

**Exploring systematic challenges with the implementation of the  
assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools**

by

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that “Exploring systematic challenges with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools” is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Riana Pruis', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Ms R Pruis

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

To my brother, Nico Pruis. His lifelong quote “Just do it!” has motivated me to live life with more passion and less planning.

To Sienna Pruis. To see life through your eyes made me more joyful and forgiving. Remember – I’ve got you! May this encourage you to always strive to learn and discover more.



## ABSTRACT

In South Africa the education system ensures that *education* is available and accessible to *every learner*. To ensure inclusivity for all learners, the implementation of accommodations for learners with barriers are vital. Research has indicated that the implementation of accommodations can be challenging at times for educators and relevant role players, e.g., policy implementers. The main aim of this study is to explore the systematic challenges when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in a qualitative method. This study applied the interpretivism paradigm to explore the phenomenon under study by applying Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory to explore the challenges experienced. An intensity case study design was selected with six participating independent high schools. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each policy implementer by using intensity sampling. In addition, audio-recordings and a reflection journal were used as a data collection strategy.

Using thematic analysis, three main themes emerged from the data, namely: challenges with parent, insufficient internal support for policy implementers, and inadequate services. Each theme was accompanied by a number of sub-themes.

Constructed on the research findings, I conclude that when the identified systematic challenges are addressed when implementing inclusive education policies like the IEB's assessment accommodation policy, then policy implementers, better supported, will be able to ensure that education is accessible to all learners in South Africa.

**Keywords:** assessment accommodation policy, South Africa independent high schools, assessment accommodations, systemic challenges, policy implementers, inclusive education, inclusive practices, inclusive policies, independent high schools, implementation of policies



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## KEY CONCEPTS

The following key concepts are identified for the study:

1. Accommodations in inclusive education
2. Assessment accommodation policy
3. Assessment accommodations in inclusive education
4. Challenges in inclusive education
5. Policy implementers
6. South Africa independent high schools
7. Systemic challenges in inclusive education



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

ACER	Australia Council for Education Research
BEES	Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services
DBST	District Based Support Team
DoBE/DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GET	Qualifications for schools in the General Education and Training Band
HPCSA	Health Profession Council of South Africa
HPCSA	The Health Professions Council of South Africa
IEB	Independent Examination Board
leBT	International Experience-Based Training
ILST	Institutional Based Support Team
INFOSEC	Information Security
ISASA	The Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa
NCESS	National Committee of Education Support Service
NCSNET	National Commission on Special Needs in Education
NPA	National Policy on Assessment

NSC	National Curriculum Statement Grade R-9
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPCT	Person-Process-Context-Time Model
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades & Occupations
SASA	South African Schools Act
SETA	Services Sector Education and Training Authority
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
TSCAZA	The School Counsellor Association of South Africa
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



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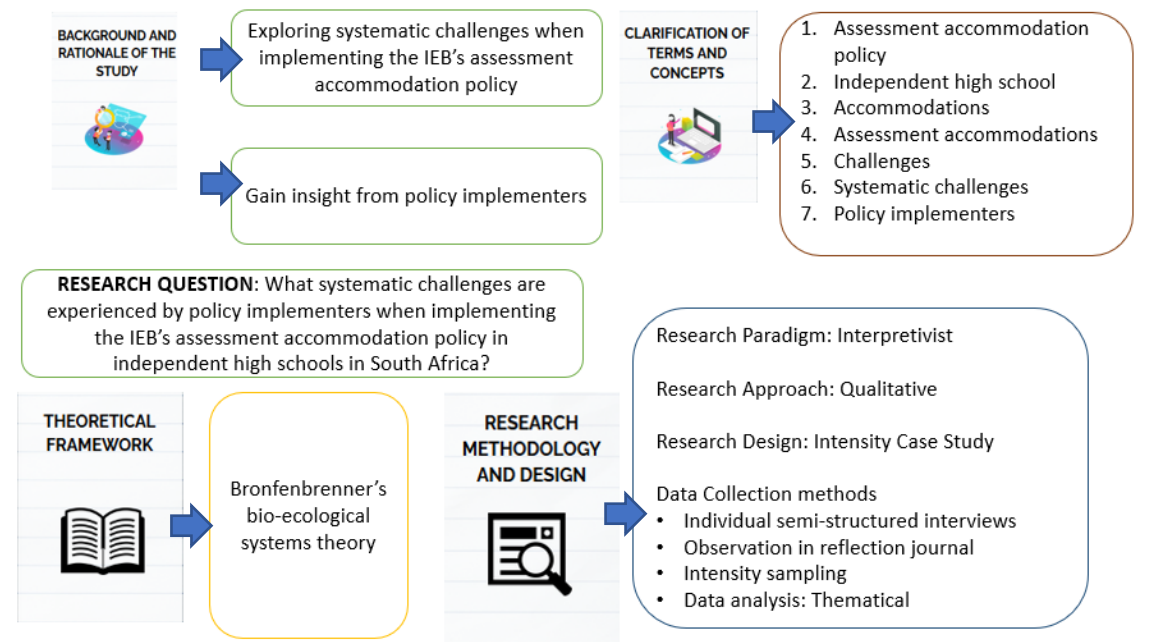
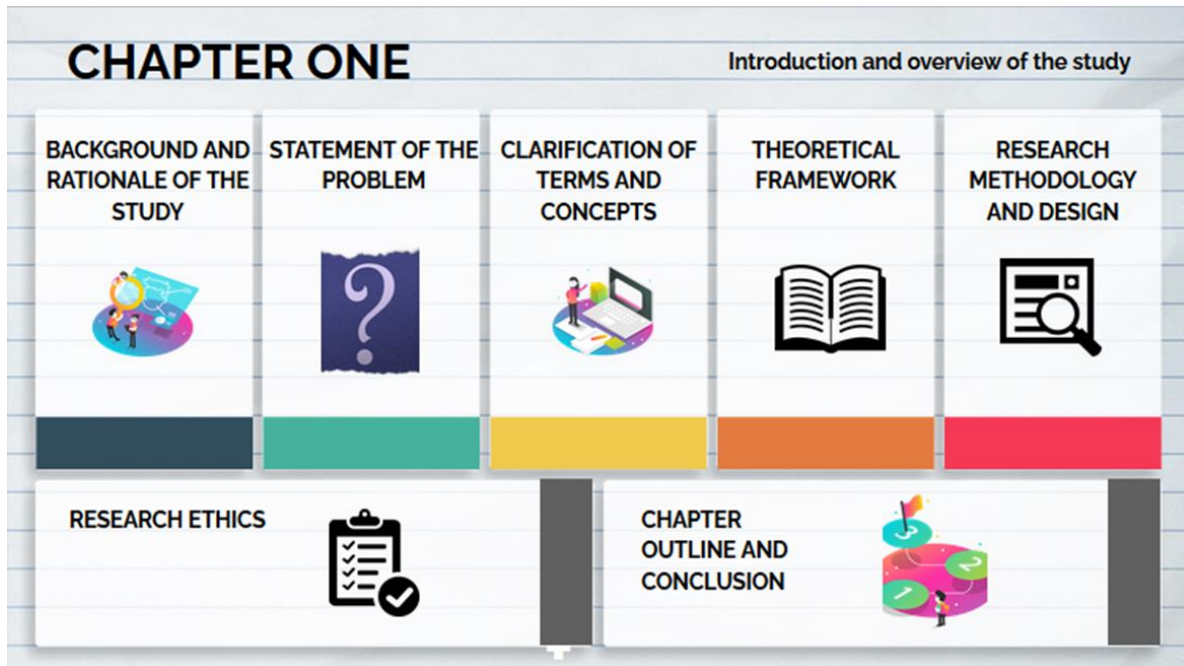
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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER





“Every child deserves a champion: an adult who never gives up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be.”

– Rita Pierson (2017: 1:15)

## **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In South Africa, every child has the right to education. To achieve this goal, education must be available to and inclusive of all children. Part of inclusive education<sup>1</sup> is the implementation of accommodations for learners with barriers. Thurlow (2013) asserts that the implementation of assessment accommodations during teaching and assessments has always been a challenge for educators. Although the purpose of assessment accommodations sounds straightforward, to ensure that the implementation thereof is effective, and not another barrier to learning, is not that easy, and can at times, be problematic (Thurlow, Christensen & Lail, 2008). An international study conducted by Thurlow et al., (2008) indicated that there are still many challenges surrounding accommodations. These challenges vary from the establishing of policies to the implementation of the policies.

Assessment accommodations emerged in the 1990's to incorporate learners with disabilities. In South Africa, the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) was circulated in 2001 to make certain that the education system meets the diverse needs of learners, particularly learners with barriers to learning, and accommodates their needs. Today, this term has evolved in such a way as to level the playing field and allow all learners an equal opportunity for success (Thurlow, 2013). The term 'accommodation' indicates that decisive changes are made by the teacher to the school curriculum to empower the learner to gain admission to the classroom, instruction, curriculum, or assessment (Janney & Snell, 2004). An 'assessment accommodation' allows learners to be assessed in order to demonstrate their understanding and skills without compromising the information being assessed. These changes to assessment include assessment practices, such as extended time, separate venues without distractions, oral assessments instead of written tests, and so on. In the past, assessment policies

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<sup>1</sup> Inclusive education in South Africa is confronted by a number of different learning barriers in the education structure for a variety of reasons (The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), 2011). Although the Inclusive Education Policy was developed to address the exclusion of learners with barriers, teachers and stakeholders struggle to meet the broad spectrum of barriers to learning (Chataika, McKensie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012).

seemed to be driven by providing learners with provision in class (instructional accommodations) and for assessment (Thurlow, 2013).

Education in South Africa has endured several changes since the mid-1990's. Special attention was paid to what the implementation of the new changes would be for learners experiencing barriers to learning<sup>2</sup> (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2019). Learners facing barriers to learning before the 1990's were grouped under the term 'learners with special educational needs' because of the international influences at the time and the needs of learners in the South African context (Fletcher, Artiles, Engelbrecht & Kozlesk, 2009). In reaction to the post-apartheid situation of special needs and support facilities in training and education, the Department of Education (DoE) at the time delivered a policy document named the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001). Many learners with barriers to learning were not attending school, so to address this challenge, the White Paper 6 recommended that the then education system change to an inclusive system to grant access to learners and to create the opportunity to participate as equal citizens in the newly proposed system (DoE, 2001). Not only did education in South Africa reach a crisis point due to the unfair discriminatory practices of the past and the apartheid government system, but internationally the United Nations (UN) had launched an agreement to focus on the quality of basic education as one of the global goals for sustainable development in 2030 (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2015). In 2015, the then Minister of Basic Education of South Africa launched her *Action Plan to 2019: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2030*, highlighting 27 goals in order to address the current challenges education faces in South Africa (DOE, 2015). Goal 26 focuses on increasing the number of schools that implement the Inclusive Education Policy effectively. This action plan document emphasises the need to start focusing on the application of a new policy to ensure a standard package of educational support services and role descriptions of key role players for those policies involved (DoE, 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> 'Barriers to learning' is a term that acknowledges that educational challenges may arise from several intrinsic and/or extrinsic factors that impact a learners learning (Walton, Nel, Hugo & Muller, 2009).

In 2002, South Africa, after the new era of democracy, adopted an inclusive education policy to address barriers to learning in South African schools. Furthermore, in 2014, the Department of Basic Education of South Africa (DoBE) implemented a Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) to assist learners that need additional support to enhance their learning (DoBE, 2014). Swart and Pettipher (2016) placed the importance of inclusive education on pursuing to create a sense of acceptance and inclusion for all learners, and in doing so, all learners are ensured to receive equal opportunity in their journey to fulfil their maximum potential. The SIAS policy of the DoBE highlights that one of the ways to ensure equal opportunities and support for all learners is through mainstream schools, full-service schools, and special schools managed by various role players in the education system.

**Table 1.1 A comparison between mainstream schools, full-service schools, and special schools**

Type of school	Description
<b>Mainstream school</b>	Khumalo and Hodgson (2017) define a <i>mainstream school</i> as an ordinary school that is necessary to ‘reasonably’ accommodate learners with barriers to learning.
<b>Full-service school</b>	<i>Full-service schools</i> have the scope to accommodate diversity and diverse barriers to learning (DoBE, 2010a). The DoBE (2014) stipulated that a ‘full-service school’ is a school that is specifically resourced to address all barriers to learning, focusing on multi-level classroom teaching and co-operative learning.
<b>Special school</b>	Khumalo and Hodgson (2017) define a <i>special school</i> as a school that is equipped to deliver specialised support for learners with severe barriers to learning. Some special schools deliver a range of support and are used as a resource centre for other nearby schools.

The DoBE is not the only stakeholder in the education of South Africa’s learners. In 1996, the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) established a national school system consisting of two categories of schools, namely: (1) *Government-controlled public schools*, and (2) *Independent schools that are privately governed* (ISASA, 2020). Privately governed independent schools have a choice of which examination they enrol their learners for in Grade 12. The Independent Examination Board (IEB) is an independent assessment body in South Africa that provides external assessment to independent schools. The IEB also implemented their

own policy relating to accommodation in 2014, highlighting the procedure of implementation for all assessment accommodations (IEB, 2013).

The focus of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy (IEB, 2013) is to change assessments to enable learners facing specific barriers to learning to validate their true ability in the assessment without altering the concept of the assessment (IEB, 2013). Through its policy, the IEB provides guidelines for each school to guarantee that adequate support is implemented at each school for the learner experiencing barriers that were successful in their application for assessment accommodation. Conway (2017) underscores the necessity to recognize how mainstream schools adopt and ratify inclusion to provide all learners with appropriate support. It is through my personal experience as a policy implementer at an IEB school that the implementation and management of the assessment policy's responsibility falls on one teacher at the relevant school. In IEB-schools, service training usually takes place to assist the teacher or any other policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy. The IEB service training takes place once a year and is conducted by one representative of the IEB managing assessment accommodations. The IEB service training involves an IEB representative to conduct a workshop about the IEB's assessment accommodation policy and the implementation of the different assessment accommodations and requirements. Implementation of assessment accommodations depend on each of the independent schools' infrastructure and physical facilities (Lebona, 2013).

Anderson, Jenkins and Miller (1996) indicate that additional studies should be performed to investigate the implementation of accommodations due to the relationship between the provision of the accommodation and participation in the assessment. Thurlow (2013) further emphasised that studies in America have documented the discrepancies in accommodations used during instruction and assessment and the challenges surrounding the implementation of accommodations. The challenges identified by these various studies include training for policy implementers, and the need for increased monitoring of the implementation of the accommodations, just to mention a few.

For the purpose of this study, the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in

independent high schools will be explored further. In this regard, the researcher is particularly concerned in exploring the different possible systematic challenges, as well as describing and identifying the challenges surrounding the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy as set out by the IEB. It came to her attention that the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy in an independent high school solely rests on one individual implementing the policy. She has been teaching for 20 years, and one of her duties as the Life Orientation teacher for the past 3 years has been the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy at the independent high school where she currently works. From her experience, she observed that the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy differs from one independent high school to another due to the challenges experienced by the relevant independent school.

## **1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The IEB provides a policy for all independent high schools relating to the implementation of assessment accommodations to support all learners with barriers to learning. This policy is referred to by the IEB as the 'Policy and Procedures for Accommodations' (IEB, 2020). This policy provides guidance on the application process and implementation process. For the purpose of this dissertation, this policy will be referred to as the 'assessment accommodation policy'.

### **1.2.1 Assessment Accommodations Policy**

The aim of this study is to explore the possible systematic challenges experienced by policy implementers when implementing assessment accommodations at independent high schools.

Policies surrounding accommodations have become complex due to the changing nature of assessments (Thurlow, 2013). For the longest of time, educators have found the implementation of accommodations during assessment and instruction challenging. Assessment policies are driven to accommodate instructional accommodations, although the learner will be making use of the accommodations during instruction as well as assessments (The IRIS Center, 2018). In South Africa, assessment policies include classroom tests and examinations to assess learners, and learners with barriers to learning do receive assessment accommodations to

ensure optimal inclusion (Venter, 2012). Due to the focus on instructional accommodations, policy implementers find it easier to access resources and recommendations to support the effective implementation of the instructional accommodation in the classroom. However, very little information is available on assessment accommodation, and although research on the topic is increasing, few irrefutable findings are offered to assist policy implementers to facilitate accurate implementation (Cawthon, Ho, Patel, Potvin & Trundt, 2009).

Furthermore, Cawthon et al., (2009) identified inconsistencies in the accommodations used during instruction in class and during the assessment. Moreover, the review of the literature revealed that many studies on accommodation focus only on instructional accommodations<sup>3</sup> and not assessment accommodations<sup>4</sup>. In South Africa, apart from Alant and Casey's (2005) research conducted on assessment focusing on the ethical issues for the practitioner, with special attention given to assessment accommodations used in a class situation or formal assessment, very little research has been showed on the matter of assessment accommodations (Venter, 2012). In addition to research conducted on the nature of accommodations, some studies (Anderson, Jenkins & Miller, 1996 Cawthon et al., 2009; Cortiella, 2020) have accentuated the importance of the implementation of assessment accommodations due to the relationship between the participation of accommodations and the provision of the accommodation.

### **1.2.2 Policy Implementers**

Policy implementation in education is a complex, developing process (Viennet & Pont, 2017). Effective implementation of a policy in education depends on the implementers and how the systematic challenges are overcome within the process of implementation, such as lack of resources, and insufficient time for implementation (Hausiku, 2017).

In South Africa, the application and implementation of assessment accommodations are managed by numerous policy implementers, ranging from the teacher to the educational psychologist who collects the relevant data from the different stakeholders

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<sup>3</sup> Instructional accommodations are adaptive acts or measures to ensure that the assessment item provides equal accessibility to learners (Bouwer, cited in Landsberg, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Assessment accommodations are defined as "changes in regular test conditions" (Dettmer, P., Knackendoffel, A. & Thurston, L.P., 2013:55).

and submits the application to the IEB (IEB, 2020). Learners with specific learning difficulties may apply for accommodation in accord with the Constitution of South Africa (Venter, 2012). The IEB solely approaches assessment accommodations based on specific barriers to learning (needs-based approach) to ensure that they assess each student's skills and knowledge accurately (IEB, 2020). The policy further emphasises that learners facing barriers to learning have substantial long-term disabilities that compromise their assessment performances, indicating that these should be addressed by applying for an assessment accommodation to implement the assessment accommodation during tests and examinations.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In South Africa, assessment accommodations are granted to learners with barriers to learning to afford them equal access to learning. Policy implementers are accountable for the effective implementation of these inclusive educational policies, e.g., The assessment accommodation policy of the IEB. This exploration will help to identify the systematic challenges experienced by policy implementers when implementing the above-mentioned policy in independent high schools in South Africa.

### **1.4 AIM OF THIS STUDY**

The aim of this study is to explore the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementer when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The main research question for this study was:

What systematic challenges are experienced by policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa?

#### **1.5.1 Sub-Research Questions**

The subsidiary research questions were:

- 1) How are assessment accommodation defined in education?

- 2) What are the challenges experienced by policy implementers in an independent high school?
- 3) Which recommendations can be suggested by the policy implementers for the development of practice with regards to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB in South African independent high schools by the study participants?

### 1.5.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- (i) Determine how assessment accommodations are defined in education.
- (ii) Establish what the assessment accommodation policy is created by the Independent Examination Board.
- (iii) Explore the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementer when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa.
- (iv) Provide recommendations for the improvement of practice with regards to the implementation of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in South African independent high schools.

### 1.6 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

This section clarifies the key terms used throughout this study:

**Accommodations in inclusive education:** The concept of 'accommodation' is used in this study to refer to purposeful changes that are made by educators to the school programme to enable the learner to gain access to the classroom, instruction, curriculum, or assessment (Janney & Snell, 2004).

**Assessment accommodation policy:** An IEB policy called 'Policy and Procedure Accommodations Exemptions' is used to determine if a student requires specific support to assist him or her to achieve their potential. The focus is to identify a learning barrier (IEB, 2020).

**Assessment accommodations in inclusive education:** The concept of 'assessment accommodations' is used in this study to refer to any change that is made in a formal assessment situation in a South African school context (IEB, 2020).



**Challenges in inclusive education:** The term ‘challenges’ refers to obstacles in education that are hindering or have a negative impact on a component in education (Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). The term intimates that “it is something that by its nature or character serves as a call for special effort” (Mandukwini, 2016:8). For the purpose of this study, the word ‘challenges’ refers to the problematic factors encountered by policy implementers when dealing with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy as set out by the IEB.

**Policy implementers:** It is the independent high schools’ responsibility to implement the assessment accommodation policy (IEB, 2020). The person responsible for the implementation differs from school to school. The IEB assessment accommodation policy refers to the person as ‘the person responsible’. The term ‘policy implementer’, for the purpose of this study, refers to the person implementing the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy.

**South Africa independent high schools:** This term refers to schools that form part of the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA). Cited here for ease of reference, the ISASA define themselves on their website as “... the oldest, largest, and most inclusive independent (private) schools’ association in Southern Africa. It is a non-profit organisation that provides its members with services to protect their interests, promote best practice and support quality education” (ISASA, 2020:1).

**Systematic challenges in inclusive education:** For the purpose of this study, ‘systemic challenges’ refer to the stumbling blocks that are evident in the different systems (according to Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model) in education that require special attention (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theoretical framework provides a qualitative research study with a clear lens for how the study will development new knowledge (Collins & Stockton, 2018). For an in-depth study, the researcher needs to articulate a theoretical framework consisting of existing knowledge about the complex phenomenon of study, her epistemological position, as well as analytic approach (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Collins & Stockton, 2018).

In this section, the idea of 'inclusive education' will be characterised, and systems theory, specifically focusing on inclusive education and Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, will be expounded on.

### **1.7.1 Inclusive Education**

'Inclusive education', which is widely applied, was established on the acknowledgment of learners with disabilities, or girls who have traditionally been omitted from education (Murungi, 2015). Internationally and in South Africa, inclusive education has been understood as the appropriate methodology to accommodate learners with disabilities when writing class tests or examinations (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) also highlights inclusive education as an approach to be used for any learner that needs support (DoBE, 2014).

The principle of 'inclusivity' is based on "...a dedication to building a more democratic society; a more equitable and quality education system; and a belief that extends the responsibility of regular schools to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners" (Landsberg et al., 2019:4). Inclusive education not only celebrates differences, but also ensures access, participation, and success for everyone. Inclusive education encompasses more than "special needs", and because of societal changes, schools have moved towards equal educational opportunities for all learners, as well as learners experiencing barriers to learning (Landsberg et al., 2017).

The change to inclusion has moved to a fundamental shift from a medical deficit model to a social system transformation perspective. Table 1.2 below presents a comparison between the medical deficit model and the social-ecological model.

**Table 1.2. A comparison between a medical deficit model and social-ecological model**

<b>Medical deficit model (Deficits)</b>	<b>Social-ecological model (Barriers)</b>
Focuses on exclusion of learners with learning barriers.	Focuses on incorporation and inclusion of learners with learning barriers.
Managing or changing the learner; interventions mainly by specialist personnel; special placement based on labels	Changing systems; developing different systems to support the learner; association between all stakeholders, including specialist personal.
Discourses: Medial deficit, individualistic, personal tragedy.	Discourses: social-critical, social oppression, bio-ecological resilience.

**(Source: Adopted from Landsberg, 2017)**

With the application of inclusive education, the focus shifted from learners with barriers who had to ‘fit into’ the educational system, to the educational system changing to accommodate and address the varied needs of all learners (Landsberg et al., 2019).

The main challenge of inclusion is to recognise the intricacy of the influences between the learner and other systems. The systems theory approach is a theoretical approach that accommodates the intrinsic environments of the medical methodology and the interrelatedness of the other systems relating to the individual (Ladbrook, 2009). Social experiences and interactions cannot be understood without studying the context in which it appears. This approach also focuses on the factors influencing the individual in the different systems. The view espoused here is that to assist the learner with barriers to learning<sup>5</sup>, the latter must be addressed at every level from various standpoints (Ladbrook, 2009).

### **1.7.2 Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-ecological Systems Theory**

The framework of the bio-ecological systems theory of development can be used to explore and describe the learner and the interactions and interrelationships of other systems in a social context. Inclusive education is embedded in a variety of systems, and therefore, the bio-ecological systems theory could be utilized to comprehend the

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<sup>5</sup> The term ‘leaners with barriers to learning’ was used during the 1990s to refer to learners with special education needs (Ladbrook, 2009).

development of the systems, and the development of the individuals within these systems (Mitchel, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's first model was well-known as the 'ecological model'. Bronfenbrenner's theory placed the child at the middle of five levels or systems, comprised of the immediate environment (home) to the outer level (community) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The five systems or levels surrounding the child influence each other, impacting the child's growth and development (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). For the intent of this study, the researcher made use of Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional systems theory – the bio-ecological systems theory – which suggests different levels of interaction between systems. This integration makes it ideal to explore the influence of the systemic challenges on the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB.

Bronfenbrenner indicated that interactions occur within five interconnected systems (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010), namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the ecosystem, and the macrosystem. All the systems interact with the chronosystem which represents time (Swart and Pettipher, 2016). Furthermore, there is reciprocal influence between these systems, in that the interaction between the factors in a specific environment, in turn, influence the other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the context of this study, the child's development takes place within these five systems, influencing both the development and behaviour of the child (Donald et al., 2010).

Policy implementation is affected by socio-cultural factors, socio-economic factors, and socio-political factors (Stofile, 2008). To ensure effective implementation of any policy in education, the agency that shapes the outcomes of the policy implementation must be explored in different systems to identify the systematic challenges (Gornitzka, Kyvik & Stensaker, 2005). Applying an eco-systemic perspective assisted the researcher to identify and define challenges that need to change and develop (Pilon, 2015). She in turn obtained a greater understanding of how the systems influence one another and, in some cases, how some of the systems create challenges in other systems.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is described in more detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. With the theoretical model of this study in place, developing theories can now be explored and described based on the research and findings.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

This section describes the methodology employed in this study. Quantitative researchers posit that all quantitative research is descriptive and explanatory (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). A qualitative research methodology, however, was chosen to explore, describe, and understand the systematic challenges accompanying the implementation of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy by policy implementers. The research methodology is seen as the pathway through which researchers need to perform research, while the research design offers the outline for the study (Sileyew, 2019; Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The researcher conducted an extensive literature review of inclusive education in South Africa, assessment accommodations, bio-ecological systems theory, and the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB.

### **1.8.1 Research Paradigm**

This study applied the interpretivist paradigm to explore the challenges experienced by the policy implementer when implementing the assessment accommodations in independent schools in South Africa.

The chosen research paradigm for this study was the interpretive paradigm, as the study consists of people's subjective experiences of a specific context and reality. The interpretivist view allows researchers to explore the current reality by explaining the understanding of individuals in a specific context (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This study endeavoured to explain the systematic challenges identified by policy implementers with the purpose of uncovering the systematic challenges experienced when implementing the IEB's assessment policy. Interpretive research values subjectivity and supports the notion that objective research is not feasible when studying human behaviour (Willis, 2007; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The interpretive paradigm enabled the researcher to perform the study amongst the participants in their immediate environment, and therefore allowed her to comprehend the participants in terms of their own worlds. The main idea of the interpretivist paradigm is that individuals create subjective meanings of their personal experiences. Meaning is therefore socially constructed, giving rise to multiple meanings or realities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Venter (2013) opines that the interpretivist paradigm is

frequently condemned for its emphasis on subjective experiences and the clarification of these experiences. Venter (2012) overcame this limitation in her study by making use of her personal background and a research journal, in the form of a reflection journal, to describe her subjective encounters in order to assist others to read her subjective findings and determine how it could inform their methods. She made use of a first-person writing style to share her personal experiences. To overcome personal bias in the current study, the researcher paid careful attention to the studies included in the research used for cross-referencing, corroboration, and review, based on their subjective methods of collecting and interpreting data (Akobeng, 2005).

The paradigm of a study consists of three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Patel, 2015). These are described in more detail in Table 1.3 below.

**Table 1.3 Description of three dimensions**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	Terre Blanche et al., (2006) describe ontology as the explanation of concepts and the relationships between the concepts in the study. Reality does not exist out of a single reality (Patel, 2015).
<b>Epistemology</b>	Terre Blanche et al., (2006) identify epistemology as the relationship between the knowledge not acquired yet and the researcher. Reality is interpreted to discover the underlying meaning of situations or activities (Patel, 2015).
<b>Methodology</b>	Methodology is defined by Terre Blanche et al., (2006) as the approach bringing the unknown to the forefront and making it known. Reality can be studied through a variety of methods to ensure all is disclosed to the researcher (Patel, 2015).

These three dimensions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this study.

### **1.8.2 Research Approach**

Due to the nature of this study, the researcher opted for a qualitative approach. The process of a qualitative study implies that the researcher make an attempt to create a complex and all-inclusive image through inquiry and understanding (Gibbs, 2005). To

facilitate a rich, in-depth insight of the phenomenon underlying the study, the qualitative approach permitted the researcher to identify influencing factors in the research setting (Babbie, 2007).

In this study, a social phenomenon (systematic challenges) that is context dependent was explored and described. This made the research descriptive and explanatory. It was descriptive in that it dealt with “questions of what things are like and depends on what the researcher wishes to describe” (Marx, 2017:24). Furthermore, the research conducted was explanatory as a result of the research analysis of the broader relationship of systems (Babbie, 2013).

Venter (2013) identifies two benefits of using a qualitative approach in a study, namely: (1) it provides the opportunity to use research in people’s lives, and (2) it attempts to understand participants’ experiences in a specific context.

### **1.8.3 Research Design**

Furthermore, this study made use of an intrinsic case study design to explore and describe systematic challenges when implementing the assessment accommodation policy. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) described a case study as a study that encourages an improved understanding of a situation and therefore accelerates educated decision making. They further postulate that a case study includes explanations, analysis of the data attained, and realistic reviews, such as the interview transcripts and field notes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Evidently, a case study focuses more on descriptions than analysis and interpretation. Yin (2011) suggested the suitability of a case study when endeavouring to comprehend an intricate social phenomenon, for instance, in regard to this study, the experienced challenges when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent schools. An intrinsic case study allowed the researcher to explore what systematic challenges each policy implementer experienced when implementing the assessment accommodation policy through their own understanding of their systematic challenges in their own school structure to ensure a better understanding of the case study (Maree, 2016). Intensity sampling permitted the researcher to choose a small number of rich cases that deliver in-depth information and understanding of a phenomenon (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

#### **1.8.4 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection methods are used to gather relevant data required in the research. Qualitative data collection methods that yield detailed and information-rich data include observation, keeping a reflection journal, semi-structured individual interviews, and reviewing of visual data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the researcher aimed to conduct a qualitative study in six suburban independent high schools in Gauteng through an intensity case study.

Each school was selected because of their location, involvement as an independent school, and their number of granted assessment accommodations. Six policy implementers were interviewed from different independent high schools. Intensity sampling was used to select the policy implementer participants based on their involvement with the implementation of assessment accommodation, as they were more likely to be knowledgeable about the context being researched, and for this reason, were included in the sample (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The participants' knowledge and experience gained from working with the implementation of assessment accommodation could be regarded as "information-rich" cases (Merriam, 2009). Intensity sampling allowed the researcher to select independent schools which strongly represent the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2016).

To ensure the collection of sound data, interviews were conducted with participants in each selected school over a period of time. The intention was to obtain a comprehensive understanding through face-to-face interaction with policy implementers from each independent school. Flick (1998) advances that interest in face-to-face interviews is due to the interviewed participants' viewpoint being more emphatically expressed than during a non-face-to-face questionnaire. During the process, the researcher made use of a reflection journal to record observations.

This data collection techniques used in this study included:

##### **1.8.4.1 Individual semi-structured Interviews**

The researcher conducted interviews with one policy implementer from each of the six independent high schools. These policy implementers are responsible for the implementation of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in each independent high school.



For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Rabionet (2011:22) explains a semi-structured interview as a "...flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience".

To ensure that a good qualitative study is conducted, training and experience is a crucial part, but semi-structured interviews also depend on the information, skills, foresight, and truthfulness of the researcher (Dingwall, Murphy, Watson, Greatbatch & Parker, 1998).

#### **1.8.4.2 Researcher observation and reflection journal**

Reflective practice is a particularly important mental skill, a mindful effort to think about a complex reality and then to gain insights to construct meaning (van Aswegen, Brink & Steyn, 2000; Mortari, 2015).

Keeping a self-reflective journal is a tool that can be used by a researcher to facilitate reflexivity. It is also a tool that can be used to examine any personal assumptions or/and goals to help to clarify the researcher's belief systems as well as highlight any subjectivities (Ortlipp, 2008; Mortari, 2015).

There are several types of observation that could be used to understand the field of study better. For the purpose of this study, the researcher opted for overt observation. The researcher was open about her intentions for conducting the research. She also clarified the purpose of the study to the participants and how it would be conducted. An advantage of making use of overt observation as a method is to ensure that the researcher avoids problematic ethical issues and provides a sound basis for generalisations (Bryman, 2016). In addition, informed consent was acquired from each of the participants involved.

#### **1.8.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis integrates several elements in the phases of collecting data. Raw data needs to be collected, transcribed, and examined for the researcher to identify the themes with different codes (Bryman, 2016). Following the advice of Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012), the researcher made use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a general approach to analysing qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns in the data" (Wagner et al., 2012:133).

After collecting the data, the researcher identified coded themes in the data. Saldana (2010) indicates that a good code can be divided into different elements: a label or name; a description of what the code includes; an explanation of how to know when a coded theme occurs; an explanation of what qualifies or eliminates the documentation of that code; and a list of positive and negative illustrations to avoid misperception or assumptions that cannot be measured.

A qualitative researcher is not dealing with measurable findings but a reality that can be described and analysed. In this study, the researcher made use of triangulation by using different data-gathering methods and sources of information to avoid biases (Forbes & Heale, 2017). According to Yin (2011), examination of the data in a case study is often dependent on the researcher's knowledge and experience. The researcher categorised, examined, tabulated, and recombined the data in the case study to ensure that each case study was regarded as a typical investigative strategy.

#### **1.8.6 Quality Criteria**

Qualitative research is not evaluated based on the same criteria as quantitative research (Mandal, 2018). Researchers using qualitative research differ in their criteria of evaluation for research (Seale, 1999). In this study, the researcher used trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability as the evaluation criteria to guarantee data quality.

The quality criteria will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

### **1.9. RESEARCH ETHICS**

Before the commencement of the study, the researcher attained ethical clearance to perform this study from the University of South Africa's Ethical Committee. After obtaining permission, she adhered to the principles cited by Hammersley and Traianou (2012), namely, that all participants involved in the study should be completely informed of the process to avoid deception after giving consent; they are to confirm the transcripts of their semi-structured interviews; and their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity are to be safeguarded.

Mouton (2015) asserts that a researcher must always focus on maintaining objectivity to make sure that the research is objective and has integrity. This can only be

accomplished through the researcher focusing on adhering to the highest possible technical standards in the study. The researcher needs to always indicate the limits of the findings in the research as well as the methodological restrictions to verify the authenticity of the findings. In this regard, the researcher reported all findings fully and did not misrepresent study results. According to Allan (2017), in what manner the individuals make decisions can impact other individuals in a society.

## **1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

This thesis comprises five chapters. These are outlined as follows:

**Chapter 1** introduces the research topic and provides the background of the study. Included is the literature review that outlines the view of the assessment accommodation policy in independent schools, and the schooling in South Africa regarding the application of the above-mentioned policy and the support of learners who are facing barriers to learning. The chapter also provides the aim and objectives of the study, the theoretical framework, the research questions, the ethical considerations adhered to, the approach and methodology employed, followed by a delineation of the chapters and a brief conclusion.

**Chapter 2** comprises the literature review of the different approaches to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy. The theoretical framework and Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory are discussed. The role of the specific policy implementer's responsibility for the implementation is also defined in the context of inclusive education.

**Chapter 3** focuses on the research process. Consideration is given to the research methodology, design, data collection methods, data analysis, and interpretation. The measures used to ensure rigour as well as ethical considerations are also discussed.

**Chapter 4** accounts on the findings of the study, highlighting the themes that emerged during the evaluation of the data.

**Chapter 5**, the final chapter, presents a summary of the findings regarding the application of the assessment accommodation policy. Included are the limitations of the study, along with a number of recommendations for additional research.

## **1.11 CONCLUSION**

This chapter introduced the study by providing a brief background of education in South Africa by looking at inclusion, the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB, and the implementation of the above-mentioned policy. The aim of the study was described as seeking to explore the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementers when implementing the assessment accommodation policy (IEB) in independent high schools. The main elements of the research process were also described, along with the research methodology that underpins this study.

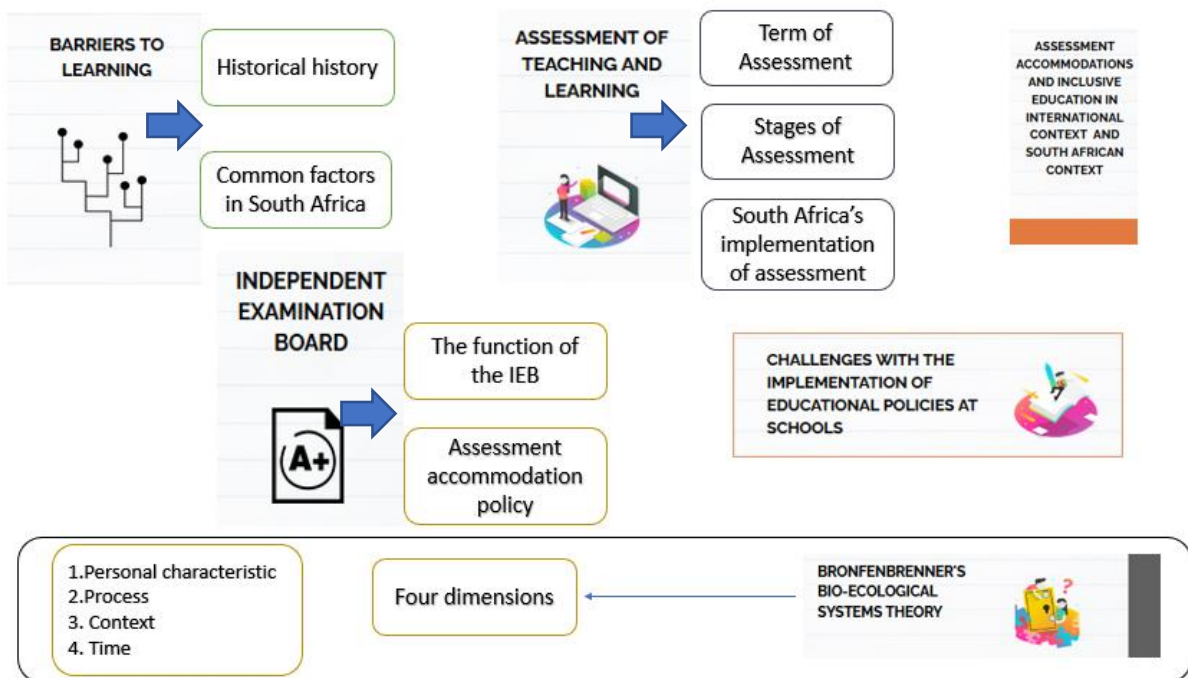
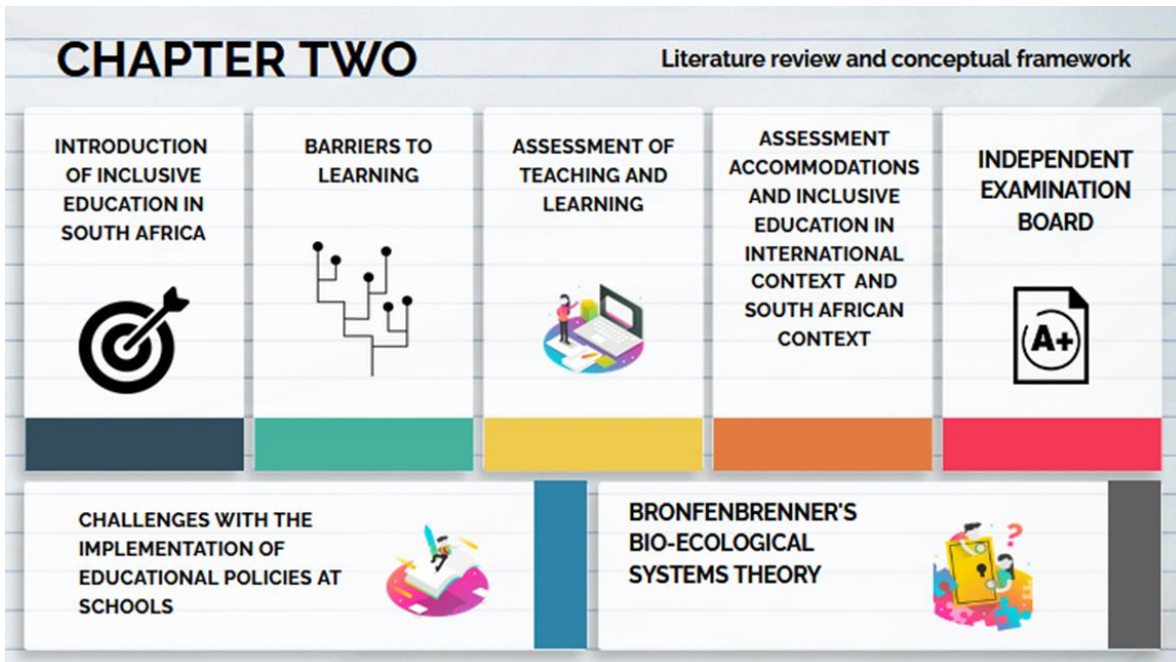
The following chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study.



# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER



## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smith (2004), the literature review is the basis from which the researcher can collect data, analyse the collected data, and discuss the research findings to aid in conceptualising the research through the current related literature. A literature review establishes evidence and adds to the current knowledge base concerning the field of study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Conway (2017:12) suggests that the literature review organises Chapter 2 “... like a funnel moving from the global perspective and international inclusive education context to the South Africa context...” This chapter comprises the following sections laid out in Figure 2.1 below:



**Figure 2.1. Summary of literature review**

Education research is complex in nature and demands thorough, sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon. “A thorough, sophisticated literature review is the foundation and inspiration for substantial, useful research” (Boote & Beile, 2005:3). Onwuegbuzie, Collins, Leech, Dellinger and Jiao (2010) recognised the following benefits of conducting a excellence analysis of the literature, namely, to: a) differentiate what has been started and what still needs to happen; b) categorise

variables that are related to the research; c) recognise the associations amongst concepts and practice; d) differentiate exemplary research; e) evades unintended and redundant repetition; f) recognise the key research methodologies and strategies that have been used; g) categorise variations as well as the assets and limitations of the numerous research methods that have been used.

In various instances, assessment accommodations are all that a learner with barriers to learning need to be effective in the classroom and assessments. Some learners will always require particular accommodations to be able to complete essential tasks, such as using braille material (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services (BEESS), 2018). With the implementation of accommodations, policy implementers may find that they need to take additional steps to accommodate their specific accommodation effectively. Sometimes the policy implementer needs to orientate or instruct the learner on how to use a new accommodation, while at other times the policy implementer needs to assist a teacher or parent to become more proficient and comfortable with the support plan (BEESS, 2018). For accommodation – instructional or assessment-based – to have the utmost impact, the learner’s use of the specific accommodation must be repeatedly monitored, endorsed through data analysis, and evaluated in terms of effectiveness (Christenson, 2000). This type of knowledge is urgently needed to tackle the potential challenges policy implementers encounter to ensure effective implementation of accommodations.

Not to overlook the importance of the instructional assessment, not much, however, is known about the challenges regarding the implementation of the assessment accommodation in an independent high school context in South Africa. At present, there is no all-inclusive national policy regarding the application of assessment accommodation (special concessions<sup>6</sup>) in South Africa as part of the Inclusive Education Policy (Venter, 2012).

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<sup>6</sup> The term ‘special concession’ is sometimes used as a synonym for the term ‘assessment accommodation’ (Alant, E. & Casey, M., 2005).

## 2.2 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

To focus on the barriers to learning in the South African education system, the country has adopted an inclusive education policy (Dalton, Mackenzie & Kahonde, 2012). Implementing inclusive education in schools in the South Africa context has two consequences for teachers and policy implementers. Firstly, it increases learners' participation in learning, and secondly, the policy helps navigate the accommodation of the diverse range of learning needs in South African schools. The Department of Basic Education has implemented a plan to focus on the application of inclusive education policies. This strategy consists of three major prescriptive guidelines, namely:

1) The National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) describes the procedure of identification, assessment, and registration of learners. The SIAS strategy provides prescriptive guidelines for all involved with the implementing the strategy (DoE, 2008).

2) The Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the classroom through Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (DoE, 2014) delivers hands-on direction on the development and teaching of lessons to address the diverse needs learners. This strategy was revised to incorporate curriculum changes and now forms part of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Dalton et al., 2012).

3) Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6): Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001) underpins the first two strategies, providing an outline for a national approach to accomplish an inclusive education system, promoting provision for all learners in mainstream schools. This recognises the importance of support practices to improve learning outcomes on national and district level (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettipher, 2002).

According to Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013), Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory allows for investigation of the expansion of systems and individuals within inclusive education as practices operating in different systems, as summarised in Table 2.1 below.



**Table 2.1 Summary of systems within inclusive education**

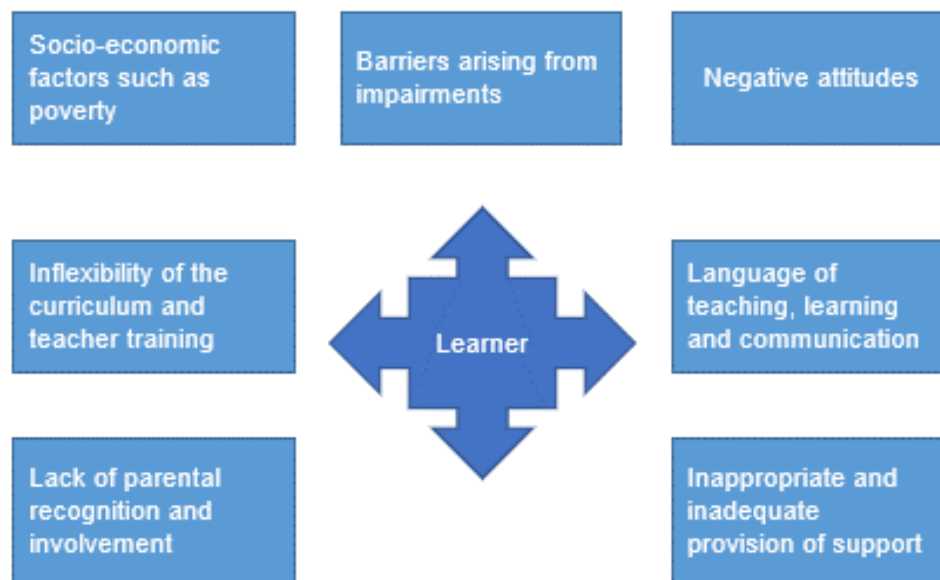
<b>System</b>	<b>Aspect within Inclusive Education</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Microsystem	Represents learners and individuals within the direct context (close family relationships and close friendships).	Duerden and Witt (2010)
Mesosystem	Represents two or more settings' interrelations directly linked to the learner (home, school or peer groups).	Donald et al., (2010)
Exosystem	Represents one or more settings that are not directly linked to the learner (school policies and district policies)	Duerden and Witt (2010)
Macrosystem	Represents the larger cultural world surrounding the learner (cultural norms and beliefs, government policies, national policies)	Duerden and Witt (2010)
Chronosystem	Represents a period of time	Donald et al., (2010)

On a national level, inclusive strategies are formulated as a systems approach, with interconnectivity amongst the relevant systems (Poole, 2017). The National Department of Education provides coordinated professional support services and proposes that schools should establish support teams to facilitate teaching and learning to address barriers to learning. At the provincial level, all schools implement education policies, including White Paper 6, to guarantee that all learners obtain quality education (Mahlo, 2017).

### **2.3 BARRIERS TO LEARNING**

Historically, in South Africa, learning barriers were primarily restricted to medical barriers, with a large diversity of socio-economic factors contributing to exclusion (Conway, 2017). South Africa's past of segregation, inequality, and discrimination intensified the external barriers. This situation left a legacy of unequal distribution and access to education and learning, and not meeting the fundamental right of education

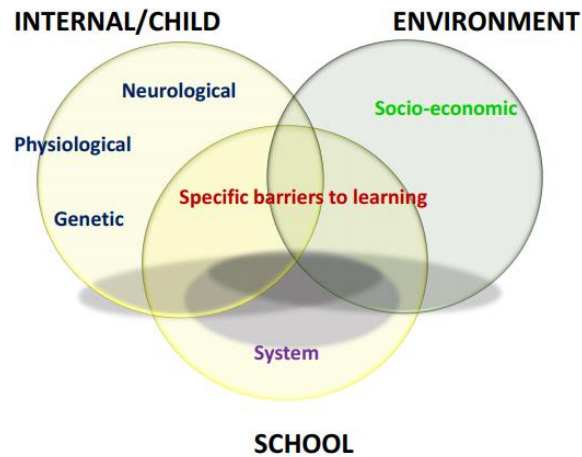
for all learners (Conway, 2017). The National Commission on Special Needs in Education (NCSNET) and the National Committee of Education Support Service (NCESS) issued a report in 1997 to identify possible common factors in South Africa that contribute to creating barriers to learning (DoE, 1997). These barriers to learning are illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.



**Figure 2.2. Common factors in South Africa contributing to barriers to learning**

Social structures have changed rapidly since 1997, resulting in severe barriers to learning produced by a range of factors still prevalent today. Prinsloo (2005) describes 'a barrier to learning' as a complication or context that prevents individuals or things apart, averting communication and blocking admission to progression. Severe factors compounded by poverty, unemployment, unexpected development, the fragmentation of family life, growing stages of violence and child exploitation, the HIV epidemic, and language and cultural changes have a huge influence on learning barriers, and must therefore be considered within inclusive schooling context (Prinsloo, 2005). Current education statistics indicate that 409 906 learners matriculated in South Africa in 2018. These learners are in need of employment, with a 29% unemployment rate reported in 2020 (Education Statistics, 2019).

These common factors influencing barriers to learning can also be divided into the three main components: school, environment, and learners, as represented in Figure 2.3 below:



**Figure 2.3 Common factors influencing barriers to learning**

**(Source: Le Roux, 2016)**

Internal and external learning barriers do not occur in seclusion, but are multifaceted and interconnected, as indicated in the figure above (Conway, 2017). An *internal barrier* lies within the child. These include sensory, neurological, and physical disabilities, and learning difficulties, such as reading, writing, language, spelling, mathematical, and communication difficulties (Smith, 2005).

*External barriers* are aspects such as poor school attendance, poverty, pregnancy, physical abuse, substance abuse, schooling system, inflexible curriculum, inadequate policies, legislation socio-economic deprivation, and inaccessible and unsafe built environments (Spinelli, 2002).

To reduce barriers to learning, it is essential to identify support as soon as possible. The SIAS (DoBE, 2014) encourages the practice of early identification from a diagnostic perspective. Landsberg et al., (2017) postulate that by only making use of a diagnostic perspective, we fail to focus on the teacher's attention to barriers inside the classroom, which may result in the labelling of the learner instead of supporting him or her. It is further emphasised that assessment for learning support should be subscribed by multiple sources of information to render optimal learning support. Using the framework set out by the bio-ecological model will ensure that effective strategies of learning support are constructed.

The implication for assessment is that a greater understanding is created about the systemic influences on child development and the systems that influence the learner with barriers to learning, facilitating effective support by policy implementers.

Classroom test and summative assessments are commonly assembled to assess all learners in terms of content and methods in South Africa. The Inclusive Education Policy indorses that the diverse needs of all learners should be addressed, and that facets of the curriculum should be available to all learners (DoE, 1997). Learners experiencing barriers to assessment, tests and examinations frequently do not have a reasonable opportunity to validate their aptitudes, knowledge and skills. Although learners with learning barriers can be evaluated in a similar manner as their peers, learning barriers could cause learners to battle with reading and writing pursuits (DoE 2008b:94).

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model delivers an all-inclusive context, showing on internal and external factors influencing the barriers to learnings in the different dimensions (Griffore & Phenice, 2016). This framework enables the systemic justification of the interactions concerning the individual and the levels of the systems involved in education, and the needs of the diverse learners (Smit, Preston & Hay, 2020).

## **2.4 ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Sethusha (2012) summarised the term 'assessment' as a concept that is used in education to refer to the components listed in Table 2.2 below:

**Table 2.2 Components that represent the term assessment**

Components	
Procedure teachers use to grade assignment for students.	Harlen (2007) Joyce, Gitomer and Laconangelo (2018)
Standardised testing in schools.	Stiggins and Chappius (2005) Maphalala and Mncube (2017)
Any learning and teaching activity created to gather information. This information can be used as feedback for learners.	Angelo (2001) Dwyer and William (2010)
A learning activity to improve instruction and learner's performance.	Sparks (2005) Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey, Barron and Osher (2019)

Assessment has always guided the entire process of teaching and learning, which makes it an integral part of education (Sethusha, 2012). Curriculum's implementation of the process of teaching and learning has always been independent of the types of assessment practices, tools, and techniques used by all involved with education. Not only do the assessment practices reform a classroom, but Kotzé (2002) pointed out that assessment practices can be seen as an agent for reform, helping learners deal with particular burdens and difficulties of real-life, as well as dealing with the current unpredictable context in South Africa. Badders (2000) categorised assessment into three stages. These are illustrated in Table 2.3 below.

**Table 2.3 Summary of the stages of assessment (Badders, 2000)**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Description</b>
1. Baseline assessment	This assessment creates the beginning point of the learner's comprehension.
2. Formative assessment	This assessment helps as a guiding tool for instruction.
3. Summative assessment	This assessment identifies the degree of conceptual understanding and execution abilities.

It is evident that all three stages collect different kinds of information about the learners, yielding a deeper, more meaningful understanding of their knowledge and performances. There is a significant body of research indicating the strong effect of assessment on learning outcomes. Furthermore, it shows that assessment may support or diminish a learner's performance and motivation, depending on the implementation of the assessment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2013).

In 1997, outcomes-based education (OBE) was launched in South Africa, followed by Curriculum 2005 (C2005). The implementation of the new curriculum was followed up in 2007 with the National Policy on Assessment (NPA) and Qualifications for Schools in the General Education and Training (GET) Band (DoE, 2007). The framework for assessment and qualifications for all private and public schools were created and referred to as the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (NSC). In 2011, the NSC was amended to create the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which included an all-inclusive curriculum and assessment for each subject, determining minimum outcomes, standards and processes, and procedures for assessment appropriate to all schools (public and independent schools) (DoE, 2014).

The implementation of the Curriculum 2005 had an impact on teachers to alter their assessment practices, which included formal and informal assessments to guarantee truthful, objective, and fair assessment, speaking to each subject learning outcomes and assessment standards. A shift in the Curriculum 2005 from a product-oriented approach to a process-orientated approach to assessment placed a huge burden on

learners, teachers, and parents (Hamidi, 2010). The last change in the curriculum meant that the importance of assessment was reiterated, and knowledge or content was no longer the primary focus. Instead, skills and values in a specific context were emphasised (DoE, 2002).

This meant that assessment could be used to help learners recognise their academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as deliver additional opportunities for intellectual growth and learning experiences (MacLellan, 2001). Assessment can help a learner to become more aware of his or her own individual learning path, and eventually become the mechanism for individual empowerment (Broadfoot & Black, 2004). To understand a learner's academic success, and to ensure further empowerment, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory can be used to analyse possible contributing factors in each system (Mulisa, 2019). Table 2.4 summarises possible factors influencing a learner's success when dealing with assessments.

**Table 2.4 Summary of possible factors influencing academic success**

<b>System</b>	<b>Aspect within Assessment</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Microsystem	Represents learner’s learning style, leisure times, teacher-student relations, and teaching methods.	Duijster, D., Monse, B., Dimaisip-Nabuab, J., Djaharnoko, P., Heinrich-Wiltzlen, R., Hobdell, M., Benzian, H. (2017)
Mesosystem	Represents the way systems interact with one another (classroom management style of teacher and influence on learner).	Hoskins (2014)
Exosystem	Represents social networking, parental networks, and financial resources.	Mulisa (2019)
Macrosystem	Represents curricula, economic status, cultural values. and technological backgrounds.	Hoskins (2014)
Chronosystem	Represents changes due to the laps of time (environmental factors, socio-economic factors, and opportunities).	Mulisa (2019)

For a policy implementer, assessment should provide information with the purpose of continuously improving the assessment accommodation implementation and support structures provided to the relevant learners (Watkins, 2007). This statement is particularly applicable with regards to implementing assessment accommodations and identifying the possible challenges regarding the implementation of this policy. Through tracking the assessment needs of learners with a barrier to learning, possible



challenges surrounding the effective implementation of the assessment accommodation could be addressed, resulting in a more effective implementation.

## **2.5 ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

Donald et al., (2010) highlighted the fact that inclusion is essentially an international movement focusing on an inclusive society for children and adults to contribute to, and contribute in, a more just society. It is clear from the literature review that the conceptualisations of 'inclusive education' and 'policies' differ meaningfully between countries, based on the interpretation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) agreement, as well as the level of commitment of each country (Xu, 2012).

The key points of international inclusive education policies are summarised by Forlin and colleagues (2013) as follows: a) The implementation of inclusive education varies based on regional needs; b) Most countries understood inclusion as a disability issue; c) Most governments are very supportive of inclusive education and acknowledge the need for interdisciplinary engagement; d) All governments are in agreement that policies should be localised, and e) Numerous teachers are not sufficiently equipped for inclusive education.

The overall aim of inclusive education focusing on assessment specificity is to create policies and procedures to support all learners and to prevent segregation by avoiding labelling (DG Education, 2007). With this in mind, the researcher maintains that policy implementers should look at what challenges there are when implementing policies and procedures (particular regarding the assessment accommodation policy) to support all learners with barriers to learning to limit the challenges of implementation and the effect on the accommodation of the learner.

## **2.6 ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

Historically, assessment accommodations emerged in the 1990's in most international schools and were characterised by changes in materials or procedures (Thurlow, 2013). Learners were exposed to national and school-based testing, and each state

had the responsibility to create their own set of guidelines on the provision of accommodations (Dempsey & Conway, 2004).

In South Africa, higher education institutions (IHE), for example, universities, were challenged to address pressing societal needs (Beets, 2007). To ensure students were supported to acquire factual knowledge and competencies in different contexts, South Africa's teaching programme was characterised by foundational components (knowledge), practical components (skills), and reflexive components (application) (Beets, 2007). In South Africa, during the apartheid period, the focus shifted to improving and expanding education that specialised in education for learners with disabilities. At the time, separate schools were established to accommodate for the specific needs of learners and to provide specialised support services and specialised teaching. Education systems labelled learners according to their ability, evident of a medical perspective (Venter, 2012). Learners were excluded based on their labels and assessment results from mainstream schooling. In 1994, when South Africa became a democracy and the South African Constitution was established, fundamental values such as human dignity, justice, and freedom were emphasised, abolishing discrimination and prejudice. Education made a shift from segregation to inclusion (Venter, 2012). This meant that all learners were guaranteed entry to education.

The new South African Government focused on an inclusive environment, instilling the knowledge and values of democracy in all sectors. This new focus meant that a high priority was placed on improving education and creating inclusiveness in education (Venter, 2012). The South African Government introduced different initiatives to ensure that previous programmes and policies, which initially only targeted white people, were extended to other racial groups (Makiwane, 2010).

An updated South African educational programme emerged in 1996, when the new democratic constitution – The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) – was implemented (Makiwane, 2010). Education in South Africa moved to the inclusion of all learners. Legislation and policies emerged out the values of the Constitution to encourage inclusive practices (Venter, 2012). The following documents and guidelines directed the process of inclusivity, as summarised by Landsberg et al., (2017):

**Table 2.5: Documents and guidelines of inclusivity, including barriers to learning  
(Source: Adapted from Kruger et al., 2017)**

<b>Policy</b>	<b>Institution</b>
The White Paper on Education and Training	DoE, 1995
The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) and Amendments The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child	Republic of South Africa, 1996
The White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy	UNCRC, 1990
The National Commission on Special Education Needs and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services.	Republic of South Africa, 1997
South Africa's Children's Act (At 38 of 2005)	NCESS 1997
The Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: building an inclusive education and training system	Republic of South Africa (2005)
Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)	DoE, 2001
	DoE, 2005

The most influential policy listed above was the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6). This policy provided the South African education programme with a framework that will allow all public schools to implement inclusive education. This will ensure equal access for all learners (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013).

Assessment in South Africa became an important part of and central to higher education in order to (1) provide a platform for exploring learners' academic decisions for academic success (Dawson, Bearman, Boud, Hall, Molloy, Bennett and Joughin, 2013); (2) promote learners from one level to the next level; (3) indicate what knowledge the learner acquired; and (4) determine the learners' academic progress.

The South African education system is distributed into three levels: elementary, secondary, and tertiary. Elementary and secondary levels of schooling in South Africa are, for the greatest part, often public, and account for the majority of admissions.

Nevertheless, independent private schools in South Africa have gotten some footing during the past several years as an alternative to the struggling public schools. In 1996, a national schooling Act, The South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), was established, recognising two categories of schools, namely: (1) public schools, which are state controlled, and (2) independent schools, which are privately administered. Within the public-school system, SASA formed a sub-grouping named “public schools on private property”, which included off state schools on private land owned by religious associations, smallholders, mines, and forestry businesses (The Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA), 2020).

The definition of ‘independent schools’ in South Africa is restricted in comparison to other countries. An independent school is classified as a school that is privately administered and not a public school on private property. The independent schools in Southern Africa that are registered with ISASA are also encouraged to use inclusivity and include learners with special educational needs wherever it is feasible because of their Diversity and Equity Policy (ISASA, 2020). ISASA is a non-profit organisation that provides members with amenities to guard their interest and endorse best practices and support. The membership of ISASA is voluntary (ISASA, 2020). The Independent Examination Board (IEB) offers accredited assessment and training practices to ISASA in accordance with South Africa’s legislation (IEB, 2020).

The focus of this study is to explore the possible systematic challenges experienced by policy implementers implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent schools belonging to ISASA. Walton et al., (2009) highlight that the most noteworthy area where accommodations can be made to minimise the influence of any learning barriers – is assessment. Some learners are robbed of the chance to effectively demonstrate what they understand during assessment, with the probability of dropping out of school or failing, and subsequently, emotional damage (Venter, 2012).

## **2.7 INDEPENDENT EXAMINATION BOARD**

Many independent schools belong to ISASA and need to meet the quality criteria and membership requirements to ensure all learners are included based on ISASA’s Diversity and Equity Policy (Walton et al., 2009).

The IEB is described as an independent assessment body accredited by Umalusi for school and adult assessments; the Quality Council For Trades & Occupations (QCTO) for the Foundational Learning Competence; and the Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) and Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) for the training course in assessment practices.

Umalusi is a council that is regulated and managed by the National Qualifications Act No 67 of 2008 [as amended], and its founding Act, the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act No 58 of 2001 [amended in 2008] (Umalusi, 2020). The Umalusi council members are assigned by the Minister of Basic Education, and provide a framework for the basis for assessing performances. Both the public and private schooling sector needs to adhere to this framework. Umalusi accredits private providers of education (as well as private schools) and validates both public and private school Grade 12 results (Umalusi, 2020).

### **2.7.1 The Function of the Independent Examination Board (IEB)**

The IEB offers certified external assessment for independent schools in South Africa as well as the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) International Benchmarking Tests for Grade 3-10, Thinking skills Grade 10-11, Grade 11 Information Security (INFOSEC) International Experience-Based Training (IeBT) in Physical Science and Mathematics benchmark tests. The IEB's aim is to create a new assessment that challenges both teaching methods and the way learners development information (IEB, 2020).

### **2.7.2 Independent Examination Board's (IEB) Assessment Accommodation Policy**

The IEB's policy for accommodations is aligned with the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and policies guiding education (IEB, 2020). Schools can apply for assessment accommodation applications for learners qualifying for assessment accommodations from Grade 8-12, with specific deadlines indicated. The school is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the granted assessment accommodation for learners who experience barriers to learning and the application process with the completion of all the required documentation for accommodations or exemptions. The assessment accommodation policy requires the school to collect the required

documentation for the accommodation, which includes teacher comments, parent consent form, historical report, medical report (if needed), samples of assessments, and educational evaluation (Redhill, 2020). After all documentation is collected by the school, it is the school's obligation to ensure that the relevant documents are submitted to the relevant IEB administrator. The granting of each accommodation lies with the IEB Assessment Accommodation Panel. When the school awards an internal accommodation<sup>7</sup> for a learner with barriers to learning, it is done at the relevant school's own discretion and is not a guarantee that the IEB will approve the application. Furthermore, the policy indicates that accommodations are not granted where the main area of the barrier occurs within the language of learning, teaching, or/and assessment (IEB, 2020).

Friend and Bursuck (2006) suggest that accommodations in assessment are also labeled adaptations, which includes altering components of the presentation, the way tests are administered, and even a change in the content of a question. Accommodations are provided for classroom instruction, classroom assessment, and external assessment (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe & Hall, 2016). The IEB encourages schools to coordinate inclusive strategies for learners who experience barriers to learning, which includes accommodations during examinations, timetabling, sourcing of accommodation providers, provisioning of equipment, or adaptation of instructional strategies (IEB, 2020).

Since the global goal of Education for All in 1990, countries have been working together to build an educational system that is inclusive of all (Dalton, Lyner-Cleophas, Ferguson & McKenzie, 2019). By sharing research and inclusive practices, success is ensured, which is critical for the implementation of inclusive learning (Dalton et al., 2019).

Internationally, accommodations can be divided into four categories (Thompson et al., 2016; The IRIS Center, 2018), namely:

- *Presentation accommodations* – alternating the methods of access (auditory, multi-sensory, tactile, and visual);

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<sup>7</sup> An internal assessment accommodation refers to an assessment accommodation that is granted by an independent school without the approval of the IEB (IEB, 2017).

- *Response accommodations* – completing the assignments or assessments in different ways;
- *Setting accommodations* – Changing the conditions or environment of the assessment setting;
- *Timing and scheduling accommodations* – A change of time (increase) in order for the learner to complete an assessment or assignment.

Alberta Schools, a leader in the implementation of accommodations in Canada, groups accommodations into three groupings, making it easier to provide support and effective implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy (Alberta Education, 2007):

- *Environmental accommodations* – alternative seating or making use of devices;
- *Instructional accommodations* – alternative reading materials;
- *Assessment accommodations* – extra time or oral assessments.

In South Africa, assessment accommodations are given to learners to maximise academic development on an equal basis with other learners to ensure equalised chances for all learners. By tackling the barriers to learning that learners may experience, assistance will be provided to account for a true reflection of knowledge and skills (DoBE, 2014). Table 2.6 below provides a comprehensive list of assessment accommodations.

**Table 2.6 Summary of assessment accommodations**

<b>Types of Assessment Accommodations</b>
Adaption of questions
Additional Time
Digital Player/Recorder
Braille
Computer/voice to text/text to voice
Enlarged Print
Handwriting
Medications/Food intake
Oral Examination
Personal assistant
Prompter
Reader
Rest breaks
Scribe
Separate Venue
Sign Language Interpreter

Each assessment accommodation procedure is discussed in the IEB Procedures: Implementation of Accommodations Policy, as well as the required documents that need to be signed by the accommodation provider and the learner to ensure all procedures were followed. All accommodations conducted in a separate venue with a learner and the accommodations provider must be recorded, and a copy must be made available to the IEB, especially in the final Grade 12 examination (IEB, 2020).



## **2.8 POSSIBLE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AT SCHOOLS**

Most educational policies aim to bring about change, but nonetheless face multiple challenges in the process (Weaver, 2010). Mbelu (2011) highlighted that the following possible challenges were identified in a study done in a public school in KwaZulu-Natal regarding the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy: a) specialised training; b) collaborative teaching; c) enabling environment; and d) education specialists.

In 2002, Kotzé investigated several possible assessment challenges when an educational policy on assessment is implemented in a public school. For teachers to use assessment as an instrument for reform, the assessment should place a greater mental demand on learners and cover all fields of knowledge, not just content, but also areas of comprehension, application, and skills. Several other researchers highlighted possible challenges as factors, such as a culture of learning, management of a school, educational resources, and teachers' beliefs of inclusive education (Kotzé, 2002). Numerous empirical studies focusing on the teacher's understanding of the implementation of assessment policies in South Africa and how teachers understand and interpret the assessment policies into practices were identified in the literature review (Sethusha, 2012; Moodley, 2013; Viennet & Pont, 2017).

However, all the above-mentioned possible challenges highlighted by Kotzé and Mbelu only uncovered the challenges within the instructional strategies when implementing the Inclusive Education Policy. They did not, however, shed any light on the possible challenges within the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy's section on the assessment accommodation. Overall, the literature review in this study identified possible challenges present in the implementation of assessment accommodation practices and how policy implementers deal with these challenges.

In their study conducted in India, Pandey and Pandey (2017) emphasised to create barrier-free inclusion of learners, one of the factors influencing inclusive education. They also indicated that inadequate assessment and evaluation procedures should be addressed by revising evaluation and planning procedures to promote greater emphasis on documenting accommodations and support services.

Mbelu's (2011) study found that learners with barriers to learning must have availability of a range of options for delivery of educational services because there is no single approach that fits all learners. To address these challenges, all learners should have access to a variety of support structured according to their needs (Venter, 2012). Assessment accommodations are implemented in accordance with the assessment accommodation policy to address the needs of learners with barriers to learning in independent schools in South Africa (IEB, 2017).

## **2.9 BRONFENBRENNER'S BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

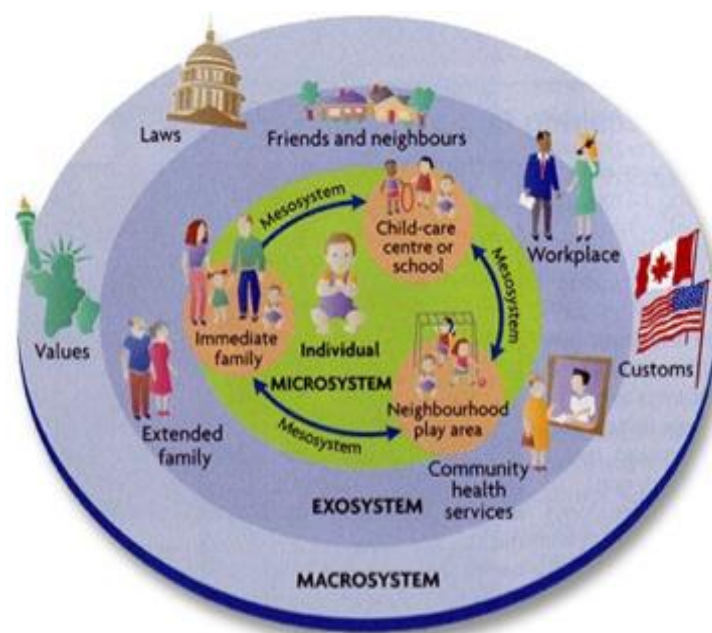
The theoretical framework for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological system theory. This theoretical framework aids the researcher to attempt to comprehend the wholeness of societal and scientific problems and understand the completeness of the human experience (Banathy & Jenlink, 2004). Citing a Persian Poet in his study, Karim (2007:16) explains the fundamental idea of systems theory as follows: "... a glue which helps us connect more pieces of the shattered mirror and to see a bigger picture of the truth in it".

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ludwig von Bertalanffy formulated the theory of systems. In this theory, he focused on all the individual parts that can be regarded as systems. He formulated systems as elements interacting with one another (Drack, Apfalter & Pouvreau, 2007).

A system is defined by Meadows (2008: 11) as "...an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organised in a way that achieves something". This definition points out the basic characteristic of a system: (1) elements; (2) interconnections, and (3) function or purpose (Meadows, 2008).

The word "system", according to Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith and Dutton (2012:124), is derived from the Greek word "*susinstanaí*", translated from the phrase "to cause to stand together". Senge et al., (2012) further emphasise that the most important characteristics of a system are that they are (1) dynamic, because they continually affect one another; and (2) persistent, because their identity as a system is formed over time. A human system does consist of many different components, making the system a complex system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

To better understand the complexity of these systems, the model that is often used as a framework in this theory is Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional model of human development (Elliot & Tudge, 2007). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development accentuates the interaction between the different systems within the social context and the individual's development. Bronfenbrenner introduced his original version of this model as an ecological model in the 1970's, explaining the influences – direct or indirect – on the individual's life. He later extended his theory by adding the term 'bio' to the term 'ecological' to include his view that an individual's characteristics are biologically based (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Central to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model are four dynamic and interactive dimensions, best illustrated in Figure 2.4 below as follows:



**Figure 2.4. Four interactive dimensions central to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (Source: Berk & Roberts, 2009)**

Although each component of the dimension is discussed separately for convenience, it is acknowledged that all four dimensions are constantly in interaction with one another (Landsberg et al., 2019). The school is located in one of these dimensions, and in order to focus on providing support in the form of best practices when implementing assessment accommodations, the study focuses on understanding the individual learners (person) and systems (context and processes) in order to determine the influences and barriers.

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT (Person-Process-Context-Time) model contains four major aspects, namely: proximal processes, person characteristics, context, and time factors that interact with the learner (person) (Bronfenbrenner, 1992).

The first major component of the bio-ecological model is the idea of *proximal processes*, which focuses on the growth that happens between the individual (learner in this case) and the environment (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). The development of these proximal processes can have a positive or negative impact. External and internal barriers, like poverty or violence, will reduce the efficacy of these processes.

The implication of these processes to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy is to remember that for proximal processes to be effective, these processes need to happen frequently and over prolonged intervals of time. Thus, for the implementation of best practices to benefit the learner positively, they need to take place repeatedly and over an expanded period. It is vital to consider the environment and the learner's experience and perception of the environment (Hirsto, 2001).

The second major component in this model is the *person's characteristics* – the biological and genetic characteristics of the person. These characteristics are inherent in the individual, argues Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik (2009), and play a role within the individual as well as in their interaction with other individuals. These characteristics are divided into: a) personal stimulus (demand characteristics, for example, age and gender); and b) mental and emotional resources (for example, food and housing); and c) force characteristics (drive to succeed or not) (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Tudge et al., (2009) explain that there is a continuous interaction in the relationship between the development of the individual and the different systems, and that this interaction, in turn, impacts the individual.

The third major component in the PPCT model highlights the *environment* in which the individual is constantly interacting. In Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, the context is formed by five distinct systems, namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exo-system, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Tudge et al., 2009). Each of these systems are reinforced by the influence of time. These systems are described in more detail below.

The *microsystem* refers to the interaction between the systems and the individual. This system focuses on the individual (learner) and their interpersonal relationships with specific role players, e.g., peers and family, which can be positive or negative (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). These interactions occur within the mesosystem. The microsystem includes the immediate environment of the individual (Smit et al., 2020). According to Rogoff (2005), this system forms the child's setting for primarily learning about the world. Furthermore, the child's current environment includes the physical, social, and psychological environment.

The *mesosystem* is a connection between all the structures of an individual's microsystem (Berk, 2000). All interactions influence one another, which in turn influence the individual. An example of this is the interaction between the peer group and the individual's home.

The *exosystem* includes the relationships and processes between more than one setting, where at least one does not include the developing individual (Smit et al., 2020). Poole (2017) describes an example of an exo-system as the parent's involvement in their child's education and the school. Influences here can be a parent's working circumstances, such as working conditions and availability due to work hours.

The *macrosystem* represents the furthest level of all the systems, and includes cultural values, customs, and laws; the assessment accommodation policy is also present in this level (Berk, 2000). An example of the macrosystem is the parent's involvement in the assessment accommodation application and implementation. Parents may not have the financial means to support all the recommendations made for the implementation of the assessment accommodation of their child. The influence of the parents' socio-economic status will influence the implementation of the assessment accommodation (Poole, 2017).

The implication of this process on the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy indicated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013) is that the learner's capacity and how they use assessment results are interconnected. The learner needs to engage and learn from the specific assessment in the specific context. The learner needs to make decisions about their lifelong learning journey and the changes they need to make to improve learner outcomes.

The four major components represent time. All four systems are influenced by time. The dimension of time is referred to as the *chronosystem*. Each of these dimensions impact one another and provide opportunities for the reduction of the barriers or management of the barriers to support the learner). Holistic intervention is required to fully understand the range of barriers to learning and growth of a learner within the South African context. Therefore, this theory is useful to understand the individual within these systems in order to identify the relationship between the systems and the impact of these systems so as to reduce the barriers and enhance positive relationships (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

The implication of this process on the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy indicated by the OECD (2013) includes the timing of when results are handed back to the learner, how the result is recorded, or the change in the learning environment or teacher.

The research has shown that the implication of the above-mentioned on the implementation of assessment accommodation in the form of a best practice is that the individual's (learner) development will be impacted by the different systems. Each learner will have a different experience of and interaction with their world. Furthermore, the researcher also needs to consider that the learner's perspective is based on personal and contextual influences (Bronfenbrenner, 2006).

The implementation of inclusive education has not only been problematic in other parts of the world, but also in South Africa (Berlach & Chambers, 2011). The inclusive approach to education is "consistent with a systemic and developmental approach to understanding problems and planning action" (DoE, 2001:19). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model is useful and provides an explanation of the complex interactions between the learner with diverse needs and the levels of systems involved in varied education (Zimmerman & Kontosh, 2007). In order to address the specific needs of each learner with barriers to learning, the policy implementer needs to understand the complication of the systematic influences to successfully apply for the correct assessment accommodation (Mahlo, 2017).

## **2.10 CONCLUSION**

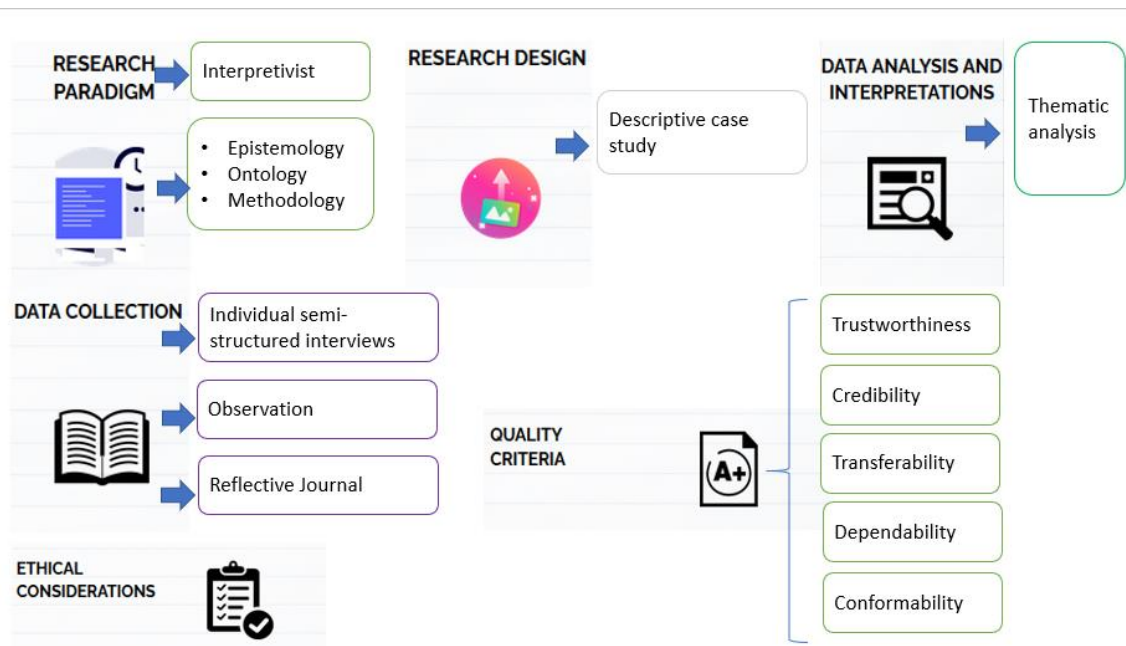
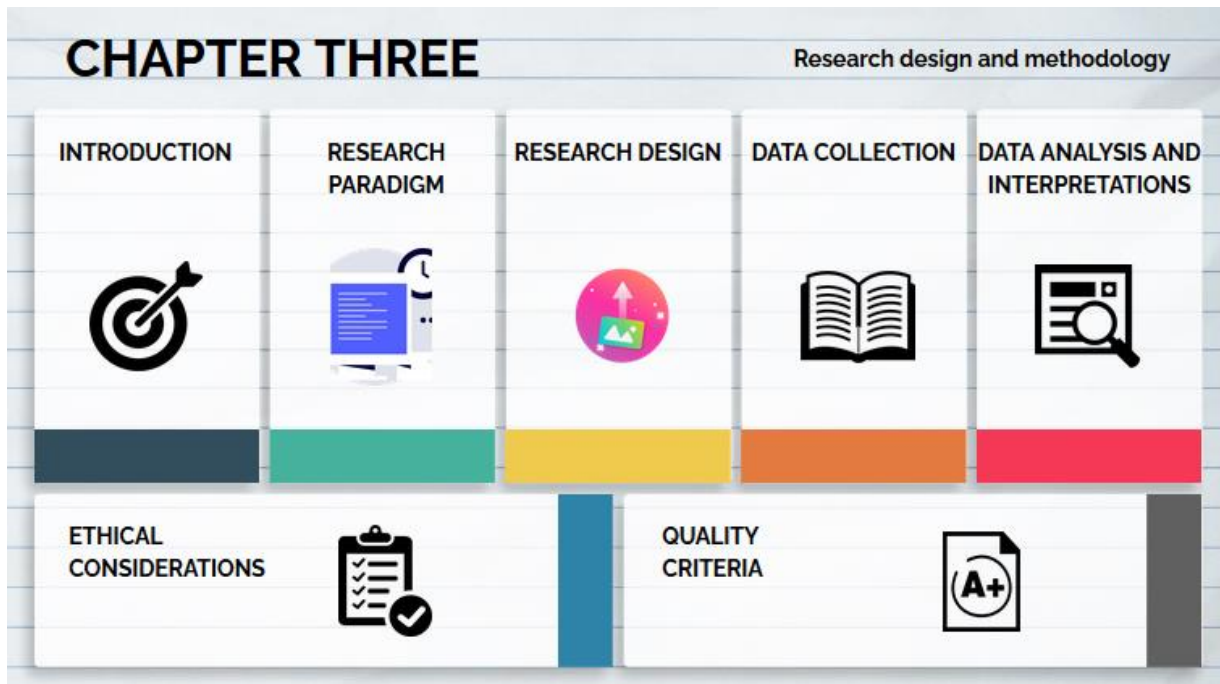
The critical review presented in this chapter focused on assessment accommodations, assessment policies, and the challenges surrounding these concepts. Inclusive education, assessment accommodations, and Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory were highlighted and discussed further. The need to explore the possible challenges surrounding the implementation of assessment accommodations was revealed. Various possible challenges influencing the implementation of assessment accommodations in independent schools was also noted and explored. To this end, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. The next chapter unpacks the research design and methodology employed in this study.



# CHAPTER 3

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER



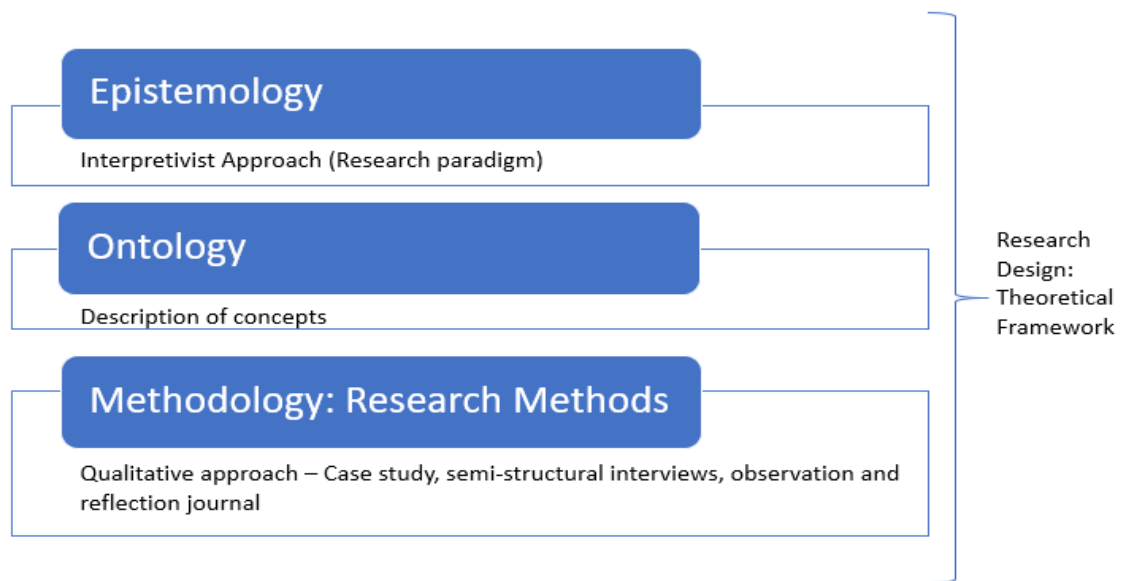


### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 2 the researcher presented the literature review that focused on inclusive education, assessment accommodations, and the theoretical framework – Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory. Detailed attention was given to the history of assessment, education, international trends, and assessment accommodations in South Africa. In Chapter 3, attention shifts to the procedures and processes used to gather the data and conduct the research. The ethical considerations that need to be followed are also provided herein, along with a description of the framework of the research study. Finally, the chapter closes with a few concluding remarks.

### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

The term ‘paradigm’, as mentioned in Chapter 1, refers to the research culture of the research study. Antwi and Hamza (2015) define the ‘research culture’ as a unit of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a particular group of researchers has in common. For ease of reference, Chapter 1 indicated that the aim of this study is to explain the possible challenges experienced by policy implementers when implementing the assessment accommodations in independent schools. For the purpose of this study, the interpretivism research paradigm was found to be relevant. The latter consists of three dimensions, namely: a) ontology, b) epistemology, and c) methodology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The specific dimensions of this paradigm are illustrated in Figure 3.1 below, and discussed in more detail thereafter:



**Figure 3.1 Diagrammatic representation of the theoretical framework (Adopted from Creswell’s (2009:5) framework for design and Kivunja & Kuyini, (2017))**

### 3.2.1 Epistemology

De Vries (2014) notes that ‘interpretivism’ involves interpreting human behaviour. In this regard, the background and past experiences of the participants should be taken into consideration.

Gray (2009:122) further defines ‘epistemology’ (knowledge) as the understanding of what is, “... a *philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate*” (italics in original). The knowledge of this study is that the real world is interconnected. The reason for opting for interpretivism is related to the aim of this study. In terms of the latter, the researcher endeavoured to understand and describe the possible systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementer when implementing the assessment accommodations in the specific independent schools that were selected. The relationships between the researcher and the attained knowledge, and how the knowledge is understood, describes the epistemology (Merriam, 2009). The interpretivist paradigm accepts a subjectivist epistemology due to the researcher creating understanding of the data through their own philosophy and cognitive processing informed by collaborations with the participants in the study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

### **3.2.2 Ontology**

The ontological dimension of a paradigm deals with how the nature of the specific reality is identified in the relevant study (Conway, 2017). To explain the specific reality, it is crucial for the researcher to include a description of the concepts and the relationships of those relevant concepts. The interpretivist paradigm accepts a relativist ontology due to the researcher studying numerous realities and the meaning of those realities being constructed or reconstructed by human collaboration between the researcher and the participants of the study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In terms of this study, a relativist ontology acknowledges that reality is a human experience and that there are multiple interpretations of a specific experience. In that experience becomes multiple realities for the researcher to explore, understanding that these experiences of reality are subjective experiences and multiple realities (Levers, 2013).

In this study, the researcher made use of a descriptive case study design to richly describe the phenomenon under study, including the real-life environment in which it transpired (Marsella, 2018; Maree, 2016).

### **3.2.3 Methodology**

Strydom (2011) underlines that the nature of reality is subjective, relying on specific methods to facilitate the creation of the reality of the study under investigation. The practise of the interpretive paradigm needs to guarantee that it has potential to generate a reality through the positive collaboration between the researcher and the participant (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). It is then clear that the researcher is essential to the methods of the research methodology in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014). The interpretivist paradigm accepts a naturalist methodology due to the researcher gathering data through observation as well as individual interviews to present a balanced report of the data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

## **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, due to the nature of this study, the researcher opted for a qualitative approach. Cropley (2019:5) claims that qualitative research “examines the way people make sense out of their own concrete real-life experiences *in their own minds and in their own words*” (italics in original).

Qualitative research is used to improve the researcher's insights into people's feelings and thoughts to allow the researcher to explore the phenomenon that may provide the basis for future qualitative studies (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher can therefore discover patterns and themes by making a detailed description of the participants' perspectives and beliefs throughout the study. This will offer a direct and personal experience that will enable the researcher to get close to the participants and their circumstances (Hoskins, 2014).

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is a plan of action or a map that is used to find resolutions to the research problem (Fouché & Delport, 2011). A research design relevant to educational practices has as its objective to create research-based resolutions for complicated challenges in educational practice (van den Akker, Bannan, Kelly, Nieveen & Plomp, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the research design as a blueprint to follow and to describe how the study was done (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

This study aimed to explore the possible systematic challenges experienced by policy implementers when implementing assessment accommodations at independent high schools.

In his study, Thurlow (2013) identified that the policies concerning accommodations have become complex because the nature of assessments have changed. Policy implementers have always found the implementation of accommodations during assessment and instruction in inclusive education a challenge (Stofile, 2008). Furthermore, the above-mentioned study indicated that most assessment policies are driven to accommodate instructional accommodations, although the learner will be making use of the accommodations during instruction as well as assessments.

Robertson (2007) explained the idea of a 'case study' as qualitative work that explores a contextualised, current phenomenon within a specific field. This case study involved interacting with the policy implementers to describe their experiences of the systematic challenges when implementing the assessment accommodations in their relevant schools. In terms of a case study, De Vries (2014) highlighted the importance for qualitative researchers to make use of small specific groups when studying a particular

phenomenon. When conducting a case study, the researcher needs to be cognisant that the collection of qualitative data is not a linear process, but that the collection and analysis of data often have similarities (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

A case study can be defined as "... a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2011:3). The case study research design comprises five components, namely: 1) a research study's questions; 2) the propositions; 3) the elements of analysis; 4) the data to the propositions, and 5) the principles for understanding the findings (Yin, 2011). It is the researcher's obligation to ensure that the above-mentioned components are cohesive to and consistent among each other. Yin (2002) recommends that the case study design is quantified by validity and reliability. The maximisation of these concepts ensures that the researcher develops a rigorous and robust case study design.

### **3.5 DATA COLLECTION**

In qualitative research and a descriptive case study design, participants can describe their experience and understanding of a specific context to collect research data (Cropley, 2019). Although a number of alternative ways of collecting qualitative data can be mentioned, qualitative collection methods can be grouped into three major methods, namely: (1) asking questions, (2) observing and noting observations, and (3) reading documents (Bassey, 1999, cited in Poole, 2017; Cropley, 2019).

Data collection methods are used to gather relevant data needed in the research. Specific research techniques in a qualitative research study are used to provide detailed and information-rich data in the form of observation, a reflection journal, and semi-structured individual interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). For the purpose of this study, the researcher performed a qualitative study through a descriptive case study in six sub-urban independent high schools in South Africa. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and the identities of the schools and participants were kept private throughout the study.

To begin the process of collecting the data, the researcher contacted several independent high schools to inquire about their interest in participating in the study. Participants were then carefully chosen on the basis of their willingness and availability to partake in the case study. By making use of intensity sampling, the researcher

selected a small number of rich case studies (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). A minimum of one participant per school was selected to participate in the individual semi-structured interviews. While the researcher conducted the interviews, she analysed, explored and reviewed the data in order to make decisions concerning the next step of the research plan (de Vries, 2014). Data was also collected by the researcher through observations (in the form of a reflection journal).

### **3.5.1 Data Collection Techniques**

In this study, data were gathered using three main instruments, namely: semi-structured interviews, observations, and written reflections (reflection journal). Different data gathering methods and various sources of information are used to guarantee that triangulation is taking place (Richardson, 2000). Although triangulation is based on assumptions, the researcher is not dealing with measurable findings but a reality that can be described and analysed (Richardson, 2000). Analysing data in a case study is often dependent on the researcher's experience and assumptions (Yin, 2011). The researcher categorised, examined, tabulated, and recombined the data in the case study to ensure that each case study was viewed as a general analytical strategy and part of the thematic analyses.

#### **3.5.1.1 Individual semi-structured interviews**

After completing the literature review and receiving the ethical clearance certificate, the researcher contacted twelve schools. Initially, the researcher contacted the principal of each school electronically to explain the purpose of the study, and to gain permission to conduct the study at the relevant school. Some principals wanted to know more about the study, so an ensuing telephonic meeting was convened to address all questions and concerns. After receiving written consent, the researcher contacted the relevant policy implementer electronically (email) to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain written consent. Some participants (policy implementers) communicated that they were pressured by duties and responsibilities, and therefore declined participation, even though permission was given by the principals.

The researcher recognised the importance of being emotionally ready to face the possible challenge ahead. Social interaction is one of the vital data collection phases of this study. It was thus important for the researcher to gain trust from the start and

create an amicable atmosphere to ensure that all participants felt relaxed and had the self-confidence to speak spontaneously (de Vries, 2014). Overall, the participants felt that the study was valuable and were eager to share their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights.

An interview is a useful source of information if conducted effectively and correctly (Wagner et al., 2012). In order to conduct the interview, the researcher needed to ensure adherence to the following guidelines: a) The policy implementer that is being interviewed is the holder of the relevant information that the researcher requires; b) The researcher needs to develop rapport with the policy implementer being interviewed; c) The policy implementer should be informed about the purpose of the study and give the relevant consent for the interview to take place; d) The researcher should not impose their own ideas on the policy implementer being interviewed; and e) The researcher should develop an interview guide, e.g., questioning strategy (avoid questions that can only be answered by YES or NO; avoid long, complex questions; carefully and observe non-verbal communication) (Wagner et al., 2012)

The researcher opted for semi-structured interviews to assist her in maintaining a certain amount of structure but, at the same time, affording her the freedom to ask alternative questions if the situation allowed. An interview guide was used to steer the interviews (Addendum). Qualitative researchers need to be good communicators to be able to show empathy in order to create trust (Merriam, 2009). A semi-structured interview is viewed as a "... flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences" (Rabionet, 2011: 567). To ensure an effective interviewing process, the researcher needed to manage six stages when conducting the semi-structured interviews (Rabionet, 2011), namely:

The first stage determines the type of interview that will be used in the research. Semi-structured interviewing allowed the researcher to identify specific themes in the qualitative research design.

The second stage establishes ethical guidelines. When entering other people's lives for a short period of time, ethical and moral guidelines should be followed (Rabionet, 2011).

The third stage involves the researcher drafting interview protocols. The researcher's introduction of herself and how she formulates questions is vital here. In this stage, the researcher was open about her intentions, ensured that all the participants were aware of the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. Stage three also involved obtaining permission and the signing of consent forms.

After gaining permission from each school's principal and policy implementer, appointments were made to conduct the semi-structure interviews as part of stage four. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Participants could choose where they wanted to be interviewed, i.e., at their office/classroom, or electronically via an online platform. The online platform allowed the participant and researcher to engage through technology in a secure environment in the comfort of the participant's own home or workplace. There was the option to communicate via video and audio, or just audio. Due to the time-consuming nature of the research, the researcher showed the relevant respect by keeping the interviews to a maximum of 60 minutes (Seidman, 2006). While engaging with the participants, she was aware that in order to gain a deep understanding, each individual's subjective experience needed to be carefully recorded (written and audio-recorded). The interviews were complemented by observational notes taken by the researcher in the form of a reflection journal. Due to the participants' willingness and commitment, and by setting enough time aside for each interview, there was no need to conduct further interviews to address any unanswered questions.

Stages five and six involve analysing the data and reporting on the findings (Rabionet, 2011). These points are discussed under sub-heading 3.6 further below.

### **3.5.1.2 Participant selection**

As this study was conducted within an interpretivist research paradigm, the context is essential to understand the specific reality as socially constructed by the numerous situations and experiences through the researcher and participants (Yin, 2011).

The six participating schools are high schools in the independent high school sector in South Africa. These schools apply the IEB assessment accommodation policy to accommodate students with barriers to learning. Not all the schools have access to a support team comprised of learning barrier specialists and have identified specific



policy implementers to assist with the implementation of the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy.

The selection of the schools and participants were influenced by their availability and involvement in the implementation of the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy. Their involvement in the latter ensured that they were likely to be knowledgeable about the context being researched. The participants’ roles at the school differed, ranging from being a teacher to an educational psychologist. A sample of six participants were involved. The relevant information pertaining to the participants’ information is illustrated in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1: Research participants’ information**

Participant	Position	Gender	Age	Formal Training	Informal Training relating to the IEB assessment accommodation policy	Years as a Policy implementer
Participant 1	Deputy Principal	Female	54 years	Two Degrees (Specialising)	IEB Training course	21 years
Participant 2	Mentor Teacher	Female	31 years	Two Degrees (Specialising)	None	2 years
Participant 3	Grade 12 Grade Coordinator	Male	55 years	One general Degree	IEB Training course	8 years
Participant 4	Teacher	Female	46 years	Two Degrees (Specialising)	IEB Training course	11 years
Participant 5	Teacher	Female	31 years	One general Degree	None	2 years
Participant 6	Psychologist	Female	29 years	Two Degrees (Specialising)	None	2 years

It was valuable to have six different roles within the school context, as the policy implementers each had diverse experience in implementing the IEB policy. This helped gain a variety of perspectives. For the resolution of confidentiality, all six schools (policy implementers) involved in the study were referred to as Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, respectively. The researcher selected twelve independent high schools in South Africa to participate in the study. However, only six independent high schools indicated their availability to participate in the end.

In qualitative research, the process of the research participants is vital because of the influence of their knowledge and experience on the outcome of the research (Conway, 2017 & Coyne, 1997). The policy implementers are viewed as significant informants and therefore seen as expert sources of information. The participants provide deeper insight into the studied phenomenon by sharing their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the position they hold within the school community. Fetterman (2008:477) regards the participants as individuals "...who are articulate and knowledgeable about their community". Focusing on each participant's knowledge and experience will be underpinned by the qualitative research design, helping the researcher to explore possible challenges each policy implementer experienced when implementing the assessment accommodation policy at each school.

Sampling refers to the choice of research participants from an all-inclusive population (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Intensity sampling was employed in this study. The latter allowed the researcher to explore the possible systematic challenges and examine each case study to illuminate the range of possible systematic challenges (Suri, 2011).

### **3.5.1.3 Researcher's reflection journal**

Keeping a self-reflection journal is a tool that can be used in a research strategy to facilitate reflexivity, and explore personal beliefs and/or objectives to help explain the researcher's belief systems, and highlight any subjectivities (Ortlipp, 2008).

To create transparency in the research process, Ortlipp (2008) suggests making use of a reflection journal. The use of a reflection journal as part of a reflective approach in qualitative research is now widely accepted. Using a reflection journal provides an opportunity for researchers to express their thoughts and experiences to learn more about themselves as a researcher, and to collect data in qualitative research (O'Connell & Dymont, 2011). The reflection journal can also be used to evaluate factors influencing the success of the process, or the need for change.

In this study the researcher used a reflection journal from the beginning of the study, during the study, and as a reflective tool after the completion of the study. This assisted in capturing informal observations as field notes in a reflection journal (observe location, atmosphere, culture and attitudes). No minors/learners were observed, and

no structured formal observation was done. This also afforded the researcher the opportunity to reflect and discuss certain issues with her supervisor.

The researcher considered the following questions when making notes in the reflection journal: a) What are the participants doing or trying to accomplish?; b) How do people describe and understand what is going on?; c) What opinions are made?; d) What else is happening and relevant to my research questions?; and e) What do I see going on here and what can I learn from my reflection? (Ortlipp, 2008).

Keeping and using a reflection journal will not only allow the researcher to avoid production, duplicating, and distributing the discourse of the research as a linear process but allow her to debrief herself. Furthermore, the process created transparency and maintained the integrity of the research (Ortlipp, 2008).

#### **3.4.1.4 Observations**

There are a number of types of observation (informal) that the researcher can use to understand the field of study better. For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of *overt observation*. The researcher was open about her intentions and ensured that all the participants were aware of the purpose of the study and how it would be conducted. An advantage of making use of overt observation enabled the researcher to avoid problematic ethical issues (Ortlipp, 2008). The researcher also obtained informed consent from all the participants involved.

The aim of the informal observation process is to: a) obtain a better understanding of and identify the context within which people interact; b) learn and observe things that the participants may be unwilling to discuss in the semi-interviews, or in addition to the interviews (triangulation); and c) understand the social context better within which the systematic challenge occurs.

#### **3.5.1.5 The role of the researcher in collecting and analysing data**

For the researcher – the most important instrument in gathering and analysing the data – is to stay near the research and immerse oneself in the data. In the interpretive paradigm, researchers do not follow a inflexible, structured process when conducting the research, and make changes when new information is brought to light (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Through the researcher's observations and reflection journal, she was able to constantly interact with the data to ensure that no vital information

went unnoticed. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed her to experience the studied phenomenon by exploring the participants' diverse perceptions and understandings (Mason, 2012).

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

To gain an all-inclusive understanding, the researcher needed to make sense of the collected data in a structured and meaningful way (Merriam, 2009). Following the advice of Wagner et al., (2012), the researcher made use of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is “a general approach to analysing qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns in the data” (Wagner et al., 2012:231). A two-stage system was implemented to capture the relevant themes or patterned responses. In stage one, each semi-structured interview was analysed separately. During stage two, the researcher made use of a cross-case analysis to identify the common themes.

The researcher made use of individual semi-structured interviews and observations to find connotations shared by the participants. The researcher was able to expand on her understanding of the participants' thoughts and emotions that accompanied their viewpoints of the implementation of the assessment accommodation at their relevant schools.

During the analysis process, the researcher made use of open coding to enable the researcher to identify and label the data (Henning et al., 2004). After the completion of the open coding, the codes were categorised based on their possible connections. Categorising the codes assisted the researcher to obtain a broader perspective of the data and identify emerging themes (Henning et al., 2004) as well as establish a narrow focus of the data (Conway, 2017). The researcher used shorthand labels, words, and phrases in the coding process, to assist in the tedious process of moving back and forth several times while identifying and grouping the data (Maree, 2016).

Henning et al., (2004) suggested a few key questions for researchers during the data analysis coding process: a) What is missing?; b) What are the relationships between all the categories?; and c) How do the codes address the research questions?

To be familiar with the data, the researcher was required to understand the transcribed data, raw data, and reflection journal several times. Working through her observation notes in her reflection journal, in conjunction with the transcribed data, allowed her as

the researcher to engage with the data and identify coded themes. A good code can be divided into five elements (Boyatzis, 1998), namely: a label or name; a description of what the code represents; an explanation of how to know when the coded theme occurs; a description of what qualifies or eliminates the identification of a code; and a list of positive and negative examples to avoid misperception.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The researcher's ethical values underpin the research process. To ensure ethical research, the researcher conducted the relevant research after obtaining ethical clearance (Addendum) as required by the University's College of Education's Ethics Committee. Written consent was obtained from each participating school's principal and policy implementer before the interviews were conducted (Addendum). Each principal and policy implementer were provided with information about the study (Addendum) and given the chance to ask questions for clarification. Full disclosure by the researcher assured the participants of her commitment to confidentiality and respect (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Furthermore, the participants were informed that they had the right to view the transcripts upon request.

During this study, no participants were subjected to any danger of extraordinary stress, embarrassment, or loss of self-esteem. All participants will remain anonymous and have the right to professional privacy. This information was communicated to all participants and principals of the relevant schools in a letter (written format), and the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements (Vosloo, 2014). Before the commencement of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and gave the participants the chance to ask questions for clarification. Permission forms were also signed beforehand. Christenson et al., (2010) articulate that researchers should make sure that their study does not harm any of the research participants – physically, emotionally, socially, or in any other way.

### **3.8 QUALITY CRITERIA**

Wagner et al., (2012) highlight that qualitative researchers are involved with the accurate measurement of the research phenomenon, and therefore tend to focus on credibility and trustworthiness, rather than reliability and validity. The concept of 'trustworthiness' was introduced with the matching criteria of credibility, transferability,

dependability, and conformability, respectively (Simons, 2009; Mandal, 2018). These are described in more detail below.

### **3.8.1 Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is based on the researcher's subjectivity and biases. It is therefore vital that researchers recognise their own subjectivity, and the influence it may have on the data and study's findings (Wagner et al., 2012). In this dissertation, the researcher made use of multiple data sources (triangulation) to gather data at different times during the research. This allowed the researcher to develop codes for themes to provide the intended depth of insight (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

### **3.8.2 Credibility**

The integrity of the study and the accuracy of the research depends on the validity of the research (Ary, Cheser & Sorenson, 2010). In qualitative research, the term validity is replaced by the preferred term, 'credibility'.

The key criterion of credibility in a qualitative study is how self-assured the researcher is in the truth of the findings and research design (Poggenpoel, 1998). To establish credibility in this study, the following strategies were implemented (Seale, 1999): (1) Prolonged engagement in the field – in this study, the researcher collected data over a period of one year; (2) Persistent observation – in this study, the researcher made notes during the visits and reflected after the interviews in a reflection journal. An extensive literature review was also carried out to obtain an understanding of the underlying principles of each theme that was observed; and (3) Searching for negative instances to challenge hypotheses – in this study, the researcher continued to conduct an in-depth literature review throughout the study to confirm the findings. The credibility of the research can be further increased if the researcher transcribes and analyses the interviews directly after the interviews have taken place (de Vos, 2003). Triangulation of data increases the credibility of the findings and indicates whether the study reflects the actual reality of the context of the participants (Mandal, 2018).

### **3.8.3 Transferability**

To generalise the results to other contexts where the research questions are applicable, the research findings must be able to be transferred to other contexts. The

philosophic underpinning of qualitative research indicates that it is necessary to think of generalisability (Merriam, 2009). However, it is important to note that the reader can decide for him/herself whether the findings are applicable to the reader's context (Conway, 2017). To increase transferability, it is vital that the researcher provides a comprehensive explanation of the context in which the research is conducted (Mandal, 2018). Providing a description of the context will allow future studies to transfer the findings of this study to another context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### **3.8.4 Dependability**

The research findings must be consistently repeated over time to meet the criterion of dependability (Conway, 2017). Dependability requires the understanding of possible changes that may have occurred during the process of research and the effects of those changes on the research findings. To increase dependability in qualitative research, the researcher needs to ensure that data and methods are properly documented (Mandal, 2018).

#### **3.8.5 Conformability**

The researcher must ensure objectivity as far as possible. Patton (2015) suggests that the researcher, especially in qualitative research, aims to understand how his or her own predispositions could affect the research processes. Therefore, it is crucial to check and recheck the data during the study. To increase conformability in this qualitative research, the researcher made use of triangulation (Mandal, 2018).

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

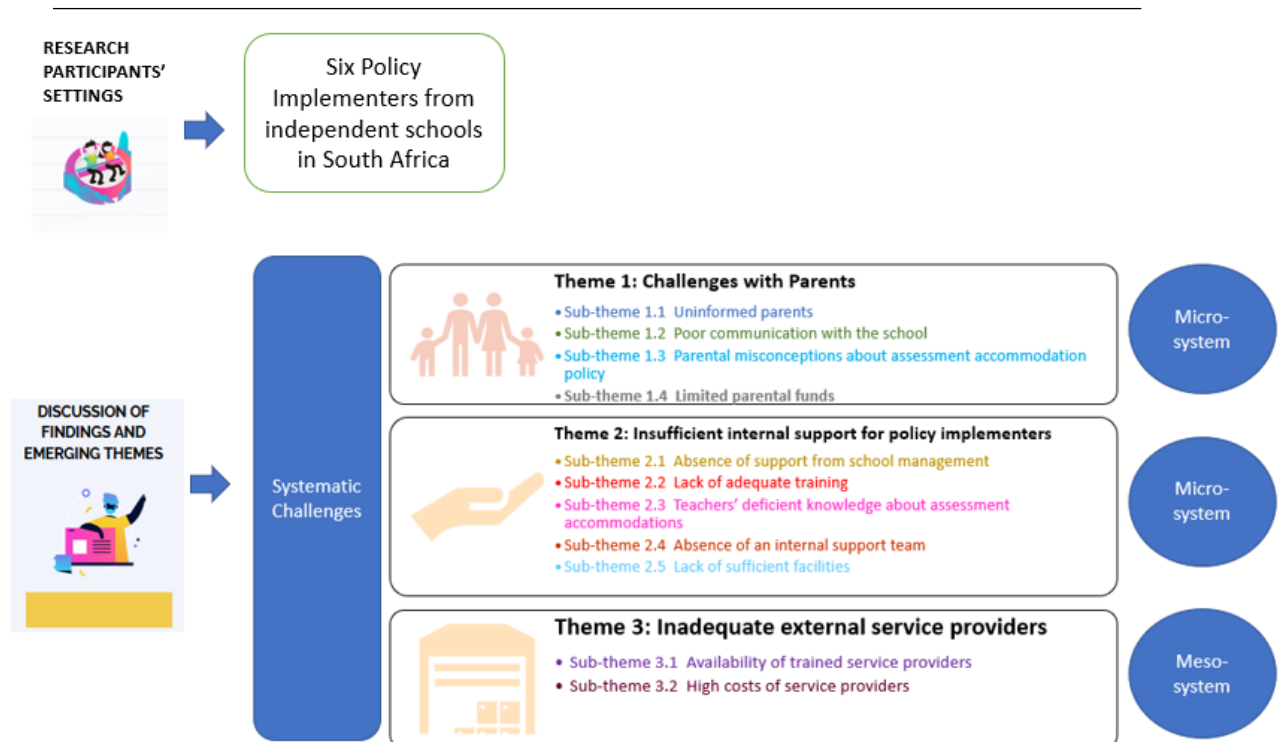
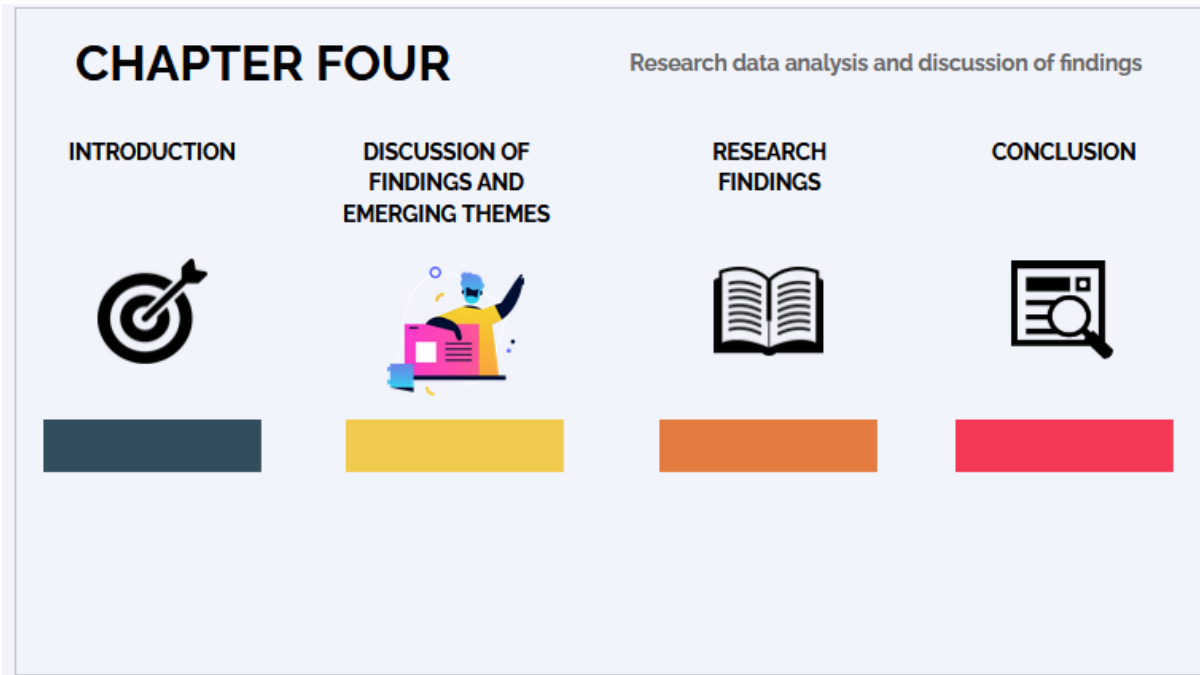
Chapter 3 offered a description of the research paradigm, research design, research approach, data collection methods, data analysis, as well as ethical considerations observed. The chapter also allowed the researcher to reflect on her personal experience of the phenomenon under study. Next, the analysis of the data is presented in Chapter 4.



# CHAPTER 4

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER





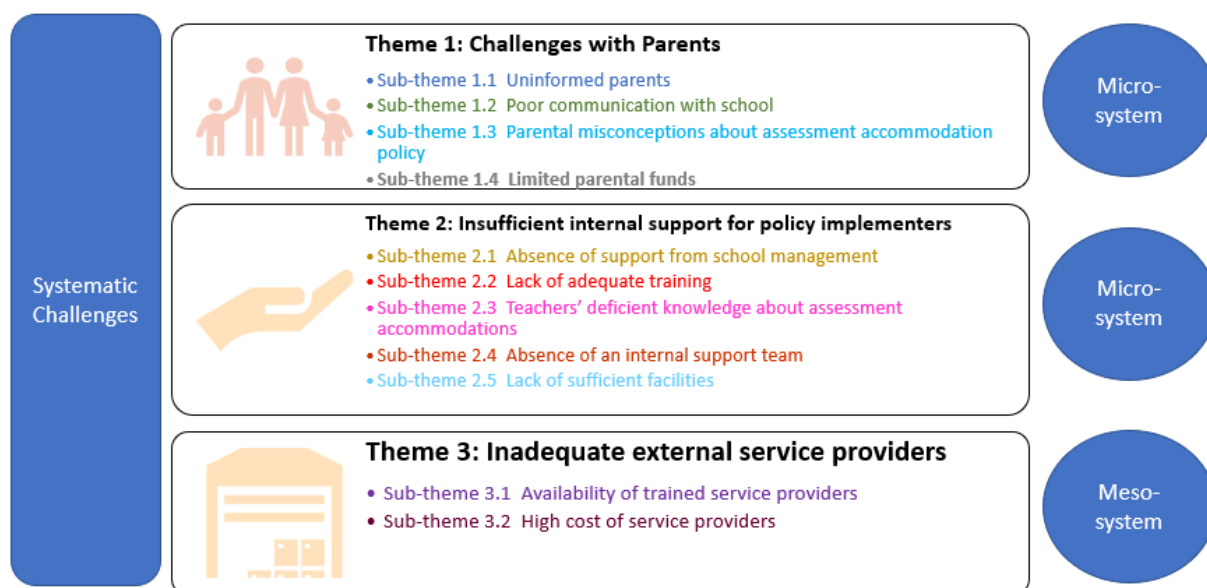
## **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the findings of the data in order to elucidate the systematic challenges experienced by policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodations policy in independent high schools.

The data from the semi-structured interviews consist of the interview transcripts. Although this was a time-consuming process, it was an exceptional way to become acquainted with the data (Bolderston, 2012). The interviews with the policy implementers were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture the viewpoints of all the participants. In this chapter, the research findings are presented according to the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. Themes were identified and clustered through color-coded extracts from the original phrases recorded in the transcripts to obtain the authentic meaning of the participants' experiences. The themes and sub-themes from the researcher's reflection journal will be examined and cross-referenced with the themes generated from the semi-structured individual interviews. To ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions, the researcher attended to the audio-recordings of the interviews several times, as recommended by Stuckey (2014). The transcriptions were then checked by the participants to help validate the accuracy of the data. This was in accordance with the recommendations made by Kisely and Kendall (2011).

## **4.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND EMERGING THEMES**

This section presents the themes identified through thematic analysis to explain the study's findings. Figure 4.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the themes and sub-themes of the study compared to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model.



**Figure 4.1 Emerging themes from the thematic analysis**

#### **4.2.1 Theme 1: Challenges with Parents**

The participants mentioned ‘challenges with parents’ as one of the main difficulties that they experienced when implementing the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy. Parent involvement includes the involvement of caregivers who fulfil parental roles when parents are not always directly involved (Epstein, 2001). The theme – *challenges with parents* – is divided into four sub-themes, namely: *uninformed parents* (sub-sub-section 4.2.1.1); *poor communication with the school* (sub-sub-section 4.2.1.2); *parental misconceptions of the assessment accommodation policy* (sub-sub-section 4.2.1.3); and *limited parental funds to sustain the implementation of the granted assessment accommodations* as set out by the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy (sub-sub-section 4.2.1.4).

Table 4.1 offers an overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to categorise the data. This is followed by a discussion of sub-themes as set out in the transcribed interviews and the researcher’s reflection journal.

**Table 4.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 1: Challenges with parents**

<b>THEME 1: CHALLENGES WITH PARENTS</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
Sub-theme 1.1: Uninformed Parents	Any reference made to parents who do not have sufficient knowledge of the requirements of the assessment accommodation policy as set out by the IEB.	Contributions that reflect uninformed parents relating to any aspects outside assessment, IEB, or implementation of assessment accommodation policy.
Sub-theme 1.2: Poor communication with the school	Any reference of ineffective or lack of communication between parents, the school, or any other role players relating to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.	Contributions that do not relate to communication between parents, the school, or any other role players relating to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.
Sub-theme 1.3: Parental misconceptions of parents about the assessment accommodation policy and the implementation of the policy	Any reference to parents' comprehension of the assessment accommodation policy, in most cases, based on misconceptions of the relevant policy.	Any reference to parents' comprehension of any other policy that is not the assessment accommodation policy.
Sub-theme 1.4: Limited parental funds	All contributions from parents that refer to limited parental funds to apply and implement the assessment accommodation policy.	All contributions from parents that do not refer to limited parental funds to apply and implement the assessment accommodation policy.

#### 4.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Uninformed parents

The participants remarked that they were regularly challenged by the parents for the following three main reasons (suggesting that parents were uninformed): a) that the school did not inform the parents early on in the learner's school career that their child has the option to apply for an assessment accommodation at the IEB and could have benefitted from it earlier in his/her school career; b) that the parents even had an option to apply for an assessment accommodation at the IEB (parents were not made aware of this option by the school); and/or c) that the parents were dissatisfied with the outcome of the IEB decision (application was denied by the IEB) without understanding the application and implementation process. When parents are disgruntled, it is most likely because they do not understand the process or the role of the school in the application and implementation process.

The participants concluded that the parents were uninformed about the assessment accommodation policy from the IEB. In addition, noted Participant 3, parents frequently fail to submit the relevant documentation on time:

*"... in my other school parents made sure to supply the relevant documentation in due time. Here, the parents tend to take their time. Maybe they are not informed enough"* (Interview, P3, line 341).

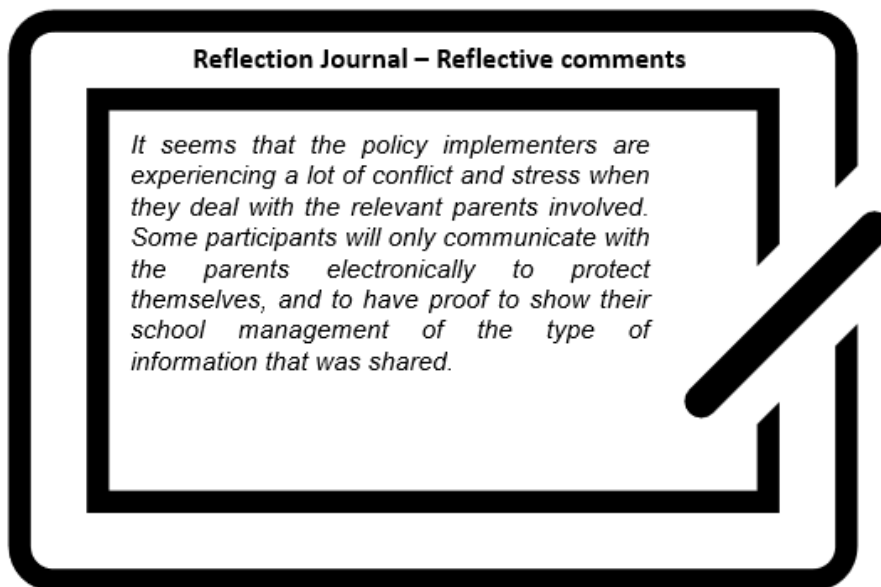
The same participant continued saying that parents more often than not do not take responsibility for the process:

*"My experience now is totally different from the past. Parents are under the impression that it is the school's responsibility to pay for the extra services because of the high school fees. They do not see the necessity of the documentations that needs to be submitted to the IEB, especially the teacher comments. My biggest challenge is to inform the parents, but they do not always attend the parent evenings or information meetings to get the relevant information"*.

Furthermore, Participant 5 indicated that parents do not follow the guidelines of the application process or understand their role in the process of the assessment accommodation policy:

*“Parents tend to lash out to you because the application was unsuccessful. They are sometimes under the impression that you only need a report from the psychologist to have a successful application. Even if the psychologist does not recommend the application. It sometimes borders at harassment”*  
(Interview, P5, line 495).

In the researcher’s reflection journal, she noted that the participants’ interaction with the parents regarding the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy revealed that the parents were uninformed:



(Reflection 4, p.7, line 47, March 2020).

#### **4.2.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Poor communication with the school**

It is essential for schools to make use of various strategies to keep a record of their communication with parents. This should be done on a regular basis to ensure effective communication between parents and the school (Sibisi, 2015).

Parents do not always want to involve the school in the assessment accommodation process. They also do not want to ask for assistance during the process. This was confirmed by Participant 2 as follows:

*“Parents do not always communicate with the school if they are struggling with the application process, e.g., finding the relevant educational psychologist to assist the learner. Not all schools want to refer the parent*

*and learner to a specific service provider. It has been my experience that parents blame the school if the application is not successful due to the reference. Parents also do not indicate if they are not able to continue the process and then to just keep quiet, or they take too long to send through the necessary documentation. Then the assessment is no longer valid”* (Interview, P2, line 208).

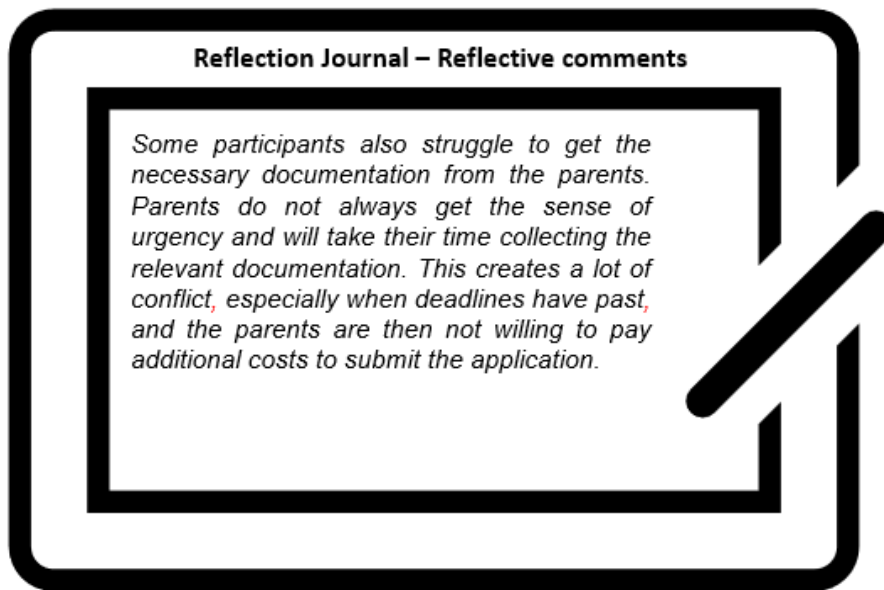
Participant 6 mentioned the lack of communication from the school as a possible challenge:

*“I had to deal with parents in the past since schools did not communicate with the parents of the option to apply for an assessment accommodation at the IEB due to the lack of facilities”* (Interview, P6, line 729).

Participant 4 felt that parent evenings are a vital component for effective communication with parents:

*“We do communicate with the parents at parents evening and communicate all the requirements through but not all parents attend these parents evening”* (Interview, P4, line 810).

In the researcher’s reflection journal, she noted that the participants mentioned their struggle with effective communication between the school and the parent as one of the possible systematic challenges with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy:



(Reflection 4, p.7, line 48, March 2020)

#### **4.2.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Parental misconceptions about the assessment accommodation policy and the implementation of the policy**

All the participants acknowledged the importance of parents' perceptions of the assessment accommodation policy. The participants agreed on and emphasised the importance of ensuring that parents have a positive attitude and understanding of the application and implementation process of assessment accommodations. Generally, parents have a positive attitude towards any inclusive education policy (Schwab & Paseka, 2019). In their study, De Boer, Pilj and Minnaert (2010) identified that parents' attitudes differ depending on the type of support needed.

Participant 4 emphasised that parents have their own ideas about what the assessment accommodation policy is and how it should be implemented:

*“It is my experience that parent have their own ideas about how the assessment accommodation policy works and needs to be implemented for their child. Even after attending a meeting and receiving electronic communication. I spend a lot of time ensuring and checking that the parents' perceptions do not change through the process, and I need to manage their expectations”* (Interview, P4, line 478).

Parents believed that their interpretation of how the assessment accommodation policy should be implemented should be considered by the school. Participant 2 reverberated that parents' interpretation of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy can be a possible challenge:

*“Parents tend to have a false sense of what the assessment accommodation policy’s function is. They want to manipulate it [to] benefit their child’s academic success”* (Interview, P2, line 201).

#### **4.2.1.4 Sub-theme 1.4: Limited parental funds**

Poole (2017) highlighted a fact that cannot be ignored; basically, that the fees of external service providers (e.g., private professionals) for assessment might be too high, especially when parents are already struggling financially. Analysis of the data showed that limited parental funds are one of the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementers.

Some participants indicated that often parents cannot afford the assessment, application, and implementation that might involve private professionals, such as educational psychologists. Participant 5 echoed the challenge of high costs:

*“We do have parents that will not continue with the process because of the high costs involved”* (Interview, P5, line 514).

Participant 5 also added that the costs of scribes and readers can be too high for parents:

*“Skilled and trained scribes and readers are costly and at times unaffordable for parents”* (Interview, P5, line 516).

Participant 3 reiterated the costs of professionals as a possible challenge for parents:

*“Educational psychologist fees are sometimes unaffordable”* (Interview, P3, line 222).

Due to the additional costs involved in the application and implementation of the assessment accommodation policy, parents who do not have medical insurance for additional support depend on the support services provided by the school (Poole, 2017). Participant 2 underpinned the parents' dependence on the school:



***“The school cannot always provide invigilators and parents are then at the mercy of costly invigilators”*** (Interview, P2, 206).

Furthermore, Participant 2 indicated that parents do at times miss the payments of service providers:

***“Increased payments of external invigilators are an issue for parents and it sometimes led to the parents not paying or missing payments”***  
(Interview, P2, line 207).

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: Insufficient Internal Support**

It appears that a number of the main challenges encountered by the policy implementers are within the school where they work. This theme was divided into four sub-themes, namely: *absence of support from school management* (sub-sub-section 4.2.2.1); *lack of adequate training* (sub-sub-section 4.2.2.2); *teachers’ deficient knowledge about assessment accommodations* (sub-sub-section 4.2.2.3); *absence of internal support team* (sub-sub-section 4.2.2.4); and *lack of sufficient facilities* (sub-sub-section 4.2.2.5). Table 4.2 offers an overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to categorise the data. A discussion of the sub-themes follows thereafter.

**Table 4.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 2: Insufficient internal support**

<b>THEME 2: INSUFFICIENT INTERNAL SUPPORT</b>		
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
<p>Sub-theme 2.1: Absence of support from school management</p>	<p>Any reference in the interviews where implementers indicated that school management was a barrier to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy, e.g., lack of support with a difficult parent, and not participating in providing a solution relating to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.</p>	<p>Since the focus was on identifying the challenge during the interviews, any involvement of the school management that was not a challenge was excluded for this theme.</p>
<p>Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of adequate training</p>	<p>Any reference to in adequate training and not empowering the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.</p>	<p>Contributions that reflect adequate training and empowering of the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.</p>
<p>Sub-theme 2.3: Teachers' deficient knowledge about assessment accommodations</p>	<p>Any reference to teachers who are insufficiently trained and informed and who are creating challenges for the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy</p>	<p>Any reference that reflects teachers who are sufficiently trained and informed, and who are not creating challenges for the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation Policy.</p>

<p>Sub-theme 2.4:</p> <p>Absence of an internal support team</p>	<p>Any reference to staff (within the same school) not supporting the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.</p>	<p>Any reference to staff (outside the same school) supporting the policy implementer with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.</p>
<p>Sub-theme 2.5:</p> <p>Lack of sufficient facilities (human resources and physical resources)</p>	<p>Any reference to insufficient/lack of facilities within the school e.g., classrooms and computers, as well as human resources (e.g., human readers and scribes inside and outside of the same school).</p>	<p>Any reference to sufficient facilities and human resources at the same school.</p>

#### 4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Absence of support from school management

It is the role of the school management team to support parents, teachers, and policy implementers with the implementation of inclusive strategies in schools. It is important to understand and implement inclusive policies successfully in order to determine if the assessment accommodation will hinder or support the learner with a barrier to learning (Thompson et al., 2016). Providing support for teaching and assessment by the school management team will result in the enhancement of learners' academic performance as well as their social and psychological well-being (Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla & Sylverster, 2014).

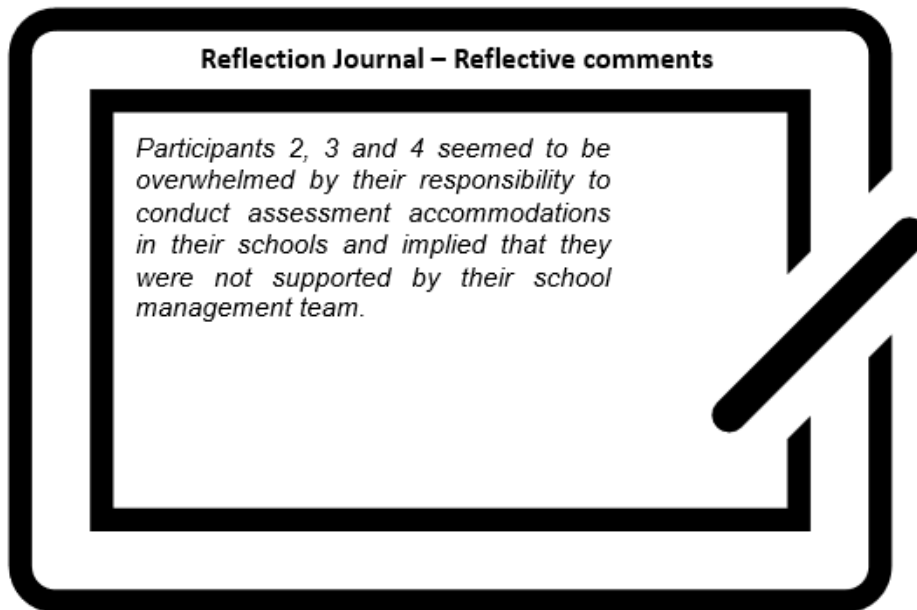
While discussing this challenge of *uninformed parents*, the participants frequently referred to the lack of support from the school management team:

*“As a teacher being responsible for the application of accommodations, I had to handle the problem myself.”* (Interview, P3, line 336).

These sentiments were reiterated by Participant 2 as follows:

*“Most of my support sometimes need to go to the teachers not knowing how to handle the accommodation. I tend to then struggle to support the learner, parent, teacher, and organise the venues and scribes without support from the school management team”* (Interview, P2, line 201).

In her reflection journal, the researcher reflected on the lack of school management team support for the policy implementers as a possible systematic challenge:



(Reflection 11, p.12, line 175, April 2020).

The policy implementers were of the view that because the responsibility of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy was part of the extra-mural responsibility allocated to them by the school management team, they were seen as the sole person responsible for any enquiries regarding assessment accommodations. Participant 4 explained the need to converse with a colleague or staff member about the specific application of the assessment accommodation:

*“I wish I had someone that can ask for advice on how to handle a specific assessment accommodation application, especially when this is a new type of accommodation for me. I had to learn through my mistakes. And this is not always fair towards the student”* (Interview, P4, line 488).

The majority of the participants voiced the need to be protected from parents if the assessment accommodation application has been denied by the IEB, as they are then

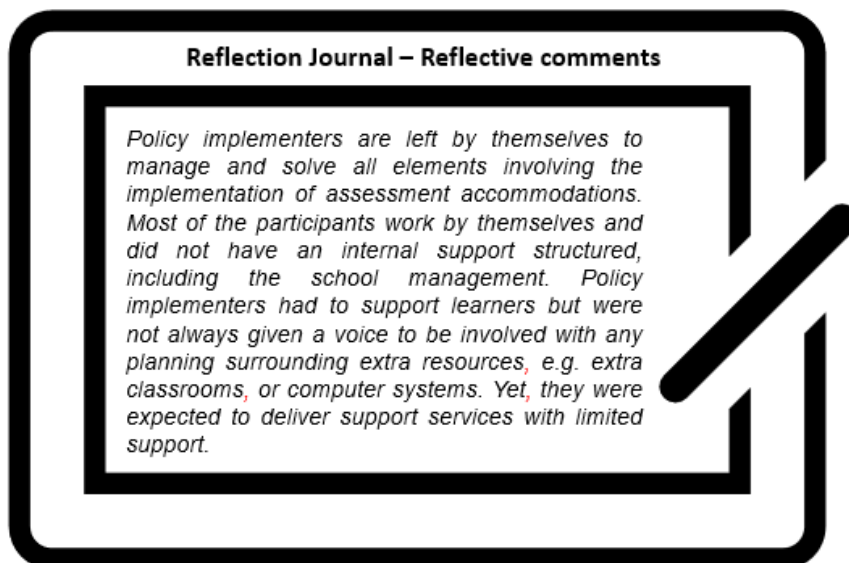
subjected to negative interaction from the parents. The participants explained the specific challenges they encounter with the parents when the assessment accommodation is denied by the IEB:

*“Parents tend to lash out to you because the application was unsuccessful. They are sometimes under the impression that you only need a report from the psychologist to have a successful application. Even if the psychologist does not recommend the application. It sometimes borders at harassment. My previous school did not protect me from those parents. I have a better experience now at my new school”* (Interview, P5, line 501).

Another participant explained that the application process can be time consuming:

*“Parent[s] will sometimes go to another psychologist for a second opinion. The process then takes longer. If the application is then not successful, they feel that the school does not support them and the learner, and there is a lot of conflict involved, especially if the school already are implementing an internal school assessment accommodation”* (Participant, P6, line 722).

In her reflection journal, the researcher also noted after some of the interviews the absence of support from school management teams:



(Reflection 11, p.12, line 165, April 2020).

#### 4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of adequate training

Not all policy implementers have received formal or informal training for the implementation of the IEB assessment accommodation policy as indicated in Table 3.2. The lack of sufficient training is two-fold in this study, namely: (1) the lack of sufficient training relating to the policy implementer as laid out in Table 3.2, and (2) the lack of sufficient training relating to the teachers or policy implementers in dealing with the implementation of the assessment accommodation as part of assessments. Ladbrook (2009) emphasised that training and staff development is possibly the single greatest challenge facing education. This confirmed the experience of most of the participants as indicated during the interviews.

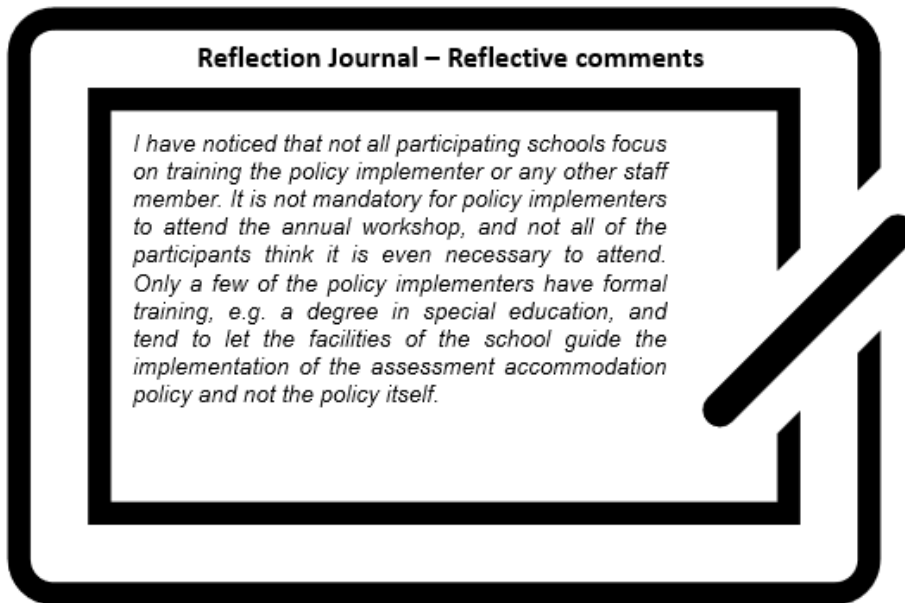
Lack of adequate training often hinders the policy implementer's effective implementation of the assessment accommodation policy by the IEB. Participant 1 contended that the school management team should receive training specifically designed for implementing the assessment accommodation policy:

*"I think it is important that all staff dealing with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy should be trained, even the management of the school. It cannot only be one person's responsibility in the school"* (Interview, P1, line 46).

Participant 2 opined that all school staff members should be trained to conduct any assessment accommodations during assessments:

*"Every staff member must be able to conduct an assessment accommodation during a test or examination situation. I have recommended several times to my school management team that to avoid ineffective implementation of the assessment accommodation policy"* (Interview, P2, line 204).

In her reflection journal, the researcher had noted after concluding some of the interviews the lack of adequate training for policy implementers:



**Reflection Journal – Reflective comments**

*I have noticed that not all participating schools focus on training the policy implementer or any other staff member. It is not mandatory for policy implementers to attend the annual workshop, and not all of the participants think it is even necessary to attend. Only a few of the policy implementers have formal training, e.g. a degree in special education, and tend to let the facilities of the school guide the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy and not the policy itself.*

(Reflection 12, p.12, line 167, April 2020).

**4.2.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Teachers’ deficient knowledge about assessment accommodations**

In order to cope with the challenges that inclusion may present, it is vital that staff members collaborate with one another (Conway, 2017). A collaborative environment contributes to experienced staff members supporting inexperienced staff members, thereby providing the required support to learners, and identifying learners with possible barriers to learning (Florian & Graham, 2014).

There was repeated reference made by the participants to the lack of other teachers’ knowledge when it came to the implementation of an assessment accommodation during examinations and tests. Most of the participants conceded that they battled with their colleagues’ lack of knowledge regarding the implementation of assessment accommodations. Participant 1 identified the latter as a possible systematic challenge:

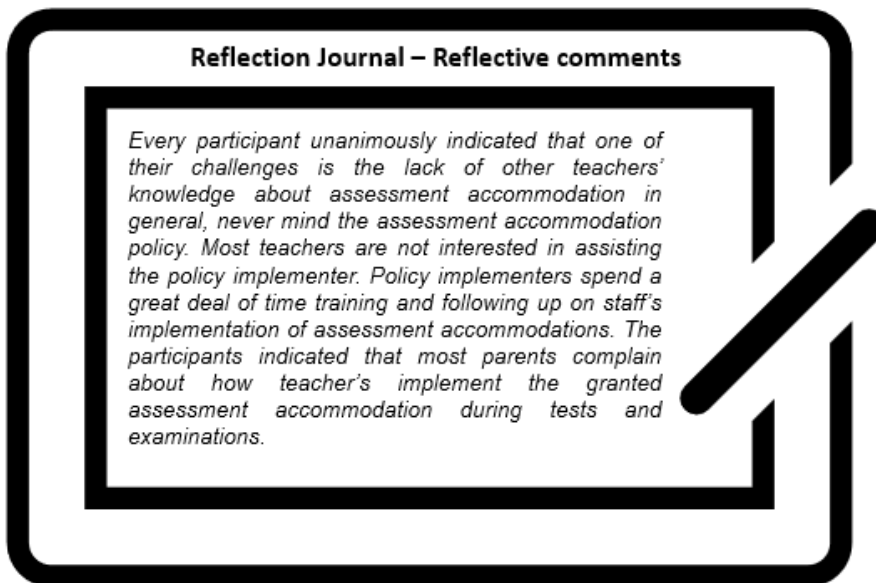
*“It is a day-to-day struggle with staff not knowing what to do with the learners that have received granted assessment accommodations or to identify learners that will benefit from an assessment accommodation”*

(Interview, P1, 209).

Participant 4 articulated that training staff on assessment accommodations can be time consuming:

*“It takes a lot of my time to train staff every term to equip staff members on how to deal with an assessment accommodation. Then I need to set up [a] special reminder to staff to ensure that the implementation of the assessment accommodation takes place correctly”* (Interview, P4, 490).

In her reflection journal, the researcher noted after conducting some interviews the lack of teachers’ knowledge about the assessment accommodation policy:



(Reflection 15, p.12, line 212, April 2020).

#### **4.2.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Absence of an internal support team**

The fourth sub-theme that emerged relates to the *absence of an internal support team*. The participants seemed to view support in any form as a vital component to make sure that inclusion is successfully implemented in their schools. An internal support team based at the schools comprise selected teachers whose main purpose is to identify and address barriers to learning (Gaffney, 2015). Most independent schools do not have access to district-based support teams which are employed by the Department of Education. In order for these internal support teams to be effective, the team should provide ongoing support to staff, learners, and parents (Gaffney, 2015).

This idea of an internal support team was evident from statements such as the following by Participant 1:

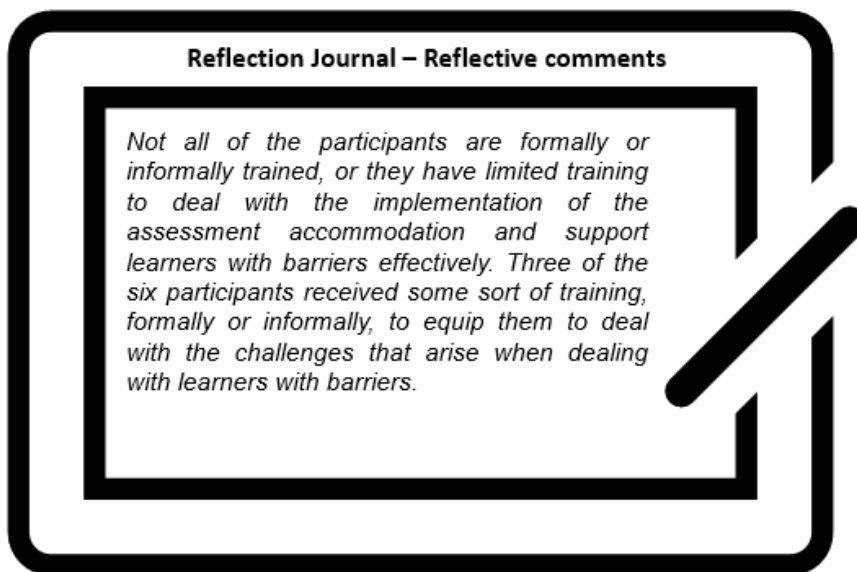


*“Sometimes I need to discuss an applicant but do not have someone to turn to or ask for advice from”* (Interview, P1, line 23).

The participants felt that the implementation of an internal support team consisting of a group of selected teachers will help to address the needs of the learners with barriers to learning more effectively. The participants acknowledged that they mostly made use of external service providers, e.g., an educational psychologist, to assist with the assessment of the prescribed battery of tests set out by the IEB, but also found it problematic:

*“We do not have a support team. What I mean is, there is no internal psychologist or speech therapist. All our referrals are done externally so to integrate external support within the school is hard”* (Interview, P2, line 44).

In her reflection diary, the researcher noted after conducting some interviews the absence of an internal support team:



(Reflection 13, p.14, line 415, May 2020).

According to Mahlo (2011), inadequate and inappropriate support is a hindrance to addressing barriers to learning and providing inclusive education for all learners.

#### 4.2.2.5 Sub-theme 2.5: Lack of sufficient facilities (human resources and physical resources)

One of the recurring themes during most of the interviews related to the participants' challenges with regards to the implementation of the granted assessment accommodation is *insufficient facilities or resources* in their schools. Participant 6 summarised the lack of sufficient facilities and resources as:

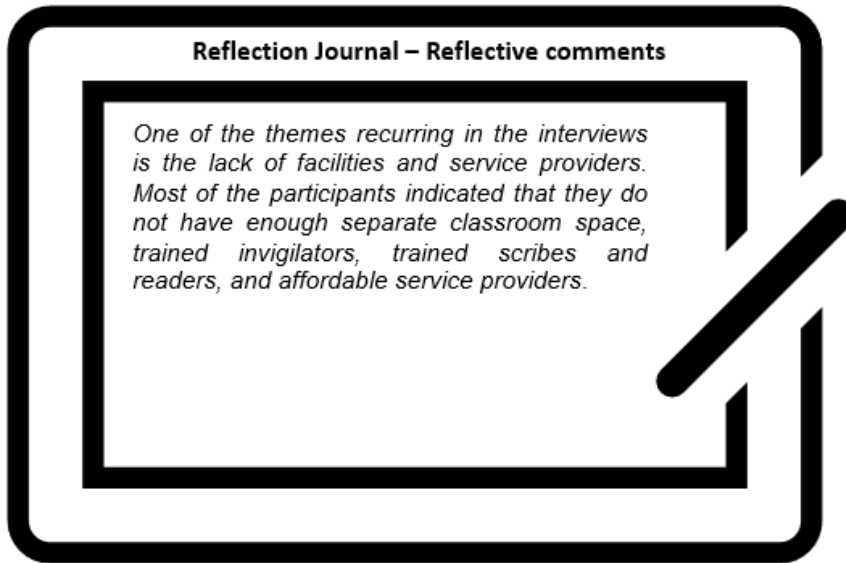
*“We do not have enough venues or scribes. So, we tend to keep quiet about it”* (Interview, P6, line 611).

Participant 2 explained that this possible systematic challenge is one of the primary challenges they experience when implementing the assessment accommodation policy:

*“We have too many approved assessment accommodations and do not always have the space or service provider to assist the learner when they need it”* (Interview, P2, line 199).

These sentiments were echoed by some participants who referred to the insufficient facilities and service providers as one of their biggest systematic challenges when implementing the assessment accommodations.

After conducting some interviews, the researcher reflected in her reflection journal on the insufficient facilities and resources:



(Reflection 12, p.13, line 305, May 2020).

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3: Inadequate External Service Providers**

In addition to the lack of support at their respective schools, the participants also felt that service providers outside their schools become a challenge if they do not support the implementation of the assessment accommodation. In this theme, the two sub-themes are described as: *availability of trained service providers* (sub-sub-section 4.2.3.1) and *high costs of service providers* (sub-sub-section 4.2.3.2). Table 4.3 offers an overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to categorise the data.

**Table 4.3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 3: Inadequate external service providers**

<b>THEME 3: INADEQUATE EXTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDERS</b>		
	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>
Sub-theme 3.1  Availability of trained service providers	Any reference to the unavailability of trained service providers inside and outside the same school.	Any reference to the availability of trained service providers inside and outside the same school.
Sub-theme 3.2  High costs of external service providers	Any reference to costly fees external service providers charge for assessment to be part of the documentation to be submitted to the IEB in support of the application of the assessment accommodation.	Any reference to the cost service providers charges for assessment that is not part of the documentation to be submitted to the IEB in support of the application of the assessment accommodation.  Any references that do not refer to costs are excluded.

#### **4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Availability of trained service providers**

Responses from the participants indicated that the availability of trained service providers influence how assessment accommodations are implemented for each learner. These service providers include educational psychologists as well as human readers, scribes, and invigilators. The assessment and implementation of assessment accommodations are specialised skills. For this reason, service providers should undergo training in order to adequately assess and implement any assessment accommodation.

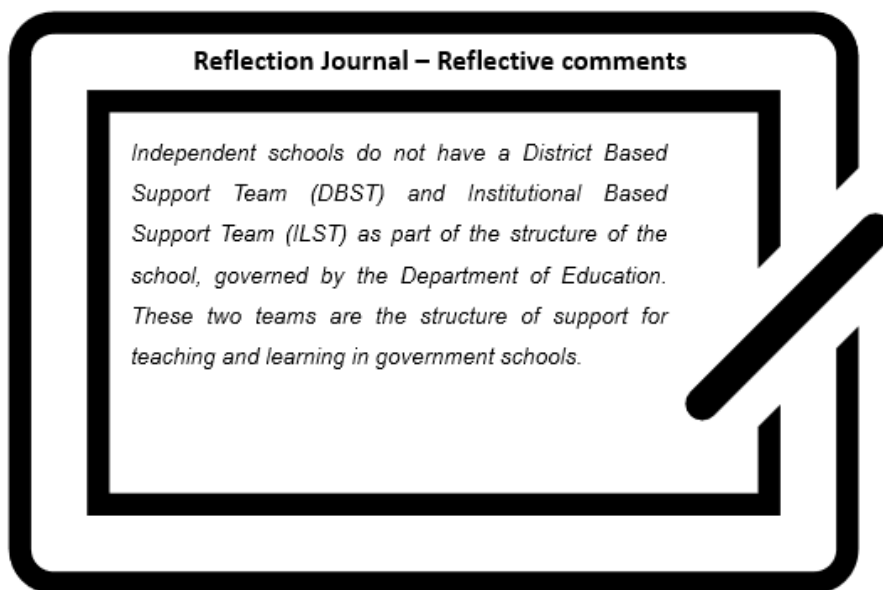
Participant 3 was of the opinion that there are not enough educational psychologists trained in the requirements of the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy:

*“We are struggling to find educational psychologists that are informed about the IEB assessment accommodation policy”* (Interview, P3, line 227).

Participant 5 underlines the possible challenges experienced by policy implementers to find scribes and readers that can implement the accommodation effectively:

*“We are struggling to find trained scribes and readers, and when we do, parents can only make use of them in some subject due to costs”* (Interview, P6, line 612).

In her reflection journal, the researcher reflected after conducting some interviews on the availability of trained service providers in the assessment and implementation of the IEB’s assessment accommodation policy:



(Reflection 12, p.13, line 311, April).

#### **4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: High costs of external service providers**

When speaking about the lack of support, the participants highlighted *the costs of external service providers*. In this regard, Participant 1 expressed the difficulty of finding affordable external service providers:

*“We need affordable scribes and readers”* (Interview, P1, line 27).

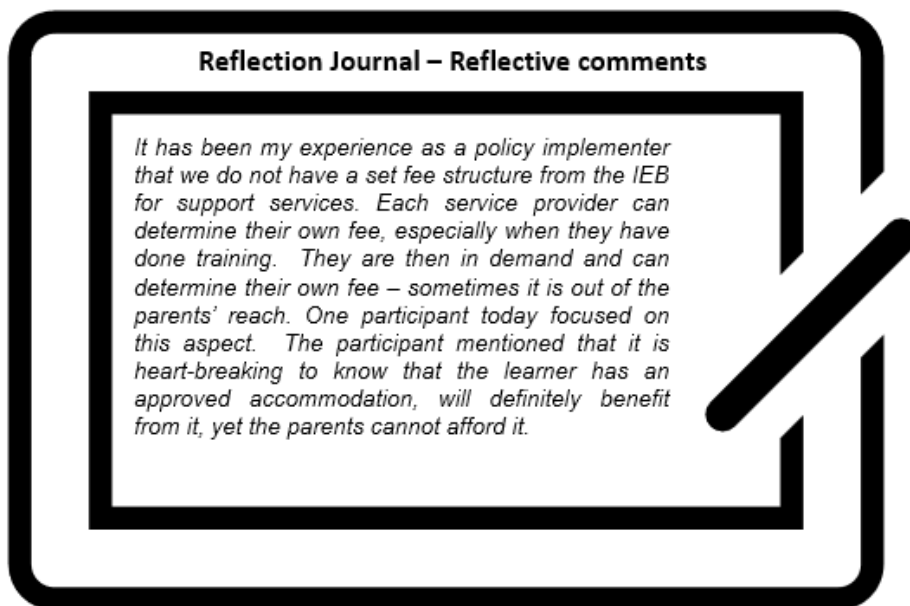
Similarly, Participant 3 mentioned that the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy is influenced by the availability of service providers due to the high costs involved:

*“It is really hard to implement a granted accommodation if there are no service providers available due to the unaffordability of their fees”* (Interview, P3, line 230).

As such, some participants indicated that as a school they do their best to provide trained external service providers to cut costs:

*“As a school we budget for readers and scribes as well as the IEB’s portal to try to alleviate the costs for the parents or we try to use available staff to assist during examinations or tests. This is not always possible. In the beginning it was easy to do so due to the small numbers of learners with granted assessment accommodations, but over the years, it has become too big of an item to budget for as a school”* (Interview, P3, line 235).

In her reflection journal, the researcher reflected on her own personal experience as a policy implementer on the costs of service providers:



(Reflection 9, p.9, line 200, April 2020).

### **4.3 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The study was grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theoretical framework referred to in Chapter 2. In turn, this theoretical perspective informed the interpretation and discussion of the research findings. The systematic challenges will be discussed

below as they appear in Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, namely: microsystem level (sub-section 4.3.1) and mesosystem level (sub-section 4.3.2).

In the section below, the themes that emerged during the analysis are discussed in terms of existing studies and literature.

### **4.3.1 Systematic Challenges at The Microsystem Level**

According to Bronfenbrenner, influences at the microsystem level have the biggest impact on the learner. This is because this system is closest to the learners and has the most direct influence (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). Not only do changes influence the learner directly, but the factors influence surrounding systems. These challenges include *uninformed parents* (sub-section 4.3.1.1); *poor communication with the school* (sub-section 4.3.2.2); *parental misconceptions about the assessment accommodation policy* (sub-section 4.3.2.3); *limited parental funds* (sub-section 4.3.2.4); *absence of support from school management* (sub-section 4.3.2.5); *lack of adequate training* (sub-section 4.3.2.6); *teachers' deficient knowledge about the assessment accommodation* (sub-section 4.3.2.7); *absence of an internal support team* (sub-section 4.3.2.8); and *lack of sufficient facilities* (sub-section 4.3.2.9).

#### **4.3.1.1 Uninformed parents**

The participants in this study acknowledged that uninformed parents often hinder the implementation and assessment process of the assessment accommodation in the schools under study due to being uninformed, having misconceptions about the assessment accommodation policy, and because of poor school–parent communication.

Parent involvement in schools is complex. In terms of these complexities, Tshabalala (2014:134) explains that “problems around parent involvement in schools revolved around misunderstandings”. Parents' inadequate awareness of the assessment accommodation policy and unclear expectations can often be seen as interconnecting problems, influencing one another. Nussbaum (2011) reiterates that the nature of support given by parents is influenced by internal and external issues in their lives. When working with parents, policy implementers need to be cognisant that the lives of parents consist of multiple elements and influences, and that these influence parents' decision making and actions. Ill-informed parents are not able to effectively support

the school and activities relating to the school (Poole, 2017). The lack of support from parents places a strain on teachers, which in turn hinders the implementation of an inclusive education policy (Hoosen, 2015).

#### **4.3.1.2 Poor communication with the school**

Effective parent-teacher communication is essential for providing learners with support in their learning process (Ozmen, Akuzum, Zincirli and Selcuk, 2016). However, in the school context there are often several barriers that prevent the establishment of effective parent–teacher communication. In this regard, Bursalioglu (2008) distinguishes between barriers within and outside the school. Some of these barriers include a) lack of communication support; b) failure to develop alternative strategies; c) working hours; and d) negative experiences.

The participants in this study identified parents' negative school experiences as a barrier in their communication with the parent. Many parents refrain from seeking help or raising an issue of concern with the policy implementer. They are therefore encouraged to seek help and obtain the necessary information (Graham-Clay, 2005). Parents do not always have enough time to collaborate with schools, and policy implementers should develop communication strategies to improve school–parent communication to encourage parents' involvement and active participation (Ozmen et al., 2016).

#### **4.3.1.3 Parental misconceptions about the assessment accommodation policy**

Inclusive policies are implemented by individuals and schools. To ensure effective implementation of an educational policy in schools, all policy implementers and stakeholders need to work together on the process (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Hess (2013) underlined that most policymakers often only focus on the formulation of the policy and pay very little attention to the practical mechanisms and expectations of all stakeholders. To ensure effective implementation, all stakeholders (parents and classroom teachers) should be taken into consideration in the focus and design support strategies to make sure that the stakeholders do not lose interest in the policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

Implementation should be purposeful to the extent that all stakeholders are informed about the assessment and implementation process of the assessment



accommodation policy to avoid misconceptions and failed implementation strategies (Hess, 2013). Accountability mechanisms<sup>8</sup> should be part of the implementation strategy of any policy (Viennet and Pont, 2017). However, there are factors influencing teachers' perceptions towards the implementation of any inclusive policy. For example: a) insufficient resources; b) lack of teacher training; and c) limited administrative support.

One factor to consider here is that teachers' perceptions are formed and shaped by their views and preferences (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Teachers are considered as a vital component in the educational system, and negative perceptions of any inclusive educational policy may become an obstacle to equal education (Newton, Carbridg, and Hunter-Johnson, 2014). Overall, teachers express more negative attitudes towards inclusion due to the lack of training in the implementation of inclusive policies (Viennet and Pont, 2017). Newton et al., (2014) suggested that training of teachers may help to redress the misconceptions of inclusion.

The second factor to consider is parents' and families' perceptions about the inclusivity of education (Newton et al., 2014). Parents in general view any policy to assist their children in education as a positive effect on their children's personal and social development (Newton et al., 2014). Elkins, van Kraayenoord and Jobling (2003) suggested that the lack of knowledge about a policy might contribute to misunderstandings and confusions, which may lead to parents feeling vulnerable. To overcome this sense of vulnerability, Newton et al., (2014) suggested that training sessions be held for parents or families to enable them to exchange experiences and ideas in order to deconstruct any myths and misconceptions they may have.

It is important to address misconceptions and myths that parents might have, as their perceptions influence their actions and positive attitudes. In this regard, perceptions can be cultivated by training, support, and successful practical experiences (Lebona, 2013).

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<sup>8</sup> 'Accountability' refers to the identification of who is responsible in case a given step of the policy implementation is unsuccessful or ineffective (Viennet and Pont, 2017).

#### **4.3.1.4. Limited parental funds**

The participants in this study acknowledged that one of the biggest possible systematic challenges is parents' inability to meet the financial needs the application and implementation process requires for assessment accommodations as set out by the IEB.

Funding has been cited as a major challenge for governments in Africa when it comes to the implementation of inclusive education (UNICEF, 2014). In South Africa, a funding strategy is proposed for public schools by the DOE for provincial Education Departments to address the extra costs of inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, independent schools do not have access to provincial budgets, and therefore need to source their own personal funds for extra assessments and service providers.

#### **4.3.1.5 Lack of support from school management**

In this study, the participants regarded support as critical for the implementation of assessment accommodations in their schools. Five participants indicated that they did not get support from parents or school management teams. This, according to the participants, sometimes made it impossible to effectively implement the assessment accommodation policy. Mnatwana (2014) identified the lack of support when implementing inclusive education policies as detrimental to the implementation process. Lack of support to successfully address learners with learning barriers and specific needs can lead to negative attitudes and constrain the implementation of inclusive education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Bojuwoye et al., (2014) advised that education support services must be placed at the centre of the inclusive strategy as the key strategy for addressing challenges to barriers to learning to support the learner successfully.

In South Africa, resources and facilities that are necessary to meet the diverse needs of learners with barriers to learning are not always available. It is therefore imperative to think differently about how to support policy implementers in coping with the challenges of inclusive classrooms and assessments (Boyer, and Gillespie, 2009). Many researchers affirm that support for policy implementers and teachers can be done through support teams, long-term professional development, and even short-

term pay incentives (Mnatwana, 2014). For positive outcomes to take place for both teachers and learners, improved monitoring and support should be offered for policy implementers by continuous support. Once-off workshops with little or no follow-up support usually do not contribute to the successful implementation of policies (Johnstone, 2009).

#### **4.3.1.6 Lack of adequate training**

Most of the participants in this study indicated that they need support from professional experts (e.g., educational psychologists, scribes, and readers) to deal with the identification and effective implementation and assessment of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy. Unlike educational psychologists, teachers have not always been trained in the strategies of addressing, assessing, and diagnosing assessment accommodations (Mnatwana, 2014).

Prinsloo (2005) identified some of the greatest challenges education is currently facing to support teachers with the implementation of inclusive policies, namely, the assessment accommodation policy in the training of teachers. Not only is formal training a vital component according to Prinsloo (2001), but so is staff development (in-service training). Effective implementation of an inclusive system involves prolonged dedication to professional development such as training (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

#### **4.3.1.7 Teachers' deficient knowledge about the assessment accommodation**

During the semi-structured interviews, the participants expressed frustration at the inept knowledge their fellow teachers demonstrated when dealing with the assessment and implementation of the accommodations in the independent schools under study. This frustration is exacerbated by the lack of support shown by the internal support team based at these schools or insufficient facilities to accommodate the assessment accommodations.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the success of inclusive education (Adewumi, Mosito and Agosto, 2019). In order to secure success, teachers need to have both knowledge about (1) inclusive education, and (2) the ability to teach diverse learners (Adewumi et al., 2019). Adequate teacher training will ensure that the teachers are

knowledgeable in the methods used for successful implementation of inclusion of learners with barriers to learning (Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht and Nel, 2016).

#### **4.3.1.8 Absence of an internal support team**

The participants further indicated that on occasion they experienced threats and negative feedback from parents and school management. In some cases, the participants received no training in the ethics and strategies of addressing challenges that learners with barriers experience.

DBE schools are making use of district support teams and institutional support teams to identify and address barriers to learning (DBE, 2004). These teams provide a key function to identify and address barriers to learning that include assessment, and teaching and learning support for learners and teachers. Independent schools do not have a central framework composed of district support teams and institutional support teams as indicated by the participants during the semi-structured interviews.

Teachers and policy implementers who do not feel that they have the required knowledge or skills to effectively support learners with barriers to learning inevitably impede the implementation of inclusive education policies (Mnatwana, 2014). There is a consensus that formal training is a crucial factor in developing the views and actions regarding the implementation of inclusive education (Mentis, Quinn & Ryba, 2005).

The majority of participants in this study also suggested that they need assistance from professional experts (such as psychologists, and speech and language therapists) to successfully deal with the implementation of the assessment accommodations. According to Mnatwana (2014), one should not underestimate the teaching experiences of participants and their passion for supporting learners and teachers. It should be acknowledged that to have this responsibility can be challenging to key role players and policy implementers. High quality training to address critical challenges should be less theoretical and more focused on practical implementation (Mouton et al., 2013). To ensure effective internal support from the internal support team, the skills of selected team members should be balanced by formal training and experience in dealing with assessment accommodations.

#### **4.3.1.9 Lack of sufficient facilities**

It is extremely difficult to address a large number of learners' complex needs in a school environment without adequate facilities (Mendell & Heath, 2005). Participants reported the shortage of available physical resources in their schools which, in some cases, are inadequate and unsuitable for learners with barriers to learning.

One of the greatest challenges facing many South African schools is that the facilities to accommodate learners with barriers to learning are not in place, which leaves teachers and policy implementers left to cope on their own (Bornman & Rose, 2014). Although it is expensive to improve the quality of school facilities, it is an essential component for effective teaching and learning to take place (Mendell & Heath, 2005). Yet policymakers do not always pay attention to the impact of facilities when setting up educational policies (Mendell & Heath, 2005). With the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy set out by the IEB, learners with granted accommodations, in some cases, must be set up in separate venues (IEB, 2020), which makes it difficult for independent schools to implement if the schools do not have adequate empty classrooms or spaces.

The section above described the systematic challenges at the microsystem level. The next section looks at the systematic challenges at the mesosystem level.

#### **4.3.2 Systematic Challenges at The Mesosystem Level**

The mesosystem level represents the connection between the other microsystems. The challenges that learners and families face are caused by the influences between school, family life, and the workplace of parents (Paduette and Ryan, 2001). Inadequate external service providers include *availability of trained service providers* (sub-section 4.3.2.1); and the *high costs of service providers* (sub-section 4.3.2.2). These are described in more detail below.

##### **4.3.2.1 Availability of trained service providers**

For the purpose of this study, trained service providers are divided into two groups, namely: a) educational psychologists, and b) scribes and human readers.

Ladbrook (2009) suggested that in order to ensure that each learner is approached holistically to determine the correct type of assessment accommodation they need,

support by service professions should be considered a vital part of inclusive practices for each school.

Educational psychologists are key role players in the District-based Support Teams (DBST) in public schools (Ladbrook, 2009). They play a specific role which includes collaboration and consultation (Ladbrook, 2009). In this study, only one independent school had an educational psychologist as a member of school staff. For the other five participants, they needed to consult with an external educational psychologist for assessment which makes consultation and collaboration difficult.

Readers and scribes are used at different institutions to assist learners and students with their granted assessment accommodations during the examination and test processes. For example, making use of a scribe or human reader should not give any advantage to the learner (IEB, 2020). There are set guidelines for scribes and human readers to follow, and therefore, training is essential (Gauteng Provincial Government of Education (GDE), 2019). The GDE offers formal training for readers and scribes, and the training certificate is valid for two years (GDE, 2019). However, according to the participants of this study, not all readers and human readers that offer their services are formally trained.

Educational psychologists who function as an independent external service provider to the school, work mainly with learners whose parents can afford their services (Berger, 2013). The participants in this study highlighted the fact that not all educational psychologists are aware of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy and its requirements. The participants have had parents that had to pay for two assessments because the first assessment was not done according to the IEB's set requirements. This, then, becomes a costly process for the parents

As discussed in sub-section 4.3.2.2, not all human readers and scribes are formally trained, and if they are, they are not always available. Independent schools need to do their own training, making use of teachers and volunteers who do not always have the relevant knowledge and skills.

#### **4.3.2.2 High costs of service providers**

Parents at independent schools generally pay for human readers and scribes. Schools, however, have experienced a substantial increase in the number of learners applying for human readers or scribes (Venter, 2017). The ideal would be to make use of trained scribes and readers, but trained scribes and readers can be costly, and they are not always available (Moodley, 2004). Accommodation assessment completed by educational psychologists can also be costly if it is not covered by a medical aid fund. Independent schools do not only need to rely on trained scribes and readers. The IEB made available a computer-based programme, namely, the Exam Portal<sup>9</sup>, making it more affordable for parents and schools.

Clasquin-Johnson and Clasquin-Johnson (2018) suggested that South Africa needs a cost-effective option for private providers for learners with barriers in an inclusive setting. In their study, 'How deep are your pockets?' carried out in South Africa, it was recommended that teachers and policy implementers investigate existing intervention strategies and create new affordable ones (Clasquin-Johnson & Clasquin-Johnson, 2018). Some concluding remarks follow next.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The emerged themes were discussed in terms of the theoretical framework and existing literature, supported by participant excerpts.

Chapter 5 will provide conclusions based on the research findings. These will be discussed in terms of the research questions that guided this study. In addition, the contribution of the study will be noted, along with the study's limitations. Finally, a number of recommendations are proposed for future research and practice.



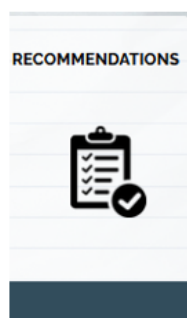
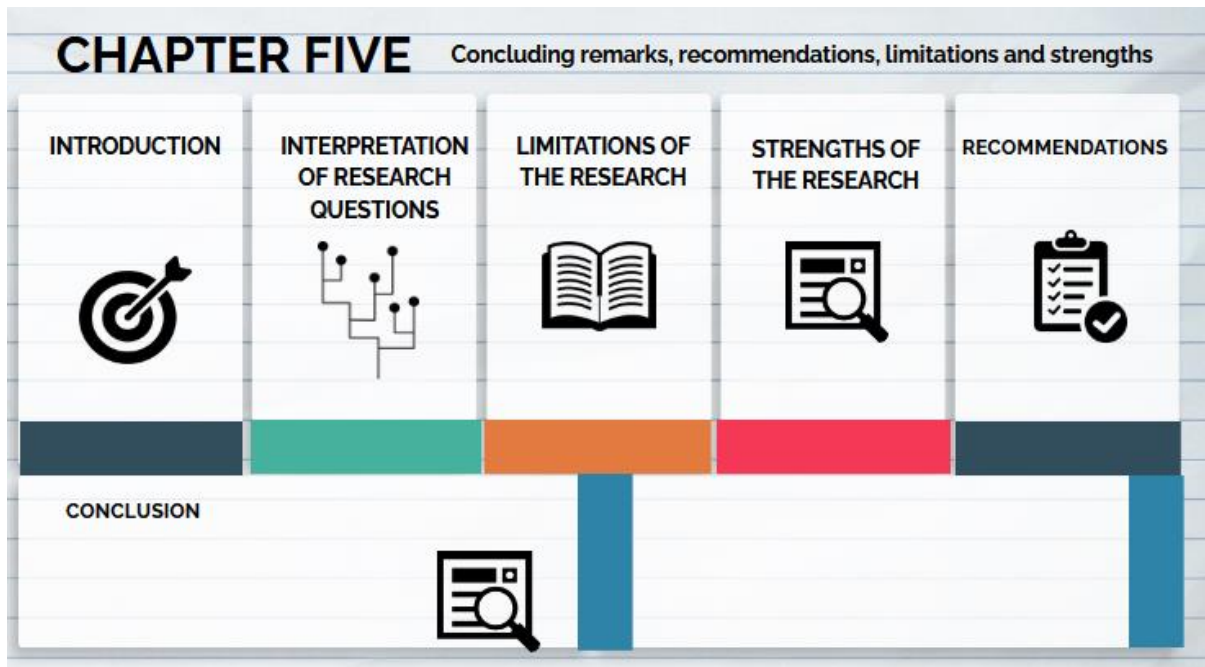
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<sup>9</sup> The Exam Portal used by the IEB is implemented by many private schools to administer computer-based tests e.g., tests for learners with barriers for either an human reader, computer accommodation, or both (IEB, 2020).

# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUDING REMARKS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER



#### Recommendations for academia

1. To investigate perceptions of schools that significantly influence their decisions to participate in research studies.
2. To measure the effect of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy on the learner's experience of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.
3. To explore the role of parent/s in the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.

#### Recommendations for practice and training

1. For training to be provided in the form of a workshop to establish the training of policy implementers.
2. For training to be provided in the form of a workshop for external service providers about the assessment accommodation policy and the requirements that need to be met.
3. For cluster groups of independent high school to be used as an external support team and training with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.



## **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the summary, recommendations, limitations, and conclusions based on the research findings of this study.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher individually interviewed six policy implementers from six different schools. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the possible systematic challenges experienced when implementing the assessment accommodation policy at independent high schools. During the research, interviews, and data analysis process, all observations and personal notes containing assumptions and preconceived ideas were recorded in the researcher's reflection journal. To make sure that researchers are aware of their own subjectivity, all notes recorded in the reflection journal should be examined through reflexivity (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). The purpose of using reflexivity in a qualitative study is to ensure authentic analysis (Palaganas et al., 2017). Conducting research is deeply personal; and who we are as persons plays a significant role in the research process and the conclusions we make as researchers (Lambert, Jomeen & McSherry, 2010). With this in mind, the researcher made use of a reflection journal to facilitate reflexivity, acknowledge her decisions to ask certain questions, interpret the findings in a specific manner, and decide which findings to use to indicate the practical implications of the research.

Against the background of the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB, the most noteworthy systematic challenges identified during the interviews are presented below.

## **5.2 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological framework presented in Chapter 2. Using this theoretical framework, the study explored the systematic challenges identified by the policy implementers when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa. From the analysis of the data, a number of important themes relating to the policy implementers' experiences of systematic challenges with policy implementation emerged, particularly the IEB's assessment accommodation policy. These themes were instrumental in interpreting the data. What follows is a discussion of the research findings. Each

systematic challenge will be described in detail and related to relevant literature from the theoretical perspective where possible.

The objectives of this study were to:

- (i) Determine what assessment accommodations are in education.
- (ii) Establish what the assessment accommodation policy is created by the Independent Examination Board.
- (iii) Explore the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementer when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa.
- (iv) Provide recommendations for the improvement of practice with regards to the implementation of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in South African independent high schools.

The research outcomes are described below in terms of the three sub-research questions in order to discuss and draw conclusions in response to the primary research question, namely:

*What systematic challenges are experienced by policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa?*

### **5.2.1 Sub-Research Question 1**

How are assessment accommodation defined in education?

In Chapter 2, section 2.4, the concept of 'assessment' was discussed while reflecting on the stages of assessments. Then, in section 2.5, the concepts of 'assessment accommodation' and 'inclusive education' in the international context was highlighted, followed by a discussion of assessment accommodation and inclusive education in the South African context in section 2.6. The accommodation assessments currently implemented by the IEB were tabled in Table 2.6.

Current research suggests that the role assessment accommodation plays help learners with barriers to learning supports learners so that the learner can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities fully. These barriers can pose a serious challenge to learning and plays a critical part of teaching and assessing.

## 5.2.2 Sub-Research Question 2

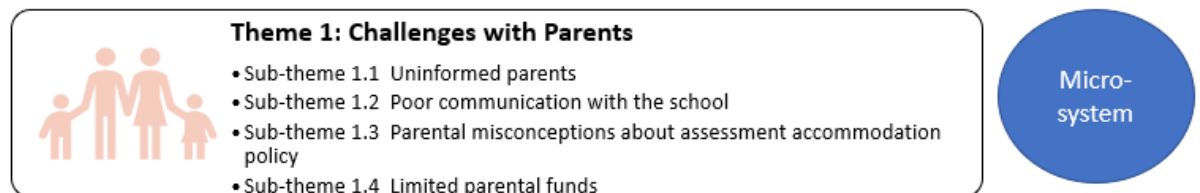
*What are the challenges experienced by policy implementers in an independent high school?*

The participant policy implementers indicated that they encounter a plethora of challenges when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy. The research findings were grouped into three themes and related sub-themes, which were illustrated in Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4.

For ease of reference, these themes and sub-themes are presented below. The researcher's personal research conclusions are indicated in her own personal reflection note.

### **THEME 1: CHALLENGES WITH PARENTS**

Four sub-themes emerged in Theme 1. These are shown in Figure 5.1 below.

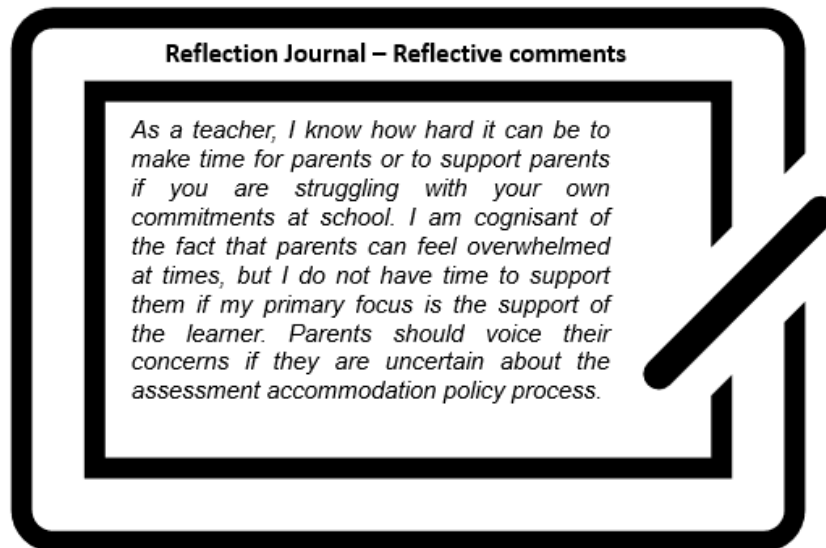


**Figure 5.1: Sub-themes of Theme 1**

As described earlier in the study, the microsystem is the closest system to the learner and their relationship with their parent/s plays a vital role (Maniram, 2015). The two microsystems – school and family – need to work together to achieve equal access to education, especially for learners with barriers to learning. Afolabi (2014) emphasises the importance of parental involvement in children's academic success. Furthermore, the significance of strong collaboration between parents and the school contributes to the successful completion of learning outcomes (Christenson, 2000). Moreover, parental involvement is seen as an important interactive agent that promotes positive

learning; it also fosters a positive school climate as well as successful inclusive practices (Afolabi, 2014).

In her reflection journal as part of the process of reflexivity, the researcher noted the following:



(Reflection 4, p.6, line 72).

### **Sub-theme 1.1: Uninformed parents**

Poor school–parent communication can make it hard for parents to engage with the school. This in turn may lead to negative responses from the parents, adversely affecting the implementation of decisions (Tshabalala, 2014). Uninformed parents struggle to participate, and problems surrounding parent involvement in schools can be ascribed to misunderstandings between teachers and parents (Tshabalala, 2014). On the other hand, effective family–school partnerships facilitate collaboration, and provide learners with barriers to learning with the opportunity to achieve optimal learning outcomes (Bauer & Shea, 2003).

### **Sub-theme 1.2: Poor communication with the school**

The interconnectedness between schools and families, especially parents, can influence the growth and behaviour of children (Kheswa, 2015). School management teams that support policy implementers in order to support parents, especially learners with barriers to learning, will create a healthy

working and learning environment and positive atmosphere at schools (Kheswa, 2015).

According to Neill (2017), communication between the school and parents in the context of teaching and learning differs from normal communication. Neill (2017) refers to 'normal' communication as day-to-day communication and is grounded on a formal relationship bond. In order to ensure effective communication between the school and the parent, the school should focus on formal communication to make sure that parents are informed, for example, parent evenings, and information shared via their preferred communication platform, such as D6 communicator<sup>10</sup>.

### **Sub-theme 1.3: Parental misconceptions about the assessment accommodation policy**

Understanding the principles of any inclusive policy is crucial for all parties involved. Through their interview responses, the research participants demonstrated that they understood the principles of the IEB's assessment accommodation policy. The participants indicated that each school has their own implementation strategies to deal with the implementation of the above-mentioned policy. Not all of the participants felt confident explaining their school's strategies; this is possibly one reason why parents had an inadequate understanding or misconceptions of the assessment accommodations policy. According to the DoE (2001), parents are expected to be active participants in the process of inclusive education. When all stakeholders involved are empowered and informed, it is beneficial for all, and any negative attitudes or misconceptions are eradicated.

### **Sub-theme 1.4: Limited parental funds**

According to Dom and Verhoeven (2006), the socio-economic status of parents influences the relationships between parents and teachers; it also influences the support parents receive from the school. The participants in this study indicated that limited funds are one of the biggest systematic challenges the

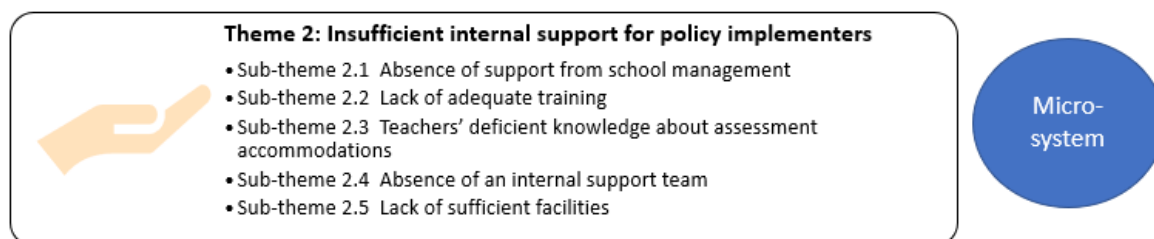
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<sup>10</sup> The D6 communicator is a school application designed to simplify school–parent communication (D6-Group, 2020).

policy implementers need to deal with. A number of parents at these independent schools were unable to continue with the assessment accommodation process due to the lack of funds.

## **THEME 2: INSUFFICIENT INTERNAL SUPPORT FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTERS**

The five sub-themes that emerged in Theme 2 are shown in Figure 5.2 below:



**Figure 5.2: Sub-themes of Theme 2**

### **Sub-theme 2.1: Absence of support from school management**

To promote effective educational practices and policy implementation, all stakeholders need to be engaged in a meaningful manner (Hayes and Bulat, 2017). Schools must actively communicate with parents and teachers involved with the inclusive practices at their schools (Fajarwati, 2017). According to Masango (2013), school principals have deficient skills in terms of providing support to inclusive education teachers. Further training is therefore needed in order to provide support to teachers and staff involved with the application of all-inclusive procedures and policies. A fundamental role of the principal and school management team is to act as negotiators and emotional advocates to those involved in the process (Masango, 2013).

### **Sub-theme 2.2: Lack of adequate training**

An overwhelming number of participants in the study agreed that teachers were inadequately trained to apply inclusive education strategies. Consequently, this became a systematic challenge for policy implementers (Tshifura, 2012). According to Nel et al., (2016), the assistance that teachers give to learners with barriers to learning should be within the scope of the learner's own awareness, skills and resources available to them. Numerous teachers are

optimistic about inclusive education but find it difficult to support learners with barriers in their classrooms and with assessments (Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey 2013). Teachers involved with learners with barriers need to be encouraged to engage in cooperative practices and to relearn the roles and responsibilities when it comes to the implementation of any inclusive education practices (Nel et al., 2016).

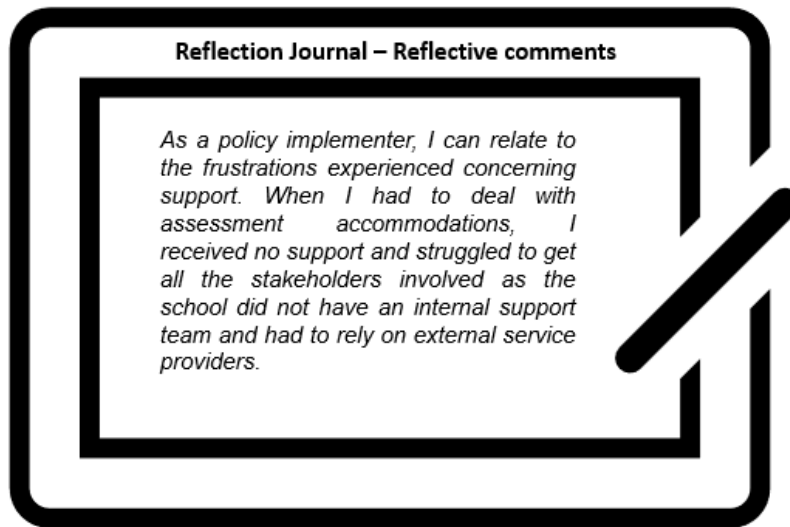
### **Sub-theme 2.3: Teachers' deficient knowledge about the assessment accommodations**

Teachers play a major role in the identification and implementation of accommodations during instruction and assessment (Alkahtani, 2013). Having knowledge about assessment accommodations can increase teachers' confidence in the identification of a possible assessment accommodation as well as the implementation thereof (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003). Unfortunately, based on the experiences of the policy implementers in this study, teachers are still struggling with the identification and implementation of assessment accommodations. Thus, teachers should have accurate knowledge in order to effectively plan the implementation of assessment accommodations (Alkahtani, 2013). In this regard, Weynandt, Fulton, Schepman, Verdi and Wilson (2009) remark that teachers often lack knowledge of inclusive education and tend to have misconceptions about the nature and causes of assessment accommodations.

### **Sub-theme 2.4: Absence of an internal support team**

Implementing an inclusive education policy involves making use of a range of resource options. This includes teaching material as well as human resources, such as a support team (Ladbrook, 2009). Support teams supply educators and policy implementers at schools with support to deliver better infrastructure and service delivery for all learners. The participants in this study revealed that the lack of an internal support team hindered the effective implementation of the assessment accommodation policy and slowed the implementation process as there was only one person involved with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.

In her reflection journal as part of the process of reflexivity, the researcher noted the following:



(Reflection 7, p.7, line 82).

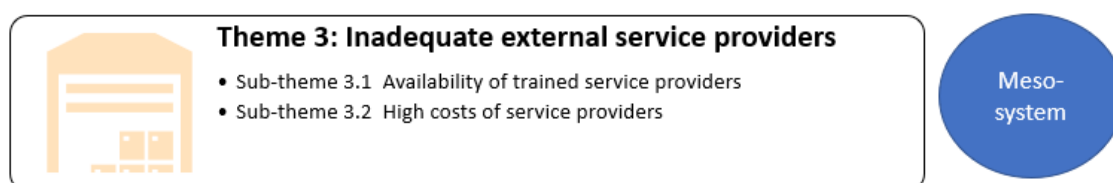
#### **Sub-theme 2.5: Lack of sufficient facilities**

One of the success factors when implementing any inclusive education practices or policy is the existence of facilities and infrastructure that supports learners with barriers (Fajarwati, 2017). Unlike Participant 3's school, which was an adequately resourced school, most of the participants were guided by the available facilities when implementing granted assessment accommodations as indicated in Chapter 4. When resources at schools are limited, it could foster educators' despondent attitudes towards parents and service providers (Tshabalala, 2014). Inadequate funding directly impacts on service delivery (Ladbrook, 2009). Parents sometimes struggle to meet the funding demands of human resources, such as a human reader, or facilities in the form of an e-reader pen or separate venue. When parents cannot fund these facilities, it makes it hard to implement the assessment accommodation at any school.



## THEME 3: INADEQUATE EXTERNAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

The two sub-themes that emerged in Theme 3 are shown in Figure 5.3 below:



**Figure 5.3: The sub-themes of Theme 3**

### **Sub-theme 3.1: Availability of trained service providers**

Inclusive education demands a network of assistance involving the school and district offices (Ladbrook, 2009). Successful implementation of inclusive policies relies on collaboration among teachers, school management, parents, service providers, and district officials (Zwane & Malale, 2018). According to Mahlo (2011), school-based support teams and service providers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to assist learners and schools to implement inclusive education policies.

The above sentiment was echoed by Participants 1 to 5 of this study when they expressed that one of their biggest systematic challenges experienced was external service providers' lack of knowledge about the IEB's assessment accommodation policy and the requirements that need to be met. This usually resulted in extra assessment and additional costs, which further prolonged the assessment process and added to the already high costs involved.

### **Sub-theme 3.2: High costs of service providers**

Independent schools operate at their own costs. This means that all facilities, resources, and services, such as human readers, might be paid by the school and the relevant parents in a form of school fees (IEB, 2020). In addition to school fees, therapy and psychological assessment is costly (Richardson, 2015). Bearing in mind that almost a quarter of the population in South Africa is unemployed, it should be noted that the extra costs for learners with barriers may be unaffordable for some parents (Al Jabery, Arabiat, Khamra, Betawi and

Abdel Jabbar, 2014). Thus, according to Clasquin-Johnson and Clasquin-Johnson (2018), there is a need for government to regulate external private service providers. When external service providers are regulated, dissatisfied parents, or parents that are vulnerable to exploitation, can be held accountable. (Clasquin-Johnson and Clasquin-Johnson, 2018).

### **5.2.3 Sub-Research Question 3**

*Which recommendations can be suggested for the improvement of practice with regards to the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy of the IEB in South African independent high schools by the study participants?*

Based on the observations of this study, the systematic challenges experienced by the policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa, according to the microsystem and mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, are as follows:

#### **The Microsystem**

- Uninformed Parents
- Poor communication with the school
- Parental misconceptions of the assessment accommodation policy
- Limited parental funds
- Absence of support from school management
- Lack of adequate training
- Teachers' deficient knowledge about the assessment accommodation policy
- Absence of an internal support team
- Lack of sufficient facilities

#### **The Mesosystem**

- Availability of trained service providers
- High costs of service providers

The proposed recommendations relating to these systematic challenges will be provided in section 5.5. But first, the limitations (section 5.3) and strengths (section 5.4) of the study are discussed.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

This section describes the limitations of this study. The first limitation was that only six schools located in the Gauteng region participated in this study. Even though qualitative research often makes use of small samples, the results and recommendations of this study may not be generalisable/applicable to other school settings or contexts, but may only be relevant to the particular schools under study. The findings may be transferred to a parallel framework based on in-depth descriptions and experience of this study, which is associated with interpretivist research.

The second limitation was the schools' lack of interest or willingness to participate in this research. Initially, twelve schools were invited to participate, but in the end, only six schools participated. However, the schools' unwillingness to participate in the research was not the main focus of this investigation. Further studies could include a bigger sample of independent schools to generate findings that could inform the IEB of the systematic challenges experienced when implementing the assessment accommodation policy. It might also be noteworthy to consider the policy implementers' level of training relating to inclusive education and accommodations in general in future studies as a possible challenge with the implementation of the assessment accommodations policy.

### **5.4 STRENGTHS OF THE RESEARCH**

Due to the explorative nature of the research design and the use of a variety of data collection methods, it was made feasible to provide an in-depth explanation of the systematic challenge experienced by the policy implementers when implementing the IEB's assessment accommodation policy. The possible benefit of conducting qualitative research is that it contributed to the collecting of rich descriptions from the participants. The willingness of each participant to answer each question with honesty and integrity contributed to identifying the four main themed systematic challenges.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

While the qualitative study's findings are exclusive to these research participants, the knowledge collected from this study could help guide the policy implementers in their undertaking to implement the IEB's assessment accommodation policy more effectively in the future. Recommendations regarding the possible systematic challenges are provided in this section. Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are made for future research:

### **5.5.1 Recommendations for Academia**

- \* To investigate the perceptions of schools that significantly influence their decisions to participate in research studies.
- \* To measure the effect of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy on the learner's experience of the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.
- \* To explore the role of parent/s in the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.

### **5.5.2 Recommendations for Practice and Training**

- \* For training to be provided in the form of a workshop<sup>11</sup> to establish the training of policy implementers at independent schools regarding the assessment and implementation of the assessment accommodation policy.
- \* For training to be provided in the form of a workshop for external service providers about the assessment accommodation policy and the requirements that need to be met.
- \* For cluster groups of independent high schools to be used as an external support team and training with the implementation of the assessment

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<sup>11</sup> The format of a workshop allows for a smaller group to be accommodated. This will assist the facilitator to cater to the group's specific needs and skills, and allow dedicated discussions to take place on specific topics relevant to the group (Alston, 2019).

accommodation policy. This will allow policy implementers to share resources and assist with decision-making.

## 5.6 CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the systematic challenges encountered when implementing the assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools in South Africa. The findings revealed four main themed systematic challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the effective implementation of the assessment accommodation policy by the IEB. During the research process, the researcher found the participants to be problem-solvers, resilient, and possessing a genuine care for their learners. At the same time, they experienced a number of challenges when implementing the assessment accommodation policy. This was the main focus of this study. To conclude, it is vital that these systematic challenges are fully addressed to ensure that all learners are afforded an equal opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed, not only in their schooling career, but beyond.

Finally, I would like end with the following quote:

*“Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them become what they are capable of becoming”.*

*-- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*



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## ADDENDA

### Addendum A: Letter Granting Ethical Clearance for Study From University of South Africa



#### UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/11/13

Ref: 2019/11/13/62074156/39/AM

Name: Ms R Pruis

Student No.: 62074156

Dear Ms R Pruis

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from  
2019/11/13 to 2022/11/13

---

**Researcher(s):** Name: Ms R Pruis  
E-mail address: 62074156@mylife.unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: 0846537944

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Dr. H. Olivier  
E-mail address: olivih@unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: 012 429 6753

**Title of research:**

**SYSTEMATIC CHALLENGES OF THE ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATION POLICY  
IMPLEMENTATION IN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOLS**

**Qualification:** MEd Psychology of Education

---

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/11/13 to 2022/11/13.

*The low risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/11/13 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

## **Addendum B: Letter to Principal of Independent Schools**

### **SYSTEMATIC CHALLENGES TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATION POLICY IN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOLS**

#### **DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT**

My name is RIANA PRUIS, I am doing research under the supervision of Dr. H OLIVIER, a Supervisor, in the Department of Psychology of Education towards a master's degree at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled SYSTEMATIC CHALLENGES TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATION POLICY IN INDEPENDENT HIGH SCHOOLS.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

This study is expected to collect important information that could assist key role players to identify systematic challenges when implementing the assessment accommodation policy.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

You are invited because you work directly with the implementation of the assessment accommodation policy at your school. I obtained your contact details from your Principal.

#### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

The study involves a semi-structure interview. Indicate what sort of questions will be asked or show the questions in this document. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes at a venue and time that is convenient for you. Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. If you do decide to take part, you need to sign a written consent form agreeing to participate, however, you are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

**WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation in this study might benefit others with an understanding of the experiences of those who have been responsible with the implementation of assessment accommodation policies.

**ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

I do not foresee any negative consequences resulting from the participation of this study. However, I do acknowledge that it does ask of your time which are very valuable in the education profession.

**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. My Supervisor and myself, will be the only ones who will have access to the data (audio tapes and my reflective dairy).

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked safe for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Hardcopies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the external drive.

**WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

You will not receive any payment for your participation in this study.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

## **WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact me, Riana Pruis, on 0846537944, or email: rianapruis@gmail.com

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Olivier at oliverh@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Riana Pruis

## Addendum C: Consent Form for Participants

### CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Addendum D: General Interview Question Guide for Semi-Structured Interview

### Interview Questions Guide

1.
  1. Qualifications
  2. Experience in the role of facilitator for concessions
  3. Official position – currently
  4. Age
  5. Gender
2. Thank you for granting me this interview. Do you have any questions before we start the interview? I would like to start our interview by gaining an understanding of your involvement with the accommodation process. How did you become aware of accommodations?
3. What do you understand from the term assessment accommodations?
4. Briefly explain your role in the accommodation process at your school.
5. Briefly explain the formal training that you have received to implement the assessment accommodation policy. (how did you get involved with assessment accommodations?)
6. Which informal training programmes did you participate in to assist you with your implementation of your school's assessment accommodations policy?
7. In your opinion, what can you regard as the value of assessment accommodations in the learning process?
8. Briefly explain your school's assessment accommodation processes. (what are the processes when applying for assessment accommodations at your school?)
9. If any, what are the challenges that you experience when implementing the IEB assessment accommodation policy at your school relating to?
  - a. The learners
  - b. The resources at the school and resources
  - c. The parents
  - d. The other teaching staff
  - e. The school community
  - f. The IEB assessment accommodation policy
  - g. Yourself as implementer
10. Does the school/processes at your school prevent you from effectively implementing the assessment accommodation policy?



11. I am interested to know what accommodations are being implemented in your school. Can you tell me more?
12. Following the granting of accommodations, could you briefly describe the support given to the learners.
13. What do you need to implement this assessment accommodation policy more effectively?
  - a. The learners
  - b. The resources at the school and resources
  - c. The parents
  - d. The other teaching staff
  - e. The school community
  - f. The IEB assessment accommodation policy
  - g. Yourself as implementer
14. Are there any other challenges that you positive and/or negative experience other than what we have discussed before that you would like to highlight relating to the assessment accommodation policy?
15. When you reflect on your role as a role player that implements the assessment accommodation policy, are there any changes that you would like to see made to the accommodation process?

## Addendum E: Example of the Transcription From the Individual Interview

### – Coding: Themes and Categories

RP	Following the granting of accommodations, could you briefly describe the support given to the learners.			
		<b>CHALLENGE</b>	<b>THEME</b>	<b>SYSTEM</b>
MI:	We do not have a support team. What I mean there is no internal psychologist or speech therapist. All our referrals are done externally so to integrate external support with the school is hard. We do not have a support programme for those learners. We show them how to use the computer or how the reader or scribe will help them and that is it.	Absence of internal support team	No support team & integrated external support	Micro and Meso
RP	What do you need to implement this assessment accommodation policy more effectively? a. The learners			
	implementer			
MI:	So, let me think. Let's start with our biggest challenge. We make use of staff as readers or scribes. Not all staff are aware what to do or sometimes because of the need of invigilators we cannot accommodate the learner. The costs are very high if you source people from outside. They charge a lot of money for their services and not all the learners can afford it.	Trained service providers	Availability of trained service providers	Mesosystem
RP:	Just to make sure, not all the staff are trained in being a scribe or reader?			

	Implementer			
HES:	Our biggest challenge or I must say for the parent is costs. We do have parents that will not continue with the process because of the high costs involved. We do encourage our parents every year. Maybe their situation will change. Not only is the assessment costly but the person they make use of. Our learners are very informed. I do have an individual meeting with the learner just to inform them on what will be happening going forward.	costs of assessment  Cost of external service providers	Limited parental funds  High cost of service providers	Microsystem  Mesosystem

	your learners and resources?			
FVE:	I do not think our school is an effective support resource. What I mean by that is that our school waits to see if a parent approaches us to regards with assessment accommodation. If our learners get their accommodation approved, we do nothing else except to help them source a service provider. We do have a list of service providers, but the parents cannot always afford their fees. They ask anything from R180 per hour upwards. Then the learner does not make use of the accommodation because of this. But we one of our	School's communication with parents  Parental funds	Poor communication  Limited parental funds	Microsystem  Microsystem

	<p>Being a computer teacher, I could also see that the learners lack of computer skills hinders them when they had to use the portal. They were totally stressed out. We need affordable scribes and readers. Most of the time the learners with granted accommodations are very stressed about writing assessments. After a few years I needed to work with those learners and show them how to manage their stress. I am thinking about myself. Maybe the school and the learners will benefit from a staff member with formal training and a passion for learners with special needs. Maybe their support will be better. I am not sure.</p>	<p>Costs of external service providers</p> <p>Staff training</p>	<p><b>High cost of external service providers</b></p> <p><b>Lack of adequate training</b></p>	<p><b>Mesosystem</b></p> <p><b>Microsystem</b></p>
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HERM:	<p>Look I never knew that it would be such an intense process because I never dealt with the process before. So that was my first lesson I had to learn. So many required documents and proof. Sige, I never knew that was a requirement. I had to study the document over and over to ensure we meet all the requirements. I still struggle understanding why all these documents are a requirement and then the IEB only grants 5 minutes or a separate venue. So, to come</p>	<p>Training/knowledge about assessment accommodation policy from IEB</p>	<p><b>Lack of adequate training</b></p>	<p><b>Microsystem</b></p>
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## Addendum F: Example of Researcher’s Reflection Journal

DATES	Reflective notes
11/2	Interesting interview today with participant. Her experience in the field is helping her to solve her challenges more effectively. She would be a wonderful mentor for other policy implementers struggling to find a solution for their unique challenges in their school. She has received formal special education training and that also seems to be the key ingredient of her problem-solving strategies.
12/2	I have been thinking about yesterday’s interview with the participant. It is my opinion that formal and informal training is vital to implement the assessment accommodation policy. It is my observation that the participants that are struggling to implement the policy do not have any formal or informal training. It is my opinion that training must be a precursor for the schools to identify policy implementers in their schools.
26/2	Today’s participant really struggled with the relevant parent’s involvement in the process. It is my observation that parents have a preconceive idea of what assessment accommodations are and how they feel it should be implemented to benefit their child. The parents do not hand in their assessment reports in on time and are reluctant to pay for the process to move forward. The second group of parents in the school underestimate the costs involve in the process and only have funds for the formal assessments and then do not make use of the granted assessment due to the lack of funds.
27/2	I have been thinking about yesterday’s interview. The parents would benefit from a budget proposal to indicate the costs. This would be hard because the availability of the readers and scribes will change indicated costs. Parent training/information videos relating to assessment accommodations will help the policy implementer.

## Addendum G: Editor's Letter

*Lee-Anne Roux*

PROFESSIONAL EDITING SERVICES

BTH (Honors) Practical Theology UNISA 2006 • BA Honors (Psychology) UNISA 2009 • MTH (Practical Theology) Stellenbosch University 2013  
PHD (Practical Theology) Stellenbosch University 2019

29 November 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**RE: LANGUAGE EDITING**

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited the thesis titled:

**Exploring systematic challenges with the implementation of the  
assessment accommodation policy in independent high schools**

by

**RIANA PRUIS**

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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