (2005) asserts that teachers have an added responsibility to make the necessary adaptations to the curriculum, in order to differentiate the learning for their students. The author further mentions that it may be disadvantageous for teachers who do not have the training, skills and knowledge, to make the necessary adjustments to the curriculum.

With reference to the UAE context, most students are not native English speakers as Arabic is their first language. Language may be an additional challenge for teachers attempting to cater for SEN students within inclusive schools. This challenge pertaining to language may result in teachers experiencing additional pressure, resulting in possible work overload (Ibrahim, Al-Kaabi & El-Zaatari, 2013).

In light of the above, it is apparent that there are advantages and disadvantages within inclusive settings. ADEC's main goal is to follow an inclusive model within UAE schools and if teachers' are unsuccessful in meeting these expectations, it may result in them leaving the teaching profession.

An exploration of inclusion within an education reform will be presented in the next section.

## **2.11 INCLUSION AND EDUCATION REFORM**

The NCSE (2010) assert that a change process such as inclusion is not predictable, because the change depends on leaders monitoring the change and making the relevant adjustments along the way. Significant changes to any school require sound planning, thoughtful implementation and a monitoring system to evaluate the changes that have occurred over a period of time (Fullan, 1991). In addition Fullan (1991) highlights that it is important to research situations where schools have been transformed positively and the improvements are significantly notables. It is therefore imperative that schools assess the impact of various factors involved in the successful implementations of inclusion. Furthermore, it is essential that all stakeholders are involved in the implementation and evaluation of such initiatives (NCSE, 2010).

Significantly, Fullan (1991) asserts that education reform initiatives that are led from the top and are passed down to teachers are often unsuccessful. This stems from the fact that those responsible to implement reform initiatives are not part of the decision making process and policy makers are not necessarily aware of what is happening in the classroom. In addition, the

author stresses a partnership whereby management and teachers support each other during the change process (Fullan, 1991; UNESCO, 2005).

With reference to the above, the NCSE (2010) asserts that successful implementation of inclusion requires a shift in culture, organisation and attitudes. Schools are therefore unlikely to implement and make these changes instantaneously.

The National High School Alliance (2005) has identified six key practices that support inclusion during a comprehensive school reform initiative. Some of the practices bear relevance to the current UAE education reform, in that the expectations are similar for schools implementing the new inclusion policy.

Personalised Learning Environment	Adjust school structure and size to ensure personal relationships with adults; rigorous curriculum; personal learning plans
Academic Engagement of All Students	Project and inquiry based learning; differentiated instruction and assessment methods; provide flexible/ block scheduling
Accountable Leaders	Assess policy, allocate resources, and use data to promote success for all stakeholders; distribute leadership among community
Engaged Community and Youth	Engage community to create vision for students;
Empowered Educators	Schedule common planning time; use data to inform practice; define professional development needs

(Source: The National High School Alliance, 2005:2)

### **Table 2.2 Key practices to support inclusion**

The above table outlines some key practices for schools attempting to implement inclusion initiatives. These practices will now be discussed and relevant links with reference to this study will be made.

- The personalised learning environment refers to schools adapting the school structure, the curriculum and developing individual learning plans for students. In the UAE context, schools are currently expected to modify the school environment and adapt their lesson plans to cater for SEN students.
- The academic engagement of all students focuses on differentiating instruction and creating opportunities for students to be involved in their

own learning. Teachers in the UAE are required, by policymakers, to offer differentiated lessons where all students develop various critical skills through project based activities.

- Leadership accountability and community engagement proves to be crucial factors during the implementation of inclusion. With this in mind, there is an expectation that school leaders build capacity amongst all stakeholders to successfully implement reform initiatives. UAE school leaders have currently been mandated to implement inclusive practices within their schools and to ensure that all stakeholders are familiar with the policy expectations.
- The empowerment of educators during a reform is essential as teachers feel more equipped to plan, make data driven decisions and to make use of professional development opportunities. With reference to the context of this study, UAE teachers are required to attend professional development workshops in order to gain an understanding of policy expectations.

An analysis of the above mentioned viewpoints suggests that all stakeholders play a vital role during reform initiatives such as inclusion. It is also apparent that any change process takes time and requires sound monitoring and evaluation to ensure that schools are making headway. Professional development and resources to support the notion of inclusion are central to building teacher capacity during an education reform.

## **2.12 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a review of the literature surrounding inclusion and its role within an educational setting. The definitions and views of inclusion and the way in which it relates to SEN were explored. Principles of inclusion were mentioned and relevant links to the UAE context were made. Teacher and parental views and attitudes surrounding the inclusion of SEN students were discussed, followed by the challenges that teachers face when attempting to implement an inclusive model.

The effects of teacher stress were highlighted and strategies for building teacher capacity within an inclusive model were explored. Various teacher support programmes for SEN were mentioned and the advantages and disadvantages pertaining to inclusion were addressed. Lastly, inclusion and education reform were discussed as it relates to the UAE context.

In the next chapter a literature review surrounding social constructivism and its relevance to education will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM AND EDUCATION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

According to Brown (2006) an epistemology refers to the knowledge of how people learn and gather knowledge. Piaget (1980) studied the intellectual capacities of children and found that they construct their knowledge by interacting with others and the world around them. As this study is concerned with applying the theory of constructivism within a school setting, with particular reference to inclusion, the chapter firstly aims to explore the philosophy behind constructivism and the views, definitions and assumptions related to social constructivism. The theories of Piaget, Vygotsky and Lave in relation to learning will also be presented. The chapter then examines the rationale for using the theory of social constructivism as a teaching method, followed by an explanation of constructivist classroom pedagogy. The chapter also further explores the role that leaders, teachers and professional learning community's play, when following a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

#### **3.2 PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Matthews (2000) explains the history of constructivism by dividing it into four main philosophies namely: (a) educational constructivism that explores the work of Piaget and von Glasersfeld; (b) social constructivism, beginning with the work of Vygotsky; (c) philosophical constructivism as per the work of Kuhn; and (d) sociological constructivism researching the sociology of scientific knowledge. Although constructivists hold different philosophies regarding the concept of learning, all seem to agree that learning occurs when students are active explorers of knowledge (Marlowe & Page, 1998).

According to Wright (2000) constructivism today is based on Kantian beliefs from as early as the 18th century. This belief highlighted that knowledge is created, rather than discovered.

Similarly, Spivey (1997) mentioned that the mind attains knowledge, and this knowledge allows individuals to make sense of various experiences. Shapiro (2003) highlighted the work of Rousseau, who identified the way students formulate their ideas. Rousseau discovered that children make use of their senses in order to connect ideas they formulated when interacting with others. In addition, the philosopher surmised that children would alter and adjust these ideas when they are exposed to a different experience or when they interact with different individuals. This viewpoint bears relevance to the context of the study, due to the fact that SEN students are currently included into mainstream schools where they get the opportunity to interact with other students and explore different experiences.

Another philosopher, Pestalozzi, believed that when children make observations and interact with their environment, they make connections and form an understanding within this particular environment. He believed that this was the way that all individual increased their knowledge. Pestalozzi also asserted that the education of children should be based on their natural development, highlighting the fact that children learn through their senses, rather than through the use of words. He further emphasised the importance of linking the school curriculum to the child's experiences at home (Shapiro, 2003). According to Wadsworth (1996) the construction of knowledge is not an automatic process, and the individual's rate of development may differ whilst the continuum of learning may remain the same.

The above mentioned philosophies surrounding social constructivism is central to this study in that it focuses on how knowledge is acquired by children. Within an inclusive schooling environment, students gain knowledge through exploration in an attempt to make sense of their surroundings. Teachers are challenged to link the curriculum to the needs of the students and to encourage parents to actively participate in the learning process.

### **3.3 VIEWS, DEFINITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

Constructivism is viewed as an epistemology, or as learning or meaning making theory, that explains how knowledge is gained and how individuals learn (Brown, 2006). According to Richardson (1997), the theory maintains that individuals construct their own meaning or knowledge through what they already know and believe, or through activities that they are exposed to. In UAE schools, teachers are exposed to the new reform agenda that focuses on the inclusion of SEN students in mainstream schools. Teachers are challenged to construct meaning regarding inclusion as it relates to the context, in order to ensure successful implementation.

The constructivist epistemology also assumes that students construct their own knowledge when they interact with individuals within their immediate environment (Brown, 2006). In addition, the social constructive perspectives of learning does not only require students to interact with each other, but it requires that teachers ensure that all students are accepted as full members of the classroom, in order to promote learning (Antia, Stinson & Gaustad, 2002). This viewpoint is significant to this study because teachers play a key role in ensuring that all students are accepted as members of the mainstream classroom.

According to Richardson (1997), constructivist theory has received considerable attention in the areas of education, teacher preparation, and policy formulation. The theory not only emphasises active and collaborative learning, but it also necessitates that teachers and students discover and construct new knowledge together.

John Dewey, a well-known philosopher, believed that when children learn, they are able to find solutions, generate new ideas, and increase their understanding of a given topic. Learning becomes embedded when students develop sound problem solving and critical thinking skills (Marlowe & Page, 1998). Dewey further proposed that both teachers and students learn when they build on prior knowledge or experiences (National Research Council, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978); and in order for students to transfer and apply their

knowledge in a different setting, they would need to be actively engaged in their own learning (Phillips, 2000).

According to Bredo (2000), the term social constructivism, is often attributed to the work of Vygotsky, who asserted that children gain knowledge during social interactions. The term scaffolding is evident in the literature from both Vygotsky (Gagnon & Collay, 2001) and Bruner (Fosnot, 1996).

The term 'scaffolding' as it relates to learning, implies that a child is assisted by an adult by means of 'hints and props that allow him to begin a new climb, guiding the child in next steps before the child is capable of appreciating their significance on his own' (Fosnot, 1996:21).

Constructivist knowledge creation leads to a revelation of what is known and what is not known (Slepkov, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) envisioned learning as a socially constructed experience involving a more capable person guiding a less capable person to understand ideas beyond their developmental level. He called this the zone of proximal development (ZPD). He further made a distinction between 'the zone of actual and proximal development' (Berk & Winsler, 1995: 5). In the zone of actual development, the student is able to solve problems independently, whereas in the zone of proximal development, the student is only able to solve the problem by means of assistance.

The above mentioned viewpoint suggests that through effective modelling and social engagement, students are able to learn things they could not learn on their own (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Wadsworth, 1996). Although the ZPD is generally discussed in relation to child development, the concept could be expanded to include relationships between adults (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). The above mentioned theory relates to this study as teachers play a pivotal role in guiding SEN students to ensure that learning occurs. These learning experiences occur within a social setting where the teacher guides the student to understand ideas beyond their level of development.

The social constructivist view of an education system, envisions collaboration as a new way of learning for students, and a new way of planning and teaching for educators (Fulton, 2003).

According to Montiel-Overall (2005) collaboration focuses on changing instruction with the aim to improve student learning outcomes. When individuals come together to share knowledge and skills in order to construct new ideas, they are involved in active collaboration.

Another view of social constructivism, as highlighted by McMahon (1997), stresses the importance of understanding a culture and context. In light of this view, Badasie (2014) maintains that when an individual participates in a community, learning and understanding occurs. Individuals are therefore able to construct new knowledge based on their understanding of the given context (Badasie, 2014).

With reference to professional development, a constructivist view suggests that teacher training is a sense making process, whereby teachers construct new knowledge by making use of existing knowledge and perceptions (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). Furthermore, the construction of knowledge entails an 'interplay between existing knowledge, ideas and beliefs and new approaches advocated by professional developers' (Chalmers & Keown, 2006:148).

An additional interpretation of constructivism focuses, on the notion of situated cognition, as described by Lave (1988). The author maintains that learning is best realised when tasks are performed, practiced and applied in real life situations. Situated cognition from a constructivist perspective, can be summarised as follows:

- Learning is situated and contextualised in action and everyday situations;
- Knowledge is acquired through active participation;
- Learning is a process of social action and engagement involving ways of thinking, doing and communicating;
- Learning can be assisted by experts or supportive others and through apprenticeship;
- Learning is a form of participation in social environments.

(McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000:61).

Kim (2001) mentions that social constructivism is based on specific assumptions regarding reality, knowledge, and learning. In light of this view, social constructivists are of the belief that reality is constructed when people interact with each other (Kukla, 2000). Knowledge is constructed on a social and cultural level, and individuals create meaning by interacting with other individuals and the environment in which they live (Ernest, 1999). Learning is therefore viewed as a social process where individuals actively participate in social activities. In addition, social constructivists are of the view that learning does not take place when individuals are passive (McMahon, 1997).

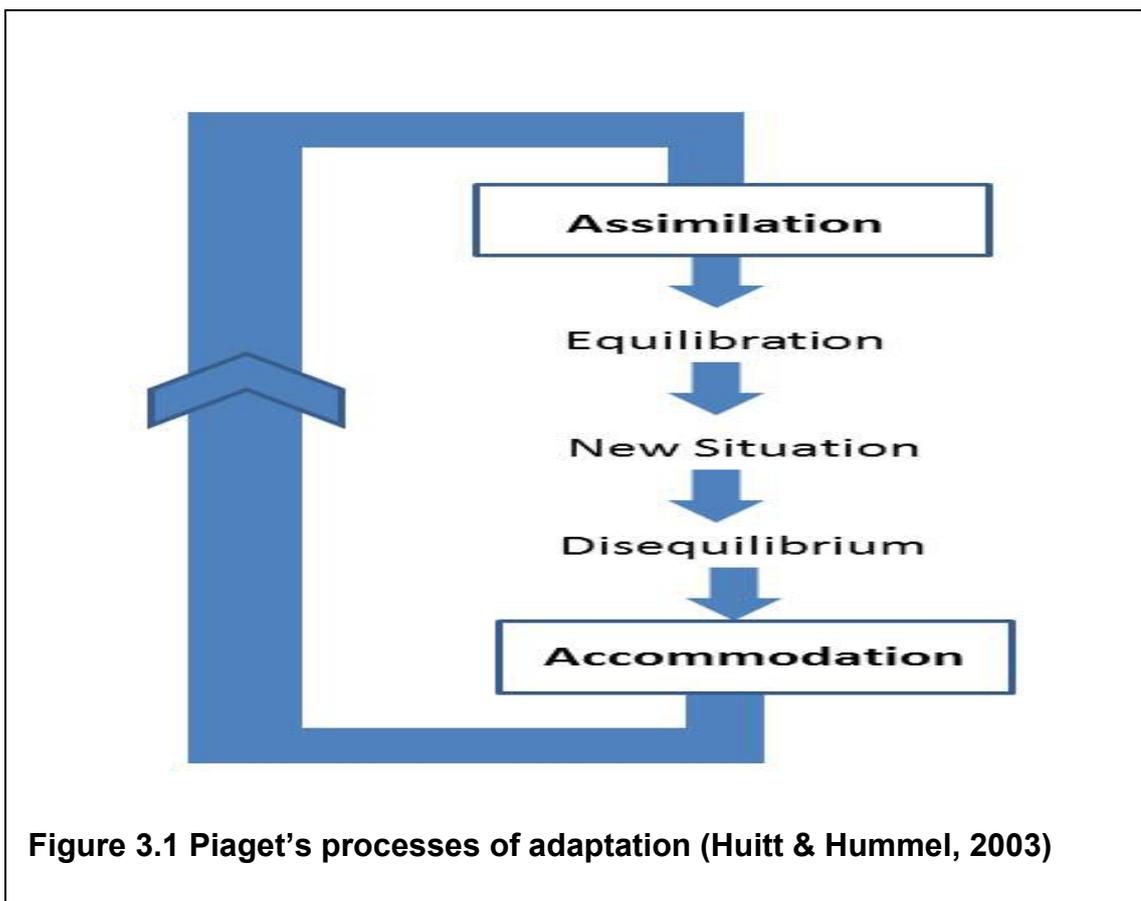
The next section will present the theories of learning as described by Piaget, Vygotsky and Lave. These will now be discussed in further detail, and its relevance to this study will be highlighted.

### **3.3.1 Piaget's theory of cognitive development**

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was an influential researcher in the discipline of developmental psychology. Piaget originally trained in the fields of biology and philosophy and was primarily interested in the biological influences on 'how we come to know' (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). The theorist further believed that what distinguished humans from other animals is their ability to think abstractly and make sense of the world around them. According to Huitt and Hummel (2003), the writings of Piaget serve as a foundation for the constructivist theory of teaching and learning. During his research, Piaget was interested in how children think, and he noted that younger children answered questions differently when compared to older children. The theorist attributed this finding to the fact that children think differently at different stages of their development.

Piaget uncovered two major aspects that relates to learning i.e. the process of coming to know and the different stages that individuals go through, in order to obtain various developmental skills (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). The theorist was also interested in the way in which individuals adapt to their environment. In this he mentioned two processes that individuals make use of to adapt to various situations.

He describes these two processes as assimilation and accommodation. During the process of assimilation, the individual uses or transforms the environment to suit the individual's pre-existing way of thinking. Accommodation refers to a process where the individual changes their way of thinking in order to adapt to the environment. Both processes are used simultaneously and alternately throughout life.



**Figure 3.1 Piaget's processes of adaptation (Huitt & Hummel, 2003)**

In Figure 3.1 Piaget processes of adaptation illustrate that as individuals grow and develop within their surroundings, they continue to add (pre-existing views), gather (new information) and use this information to make sense of their environment (assimilation).

Throughout their development, individuals strive to create a balance regarding the way they construct meaning on a daily basis (equilibrium). When these individuals are faced with a new situation or new information, their thinking

may be disrupted or challenged, resulting in them feeling a sense of disequilibrium. To gain back the feeling of equilibrium, they may need to change their thinking in order to adapt to the new situation (accommodation).

Further to the above, Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). These four stages will now be discussed in further detail.

The sensorimotor stage usually occurs during infancy and the child develops their intelligence through motor activity. The child knowledge is generally limited because it is at a developmental stage and this knowledge is based on the interactions and experiences that the child comes into contact with. During the child's physical development, new intellectual start to emerge. Language development usually occurs at the end of this stage.

- The pre-operational stage occurs during early childhood (toddler stage). The child's intelligence is expressed by making use of symbols, the use of language increases, imagination and memory starts to develop. At this stage the child's thinking is largely egocentric.
- The concrete operational stage takes place during early adolescence. During this stage, the child's intelligence is logical and systematic and operational thinking starts to develop. At this stage children are usually less egocentric.
- The formal operational stage is the period between adolescence and adulthood. In this stage, intelligence is logical and related to abstract ideas.

In light of the above, many school programmes centre around Piaget's theory as it lays the foundation for constructivist learning. The theory further promotes two instructional techniques namely, discovery learning and the development of the child's interests.

Parents and teachers are also encouraged to challenge the child's ability, by offering suitable instructional material and resources. In addition, teachers should make use of concrete experiences in order to promote learning.

Piaget's theory regarding the way in which children adapt to new situations bears relevance to this study, because both SEN students and their teachers are placed in a new situation; and are challenged to make sense of and adapt to the new situation through a process of assimilation and accommodation. All stakeholders are therefore striving to achieve a sense of balance (equilibrium), in order to successfully include SEN students into mainstream schools, as per the reform directive.

### **3.3.2 Vygotsky's zone of proximal development**

Vygotsky (1978) was well known for formulating ideas surrounding the learning and development of individuals from a constructivist point of view (Richard-Amato, 2003). Within a constructivist classroom, students are engaged and at the centre of their own learning. These students also collaborate with other students through the means of inquiry based activities. Group projects that are created by students provide opportunities for groups to present their work in an interesting manner, and in doing so, students are able to discuss, question and reflect on their learning.

According to Richard-Amato (2003), Vygotsky was of the view that knowledge is structured and formulated from within the individual through a process of active learning. Vygotsky further focused on two developmental levels namely, the 'actual' and 'potential' level of development (Richard-Amato, 2003). The ZPD refers to the area between the student's actual and potential level of learning and development. The students' reaches their potential through problem solving activities and under the guidance of an adult (more knowledgeable), or by collaborating with a more competent peer (Vygotsky, 1978; Bradley, 2010; Richard-Amato, 2003). Figure 3.2 illustrates Vygotsky's ZPD (in Bock, 2014: 10):



- being flexible in their instruction;
- removing all possible causes of anxiety from the classroom situation;
- limiting attention to errors;
- motivating and encouraging students to take risks.

In the ZPD Vygotsky also emphasises the importance of play within a classroom situation, as it assists students' in reaching their potential. In this regard, he mentions that when children play, they tend to behave beyond their typical age and they are capable of inventing new rules, in order to create a more fun learning experience (Richard-Amato, 2003).

Group activities are therefore regarded as a form of play and groups generally decide on the rules that will guide them to completing a given project (Richard-Amato, 2003). When teachers create a fun environment where students can play, it enhances the learning experience and motivates the student to reach their potential (Richard-Amato, 2003).

According to Richard-Amato (2003), Vygotsky's interactive model further suggests that knowledge within a classroom situation can be co-constructed, where the teacher may take on the role of the student and the student becomes the teacher. In this scenario, everyone gets the opportunity to share and learn from one another, and the teacher is able to assess student learning in the process.

With reference to the above, Vygotsky's theory bears relevance to the study in that, teachers are currently viewed as the 'knowledgeable person', who is responsible to ensure the effective transition of SEN students into mainstream schools. These teachers are further tasked to ensure that the needs of all students are being met and that students are guided and supported in reaching their full potential (ZPD).

### **3.3.3 A comparison between Piaget and Vygotsky's theory on learning**

The theories and views of Piaget and Vygotsky are often compared because it relates to the way children and adults construct knowledge. Table 3.1

illustrates some comparative views related to the way individuals learn and develop.

	<b>Piaget</b>	<b>Vygotsky</b>
<b><i>Defining Characteristics</i></b>	Stages, development drives learning, learner centered	Social interactions, Zone of Proximal Development, learning drives development
<b><i>Mechanisms of Change</i></b>	Innate development, stages, assimilation, accommodation, equilibration	Scaffolding, social interactions, cultural development, internalization
<b><i>Readiness</i></b>	Genetic development growth, biological stages, has to be developmentally appropriate	ZPD has to contain the capabilities that are being taught, scaffolding
<b><i>Role of Student</i></b>	Actively manipulates objects/ideas, continually invents/reinvents knowledge through interaction with the world	Interact with instructor, peers, and socio-cultural environment to solve problems.
<b><i>Role of Teacher and Classroom</i></b>	Provide environment that encourages students to interact and ask probing questions.	Engage learners in socially-organized activities, provide scaffolding for learner.
<b><i>Endpoints</i></b>	Hypothetically everyone can reach the endpoint.	Learning how to think.

**Table 3.1 Comparative table of Piaget and Vygotsky's theory on learning (DeVries, 2000)**

Table 3.1 provides six comparative elements related to learning, as described by Piaget and Vygotsky. The first element focuses on the defining characteristics of the theories. Piaget asserts that children progress through different stages of development and that learning occurs as individuals grow and develop. In contrast, Vygotsky highlights the ZPD, where learning occurs through social interactions and that learning drives the rate of development.

The second element highlights the mechanisms of change where Piaget mentions that individuals have the innate ability to process change, through

either assimilation or accommodation. In comparison, Vygotsky mentions that learning should be scaffolded and through social and cultural interaction, change is internalised.

The third element focuses on the individual's readiness. Piaget stresses that the individual's biological and genetic makeup is central to the way in which the individual develops. Vygotsky on the other hand, asserts that learning occurs through scaffolded instruction.

The fourth element refers to the role that students play within the learning environment. According to Piaget, students explore and learn by manipulating various objects and ideas in order to make sense of the world around them. Vygotsky is of the view that learning occurs when students participate in problem solving activities, whilst interacting with their teacher and peers.

The fifth element focuses on the role of the teacher within the classroom. Piaget is of the view that the teachers role is to provide opportunities for students to interact and to ask various questions. Vygotsky mentions that teachers should create socially engaging activities that are differentiated according to the needs of the students, in order for learning to take place.

The final element refers to the end point or goal for learning. According to Piaget, all individuals will eventually reach their potential as they grow and develop. In contrast, Vygotsky is of the view that learning will only take place through effective teaching, guidance and facilitation. When this happens individuals will think differently and be able to apply this knowledge to a different context (Blake & Pope, 2008).

#### **3.3.4 Lave's theory of situated cognition**

Lave's theory of situated cognition refers to elements of cognition, perception and actions within a given social context (Chaiklin & Lave, 2006). According to Lave (1988), the emphasis is not solely on the individual, but more on the social setting and the interactions of individuals within these settings. In addition, the theorist mentions that individuals make use of everyday situations in order to gain knowledge, and share learning experiences. The

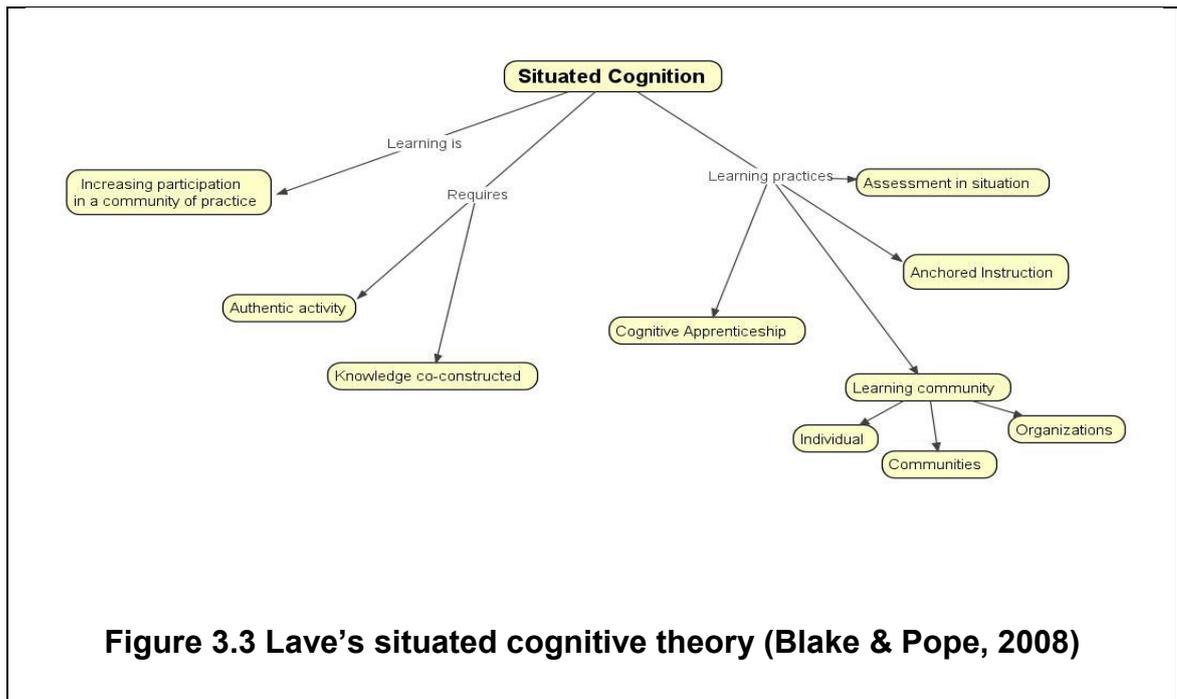
theorist further highlights that when individuals come together in a group situation and share these learning experiences, a community of practice is established (Lave, 1988).

Communities of practice are described as learning groups that exist in different contexts. These learning groups are made up of members that are either the expert or the novice within the group. Every community of practice changes and evolves over time and groups create their own norms and routines during social interactions. Members within these communities usually feel a sense of belonging (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Additionally, from a situated cognitive perspective, the theorist maintains that learning has four major premises namely:

- The foundation for learning occurs in everyday situations, or experiences.
  - Knowledge is obtained within the context and can only be transferred to a similar context.
  - Social practices within the context influence the way individuals think, behave, perceive, build knowledge and interact with each other.
  - Learning is dependent on the individual's participation within the community of practice
- (Blake & Pope, 2008).

Figure 3.3 below illustrates the process of learning from a social cognitive perspective as described by Lave (1988).



In Figure 3.3 Lave model on situated cognition illustrates various learning stages within a community of practice. Firstly the model suggests that learning takes place when individuals actively participate within the community of practice. Learning occurs when these individuals engage in an authentic activity where they have the opportunity to co-construct and share knowledge. Secondly, as part of the learning practices, individuals reflect and assess what they have learned within the community. The learning community consists of the individual, the community and other stakeholders with the environment (Lave, 1988; Chaiklin & Lave, 2006; Blake & Pope, 2008).

Regarding communities of practice, teachers in the UAE are encouraged to work with their colleagues, by sharing ideas and instructional material, with the overall aim to improve teaching and learning for all students. Teachers also need to collaborate with all stakeholders, namely, students, parents, colleagues and the wider community in order to build relationships within the UAE context. Significantly, teachers in the UAE should gain an understanding of how communities share knowledge and operate in order to implement change successfully.

## **3.4 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN SCHOOLS**

### **3.4.1 Rationale of social constructivism as a teaching method**

According to Rowe (2006), student centred teaching methods is synonymous with the theory of constructivism. Advocates for constructivism have linked various constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. Some of these approaches includes: 'discovery learning', 'task-based learning' and 'scaffolding' (Rowe, 2006). Additionally, Westwood (2006) highlights that problem-based learning (PBL) has gained popularity over the years, and it encompasses many of the 'student-centred' approaches to teaching and learning. The underlying rationale for PBL is that:

- the students are intrinsically motivated and actively involved in their learning; the curriculum content is relevant, interesting and caters to the needs of the students.

In light of the above, Rowe (2006) maintains that the intrinsically motivated learners, would possess the necessary skills and knowledge to engage effectively in their own learning.

### **3.4.2 Constructivist classroom pedagogy**

If constructivism is viewed an epistemology, a study of the way people learn, then constructivist pedagogy would be the teaching strategies that complement the constructivist theory of how people learn (Brown, 2006).

According to Brooks and Brooks (1999), there are five tenets of constructivism that form the basis for constructivist classrooms namely:

- Constructivist teachers seek and value the viewpoints of all students'.
- Teachers' structure the lesson in order to challenge the ideas and assumptions of all students.
- Teachers' are aware that the curriculum needs to be relevant for all students.
- Teachers' generate a big idea and plan lesson around this idea.

- Teachers' make use of investigations in their daily lessons in order to assess the learning of students.

Some of the above mentioned tenets of constructivism bear relevance to the context as there is an expectation that teachers apply some of these strategies, in order to enhance teaching and learning in UAE schools.

In relation to the above, Alesandrini and Larson (2002) speak of a number of components that are generally found in constructivist lessons namely: conceptualisation; clarifying; inquiring; planning; realising; testing; modifying; interpreting; reflecting and celebration. In addition, Brooks and Brooks (1993) highlight that teachers' often talk for most of the lesson, in order to get information across to their students. The authors suggest that teachers should incorporate listening into the lesson, as it is an essential component within a constructivist classroom. Through listening, teachers are able to gain an understanding of students' viewpoints and clarify any misconceptions.

Chalmers and Keown (2006) stress the importance of thinking and reflection as a means of constructing knowledge and personal beliefs. During reflection, teachers develop new ideas, skills and approaches to teaching, in order to decide which approach is best suited for their lesson. Additionally, constructivist pedagogy requires that teachers are aware of the way in which students' learn, in order to offer a more rigorous curriculum, best suited to their individual needs (Muradova, 2009).

### **3.4.3 The role of the leader**

With reference to constructivist leadership, Lambert (1995) identified key components of leadership that bear relevance to constructivism namely: 'designing learning processes' (Fullan, 1993); 'shared leadership' (Schlechty, 1990); 'fostering mutual respect' (Covey, 1990); 'the ability to persuade others' (Sergiovanni, 1999). The author further describes schools as interdependent communities, where policies and teaching practices are underpinned by constructivist leadership and learning (Lambert, 1995).

In light of this, Lambert (1995) mentions that when the school leader orchestrates social interaction amongst staff members and provides opportunities for reflection, teachers are able to construct knowledge and meaning in the process. Moreover, teachers are more likely to gain an in depth understanding of their surroundings and accept new initiatives when they engage in reflective dialogue with their colleagues (Lambert, 1995).

Fullan (2001) is of the view that since constructivist learning is a collaborative experience, and in order for learning to occur, there is a need to establish a strong community of learners. Combs, Miser, and Whitaker (1999) assert that effective leaders strive to establish this community of learners and should consistently remind staff of the vision for the school community. In addition, leaders should engage in regular dialogue with all stakeholders, in order to reinforce objectives and when leaders gather the ideas and opinions of all stakeholders, they strive to enhance the overall learning within the school (Combs, Miser & Whitaker, 1999).

With reference to teacher supervision as it relates to constructivist leadership, Shapiro (2000) asserts that constructivist leaders should not follow an autocratic approach to supervision, but aim to share the supervisory responsibility with teaching staff. Teachers would therefore observe other teachers in action and provide feedback of the lesson they observed.

Some of the supervisory roles include: peer supervision, coaching, mentoring and within these roles teachers get the opportunity to discuss learning, assess opportunities, and plan for more advanced teaching and learning experiences. According to Isaacson (2004) collegiality is the consequence of teachers interacting on a professional level and when teachers share their experiences, they develop a common language surrounding best education practise.

Consistent with constructivist philosophy is the view that school leaders would need to observe teachers' lessons in order to establish whether teachers have internalised the practises related to constructivism National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). The feedback related to observation

of the lesson, would support both teacher and student development (NAESP, 2002).

Significant for the study is the role that school leaders play in ensuring the establishment of a school learning community in order to build capacity amongst stakeholders.

#### **3.4.4 The role of the teacher**

According to Windschiti (2002), the role of the teacher in a traditional sense is quite different to the role in a constructivist environment. In this environment teachers tend to work harder, concentrate more and are challenged to embrace a variety of instructional techniques, in order to raise student attainment. Teachers act as a guide, or facilitator, to assist students to make connections during the lesson. The teacher therefore needs to follow a rather flexible approach to learning (McKeown & Beck, 1999). Gregory (2002) is of the view that an expert constructivist teacher is able to judge exactly when and how to intervene during the lesson in order to facilitate student discovery.

Mowatt and VanName (2002) offer a checklist for teachers wishing to follow a constructivist approach in their classroom. These include:

- The teacher's readiness to act as a facilitator. The teacher would need to be aware of his/her learning style and those of the students'. The teacher would also need to have a sound understanding of how groups function in order to observe, document and assess group attainment.
- The teacher would need to structure the environment to encourage group work (arrange the desks and seats to allow for effective groupings).
- The teacher should set the tone within the classroom, that is, creating a safe and comfortable environment; an environment where students feel comfortable to share their ideas and know that their contributions are appreciated; students physical and social needs are met when students are divided into smaller groups; the teacher acts a facilitator by observing the groups in action and facilitating discussions as the lesson progresses.

In regards to planning within a constructivist setting, Windschitl (2002) identified some guidelines for lesson planning namely:

- Teachers need to explore and be aware of students prior knowledge regarding the lesson topic.
- Teachers need to outline a clear learning outcome.
- Teachers need to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies to challenge students.
- Lesson plans need to offer opportunities to utilize and generate new ideas.
- Teachers' need to create an environment that encourages opportunities for students to communicate and collaborate.

#### **3.4.5 The role of the professional learning community**

Organisational capacity refers to a process whereby organisations solve problems and make decisions in an effective manner, thus renewing the organisation. In an effective professional learning community, teachers are empowered and share in the decision-making within the organisation. The notion surrounding a professional learning community is a shift from the traditional top-down management approach to a more inclusive approach (Brown, 2006).

Senge (2001), states that in order for organisations to develop and grow, they would need to become learning organizations. Schools embracing this idea as proposed by Senge would establish professional learning communities (Brown, 2006).

According to Hipp (2001) there are various descriptors related to professional learning communities namely:

- Professional learning communities have a shared and supportive leadership structure and school administrators share power, authority and decision-making with teachers.
- Staff shares the vision for school improvement that focuses on student learning.

- Teachers' collective learning and application sets high expectations in order to address the needs of all students.
- The school conditions, facilities and capacities support the professional learning community.
- Teachers share practice through peer observations and feedback in order to build teaching and organisational capacity.

With reference to the above, the creation of professional learning communities help to support leaders in creating a learning community for everyone (Barth, 1992). Significantly, Isaacson (2004) mentions that school leaders should recognise that all stakeholders bring their own knowledge, experiences, beliefs and perceptions to the professional learning community.

Staff development, is therefore central to a professional learning community since the focus is on improving student achievement (Brown, 2006). The aim of the professional learning community is to develop and empower teachers to utilise innovative teaching strategies, in order to support the needs of the students (Dufour & Eakers, 1998).

In light of the above, Isaacson (2004) asserts that when teachers see themselves as leaders within a professional learning community, they play a central role in supporting and maintaining the philosophical vision of the organisation. In the context of this study, the current reform initiative within the UAE advocates for the creation of professional learning communities, in order to ensure that new directives such as the SEN policy are put into practice.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter provided a review of the literature surrounding social constructivism and its role within teaching and learning. Various philosophies of social constructivism were presented, followed by an exploration of the views, definitions and assumptions related to social constructivism. The rationale for social constructivism as a teaching method was mentioned, followed by an exploration into the teaching strategies (pedagogy) that could be employed within constructivist classrooms. The chapter also highlighted

the role that leaders, teachers and professional learning communities play in establishing constructivist learning environments. Chapter four will present the research design and methodology applicable to this study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEACH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the purpose of the study, the research design, the context and the sample is explained; followed by a description of the qualitative data collection methods, and an explanation of the data analysis process. An exploratory approach was used to address the research questions of this study. The chapter ends with an examination of the ethics and role of the researcher within the study.

#### **4.2 RESTATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE**

The UAE is currently undergoing an education reform and there is an expectation that teachers include all students into their classrooms regardless of their disability. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the process of inclusion for SEN students from the viewpoints of teachers and parents. Rather than attempting to impose a definition of the inclusion process from the research literature, the purpose of this study was to investigate teacher and parental views regarding SEN students, who are currently being included into mainstream schools.

#### **4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

Shank (cited in Ospina, 2004:5) defines qualitative research as 'a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning'. By systematic, the author refers to having a plan that is agreed upon. Empirical refers to research that is guided by experience and inquiry refers to the researchers attempt to make sense of the participants' experiences.

The use of qualitative research grew out of a consensus that quantitative measures alone could not sufficiently answer questions related to social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The purpose of qualitative research is

to therefore to produce in depth knowledge that assists in describing why and how certain phenomena occur (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). This study followed a qualitative exploratory research design, which was employed to gain insight, and to discover the meaning individuals attributed to a social problem (Creswell, 2007).

According to Krueger (2000), qualitative research relates to the way in which individuals make sense of the world around them, whilst interacting with other individuals. It is therefore also important to consider and understand the perspectives and views of the participants involved in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In this study, the researcher attempts to understand the experiences of teachers who are currently required to include SEN students into their classrooms.

In a qualitative research study, any effort to share what is discovered from teachers and parents requires an awareness of the context (Merriam, 2009). In relation to this, Krauss (2005) asserts that for the duration of the qualitative research project, it is best to assimilate into the culture or the context and in so doing, one attempts to gain an understanding of the way it functions. In this study, the researcher has been immersed in the UAE culture for over eight years and has a sound understanding of the education reform that the UAE is currently undergoing (further elaborated on under section 4.6.3).

Ospina (2004) maintained that qualitative research has the following advantages significant to this study, namely:

- the flexibility to follow unexpected ideas and explore processes effectively;
- sensitive to contextual factors;
- the ability to study symbolic dimensions and social meaning;
- increased opportunities due to its emergent design;
- the ability to develop new ideas and theories that are empirically supported;
- allowed for the opportunity to do an in depth study on phenomena; and
- established issues of interest to the practitioner

During the initial stages, the study began with a literature review on inclusion as it relates to education reform and the role that social constructivism plays within an evolving education system. A pilot study was conducted, where two participants were interviewed (see further details of the pilot study in section 4.7.1).

The data that was collected over a two year period consisted of a pilot study (March 2014); followed by individual semi structured interviews with five teachers (January-April 2015); and a focus group session with four parents (March 2015). The five interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes per participant and the focus group session was conducted over 90 minutes. All observations and reflections were documented throughout the study.

Consistent with the tenants of qualitative research, the epistemological perspective of constructivism underpinned this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Constructivism is the belief that knowledge is situated in a particular context and is constructed and shared through the interactions and interpretations people have of themselves and others (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). This study was therefore aimed at the UAE context, where teachers' and parents' views surrounding the new inclusion agenda were analysed, in order to gain an understanding of their experiences. Furthermore, the aim of research was not to have a fixed idea about reality, but to understand that every individual has their own perception of reality. Using a constructivist approach helps the researcher utilise rich narrative descriptions (Stake, 1995).

#### **4.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study examined teacher and parental views on the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools and whether teachers experienced any challenges during the instruction of these students. In order to complete the investigation, the following questions were asked:

- What are teachers' views on working with SEN students in the UAE?
- What challenges do teachers' experience when working with SEN students in UAE schools?
- What are parents' views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students in UAE schools?

## **4.5 DATA COLLECTION**

### **4.5.1 The school context**

The UAE is comprised of seven Emirates namely Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Umm Al Quwain, Fujairah an Ajman. The current education reform was mandated by The Abu Dhabi Education Council and the school is situated on the outskirts of Al Ain, a city that forms part of the Abu Dhabi Emirate. This study was conducted in an Arabic medium government school that has 720 students (further elaborated on under section 5.2).

### **4.5.2 The sample**

The study adopted purposive sampling as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). During purposive sampling, information rich participants were selected to participate in the research study. Seven teachers were purposefully selected as they are currently involved in the implementation of the new inclusion policy. In addition, four parents were also selected in order to obtain their views surrounding inclusion. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2009) mention that qualitative samples are generally small and it was on these grounds that I selected the number of participants.

### **4.5.3 The researcher as instrument**

According to Sherrad (1998), there are measures that researchers can adopt in order to avoid researcher bias. Firstly, the researcher's awareness of the participants feedback and the manner in which this feedback is transcribed. Secondly, the author mentions that there is a need for the researcher to be aware of the way in which they relate to the context. In this study, all the

participants information was analysed and interpreted by the researcher, thus the researcher was an instrument during the data gathering phase.

During this study, I perceived myself to be close to the participants, due to the fact that I currently work in a number of schools as an Educational Advisor. My current role entails mentoring and up-skilling teachers', in order to improve their performance within UAE schools. These teachers are monitored on a regular basis and consistent feedback is provided in order to facilitate change. I have been working in the UAE for eight years and therefore have a clear understanding of the current expectations placed upon teachers, attempting to implement an inclusive model within UAE schools.

#### **4.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Since the unit of analysis was the school level as an organisation, exploratory data collection methods were used to drive this study. According to Bassey (1999), a research offers diverse tools for data collection. It is therefore important to select the tools that are suitable, in order to answer the research questions. In addition, Fetterman (2010) recommends using some of the following methods i.e. interviewing, participant observations, reflexive journals and life histories where appropriate, during qualitative research. Moreover, Yin (2009) maintains that an indicator of a sound qualitative research design calls for multiple sources of evidence. Accordingly, this study gathered data from pilot semi-interviews; semi structured interviews; a focus group and the literature review.

In the next section, a description of each of the data collection methods will be discussed.

##### **4.6.1 The pilot study**

The purpose for undertaking pilot interviews was two-fold. Firstly, the researcher was able to become comfortable with the interview procedures i.e. question formulation and probing for follow up responses. Secondly, the test run allowed the researcher to modify questions before the official data collection commenced.

Strydom (1998) highlighted the importance of conducting a pilot study, to establish whether the research design was accurate or whether it required modification. Two pilot interviews were conducted, and participants were asked to provide feedback on the clarity of the questions and to rate the overall interview process. The transcripts from the pilot interviews were coded and comments were added to the final data analysis. Informed consent was obtained from both pilot participants, and their privacy and confidentiality was protected in the same way as the participants involved in the study.

#### **4.7.2 Interviews**

Face to face semi structured interview protocols were adopted during the study. According to Dawson (2009), semi structured interviews were a common data collection method employed during qualitative research. In addition, the author asserted that during semi structured interviews, the researcher aimed to gather in depth information, in order to compare and contrast the responses between the participants. Moreover, it was imperative to ensure that the same questions were posed to all participants (Dawson, 2009).

During this study, an interview schedule was generated and I ensured that the time and venue were suitable for all participants. Participants were then notified of their allocated interview time. Pilot interviews were firstly conducted with two teachers, followed by semi structured interviews with five teachers (in individual sessions) and four parents (in a focus group). All participants were involved in the implementation of the new inclusion model. The interviews aimed to uncover views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream UAE schools. The interview responses were transcribed verbatim, in order to assist the researcher during the data analysis phase.

#### **4.6.3 Focus group session**

Focus groups were conducted with four parents of SEN students, in order to gather their views surrounding the current reform and the inclusion of their children into mainstream schools. All parents were informed of the logistics i.e. date, time and venue for the focus group. At the start of the focus group

session, parents were reminded of the research aims, and I highlighted the fact that confidentiality and anonymity were to be upheld throughout the study. The focus group session lasted for 60 minutes and the following probes were addressed during the session:

- What are your views on the current education reform initiative to include SEN students into mainstream schools? Probe
- What are your views regarding the role of the teacher within an inclusive setting? Probe...
- What are the advantages of following an inclusive model in the UAE? Probe...
- What are the disadvantages of following an inclusive model in the UAE? Probe...
- What are your recommendations for the successful implementation of the inclusion model? Probe...
- Are there any additional thoughts or comments?

During the session I facilitated the discussion and ensured that parents remained focussed on the questions being posed. During the session parents were very outspoken and appeared to be happy to share their thoughts in an open forum.

#### **4.6.4 Observations and field notes**

Throughout the study, various observations were made by the researcher and field notes were consistently documented. Observation allows the researcher an opportunity to directly record all verbal and non verbal interactions with participants (Good & Brophy, 2002).

The purpose of using field notes was to capture the views surrounding the implementation of the inclusive model within the current reform. I gathered field notes during the following stages of the investigation:

- During the interviews and focus group, the viewpoints of the participants were documented. Verbal and non verbal communication was also noted.
- During the data collection phase, the researcher's experiences, insights and interpretation of the interviews were noted.

#### **4.6.5 Reflective journal**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) assert that it is vital for all researchers to attend to their own subjectivity during the research process. For the purposes of this study, a weekly reflective journal was kept, highlighting my assumptions prior to meeting with the participants and after the data collection process. I also recorded any preconceived ideas I had regarding what results may be found during data gathering.

### **4.7 DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis was adopted in order to analyse the data gathered during the study. This method allowed the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns or relevant themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the context of this study, the notable themes constituted some of the participants, views or experiences that were significant in addressing the overall research questions.

#### **4.7.1 Segmenting**

During the data analysis phase all qualitative data was analysed according to small segments of information. These segments were units of ideas that were meaningful during the study. The categorisation process was time consuming and I read over the transcripts several times in order to submerge myself into the data; thus allowing me to get a sense of the interviews and focus group session as a whole, before breaking down the main ideas into smaller segments (Creswell, 2007).

#### **4.7.2 Coding**

I made use of codes to give meaning to each of the segments (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The codes referred to educational terms, stakeholders, teacher stress, workload, relationships, views of participants, reform initiatives, culture and religion, professional development and other ideas.

#### **4.7.3 Forming categories or themes**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) mention that themes or categories are single ideas that are grouped together under a code. As part of the data analysis, I merged some of the codes into different categories, and these categories denoted the main themes that became apparent during the study. For example, codes such as 'teacher stress' and 'workload' made up the category of challenges regarding inclusion in the UAE. The interview responses were read, re-read and grouped in order to determine any similarities or differences, thereby giving rise to emerging themes or categories related to SEN and inclusion.

#### **4.7.4 Discovering patterns**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the discovery of various patterns in the data, suggests that a relationship exists between the different categories, In discovering patterns, I attempted to make sense of the complexities related to the new inclusion initiative, individual beliefs systems and the diverse mind sets of both teachers and parents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

According to Blaxter (cited in Bell, 2010), when conducting ethical research, the researcher needs to obtain consent from participants that will be interviewed, observed and questioned. In addition, the author highlighted that ethical research involves the agreement between the researcher and the sample group about the way the data will be utilised and how the final analysis will be reported.

Furthermore, ethical conduct refers to the researcher upholding the agreement when it has been reached.

In light of the above, the researcher was granted clearance to conduct research from the Psychology Department's Research Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa on 22 October 2013. Wisker (2008:86) maintained that 'ethical guidelines insists that researchers should not do physical or psychological harm, and where human subjects are involved, the participants should give their fully informed consent before taking part'. The following ethical principles were considered throughout the investigation and these will now be discussed in more detail.

#### **4.8.1 Informed consent**

During this study, informed consent was obtained where participants were reassured that all disclosed information would be treated confidentially and anonymously (Wisker, 2008). I explained the aim of the research, and summarised the participants' role within the study; including the interview schedule, meeting times and the fact that I would be taking notes throughout the study. Participants were also reassured that they could withdraw from the study at any stage, and were invited to sign the consent form to indicate whether they wished to participate or not.

#### **4.8.2 Voluntary participation**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), voluntary participation refers to the notion that participants were not forced or persuaded to partake in the research study. Furthermore, the authors mentioned that this element within research ethics was key in ensuring that participants had sufficient time and information, in order to make an informed decision about whether to participate or not. In this study, I informed all participants of the purpose of the research and reiterated that their participation was solely on a voluntary basis.

### **4.8.3 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Dawson (2009) mentioned that researchers needed to ensure that information disclosed during a study, could not be traced back to the participants once the final thesis was compiled (i.e. anonymity needed to be maintained). The researcher assured participants that their names and the identity of the school would not be revealed, and therefore the study made use of pseudonyms to ensure participant anonymity.

In addition, the author asserted that the information shared by the participants should be treated confidentially and should not be revealed to a third party (Dawson, 2009). Participants were assured that all information gathered, would only be viewed by the researcher, that all responses would be treated confidentially and that only their role (e.g. teacher or parent) would be used for identification purposes.

Participants were also told that they would have the opportunity to review their response summaries in the form of a written report in order to allow them the opportunity to make corrections, expansions, or deletions as they saw necessary, in order to clarify content.

### **4.8.4 Deception and privacy**

At the beginning of the study, all participants were made aware of the rationale for conducting the research. In order to avoid deception, informal briefings were held with participants in order to obtain their consent, and in so doing, I made every effort to protect the privacy of the participants (Dawson, 2009).

### **4.8.5 Researcher competence**

During a research study, it was imperative that the research was conducted by a competent individual in a truthful manner (Strydom, 2005). The following researcher traits were demonstrated during the investigation:

- Objectivity for the duration of the study;
- Sensitivity to the needs of participants and the cultural context and
- Competence and skill during the empirical investigation (Strydom, 2005).

Furthermore, I hold two Honours degrees in Psychology and Sociology from the Rand Afrikaans University, I work as an educational advisor within the UAE education sector, and I am currently supported by an experienced supervisor

#### **4.8.6 Acknowledging financial support**

I have been awarded a scholarship covering the expenses for this study. The funding was made available by the Directorate of Student Funding at the University of South Africa.

#### **4.9 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS**

According to Shenton (2004), the term trustworthiness is commonly referred to during a qualitative research study. The focus is usually on the quality of the data collection methods that the researcher employs during the study (Conrad & Serlin, 2006). I made use of the following strategies, in order to ensure trustworthiness as proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) namely;

- Prolonged data collection period - I collected data over a period of time thereby allowing for opportunities to refine ideas;
- Participants' language - I used English throughout the study due to the fact that the use of English is a requirement for the current education reform. All participants were fluent in English;
- Field research - the data gathering process i.e. interviews, focus group session, observations, field notes took place at the school (the natural setting). This gave me more insight into the daily routines of teachers implementing the inclusive model;

- Disciplined subjectivity - I was constantly aware of the subjective nature of the study and monitored my actions and thoughts to avoid bias;
- Triangulation of methods - I used interviews, a focus group, observations and field notes to gather data; and
- Member checking - I checked interpretations with participants to ensure that my interpretations were accurate.

#### **4.10 SUMMARY**

Chapter 4 explained the research design and methodology that was adopted for this study. A detailed description of the data collection, data analysis, ethical measures and measures to ensure trustworthiness was presented. In chapter five the results of the investigation will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The main research question for this thesis was: What are teachers views regarding the inclusion of SEN students into UAE mainstream schools? The study aimed to explore the views of teachers attempting to implement a relatively new inclusion policy, within UAE schools. In addition, the study also considered parental views regarding the implementation of the inclusion model.

In this chapter, the findings of the investigation are presented and discussed. The data is presented according to the main research questions and compared with the existing literature pertaining to social constructivism and inclusion in education. I chose to use the qualitative research method, where parts of the information from participants were presented in their own words, in order to substantiate the findings of the research (Merriam, 2002).

#### **5.2 REALISATION OF THE SAMPLE**

Eleven participants consented to take part in the investigation. Two of the participants were involved in the initial pilot interviews, five were involved in the face to face semi structured interviews and 4 parents formed part of a focus group. The interviews and focus group aimed to uncover teachers' and parental views surrounding the new policy to include SEN students into mainstream schools. All participants consented to having their words transcribed verbatim (as illustrated in the findings). After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher compiled and analysed the data.

Data was gathered in an Arabic medium government school comprised of 720 students. The school is in a semi modern building with good facilities such as a large outdoor central area, well resourced classrooms, a large computer

room, and a library to enhance student development. The majority of the student population consists of local Emirati students who come from wealthy backgrounds. The minority student population are comprised of expatriate Arabs from various countries namely, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Turkey.

The school is managed by an Emirati principal, two Emirati vice principals and the school is supervised by a cluster manager. Subject advisors also visit the site to offer curriculum and instructional support for English, Math and Science teachers. The school has nine English medium teachers (EMT's) and twenty Arab medium teachers (AMT's). EMT's teach 6 lessons per class per week of either, English, Math or Science. Most of these teachers have no experience in SEN. EMT's teach an average of 24 periods a week. These teachers are predominantly native English speakers, and are hired from countries such as The United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. The AMT teachers cover other subjects including Arabic Studies, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Art and Physical Education. AMT's teach an average of 12 lessons per week and they originate from countries such as the UAE, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Palestine.

Table 5.1 illustrates the biographical data of sample group that participated in the study.

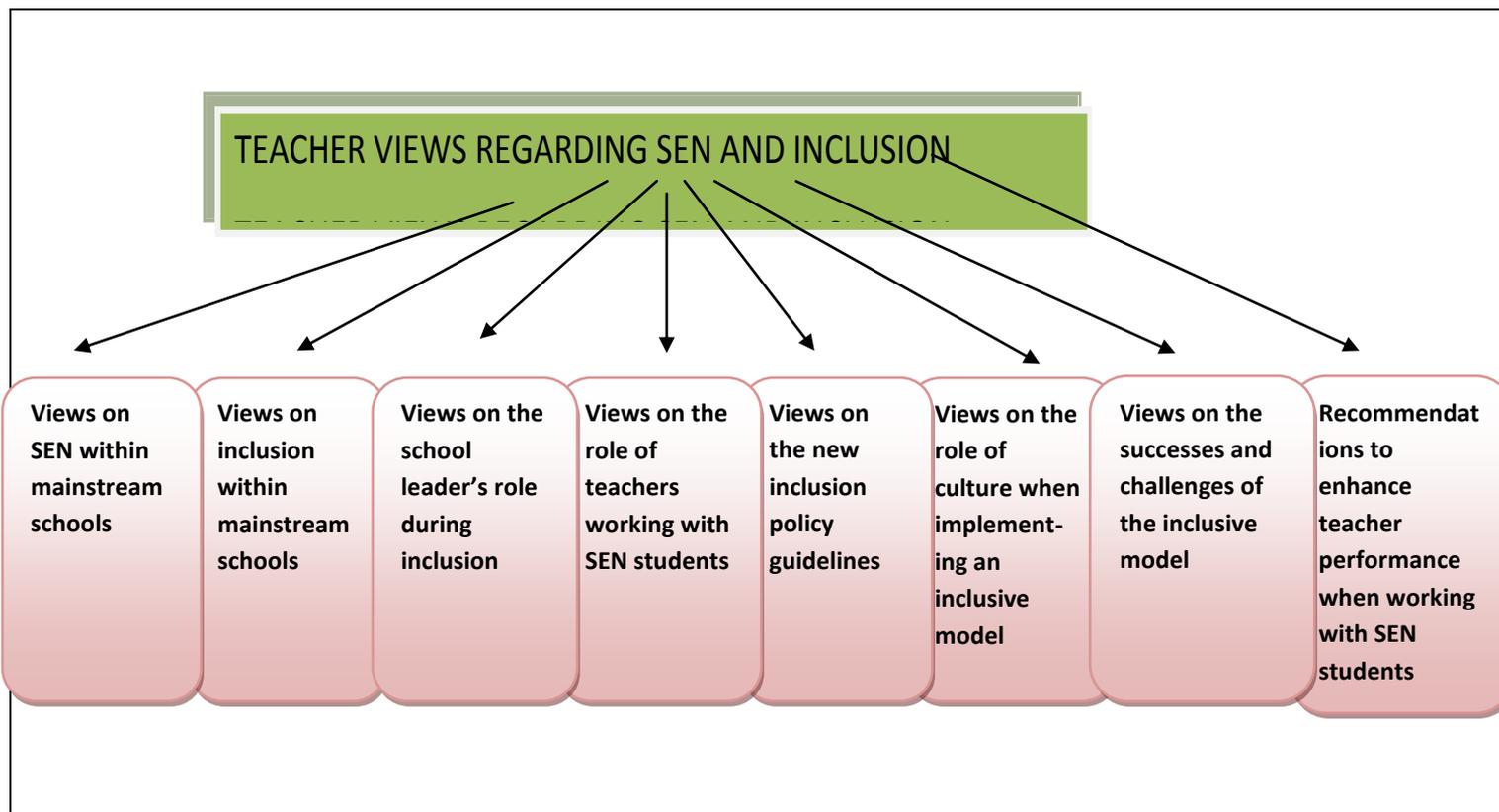
Name of participant	Gender	Job Title	Age	Years of teaching experience
Alana	Female	Grade 6 Teacher	30	3 years
Grea	Female	Grade 6 Teacher	46	16 years
Raina	Female	Grade 7 Teacher	35	5 years
Rafeea	Female	Grade 8 Teacher	53	25 years
Bushra	Female	Grade 7 Teacher	40	12 years
Aisha	Female	Parent	32	_____
Ilham	Female	Parent	35	_____
Raya	Female	Parent	28	_____
Noura	Female	Parent	25	_____

**Table 5.1 Biographical data of sample group**

Initially a pilot study was conducted and two teachers were interviewed. The total sample group consisted of five teachers (EMT's and AMT's) working across different grade levels namely; grade 6 (two teachers), grade 7 (two teachers) and grade 8 (one teacher). Additionally the sample also consisted of four parents involved in a focus group session. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the names of those that participated in the study.

### **5.3 TEACHER VIEWS REGARDING SEN AND INCLUSION WITHIN THE UAE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Figure 5.1 illustrated the views of teachers regarding the implementation of the new inclusion policy, whereby SEN students were included into mainstream schools in the UAE. Additionally parental views were also included to gain a broader understanding of SEN and inclusion in schools. The figure presents various sub categories that were obtained from the interview questions (see Appendix B and C).



**Figure 5.1: Teachers’ views regarding the inclusion of SEN students**

In the next section, the sub categories outlined in Figure 5.1 are discussed in full. I discussed each finding using quotations from both the interviews and focus group in order to validate the findings, and compare and contrast them with relevant literature.

### **5.3.1 Views regarding SEN in UAE schools**

When I asked teachers and parents about their views regarding SEN in UAE schools, most were aware of the expectation to include SEN students into mainstream schools and participants expressed their admiration towards the leaders’ of the country, for making SEN a priority within the current education reform. The following observation illustrated this point:

*In the past, SEN was not a priority in UAE schools; therefore the new focus by the leaders of the country and the education reform team is wonderful. More focus should go to the SEN students and extra support should be provided to teachers in order to support these*

*students more appropriately and effectively...* [Observation, 13 March 2014]

The above viewpoint correlates with the stance by Travers and Cooper (1993) who stressed that teachers should feel supported by school management, when implementing new initiatives. It was evident that teachers felt it was vital that school management support the new initiative.

During the focus group, parents mentioned the following:

*We know that ADEC wants to include SEN students into schools. It is a good idea, but it will take time. Inshallah it will be successful. We think parents will support the school...* [Parent focus group, March 2015]

Teachers and parents also highlighted the lack of teacher training and experience in dealing with SEN students:

*There are many students with SEN here in the UAE. I think there are not enough special schools to accommodate such children. I do think that the leaders of the country are trying to address this need, because these children deserve a fair opportunity to learn and to be stimulated academically...however, most of us are not qualified or trained to work with such students. It makes me anxious that I cannot offer more...* [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]

The above statement correlated with the viewpoint of Stainback and Stainback (cited in Eloff et al., 2002) who highlighted the right of every student to a fair education, regardless of varying circumstances or disability.

*I am very worried about including SEN students into mainstream schools because it is a new for teachers, parents and students. All of us do not have the knowledge and experience to deal with this change. It will take time...* [Parent focus group, March 2015]

In light of the participants views regarding the lack of qualification to educate SEN students' in the UAE, Billingsley (2003) mentioned, that the major challenge within special education, lies in the training and professional up

skilling of teachers. Furthermore, the author stressed that unqualified teachers could be detrimental to the education of SEN students'.

Additionally, it was further evident that teachers were experiencing anxiety when working with SEN students due to a lack of training. This notion was in partial agreement with Brown and Uehara's (1999) viewpoint, that anxiety, was an unpleasant emotion that occurred as a result of stress within the teaching profession.

An additional viewpoint highlighted some of the emotions that teachers experienced when dealing with SEN students on a daily basis:

*Many SEN students in the schools do not get the attention they deserve. This is due to the fact that we are not trained and the circumstances do not allow teachers to provide them with extra attention. It is very sad...I have four SEN students in my classroom and they are receiving the same workload as all my other students. Many days I feel lost and overwhelmed...but this is the current reality in UAE schools. [Grade 7 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

The above statement also drew attention to the fact that teachers were feeling ineffective and overwhelmed when teaching SEN students. This was due to the fact that teachers were unable to modify lessons in order to accommodate the needs of SEN students. Kim et al. (2009) asserted that some of main stressors within the teaching profession included, lack of planning, ineffective resources and work overload.

Regarding increased responsibilities pertaining to SEN, one teacher stated the following:

*I am a PE teacher and I interact with many SEN students on a daily basis. My issue is that...in some instances students are incorrectly labelled as SEN students, due to a lack of expertise in this field...sometimes the school administration increases my responsibilities and expects me to identify SEN students and to*

*compile reports on these students. It is very stressful because I am not qualified... [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

Parents mentioned that the inclusion of SEN students may be overwhelming for teachers. The following illustrates this point:

*We as parents know that any change can be challenging in the beginning. There are also many SEN students in schools. We would like the school to have a meeting with all the parents to tell us what is expected from us and how parents can support... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

It was evident from the above statement, that the participant was experiencing stress as a result of an increase in their responsibility. According to Hussein (2010), job-related stress occurs when the individual's responsibilities increased in the workplace, thus leaving the individual feeling undervalued and unsupported.

With reference to the above viewpoints, it became apparent that both teachers and parents welcomed the new directive regarding SEN in the UAE. It was also evident that teachers' experienced stress within their day to day interactions with SEN students and parents needed guidance on how best to support this additional demand placed on teachers. According to Olivier and Venter (2003), additional demands place on the body can result in a stressful situation. These demands could be in the form of environmental conditions, or as a result of individuals placing additional pressure upon themselves, in an attempt to accomplish their personal goals.

### **5.3.2 Views regarding the inclusion policy in UAE schools**

When participants were asked about their views regarding the new inclusion policy, they highlighted the need to build staff capacity during inclusion; the importance of including all stakeholders during the introduction of new initiatives; and the need for administration to support staff during the implementation of an inclusive model. Teachers also highlighted that school leaders did not have a clear understanding of what SEN entailed, for example:

*I think that the new inclusion policy is a great initiative for UAE education...every student has the right to an education. There is a huge need to address the individual needs of students in the UAE, but there is also a need to develop staff capacity in order to deal with SEN students. It can become very stressful for teachers, if we are unable to cope with SEN students in our classrooms. In my view, it will take a long time to implement such a policy successfully, because the cultural expectation plays a huge role during the implementation process... Inshallah, we will all become more effective in order to support our SEN students... [Grade 7 Teacher pilot interview, March 2014]*

Parents had a positive outlook on the new inclusion policy. The following example illustrated this point:

*The UAE leaders are trying their best to develop the education system. We are very happy that ADEC is making changes to improve the education for our children... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

It was evident that participants welcomed the new inclusion policy that focussed primarily on equal opportunities for all students. This view correlated with a statement released by the UAE Ministry of Education (2006), stating that the new SEN Law aimed to provide opportunities for all students to develop to their full potential. In addition, the teachers comment, 'There is a huge need to address the individual needs of students in the UAE...' was in partial agreement with Gaad and Khan (2007:95) who maintained that UAE teachers were faced with huge challenges when implementing the new inclusion policy.

A pivotal point mentioned by the above participant regarding the development of staff capacity, highlighted the need for school leaders and other stakeholders to enhance teachers' capabilities when implementing the inclusion policy. Newman et al. (2000) defined school capacity as a process that involved all stakeholders, and aimed to improve the achievement of all

students. The author further stressed the significance of understanding and developing strategies for capacity building, during the implementation of an inclusive model. Building staff capacity could therefore enhance and motivate teachers to implement the inclusion policy.

Ainscow (2005) stressed the importance of developing a collaborative culture amongst all stakeholders, when attempting to foster an inclusive school environment. However, one participant objected to the fact that teachers were not initially invited to attend the briefing concerning the new inclusion policy. For example:

*I am pleased that ADEC launched the inclusion policy, but this information was only shared with school principals. All educational staff in the UAE should have been included...and as a result, teachers are being misinformed and lack understanding as to how this policy will be implemented within schools. I think it is important for all of us to be included from the beginning. It would require all staff to be on board and work together as a team, so that the policy can work successfully. [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

With reference to the above mentioned view, Kyriacou (2001) drew attention to the fact that teachers felt disconnected from decision making due to the hierarchical barriers within educational organisations. In this regard, Cheek and Miller (1983) asserted that being excluded from decision making was the most prominent source of stress for most individuals. Similarly, Hussein (2010) argued that work related stress within education occurred as a result of the inability to influence decision making. Moreover, the bureaucratic nature of the organisation as expressed by the participant, 'this information was only shared with school principals...' highlighted the fact that teachers were provided little opportunity to contribute towards the implementation of the inclusion policy (Karasek, 1979).

Regarding the lack of direction and administrative support, one participant made the following comment:

*As a teacher I find this new policy very challenging. There is absolutely no support and direction from the school administration. All teachers have many questions regarding the curriculum and methods of instruction, but we get no answers. Many times we get told: "just try your best". We lack resources to support these students and I think that is the main reason why we struggle to differentiate lessons... [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

It was evident from the above comment that teachers experienced difficulties with regards to the new inclusion policy, based on the fact that school administration offered very little support in this regard. This uncertainty could ultimately hinder the implementation and success of the inclusion policy. Bacharach et al. (1990) mentioned that teachers could experience stress and burnout, if they were not supported by the school management team. This stance was also in accordance with the view by Leithwood (1999), who mentioned that teachers were more likely to experience exhaustion due to unrealistic management expectations, without providing the necessary support.

In light of the participant's comment regarding the lack of curriculum support and resources, Capper and Frattura (2009) were of the view that it was vital for school administration to have a sound understanding of the curriculum, teaching and leading practices that were vital to the implementation of an inclusive model. The authors also stressed the importance of having the appropriate resources, in order to educate SEN students effectively.

### **5.3.3 Views on the role of UAE school leaders working with SEN students**

When teachers were asked about their views on the school leaders' role with regards to the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools, one participant mentioned the following:

*I think our school leadership team should be at the forefront of this initiative. In our school, the principal did not call all staff together to discuss and explain the new policy or our approach for dealing with*

*the SEN students. I think school leaders should be more involved with the inclusion process and support their staff more... [Grade 6 Teacher - pilot interview, March 2014]*

The above comment was in accordance with Century (1999), who mentioned that a schools capacity was strengthened when it followed a process of collaboration. In addition the author expressed that the school leadership team played a pivotal role in establishing this collaborative culture, in order to achieve a targeted outcome. This view was further endorsed by Newman et al. (2000) and Leithwood and Day (2007) who maintained that school leaders should be at the forefront of new initiatives and should strive to motivate teachers, in order to ensure a sustainable outcome. Without the necessary guidance and direction from school leadership, the approach to include SEN students into mainstream schools could be unsuccessful.

The next comment drew attention to the participant's perception that school leaders lacked the necessary knowledge and understanding of SEN and inclusion:

*School leaders should play a very prominent role during the implementation of the new inclusion process. If school leaders are unsure about the inclusion of SEN students, teachers and support staff will feel even more stress and pressure...our school leaders display very little understanding of SEN and inclusion... [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

The notion surrounding the school leader's lack of knowledge regarding SEN and inclusion was notable, because it placed undue stress and pressure on teachers within the schooling environment. In this regard, Newman et al. (2000) stressed the importance of developing staff during the implementation of reform initiatives. In addition, Pettegrew and Wolf (cited in Sprenger, 2011) highlighted role based stress, and suggested that teachers' could experience stress as a result of the role expectations placed upon them. Moreover, Hastings and Bham (2003) asserted that administrative pressures and the lack of managerial support were classified as physical stressors that led to

role ambiguity. Thus, it became apparent that teachers were experiencing additional pressure because school leaders did not effectively lead and manage the implementation of the inclusion policy; nor did they display a sound understanding of what SEN and inclusion entailed.

#### **5.3.4 Views on the role of teachers working with SEN students**

When participants were asked about their experiences when working with SEN students, it was evident that most participants felt overworked in their day to day dealings with SEN students. Parents also mentioned that they were interested in assisting teachers dealing with SEN students and that they expected teachers to establish a relationship with the parents. Significantly, participants drew attention to the fact the teachers were not provided with adequate professional development, resulting in teachers feeling unsupported and stressed. The following comment illustrated this point:

*Most of us are not qualified or experienced to work with SEN students...I am very nervous and stressed since this new policy have been launched. The parents are also putting loads of pressure on me to meet the individual needs of their children. Last week, a colleague and I worked late, in order to plan differentiated lessons and we needed to create resources for our SEN students. I am exhausted... [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

In light of the above viewpoint, Hwang and Evans (2011) highlighted the fact that various challenges could arise during the implementation of an inclusive model. In addition, the author emphasised that teacher attitudes determined the success of the inclusive model. The participants comment, 'I am very nervous and stressed...' suggested that teachers experienced stress when working with SEN students (Ainscow cited in Carrington, 1999). This notion was further supported by Kyriacou (1998) who maintained that inclusive education altered teacher responsibilities and the need to cope with these changes, resulted in teachers experiencing stress.

In stating, 'I am exhausted...' suggested that some teachers were feeling tired and overwhelmed due to the pressure involved in educating SEN students.

Friedman (2000) highlights that the main components of teacher burnout are exhaustion and poor job satisfaction. Furthermore, the author maintains that burnout can lead to teachers experiencing feelings of professional failure.

The statement from the participant below indicated the perceptions of some teachers regarding their immense workload, the need for professional development and their desire to leave the teaching profession:

*I support the inclusion of SEN students into regular classrooms, but I will honestly say that it requires an immense load of work. Teachers should receive extensive professional development on SEN, because for most of us this is new. I am not sure whether I am meeting the needs of my SEN students. When I meet with the parents, I feel anxious and I can read their body language indicating that they are not happy with my work. I sometimes think it would be best to leave teaching and try another career... [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

The above view regarding the need for professional development supported the view by Al Zyoudi et al. (2010), who stressed that extensive professional development was a necessary component to enhance the practice of teachers working with SEN students. In addition, Idris (2011) mentions that when individuals' goals, roles and performance criteria are ambiguous, they tend to feel strained in the workplace. This notion was in line with the participants view regarding the lack of confidence to meet the needs of SEN students.

A pivotal point mentioned by the above participant regarding the desire to leave the teaching profession, suggested that teachers were willing to leave as a result of the pressure and stress associated with SEN. This stance was supported by Miller et al. (1999) who stated that teachers working with SEN students were more likely to leave the teaching profession due to excessive workload and stress. Wilson (2002) further supported the notion that work related stress, job dissatisfaction and psychological distress within teaching, could result in teachers resigning from the profession.

During the focus group, parents mentioned the following:

*We would like to help and support teachers working with our children. Teachers must build a relationship with parents to support this new initiative... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

The above viewpoint mentioned during the focus group was in line with the stance by Newman, King and Youngs (2000), who defined capacity as the potential to fulfil a function. In addition, the authors viewed capacity building within schools, as a collective process involving all stakeholders, in order to improve the achievement of all students.

### **5.3.5 Views regarding the new inclusive guidelines**

When teachers were asked about their views surrounding the new inclusion policy guidelines and whether the guidelines offered any support and assistance to teachers, the following views were shared:

*The guidelines are clear, but it is all on paper...we should get together as a school and unpack the entire policy and then decide as a school how we will go about achieving our goals. We all feel alone in this process and we need to start working together as a team... [Grade 6 Teacher - pilot interview, March 2014]*

The above comment suggested that teachers felt alone and isolated when implementing the inclusion model. The participant's view further alluded to the fact that teachers were not following a consistent implementation approach. This viewpoint was in contrast to the view by UNESCO (1994) who described inclusive education, as a consistent whole school approach, that was built on partnerships and strategies amongst all stakeholders. Furthermore, Capper and Frattura (2009) highlighted the notion that schools should utilise all staff effectively, in order to support the implementation of an inclusive model.

With reference to the participant mentioning, 'we all feel alone...', Hwang (2010) mentioned it was imperative for policy makers and school administration to collaborate with teachers in order to foster positive teacher attitudes towards full inclusion. It was thus evident that teachers would feel

more confident and supported, if they were given opportunities to collaborate and share ideas.

Another comment presented similar views surrounding the need for collaboration in order to build capacity within the school:

*The new inclusive guidelines help me to understand what is expected of me as a teacher, when working with SEN students in the classroom. There are some steps to follow in identifying SEN students...however, more meetings and brainstorming sessions should take place for teachers to consult with each other and share ideas and experiences. We need the support and input from one another because the inclusion of SEN students is new for all of us and it can be very challenging and tiring... [Grade 7 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

In light of the participant's response, Century (1999) maintained that capacity building occurred when individuals collaborated and shared ideas within a given organisation. In addition, the above comment supported the stance by Choate (1993) who spoke of teachers' responsibilities increasing due to the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream classes. This notion was further emphasised by Ainscow (1994), who asserted that inclusion could unsettle teachers and this in turn could affect the extent to which they were willing to implement the new inclusion expectations. Thus, it was evident that teachers required professional development and opportunities to collaborate, in order to enhance their practice when dealing with SEN students. It could therefore be argued, that these opportunities could alleviate some of the uncertainty, fatigue and stress related to their current situation.

### **5.3.6 Views regarding culture and SEN in the UAE**

When participants were asked about their views regarding the role that culture played during the inclusion of SEN students into their classrooms, the following views were shared:

*Culture plays a huge role when it comes to SEN in the UAE. These children now have an opportunity to attend mainstream schools and this is new for most parents. Some parents do not want to accept that their child has special needs and fear that their child will be labelled by the rest of the family or community... [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

The above comment supports the view by Groce (1999) who stressed that culture played a significant role in determining how individuals with SEN were perceived by the wider community. Furthermore, Crabtree (2007) stated that the inclusion of SEN in the UAE was still an underdeveloped area and new for most parents. Thus it was evident, that parents were not well educated regarding SEN. Although education was a valued commodity within the UAE, it was still unreachable for most SEN students (Crabtree, 2007).

One participant alluded to the fact that some parents and teachers were ill informed regarding ADEC's vision on SEN and inclusion, for example:

*Some parents and teachers expressed views that SEN students should go to a special school...When they come to my classroom, they mention that these students should be removed because they are slowing down the academic progress of the other students...therefore I am of the view that ADEC should provide information and training to UAE citizens regarding SEN and inclusion. They are very ill informed and conservative in their way of thinking! [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

During the focus group the following was mentioned:

*This is new to us, so we all need to learn more about SEN and inclusion. For most Emirati's this may be a sensitive issue because in our culture children with disabilities are kept out of the public. We are very private and do not want any shame for our families. Inshallah we will learn to work with this change... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

Significantly, the above views were in line with the view by Crabtree (2007) who mentioned that SEN and inclusion was still at a rudimentary within the UAE. Additionally, Almanal (2002) highlighted the fact that some parents in the UAE were not ready to embrace the rationale behind inclusion, as most believed that special education centres were a better option for SEN students.

The comment that SEN students should be removed from mainstream schools was indicative of the fact that until recently, very few attempts were made to integrate SEN students in the UAE (Ministry of Education-Special Education Department, 2002). It was thus imperative to educate parents about the inclusion policy, in order to alleviate the additional pressure placed on teachers.

### **5.3.7 Views regarding what works well with the inclusion policy**

When participants were questioned about what worked well regarding the new inclusion policy, some teachers referred to feeling positive about the prospects surrounding the new policy; some expressed their willingness to learn; and some teachers felt motivated because they believed they would receive professional development in the process. The following examples served as illustrations:

*I do think that most teachers are on board with this new initiative and willing to learn...when the new policy were launched last year, some teachers were motivated to embrace this new challenge. [Grade 7 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

*Most teachers were very optimistic that this new inclusion policy could support SEN students... [Observation, 15 April 2014]*

In correlation with the above comments, Carrington (1999) stated that teacher attitudes could have an effect on schools attempting to follow an inclusive model. Furthermore, the author highlighted the social constructivist view, whereby teachers created their own perspectives surrounding inclusion and this could in turn influence the way in which they implemented the inclusion policy. In this regard, it was evident that teachers were initially optimistic about

the idea behind inclusion and were of the belief that the process could present a positive outcome for all stakeholders, as affirmed by Subban and Sharma (2006).

Some additional comments from participants:

*Teachers are excited because many of us are not trained in SEN and inclusion. Professional development and training in this area would enhance our teaching practice...even our teaching careers. [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

*Teachers showed some excitement to learn more about SEN through professional development workshops... [Observation, 5 March 2014]*

*We feel positive about this policy and inshallah it will give us the opportunity to become part of a strong team to support all students... [Parent focus group, March, 2015]*

Century (1999) stated that capacity building was fundamental to the success of any reform initiative. The author also stressed that knowledge could be enhanced when teachers become more familiar with the organisations expectations, and when they search for professional development opportunities to improve their own teaching practise. In addition, Century (1999) asserted that fostering the innovation of teachers' was central to building the instructional capacity within the organisation.

In this regard, it became evident that teachers' willingness to participate and implement the new directives was dependant on their skill development and their ability to cope with the new demands. Significantly, O'Day et al. (1995) maintained that teachers' willingness to implement new policies was fundamental to the success of this reform initiative.

### **5.3.8 Views regarding the challenges of the new inclusion policy**

When participants were asked about their views regarding the challenges they experienced whilst implementing the new inclusion policy, most responses were negative due to a lack of administrative support; lack of planning;

feelings of confusion; the lack of professional development to support teachers; and the parental demands placed upon teachers. The comments below illustrated these points:

*The attempt to promote this new policy here in the Emirates is very welcoming....but I do think that the school administration team should lead this...Teachers are trying their best to implement this policy without any input from management...it is sometimes very confusing and stressful. It almost seems as if there is no plan in place. To implement any policy takes a long time, and I believe there should be sound support in order to cater for SEN students across the Emirates. [Grade 7 Teacher - pilot interview, March 2014]*

The above comment drew attention to the fact that teachers were feeling overwhelmed. This comment supported the view by Sprenger (2011) who asserted that unresolved stress over a period of time could leave teachers feeling de-motivated, depressed and teachers could ultimately experience burnout. This notion was further supported by Schamer and Jackson (1996), who stressed that burnout, caused teachers to lose their optimism and thus developed negative feelings towards the profession. It became apparent that the lack of administrative support placed undue stress on teachers, and this could ultimately hinder the successful implementation of the inclusion policy. The above notion correlated with the view of Billingsley (2003) who mentioned that burnout could be reduced through administrative and collegial support.

Another comment from participants:

*Teachers are thrown in the deep end with this new policy...we did not receive any prior information or training. We are overloaded with extra planning, longer working hours as a result of the new inclusion policy. We desperately need professional development because most of us are not qualified to work with SEN students... [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

*It is a huge problem when some teachers inform us that they are not trained to work with SEN students. We depend on their guidance and*

*expertise, so the school administration should support these teachers... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

Teacher qualification and experience in dealing with SEN were deemed to be problematic for teachers. Chaplain (1995) argued that the integration of SEN students was stressful for teachers, due to the fact that they would require extensive professional development and a specific skill set, in order to cater to the needs of these students. Additionally, Paulse (2005) asserted that the major cause for teacher stress was as a result of increased responsibility. The anxiety related to the participants comment, 'we desperately need...' suggested that the well-being of teachers were being challenged on a daily basis (Bunting, 2000). It became apparent, that the lack of SEN training and the fact that teachers were not qualified to teach SEN students was a huge concern for parents and the source of anxiety and stress for teachers.

An additional comment regarding the fact that some parents' were rejecting the new inclusion policy:

*Some parents are rejecting this new policy...they feel that there is no place for SEN students within mainstream schools. Some students make fun of their peers within the classroom. Sometimes after work I have flashbacks of how horrible they were to the SEN students in my class... it saddens me as a teacher. Their behaviour and attitudes place additional strain on me to implement the new policy successfully. [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

With reference to the above, it was evident that teachers attempting to educate SEN students were feeling a lack of support from some of the parents (Doorn, 2003). The view that some parents were rejecting the policy and that some students were making fun of their peers, was indicative of the fact inclusion was a new concept within UAE schools. It further indicated that the community were not educated to deal with the current situation in schools, as mentioned by Anati (2012). In addition, Gaad (2004) stated that most parents were still of the view that SEN students should be educated in separate institutions. This conservative outlook could ultimately hinder the

implementation process and place additional strain on teachers attempting to fulfil role expectations.

In light of the above comment pertaining to feelings of sadness as experienced by the participant, Wilson (2002) mentioned that occupational stress resulted in feelings of worry and helplessness. The intolerance towards SEN students, as depicted in the above scenario, was in support of the viewpoint by Sailor (cited in Toson, 2013), who stressed that school communities should refrain from labelling students with SEN.

### **5.3.9 Recommendations to enhance teacher performance when working with SEN students**

When participants were asked to offer some recommendations to improve teacher performance, the suggestions offered referred to regular workshops to train teachers on SEN; regular staff collaboration meetings to share ideas; the need for administration to offer more support and empathy towards teachers; and the need for regular parental workshops on the new inclusion policy. For example:

*Teachers need a series of workshops on how to teach SEN students in mainstream schools. We need to meet regularly and share challenges we experienced as well as successes...that is how we can learn from one another. Right now everyone works in isolation. [Grade 7 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

The above recommendation was in accordance with the view by Tracy and Whittaker (1990), who viewed social support as an opportunity whereby individuals could assist one another and those that received support were more like to experience reduced stress and burnout. Additionally Florian, Hange and Copland (2000) assert that school leaders should support capacity building within schools, by evaluating the effectiveness of the reform implementation, through quality assurance of the curriculum, by providing professional development workshops and by fostering working relationships with teachers, parents and other external organisations.

Another view regarding a recommendation for school leadership teams:

*School leadership teams should host regular meetings with staff to communicate information surrounding SEN. It is new...therefore it requires a lot of attention. Teachers would feel more confident if the school leadership team showed interest in our well-being...we are exhausted and we are just at the beginning stages... [Grade 8 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

Wiederholdt and Chamberlain (1989) mentioned various support programmes that were available to assist teachers working with SEN students. In addition, Sansosti (2008) highlighted the fact that teachers lacked the necessary support from administration when implementing an inclusive programme. It was thus evident, that school leaders were not guiding and making the best approaches available to their teaching staff, hence the teachers' lack of confidence in their school administration teams. This view was also in accordance with Mittler (1994), who stressed that the successful implementation of an inclusive model was dependent on the commitment and execution of targets by the school administration team.

Additional recommendations regarding workshops for parents were illustrated in the following comments:

*Parent workshops on SEN and inclusion would be helpful. That would relieve some of the pressure on teachers. At the moment teachers constantly have to explain and justify the inclusion of SEN students into the classroom. Parents are calling after hours and this causes unnecessary stress on my personal life and I keep arguing with my spouse... [Grade 6 Teacher - individual interview, April 2014]*

*We all need training and workshops to understand inclusion better. We also need regular meetings at the school to make this process a success. We need to work as a team... [Parent focus group, March 2015]*

The above comments were in support of the view by Billingsley (2003), who asserted the importance of a supportive working environment, where all stakeholders were committed to supporting SEN and inclusion. The participants comment regarding the after hour phone calls from parents, suggested that teachers were experiencing excessive pressure as a result of the current role expectations (Conley & Woosley, 2000). Similarly, Sprenger (2011) argued that the psychological and behavioural effects of stress could result in negative behaviours, including violent outbursts or withdrawal from family members.

In light of the above, it became evident that teachers were experiencing strain in the workplace due to job-related demands as well as the demands placed on them by parents. Teachers were also in need of training and support in order to cope with these additional demands. Parents were also keen to get training in order to understand the process of inclusion within schools.

#### **5.4 SUMMARY**

Chapter 5 presented the findings of the exploratory study. It commenced with the realisation of the sample and then proceeded to present the results of the study, including the findings from the individual semi-structured interviews, focus group session and observational notes. The findings highlighted teacher and parental views regarding the inclusion of SEN students; it shed light on teachers' views regarding administrative and parental support; and it offered some recommendations in order to enhance the process of including SEN students into mainstream schools. The next chapter will present the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, the conclusion from the findings, the recommendations and limitations of this research are presented. These conclusions aim to answer the main research question, namely: *What are the views of teachers, regarding the inclusion of SEN students' into mainstream schools?*

In light of the above, the results and conclusions were integrated and presented as the final conclusions for this research study. This is followed by the limitations and finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

#### **6.2 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FINDINGS**

##### **6.2.1 The role of teachers working with SEN students in UAE schools**

###### *6.2.1.1 Responsibility towards implementation of SEN*

The study determined that there was a substantial expectation placed on teachers to ensure the successful inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools in the UAE. From the findings it emerged, that teachers were initially optimistic about the implementation of the new inclusion policy and they were confident that SEN students would benefit from the process. Despite the fact that teachers were aware of the expectation to include SEN students, the findings suggested that the inclusion of these students was unfamiliar for most, and it was evident that they required additional support, in order to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. In light of the above, Piaget's theory (1980) regarding cognitive development suggests that individual's facing new situations, may experience a sense of disequilibrium. The author further asserts that in order for the individual to gain back a sense of equilibrium, they may need to change their thinking accordingly.

###### *6.2.1.2 Teacher willingness*

It was apparent that teachers were willing to implement the inclusion policy and welcomed the new initiative to provide SEN students with the opportunity to attend regular schooling. It could therefore be argued, that teacher willingness was central to the implementation of the new initiative, as highlighted by the study. This finding partly correlates with the theory surrounding social constructivism, in that it suggests that within an inclusive schooling environment, students gain knowledge through exploration, and teachers are challenged to link the curriculum to the needs of these students. Teacher willingness is therefore a necessary component to ensure successful inclusion. In addition the literature review further supports the notion that teacher willingness during new initiatives should be endorsed by the school leadership teams, in order to foster the innovation of these teachers.

## **6.2.2 The views and beliefs of teachers regarding SEN and inclusion in the UAE schooling system**

### *6.2.2.1 Increased responsibility*

The study revealed that teachers' responsibilities increased due to the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools. From the literature review and the exploration, it further emerged that the increase in responsibility, caused teachers to feel overworked and stressed in their day to day dealings with SEN students. Thus it could be argued, that teachers were placed in a challenging and stressful situation, as a result of the additional demands placed upon them. With reference to this finding, Piaget (1980) draws attention to the process of coming to know, as individuals learn and develop in new and challenging situations (increased responsibility). The theory suggests that individuals will eventually adapt to their surroundings, and develop the necessary skills over a period of time (Huitt & Hummel, 2003).

#### *6.2.2.2 Capacity building*

In considering the views of participants surrounding the need for capacity building, it was evident that there was a definite need for school leaders to enhance the teachers' capabilities, during the implementation of the inclusion policy. The literature highlighted that it was significant for school leaders to understand and develop strategies, in order to support staff in following an inclusive approach. In addition, it was also evident that professional development was central to building staff capacity during new reform initiatives. Vygotsky's (1978) approach to social constructivism highlights the ZPD, where a more knowledgeable other is central to the development of a less knowledgeable other. It could therefore be concluded, that capacity building by means of professional development, is imperative to the success of an inclusive agenda.

#### *6.2.2.3 Unrealistic expectations*

It was apparent that teachers experienced exhaustion and additional pressure as a result of the unrealistic expectations from the school leadership team, without the necessary support. Additionally, the literature review and the investigation revealed that school leadership should provide teachers with adequate support and appropriate resources, in order for teachers to meet the required expectations. The constructivist theory emphasises a more active and collaborative approach to learning (Richardson, 1997). It necessitates that teachers and students discover and construct new knowledge by making use of appropriate resources. Thus an important conclusion of the study was that teachers were overwhelmed, due to the lack of resources and the unrealistic expectations placed upon them by the school leadership team.

### **6.2.3 Factors that constrained the successful inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools**

#### *6.2.3.1 Stress*

It was concluded from the literature review and investigation, that most teachers working with SEN students were experiencing anxiety and stress,

due to a lack of experience and professional development. In this study, most participants also revealed that they felt disconnected from the decision making pertaining to the implementation of the new inclusive model and as a result, they experienced additional stress. Although many participants were dedicated to the new initiative, it was further apparent that the lack of leadership knowledge regarding the inclusion of SEN students, placed added stress and pressure on teachers. Moreover, the lack of managerial support and direction, were identified as physical stressors that led to teachers experiencing role ambiguity. The investigation further revealed, that teachers felt exhausted and stressed due to the increased workload associated with the inclusion of SEN students. It could therefore be concluded, that managerial support, clear role expectations and professional development could alleviate some of the pressure that teachers were experiencing, as a result of the new directive.

#### *6.2.3.2 Lack of professional development*

The study revealed that teachers did not possess the relevant qualifications and were not provided with training to effectively educate SEN students in their respective classrooms. It was further apparent, that teachers did not have the necessary skills to modify lessons, in order to accommodate the varied needs of SEN students. According to the social constructivist theory, Vygotsky (1978) envisioned learning as a socially constructed experience, involving a more capable person guiding a less capable person to understand ideas beyond their developmental level. Thus it could be concluded, that professional development and the support from an SEN expert was vital for the implementation of the new inclusive model.

#### *6.2.3.3 Lack of support*

In the study teachers revealed, that they felt unsupported by the school administration team during the implementation of the inclusive model. It was further evident, that teachers felt undervalued because they were tasked with more responsibilities without the necessary guidance and support. Lave (1988) suggests that learning occurs when individuals actively participate

within a community of practise. Learning further occurs when these individuals engage in an authentic activity, and where they have an opportunity to share knowledge. This learning community usually consists of the individual, the community and other stakeholders within the environment. In relation to the above it is evident that the lack of teacher support during the implementation of an inclusive model, could be detrimental to the success of such an initiative.

#### *6.2.3.4 Parental demands*

The investigation and literature review revealed that parents were uneducated regarding the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools. This was mainly based on the fact that SEN and inclusion were relatively new concepts within the UAE context. It was further evident, that some parents rejected the inclusion policy because they lacked the necessary understanding of what such a policy entailed, and this in turn caused additional pressure for teachers attempting to implement the policy. Constructivism suggests that learning does not occur in isolation, on the contrary, it requires of teachers' to ensure that all students and stakeholders are accepted as full members of the learning process. It could therefore be concluded, that parental training and collaboration regarding the inclusion of SEN students, was imperative for the success of the new initiative.

#### *6.2.3.5 Cultural barriers*

The study revealed that the UAE culture could play a role in the attempt to include SEN students into mainstream schools. The literature further revealed that although education was valued in the UAE, most parents were not ready to deal with the inclusion of SEN students, due to sensitivity and the cultural perceptions surrounding SEN. Social constructivism stresses the importance of understanding a culture and a context. Badasie (2013) stated that when an individual participates in a community, learning and understanding occurs. It could therefore be concluded, that although the UAE culture could serve as a potential barrier, an understanding of both the culture and the context is therefore necessary for the success of the reform initiative.

#### 6.2.3.6 *Lack of collaboration opportunities*

It was apparent that teachers required opportunities to collaborate and share ideas in order to enhance their teaching practice. The literature further revealed that it was vital to create a collaborative culture amongst teachers, when implementing an inclusive model. It was further concluded, that teachers would feel more confident and supported if they were provided opportunities for collaboration or opportunities to debrief. Lave's theory of situated cognition suggests that learning takes place through social interactions and during these interactions, teachers get the opportunity to engage and participate in effective modelling sessions (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000). In this regard it could be argued, that collaborative and/or debriefing opportunities could alleviate some of the uncertainty, and stress that teachers experienced, during the inclusion of SEN students.

### **6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The research regarding teacher views surrounding the inclusion of SEN students' into mainstream schools presented the following limitations:

- The data in this study was collected using semi-structured interviews (seven participants), and a focus group with four parents. Due to the fact that only a small sample of teachers and parents participated in this study, it limited the way in which the findings could be generalised to the given context. In this regard, the data could only provide an explorative understanding of teacher perceptions surrounding the inclusion of SEN students into their classrooms.
- Cultural barriers served as limitation due to the fact that the researcher was always conscious of the cultural context and the sensitivity surrounding the research topic. The UAE is very restrictive regarding information that is shared with the rest of the world. Since the inclusion of SEN students is new for most of the Arab society, the researcher was always conscious of the fact that participants may limit their responses. Although participants were reassured that confidentiality

would be upheld, they were still conscious not to overstep certain cultural lines. Examples included the sharing of negative viewpoints regarding the country, and views surrounding the Emirati stakeholders responsible for leading the reform.

- The study included female participants due to the cultural customs surrounding segregated genders. Gaining male perspectives on the inclusion of SEN students could have provided more data richness.

## **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.4.1 Recommendations pertaining to the study**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- The findings can be useful in informing the development of professional development workshops that are aimed at up-skilling and training teachers and parents, in order to enhance their practice when dealing with SEN students. Professional development workshops could empower teachers and parents, and in so doing, would alleviate some of the stress associated with the inclusion of SEN students.
- School leadership teams could benefit from the findings and gain an understanding of teacher views during the implementation of an inclusive model. This information could serve as a guide for school leaders, thereby assisting them to plan more effectively during the implementation of the inclusion model.
- The findings could guide the development of parental workshops that are steered at creating knowledge and a common understanding regarding the inclusion of SEN students into mainstream schools. The findings could also help to bridge the gap between parents and teachers, by providing insight into the experiences of both parties, during the implementation of this new initiative.

#### **6.4.2 Recommendations for future research**

The study provided the following recommendations for future research:

- The opportunity exists for further research, to investigate the effects that a lack of appropriate training could have on teachers working with SEN students in UAE schools.
- Further investigation into the UAE cultural perceptions surrounding SEN.

#### **6.5 CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the views of teachers attempting to include SEN students into mainstream UAE schools. The results revealed that most participants experienced a range of emotions during the inclusive process, leaving most feeling uncertain and overwhelmed. The main conclusion was that the new inclusion policy caused teachers' to experience additional pressure and some of the major challenges during the implementation phase included: teacher stress during inclusion; lack of professional development; lack of support; parental demands; cultural barriers; and lack of collaborative opportunities. The study also provided recommendations to develop the capacity of all stakeholders that were involved in the process of including SEN students into mainstream systems. The study further offered recommendations for future research and lastly, the limitations of this research study were presented.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant

I am a master's student in Psychology at the University of UNISA in South Africa. I would like to invite you to participate in the research study. I am interested in exploring teacher views regarding the inclusion of SEN students' into mainstream schools.

All participants that are willing to participate will be interviewed over a 45 minute face to face session.

Participating in the research will also enable you to reflect and review your perceptions surrounding the new reform policy, to include SEN students into mainstream schools.

There are no known risks involved. Your name and the name of your school will be kept a secret. Participation is voluntary and unpaid. There is no obligation, and you are free to stop participating at any point, should you feel the need to do so. The results of the study may be published in a scientific journal or presented at a meeting.

This study is conducted under the supervision of Dr Monika dos Santos at UNISA (Department of Psychology). Please feel free to contact me or Dr dos Santos at [dsantmml@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dsantmml@unisa.ac.za) for any questions you may have.

Thank you.

Simone Bock

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

E-mail: [simone.bock@hotmail.com](mailto:simone.bock@hotmail.com)

Mobile:

0501383253

PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

I, \_\_\_\_\_ herewith confirm that I understand the above conditions of the research which have been explained to me and that I agree to participate in the above mentioned study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS**

1. What are your views on SEN in UAE schools? Probe...
2. What are your views on the new inclusion policy? Probe...
3. What are your views on the role of school leaders working with SEN students in UAE schools? Probe...
4. What are your views on the role of teachers working with SEN students in UAE schools? Probe...
5. To what extent has the new inclusive guidelines assisted you in your role as a classroom teacher? Can you give some examples?
6. What are your views on the role of culture when working with SEN students in the UAE?
7. What are your views on what works well with regard to the new inclusion policy? Probe...
8. What are your views on what does not work well with regard to the new inclusion policy? Probe...
9. What can you recommend to improve the performance of teachers working with SEN students in mainstream schools? Probe...

## **APPENDIX C**

### **FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS**

1. What are your views on the current education reform initiative to include SEN students into mainstream schools? Probe...
2. What are your views regarding the role of the teacher within an inclusive setting? Probe...
3. What are the advantages of following an inclusive model in the UAE? Probe...
4. What are the disadvantages of following an inclusive model in the UAE? Probe...
5. What are your recommendations for the successful implementation of the inclusion model? Probe...
6. Are there any additional thoughts or comments