

**Teacher preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream
classrooms in a selected combined school in South Africa**

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted from have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the 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.



Signature

07 November 2023

Date

DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to all learners who experience barriers to learning wherever they may be. Never stop pushing the boundaries to attain the success you so richly deserve.

and

To all the children who will forever live in my heart of hearts

and

Most endearingly, to my beloved dad, Reggie Govender who taught me that anything in life is possible.

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Do everything you have to do, but not with greed, not with ego, not with lust, not with envy but with love, compassion, humility and devotion.

- Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita (17 February 3102 BCE / 5124BC)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to establish teachers' preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in a selected combined school in South Africa. It was significant in Foundation to Senior Phases in mainstream classrooms to ensure that the principles and guidelines of inclusive education were implemented to promote learners' academic success, and thus decrease the failure rate. Although inclusive education policies have been visible for many years, their implementation has been gradual and mired in bureaucracy. A more streamlined approach to implementing inclusive education policies is needed. The appropriate educational theories and the Foundation Phase curriculum and assessment policies underpinned this qualitative study based on a single case study research design. The case identified was located in the ordinary quintile 5 public combined school in the Pinetown District. Data was gathered through a pre-planned questionnaire (containing open-ended questions), semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Five school management team members and four Foundation Phase (Grades R – 3) teachers were individually interviewed or participated via online interviews. The participants were purposively selected by the researcher to provide insight regarding the implementation of an inclusive education framework at the combined school. Document analysis was conducted by perusing curricula (Mathematics, English Home Language, and Life Skills), assessment policies, EWP 6, SIAS, and lesson plans. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the responses from the questionnaires and interviews. Bronfenbrenner's theory was considered to understand the reciprocal interconnectedness and relationship of teacher-preparedness and its impact on inclusive learners at a mainstream combined school in South Africa. The findings from the study revealed that both teachers and SMTs believed that they were neither adequately prepared to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms, nor skilfully trained to teach learners with varying challenges. Further, the SIAS policy was not fully utilised. While all teachers were encouraged and supported positively by the SMT to implement and promote inclusion, the support offered by the SBST and DBST was superficial. The reality of not having a visible and responsive SBST/DBST as a support structure becomes a barrier for both teachers and learners alike. The DBE efforts to train teachers to improve their practice, have been few and largely ineffective. One major challenge is the lack of resources which hinders learners with physical

impairments to access classrooms, toilets, and sporting facilities. The study recommends that the DBE should urgently prioritise continuous professional development workshops, the provision of relevant teacher resources, and promoting hands-on methods to demonstrate to teachers' strategies to assist learners experiencing barriers to learning. This is possible when all role-players collaborate to commit to an action plan to modify and upgrade existing infrastructure (among others) to fully accommodate inclusive learners. The findings of this study should guide efforts for tangible transformation. This will benefit teacher-efficacy, and accommodate all learners, especially those who are marginalised.

KEY TERMS: Foundation Phase, teacher-preparedness, inclusive education, mainstream classroom

摘要 (ABSTRACT IN MANDARIN CHINESE)

本研究旨在确定教师在南非选定的一所综合学校的主流课堂中实施全纳教育的准备情况。在主流课堂的基础到高中阶段，确保全纳教育的原则和指导方针得到实施，以促进学习者的学业成功，从而降低失败率，具有重要意义。

尽管全纳教育政策已经出台多年，但其实施却是渐进的，并深陷官僚主义的泥潭。需要采取更简化的方法来实施全纳教育政策。适当的教育理论以及基础阶段课程和评估政策支撑了这项基于单个案例研究设计的定性研究。发现的病例位于派恩敦区的一所普通五分之一公立综合学校。通过预先计划的调查问卷（包含开放式问题）、半结构化访谈和文件分析收集数据。五名学校管理团队 成员和四名基础阶段（R 至 3 年级）教师接受了单独访谈或通过在线访谈参与。研究人员有目的地选择参与者，以提供有关合并学校实施全纳教育框架的见解。通过仔细阅读课程（数学、英语母语和生活技能）、评估政策、EWP 6、SIAS 和课程计划来进行文档分析。

采用主题分析来分析问卷和访谈的答复。Bronfenbrenner 的理论被认为可以理解教师准备的相互关联性和关系及其对南非主流混合学校包容性学习者的影响。研究结果显示，教师 和 SMT 都认为，他们既没有为在主流课堂上实施全纳教育做好充分准备，也没有接受过熟练的培训来教授面临不同挑战的学习者。此外，SIAS 政策并未得到充分利用。虽然 SMT 积极鼓励和支持所有教师实施和促进包容性，但 SBST 和 DBST 提供的支持却很肤浅。没有可见且积极响应的 SBST/DBST 作为支持结构的现实成为教师和学习者的障碍。DBE 为培训教师改进实践所做的努力很少，而且基本上没有效果。一项主要挑战是缺乏资源，这阻碍了有身体障碍的学习者进入教室、厕所和体育设施。该研究建议 DBE 应紧急优先考虑持续专业发展研讨会，提供相关教师资源，并推广实践方法，向教师展示帮助遇到学习障碍的学习者的策略。当所有角色参与者合作致力于制定一项行动计划来修改和升级现有基础设施（等等）以充分适应包容性学习者时，这是可能的。

这项研究的结果应该指导切实转型的努力。这将有利于教师的效能，并适应所有学习者，特别是那些被边缘化的学习者。

关键词：基础阶段、教师准备、全纳教育、主流课堂

ISIFINYEZO (ABSTRACT IN ISIZULU)

Lolu cwaningo beluhlose ukusungula ukulungela kothisha ukusebenzisa imfundo ebandakanyayo emakilasini ajwayelekile esikoleni esikhethiwe esihlanganisiwe eNingizimu Afrika. Bekubalulekile ezigabeni eziyisisekelo kuya kwezipezulu emakilasini ajwayelekile ukuqinisekisa ukuthi imigomo nemihlahlandlela yemfundo ebandakanyayo iyasetshenziswa ukuze kuthuthukiswe impumelelo yabafundi ezifundweni zabo, ngaleyo ndlela kwehle izinga lokufeyila.

Nakuba izinqubomgomo zemfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu sezineminyaka eminingi zibonakala, ukuqaliswa kwazo beku lokhu kuhamba kancane futhi kucwile ezikhundleni zokuphatha. Kudingeka indlela ehleleke kakhudlwana yokuqaliswa kwezinqubomgomo zemfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu. Amathiyori ezemfundo afanelekile kanye nekharihulamu yeSigaba Sabokheko kanye nezinqubomgomo zokuhlola zisekele lolu cwaningo lwekhwalithi olusekelwe ekwakhiweni kocwaningo lwesibonelo esisodwa.

Icala elihlonziwe latholakala esikoleni esijwayelekile sika-quintile 5 esihlangene esifundeni sasePinetown. Idatha yaqoqwa ngohlu lwemibuzo oluhlelwe kusengaphambili (oluqukethe imibuzo evulekile), izingxoxo ezihlelwe kancane, nokuhlaziya kwemibhalo. Amalungu amahlanu ethimba labaphathi bezikole kanye nothisha abane beSigaba Sabantu (Banga R – 3) baxoxwa ngabodwana noma babamba iqhaza ngezinhlokhono ze-inthanethi. Abahlanganyeli bakhethwe ngenhloso umcwaningi ukuze anikeze ukuqonda mayelana nokuqaliswa kohlaka lwemfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu esikoleni esihlanganisiwe. Ukuhlaziya kwamadokhumenti kwenziwa ngokufunda ikharihulamu (Izibalo, Ulimi Lwasekhaya LwesiNgisi, Namakhono Empilo), izinqubomgomo zokuhlola, i-EWP 6, i-SIAS, nezinhlelo zezifundo.

Kusetshenziswe ukuhlaziya isihloko ukuze kuhlaziye izimpendulo ezivela kuhlu lwemibuzo nezingxoxo. Ithiyori kaBronfenbrenner yayibhekwa njengokuqonda ukuxhumana okuhambisanayo kanye nobudlelwano bokulungela uthisha kanye nomthelela wako kubafundi ababandakanya wonke umuntu esikoleni esihlangene esijwayelekile eNingizimu Afrika.

Okutholwe kulolu cwaningo kuveze ukuthi bobabili othisha kanye nama-SMT bakholelwa ukuthi bebengakulungele ngokwanele ukuqalisa imfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu emakilasini ajwayelekile, noma baqeqeshwe ngamakhono ukuze bafundise abafundi abanezinsalele ezahlukene. Ngaphezu kwalokho, inqubomgomo ye-SIAS ayizange isetshenziswe ngokugcwele. Nakuba bonke othisha babekhuthazwa futhi besekelwa kahle i-SMT ukuze iqalise futhi ikhuthaze ukufakwa, ukusekelwa okunikezwa i-SBST ne-DBST kwakungagcini nje. Iqiniso lokungabi nayo i-SBST/DBST ebonakalayo nesabelayo njengesakhiwo sokusekela kuba isithiyo kubo bobabili othisha nabafundi ngokufanayo. Imizamo ye-DBE yokuqeqesha othisha ukuze bathuthukise ukusebenza kwabo, ibe mincane futhi ayiphumelelanga. Enye inselelo enkulu ukuntuleka kwezinsiza okuvimbela abafundi abakhubazekile ukuba bafinyelele emakilasini, izindlu zangasese kanye nezindawo zemidlalo.

Ucwaningo luncoma ukuthi i-DBE kufanele isheshe ibeke eqhulwini izinkundla zokucobelelana ngolwazi eziqhubekayo zokuthuthukiswa kochwepheshe, ukuhlinzekwa kwezinsiza zothisha ezifanele, kanye nokukhuthaza izindlela zokubonisana kothisha amasu okusiza abafundi abahlangabezana nezithiyo ekufundeni. Lokhu kungenzeka uma bonke ababambiqhaza besebenzisana ukuze bazibophezele ohlelweni lokusebenza lokushintsha nokuthuthukisa ingqalasizinda ekhona (phakathi kokunye) ukuze kuhlaliswe abafundi bonke. Okutholwe yilolu cwaningo kufanele kuqondise imizamo yoguquko olubambekayo. Lokhu kuzohlomulisa ukusebenza ngempumelelo kothisha, futhi kuvumele bonke abafundi, ikakhulukazi labo ababukelwa phansi.

IMIGOMO ENGUMQOKA: ISigaba Sabokheko, ukulungela uthisha, imfundo ebandakanyayo, ikilasi elijwayelekile

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District Based Support Team
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EWP6	Education White Paper 6
FSS	Full-Service Schools
IE	Inclusive Education
ILST	Institutional Level Support Team
HOD	Head of Department
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal Province
LP	Learner Profile
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
WHO	World Health Organisation
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAFCD	South African Council for Disability
SNA1	Special Needs Assessment

SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SBST	School Based Support Team
SNE	Special Needs Education
SGB	School Governing Body
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
SMT	School Management Team
SSR	Special School Resource Centres
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCERI	National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion
POE	Portfolio of Evidence
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WEF	World Education Forum

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The preparedness of an individual entails the readiness for a possibility in the near or distant future (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). Preparedness, within the framework of this research, includes possessing emotional intelligence, cognition, and critical-thinking prowess to manage an inclusive classroom (Hay et al., 2001).

The Department of Education [DoE] (1996) emphasises that the practice of inclusive education (IE) involves addressing the distinct and different needs of diverse learners while minimising obstacles both within and around the learning setting. The practice of implementing effective inclusive education in the Foundation Phase relies on distinguished quality education standards, specialised acquisition of knowledge, and the ongoing training of teachers at pre-service and in-service levels which capacitate teachers with updated knowledge, incisive understanding, and improved abilities and proficiency to cater to the needs of a heterogeneous classroom (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

In the present-day South African setting, a diverse and inclusive classroom entails employing varied and innovative teaching and learning methods that enable teachers to address the educational requirements of every learner, regardless of different abilities, within a single classroom. Hence, teachers should structure their instructional methodologies to align with learners' wide-ranging interests, capabilities, and backgrounds (Pienaar & Raymond, 2013).

Literature indicates that teachers are the primary drivers of engendering value in inclusion (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Also, when teachers are part of a support system that operates effectively, transforming the school environment becomes less tedious. However, if they do not have a sound support structure, they may not generate any meaningful contribution (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Therefore, for inclusive education to be successful, the readiness of each teacher, and the cooperation of other role-players are critical.

Forlin and Deppeler (2022) finds that historically, there has been an evolution from segregated to inclusive placement of teachers. As a result, this has led to complex and sometimes demanding shifts in school operations which affect the roles of teachers (Forlin & Deppeler, 2022). The present condition of education in South Africa is impacted by the historical influence of the educational policies implemented during the apartheid era (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). A distinct factor that characterises education in South Africa as compared to other countries, is the deeply ingrained racial attitudes and the institutional establishment of prejudiced methods, resulting in notable inequalities in the allocation of educational possibilities (Engelbrecht, 2006). Additionally, in the period of apartheid, the dreaded Bantu education system was implemented for black South Africans, offering limited instruction in areas of mathematics and science (Asmal & James, 2001). This measure was implemented with the intention of channelling black South Africans into low-skilled employment roles. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) state that distinct ethnic communities received education in segregated institutions, with black schools having twice the number of learners per classroom, compared to white schools. The legacy of apartheid with its practice of segregation significantly influenced how education is provided in South Africa; and its effects are still evident even today.

The introduction of fresh educational policies in South Africa after the advent of democracy in 1994, precipitated a noteworthy change in the education system including the implementing and administering of inclusive education. One change involved mainstream schools accepting and providing education for learners who encounter learning difficulties. In the year 2001, the Department of Education (DoE) introduced The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) which stipulated the right of learners to receive comprehensive support in attaining equal education. The DoE (2001) that formulated the EWP6, intended it as a policy document to guide and coordinate the process of implementing inclusion. The EWP6 details the requests and requirements of every learner, in addition to acting as a guide to inform the system of education to include all learners, irrespective of their special circumstances. Engelbrecht et al. (2015) mention that teachers must anticipate that their understanding of teaching and learning (T&L) will be challenged, and their adaptability to the new curriculum will test their resilience. Although this can be demanding initially, it will ultimately empower teachers to cater effectively for learners with diverse abilities (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

According to the DoE (2001), its National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy, formulated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), serves as an additional guide to reinforce the EWP6. The SIAS programme is crucial in shaping the principles of inclusive education. The DBE (2014) emphasises all learner-needs, especially those who were previously marginalised and relegated to the sidelines due to their impediments such as poverty, language, family disruptions, learning difficulties, and disability. The relevant policies were designed to guide schools to provide improved assistance, access, and value to fulfil the learning objectives regarding all learners (DBE, 2014).

However, concerns have arisen regarding the execution of the requirements of the inclusion policy document due to teachers not being fully prepared, knowledgeable, and supportive (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Skinner (2016) suggests that many teachers feel inadequate and ill-equipped in dealing with inclusive education matters. Unfortunately, limited scholarly investigation has been conducted regarding supporting teachers to achieve success in inclusive classrooms (Skinner, 2016).

Alarmingly, Dreyer et al. (2012) state that approximately 65% of teachers in regular schools lack a formal qualification in initial teacher education. Since a teacher qualification capacitates a teacher through practical training and the implementation of theoretical frameworks, the teacher is expected to be skilled and versatile on how to accommodate the varied requirements and situations of all learners within mainstream classes.

Donohue and Bornman (2014) indicate that the model of disability was broadly recognised by South African teachers who were trained to provide instruction in either mainstream or specialised education. However, many South African teachers, despite being in the profession for several years, especially those over the age of 50 years, struggle to grasp and apply new methods of educating learners. This remains a challenge to inclusive education practices at present (Armstrong, 2009). According to Oswald and Swart (2011), current teacher education programmes provided at South African teaching institutions prepare pre-service teachers to cater to varied learner needs and abilities within a unified class setting; this should have created a better quality of service in inclusive classrooms, but this in the main did not materialise – it calls for ongoing in-service workshops for all teachers.

It is disappointing that there exists limited documentation regarding the actual situation and challenges on the ground that teachers confront in implementing inclusive education policies to support Special Needs Education (SNE) learners (Hay, 2012). Wearmouth et al. (2000) believe that even in a country like England, where it is accepted that teachers are adequately trained, the application of new additional policies has not engendered the desired change. Also, the application of principles in inclusive education policies within the context of South Africa is severely hampered as most teachers are inadequately trained (Hay et al., 2001). When implementing new policies, the situation of inadequately trained South African teachers and the reality of current inclusive education implementation should be scrutinised, such as in England (Hay et al., 2001).

Inclusive education within schools and class settings goes beyond ensuring equal educational access for all learners; it also focuses on fostering a sense of fitting in, caring, and teaching learners, regardless of differences in their capabilities, culture, gender, language, social class, and ethnicity (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). In this regard, the DoE (2001) provided guidelines for schools which included the establishment of a School-Based Support Team (SBST) which works in conjunction with the District Support Team (DBST) to offer assistance to teachers who are engaged in the implementation of inclusive education as outlined in the EWP6. The purpose of the EWP6 is to offer guidelines on how inclusive education can occur in educational settings for the learner's benefit (DoE, 2001). The SBST and DBST perform a critical function in assisting and guiding teachers to circumvent the impediments they encounter when imparting inclusive education.

According to the DBE (2014), school-based teams are mainly responsible for recognising learners who are at-risk and dealing with learners who encounter learning challenges at school. The DBST plays a critical function in the effective application of an inclusion education support system. However, the extent of preparedness among teachers in executing inclusive education in mainstream schools determines their rate of success in providing an inclusive curriculum to ensure learners' success. As such, the preparedness and readiness of all teachers to apply and support inclusion, specifically in the Foundation Phase, play a pivotal role in facilitating learners to gain a thorough grounding to attain educational success. Since there is a correlation between what learners are taught in their earlier years of schooling and its impact during the latter years of schooling, it is imperative that teachers (especially in the Foundation Phase) are well-trained, well-prepared, and possess a positive mindset to drive inclusive education (Makoelle & Van der Merwe,

2016). Incorporating inclusive education within regular classroom settings means to teach diverse learners, and to be able to recognise their learning challenges in order to provide the required assistance. The extent of teachers' preparedness to implement inclusive education will determine the learners' rate of academic success. I, the researcher, chose to examine the Foundation Phase classroom setting at a combined school due to its importance for setting the grounding for learners' entire future schooling career as it prepares learners with the fundamental skills, knowledge, values, and acumen necessary to progress to a higher grade.

Special needs education (SNE) aims to offer assistance to learners facing mild to moderate learning difficulties within regular classrooms. As stipulated in the EWP6, this approach encompasses a range of considerations: physical, cognitive, sensory, neurological, developmental limitations, psycho-social issues, variations in intellectual abilities, specific life encounters, and socio-economic disparities (DoE, 2001).

UNESCO (1994) states that according to the Salamanca Statement presented during the World Conference on Special Needs Education, mainstream schools that prioritise inclusivity provide the best opportunities for diminishing prejudiced perspectives, fostering inclusive communities, encouraging the development of a community that acknowledges diversity, and achieving universal learning for every learner. Moreover, since the inception of the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6), we have learnt to recognise the right of learners to be fully supported in receiving equal education. Hence, the DoE (2001) structured the EWP6 policy document intended to act as a guide to coordinate processes of implementing inclusion. The National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) which was developed by the DBE, is a supplementary policy to reinforce EWP6 (DoE, 2001). However, there is limited information regarding the actual state of affairs, including challenges that teachers encounter in executing inclusion policies to support SNE learners (Hay, 2012)

As indicated by the National Centre for Education Statistics in 2021, a combined school is in a unique position to offer school services to all learners from Grades R – 12, often catering for a learner's entire schooling career. A mainstream school provides for all learners, irrespective of any barriers they may face, with admission to age-related categories of education in their geographic area to empower them to achieve their maximum potential (Warnes et al., 2021). This chapter aimed to succinctly present aspects of inclusive education to unpack the phenomenon under

investigation – these included the rationale for the study, problem statement, research questions, aim and objectives, overview of literature and methodology, ethical considerations, and layout of chapters.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The researcher was motivated by a passion to deliver quality teaching to all learners irrespective of their circumstances. As a qualified teacher, the researcher worked in several countries, teaching diverse international learners. The challenges that teachers face are largely universal, and this study attempted to ascertain how ready and equipped teachers are to effectively provide inclusive education in mainstream classroom contexts. The researcher realised that SNE learners perform well in the foundational grades in mainstream schools, but as they progress to higher grades, the probability of failure becomes apparent. This could mean that the learners' education, progression, and performance were not tracked and supported, or that teachers' preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms was limited.

Approximately 22 years after the first policies of the EWP6 were passed (DoE, 2001), many challenges still prevail. The DoE planned to fully achieve and implement the system of inclusive education and training in 20 years, starting from 2001 and ending in 2021 (DoE, 2001:38). The year 2021 should have resulted in a fully-fledged, working system of inclusive education in South African schools. It was significant and appropriate to embark on this study to determine how prepared and ready teachers were in providing inclusive education in the Foundation to Senior Phases in mainstream classrooms such that they adequately train and develop learners for academic success and for life after the schooling years. Additionally, this study examined whether inclusive education has been successfully rolled out in the Foundation Phase, and whether its implementation has been sustainable since its inception in South African schools.

This research focused on an ordinary quintile 5 public combined school in the Pinetown District which is in a unique locality on the fringes of a rural and urban settlement which services learners from Grades R–12. The school accommodates learners from challenging environments: an orphanage, informal settlements, and a youth care rehabilitation centre. Learners who experience psychosocial challenges mainly hail from the youth care rehabilitation centre and are integrated into the mainstream school system.

The school is the researcher's scholastic alma mater, where she had personally advised, helped, and interacted with many learners from the disadvantaged community. In her schooling career, it became evident to her early on, that a need exists to help and encourage special needs learners (SNE) to cope. This inspired her to investigate whether such type of learners are being effectively catered to in the present schooling system.

The following statistics confirmed the necessity for this study: 14,6% of all SNE learners did not achieve a matric pass in 2020 (Mweli, 2020:104); more than 25% of all learners with mild intellectual disabilities did not achieve a matric pass (Mweli, 2020:140); and a startling 54% of SNE learners did not achieve admission to study for a bachelor's degree in 2020 (Mweli, 2020:140). A study of this importance sought to establish teachers' responsibilities to deliver quality education to learners during the Foundation Phase so that they are prepared to succeed in matric, for the real world, and to study at tertiary level.

While engaging with colleagues on how they prepared and/or adapted to meet the requirements of learners with special needs in the Foundation Phase, I deduced that they were not adequately prepared to deliver inclusive education effectively as they did not have the required ability, training, awareness, and attitude to assist learners with special needs.

Further, it was imperative to undertake a study of this nature to ascertain whether departmental policies were understood, and that implementation was adequately followed as per guidelines. The recruitment of approximately 23 800 teachers per annum (DBE, 2018), and those already in service in the education system, have differing and somewhat negative views, attitudes, and misunderstandings regarding the inclusive education policy in South Africa. Therefore, knowledge, skills, willingness, readiness, attitude, and aptitude of teachers in inclusive classrooms necessitates rigorous study (Hay et al., 2001).

In the absence of such a significant study, facilitating quality inclusive education for all learners may not be achievable. It was important to note how schools' mission and vision, and DoE policies were enacted upon; and if there were still deficiencies and gaps that needed to be investigated. Learners with special requirements must be afforded the same opportunities as those in the general enrolment. It is critical to study the connection that teachers have with the inclusive education system, and whether they conduct their duties with respect, understanding,

and technical know-how to ensure that learners experiencing challenges receive academic, emotional, social, and physical assistance. Accordingly, teachers must have an inherent belief that every learner can gain knowledge and skills when provided with essential support. The information gleaned from the findings of this study can offer suggestions and strategies to promote best practice in inclusive education.

The benefits of this research include:

- The emerging of new knowledge when addressing teachers' skills, efficacy, and preparedness in managing inclusivity in mainstream classrooms;
- Measuring the success or disadvantages of teaching practices that act as enhancers or barriers to inclusive education; and
- Offering a clear insight into organisational barriers preventing learners from succeeding.

In sum, the rationale for conducting this research was to determine how ready teachers are in implementing inclusive education within a Foundation Phase classroom, as well as how committed they are to promote inclusiveness as a collective. This study will benefit the education system, community, the school, teachers, and ultimately the learners as it aimed to examine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education successfully via mandated policies and guidelines.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teachers' lack of inclination to implement inclusive education in the mainstream classroom can impact the delivery of quality learning and learner academic outcomes. It was noted that the SNE learners perform well in the foundational grades in mainstream schools; however, as they progress to higher grades, their progress decreases. Therefore, the researcher aimed to investigate how prepared teachers are to execute and apply inclusive education policies in mainstream schools to develop learners to succeed in higher grades.

Makoelle and Van der Merwe (2016) confirm that the teaching-learning conducted in Foundation Phase classrooms are crucial for learners' intellectual, mental, emotional, physical, and social development. South African educational governance prioritises inclusive education to ensure that

the support for all relevant educational requirements is provided and incorporated into one educational system (Donald et al., 2010).

However, inclusive education is not always successfully implemented. Adewumi and Mosito (2019) observe that there are significant challenges that hinder the successful execution of inclusion worldwide, adding that poor support for teachers and learners, inflexible methods of teaching, parents who are not active participants in a learners' schooling career, overcrowded classrooms, assessments premised on the controversial medical deficit model, negative attitudes towards impaired learners, and the absence of Government policies affect inclusive education.

Additionally, there are various intrinsic factors that affect teacher preparedness which may include the deficit skillset of a teacher, knowledge and training, physical and psychological states, and emotional constitution. Moreover, external factors such as infrastructure, methodological implementation, and the DoE's (2001) sometimes complex and ambiguous policy guidelines with idealistic goals obstruct the processes of successfully entrenching inclusivity. Hay et al. (2001) acknowledge that implementing inclusive education is a difficult and a complex process that needs specific preparation such as ongoing teacher-training, management support in the classroom, the assistance of the school community, incentives, and the DoE's intervention at District level.

Ascertaining the quality of teacher-preparedness requires the perusal of planning instruments (e.g., lesson plans and remedial work records). Therefore, the aim of this research was to assess the level of preparedness among teachers to successfully implement inclusive education within traditional classroom environments. In summary, the problem statement speaks to how teachers' understanding, foresight, knowledge, and expertise of inclusion would promote best practice which could result in the implementation of quality learning standards (Nel et al., 2016).

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1 Main Research Question

- How prepared are teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?

1.4.2 Sub-questions

- What are teachers' perceptions about an inclusive education framework?

- How do teachers support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms?
- What impediments prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?
- What support structures and strategies are available for teachers to support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms?

1.5 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Aim

- The aim of this research was to determine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

1.5.2 Objectives

- To measure teachers' understanding about an inclusive education framework;
- To determine how teachers support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms;
- To identify impediments that prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms; and
- To recommend possible support structures and strategies that could be made available for teachers to support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms.

1.6 REVIEW OF LITERATURE: AN OVERVIEW

In evaluating the quality and progress of implementing an inclusion-based policy, teachers are key agents and essential partners to drive the inclusive education trajectory (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Since teachers are ultimately accountable for providing for all learner requirements, there is a need for classroom teachers to exude confidence and positivity in addressing and supporting learners who face obstacles to learning. Wearmouth et al. (2000) maintain that endeavours to enhance teacher-readiness and teacher-empowerment have been inadequately addressed in South African education policy documents concerning inclusive education, hence the rollout of policies in education has led to unsuccessful implementation mainly due to unsatisfactory teaching practices (Oswald & Swart, 2011).

1.6.1 The Need for Inclusive Education

The Salamanca Statement advised that inclusivity must promote the most efficient methods for diminishing discriminatory attitudes, foster the notion of inclusive communities, develop an integrated society, and provide for every learner concerned (UNESCO, 1994). This approach also results in delivering effective education to a considerable number of learners, consequently enhancing the overall competence and efficiency of the educational institution which leads to quality academic performance outcomes.

1.6.2 The South African Approach to Inclusive Education

All South African schools must be inclusive in nature and in practice, while adhering to official and internal policies. South Africa's Bill of Rights enshrines the rights of every individual, including learners with special educational requirements, in addition to rooting out all discriminatory practices (DoE, 1996). Previously, during apartheid, the fragmented and segregated education system was discriminatory (to all those who were not of European descent) in practice, and not in line with global trends (Doran et al., 2011).

1.6.3 Barriers to Learning that Learners may Experience

Visser (2002) mentions that learning barriers hinder learners from acquiring vital educational skills and knowledge; barriers manifest in either the inherent education system, schooling institution, or the learner's intrinsic self. Mestry, Moloï and Mohamed (2007) state that the key concern in South African schools include emotional and behavioural barriers which require urgent addressing as it negatively impacts learners' schooling in mainstream schools.

1.6.4 Preparedness of Teachers

The DoE (2001) via the EWP6 posits that each teacher has the expertise, competence, and abilities to recognise learning challenges. Regarding the segregation of special needs learners, teachers will need to urgently reassess their thinking and attitude. There is an expectation set for teachers to collaborate with other teachers and stakeholders to effectively support and empower learners in the classroom (DoE, 2001).

1.6.5 Impediments to Implementing Inclusive Education in Mainstream Classrooms

Daane, Beirne-Smith and Latham (2000) attest that teachers' unpreparedness or reluctance in practising inclusion is primarily due to inadequate teacher-training as they may not always possess the necessary skills, competence, ability, understanding, expertise, and familiarisation with the inclusive education system and practices (Hay et al., 2001).

1.6.6 Policy Guiding the Implementation of Inclusive Education

The SIAS which is an additional policy to support the efforts of EWP6, was designed to address the various issues encountered in the initial trial of the 2008 National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support policy (DoE, 2008; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). During its 2008 draft phase, teachers were not completely familiar with their roles and duties, primarily because of the absence of appropriate ongoing training.

1.6.7 School Support Structures

The SBST is a support structure at school consisting of teachers and school governing body (SGB) representatives, whose primary purpose is to offer joint assistance for learners, teachers, and the school (DBE, 2014).

1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: AN OVERVIEW

This study was underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological system theory which is a meta-approach that defines and explains the characteristics of the general systems theory and the ecological theory (Donald et al., 2010). The ecological theories, as evident in social settings, include individuals who are part of microsystems that include the greater mesosystem, which is rooted in the macrosystem and ecosystem (Donald et al., 2010).

The influence of institutional learning challenges can be interpreted and understood by examining Bronfenbrenner's (1977) four levels of systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The study aimed to understand the interconnectedness, relationship, communication, and functioning of inclusive education at a South African school to determine whether these factors advantages or disadvantages learning for learners with barriers.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

This research focused on a single qualitative case study in the interpretive paradigm to dissect the social phenomenon of teacher-preparedness in the context of a Foundation Phase inclusive classroom from the perspective of the teachers, instead of the researcher. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) maintain that after gathering the data, the researcher should analyse patterns and themes, and subsequently search datasets for words, statements, and events to understand the teachers' lived-experiences concerning the phenomenon under study to generate new knowledge.

1.8.1 Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in an interpretive framework. A research paradigm consists of a collection of principles, notions, or concepts that guide decisions and methodologies during the course of a research investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It serves as an essential framework to structure our observations and logical thinking on the selected topic or issue for interrogation. Therefore, the researcher selected a qualitative interpretative approach to comprehend the encounters of teachers in identifying, managing, and addressing barriers to inclusive learning (Babbie, 2015). An interpretive paradigm was found to be appropriate by the researcher to acquire knowledge and awareness regarding the support learners need to transcend barriers to learning. In engaging with participants, this chosen paradigm envisages eliciting teachers' own views on how they support, and what form of support they provide to inclusive learners who encounter challenges.

Research paradigms with a research-process-framework can be categorised according to their ontological, epistemological, and methodological domains (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014) which should be considered when adopting a research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

1.8.1.1 Ontology

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe ontology as the researcher's perspective on reality. Lincoln (2011) adds that ontology determines the structure and essence of reality; and consequently, what can be understood regarding it.

1.8.1.2 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to how the researcher comprehends or perceives reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Epistemology is the essence of understanding the process of acquiring knowledge, and its dissemination to others (Cohen., 2018).

1.8.1.3 Axiology

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe axiology as the value-position of the inquirer which concerns itself with the significance of ethics and principles in the research process; the researcher identifies that research requires inherent values to acknowledge the presence of biases in connection to the researcher's position within the study's context.

1.8.1.4 Methodology

Methodology is the method used in the research study to guide how researchers go about acquiring understanding about the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that post-positivist assumptions characterise research in its traditional form. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) observe that the ontology of the post-positivism paradigm is related to objective reality which embraces the idea that there can be other perspectives of this veracity.

1.8.2 Research Approach

Utilising a qualitative research approach assists in gaining rich insight, deeper knowledge, and authentic information from teachers' experiences regarding learners with learning barriers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

1.8.3 Research Design

This research selected a single case study design that centred on teachers' lived experiences at a combined school regarding learners' barriers in inclusive education. This case study offered the opportunity of engaging with relevant participants in their real-life contexts (Cohen et al., 2018).

1.9 SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was utilised for this study. Johnson and Christensen (2019) state that a sample can be explained as a collection of representative subjects extracted from a broader group of individuals from whom the researcher can collect data. The target population comprised of 9 participants, (4 Foundation Phase teachers and 5 SMT members) from a combined school representing the teaching and learning fraternity. The researcher selected teachers from the Foundation Phase because it provides foundational knowledge and skills to learners to progress to subsequent school phases. Also, the researcher chose the SMT members because each represents a different phase in the combined school who will provide thick descriptions when answering

research questions. Additionally, the method that the researcher chose to select the participants included purposive sampling for convenience as they satisfied the criteria of relevancy, size, time, proximity, and costs. The target sample focused on the Foundation Phase with 4 participants (each from Grades R, 1, 2, and 3) who participated in responding to the questionnaires. As part of the interview process, 5 SMT participants were chosen from the combined school: the principal, deputy principal, and the HODs from each phase.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher utilised three distinct methods for gathering data: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and analysis of documents. In a case study, data collection can consist of using many instruments such as interviews, questionnaires, reflections, documents, and relics which reinforce triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

1.10.1 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher opted for a data collection strategy involving semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix F) contained open-ended questions, enabling a degree of flexibility during the process of inquiry (Greef, 2011). An interview constitutes a method for collecting data which entails communicating with individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using a written medium as participants were more comfortable to respond to the questions in writing. Also, participants requested a written interview due to COVID-19 restrictions which made them feel more secure. The researcher conducted interviews with each of the 5 SMT members.

1.10.2 Questionnaire

The researcher also selected the questionnaire method for data collection using Google forms as an online platform. Data was collected individually from each Foundation Phase teacher in each Foundation Phase grade by using an online questionnaire. A Google form link was sent to each participant to access the online questionnaire at their own convenience, but within a specified deadline. In a qualitative research study, a researcher may design an instrument like a survey containing questions that are open-ended in nature. A consistent series of inquiries devised to collect information from participants is referred to as a questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1.10.3 Document Analysis

The researcher analysed various policy documents for the purpose of triangulation. The document analysis process comprised of inclusive education policies: EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and SIAS (DBE, 2014). The researcher examined the policy documents with specific reference to subjects like English, Mathematics, and Life Skills, in addition to the Grade 3 lesson plans. The school administration was requested for these documents, while further records were accessed from the DBE portal. Pursuant to this, a thorough analysis and interpretation of these records were conducted. The researcher perused all forms of communication that had been penned so that a holistic perspective of the case study could be gleaned (Maree, 2016).

1.11 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Creswell (2013) states that confirmability, transferability, credibility, and dependability are the four pillars that define trustworthiness:

1.11.1 Trustworthiness

The study's reliability was established by evaluating the research's credibility in line with the defined research objectives and research questions. In order to establish the trustworthiness of the researcher's findings, the approaches for collecting data were triangulated. The methods included interviews, document analysis, and the use of questionnaires. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) maintain that trustworthiness in qualitative research is improved by the in-depth narratives or detailed portrayals of the data that are genuine and illuminate participants' experiences.

1.11.2 Conformability

To ensure conformability, the researcher aligned all data collection and analytical processes to emerge with authentic findings so that the reader is able to validate and verify the appropriateness of the research, free of bias and subjectivity (Vogt et al., 2012).

1.11.3 Credibility

During the interview and online questionnaire processes, the researcher ensured rigour and trustworthiness when engaging with the participants. Various approaches to gathering data were

corroborated to render the findings credible. Anney (2014) states that the objective of credibility is to determine how rigour in research can be achieved, and how internal consistency is maintained.

1.11.4 Transferability

Transferability is described as the foundation on which similarity judgements are made, the degree to which findings are appropriate to related situations outside the study, and the extent to which the study is found to be meaningful (Wagner et al., 2012).

1.11.5 Dependability

The researcher depended on the audit results of the data, methods, and decisions that emerged during the research investigation, as well as the verbatim accounts of each individual's perspectives. Dependability is consistency of facts - a measure acquired by attesting to the accuracy of interpreting information from various data sources (triangulation) and reconstructing events and processes leading to the elicitation of conclusions from the study.

1.11.6 Reliability and Validity

The researcher must safeguard the credibility of the qualitative research as being dependable. To demonstrate this, the researcher ensured validity and reliability by collecting data utilising a range of instruments such as semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The validity and reliability elements are crucial in a qualitative framework as they promote authenticity of the study (Cohen et al., 2018).

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethical considerations are critical to any scholarly study. This study ensured the wellbeing and privacy of all participants in all research processes. Creswell (2014) emphasises that it is important to seek prior consent for the collaboration of individuals involved in the research. The researcher applied for (and obtained) ethical approval from the University where the study was registered. Ethical clearance was obtained from the DoE to conduct interviews at the school. The school principal was also notified of the study, and permission was obtained from him to engage teachers and SMT members in the data collection processes, in addition to accessing school documents for analysis. Participants were notified about all fine procedures involved in this

research including the aim, objectives, and ethical considerations for the research process. Consent was obtained in writing (signed) to voluntarily participate in the research. Participants were also informed of their right to exit participating in the study at any stage without being disadvantaged in any way. Research participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality concerning their identities and provision of information via assigning them pseudonyms or codes.

1.13 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

Dimitrios and Antigoni (2019) define limitations as specific weaknesses inherent in a study that are beyond the researcher's control. These are mainly associated with the selected research design, constraints imposed by statistical models, funding, proximity, and time factors. Delimitations, on the other hand, pertain to limitations intentionally planned by the researcher. They are restricted to the boundaries the researcher established to guarantee that the study's aims and objectives remain attainable (Dimitrios & Antigoni, 2019).

This research was restricted to a single combined school, and the findings were confined to the information and experiences within this research site. Initially the researcher envisioned involving 21 participants but owing to the unanticipated COVID-19 pandemic, only 9 participants responded. Further, the school accommodates learners from challenging environments such as an orphanage, as well as a youth care and rehabilitation centre. Also, the learner-population is approximately 900, mostly from diverse backgrounds.

Creating, developing, and conducting a case study is lengthy in nature and involves much time and resources. In other words, a case study that is detailed, time-consuming, intricate, and arduous may be challenging for policymakers to peruse, synthesise, and apply their sense-making to eradicate present issues evident in inclusive education (Patton, 2014).

It can be also challenging to ascertain meaning within a case study design. This is exacerbated by opportunities for exaggerating the generalised findings, while researcher-bias may affect the authenticity of the study. Bell (2005) confirms that to evaluate and authenticate a case study depends on whether the processes of the research are satisfactory, sincere, and suitable such that if a teacher who has the same working circumstances reads the case study, he/she must be able to relate to the decision-making and wisdom demonstrated and tabled in the case study. The case study's reliability is significantly more paramount than its generalisability. The researcher thus

endeavoured to circumvent the limitations of researcher-bias and exaggerated generalisability by pursuing the case study based on valid, authentic, and believable principles (Bell, 2005).

Lastly, the sample population was limited as the availability and time-constraints of some selected participants prevented them from engaging in the interview. Thus, the researcher scheduled the interview according to the availability of the SMT members which may have proven to be limiting in itself.

1.14 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

- **Barriers to learning** are challenges found in learning sites, the education system, and in inherent and intrinsic learner characteristics which may hamper access to learning and growth of learners (DBE, 2010). The researcher intended to develop an understanding and awareness of teacher-preparedness and the support learners need in overcoming impediments to learning.
- **Inclusive education** is characterised as a procedure that caters to the varying requirements of every learner by minimising obstacles both within and surrounding the educational setting. It involves an instructional strategy that acknowledges and values the distinctions between learners, while capitalising on their shared traits. This approach encompasses the transformation of attitudes, teaching techniques, curricula, and the learning setting to effectively support every learner (DBE, 2010).
- **Learner with special education needs:** This pertains to a learner who has been recognised through a process of screening, identification, and assessment as needing extra assistance that necessitates suitable adjustments and specialised interventions (DBE, 2010).
- **Teacher:** The teacher is an individual who assists learners in gaining comprehension, abilities, and proficiencies. The teachers' primary role is to be responsible for the learning progress of a learner. The teacher needs to be suitably qualified and hold at the very least a qualification level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as outlined in the National Education Policy Act, No. 27 of 1996.

1.15 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction outlined the research study which included the background to the problem, the rationale, statement of the problem, research methodology, key concepts, aims and objectives, research questions, and the chapter layout.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review chapter presented the dissection and discussion of current concerns regarding teachers' service-delivery skills, readiness, and the challenges that they are confronted with in mainstream classrooms. It established the theoretical groundwork by describing existing literature on inclusion concerning readiness, entry, obstacles to learning, and engagement in educational establishments.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The methods the researcher selected and applied to garner data for the research were explained. This included the selection of the research design, methods, paradigm, instruments, context of the study, sampling, and research approach. Research ethics, credibility, and how trustworthiness was achieved were also outlined.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Analysis

The results from utilising the research tools were assessed, tabulated, interpreted, and categorised into themes and sub-themes, and then compared to similar research studies and theories.

Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The recommendations offered strategies to circumvent challenges in inclusive education, while the conclusions drawn generated theories and suggestions for further investigation to widening the research field to unearth better and sustainable solutions regarding inclusive education challenges issues.

1.16 CONCLUSION

A successful and high-performing inclusion class is characterised by thoroughly prepared teachers who are qualified, equipped, organised, positive, committed, and passionate to deliver inclusion education in mainstream schools that have been mandated to admit and teach inclusive learners.

Donohue and Bornman (2014) state that before the model of disability was fully recognised, teachers were given training in special education or general education. The 22nd anniversary of the DoE (2001) saw the introduction of (the objective of this research) investigating teachers' preparedness regarding the implementation of inclusion in classrooms, in line with the understanding of relevant inclusion educational policies. In order to determine how prepared teachers were to address and manage inclusivity, exploratory qualitative research methods were utilised to conduct this research. As such, the researcher integrated inclusion issues in line with the aim and objectives of the investigation. Additionally, the study provided an overview into the research approach that was employed to examine teacher-preparedness for implementing inclusive education within regular classrooms. Regarding data collection, the instruments that were utilised included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. The construction, distribution, collection, organisation, and analysis of data from the interviews and questionnaires were explained. Validity, reliability, and ethical considerations were tabled. Thematic analysis was conducted by the researcher to analyse the responses from the questionnaires and interviews. All data was protected by utilising security measures in line with the POPI Act. The next chapter (2) dealt with the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one introduced the background and outlined key aspects of the study. This chapter (2) detailed the body of literature concerning the topic under investigation. This study aimed to establish teacher-preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in a selected combined school in South Africa. The literature review provided a comprehensive understanding of the issues regarding the provision of Foundation Phase teacher-education, teaching skills, preparation for inclusive teaching, and the difficulties teachers encounter in mainstream school contexts. The literature review also presented discourse from available literature regarding teacher-preparedness in the Foundation Phase, and how learners with impairments and disabilities were managed and supported at schools.

2.1.1 Conceptualising an Inclusive Education Framework

Walton (2018) describes inclusive education as an approach that focuses primarily on rights to education, with the aim of seeking social justice by challenging institutions on exclusion issues within and outside the school communities, as well as imperatives such as encouraging access, input, and success for all concerned. At the 1994 Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs in Education in Spain under the auspices of UNESCO, unanimity emerged that encouraged promoting the notion of inclusion. The Conference encouraged schools across the world to permit access to every learner, particularly individuals in need of specific or special education.

In a classroom that promotes inclusivity, the responsibility is that of the teacher to drive quality and value. Teachers' positive outlook and astute execution in implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms ultimately determine successful learner-performance, while overcoming learning barriers by implementing remedial intervention strategies. According to Swart and Pettipher (2016), teachers have a crucial and indispensable duty as key stakeholders in evaluating effectiveness to implement an inclusion-based approach. However, there is concern about

classroom teachers' confidence and optimism while working with learners who have learning difficulties as the responsibility and accountability for supporting all learners' rests primarily with the teacher. While the rollout of policies in inclusive education has been somewhat unsuccessful due to the lack of understanding, convolutedness, language barriers, inconsistency and ambiguity, unsatisfactory teaching practices are continuing unabated (Oswald & Swart, 2011). In support, Wearmouth et al. (2000) agree that policy documentation on inclusion education in South African schools has hindered initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher-preparedness and empowerment. Hence, the urgency and responsibility rest with mainstream school communities to develop teachers to become adept at administering, implementing, remediating, and overcoming challenges to enhance inclusive education to attain standards comparable to best practice.

2.2 NEED FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Internationally, high-quality inclusive teaching remains elusive (but a necessity) in mainstream school environments. Adherence to the principles of best practice eliminates impediments to learning for every learner, decreases school dropout rates, enhances the upward mobility between levels in education, and addresses discrimination (Liliane Foundation, 2017). Thus, the need for effective inclusion is top priority. Globally, there is unanimity regarding inclusion in mainstream schools, but quality should be paramount. It is encouraging that there is an attempt to reduce learning barriers that learners are faced with by assisting them not to fall by the wayside.

Ainscow (2000) observes that there can be no one particular belief about inclusive education in a school, district or country; and that diverse beliefs on inclusion are widespread. Given this situation, it becomes more than essential for mainstream schools to maintain a high standard of inclusion, as this is critical in empowering learners to overcome enduring obstacles and make progress in their education.

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) advocates for inclusive-oriented mainstream schools to adopt a successful and effective approach in eradicating attitudes that are biased to create and enhance inclusive societies and communities to become more productive via improved service-delivery, manageable costs, and quality-based schooling.

The United Nations (UN) held meetings deliberating on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Rights of the Child (CRC) which encouraged countries that have

enshrined the principle of equity regarding learners' access to quality education, to promote learners with special needs to not be deprived of a fair opportunity. In other words, the necessity for inclusive education implementation warrants that schools provide significant learning opportunities in an ordinary school environment. Globally, inclusive education allows learners who have impairments or experience challenges, to access to the same school and the same courses, with the assistance of learning-support structures (Liliane Foundation, 2017).

UNESCO (2021), through the CRPD, acknowledges the critical role of inclusion in classrooms which should provide all learners with equal and quality education. Further, UNESCO (2021) refers to the Cali Pledge for Fairness and Integration in Education Conference, where inclusion was entrenched as a transitional trajectory to guarantee complete involvement and entry to first-rate educational opportunities for every learner while appreciating and recognising diversity and eradicating any kind of prejudice within the realm of education.

Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) highlight that inclusive education is viewed internationally as demonstrating ideals and ideas that lessen the manner in which scholastic institutions perpetuate and disperse social injustices impacting marginalised and disregarded categories of learners. This encompasses a wide spectrum of capabilities, characteristics, and progressive pathways, inclusive of social and economic settings. Internationally, inclusive education is recognised as embracing attitudes and ideas that reduce inequities in educational settings, and support learners who are segregated in mainstream classrooms.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), globally there are in excess of a billion individuals who experience challenges or impairments. It has, however, had a severe influence on the socioeconomic position of millions of families worldwide, with 'educational success' being the most affected. This is mostly due to the lack of facilities (infrastructure) and the numerous obstacles they confront in their daily lives. Learners with disabilities experience various barriers including stigmatisation and discrimination when accessing education, in addition to health and recreational services (WHO, 2011). UNESCO (2010) asserts that learners who have disabilities account for a third of the disadvantaged learner-population globally. Internationally, the scholastic performance of impaired learners in mainstream classroom environments has decreased and seems to have unfavourably impacted such learners, hence, learners with impairments are less inclined than their peers without impairments to enrol in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2010).

Additionally, they contribute to a decreased proportion of school learner retention rates, promotion, and opportunities to access tertiary learning (WHO, 2011). The need for inclusion in schools is dependent on and has a symbiotic association with the development of a learner.

Moreover, disability and success in education are directly connected to the rate of development of learners. Mitra et al. (2011) assert that learners with impairments from lower socioeconomic communities have experienced more school exclusion than learners from wealthy ones. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) call for equitable opportunities and inclusive involvement in education, learners with impairments still struggle to attain their desired academic goals (UNESCO, 2010).

Although the widely approved international agreement on fundamental rights, principles, and protections enshrined in the Treaty on Children's Rights [CRC] (1990) emphasises the requirement for governments to guarantee that learners with disabilities are provided for appropriately to boost their scholastic endeavours, this is largely not the case (Myers & Bagree, 2011). The CRC (1990) emphasised the significance of making inclusive education accessible, such that governments are obliged to cater to learners with impairments and varying challenges. Teacher experience in other countries demonstrate that they are all-inclusive and that they play key roles in the learning structure. Teachers need to be cognisant of inclusive best practice to contribute to designing an innovative inclusion policy that delivers value to learners irrespective of learners' capabilities and challenges, thus ensuring that inclusive education is successfully implemented (DoE, 2002b). Globally, it was observed from past occurrences in other countries, that teachers play an integral and an all-inclusive role in the education system; hence, it is possible for teachers to successfully implement inclusion to promote value and quality for learners experiencing difficulties in learning.

The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion [NCERI] (1995) claim that schools in the US cater to disabilities and are equipped to navigate education in a fair and supportive manner such as the provision of supplementary learning aids, and classrooms that cater to learners of similar ages. These measures ensure the successful preparation to ensure that learners become productive members of society.

Pottas (2005) states that research conducted on professional views toward ordinary schooling and inclusive education, revealed that countless teachers throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia, support the concept of inclusion, but anticipate difficulties in implementing it. In

Australia, research findings demonstrated that inclusive education can be beneficial to all inclusive learners, including those with disabilities and those who are vulnerable (Aniftos & McLuskie, 2003). Subban and Sharma (2006) explored the perspectives of teachers in regular schools by referring to inclusion in Victoria, Australia, which revealed that whilst teachers emerged as accepting progressive inclusion programmes, apprehensions persist regarding the integration of inclusion within regular classrooms. In addition, teaching experience was understood as being an influencing variable of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Subban & Sharma, 2006).

A compelling need exists for effective inclusive education implementation, not just in the Western countries, but also in Africa. Botswana is noted for having a clear shift regarding the education model derived from a 1977 Botswana Government policy known as the Botswana Scholastic Structure which is based on the premise of *Kagisano* (societal harmony) a model which shares admiration and an all-encompassing vision of education, irrespective of the divergence of individuals (Dart, 2007).

According to a perspective from South Africa, inclusive teaching continues to be elusive to teachers who are uncertain of what requirements comprise an inclusive pedagogy (Makoelle, 2012). Makoelle (2012) who established an ongoing relationship between describing inclusive education and teaching in inclusion, based his research on the status of inclusive teaching methods in South Africa by investigating the aspects of inclusion and specialised approaches to education before 1994. To engender a change from the special needs approach, a better description of inclusion should be devised. Makoelle (2012) elaborates that a well-defined inclusive concept must distinctly describe the agenda to offer and drive value in the learning for every learner, irrespective of their descriptions or circumstances.

Engelbrecht (1999) observed that the long road towards empowering learners with special needs has somewhat progressed through mainstreaming and integration phases. Learners with inclusive needs in North America were mainstreamed and placed in regular class environments. It was widely assumed that they would adjust to the needs of the class with the help of an assistant or a normal teacher. However, Engelbrecht (1999) notes that the mainstream approach was an abject failure as learners were not managed well, in addition to not having the required support of the teachers, nor other learners. The integration process was organised for all learners in a way that it did not change how the curriculum was presented. Different tasks should have been developed for

modification for a particular learner or a group of learners with support being provided where necessary (Engelbrecht, 1999). According to Engelbrecht et al. (2004), integration is repackaged as inclusion as it generally socialising in nature, as well as being educational.

Ahmad (2015) postulates that inclusive education provides for the retrieval of information, being cognisant of diversity, and having mainstream educational curricula that are adaptable and inclusive of learning materials. Inclusive education, when integrated with essential support services, can assist learners who experience learning challenges such that they can learn at a similar level with their peers who don't experience learning difficulties in the classroom (Ahmad, 2015). This guarantees equal and just access to quality education for all learners.

Additionally, Walton et al. (2014) mention that the voice of the teacher and the viewpoints of the people on the inside are fundamental in understanding how learning within an inclusive environment progresses. Evidently, South African teachers lack the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare classroom activities for inclusive education. The absence of skilled teachers in South Africa can be apportioned to the policy of apartheid which advocated for only white teachers to be trained for special needs education pre-1994. This system's effects cascaded into post-1994 with a significant number of teachers remaining untrained, unqualified, or lacking the qualifications and skills necessary to administer inclusion (Walton et al., 2014).

Akinsola and Chireshe (2016) purport that impaired learners who are part of ordinary classrooms can gain fundamental understandings in a normal environment that is inspiring and supported by fundamental communication and movement skills through engagement with peers who are not impaired. This may lead to greater recognition and respect for diversity. This reinforces the notion that teachers should consider implementing inclusion policies effectively in their unique classroom contexts as a strategy to drive inclusive education towards successful outcomes.

Materechera (2014) states that essentially inclusion requires learners to learn collaboratively regardless of any obstacles or inequalities they might encounter, as the provision of appropriate assistance and resources will increase their capabilities and meet their requirements. In sum, the appropriate approach, together with a positive attitude to effect inclusive education, is paramount.

2.3 SOUTH AFRICAN APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The World Education Forum [WEF] (2000) stipulates that inclusion is founded on the principle that access to education is a basic entitlement of every individual. At the World Conference on Education (Thailand, in 1990), the Jomtien Declaration highlighted that the aims and objectives of education for all needed an urgent rejuvenation by amplifying the horizons and awareness of inclusion that are so necessary in mainstream schools (WEF, 2000). Moreover, UNESCO (2002) affirms that the principle of schooling for all involves not only keeping schools available and reachable, but also to be vigilant in recognising barriers that certain groups face in the quest for obtaining equal educational opportunities.

Miles' (1997) historical perspective explains that at the outset, countries in West drove inclusive education and advocated for its integration into mainstream classes. This was followed by countries in the East. Missionaries were the earliest to recognise the need for teaching learners with impairments. Thus ensued the establishment of diverse schools catering for learners with impairments. Engelbrecht et al., (2015) state that inclusion developed to assist learners who have impairments and disabilities, whether psychologically, cognitively, emotionally, or socially - all within the confines of an ordinary school in a mainstream class.

The year 1990 witnessed the World Conference on Education for All which denounced present methods of evaluation worldwide, due to the fact that several learners were excluded from accessing education institutions which were prejudiced towards learners' special needs (Anderson & Boyle, 2015). Anderson and Boyle (2015) elaborate that among the resolutions at the conference, it was recommended that assessments and teaching strategies should be adapted and customised in a way that fosters the achievement of outcomes for each learner in a mainstream classroom, despite their challenges. In support, the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 Salamanca (Spain), validated the view that learners irrespective of their limitations or impairments, should obtain their education solely in an inclusive mainstream classroom (UNESCO, 1994). Accordingly, Doran et al. (2011) contend that all South African schools must be inclusive and accommodating in their rules and procedures of admitting and servicing special needs learners. In this regard, South Africa's Bill of Rights safeguards individual rights, inclusive of special education learners, against all forms of discrimination (DoE, 1996). To eradicate the vestiges of apartheid, the previously fragmented and segregated education system was brought on par with

international trends, though it takes time to right the wrongs of apartheid - especially in education. Also, global trends highlighted inclusive special education learners' varying requirements in regular mainstream classrooms (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013) which acknowledge the need for superior value, an equitable education system for each learner, and a belief that regular schooling should support every learner (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

Additionally, Naicker (2008) states that South African schools need to strike a balance between inclusion and concurrently inculcating an ethos of teaching, thus ensuring the application of value-driven learning. Donohue and Bornman (2014) expose the calamitous attempts at inclusion in South Africa, including being critical of the ambiguities in the EWP6 policy which precipitated situations of disconnect between the theoretical and practical execution of inclusion. Evidently, the policy lacks clarity, while interpreting and determining the inclusion goals proved to be difficult (Mahlo, 2013).

At the outset, when the medical model of disability was applied, it was used to direct 'special education' processes as it was previously termed (Kafle, 2014). This model positioned disability myopically as a pathological case; hence, the medical model's position encouraged segregating learners with impairments and disabilities from other learners. Alarming, the disability model, which was based on medical perspectives, was inequitable and biased in nature. This unfair and prejudicial notion of disability in the medical model, led academics during the 1960s to recommend firm principles that would underpin inclusive education to promote the interests of impaired and disabled learners to be in the same environment, school, and classroom as other learners, but with necessary support to enable them to successfully achieve all learning outcomes. The strategy used to drive the new approach to accommodate impaired and disabled learners was termed *inclusion* (Kurth et al., 2018). UNESCO (2016) states that teachers who are involved in administering inclusive education in their class settings develop in time novel competencies in engaging all learners.

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act 108 of 1996, Section 29 of the Bill of Rights articulates the universal entitlement to fundamental education for every person. Similarly, Section 9 of the Bill of Rights prohibits discrimination on any basis, including disability (RSA, 1996). The *Constitution* in this context serves to protect learners with impairments and disabilities.

The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) established the foundational guidelines for promoting inclusivity (DoE, 2001) by emphasising the significance of focusing on the distinct requirements of learners encountering difficulties. The following guidelines promoted the values and processes of inclusive education (EWP6):

- Every learner must receive the required educational assistance.
- Teachers must acknowledge and embrace varied learning requirements of learners.
- The emphasis should be on the importance of providing support for learners encountering difficulties.

In elaboration, and as detailed in the Electronic EWP6 (DoE, 2001), inclusive education is described as follows:

- Recognising and embracing diversity in learners, independent of age, sex, cultural background, language, class, handicap, and HIV, or other transmissible diseases;
- Recognising all learners: younger learners and adolescents are capable of learning and may need timely support; and
- Allowing education structures, learning practices, and systemic operations to satisfy all learners' requirements.

Since South Africa's education system is undergoing a transformation, and is developing policies periodically to ensure South African schools provide a conducive and thriving inclusive environment for learners, there have been advances within legal frameworks and governing principles that have resulted in initiatives to foster inclusion such as the following policies and guidelines:

- White Paper on Education and Training (1995)
- South African Schools Act (1996)
- Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997)
- Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001)
- Conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education: District support teams (2005a).
- Curriculum adaptation guidelines of the revised national curriculum statement (2005b).

- National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (2008).
- Guidelines for full-service/inclusive schools (2009)

(From: Legislation and policies promulgating inclusive education (DoE, 2001; DoE, 2008; DBE, 2010; DBE, 2014; DoE, 2015)

Section 12.4 of the South African Schools Act (1996) introduced the notion of inclusion by advocating for the education of learners with special needs alongside their peers in the same class, with appropriate support. Following this, the Electronic White Paper [EWP6] (DoE, 2001) extended the concept of inclusive education, presenting it as a comprehensive plan to enhance all aspects of a learner's life.

The Preliminary Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes (DoE, 2005) highlight the importance of the DBE's commitment in implementing inclusive education by proposing that learners encountering obstacles in learning, particularly those linked to disabilities, should be integrated into regular school environments. This approach enables teachers and other professionals to assess the required support structure to aid learners. According to Brand et al. (2012), implementing an effective policy for inclusive education is imperative in addressing educational difficulties within South Africa. However, the successful execution of such a policy will likely be hindered by teachers' insufficient skills and understanding in adapting to a curriculum that caters for diverse learning abilities.

Learners confronted with hurdles while engaging in classroom activities must be assisted through age-appropriate remedial education programmes. Moreover, they must be accommodated even though their curricular needs may differ from other learners in the classroom. In this regard, the South African Federal Council on Disability (SAFCD) has strongly advocated a unified inclusive schooling system throughout the country (SAFCD, 1995).

The SAFCD (1995) confirms that SNE learners with barriers to learning must be accommodated in a unified education system that embraces inclusivity for learners at all levels including access to all human rights, recognition of diverse learning styles and rates of learning, and respect for language needs. For example, hearing-impaired learners must be accommodated through sign

language, which is their lingua franca. Further, the SAFCD (1995) recommends that the system should ensure education that has quality standards for all, with the relevant curricular content, structural arrangements, access to equal education, technical assistance, and partnership with their communities. This approach necessitates teachers to encourage and accommodate the varying learning styles of every learner, in addition to being sensitive, adaptable, receptive, and versatile enough to deal with diverse learners even though the objectives of the curriculum may be different to what they are used to teaching (SAFCD, 1995).

2.4 BARRIERS TO LEARNERS' LEARNING

Learners with impairments have pre-existing challenges which frequently prohibit them from being integrated into traditional institutions (Clark, 2007). The DoE (2005) explains that the concept of learning difficulties transcends all cultural, inherent, and internal issues - examples include impairments dealing neurologically and autistic spectrum disorders which can be caused by the learner, the school system, or the learning environment.

Learning impediments are problems that arise inside the schooling system as an entirety, the settings, and/or the learner which prohibits the successful development of learning regarding learners in mainstream classrooms (DBE, 2010). Learning impairment is not considered a mental condition with a specific set of indicators and signs; it is a concept used to describe a group of learners who require social and special educational assistance to adapt in order to successfully execute daily routines in a classroom setting (DBE, 2014). Additionally, George and George (2016) mention that teachers are frequently assisting learners who encounter various types of learning difficulties which emanate from a host of intrinsic and/or extrinsic barriers. The DBE (2010) notes that the learning process becomes inefficient for learners as a result of the negative effects of these complexities.

The definition of a *barrier* refers to an aspect(s) which prevents inclusion for certain learners, while other learners experienced barriers when they were 'isolated' in mainstream classrooms (Kurth et al., 2018). Zwane and Malale (2018) observed that teachers are seldom the recipients of sufficient guidance, and neither are they provided with the necessary support to fruitfully evaluate and assist learners with impairments or disabilities.

In addition, teachers must, as far as possible recognise beforehand, impairments in order to help learners who may encounter challenges in mainstream classes (DBE, 2014). According to the DoE (2014), to ascertain the stage and kind of assistance needed by learners, the nature of the impediments must be clearly understood by the teachers. The broader education systems have shortcomings in assisting and providing for learners with challenges to learning; hence, further possible challenges in inclusive contexts must be explored, otherwise if they are encountered on a regular basis, it may affect and disrupt learning.

The DBE (2010) states that learners are impacted by the curriculum; in particular, the instruction medium and the relevance of subject matter. Motitswe (2012) notes that the inflexibility of delivering the curriculum affects learners' styles of learning in an inclusive setting.

2.4.1 Barriers Learners Encounter in the Foundation Phase

Learning barriers impede learners from successfully attaining their educational goals. Barriers may be inherent in the education system, the institution, or in learners' intrinsic frailties (Visser, 2002). The key concern in South African schools include emotional and behavioural barriers which require urgent intervention as it negatively impacts learners' performance in mainstream schools (Mestry et al., 2007).

Additionally, social, economic, and political challenges hinder the development of learners, both emotionally and physically (Baxen & Breidlid, 2004). In context, learning barriers within mainstream classrooms refer to learners experiencing mild to moderate intellectual challenges, including spelling, reading, numeracy, and physical and psychosocial challenges (DBE, 2010). Moreover, Miller (2004) states that learners at youth care rehabilitation centres include those who have been displaced and living in conditions that could result in considerable damage to their mental, physical, and social wellbeing. Regarding the role of the teacher, aside from pressure in inclusive spaces, the accountability factor gave rise to teacher-opposition, misunderstandings, and attitudes that were not supportive of educating learners with impairments (Hines, 2011).

The EWP6 mentions that a range of learning difficulties emanates from a number of causes like physical, cognitive, sensory, neurological, developmental, psychosocial and cognitive challenges which should be managed via a broad spectrum of intervention strategies (DoE, 2001). Since mainstream schools accommodate learners who experience mild to moderate learning challenges,

their special needs and requirements must be supported; hence, teachers should be ready to manage a wide range of learners' difficulties.

2.4.2 Learning Barriers as Categorised by the DoE (2001)

In the list below, learning barriers are categorised as outlined by the EWP (DoE, 2001):

- Multiply Disabled
- Deafness
- Hard of Hearing
- Blindness
- Partially Sighted
- Deaf/Blind
- Cerebral Palsy
- Specific Learning Disability
- Behavioural Disorder
- Mild or Moderate Intellectual Disability
- Severe Intellectual Disability
- Physical Disability
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders
- Epilepsy
- Attention Deficit Disorder with/without Hyperactivity

2.5 PREPAREDNESS OF TEACHERS

Across the globe, primary school teachers experience various difficulties in implementing inclusion. Educating teachers for inclusion classes, as a part of their formal learning processes, must be regularised so that teachers can successfully cope with learners who face difficulties in learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

Theoretically, there is a wide-range of support mechanisms for inclusion; however, there remains apprehension over the implementation of policy due to teacher's unpreparedness and lack of support for inclusion in the classroom. While there is expansive philosophical assistance for inclusive education, there is considerable anxiety that the policy will be difficult to execute in the Foundation Phase because teachers are not effectively trained or assisted to operate in inclusive classrooms as this necessitates assuming accountability for promoting sound schooling habits such that learners acquire knowledge and skills in an integrated inclusive environment (Mahlo, 2011). The Foundation Phase is the grounding for a learner's success right into the Senior Phase, and for the real-world of work. It is during this critical stage of a learner's development that promoting quality education through reading, writing, numeracy (mathematics), use of motor skills, mastery of emotive skills, and intellectual abilities is paramount. Teachers are therefore seen as agents

instrumental in laying the foundation for learners in mainstream classrooms in preparation for success in higher grades.

The DoE (1997) indicates that Foundation Phase learners' range from 6 to 9 years of age and are enrolled from Grades R to 3. The Foundation Phase lasts for four years, beginning with focusing on critical educational knowledge and competencies such as numeracy, literacy, and life skills. The belief is that a learner matures holistically throughout this period – the learner benefits from gaining coordination abilities, as a psychosocial being to manage his/her emotions, and as a rational individual to comprehend the surroundings (Davis, 1994). It is during this crucial stage that the basics of learning is successfully embedded such that developing curiosity in learning and adopting positive values regarding schooling becomes a reality.

According to Joshua (2006), if a learner does not succeed at Foundation Phase level, he/she will be negatively impacted and may even drop out of school without having fulfilled educational goals. Gargiulo and Kilgo (2011) indicate that initial inclusion covers principles, guidelines, and practices that ensure every learner's right to participation in a variety of learning opportunities. However, although inclusion is the vision of most South African schools, several issues within the system impede policy execution.

A teacher's critical importance stems from the fact that he/she has the ability to either facilitate progress or diminish the overall quality of life for a learner with disabilities. If a teacher exhibits an adverse attitude towards a disabled learner, it can have a debilitating effect on the learner's life (Gilmore et al., 2003). Teachers' perceptions of inclusion evolves positively when they are prepared to teach with an optimistic mindset within an all-encompassing class. However, due to their persistent negativity and lack of preparation pertaining to the inclusive educational approach, teachers continue to frustrate themselves and learners with disabilities (Jones, 2010). Teachers with positivity foster sound relations with learners which has a major influence on learners' social and educational behaviour. The cornerstone for behaviour management should be a systematic emphasis on what support actions are performed within the classroom setting to promote learning among diverse groups of learners in mainstream contexts. Hence, teachers, particularly at the Foundation Phase stage, should be mindful of the possibilities of learning they offer to every learner, including reflecting on their behaviours throughout interaction and intervention stages.

Additionally, learners rely heavily on teachers for quality education, thus teachers radiate much significance on the level of teaching and learning in school contexts. Darling-Hammond (2006) maintains that education is essential for learners' success, and that teachers have a crucial function in shaping the learning trajectory. In other words, how teachers engage with learners has a meaningful influence on learner-behaviour and achievement (O'Leary & O'Leary, 1977).

The DoE (2001) through the EWP6 posits that each teacher has the necessary expertise, competence, and abilities to detect and solve challenges to learning. Considering, the uniqueness of special needs learners, teachers must re-evaluate and transform their perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes. There is an expectation for teachers to communicate and teamwork with other supportive stakeholders to effectively empower learners with knowledge, skills, and values in inclusive classrooms (DoE, 2001).

The ever-increasing number of learners in Government schools has made it progressively imperative for teachers to be ready and equipped to respond to learners' requirements (Eichinger et al., 1991). Deku and Ackah (2012) declare that teachers should accept inclusion as being a fundamental privilege such that learners must be provided with education that is on par, fair, just, and that they should be accommodated and nurtured in the same environment.

Therefore, the outlook, beliefs, and views of teachers in achieving quality results and attaining the objectives of inclusive practices are critical to the success of all (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). These teacher attitudes, beliefs and opinions also have functional ramifications for policymakers who plan strategies to promote inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). As such, teachers recognise that learners taught in a single setting classroom form part of the fundamental philosophy of inclusion which helps learners develop a sense of belonging amongst themselves and their peers (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

Hay et al. (2001) contend that some teachers have insufficient requisite skills, knowledge, and do not possess the correct attitude, therefore they require more training in order to implement inclusion successfully. Ladbroke (2009) states that although teachers believe that (among others) there is insufficient educational infrastructure, poor assistive teaching devices, and inadequate teacher-learning resources, they also lack educational expertise and commitment to lend support to special needs learners. Razali et al. (2013) note that teachers are contented to teach learners

whom they perceive as manageable in the class environment, but they sometimes convey 'hidden messages' such that some learners feel unwelcome in a class; this reveals that certain teachers struggle to address the requirements of learners encountering difficulties in a mainstream classroom.

As teachers become more familiar with learners' learning barriers, the more confident they become in guiding learners with disabilities (Ghanizadeh et al., 2006). Accordingly, teacher-preparation for learners with disability entails utilising suitable and innovative practices to foster better educational learner-achievement. Batsiou et al. (2008) state that a firm connection exists between information and attitudes, as well as knowledge and attitudes; hence, for teachers to impart knowledge and skills effectively to learners with challenges in an inclusive mainstream schooling environment, they require to special skills as well as a positive attitude.

Further, Booyse and Du Plessis (2008) advocate that the learners' needs must be met by applying suitable methodologies that cater to diverse learners. This is the responsibility of the teacher who must possess the relevant training, strategic planning acumen, core values, adequate skills, visionary character, and in-depth knowledge in their domains as subject specialists in teaching and learning. Also, a focus on meaningful professional enhancement (e.g., ongoing training and information sessions) ensures that teachers are ready for collaborative and supportive efforts such that they truly grasp their role and responsibility in an inclusive class. Although importance is placed on providing early and continuous professional development opportunities for classroom teachers (DoE, 2001), the desired results have not yet been achieved. Workshops should be driven by the recognition of teachers as being significant assets in attaining the objective of establishing an inclusive education system. Engelbrecht (2013) criticises the fact that it has become apparent in South Africa that priority is on teaching-learning plans while policies remain disjointed, temporary, and unrealistic.

According to research conducted by Kuntsmann (2003), it appears that teachers do not fully prepare for inclusive teaching. A significant number of teachers lack confidence in engaging with learners who need support because of their impairments. They are uncertain about how to adapt their teaching and learning methods to assist such learners, thus making it a challenging endeavour (Kuntsmann, 2003). The way learner disabilities are assessed can greatly influence a teacher's

capacity to assist in learning, particularly with autistic learners or those displaying behavioural conditions (Cassady, 2011). This originates from integrating learners with impairments into regular classrooms without consideration for their individual needs or the type of further assistance such learners may require. Teachers frequently mention a shortage of supplies as an obstacle to teaching large classes with diverse learners. At times, inappropriate materials are introduced into mainstream settings without a well-planned application strategy which leads to a situation where addressing special needs becomes more challenging and dissatisfying to teachers (Topping, 2012).

Another concern was that while in-service teachers at mainstream schools followed the accepted guidelines when teaching inclusive education, prospective teachers who underwent specialised instruction in special education and mainstream programmes did not receive the essential skills and experience in a mainstream environment to manage impaired learners (Engelbrecht et al., 2011). Engelbrecht et al. (2011) also discovered that this led to the absence of teacher-preparedness to deliver robust, quality inclusive teaching to all learners. Lastly, shortcomings evident in the current support structures severely impede inclusion in a mainstream classroom which lowers teacher-morale.

2.6 IMPEDIMENTS IN IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

2.6.1 The Practice of Inclusion in Grade R-3 becomes problematic if teachers are inadequately prepared and trained

Mainstream teachers are fundamental in accomplishing the goals of inclusion. Teachers serve as the pillars for affording all learners the opportunity to attain their maximum potential (DoE, 2001). Teachers have to be acutely adept and equipped to meet the varied learning requirements of learners - especially learners facing challenges to learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

2.6.2 Teacher Beliefs

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion tend to improve once they undergo necessary training and gain experience to impart knowledge and skills in an inclusive class setting. If negative views persist, then teachers will be unprepared for this educational evolution (Jones, 2010). Slee (2013) notes that in mainstream schools, a perception exists among teachers that the only teachers equipped to assist and manage learners with impairments and disabilities are specialist teachers.

Teachers view these specialist teachers as those who do not focus on ordinary learners, which creates a negative attitude amongst teachers.

Teacher-attitudes serve as a barometer to gauge the quality of inclusive education, more than the training teachers have received. Teachers with an optimistic outlook, the right attitude, and a positive mindset towards inclusive education, contribute to an invaluable support structure for learners with impairments and disabilities (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). When teachers' beliefs and perceptions transform, it is the learner who will ultimately benefit (Ndinisa, 2016).

2.6.3 Inadequate Teacher-training

Teachers attest that their unpreparedness in practising inclusion is predominately due to inadequate teacher-training. Hay et al. (2001) maintain that the requisite ability, knowledge, competencies, and skills required are not part of some teachers' repository. If teachers lack essential teacher-competencies, essential abilities, expertise, and understanding, they will assume that they are ill-equipped to teach learners with special needs (MacPherson-Court., 2003). This further compromises the quality of teaching and supporting learners who encounter barriers to learning. Hence, according to literature, the lack of effective teacher-training is the major factor that prevents teachers from effectively executing inclusion in mainstream class settings (MacPherson-Court et al., 2003).

Moreover, Mpu and Adu (2021) confirm that the positive execution of inclusion faces obstacles such as the lack of adequate preparation levels, overcrowded classrooms, and teachers lacking the necessary knowledge and skills. Training for teachers must prepare them with the mandatory proficiencies, competencies, and realisation to effectively work in a mainstream inclusive classroom especially with learners experiencing challenges to learning (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018) add that these teachers who are charged with the responsibility of managing a mainstream classroom are ill-equipped and reluctant to address learners with barriers. Research conducted by Alberts (2016) noted that teachers mentioned that the support they needed included unimpeded access to the SBST, a choice of teacher-assistants, and an adequate mode of training. This need for teachers to receive training to address inclusive education in a consistent and effective manner can be overcome through in-service and pre-service developmental training facilitated by experts (Ledwaba, 2017).

Ledwaba (2017) elaborates that higher education institutions (HEIs) have an obligation to ensure that their curricula encompass inclusive education training that is theoretically sound and practical in nature so that it prepares teachers in pre-service with the tools to work with learners facing obstacles to learning. To ensure learners receive appropriate assistance in their academic pursuits, teachers in inclusive classrooms need robust in-service training to provide for all learners (Mahlo, 2011).

Unfortunately, teachers don't consistently consider learners with impairments as their main concern (Singal, 2010). Forlin (2008) argues that this is opposed to the guiding concept supporting inclusion, which emphasises that mainstream schools should be inclusive and open to every learner, irrespective of physical, intellectual, sensory, emotional, or other challenges. Importantly, teachers should have sufficient abilities and an unbiased attitude to meet the demands of mixed-ability learners.

2.6.4 Lack of Professional Development

Armstrong et al. (2011) confirm that professional development, whilst sometimes overlooked, is a significant component in preparing teachers to fully comprehend, at an in-service level, the dynamics of addressing and implementing strategies and methods to overcome barriers to learning. The DoE (2002) reports that if teachers attain the relevant inclusive education competencies, knowledge, training, and skills, then only will the standard of implementing inclusive education be elevated.

The absence of thorough preparation renders teachers incapable of offering assistance to learners facing learning difficulties (Horne & Timmons, 2009). Identifying success-factors for teachers includes a thorough cognition of interactive learning, positive behaviour assistance, suitable content teaching, curriculum differentiation strategies, and using assistive technology such as computer aids or magnifiers (Fisher et al., 2003). Winter and O'Raw (2010) state that it is crucial for teachers in mainstream classrooms who are tasked with educating all learners regardless of their skills, to possess a sense of self-assurance when teaching. As such, it is important that the institutions, the curricula, and the educational professionals involved in administering training, offer the support and expertise to teachers in effectively dealing with learning challenges.

Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001) state that curricula at many South African tertiary institutions contain theory and practical aspects regarding inclusive education for teachers joining the teaching fraternity, or those currently serving as teachers. This should include training programmes with theoretical knowledge about inclusion, and practical methods to implement inclusive education in mainstream classes.

2.6.5 Classroom Constraints

De Oliviera Fernandez et al., (2016) state that teachers should possess the capability to effectively handle diverse challenges that arise while managing a mainstream class within the school setting. Bizimungu (2016) affirms that difficulty arises for teachers in an inclusive setting when several learners need a longer period of cognition, whereas others swiftly understand what is being taught. As a consequence, boredom, disinterest, frustration, and delayed learning becomes evident among learners (Bizimungu, 2016).

Significantly, while teachers play an important part in accommodating learners who encounter learning hurdles, some appear to find the inclusion of these learners daunting since they feel ill-equipped to manage diversity. Forlin et al. (2009) and Roberts (2011) highlight the importance of teacher-training institutions offering mandatory courses in inclusive education or special education. While Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018) note the diverse opinions of teachers regarding support needed to successfully navigate an inclusive setting, it is imperative for training and re-training efforts to transform thinking on inclusion to facilitate the needs of diverse learner-groups, especially those with physical, psychological, or intellectual challenges.

2.6.6 Time-constraints

Time-constraint plays an influential role; longer time is necessary for learners with impairments and disabilities to grasp academic concepts (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012). It is often challenging for teachers to balance meeting curriculum standards with the additional time required to assist learners encountering impediments to learning (Mukhopadhyay et al., 2012). Tertiary institutions where teachers undergo training on inclusion, and DoE policymakers need to ensure that time-management skills linked to theory and practice are integrated into their programmes (although each case is unique) to adequately support and manage learners with barriers (Ledwaba, 2017).

2.7 POLICY GUIDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The SIAS is a supplementary policy aimed at bolstering the efforts of EWP6. The revised SIAS strategy sought to address several concerns that emerged from the pilot draft policy in 2008. Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) state that teachers did not completely comprehend their duties and responsibilities as directed by the 2008 draft policy, owing mostly to an absence of preparation to teach diverse learners. The SIAS, which is a policy framework designed to aid in the management and assistance of teaching and learning, impacts learner-performance in the inclusive schooling system. This involves establishing sustainable workable methods for recognising, evaluating, and offering necessary aid to learners who may need extra support for improving their knowledge and skills to attain better results (DBE, 2014).

In South Africa, the SIAS policy is significant in fostering inclusive education. Central to inclusive education in South African schools, is meeting the needs and requirements of every learner, and by focusing on those who face the possibility of being excluded or marginalised. The DBE (2014) maintains that the ultimate goal is to enhance entrance opportunities into diversity-friendly academic institutions such that proper support is provided to all learners. This goal emphasises identifying initial learning hurdles and accurate methods of evaluation and interventions to deal with the challenges that learners may face in an inclusive classroom.

According to Education Minister Angie Motshekga, the adoption of the SIAS policy grants a considerable number of learners of school-going age, including those with impairments, the right to fundamental education and the essential assistance they require within their local schools to overcome learning difficulties (DBE, 2014). Additionally, the implementation of SIAS resulted in novel responsibilities and duties for participants within the educational assistance framework, including District-based support teams (DBST), special school resource centres (SSRC), full-service schools (FSS), and School-based support teams (SBST). Significantly, SIAS recognises the significant contributions of teachers and parents in decision-making processes and by providing assistance when necessary.

The SIAS policy aimed to stimulate the SBST and DBST teams to service special education in 2000 full-service schools spanning across 86 school districts (DBE, 2014). In South Africa, the SIAS policy is the most fundamental and critical instrument for advancing inclusion because it focuses on the needs of every learner in South Africa (DBE, 2014). It particularly provides for

learners who have been disregarded, displaced, and neglected, and is intended to enhance accessibility and support for all learners to receive quality education (DBE, 2014). Learners' education may also be hindered by challenges such as poverty, family fragmentation, social issues, communication hurdles, language hurdles, learning barriers, psychosocial challenges, physical impairments, and a curriculum that does not support their needs (DBE, 2014).

Between 2015 and 2019, the SIAS implementation strategy concentrated on training teachers in the Foundation Phase and served as a measure to rectify the difficulties encountered in following the 2008 draft policy. According to the DBE (2014), the level of support in training teachers can be classified as low, moderate, or high-level support. At the lower level of support, teacher-training is a once-off or short-term training programme (10 sessions or fewer). Awareness programmes and policy implementation strategies are examples of training aspects. In this regard, teachers or specialists (experts) from the school or nearby educational institutions, along with the SBST or DBST members or even stakeholders from the schooling system, can facilitate the training (DBE, 2014).

For the level of support that is moderate in duration, training sessions can vary in extent, ranging from short-term (a maximum of 10 sessions) to long-term (over 10 sessions). This involves providing preparation and outreach initiatives to teachers on aspects of assistance, conducting public awareness campaigns, and implementing policies. These initiatives which can be conducted at schools, are mainly offered by the school's interconnected group of stakeholders external to the DoE (DBE, 2014).

Lastly, higher level support training is supported by a range of specialists. The training includes intensive induction programmes so that teachers master competencies that are needed, including special and continuous mentoring (DBE, 2014).

2.7.1 The Process of Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

The key objectives of the SIAS procedure outlined by the DBE (2014) entails:

- Developing strategies for delivering learner-assistance instead of bringing the learner to the required assistance; and
- Offering guidelines and aid assistance programmes.

2.7.1.1 Screening

The teacher is obligated to test and monitor all learners upon admission and at the introductory stage, and to document their results in the Learner Profile (LP).

To collect information, the following documents are normally perused during *screening*:

- Admission form
- Road to Health Card
- Integrated School Health Programme reports
- Year-end school reports (included in the Learner Profile)
- Parent and/or stakeholder reports
- The report(s) of the teacher(s) currently involved with the learner (DBE, 2014).

From: SIAS Screening process (DBE, 2014)

2.7.1.2 Identification

Once a learner has been recognised as being susceptible to potential challenges during the initial screening process (as shown in the Learner Profile), the teacher is obliged to assume the position of the case manager who leads the assistance procedure.

The active involvement of the parent/caregiver and the learner (for older learners) is essential during the SIAS decision-making process. The teacher's guidance is based on the process of SIAS which commences with filling out the Support Needs Assessment form 1 (SNA 1) involving the teacher and the parent/caregiver who enter into an agreement by noting the undermentioned details as per the SNA 1:

- To verify the results, the teacher engages in a conversation with the parent/caregiver to ascertain if any previous interventions have been attempted;
- A summary of the learner's strengths and requirements from a wide range of disciplines is created;
- Once the information has been obtained, a plan of action to assist the learner is developed, and a re-evaluation date is scheduled as it is essential to conduct a review of these plans at least once per semester; and

- If the teacher finds that the assistance that is provided is insufficient, he/she will arrange an appointment with the SBST during which the teacher will present the learners needs to the team for collaborative brainstorming.

Additionally, the SNA 2 form acts as an instrument for providing direction to the SBST in cases where a learner is referred to them, which entails the following:

- Thorough evaluation is conducted concerning the identification of teacher obstacles and the implemented interventions;
- A comprehensive plan or strategy is devised to enhance support for the learner by involving in-house specialists and experienced teachers within the school; and
- The support plan is documented and implemented, incorporating a review date to discuss the progress made or any challenges faced. During the review, adjustments are made to the plan, and if necessary, the SBST may choose to seek further support from the DBST. These plans must be revisited for a minimum of one time every academic term.

The following procedures are useful in identifying and addressing barriers to learning and development at District level:

The SNA 3 form aids the DBST in planning the following mediation approaches:

- Evaluation of the teacher's and SBST's course of action and applying additional guidance techniques;
- Measuring the extent of aid needed via decision-making concerning the type of support offered to the learner; and
- Basing this on the available information, an additional action strategy may be presented by the DBST involving the learner and/or the educational institution.

The DBE (2014) strategy outlines relevant assistance including:

- The planning and allocation of resources for supplementary support programmes are decided, and based on the outcomes of SNA 3;
- Delivering supplies and assistance services to both the school and the learner;
- Providing instruction, guidance, and coaching to teachers and parents/legal caregivers;

- Supervising the delivery of assistance services;
- Utilising the different instruments provided as Annexures to the SIAS to assist in making informed decisions; and
- Considering the above processes instituted by the various institutions, mainstream schools must establish sufficient support systems to effectively implement inclusive education.

2.8 SCHOOL SUPPORT STRUCTURES

Matlala (2015) asserts that the education department at Provincial level is accountable for supporting learner-admission processes inclusive of learners with disabilities, funding distribution, human resources, resource materials, operational and technical resources, and the recruitment and selection of teachers. The focus of this study pertains to teachers' needs according to their first-hand experiences of providing assistance to learners facing challenges. Slee (2013) maintains that on a global scale, hesitancy gains traction when decisions are made regarding how to fund initiatives for learners with impairments and disabilities as tabled in reports, proposals, and policies.

The EWP6 (DoE, 2001) mentions the following for which the DoE is accountable for:

- Expanding the District's educational assistance services;
- Commencing with a national information, advocacy, and mobilisation campaign;
- Ensuring that staff obtain adequate professional development; and
- Mediating in conflicts between stated inclusion objectives and performance drivers within the system, such as critical assessment and school classifications.

In the EWP6, the term *institutional level support teams* commonly refers to the SBST (DoE, 2001). Makhalemele and Nel (2014) state that as per the guidelines summarised in the *Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of IE: District Based Support Teams*, various individuals constitute the SBST team such as teachers (along with other staff members like administrators and learners) with specific expertise in areas like guidance or support for learners. Engelbrecht (2006) states that in an effort to metamorphose schools into mainstream inclusive schools, the cooperation between learners, teachers and administrators is critical as it allows for the evolution of each school.

According to the DoE (2005), the institutional-level support team's (ILST's) functions are:

- Responsiveness on research information provided by teaching staff which included confirmed challenges to learning, the form of assistance offered currently, and the significance of the support offered;
- Evaluating the extent of support required, and devising a core programme for teachers, learners, and the parents of these learners; and
- Assisting with the implementation of in-classroom interventions by providing instruction and motivation.

2.8.1 School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs)

The SBSTs epitomise a specific organisational framework within the school that is supportive and encompass teachers and SGB representatives. The SBST's primary role is to offer school-based assistance by coordinating support for learners, teachers, and the school (DBE, 2014). Moreover, the SBST team establishes itself as the key central function to promote, facilitate support, and guide the T&L progression at schools. The institution-level support team (ILST) is the DoE's partner to assist the SBST.

Significantly, the principal's priority is the establishment of the SBST to assure functional assistance. The SBSTs have a crucial function in delivering essential support regarding in-service training and helping teachers improve their assessment technique. Secondly, they form associations in the schooling system and the community to manage learning challenges in an attempt to publicise inclusion. Thirdly, they engage in learner-development by consistently evaluating their progress through continuous assessments. They are also responsible for supervising and monitoring the placement of learners when required. Lastly, the DBE (2014) mentions that the SBST enables resource allocation and encourages parental engagement.

2.8.2 District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs)

Naicker (2008) believes that the DBST's main goal is to promote teacher-readiness, with special emphasis on the development of the curriculum and the institution, in addition to ensuring that the framework of teaching and learning within a specific setting remain supportive to all educational requirements. In other words, the DBST's primary role is to assist schools with organising the inclusive education initiatives which includes the dissemination of resources, the delivery of curriculum, developing the structure to facilitate inclusive education delivery, assessment, and

managing the intricacies associated with learners facing learning difficulties; and importantly, providing teachers with the requisite and relevant instructional policies to better manage inclusion in their classrooms.

Additionally, the DBST which is regarded as an administrative framework at District level, is seen as a multidisciplinary team of experts (Makhalemele, 2011). Muthukrishna (2008) notes that inclusive education professionals are provided for by the District and Provincial offices to be a part of the team. Also, the DBST ensures that inclusive education is appropriately executed whilst rendering a dynamic support structure service to ensure smooth implementation.

It was also observed that teacher-preparedness for inclusive education can be enhanced through District-level support (Naicker et al., 2008). Landsberg, Krüger and Swart (2019) contend that the team's synchronised specialised assistance service is fully versed in the intricacies of tertiary education and communities locally; and primarily concentrates on special schooling within specialised environments, as well as selected comprehensive and supplementary primary educational institutions and academic establishments (DoE, 2001).

Global evidence supports teachers' and learners' recognition that formal help has a favourable influence on educational development (Makhalemele & Nel, 2014). To accommodate the smooth functioning of inclusion, the DBST's primarily focus on supporting learners with challenges. This is reinforced in the *Department of Education's Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for Implementing Inclusion* which emphasises the need for an all-inclusive, united assistance strategy through cross-sectional collaboration (DoE, 2005).

The DBST, which is a functional group that promotes best practice, consists of a panel of specialists such as curriculum experts, management specialists, psychologists, counsellors, therapists, and health and welfare personnel from the Department of Education, NGOs, and community-oriented groups in the local area (Makhalemele & Nel, 2014). With this team of experts, inclusion is expected to be a smooth and successful process.

2.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The meta-perspective of the eco-systemic approach elucidates the fundamental principles and interactions within systems, encompassing both the general systems theory and the ecological

theory (Donald et al., 2010). The ecological theory's basic tenet as seen in social settings, includes individuals who are microsystems that include the greater mesosystem, which are rooted in the macrosystem and ecosystem (Donald et al., 2010).

The eco-systemic framework was adopted to lend structure to this study as it describes the interrelationships between individuals and their contexts. It facilitates the learner to be studied in a particular social context as ecology is believed to be crucial in eradicating (or deepening) a learner's problems (Kapp, 2001). Booth et al. (2003) contend that the philosophical principles of inclusion are valuable to provide a clear and concise conceptual framework. The systems theory proposes the practice of understanding comprehensive, multifaceted influences, and relations evident in classrooms, learning environments, and in the whole education system (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). As such, development, growth, and the progress of an inclusive individual are influenced by the interaction of the systems and subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This theory was selected as the theoretical underpinning for the study because it aligns well with exploring the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education practices at a mainstream combined school.

By evaluating Bronfenbrenner's (1977) four levels of systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) the influence of institutional obstacles to learning may be interpreted, realised, and comprehended. This study aimed to understand the interconnectedness, relationships, communication, and functioning of inclusion at a South African school to determine whether the application of the systems theory results in advantages or disadvantages for learners with barriers in an inclusive environment. In this regard, the study focused on the microsystem where the learners and the school co-exist such that the primary focus is the learner who is at the very centre of the system itself (Pieterse, 2010). The microsystem also includes, as part of its subsystem, the learner's peer group, the classroom, and the learning environment.

Additionally, by applying the ecological systems theory which is vital to this research, teachers, whether at tertiary or school level, are critical agents since their educational experiences and their teaching responsibilities at the institution never occurs in exclusion, but are entrenched into a wider structure integrated with further social institutional spheres such as the learners, their families, institutional management, departmental divisions, and the wider communities. These intertwined structures impact on each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) works have been widely used in developmental psychology as the systems theory is related to ecology. It highlights the connections between various educational entities like academic institutions, learners, caregivers, the education authority, and the community as a whole. These components assist the learner to develop as part of the system's function. In relation to this study, teachers' experience of including learners with learning challenges in an educational setting cannot be viewed in silos; hence, teachers' experiences with these interrelated components must be investigated.

Importantly, Stronge et al. (2007) observe that teachers who performed well had innovative inclusive practices, varied assessment methods, and exemplary personal characteristics that shone to produce successful learner performances. Moreover, Kunter et al. (2013) state that teachers' pedagogical content knowledge affects learner outcomes positively – the more knowledgeable teachers are of inclusiveness, the better learners perform academically. Hence, the progress of learners is reliant on the teacher's interconnected relationship with them which improves the teacher's quality and value during different classroom practices (Adegoroye, 2004). Lastly, Walaba (2008) confirms that learners' school performance is related to sufficient acquisition of knowledge and thorough preparation by teachers for delivering lessons in inclusive classroom contexts. The researcher views adequate training and preparation of teachers as a crucial factor in prioritizing and effectively implementing inclusive education practices at a mainstream combined school.

2.10 CONCLUSION

The chapter presented the relevant literature pertaining to issues on the provision of teacher-education, and challenges teachers face in the Foundation Phase in mainstream classrooms. Included in this chapter were impediments that prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusion in mainstream classrooms, the policy guiding the execution of inclusive education, school support structures, and the theoretical framework. Bronfenbrenners' (1977) ecological systems theory was utilised to comprehend and guide this research's processes. If teachers are deficit in their essential ability, learnings, and assistance then they do not feel fully prepared and confident in managing inclusion classes (MacPherson-Court et al., 2003). For inclusive education to be effectively executed in mainstream schools, support structures need to be functional. This

was supported by Makhalemele and Nel (2014) who mention that globally formal and appropriate inclusive support favourably impacts on academic development. The next chapter (3) dealt with the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to determine teacher-preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in a selected combined school in South Africa. This chapter (3) explained the descriptive research design, sampling, research instruments and procedures, data analysis, and ethical issues such as permission, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity.

Methodology deals with processes that can be utilised to examine participants' real-life lived-experiences (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. (2014) add that methodology refers to the researchers' techniques of gleaning knowledge about the world around them. These include the ontological question of what is real, what can be known, and the essence of existence. Also encompassed in methodology is the concept of epistemology which describes beliefs, how phenomena can be explained, and how to describe them.

For this study, a qualitative case study framed by the interpretive paradigm was selected to ascertain the social phenomenon of teacher-preparedness in an inclusive class through the eyes of the teachers, rather than that of the researcher. After the collection of data, patterns and themes were identified, interpreted and categorised. Thereafter, a search through the data sets for similarities and differences involved dissecting words, statements, and events to understand the teachers' lived-experiences of the phenomenon to generate new knowledge and possibly a new theory (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Additionally, the researcher described in detail the selected research paradigm, the research approach, the research design, the study's context, sampling, and research methods to be applied.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The study was grounded in an interpretive framework as the researcher selected a qualitative interpretative analysis to understand teachers' experiences of identifying, managing, and examining challenges to inclusive learning. In other words, the researcher selected an

interpretative paradigm to investigate perceptions and knowledge on the support learners need and receive in overcoming barriers to learning. In engaging with participants, it was envisaged that the chosen paradigm will elicit responses on how they support, and what form of support they provide to inclusive learners who encounter challenges. The interpretive paradigm determines how individuals form their understanding, meaning-making, and elucidation of phenomena, whether as individuals or in a social context (Woolfolk, 2007). Within an interpretative paradigm, participants' personal understandings are real and authentic and thus must be handled with the utmost sensitivity and seriousness and must be appreciated. To guarantee the reliability of the topic being studied, the researcher comprehended and appreciated the participants' lived-experiences within the framework of this study. Moreover, the selected paradigm was envisioned to validate the objectives and rationale of the research topic (Cohen et al., 2018). A research paradigm comprises of a range of perceptions and theories that influences the way we organise our observations whilst conducting a research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Paradigms serve as crucial frameworks that we utilise to structure our observations and reasoning. They shape our perspectives on reality, and guide how we perceive and define it (Babbie, 2015). The researcher employed these underlying beliefs to guide the direction of this research study. Also, research paradigms with a research-focus framework can be categorised according to their ontological, epistemological, and methodological components (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014). The ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology aspects of the study should be contemplated when adopting a research paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In this study, data was dissected in detail, and then thoroughly and repetitively scrutinised. Thereafter, data was sorted into prescribed classes, and emerging themes were categorised.

3.2.1 Ontology

The study addressed the aspect concerning ontology; that is, what teachers' reality are when implementing inclusive education. The research investigated teachers' conceptual understanding and definitions of inclusive education, examining how they perceive and interpret the reality of inclusive education within their teaching practices. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe ontology as the researcher's view of reality. Ontology explains the structure and the characteristics of existence, and therefore, what can be known about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research uncovered the lived experiences of teachers in implementing inclusive education, identifying the challenges,

obstacles, or facilitating factors they face in their daily teaching under an inclusive education framework. Crotty (2003) reiterates that ontology involves the exploration of existence, focusing on the type of reality being examined, the essence of being, and the concept of realism. The ontological analysis delved into teachers' fundamental viewpoints and assumptions regarding students with diverse needs, exploring how their beliefs and worldviews shape their approaches to teaching and interactions with students of varying abilities and backgrounds. Merriam (2009) recognises ontology as a constructed interpretation of realism from one occurrence. The study analyzed the influence of the school's culture, policies, and support systems on teachers' realities, examining how broader institutional and systemic factors shape their ontological perceptions and experiences of implementing inclusive education. This ontological process enables participants to perceive the genuine value, importance, and reality of events in their own lives, thereby providing a platform to gaining a comprehensive perspective of these occurrences. The research considered the role of teachers' personal histories, backgrounds, and identities in shaping their ontological perspectives, investigating how their individual life experiences, values, and beliefs influence their fundamental understanding and enactment of inclusive education practices at a selected combined school in South Africa.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology, in this study, is the process of understanding what knowledge and skills teachers possess when teaching in an inclusive classroom. The research investigated the existing knowledge base and comprehension of inclusive education principles, strategies, and pedagogical approaches possessed by the teachers, exploring the foundations and origins of this understanding. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe epistemology as how the researcher comes to know reality. Cohen et al. (2018) state that epistemology is the process of understanding, how understanding is acquired, and how it can be transmitted to others. It is a means of perceiving and describing how we know what we know. It examined the processes through which educators acquired and developed knowledge and skills related to inclusive education, such as formal training programs, professional development opportunities, personal experiences, or collaborative learning with colleagues. It is also related to providing a scholarly groundwork for determining what categories of understanding are achievable, and how we can guarantee that they are mutually sufficient and legal (Crotty, 2003). The epistemological analysis delved into the role of teachers' beliefs, values, and prior experiences

in shaping their epistemological viewpoints on inclusive education, influencing how they perceived and interpreted knowledge in this domain.

Accordingly, an interpretivist epistemology denotes a reality that is dependent on the actors within the social realm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) which maintains that people's reality about what they know is subjective in nature. It considered the ways in which educators constructed, validated, and shared knowledge about inclusive education practices within their educational community, investigating the collaborative and social dimensions of epistemological processes. The primary purpose of an interpretivist epistemology is to interpret, recognise and comprehend people's behaviour, motives, and meaning instead of generalising and relying on the cause and effect principle (Neuman, 2000). By adopting an interpretivist epistemological stance, the study acknowledged that teachers' realities about their knowledge regarding inclusive education were subjective in nature. The primary aim was to interpret, recognize, and comprehend teachers' knowledge, skills, and epistemological processes related to inclusive education implementation, rather than relying solely on cause-and-effect relationships or broad generalizations.

Through this epistemological lens, the study strived to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers came to know and comprehend inclusive education, the sources and processes through which this knowledge was acquired and constructed, and the ways in which it shaped their preparedness and practices within the specific educational context in South Africa.

3.2.3 Axiology

The axiology dimension in this study refers to how teachers exert and manage their own values and ethics within inclusive education. The study examined teachers' individual values and ethical standards regarding inclusive education, such as beliefs about equity, diversity, and the rights of students with diverse needs, and how these values guided their teaching approaches. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe axiology as the value-position borne by the inquirer. It investigated the ways in which teachers navigated and managed potential conflicts or tensions between their personal values and the values or ethical principles promoted by the school, educational policies, or broader societal norms related to inclusive education. It concerns the significance of values in research, how the researcher recognises that research is value-rich, and that biases do exist relative to the researchers' part in the interpretations of the collected research data. The axiological analysis

delved into the influence of teachers' cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and identities on their axiological perspectives, and how these factors impacted their values and ethical considerations in implementing inclusive education practices. In other words, axiology refers to the role of values and ethics inside the research process, which includes questions about how researchers manage their own values and those of the research participants (Saunders et al., 2019). It considered the strategies and methods teachers employed to ensure their values and ethical principles were upheld and reflected in their inclusive education practices, including decision-making processes, classroom management, and interactions with students and stakeholders.

By acknowledging the value-laden nature of research, the study recognized that the researcher's own values and biases could influence the interpretation of data collected from teachers. The axiological analysis strived to understand how teachers navigated their own values and those of their students and school community in the context of inclusive education implementation. Through this axiological lens, the study aimed to gain insights into the complex interplay between teachers' values, ethical principles, and their preparedness and practices in implementing inclusive education within the specific educational context in South Africa.

3.2.4 Methodology

The qualitative research methodology which was employed in this study, refers to the procedures applied to acquire an understanding of inclusive education and the challenges that learners experience in mainstream classes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Methodology invariably includes data collection as described by ontology (what exists) and epistemology (what can be known), how the phenomenon can be described, and how the researcher explains the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018).

Ryan (2018) states that there is a triad of generally acknowledged philosophical research paradigms utilised to manage research: positivism, interpretivism, and critical theory. Mertens (2015) elaborates that the four major paradigms are post-positivism, constructivism, transformativism, and pragmatism. This study embraces the merits of the post-positivism, critical theory and interpretivism.

Bertram and Christiansen (2020) state that the critical theory paradigm is judgemental of how the inequalities and biased ways of society is ordered. In a critical paradigm, research explores social

institutions, inequality, social change, colonial domination, and social life challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Pascale (2011) confirms that the interpretivist paradigm stems from the critique of post-positivism which posits that people create, form and compose knowledge as they interpret their own personal experiences of, and in the world they live in. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) state that the intent of an interpretivist paradigm is to recognise and interpret how individuals comprehend and interpret events in their world, and to extract meanings of the interactions within their environments. The interpretivist paradigm discounts the objectivist approach that knowledge simply exists, and is there to be recognised and collected (Pascale, 2011). Hence, the need exists to understand the subjective experiences of teachers regarding their preparedness to promote inclusive education in mainstream schools. This study is thus supported by the ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions of an interpretive paradigm.

In sum, the ontological postulation in this research is therefore what teachers' realities are when implementing inclusive education. The epistemological aspect in this study is what knowledge teachers possess when teaching in an inclusive class. The axiological aspect in this study relates to how teachers cope with their own values and ethics within inclusive education.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This research adopted a qualitative research approach to gain deep insight, knowledge, and information personally from teachers teaching at the combined school regarding the inclusion of learners with impediments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). An approach that is qualitative in nature is intrinsically focused on attempting to elicit a detailed understanding of a phenomenon through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In undertaking a simple qualitative inquiry, the research must explore pertinent aspects about the phenomenon, the systems involved, perceptions, understandings, and how participants are engaged in the process of viewing the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell (2014) maintains that the usefulness of the qualitative research approach is in obtaining insightful awareness regarding a specific phenomenon. This method assisted the researcher in obtaining an in-depth perception and incisive awareness of the issue being researched. It also

allowed the researcher to pose questions that were all-encompassing, while allowing the research participants to communicate their beliefs from personal experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, Mertens (2015) states that obtaining rich information is possible in qualitative methods, and can be achieved primarily by conducting interviews with participants and through personal interaction. This study fits into the parameters of a qualitative research design as it allowed the researcher to engage with teachers about their ontology and their descriptions on how they assist learners with special needs requirements in the classroom. Lastly, the qualitative paradigm allowed for the collection of detailed, rich, valuable data by using small scale samples of participants (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A single case study was chosen as the research design for this study which was experiential in nature, and could be analysed through qualitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). An exploratory design and approach allow for a broad and detailed explanation of the social phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher adopted a qualitative research design with the intention of gathering richer and more meaningful information from teachers regarding the type of assistance they provide to learners who may encounter challenges to learning (Mertens, 2015). A case study offered the opportunity of engaging relevant participants in real-life contexts and scenarios (Cohen et al., 2018). A case study can further dissect circumstances in a manner that is not subject to quantitative analysis (Morgan, 2018). One single combined school was adequate as the population was large enough. The researcher employed multiple methods to extract information from a single case study to corroborate the data for credibility.

According to Yin (2014), a case study is a comprehensive inquiry into a topic or experience in an actual real-world context. Ethnographic designs permit the qualitative researchers to explain, discuss, interpret, and understand the multitude of actions and opinions of people with a comparable philosophy. Willis (2007) agrees that the case study method is appropriate as it establishes, prepares, categorises, records, and accounts for the findings of the case, while adding value as an instrument rather than just a simple data collection method.

Lastly, in support, Thomas (2011) confirms that a case study is a research technique that focuses on a specific element, delving deeply into particulars without aiming for generalisation. This case

study enabled the researcher to gather data more efficiently since she was physically present with the participants, and could directly collect first-hand information.

3.5 CONTEXT OF STUDY

The study was conducted at an ordinary quintile 5 public combined school in the Pinetown District situated in a peri-urban environment. The school has a student population of approximately 900 learners, with 39 academic staff members, and provides education from Grades R to 12. The school is uniquely positioned at the fringes of a rural and urban settlement. The school is instrumental in offering services and assistance in a district that experiences social and economic challenges. The breadwinners in many families are middle- to low-income earners, and are not necessarily in the best financial position. The school accommodates learners from challenging environments such as an orphanage, informal settlements, and a youth care rehabilitation centre. Some of the learners who are integrated into the mainstream school, come from the youth care rehabilitation centre because they experience psychosocial challenges. Learners at this combined school normally complete a schooling career from Grade R through to matric. This means that it is a focused learning space for inclusive learners free from external forces such as the influence of different schooling environments. The researcher believed that this would have relayed an authentic narrative of the schooling journey of inclusive learners, including how inclined teachers were to implement inclusion. The key motivating factor of this research study was to achieve greater insight into teacher-preparedness, how they supported learners with impediments, and how they managed to implement inclusive education practice in their classes.

3.6 SAMPLING

The sampling method to select participants entailed purposeful sampling. Johnson and Christensen (2019) state that a sample can be described as a collection of representative subjects from a sizeable population for the purposes of collecting data. The total population comprised of 9 participants (4 Foundation Phase teachers and 5 SMT members). However, the initial sample consisted of 21 participants who represented the teaching and learning section of the school. The researcher chose the Foundation Phase teachers as this phase serves as a grounding for learners to acquire foundational knowledge. The researcher also chose SMT members, each representing a different phase in the combined school, who were able to offer valuable information while responding to

key research questions. The target sample represented the population from the Foundation Phase. The 4 participants (teachers) comprised of one from each grade (Grade R, 1, 2 and 3) who participated in answering the questionnaires. As part of the interviewing process, 5 SMT participants were chosen from the combined school comprising of the principal, deputy principal, and the HODs (one from each phase), who participated in the semi-structured interview. The principal assisted by providing a staff list of the prospective participants for the study as he was familiar with the teachers at the combined school. He also had expert knowledge of all the teachers. Through purposive sampling the researcher was able to study a collection of teachers in a mainstream combined school regarding their preparedness to deliver service in an inclusive classroom.

The inclusion criteria for the purposive sample included 4 teachers each from a different grade of the Foundation Phase, all of whom have at least one year of lead teacher experience in a classroom. There was no restriction on the teacher's specialisation. The exclusion criteria included part-time learner teachers and teaching assistants. This allowed for a fair and diverse representation of teachers in the school.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic further dictated that a blend of purposive sampling and convenience sampling must occur to collect the data (Creswell, 2014). In purposive sampling, participants are chosen on the basis of possessing crucial traits that make them worthy contenders of rich information to be selected for the study (Creswell, 2014).

3.6.1 Selected Research Participants for the Semi-structured Interview

The participants who were selected for the semi-structured interview included the SMT members at the combined school. They were chosen purposefully by the researcher to offer another perspective regarding inclusive education at the school.

Table 3.1 below indicates the biographical data of the SMT participants, including their relevant qualifications, and their years of experience in teaching. Each SMT member was assigned a pseudonym/code for privacy reasons.

Table 3.1: Biographical data of SMT members

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Qualification	Number of years of teaching experience
SMT 1	Female	59	Diploma	Junior Primary Education Diploma	More than 25 years
SMT2	Male	51	Degree	B. Paed (Arts)	More than 25 years
SMT3	Male	56	Honours	BEd (Hons)	More than 25 years
SMT4	Male	59	Degree	BA	More than 25 years
SMT5	Female	56	Degree	BA	More than 25 years

3.6.2 Selected Research Participants for the Questionnaire

Presented in Table 3.2 below are the biographical details of the Foundation Phase teachers, including their qualifications in education, and the length of their teaching tenure. A pseudonym/code was assigned to each participating teacher to ensure confidentiality.

Table 3.2: Teachers' biographical details

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Qualification	Number of years of teaching experience
T1	Female	49	Honours	BEd Honours	20 years
T2	Female	56	Degree	BA	More than 25 years
T3	Female	34	Degree	BEd	10 years
T4	Female	61	Diploma	Junior Primary education diploma	More than 25 years

The individuals who were selected to participate in the digital surveys were teachers from the Foundation Phase, namely from Grades R - 3. They were selected purposefully by the researcher

to offer deep insight based on the content and delivery of the school's curricula. All participants were assigned a pseudonym/code to maintain confidentiality.

3.7 RESEARCH METHODS

The researcher utilised a range of techniques to gather data: semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. These were guided by a semi-structured interview schedule, pre-planned questionnaires, and the perusal of policy documents and lesson plans. Monsen and Horn (2007) state that research methods are the systematic application of data collection instruments, while Goundar (2012) adds that research methods include experiments, tests, and surveys by which a researcher explores a subject or a topic. The researcher utilised the semi-structured interviews format by involving the SMT participants as part of the process. The procedure was initiated by following an interview schedule (appendix F). The responses from the interviews were recorded and studied. Also, the researcher sent questionnaires to teacher-participants with open-ended inquiries via email for completion online (appendix G). The data was gathered electronically and subsequently subjected to analysis. Thereafter, the researcher finalised the document analysis for corroboration, and for gaining an incisive insight into the phenomenon under investigation. These consisted of policy documents related to Foundation Phase subjects such as Mathematics, Life Skills, and English Home Language, in addition to the SIAS guidelines, EWP6, and Grade 3 lesson plans.

The sub-sections that follow include selection of participants, the methods of data collection, the research instruments, and the type of data analysis that was implemented.

Burns and Grove (2010) state that the data collection is a systematic procedure of collecting information. For triangulation purposes, the researcher chose document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Triangulation is when many data collection sources are utilised such that all converge in supporting and developing a comprehensive, credible, and valid understanding of the case (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The data was collected via semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis which assisted in satisfying the validity of results concerning the phenomenon under study. Maree (2016) states that the data collection method of document analysis involves dissecting original documents. The researcher's onus is to ensure the veracity of the original documents. Such documents could take the form of minutes,

class timetables, the daily register, teachers' lesson plans, assessment records, and notes. Regarding triangulation, Creswell (2014) confirms that it is extensively studied as a process which employs many techniques to authenticate the occurrence of an observation, understanding, or interpretation. The decision to choose the above tools was encouraged by the theory of inclusion and the ecosystemic theoretical framework. Data from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires was interpreted, and thereafter descriptive statistics was generated to review the data (Punch, 2005). Data was extracted from the interviews and then categorised so that themes, patterns, and sub-themes could be ascertained.

3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher using a written format as requested by the SMT. An interview is a data collection procedure that involves communicating with individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cohen et al. (2018) state that the interview research instrument is indeed impactful. In an interview, participants express their own views, and converse about their ontological viewpoints about matters of interest. The data is collated using two-way communication.

The researcher conducted 'written' interviews with each of the five (5) SMT members. The researcher provided the SMT members with the written interview templates. Conducting written interviews instead of face-to-face interviews allowed participants to feel comfortable to respond freely, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The researcher opted for semi-structured interviews as the technique to gather data as it suited the study's aim and objectives. This permitted a certain level of fluidity and adaptability when questioning (Greef, 2011). The interview schedule guided and encouraged the researcher to ask probing questions to seek further information and clarity.

An interview needs to begin with a specific plan which it may depart from and evolve into a cascading dialogue and discussion, mainly for elaboration (O'Leary, 2005). As such, the researcher can collate intriguing and unexpected data along with the expected data. Though the schedule is there as a guide, it is not prescriptive – it guides the interviewer to navigate the interview in a professional manner (Greef, 2011).

3.7.1.1 Semi-structured interview process

The data collection commenced with the semi-structured interview process which was conducted in English, via an electronic medium involving each participating SMT member. The researcher structured a schedule for the interview which comprised of a series of questions that was prepared with a clear understanding and standardised for participants' benefit. The interview schedule was used as a tool to commence the interviews and thereafter for the interview to progress smoothly. Since semi-structured interviews allow for a certain degree of flexibility, the SMT members were contacted via an electronic social media platform by using the participant information sheet which clarified all details of the study with each participant. The electronic social media platform interview was a viable option due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, while the SMT component opted for a 'written' interview. Hence, the researcher scheduled a time convenient to each SMT participant. The researcher then personally visited the school and distributed the interview schedule which provided the participants with sufficient time to prepare for the interview. The semi-structured interview schedule which guided the interview process, directed the collection of data, methods utilised by the researcher, and appropriate manner in posing a range of predetermined open-ended questions (Greef, 2011). This allowed participants to follow a natural process of conversation. All written responses were analysed and thereafter interpreted for drawing conclusions.

3.7.2 Questionnaire

In qualitative research, a researcher may design an instrument such as a questionnaire that comprises of open-ended questions. Questionnaires can be referred to as being a systematised set of questions for the collection of participants' information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, data was collected from each teacher per grade in the Foundation Phase by using an online questionnaire. A link was sent to each participant to access, at their convenience, the online questionnaire using Google forms to respond to, and to return within a reasonable specified time. The four (4) Foundation Phase teachers responded to the online questionnaire. Employing the questionnaire as a tool for data collection aids in achieving the study's goals by ensuring meaningfulness and facilitating the acquisition of trustworthy and dependable data. Mathers et al. (2009) affirm that the questionnaire is a valuable instrument for evaluating perspectives and substantiating evidence. Lewis-Beck et al. (2004) highlight the benefits of questionnaires that are

online-based as having no physical limitations, and have fewer complications in accessing responses for data analysis.

Additionally, Cohen et al. (2018) state that the advantages of questionnaires are that they can be distributed and collected electronically, easy to collate statistical data with, can be tabulated and analysed, and managed in the absence of the researcher. Bertram and Christiansen (2020) add that in the questionnaire, participants respond to a range of open-ended and closed-ended questions. In this study, the researcher chose the questionnaire as a research instrument because of its suitability in allowing the research process to be swift, straightforward, and timeous for the researcher to collate data. Questionnaires consisted of similar questions for all participants to answer, it assured anonymity, and was cost-effective to create and disseminate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.7.2.1 Questionnaire process

The researcher, who selected a self-designed questionnaire as one of the research instruments, preferred to contact participants who could complete the questionnaires online to adhere to COVID-19 protocols. The questionnaires were disseminated via email to participants to complete an online Google form at their own convenience, but within a given timeframe. The questionnaire comprised of open-ended questions which permitted the researcher to collate rich, descriptive qualitative data. Google Forms were utilised to obtain, gather, and record participants' responses to the questions. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, appropriate accommodations were made, including granting participants several weeks to complete the questionnaire. When all completed questionnaires were collected, the virtual organisation of extracted data for analysis proceeded. The survey results were obtained and exported for data analysis via NVivo (version 1.0). Variables and metadata were directly transferred from the data file of Google Forms into the NVivo data analysis software. The data was then stored on Google One cloud storage for analysis by NVivo which is a secure system of protecting data. The transcription data for NVivo is normally encrypted both in transit and at rest, and only the account-user has access and control over the data (QSR International, 2021).

3.7.3 Document Analysis

The technique of document analysis was utilised to examine the requirements outlined in the policies of the Foundation Phase for inclusive teaching and learning. The researcher perused all

forms of communication that were penned, so that a holistic perspective of the case study could emerge (Maree, 2016). Document analysis operates within the readings of primary data found in original documents. The researcher's responsibility is to ensure the veracity and authenticity of the original source documents which could take the form of minutes, policies, class timetables, the daily register, teachers' lesson plans, assessment records, and notes. There is also a category of unofficial source documents which include the learners' workbooks, personal emails, teacher and learner diaries, and personal notes emanating from casual and informal gatherings.

Lastly, Maree (2016) contends that it is significant to know the type of document the researcher is working with, its date of publication, what was the methodology used when constructing the document, its purpose, and its empirical data.

3.7.3.1 Document analysis process

The researcher personally visited the school and contacted the principal via email and telephonic correspondence. The information sheet for the respective participants and consent forms were distributed to the teachers and the SMT members. The principal held a meeting with his staff to inform them of the researcher's intended study. The policy documents were gathered by requesting them from the school administration, as well as downloading them from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) website. Permission was requested from and granted by the school principal to access the policy documents. The researcher contacted the selected participants personally via email and WhatsApp during a convenient time specified by the participant. The researcher examined the various policy documents for the purposes of triangulation at her private residence that consumed much time. Moreover, the perusal of the EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and SIAS (DBE, 2014) formed part of the document analysis process which included the examination of inclusive education policies.

Document analysis was a supplementary method selected to collect data and to strengthen triangulation. The Grade 3 Foundation Phase documents included subject documents (English, Mathematics and Life skills), the SIAS document, as well as the Grade 3 lesson plans. Document analysis was conducted to determine what the SIAS policy dictates about implementing its procedures in schools. Also, the curriculum policy of the Foundation Phase was examined. The policy documents were requested from the school administration, while the lesson plans (for the present month) were requested from the Foundation Phase teachers which included 1 lesson plan

per week. The researcher employed this method for data collection to ascertain if teachers were implementing (via evidence in the lesson plan) the curriculum as stipulated by SIAS. The researcher then studied the policy documents and compared them to the lesson plans.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The aim of the data analysis process was to recognise and categorise themes, sub-themes, and patterns. Data was extracted by utilising research instruments and data reduction techniques to ensure that it was error-free and robust (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2014) mentions that the thematic analysis approach is utilised to study the open-ended data responses to the questions. The transcripts from the interviews were scrutinised, proofread, and repetitively read so that the researcher became thoroughly au fait with the content. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that one of the most common methods to analyse qualitative data is utilising the thematic analysis approach.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), thematic analysis is primarily applied in encrypting qualitative information where specific codes are needed. The data collected in this study was analysed for the purposes of classifying and summarising the initial themes into data categories. Open-coding was used at the first review of the data, and axial coding was applied for the second review of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Clustering data into a general category was done with axial coding. On the occasion of the third review, discerning-coding was employed to recognise themes. Once the themes had been identified, graphs, charts and infographics were drawn up for further insight.

3.9 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Creswell (2013) states that confirmability, transferability, credibility and dependability are the four pillars that define trustworthiness. The concept of reliability and validity was replaced with the parallel concept of *trustworthiness* which incorporates principles such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as techniques to assess qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This research proved to be reliable as the aim, objectives, and research questions were aligned and well-defined. The reliable and suitable methodology that was applied also assisted to achieve results that were truthful and believable.

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

Bertram and Christiansen (2020) maintain that enhancing the credibility of trustworthiness in qualitative research involves providing thorough and accurate depictions of data that emerge from participants' experiences. Emphasising trustworthiness, as opposed to validity, is crucial to ensure the study's reliability and consistency. Yin (2014) suggests that trustworthiness is established through triangulating data and maintaining a clear audit-trail of evidence. Furthermore, Yin (2014) asserts that incorporating diverse data sources aids in capturing a broader spectrum of viewpoints, behaviours, and attitudes, thereby enhancing the credibility of the data. Schwandt (2007) adds that trustworthiness of research is reinforced through the quality of the investigation and the resultant findings to make it believable to audiences. To ensure the credibility of the researcher's findings, the techniques for collecting data were triangulated through interviews, document analysis, and the use of questionnaires. To assess the accuracy of the research process, the study was evaluated by peers as well as the supervisor of the study.

3.9.2 Conformability

Vogt et al. (2012) contend that research, in any circumstance, cannot be free of bias and the lack of objectivity. In conformability, the onus is on the researcher to ensure that the data gleaned satisfied the integrity, objectivity, and authenticity elements concerning the findings. To attain conformability, the researcher also ensured that the data and analytical processes were adequately aligned so that the reader is able to gauge its logical progression, as well as to validate the appropriateness of the findings.

3.9.3 Credibility

Anney (2014) states that the objective of credibility is to determine how rigour in the research is achieved, and how internal consistency is maintained. During the interview and online questionnaire processes, the researcher ensured rigour and credibility when engaging professionally and harmoniously with the participants. Additionally, various techniques for gathering data were utilised to render the findings credible. Also, this research is credible as the research aims and questions are well-defined.

3.9.4 Transferability

Transferability is defined as the foundation on which similarity judgements are made, the degree to which findings are appropriate to the situation outside the study, and are found to be meaningful (Wagner et al., 2012). Transferability allows an individual who is reading through the study, to be able to draw broader conclusions from the results to a level that expresses his/her perspectives and circumstances (Maree, 2016). The DoE, teachers, caregivers, and parents are the communal support systems through which transferability can be generalised in an effort to assist learners with overcoming learning impediments.

3.9.5 Dependability

Wagner et al. (2012) state that dependability is consistency of facts - a measure acquired by attesting to the accuracy of interpreting information from various data sources (triangulation) and reconstructing events and processes leading to similar conclusions emanating from the study. Morrow (2005) states that though learners with the same barriers to learning may not attend the same school, the study must aim, over time, to be stable and dependable. The researcher depended on the audited results of the data, methods, decisions, verbatim accounts, and individuals' perspectives during the investigation to enhance the principle of dependability.

3.9.6 Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are crucial in the qualitative research framework. The researcher needs to protect the integrity and authenticity of the qualitative study by using trustworthy research instruments (Cohen et al., 2018). The researcher satisfied the validity and reliability principles of research by gathering data using a range of instruments for collection, specifically semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The accepted qualitative standard of validity and reliability and the accepted quantitative standard of validity and dependability were not utilised in the same manner (Neuman, 2000). Words such as credibility, authenticity, trustworthiness, dependability express reliability and validity when conducting a qualitative study. The findings of the research were recorded and transcribed verbatim with complete discretion and integrity; for instance, all information was stored in a secure cloud storage facility making the study reliable and valid.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics remains an important aspect of any investigative study. This study ensured the wellbeing and privacy of all participating in the study. Creswell (2014) emphasises that obtaining prior consent and cooperation from individuals involved in the research is of utmost significance. Ethical clearance was obtained by the researcher from the University where the study was registered (appendix A). Also, permission was obtained from the DoE to conduct interviews within the school setting by following ethical guidelines (appendix B). Permission was also sought (and granted) from the school principal who was notified of the school being used as a research site (appendix C). All participants were informed of the finer details of the research processes including ethical issues. Consent was given in writing to be voluntarily involved in the study. Participants were informed that they had the right to exit from the study at any stage without being disadvantaged in any way. Moreover, research participants' anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

The researcher's duty, ethical values, principles, and professionalism play a crucial role in conducting a valid research study. Ethical concerns take precedence when engaging with participants. Securing voluntary consent from participants, safeguarding them from potential embarrassment, upholding their fundamental human rights, respecting privacy as stipulated by the POPI Act, and preventing harm to participants are paramount principles guiding research practices. The researcher's objective was to consider the participants' emotions, confidentiality, dignity, and avoid any negative impact within the study.

The study is underpinned by Act 108 of 1996 in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, and its Bill of Rights. The Bill of Rights, specifically section 2 (5) (32), safeguards the well-being, dignity, and privacy of participants. The researcher ensured that participants' integrity aligned with these legal provisions.

During all data gathering processes, the researcher employed the principles of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. Creswell (2014) states that when a participant remains anonymous, his/her identity is protected and is not tied to any response. In other words, participants' identities remained confidential, which meant while their identities were known to the researcher, but they are hidden from the public eye (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Although the researcher was aware

of the participants' identities during the semi-structured interviews, participants received assurance that their data will be treated with the strictest level of confidentiality. A report on the outcomes of the research will be made available to the principal and relevant stakeholders (on request) on completion of the study. The participants will also be consulted should the researcher require further clarity on any aspect of their responses.

Data security was a top priority with rigorous measures installed. All information was stored on the researcher's Google One subscription cloud storage, benefiting from the constant safeguarding of the cloud's infrastructure, including 24/7 protection and SSL encryption (Google, 2021). The data was further fortified through encryption technologies like HTTPS/TLS, coupled with multiple layers of security. It was noteworthy that Google's security systems prevented unauthorised access from external entities, including governments and international bodies (Google, 2021). Strict adherence to data protection protocols, including the POPI Act, was enforced.

3.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the phenomenon under investigation by applying appropriate research methods involving all participants within a combined school situated in the Pinetown District, characterised by a peri-urban setting. It explained the qualitative research methods utilised, including the justification for adopting interpretivist paradigm, the sampling approach, research tools, design, sample, procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations. It encompassed discussions on data presentation, analysis procedures, the process of data analysis, matters of credibility, and ethical aspects. The next chapter (4) explained the data analysis processes and discussed the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter (3) addressed the study's methodology, while the current chapter presented the study's outcomes in alignment with the research inquiries outlined in chapter one. The aim of the research investigation was to investigate teacher-preparedness to implement inclusive education in a selected combined school in the Pinetown district. The data was analysed from SMT written interviews, teacher responses to open-ended questions, and document analysis of the SIAS and EWP6 policy documents, English, Mathematics and Life Skills policy documents, and lesson term plans. This chapter provided the findings and outcomes of the research process. The information was examined, analysed, and discussed based on the emerging themes that were identified.

Table 4.1: Tabulation of research inquiries, purpose, and goals of the investigation

RESEARCH QUESTION
How prepared are teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?
SUB-QUESTIONS
1. What do teachers understand about an inclusive education framework?
2. How do teachers support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms?
3. What impediments prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?
4. What structures are available to teachers to support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms?
RESEARCH AIM
The aim of this study was to determine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.
OBJECTIVES
1. To determine teachers' understanding of an inclusive education framework.

2. To determine how teachers support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms.
3. To identify the impediments that prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.
4. To establish what support structures are available for teachers to assist learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms.

4.2 PROCESS OF DATA COLLECTION

The difficulties arising from both the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2022 flooding catastrophe in KZN were successfully managed by the researcher. These circumstances led to additional disruptions in the research timeline as the widespread devastation of the pandemic and the floods necessitated adjustments to data gathering approaches, such as minimising in-person interactions.

Email and telephonic communication were utilised by the researcher to obtain gatekeepers' authorisation, conducting online distribution of questionnaires, and executing written interviews. Following the overcoming of these obstacles, the data collection process proceeded smoothly, with participants promptly responding to the online survey within the stipulated timeframe. These practical and feasible alternatives proved to be efficient solutions.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis aims to recognise recurring themes, underlying sub-themes, and recognisable patterns (Creswell, 2013). Information was gathered via individual written interviews with the SMTs at a combined mainstream school. Furthermore, the input provided by the four Grade R-3 teachers in response to the open-ended questionnaires enhanced the information's quality, by enriching the data with depth and sense-making.

The policy for appropriate practice was examined through the examination of the CAPS documents for the Foundation Phase, encompassing English, Mathematics, and Life Skills. The EWP6 and SIAS policy and Grade 3 lesson plans were analysed. The SIAS policy is a fundamental aspect in guiding inclusive education policy, thus it was carefully analysed.

The data analysis process began with the transcription and coding of information derived from interviews, questionnaires, and pertinent documents. Thereafter, thorough scrutiny and careful

examination of the data ensued, involving its categorisation and the identification of emerging themes.

4.4 THEMES

Table 4.2: Themes and Sub-themes

No.	Theme	Sub-themes
1.	Teachers' understanding of inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perceptions of inclusive education ▪ Preparedness in implementing inclusive education ▪ Policy document implementation ▪ Encouragement, willingness, and attitude towards implementing inclusion ▪ Current implementation of inclusion
2.	Teachers' support for learners with barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training acquired to implement inclusive education ▪ Identifying learning barriers ▪ Assessing learning barriers ▪ Assessment strategies implemented ▪ Accommodation of teaching methods for different learning styles
3.	Impediments that prevent teachers from implementing inclusive education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Factors impeding teachers from implementing inclusive education ▪ Teachers' challenges with inclusive education policies.
4.	Available support structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extent of adequate resources and facilities ▪ Support structure challenges

4.5 BIOGRAPHICAL AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Table 4.3: Biographical Information of teacher-participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Educational Level	Qualification	Years of teaching experience	Inclusive Education training
T1	Female	49	Honours	BEd Honours	15-20 years	Yes
T2	Female	56	Degree	BA degree	More than 25 years	None
T3	Female	34	Degree	BEd degree	5-10 years	Yes
T4	Female	61	Diploma	Junior Primary Education Diploma	More than 25 years	None

4.5.1 Gender

Figure 4.1 below indicates the gender representation of teacher-participants.

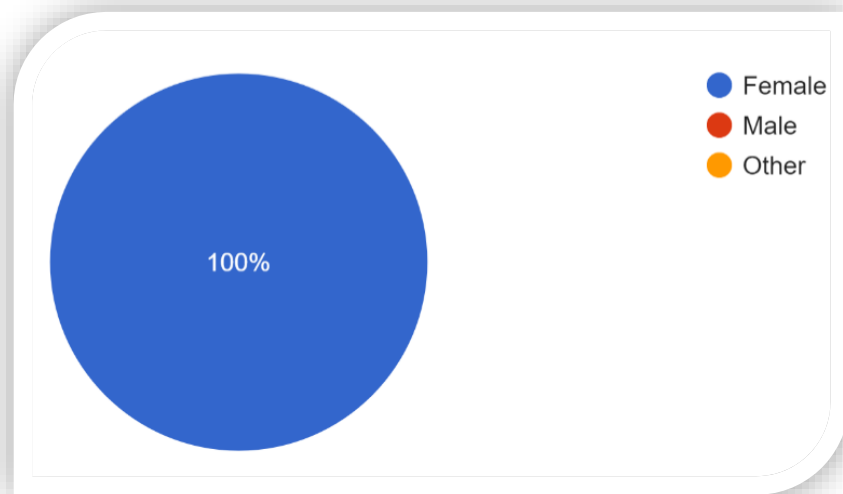


Figure 4. 1: Gender representation of teacher-participants

Figure 4.1 above indicates the gender of the teachers interviewed which comprised of 100% female teachers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2019), indicate

that in South Africa, the teaching profession is dominated by females, who constitute more than 60% of all teachers in the country. This trend is consistent with global patterns where the teaching profession has traditionally been a female-dominated field (UNESCO, 2014).

Studies have shown that there are differences in the teaching styles and classroom practices of male and female teachers. Male teachers have been found to use more direct instruction and discipline in the classroom, while female teachers tend to use more cooperative learning and positive reinforcement (OECD, 2009). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that these results are not universally applicable and may be influenced by cultural and contextual factors.

4.5.2 Age

Figure 4.2 below indicates the age of each teacher-participant.

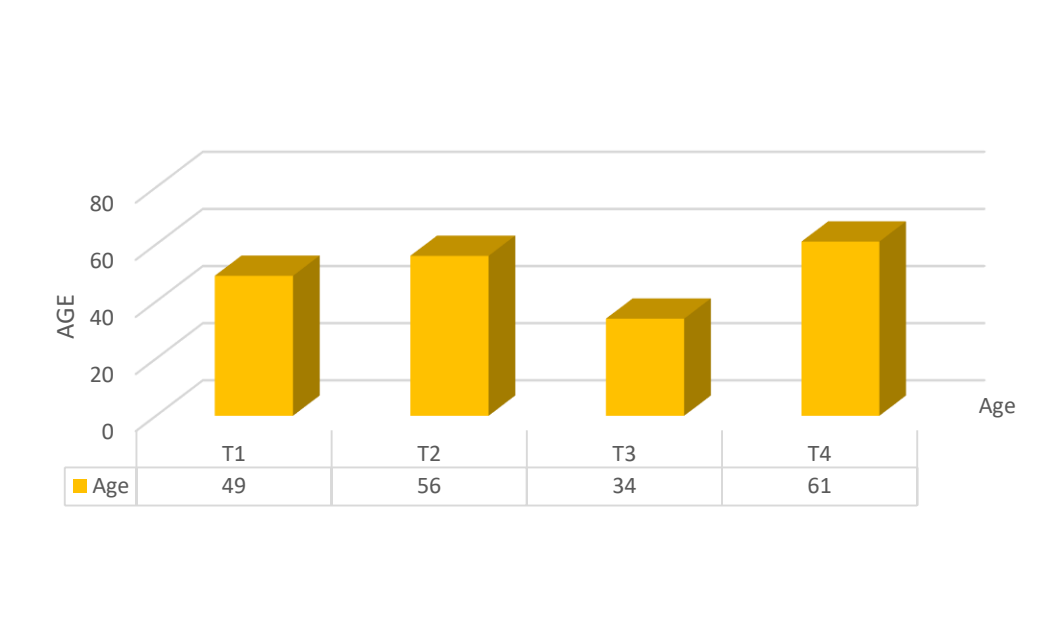


Figure 4. 2: Age of teacher-participants

Figure 4.2 above indicates T1 is 49 years of age, T2 is 56 years old, T3 is the youngest teacher who is 34 years of age, and T4 is the oldest teacher who is 61 years of age.

The differences in perspectives between younger and older teachers suggest that age may play a role in shaping attitudes and beliefs about education. Younger teachers may be more likely to embrace technology and newer teaching methods, while older teachers may prefer more traditional

approaches. This aligns with earlier studies that identified generational differences in attitudes towards technology and education (Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017) as younger teachers tend to be more comfortable with technology, while older teachers may be less familiar with new tools and methods.

However, it is important to note that age is just one factor that can influence teaching practices and attitudes. Other factors such as education, teaching experience, and cultural background can also play a significant role. Further research could help illuminate the distinct aspects that contribute to differences in teaching perspectives among different age groups. By better understanding the factors that influence teaching practices and attitudes, school officials can ensure that learners have the opportunity for top-notch education.

In South Africa, age is a critical factor in the teaching profession. The report on Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) by the OECD (2019), indicates that most teachers in the country are over the age of 40, with 43.7% of teachers falling in the age range of 40-49 years, and 31.9% over the age of 50 (OECD, 2019).

Age can have both positive and negative effects on teaching. Older teachers may have more experience and wisdom which can be beneficial for learners, they may have developed a deeper understanding of pedagogy and subject matter knowledge over the years, and may be able to relate better to learners due to their life experiences. On the other hand, older teachers may be less open to accept and apply new teaching methods and technologies as they may be reluctant to adapt to changing circumstances.

In addition, age can also have an impact on teacher turnover. In South Africa, in the initial five years of their profession, newly-appointed teachers tend to be more likely of exiting the profession, while older teachers remain in the profession for longer periods of time (SACE, 2020). This has implications for teacher recruitment and retention strategies.

Overall, it is important for schools and education policymakers to consider the age distribution of teachers regarding teacher-training, professional development, and recruitment strategies. By ensuring that teachers of all ages have access to quality training and support, and by promoting a culture of lifelong learning and professional growth, South Africa can develop teachers who are

prepared to provide high-quality teaching-learning to every learner, irrespective of age or background.

4.5.3 Educational Level

Figure 4.3 below indicates the educational level of teacher-participants:

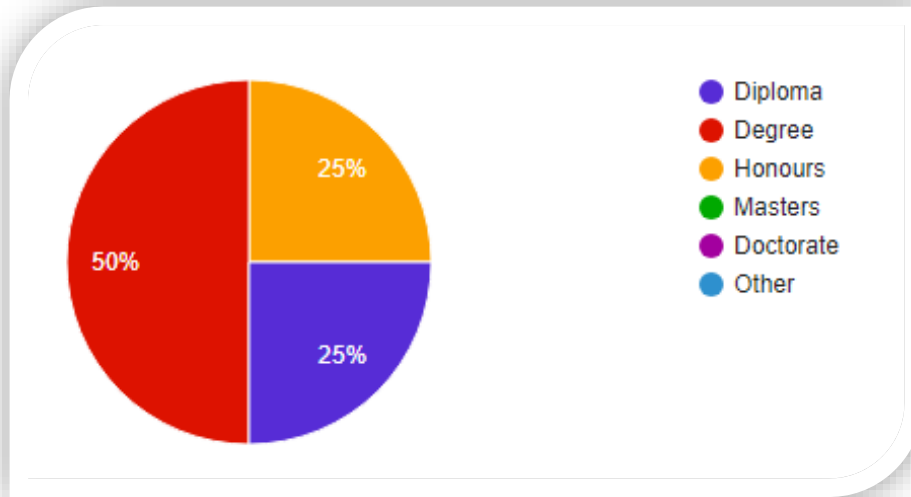


Figure 4. 3: Educational level of teacher-participants

Figure 4.3 above indicates that 25% of teachers hold a diploma qualification (NQF6), 50% hold a degree (NQF 7), and 25 % possess an honours (NQF 8) qualification.

Foundation Phase teachers in South Africa, who teach Grades R to 3, are required to have a minimum of a National Diploma or bachelor’s degree in education at NQF level 6, although some institutions may require higher qualifications such as an Honours Degree or Postgraduate Diploma in Education at NQF level 7.

Teachers are also required to register with the South African Council for Educators (SACE) and renew their registration every five years to ensure that they meet the minimum qualifications, experience, and ethical standards required to teach in the country (DBE, 2019).

4.5.4 Qualifications

Figure 4.4 below indicates the professional qualification status of teacher-participants:

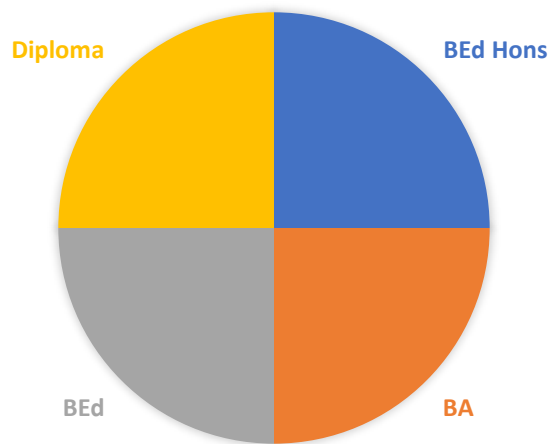


Figure 4.4: Teacher-participants' qualifications

Figure 4.4 above indicates that 25 % of teachers hold a diploma qualification, 25% hold a BA degree, 25% hold a Bed, and 25% of teachers possess a BEd honours degree.

In South Africa, there are various qualifications that teachers can obtain, including a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and a Diploma in Education (DipEd). The level of qualification can impact teacher-performance, thus it is essential to analyse the relationship between teachers' qualifications and learner outcomes.

Lee and Lee (2020) found that there is a correlation between teachers' qualification levels and learner achievement. Further, Crouch and Mabogoane (2001) found that in South Africa, teachers with higher levels of qualification, such as a master's degree in education, had an encouraging influence on learner-performance. In contrast, teachers with lower qualifications had a less positive effect on learner outcomes. This finding emphasises the importance of promoting teacher education and training to improve learner outcomes.

On an international level, a study by Hanushek et al. (2015) analysed the relationship between teachers' qualifications and learner-performance in several countries and it was found that teachers' education levels were positively associated with learner-performance across countries including the United States, Mexico, and Germany. Furthermore, the study highlights that teachers' subject knowledge is essential in enhancing learner outcomes. In countries with higher levels of

teacher education such as Japan and Korea, learners consistently outperform their peers in countries with lower levels of teacher education, such as the United States.

In sum, teachers' qualifications play a significant role in learner-performance, both in South Africa and globally. Encouraging and supporting teachers to obtain higher levels of education and training can lead to improved learner-performance and enhanced learner academic success.

4.5.5 Teaching Experience

Figure 4.5 below indicates the years of teaching experience for teacher-participants:

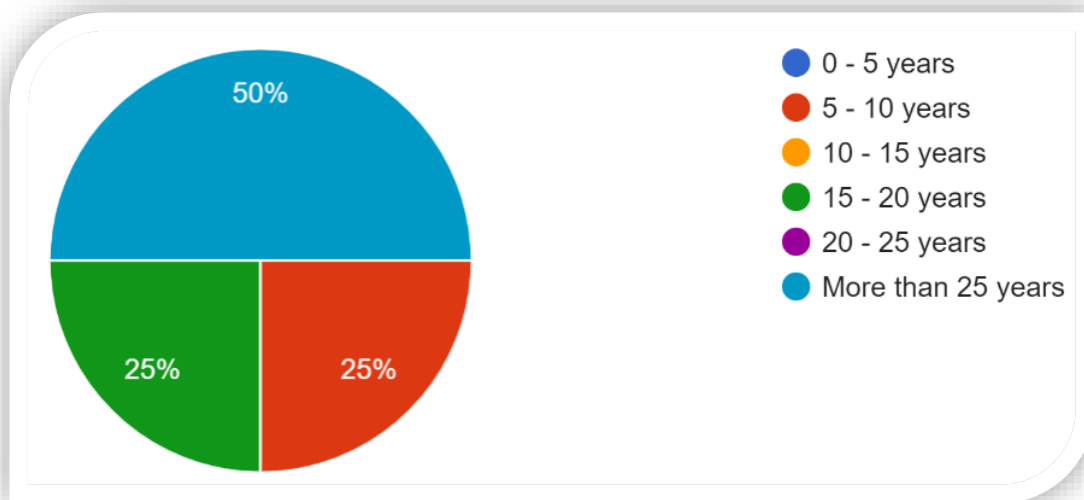


Figure 4.5: Teacher-participants' years of teaching experience

Figure 4.5 above indicates that 50 % of teachers have more than 25 years of teaching experience, 25% of teachers have between 15-20 years of teaching experience, and 25% of teachers have 5-10 years of teaching experience.

According to a study by Polly et al. (2022), there is a progressive correlation between years of teaching experience and learner-achievement, and that on average, teachers with extended tenure had a greater impact on learner-achievement than those with less experience.

Teachers who possess more years of experience often exert a beneficial influence on learner-achievement, including test scores and better school attendance. This influence is most pronounced

during the initial teaching years, yet it remains significant throughout a teacher’s professional journey. Additionally, more seasoned educators bring advantages not only to their learners, but also to fellow teachers and the broader school community (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

Another factor to consider is that the impact of years of experience on learner-achievement can vary depending on the subject and grade level being taught. Teachers who work in supportive and collegial environments, or who teach the same grade level, subject, or are in the same District for years, tend to be more effective than those who do not (Kini & Podolsky, 2016).

It’s also worth noting that while years of experience can be a valuable asset for teachers, it’s not the only factor that contributes to their effectiveness. Factors such as ongoing professional development, classroom management skills, and a commitment to teaching-learning can also play a significant role in teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

4.5.6 Inclusive Education Training

Figure 4.6 below indicates whether teacher-participants received inclusive education training:

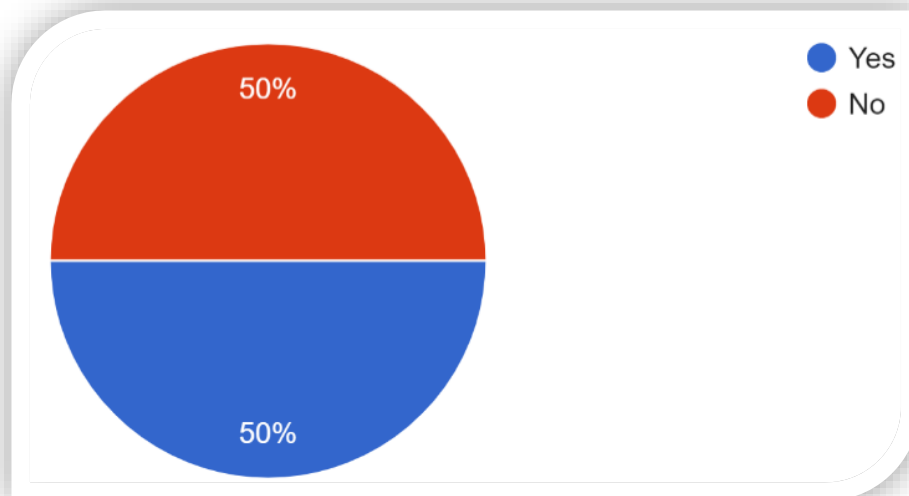


Figure 4. 6: Teacher-participants’ inclusive education training

Figure 4.6 above indicates that 50% of teachers possess BEd qualifications with inclusive education training, and 50% possess qualifications without inclusive education training.

In South Africa, the qualifications of teachers have proven to be valuable in the execution of inclusive education. Donohue and Bornman (2014) emphasise that teachers who have undergone inclusive education training display more favourable inclinations toward inclusive methods and possess enhanced capabilities for their successful enactment; however, there is a considerable number of South African teachers have not been sufficiently prepared to teach in inclusive education environments (Dreyer et al., 2012).

Moreover, the deficiency in inclusive education training extends beyond the borders of South Africa. A study carried out in Saudi Arabia unveiled that many teachers lacked the essential expertise and capabilities to proficiently integrate inclusive methodologies - this was linked to insufficient training and a scarcity of professional growth opportunities (Aldousari & Dunn, 2022). Correspondingly, research conducted in the United States revealed that despite teachers acknowledging the significance of inclusive education, numerous felt ill-equipped to adeptly incorporate inclusive practices within their instructional settings (De Boer., 2013).

To encapsulate, the successful execution of inclusive education is significantly influenced by the qualifications and inclusive education training of teachers. While research suggests that there are gaps in inclusive education training for teachers in both South Africa and internationally, efforts to address this through professional development and training opportunities could lead to positive outcomes for learners with diverse learning needs.

4.6 THEME 1: TEACHER UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.6.1 Sub-theme 1: Perceptions of Inclusive Education

The awareness of teacher-participants' knowledge and comprehension of the framework of inclusive education became apparent during the analysis of data gathered from teacher questionnaires and interviews, as well as from the CAPS policy, SIAS, and EWP6. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that a significant number of teachers expressed a sense of unpreparedness to effectively implement inclusive education within the classroom. It was apparent that intensive training was necessary for the successful implementation of inclusion.

The initial question of the open-ended questionnaire (appendix F) and the interview (appendix G) was intended for participants to assess their understanding and knowledge of inclusive education.

The responses below reflect all teacher-participants' and all SMTs' understanding, perception and preparedness of inclusive education.

All teachers indicated being familiar to the idea of inclusion which aligned with the EWP6 and the SIAS document in addressing the needs of all learners. Teacher 2 (T2) provided a more incisive explanation of inclusive education which focused on a few aspects on what learners' experience with special reference to learners' special needs including those who experience mild physical challenges but are able to be accommodated in an mainstream classroom. Teacher 3 (T3) provided an all-encompassing explanation of inclusive education stating that it allows all learners experiencing barriers to learning, including those with disabilities, to access free, equal and quality education from primary to secondary education levels,

The following excerpts support the above findings:

T2: *It refers to learners with special needs but are able to function in a normal classroom. These learners mostly have very mild physical difficulty.*

T3: *It ensures that all children of school-going age experiencing barriers to learning, including those with disabilities, have reasonable access to inclusive, quality, free, primary and secondary education on an equal basis with other young people in the communities in which they live.*

Additionally, a more diluted perception of inclusive education was articulated by T1 and T4. While T1 briefly indicated that inclusive education involved the accommodation of the diverse needs of learners, T4 summarily viewed inclusive learners as being those who can be accommodated in mainstream classrooms.

The responses below support the above assertions:

T1: *Catering for the needs of diversity of learners.*

T4: *These children can be included in mainstream classes.*

It was found that some teacher-participants who were interviewed had a basic grasp of the concept of inclusive education, whilst others had a slight notion of it. Despite having documented certain lexical concepts related to inclusive education, this is not sufficient when it comes to the application of inclusion, especially with learners experiencing a multitude of challenges.

Kurth et al. (2018) notes that the terms *inclusive education* and *inclusion* emerged to distinguish practices where learners facing learning barriers were accommodated. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) research further supports and emphasises the interconnectedness among various educational components like schools, educators, learners, parents, educational institutions, and the broader society. These components collaborate to facilitate the growth and development of learners within the system's framework. An individual's progress, development, and inclusive advancement are enhanced through the interplay of these systems and subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Teachers' experience of including learners with learning challenges in an educational setting cannot be viewed in isolation. It is necessary to investigate the experiences of teachers regarding the interrelated components. Importantly, the progress of learners is reliant on the teacher as they share an interconnected relationship in improving the quality and value of different classroom practices and experiences with the subject and/or the class teacher (Adegoroye, 2004).

In order for teachers to effectively aid learners facing learning obstacles within regular classrooms, it is imperative that they identify learners' barriers to learning as an initial step (DoE, 2014). The CAPS policy document (DoE, 2001) for Foundation Phase English, Mathematics and Life Skills subjects stipulates that the integration of inclusivity needs to be ingrained into the core of every school's organisation, curriculum development, and instructional practices. Achieving this goal is contingent upon ensuring that all teachers possess a solid comprehension of identifying and overcoming obstacles to learning, as well as effectively designing lessons that accommodate diverse learner populations. Hence, CAPS clearly states that the teacher should acknowledge and confront barriers to learning (DBE, 2011). Respondents T2 and T3 emphasised *barriers* that hinder learners as being related to inclusive education. Additionally, teachers need to be sensitive and familiar with obstacles confronted by learners as this will determine the type of support required for the learner (DoE, 2001; 2014). The EWP6 (2001) refers to inclusion as the acknowledgment and respect for the unique qualities and characteristics of every learner, while recognising their special traits and attributes.

Understandably, T2's and T3's responses largely corresponded with the special needs education definition as indicated in the EWP6 policy document. However, the perception by T2 was partially true, though the full definition includes more than just physical challenges. The EWP6 highlights that special needs education addresses various factors including physical, mental, sensory,

neurological and developmental impairments, including psycho-social disturbances, intellectual ability differences, certain traumatic life experiences, or lack of socio-economic stability (DoE, 2001). The DoE (2001), in its quest to promote special needs education, focused on integrating learners with mild-to-moderate learning difficulties into regular classrooms.

Half the number of participants (50%) had an average understanding of the concept of inclusive education, whilst others had an elementary perception. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) highlight the significance of teachers' deep understanding of inclusive pedagogy and the role of ongoing professional development in enhancing their knowledge and skills. A strong theoretical foundation, ongoing professional development, and collaboration to enhance teacher knowledge of inclusive practices are paramount. The findings prove that though teachers understand some lexical concepts of inclusive education, this is profoundly insufficient. Therefore, teachers must acquire and demonstrate a thorough knowledge of inclusion education concepts such that it forms a strong theoretical foundation.

4.6.2 Sub-theme 2: Preparedness in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers and SMT's responses regarding their readiness to implement inclusive education were analysed. Teachers had mixed views on their state of preparedness in addressing inclusion.

4.6.2.1 Adequately prepared

A minority (25%) of teachers and SMTs (20%) deemed that they were adequately prepared to implement inclusive education in a mainstream classroom.

The expressions below support the above findings:

T4: *Well prepared!*

SMT5: *They are fairly prepared.*

4.6.2.2 Inadequately prepared

The majority (75%) of teachers (T1, T2, & T3) believed that they lack sufficient preparation to integrate inclusive education into their conventional classroom settings. One teacher believed that given the appropriate training, they would possess the necessary abilities to effectively implement inclusive education.

The responses below support the above findings:

T1: *Not very.*

T2: *Not sure.*

T3: *Given the right training, I believe that I would be more than capable to implement inclusive education.*

Alarming, about 80% of SMTs (SMT 1- 4) stated that teachers were insufficiently equipped and trained to instruct and assist learners with diverse challenges. Further, they bemoaned that the combined school was not in a position to accommodate such learners as teachers did not have the necessary resources and learning aids due to budgetary constraints. It seemed that training had not taken place as SMTs revealed that teachers were not prepared, and neither were they trained to teach learners with diverse needs.

The extracts below support the above findings:

SMT1: *They are definitely not prepared and trained to teach learners with different emotional, physical and educational challenges. Schools are also not able to cater for learners who are differently abled. Also educators do not have the necessary resources or learning aids to assist them to work with these learners.*

SMT2: *Educators, I believe are not prepared for having diverse children in the same classrooms in the same schools. Firstly, because not all teachers are trained to teach learners with physical/emotional/educational challenges. Secondly, our schools do not physically, practically cater for learners who are differently abled. Thirdly, budgetary constraints prevent learners from receiving modern learning aids to assist in their education.*

SMT3: *Teachers in my school are not trained to implement inclusive education. I am not aware of any training workshops in this regard up to this point or in the near future.*

SMT4: *Not really equipped to deal with this.*

Many teachers believed that they were not adequately prepared and trained to teach learners with varying challenges. Teachers believe that they were inexperienced to teach learners with different emotional, physical, and educational challenges.

The DoE (2001) via the EWP6 posits that each teacher has the necessary expertise, competence, and skills to acknowledge barriers to learning. Teacher-unpreparedness to implement inclusive education in the mainstream classroom can impact the delivery of quality education and learner-achievement.

Additionally, the SIAS policy refers to the implementation of inclusive education training by the DBE (2011) by stating that it is necessary for all teachers, managers, as well as provincial and District officials to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for its effective implementation. Teacher-unpreparedness as evidenced by the teachers and SMTs alike can be attributed to the absence of workshops or training in current times. Moreover, an absence of necessary resources demotivates teachers' drive to support differently abled learners.

The majority of teachers (75%) believed that they were not adequately prepared to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms; similarly, about 80% of SMTs reiterated that teachers were not adequately prepared and trained to teach learners with varying challenges in mainstream classrooms. The findings corroborate with a study by Hay et al. (2001) where they maintain that teachers do not necessarily have the requisite skills, ability, knowledge, and competence as they are not familiar with the inclusive education system and practices. MacPherson-Court et al. (2003) reiterate that if teachers do not have the required skills, ability, and knowledge, they do not feel as prepared and confident about their teaching capabilities. Teachers confirm that their unpreparedness in practising inclusion is predominately due to inadequate teacher-training.

4.6.3 Sub-theme 3: Use of Policy Documents

The respondents' views on which policy documents they referred to when teaching in an inclusive classroom were analysed in tandem with the Foundation Phase English, Mathematics and Life Skills lesson plans, as well as the EWP6, CAPS and SIAS documents.

The research indicated that 50% of teachers (T1 and T3) consulted the CAPS documents and 50% of teachers (T2 and T4) consulted the EWP6 policy documents. Teachers seemed to be more familiar with the CAPS and the EWP6 policies. The CAPS is a specific teaching and learning policy document on inclusion, whereas EWP6 and SIAS are guidelines for inclusion. However, the SIAS policy was not cited among the policy documents that teachers consult to implement

inclusive education in the classroom, yet it serves as a basic guide for screening, identification, and assessment of learners experiencing learning barriers.

The following articulations attest to the above findings:

T1: *CAPS.*

T2: *Yes. White Paper 6.*

T3: *The CAPS document.*

T4: *Yes. White Paper 6.*

Only 20% of SMTs (SMT5) indicated that teachers do indeed refer to the EWP6. The response below supports this:

SMT5: *Yes. White Paper 6.*

The SMTs expressed various views on whether teachers utilise policy documents. Whilst most SMTs (80%) agreed that the EWP6 is the *modus operandi* document, they believed that not all teachers really understood the contents of EWP6. They indicated that the DoE needs to workshop teachers on an ongoing basis to familiarise them with the contents so that knowledge and skills can be enhanced. The SMT2 directed responsibility to the DBE to make a concerted effort to ensure that at the very least, an annual refresher workshop is conducted. The SMT3 indicated that no policy documents have been received by his school, while SMT4 believed that the tuition at the school caters for primarily mainstream learners, thus teachers do not refer to policy documents regarding inclusion.

The above assertions are substantiated below:

SMT1: *White Paper 6. Not all educators are au fait with this document and its contents. The DOE must make sure that they have workshops or seminars to discuss these policies on an ongoing basis so that educators are updated and refreshed.*

SMT2: *White Paper 6 is expected to be the 'go to' document in respect of inclusive education in South Africa. Unfortunately, I believe that few educators are truly au fait with its contents - the DOE needs to make greater efforts in ensuring that all educators are familiar with its policies, and that educators are refreshed annually on its aims and objectives*

SMT3: *No. No policy documents have been received by the school to my knowledge.*

SMT4: *Not that I am aware of. We cater for mainstream learners, as a public school.*

Teachers referred to the CAPS and EWP6 policy documents on a regular basis. Half the number of teachers (T1 and T3) consulted CAPS, and the others (T2 and T4) consulted the EWP6 policy documents. The SMTs provided a range of views of whether teachers utilise any policy documents. Also, it was evident from the findings that teachers were not familiar with the SIAS process.

According to the SIAS policy, teachers were expected to complete the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms on learner-admission at each phase, document learner needs, strengths, abilities, and preferences in the learner's profile (DBE, 2014).

The implication of the findings point to teachers' lack of inclusive knowledge because they do not adhere to the details of the SIAS policy and its procedures. The DBE (2014) highlights the use of the SIAS policy to guide inclusive education in the classroom. It was evident from the research processes that this policy was not utilised to its maximum. By having knowledge of and following the quintessential SIAS procedures, learners with diverse needs can be accommodated and learner needs can be met unequivocally. Lastly, if teachers are not au fait with this main policy document, the opportunity to indulge inclusive education learners in daily teaching and learning is virtually impossible.

4.6.3.1 Document analysis

The teacher's role in an inclusive classroom is of utmost importance, therefore it is the duty of educators to comprehend inclusion education principles and the diverse requirements of learners, including those who are differently abled (DoE, 2014).

Teachers at this combined school indicated that they were au fait with utilising the teaching and learning policy document in the pursuit of assisting learners with barriers. Regarding the role of an inclusive teacher, teachers share equal responsibility for the creation of lesson plans based on the directives outlined in the CAPS document (DBE, 2011).

The researcher examined the Foundation Phase classroom environment at a combined school due to the gravity, value, and determining nature of the phase. This phase prepares learners with the fundamental skills, knowledge, and acumen necessary to progress to a higher grade.

The Grade 3 lesson term plans serve as an exit level teaching and learning document for the Foundation Phase. As part of the document analysis process, the Grade 3 lesson term plan was interrogated to gain more insight on the CAPS content covered in a term period, and to determine, if necessary, whether adjustments were made for inclusive learners in mainstream according to policy guidelines.

The DoE (2001) emphasises that the CAPS is a fundamental document that guides teaching and learning from Grade R to 12. Each subject has a specific CAPS document that stipulates what and how aspects should be taught and assessed per grade by teachers.

The CAPS policy document for English, Mathematics and Life Skills theorises that teachers should have a well-rounded grasp on how to recognise and address challenges to learning (DoE, 2001). According to the DoE (2001), the overarching objectives of the South African curriculum for educators involve tackling and solving classroom impediments. To accomplish this, teachers are encouraged to employ diverse curriculum differentiation techniques, including those outlined in the DBE's Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (2010). This information is clearly listed in all three CAPS policy documents (English, Mathematics, and Life Skills).

The researcher collected and collated lesson term plans provided by the Grade 3 teacher at the combined school. The lesson term plans encompassed the disciplines of English, Mathematics, and Life Skills. On perusal of the term lesson plans, it was determined that they were aligned with the content prescribed for a term according to the CAPS policy document; however, these plans did not include any provisions for aiding learners with disabilities. (DBE, 2011).

Generally, the term plans outlined comparisons. The Grade 3 lesson term plan incorporated content to be covered as per CAPS guidelines. The CAPS document for English and Life Skills details a standardised area of study, weighting, time allocation, assessment tasks, and recommended resources (DBE, 2011). The Mathematics lesson term ostensibly differed slightly to other term plans. It detailed the following: time allocation, aims, skills, focus of content area, weighting, Mathematics in the Foundation Phase, and recommended resources.

Table 4.4: CAPS instructional time-plan for 3 subjects (DBE, 2011)

Subject	Grade R (hours)	Grades 1-2 (hours)	Grade 3 (hours)
Home Language	10	8/7	8/7
First Additional Language		2/3	3/4
Mathematics	7	7	7
Life Skills	6	6	7
• Beginning Knowledge	(1)	(1)	(2)
• Creative Arts	(2)	(2)	(2)
• Physical Education	(2)	(2)	(2)
• Personal and Social Well-being	(1)	(1)	(1)
Total	23	23	25

In the CAPS policy document, the subject Life Skills in Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) has been organised into four study areas: Beginning Knowledge, Personal and Social Wellbeing, Creative Arts, and Physical Education. The Life Skills lesson term plans focused on the learning outcomes that needed to be met as per the CAPS requirements. The term plan included an area of study, weighting, time allocation, assessment tasks, and recommended resources (DBE, 2011).

The English lesson term plans comprised of learning objectives encompassing listening, speaking, reading, phonics, writing, and handwriting. These provided teachers with information for the learning outcomes and methods of teaching that facilitate learning (DBE, 2011). Moreover, the English lesson term plan concentrated on varied reading styles that can be utilised by teachers for the benefit of all learners.

The CAPS policy document offers teachers a description of Mathematics, with its distinct objectives, particular skills, areas of content emphasis, allocation of content importance, suggested resources for Foundation Phase Mathematics classes, guidelines for aiding learners facing learning obstacles, and techniques for improving mental Mathematics. The Mathematics lesson term plans included the learning outcomes that needed to be taught by teachers and attained by learners (DBE, 2011). However, these did not stipulate information on how teachers should utilise the content to

teach learners, neither did it focus on learners with barriers. In other words, they lacked any kind of assistance for learners with impairments. There are random headings included in the lesson term plan such as *barriers to learning*, and reference is made to supporting learners facing impediments, but without suggesting what methods should be considered.

Though the lesson term plans reiterate the CAPS subject matter that requires instruction by teachers, it does not demonstrate how the CAPS curriculum can be sufficiently presented with an inclusive education focus in line with education policies.

4.6.4 Sub-theme 4: Encouragement, Willingness and Attitude Towards Implementing Inclusion

The teachers' perceptions of SMTs' encouragement and attitude toward the enactment of inclusion were analysed in conjunction with SMTs' perceptions about the willingness of teachers to implement inclusive education.

4.6.4.1 Teacher willingness and attitude

All teachers (T1-T4) concurred that the management of the combined school is supportive as T1 and T4 indicated that the SMT team exhibits a positive attitude by encouraging teachers to implement inclusion. Additionally, T2 believes that the SMT team encouraged teachers to implement policies and that they will support teachers when necessary. According to T3, the SMT team allows teachers to be versatile and adaptive in their teaching styles so that they accommodate the different developmental levels of all learners.

The articulations below support the above assertions:

T1: *They do encourage it with a positive attitude.*

T2: *They encourage us in the implementation of policy and will support when they can.*

T3: *Management encourages educators to adapt their teaching to include all learners, taking their developmental levels into account. Teaching methods must be adapted to cater for all learners.*

T4: *They are supportive.*

4.6.4.2 SMT encouragement

The SMT 2, SMT3 and SMT5 indicated that teachers understand the value and need for inclusion and are willing to incorporate inclusion into their classrooms. The SMT1 and SMT2 implied that

all teachers were willing to embrace inclusion as they see the importance and potential of inclusion in their daily practices. Since their roles are twofold - firstly, as parents of learners, and secondly as teachers in a classroom, they feel that they should become committed to inclusiveness. The SMT3 indicated that teachers have a willing attitude, despite not being trained to facilitate inclusion. Lastly, SMT5 believed that teachers were accommodating and sufficiently competent in applying inclusive policies.

The extracts below support the above evidence:

SMT1: ... *willing to incorporate inclusion in their daily teaching as they are also parents and then teachers, and will understand its positive impact and value.*

SMT2: *I believe that educators understand the need for inclusive education, largely because they are parents first, then teachers, so they understand its value.*

SMT3: *Teachers are working with learners who are experiencing challenges.*

SMT5: *They are very cooperative, and are very capable of implementing new policies.*

The SMT1 and SMT4 found that teacher willingness to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning is weakened by an absence of teacher-training and DBE support. The SMT1 alluded to the fact that teachers were willing to incorporate inclusion in the classrooms, though they are not currently equipped to do so with the current low levels of support from the DBE. The SMT4 indicated that teachers are not enthusiastic in applying inclusion as they see it as challenging. Furthermore, they are already faced with other challenges such as voluminous paperwork, lack of resources, large class sizes, and maintaining learner-discipline. The SMT2 reiterated that burdensome administrative work, extensive paperwork, and a general absence of support from the DBE hamper tangible efforts to enforce inclusion.

The assertions below support the above findings:

SMT1: *I think that all educators will be willing to incorporate inclusion in their daily teaching as they are also parents, and then teachers and will understand its positive impact and value. If we do not have any support from the DOE, the educators cannot progress and will also be stifled.*

SMT2: *However, it's the bureaucracy associated with teaching, the volumes of paperwork and the lack of support from the DoE that stifle any real progress.*

SMT3: *Teachers are working with learners ... although they are not trained to do so.*

SMT4: *Not very keen, see it as an impediment. This is understandable due to large class sizes, lack of resources, and a great amount of record-keeping and paperwork that educators need to contend with. Also, discipline among learners leaves much to be desired.*

The implications of the findings corroborate with those studies which revealed that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions in achieving the objectives of inclusive practices are crucial to its success (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). According to Eloff and Kgwete (2007), teacher attitudes are seen as key predictors of positive inclusion more than teacher-training. Evidenced in the research is that all teachers concur that management of the combined school are supportive. The responses gathered from the relevant participants indicated that they are all encouraged and supported positively by the administrative personnel of the school to implement inclusion. However, teachers' willingness to assist learners facing obstacles to learning is weakened by an absence of teacher-training, DBE support, resources, and negative attitudes towards challenging classroom environments.

This is further supported in current literature as there is substantial evidence indicating that teachers are the primary drivers of enhancing value in inclusion (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). It is certain that teachers can, when part of a functional support structure, play a crucial role in transforming the school environment; however, if they don't have the necessary assistance, they may not engender the desired contribution (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). Adewumi and Mosito (2019) elaborate that poor support for teachers and learners, inflexible methods of teaching, parents who are not active participants in a learners' schooling career, overcrowded classrooms, assessments based on the controversial medical deficit model, reluctant attitudes towards learners with impairments, and the absence of clear Government policies affect inclusive education.

This study relies on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory to illustrate support. This is essential because the educational experiences and teaching duties of teachers in tertiary or school settings are intertwined with a broader structure that encompasses various interconnected elements:

learners, families, institutional management, departments, the larger community, and entities like the DoE. These interconnected components mutually influence one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

4.6.5 Sub-theme 5: Current Implementation of Inclusion

The responses of how teachers currently implement inclusion were analysed. The SMTs' views of the application of inclusive education policies were also elicited.

4.6.5.1 Teachers' current implementation of inclusion

Participants' responses indicated that teachers' preparation included provisions based on learners' needs, researching teaching strategies, drawing from experiential knowledge, planning as key for teacher preparation, and paying adequate attention to learners. Also, T1 indicated that the current preparation initiatives involve diversifying the curriculum as per learner requirements, while T2 pointed out that the background information (of learners) available to the teacher is important in how the teacher plans to prepare an inclusive lesson. Moreover, T3 believed that the planning process is key and that studying inclusion strategies is crucial to preparation. Lastly, T4 believed that focusing on learners with barriers to learning is an important preparation step.

The enunciations below support the above evidence:

T1: ... *curriculum diversity according to the needs of my learners.*

T2: *I will try using what background information I have.*

T3: ... *researching teaching strategies to aid in inclusive education. Proper planning is vital.*

T4: *Give them more attention.*

Teacher preparation essentially involves making provisions and accommodations based on learner needs. It emerges as the focal point in addressing barriers to learning that learners face. As such, planning should take precedence in accommodating learner needs, while studying inclusion strategies for implementation facilitates preparation.

Addressing learner needs is contingent upon introducing curriculum diversification. The predominant challenge encountered by the majority of learners pertains to the curriculum itself. Both the curriculum content and the mode of instruction remain rigid and unyielding (DoE, 2010).

The lack of adaptability within the curriculum fails to satisfy individual differences among learners, thereby detrimentally affecting optimal learning within inclusive mainstream classes (Zwane & Malale, 2018).

In order to effectively address learner requirements and implement inclusion strategies, the teacher must be well-versed with the SIAS policy. The DBE (2014) indicates that the SIAS policy document provides clear guidelines for teachers to follow while assessing learners' needs in conjunction with their home and school circumstances, with the aim of gauging the extent of supplementary support that may be needed. The DBE (2014) maintains that the teacher and relevant personnel who have regular interaction with the learner are responsible for executing the SIAS procedures according to the policy's specifications. Accordingly, within the SIAS process, the teacher assumes the role of a case manager to augment the support mechanism.

This study determined that teacher-preparation involves tackling and overcoming classroom barriers congruent to the CAPS guidelines. For instance, Foundation Phase English, Mathematics, and Life Skills teachers are advised to employ diverse curriculum differentiation tactics, akin to those outlined in the DBE's Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (2010).

According to Annexure C of the SIAS policy, curriculum differentiation is clearly indicated as part of the SIAS process applied after a learner who requires differentiation was evaluated, and if the learner performs exceedingly below the norm (DBE, 2014).

Thwala (2015) indicates that teachers need specific preparation tools to effectively tackle (and solve) hurdles to learning within inclusive environments. Proper teacher-training should equip teachers with the necessary expertise to manage learning challenges among diverse learners within inclusive settings (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). It is no secret that mainstream school teachers often lack sufficient training to effectively address learning barriers within inclusive contexts (Mfuthwana & Dreyer, 2018).

4.6.5.2 SMTs' views on the current implementation of inclusion

The SMT1 and SMT2 recommended that in order to thoroughly prepare lessons with inclusion education strategies, teachers must regularly apply inclusion policies on a daily basis in the classroom. The DBE must also prioritise continuous professional development, workshops, provision of necessary teacher resources, and suggest hands-on methods to showcase supportive

creative techniques to assist learners with barriers to learning. The SMT2 further states that the DBE must offer a solution on how to deal with large class numbers whilst adhering to inclusive practices. The SMT3 is also of the opinion that untrained teachers find it difficult to manage learners with barriers as their teaching and management skills are lacking. Lastly, SMT4 pointed out that the growing learner numbers sets the expectation and motivation for teachers to familiarise themselves with inclusive education practices which may become embedded in our education system in the future.

The excerpts that follow support the above assertions:

SMT1: *I think it is very important and all educators should apply inclusive education policies in their daily teaching and let our learners benefit. I think that the DoE should play a more pivotal role by assisting educators by updating them via workshops, teaching resources, having practical classes, and demonstrating to educators how to cope with their learners.*

SMT2: *It's important that all educators apply inclusive education policies in their daily teaching methodology to ensure that all learners benefit equally from the schooling system. However this can only be accomplished with further intervention from the DoE, in respect of classroom size, teaching resources, a well as workshops assisting educators with hands-on activities to cope with the new classroom environment.*

SMT3: *Working with learners who have challenges will definitely be challenging for educators who are not trained to cope with these challenges.*

SMT4: *There is an increasing number of learners in schools that warrant educators to become au fait with inclusive education practices.*

Interestingly, SMT5 believed that the application of inclusive education guidelines by teachers is significant in their daily interactions because all learners are more or less the same when it comes to ability levels. SMT5's belief that inclusive education policies must be consistently applied is congruent with the guidelines in the EWP6. However, expressing the opinion that all learners' abilities are almost on par with each other, is untrue. The EWP6 states that inclusion entails the acceptance and reverence of the fact that every learner possesses unique qualities and distinct

learning requirements. These differences are acknowledged as equally valuable and inherent aspects of our shared human journey (DoE, 2001). Teachers need to be aware that learners exist with differing learning needs, and therefore must apply inclusivity accordingly. Teachers are aware that learners entering regular classes possess varying capabilities, competencies, and understanding, including diverse learning preferences, socioeconomic contexts, and individual traits. To effectively address the varied requirements of learners, teachers must vary their instructional approaches and techniques within the classroom (DBE, 2014). Learners may need several focused types of assistance in order to achieve their full potential (DoE, 2001).

In the preparation phase for the implementation of inclusion, learner needs must be provided for, teaching strategies must emerge from experiential knowledge, and teachers should adhere to proper planning procedures and pay adequate attention to learners who are differently abled. The SMTs found that in order to properly prepare and apply inclusion education policies, teachers must apply inclusion policies on a regular basis in the class. The SIAS Participant Manual for Educators (2015) asserts that a good teacher plans by navigating adaptations and modifications to reach every learner to grasp skills and knowledge to attain a higher level of learning and understanding. The priority is the provision of the entire package of curriculum differentiation. Implementing effective inclusive education in the Foundation Phase relies on quality education standards, specialised acquisition of knowledge, and the preparation of teachers at pre- and in-service levels (DBE, 2015). Engelbrecht et al. (2015) assert that the continual preparation of teachers provides updated awareness, continual understanding, improved skills, and competencies to meet the needs of a diverse classroom. This implies that the onus also lies with the teacher in modifying the curriculum in a way that is tailored-made for learner needs.

Additionally, the DBE must prioritise continuous professional development, workshops, provide the necessary teacher resources, and recommend innovative but practical methods to demonstrate ways to assist learners facing impediments to learning. Moreover, the DoE (2002) notes that the integration of inclusive education points out that the quality of education in schools can be elevated if teachers acquire the essential abilities and expertise to facilitate learners facing obstacles in learning. This corresponds with the investigation conducted by Armstrong et al. (2011) where the significance of professional growth was highlighted for teachers to comprehend how to tackle learning obstacles within inclusive classroom environments, thus emphasising the importance of

prioritising this aspect. Lastly, Horne and Timmons (2009) affirm that without sufficient training, teachers will be incapable of providing suitable support to diverse learners in mainstream schools.

4.7 THEME 2: TEACHER SUPPORT FOR LEARNERS WITH BARRIERS

4.7.1 Sub-theme 1: Training Acquired to Implement Inclusive Education

The views on teacher-training, the adequacy of training, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills gained regarding inclusive education were analysed. The SMTs' views on the training offered to teachers, the adequacy of the training, and how the introduction of the system of inclusive education versus the apartheid system of education were analysed.

4.7.1.1 Training received by teachers

According to T1, training was conducted on differentiated learning, but it was not sufficient. Further, T2 indicated that training was offered by DBE psychological services where wide-ranging content and materials were disseminated on how to recognise and assist inclusive learners' learning needs in a classroom environment, while T3 indicated that inclusive education modules completed at university level included teaching methods to assist learners experiencing barriers to learning. Lastly, T4 mentioned that the only workshops were provided and facilitated by the DBE.

The responses below confirm the above evidence:

T1: *Training was given via a workshop on differentiated learning. Was not adequate.*

T2: *I have attended workshops by the DoE psychological services. They gave us lots of information on how to identify learners with barriers to learning, and how to help them achieve in the classroom.*

T3: *I completed two modules of inclusive education at university. It dealt with teaching methods used to assist learners with disabilities and barriers to learning.*

T4: *Only workshops by DoE.*

4.7.1.2 SMTs' views on teacher-training

The SMTs' provided information that echoed the sentiments of T1 and T4 that workshops are few and far between, if at all. The SMT1 provided insight into how the DBE has minimally supported efforts to workshop inclusive education. The DoE has not in the last 7 years provided any training

sessions to assist teachers in managing inclusive education challenges. The SMT2's sentiments were similar to that of SMT1 in that more than 6 years have elapsed since the last workshops were held by the school, which only focused on class teachers. Hence, SMT2 implied that there was a multitude of challenges facing the current set of learners, including the fact that teachers are not adequately equipped to manage and teach inclusive classes. Lastly, SMT3 also agreed that no training had taken place recently, and emphasised that training is necessary and beneficial.

The extracts below support the above views:

SMT1: *Very little support is provided by DOE. No workshops or seminars or support material was given to educators for the past 7 years, I think. Very disappointing. Educators are faced with many challenges, but no help from the DOE.*

SMT2: *I believe that very little support is provided to educators regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The last workshop I believe was on autism, held about 6 years ago. That too, was only for educators on the staff. But there's an array of problems current learners are experiencing, which educators have to solve.*

SMT3: *... no training that I am aware of. Some training workshops will be helpful.*

The SMT4 and SMT5 were of the opinion that training had been received, while SMT4 opined that there was uncertainty about inclusive education modules offered in education degrees. Also, SMT4 alludes that workshops do occur occasionally which uplifts teachers' ability to manage an inclusive education classroom. Lastly, SMT5 mentioned that training was received, and the learning from the training was imparted to fellow teachers.

The following articulations support the above assertions:

SMT4: *I am not aware of any currently in the curriculum of education degrees offered. The Department holds workshops from time-to-time trying to empower educators to deal with this challenge.*

SMT5: *I have received training and cascaded the information to the teachers.*

The findings revealed that some participants attended workshops arranged by the DBE; a teacher alluded to being trained on differentiated learning, but the training was not sufficient. Another teacher had completed some modules at university level pertaining to supporting learners with

disabilities and barriers to learning. Teachers were unanimous that training by the DBE was not provided in recent years to assist teachers in managing inclusive education challenges. This is unfortunate as ongoing and updated training sessions for teachers assist inclusive learners overcome barriers to learning.

Teachers mentioned that the relevant education authorities from the DBE and DoE have not made the lives of learners with special needs any easier. A teacher indicated that she completed education modules at university level which comprised of teaching methods to assist learners experiencing barriers to learning, but this is insufficient to meet the needs of the special learner. Other teachers received minimal training related to inclusion from the DBE. Responses by teachers indicate that teachers are not familiar with the idea of an SBST structure within their school environment. Participants indicated that the SBST and DBST were not fully functional. Unequivocally, it appears that teachers are not aware of any internal support programmes or school support structure. The findings are alarming as the support expected from the SBST and DBST is non-existent or insufficient.

As per the DBE (2001) regulations, it is stated that the main responsibility of SBSTs and DBSTs centres on providing assistance to both learners and teachers. This is achieved through the identification of areas requiring urgent support and the formulation of programmes aimed at tackling the difficulties faced by teachers. However, the evidence from this research shows that the support structure at mainstream schools is non-functional. A functional SBST and DBST must exist to foster the implementation of learner and teacher support.

4.7.1.3 SMT views on training teachers received in the apartheid era

In concurrence, SMT1 and SMT2 admit that a vast number of teachers were trained according to the discriminatory previous educational dispensation, and thus have outdated or traditional teaching methods. Whilst some teachers who have been trained in the new dispensation which capacitated them with the appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills to manage inclusive education, they too are inundated with hindrances that affect the successful implementation of inclusive education. Barriers that impede teachers include huge classes, lack of resources, fast paced syllabus, excessive administrative duties, and no support from the DBE.

The excerpts below support the above assertions:

SMT1: *Most of our educators at school were trained according to the old system, and still use old methodology. The younger trained educators are facing many obstacles. Large classes, no support material, long syllabus to complete in a term, too much of administrative work, no time for co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and no guidance and help from the DOE and subject advisors.*

SMT2: *Many of teachers were trained according to the old system, and still continue to teach using the old methodology. The reality is that that if younger teachers who were trained to facilitate inclusive education via their teaching methods, find several obstacles then Firstly, the class size is far too big to ensure that learners with barriers are adequately catered for. There is no additional support from the Department, like physiological services and the like.*

While SMT 4 and SMT 5 noted that teachers trained in the old system were not affected by the new system of inclusive education, SMT4 stated that teachers must be enabled by the DoE to manage classroom challenges via creative ways. The SMT5 added that ‘old’ teachers have adjusted to the new system of inclusion, and are determined to offer all learners support. The SMT3 did not provide feedback.

The articulations below support the above notions:

SMT4: *Not really serious. Educators must be empowered or trained, and then they should cope. However, new challenges in the classroom arise and should be solved via mutual efforts between the DoE and educators.*

SMT5: *Teachers have adapted quite well to new systems of education. Yes, it is difficult at times, but they persevere in order to give learners the best education.*

Generally, 65% of educators in regular schools lack a formal qualification in initial teacher education (Dreyer et al., 2012). A teacher-qualification is indispensable as it focuses on theory and practice via comprehensive training at tertiary institutions on how to facilitate the different needs of learners within mainstream classrooms, especially those who are differently abled. Due to the lack of training by the DBE and to teachers not having upgraded their qualifications in recent times, teachers have resorted to employing outdated methods to teach learners experiencing barriers. Younger teachers who have not had exposure to inclusion face the gargantuan task of dealing with

huge class numbers, extensive curriculum, no support material, and no training from the DBE. Whilst there are some teachers who have been trained in the new dispensation to possess the appropriate knowledge to manage inclusive education, they too are inundated with obstacles that stifle the successful execution of inclusive education. The implications of the findings corroborate and align with the study carried out by Dignath et al. (2022) which highlights the importance of having previous exposure and experience as an inclusive teacher. This appears to have a favourable impact on teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Moreover, Dignath et al. (2022) and Naicker (2008) maintain that previous exposure in this field enables regular teachers to feel comfortable in an inclusive classroom environment. It is suggested that educators need ongoing training to attain the essential expertise, capabilities, and principles for adequately instructing learners with varying capabilities and requirements.

4.7.2 Sub-theme 2: Identifying Learning Barriers

Teachers' views on identifying learning barriers were analysed. This study exposed various challenges learners experience in the classroom environment.

Teachers T1 and T2 concur that learners experience barriers such as language, learning styles, and socio-economic challenges. Further, T3 explained that learners have problems concerning reading and comprehending, whilst T4's learners were seen as being hyperactive and experienced socio-economic barriers.

The articulations below support the above assertions:

T1: *Language and learning styles.*

T2: *Language and socio-economic challenges.*

T3: *Currently I have learners struggling with reading to understand.*

T4: *Hyperactive learners, language, socio- economic factors.*

Identifying learning barriers for newly trained teachers is part of the inclusive programme at tertiary institutions. Besides identifying learning barriers, teachers are faced with a range of impediments such as coping with different learning styles, socio-economic factors, learners struggling with reading and comprehension, language barriers, and hyperactive learners. These findings corroborate with policy guidelines on inclusion which primarily concentrates on surmounting challenges within the education system that hinder accommodating the full range of

learning needs (DBE, 2001). The SIAS policy assists in informing teachers about obstacles to learning which should be mitigated through comprehensive practices such as careful observation, interviews, discussions, self-assessment, and perusing historical records to understand learners holistically. Moreover, SIAS advocates for inclusion to be integrated into all curricula. Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018) criticise the fact that teachers in mainstream settings lack sufficient readiness to manage and overcome learning barriers within inclusive set-ups. Thwala (2015) agrees that for teachers to effectively circumvent obstacles to learning in inclusive contexts, adequate training and resources are necessary.

4.7.3 Sub-theme 3: Assessing Learning Barriers

Teachers' views on assessing learning barriers experienced in the classroom were analysed.

Participant T1 indicated employing different teaching methods without compromising the assessment standard goals, while T2 identified the barrier first and then applied the required method that will assist the learner. Also, T3 identified the learner with the barrier, and then evaluated and engaged the appropriate approach to assist the learner on an individual basis, while T4 mentioned that different methods of assessment are utilised in her teaching programme to mitigate learners' challenges.

The responses below support the above approaches:

T1: *Try different methods without sacrificing the goals of the assessment standards.*

T2: *I first identify the barrier, and then find a method that will most assist the child in achieving the best in the tasks set out.*

T3: *Once learners are identified, they are assessed on an individual basis.*

T4: *Set different forms of assessments.*

It emerged from the research findings that teachers have a basic idea of different assessment strategies to assist learners experiencing challenges. However, whilst a basic understanding is laudable, teachers must follow the precepts of the SIAS policy which advises that once a student has been recognised as being at-risk, the teacher must complete the SNA 1 form which addresses assessing learning barriers. In consultation with the parent or caregiver, the teacher needs to identify the area requiring attention, and assess the abilities and requirements of the learner. Once the information has been tabulated, an action plan must be drawn up and effected (DBE, 2014).

The teacher's role in formulating an inclusive assessment strategy is fundamental. Therefore, teachers are required to have a conceptual grasp of inclusion, and an awareness of diverse learning needs of those learners are differently abled (DBE, 2014). The accessibility to learning materials, assessment procedures, and creative learning programmes to learners are critical to provide diverse learning needs that must be accommodated in an inclusive environment (DBE, 2014).

However, there seems to be a major misunderstanding amongst teachers concerning the pursuit of identifying and assessing learners experiencing learning challenges. In utilising the SIAS policy, teachers are guided clearly through the identification process. The DBE (2014) also mentions that at this stage, all teachers should adhere to the standard procedures as documented in the SIAS policy. Unfortunately, among teachers, there appears to be a disconnect between the SIAS policy's guidelines and the teachers' practical execution of the policy.

The SIAS policy serves as a basic guide for screening leading to the identification and assessment of learners experiencing learning barriers. The DoE (2014) asserts that the policy on SIAS, directs teachers to assess all learners upon enrolment, and at the beginning of each educational stage. Teachers should record their observations regarding learners' preferences, capabilities, strengths, and requirements in the learners' learning profile using the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms. By being acquainted with, and adhering to these fundamental SIAS protocols, learners with varying needs can be appropriately integrated, and their requirements can be effectively addressed.

4.7.4 Sub-theme 4: Assessment Strategies Implemented

Perspectives of teachers on the application of effective assessment strategies were analysed along with SMTs' views regarding assessment strategies used for the effective implementation of inclusive education.

4.7.4.1 Teachers' Views on the Implementation of Assessment Strategies

Participants T2, T3 and T4 indicated that oral assessments and practical assessments are assessment strategies undertaken to ensure the effective implementation of inclusive education. Further, T2 and T4 noted that one-on-one engagement with the learner is an effective and strategic assessment method to accommodate different learning styles in an inclusive classroom, while T1 provided a somewhat vague response of using different assessment methods to implement inclusion.

The articulations below support the above evidence:

T1: ... *different assessment methods to achieve the goal.*

T2: *Oral assessments, assessments using concrete aids, one-on-one teacher-learner engagement.*

T3: *Oral and practical assessments are helpful.*

T4: *Oral, practical, one-on-one interaction ...*

4.7.4.2 SMTs' views on the implementation of assessment strategies

Participants SMT1 and SMT2 indicated that all theory and practical assessments are set by the DBE, and that the school does not cater to learners with disabilities. Further, SMT2 states that assessments are learning-area-specific that include written and practical assessments. Oral assessments are limited to language testing and account for minimal weighting. The SMT2 corroborated the view of SMT1 stating that the school does not cater to assessing (testing) learners with disabilities. Hence, SMT2 implies that assessments for learners with disabilities must be conducted at a specific school.

Although SMT3 stated assessment policies are designed by the DBE, and there is insufficient leeway for teachers to manoeuvre assessment processes by using different strategies. Some teachers, though, are resourceful enough to use their own innovative strategies. However, at Grade 12 level, the curriculum (NSC) has made no provision for inclusive assessment strategies. Lastly, it was noted that SMT4 was silent on this issue.

The responses below support the above notions on assessment:

SMT1: *All assessments are determined by the Department of Education. We have theory and practical assessments. We do not cater for learners with disabilities at our school.*

SMT2: *All assessments are determined by the Department of Education and are learning-area-specific. That, however, includes only 2 (two) types of assessments in general-written testing and practical work. Oral testing is limited to the languages only, and make up a small percentage of the mark. Currently testing for learners with disabilities are only catered for at schools specifically for learners with disabilities.*

SMT3: *Assessment policy is designed by the DoE. Not much room for use of many strategies to conduct assessments. Where possible, teachers who are creative do apply strategies. But at Grade 12 level, NSC doesn't allow for this.*

Participant SMT5 varied in his view by mentioning that teachers utilised varied assessment strategies for different learning styles in the classroom.

His view (below) indicates this:

SMT5: *They try different assessment strategies to cater for the different learning styles of the children.*

The CAPS document mentions that the requirements for each formal assessment and informal assessment are clearly indicated and suggested accordingly (DBE, 2001). Teachers and SMTs have indicated that assessment policies are set by the DBE. Also, assessment strategies for various assessments are suggested by the DBE to the teacher. Teachers are expected to follow the prescribed lesson outcomes according to the specified time-allocation per term. In this regard, recommended and relevant text resources are supplied by the DBE. Moreover, the DBE devised assessment suggestions for teachers to follow to achieve learner outcomes. The findings of this study align with the research undertaken by the DBE. Teacher-participants in this research have the option to adhere to the DBE directives which involve addressing the varying needs of learners encountering learning obstacles. Additionally, teachers can promote and engage the active involvement of all learners by adjusting their teaching, learning, and assessment methods, thereby accommodating the diverse requirements of learners and maximising the educational prospects for each individual in the class (DBE, 2011). In support, Olivier (2017) agrees that a teacher's principal duty lies in tackling learners' difficulties by effectively addressing the diverse range of learner differences in the class through curriculum adjustments. Importantly, Salend (2011) advises that teachers have the capacity to furnish learners with a variety of graded educational resources, and they should acknowledge that certain materials might necessitate adjustments to suit learners who encounter learning challenges.

4.7.5 Sub-theme 5: Accommodation of Teaching Methods for Different Learning Styles

Data analysis also focused on teachers' perspectives regarding the instructional approaches employed to cater to diverse learning preferences. The SMTs' views on the teaching methods

teachers employ to accommodate different learning styles in an inclusive classroom were also analysed.

4.7.5.1 Teachers' views of the teaching methods

Teachers T1 and T3 indicated that differentiated teaching methods are used involving the visual, tactile, linguistic, and musical aspects (example counting with a beat and song) to accommodate different learner styles. Also, T2 mentioned that dependable methods are employed which include use of concrete aids, code-switching so that learners understand the content, and the use of visual aids such as pictures to encourage responses from learners. Similarly, T4 applied teaching methods like using visual aids, picture discussion, and practical tasks.

The responses below support the above evidence:

T1: *Differentiated. Use of visual, tactile, linguistic, musical etc. Example, counting with a beat and song.*

T2: *Practical methods using concrete aids, using their own language where it is possible to make them understand what is required, giving them pictures to elicit answers.*

T3: *The use of different aids, such as visual or audio. Some learners are tactile learners and learn from using their hands.*

T4: *Concrete aids, picture discussion, practical tasks.*

4.7.5.2 SMTs' views of teaching methods used by teachers

Teachers T1 and T2 had similar views as they mentioned that the inclusive classroom programme is not included as part of the planning at the combined school. Their school focused purely on academics and relied on the CAPS document and annual teaching plans which do not include inclusion. The school comprises also of learners with barriers, but there are intervention programmes in place to assist such learners when required. Also, T3 mentioned that the teaching method is not different from mainstream learners, while T4 remained silent on the aspect. Participant T5 mentioned that to a great extent, practical work and concrete aids were utilised to grasp learning concepts to cater to differing learning styles.

The following excerpts support the above findings:

SMT1: *The inclusive classroom programme is not incorporated in our planning at our school. Our school is purely academic and follows the CAPS document and an annual teaching plan which does not include inclusive education. We have learners with barriers to learning and we have intervention programmes where educators work with these learners as the need arises.*

SMT2: *Inclusive classroom programmes and teaching are largely absent at our school. Ours is purely an academic curriculum and as such it follows the mainstream annual teaching plan and no plans are in place to tackle an inclusive classroom. Having said that, every effort I made to identify learners with barriers to learning, and educators respond according to individual needs of learners only if and when the need arises.*

SMT3: *Nothing different.*

SMT5: *They have lots of practical work, and make use of concrete aids to help them grasp learning concepts.*

For teachers to respond to learners' varied needs, they need to demonstrate creative and innovative teaching methods and strategies in the classroom. Teachers have indicated that differentiated teaching methods are used involving visual, tactile, linguistic, and musical (example counting with a beat and song) aspects to accommodate different learning styles at their school. Inevitably, adjustments must be made to curricula for learners encountering difficulties in learning in an inclusive classroom. This research revealed that teaching methods that are used are differentiated, practical, accommodating, visual, tactical, linguistic, and musical in nature for such differently abled learners which is in line with Howard Gardner's (2006) theory of multiple intelligences where the author identifies nine intelligences that can help teachers pluralise instruction to enrich learners' experiences when learning. Further, the DBE (2015) advises that teachers should be cognisant of learners who enter mainstream classes with diverse abilities, skills, knowledge, learning styles, socio-economic backgrounds, and personalities. The SMTs seem to be under the impression that the school does not follow an inclusively integrated programme as they articulated that their school focuses on the academic programme by utilising the CAPS document and annual teaching plan, which do not include inclusion. However, there are intervention programmes implemented at the school to assist learners with barriers. A teacher mentioned that the teaching

method is not different from mainstream learners, which is disquieting; to meet learner needs and apply inclusive practices, the teacher needs to be au fait with the SIAS policy and various teaching methodologies. The implications of the findings partially align with the SIAS policy document in that it presents distinct recommendations for teachers to follow when identifying the needs of learners in relation to the learner's home and school environment, to determine the degree of additional support that is required (DBE, 2014). Whilst the teachers in this study aimed to accommodate the multiple intelligences of learners, further functional and tangible efforts must be provided to accommodate inclusive learners who experience challenges in mainstream learning contexts.

4.8 THEME 3: IMPEDIMENTS TO IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

4.8.1 Sub-theme 1: Impediments Obstructing Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers' views on the hindrances derailing the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms were analysed. The SMTs' views on impediments preventing teachers from implementing inclusive education since the dawn of the EWP6, were analysed.

4.8.1.1 Impediments to teachers' implementing inclusive education

Teachers (T1, T2, T3 and T4) unanimously agreed that barriers that prevent the application of inclusion practices in the classroom include large class numbers, choice of the LoLT, an extensive curriculum, and the lack of resources which were ongoing challenges in schools. Further, T2 indicated that due to the constraints of time allocated to teaching, implementing inclusion becomes difficult.

The articulations below support the above findings:

T1: *Resources. Class numbers. Lolt. Vast curriculum.*

T2: *Big classes, not enough teaching time, and our curriculum does not give us enough time for effecting inclusive education.*

T3: *Limited resources available, time constraints and big class sizes.*

T4: *Insufficient resources.*

The SMT1 and SMT2 were of the opinion that even after years of policy-banding, the challenges affecting the successful implementation of inclusion are that teachers are unaware (or do not comprehend) of policy documents such as SIAS (DBE, 2014) and the EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and are therefore not able to implement inclusion. The SMT1 and SMT2 believed that the DoE is responsible for making inclusive practices more accessible so that learners receive the support they need and do not fall by the wayside. Further, the SMT2 stated that it is up to the DBE to not only up-skill teachers but also to avail resources, construct or upgrade teacher facilities, and minimise class sizes in the interests of inclusive learners. In support, SMT3 was clear that resources such as personnel are severely inadequate, and the physical infrastructure is unsuitable for the needs of inclusive learners. Additionally, SMT2, SMT3 and SMT4 bemoaned that teachers lack the required training and that the classroom infrastructure was inadequate for learners with physical impairments. The SMT4 pointed out that there was no provision in the school budget to renovate or upgrade school infrastructure, and the DBST support structure was not in place to assist the school with interventions on a regular and ongoing basis. Participant SMT5 alludes to the fact that inclusive education had been thrust on schools without the proper rollout process, thus leading to untold challenges upon its forced implementation.

The verbatim responses below support the above assertions:

SMT1: *Many educators are unaware of the EWP6 and SIAS. The Department of Education needs to make learning and teaching for learners with specialised needs more accessible. I think the DoE should reduce the size of classes, have more training for educators so this could assist the school to help these learners who are always side-lined.*

SMT2: *Many educators are not aware of EWP6, neither are they familiar with SIAS or SBST. More effort needs to be made by the relevant education authorities to make teaching and learning for learners with specialised needs accessible. Besides arming educators with knowledge, provide them with resources, teacher aids and reduced learner numbers so they may best serve their learners.*

SMT3: *Schools are not equipped in terms of human and material resources to implement inclusion. The infrastructure is also not suited for this.*

SMT4: *Lack of proper training and development of educators. No District team to assist schools with interventions on a sustained basis. Classrooms are not equipped to help learners with physical challenges. No budgets to ensure effective implementation.*

SMT5: *Inclusive education has not been introduced gradually to schools, so it will have its challenges when it's implemented.*

Teachers unanimously indicated that impediments that prevent the application of inclusion in the classroom include large class numbers, the choice of LoLT, an extensive curriculum, and the lack of resources which seem to be perennial challenges in schools. Further, T2 indicated that due to the time-constraints, implementing inclusion becomes challenging. The DBE is responsible for making inclusive practices more accessible so that learners receive the support they need, so that they do not fall by the wayside. The study's findings aligns with Thwala's (2015) study which revealed that in order for teachers to be able to address barriers to learning and assist learners in inclusive environments successfully, they require training and resources. The reality of not having a visible SBST/DBST within the school environment on a regular and ongoing basis becomes problematic and compromises the quality of assistance of teachers to learners in need. The SBST and DBST are critical in guiding and assisting teachers to address the barriers they encounter in teaching inclusion classes (DoE, 2001). Lastly, the lack of basic infrastructure has a debilitating snowball effect on learners and teachers alike.

4.8.2 Sub Theme 2: Teachers' Challenges Regarding Inclusive Education Policies

This study examined the opinions of teachers concerning the difficulties encountered while implementing inclusive education policies like SIAS and EWP6. In addition, the study analysed the perspectives of SMTs on the impediments confronted by teachers in the execution of inclusive education policies such as SIAS and EWP6.

4.8.2.1 Teachers' challenges regarding inclusive education policies

The responses from the questionnaire highlighted various challenges that teachers experience whilst engaging with relevant and prescribed policy documents. Teachers (T1 and T2) concurred that the SIAS policy is long-winded, voluminous, and sometimes unclear. Also, T1 and T2 agreed that the SIAS forms were time-consuming to fill out, and require consultation with the parents during school hours, while T3 advocated that teachers need to be trained prior to rolling out the

inclusive education policies. Disturbingly, T4 stated that no physical copies of the policy were available at her school.

The responses below support the above revelations:

T1: *SIAS, too lengthy.*

T2: *The forms take a long time to fill. Parents are unavailable during school time to be interviewed.*

T3: *Prior training must be done before implementation of these policies.*

T4: *No hard copies of the policies.*

4.8.2.2 SMTs' views on challenges teachers face in implementing inclusive education policies

To facilitate the completion of the large data collection tasks, the SMTs (SMT1 and SMT2) agreed with the teachers that the onus is entirely on the teacher to complete the SNE forms, not that of the DBE. Further, the SMT1 and SMT2 state that there is a significant waiting period in getting feedback and resolution from the DOE after sending in the learners' forms. The SMT3 explained that the DoE has minimal capacity to deal with learner referrals. In support, SMT2 states that the department is considerably understaffed in assisting schools' learners as evidenced by the regional psychologist having to service learners from 150 schools, which is an improbable task. Additionally, SMT3 mentions that only one teacher from the school was invited to attend SIAS training at a DoE workshop. The reason for this was that DBE expected the teacher to disseminate the information gained at the training to the staff at the school. This further exposed the absence of support and guidance regarding policy implementation from the DBE.

The extracts below support the above findings:

SMT1: *The responsibility is entirely on educators. No extra or additional staff from the Department. Many forms to fill and this becomes very tedious for educators. We also have a waiting period. Response from the department is also very slow.*

SMT2: *These responsibilities are placed entirely on educators. There is no additional support in the form of staffing, and the process of document filling is tedious. There is also an extended waiting period for any resolution from the Department. The*

educational psychiatrist in our region along has to attend to about 150 schools, making it challenging to assist learners.

SMT3: *Educators have not been workshopped on SIAS. Department of Education only invited one educator per school for the workshop. This educator was to return to school and workshop staff. The DoE does not have the capacity to attend to manage referrals from school.*

Participant SMT4 stated that teachers neither have the requisite training, nor have they been workshopped in aspects of the EWP6 and the SIAS. Further, SMT4, similar to SMT3, provides a timeline where a considerable period of time had elapsed (two years ago) when a solitary teacher from his school was invited to attend a training workshop. In order to implement inclusion, the DBE's role is pivotal for success but SMT4 notes that when the help of the DBE is sought, the DBE is unable to assist as they are inundated as they cater to more than 500 schools. This is despite the fact that there are learners in the school system who have been recognised as being in need of help but have not been assisted by the DBE's support structures. Despairingly, SMT5 reiterates that to date, no teacher has received training to properly understand and implement EWP6 and SIAS, adding that even the resources that were supposed to be provided are absent.

The excerpts below support the above findings:

SMT4: *Teachers are not trained or developed for both documents. A teacher was invited for a workshop 2 years ago. Little help is available from personnel who are from the Department. They claim to be overwhelmed when contacted by the school, because of a heavy workload as they handle more than 500 schools and cannot cope. The school has identified learners for special help, but no co-operation from the department is forthcoming to place the learners with the appropriate personnel for assistance.*

SMT5: *All educators have not been trained. We will need more resources to help these children.*

It was noted that teachers neither have the requisite training, nor have they been workshopped on the EWP6 and SIAS policy document. The absence of training impacts learner support. It was exposed that when help is sought from the DBE, it is unable to assist claiming that they have a

deluge of inquiries as they cater to more than 500 schools. There seems to be a disconnect as teachers already execute the process of identifying *at-risk learners* which forms the basis for utilising the SIAS forms. Filling out the SIAS forms seems to overwhelm teachers who need training in this respect. The implications of the findings are that though teachers are mindful of the need to embrace every learner in the class as sanctioned by the DBE, they do not acknowledge the significance of the SIAS document and are unacquainted with the importance of using SNA documents in identifying learners who experience barriers to learning. Mkhuma et al. (2014) mention that this is partly attributed to teachers lacking the necessary competencies, training, materials, and backing from the DBE. Findings revealed that educators felt burdened by the SIAS paperwork, prompting the recommendation for teachers to streamline the process. Nevertheless, teachers were encouraged to develop proficiency and awareness in recognising learners with learning challenges. This is intended to mitigate potential biases, under-recognition, over-recognition, or misjudgement.

4.9 THEME 4: AVAILABLE SUPPORT STRUCTURES

4.9.1 Sub-theme 1: Availability of Adequate Resources and Facilities

Teachers' views on the extent of adequate resources and facilities necessary for inclusive education were analysed. The SMTs' views of the challenges faced with regard to resources, facilities, infrastructure, and buildings towards the implementation of inclusive education were analysed.

4.9.1.1 Teachers' Views on the Availability of Adequate Resources And Facilities

Participant T1 provided information about learning resources that they have brought to the classroom. Teachers developed their own resources to assist learners with barriers to learning. It must be noted that although T1 mentions remedial classes, this has been done away with in an era of inclusive education as learners are now supposed to be in mainstream classes. Also, T1 indicates that teachers are left on their own to support inclusive learners. A combined public school with Grades R -12 spreads the available school resources thin, especially in the primary phase. Further, T2 indicated that once the teacher has referred a learner, the school counsellor will assist the learner experiencing learning challenges. Moreover, T2 stated that the engaging of teaching assistants to assist learners with barriers to learning is allowed to assist with schoolwork. Additionally, T3 noted that the school has technological aids such as tablets and projectors available for teaching-learning

purposes. T4 on the other hand has indicated that the school has sufficient resources for Grade R teaching.

The verbatim responses below support the above findings:

T1: *Teachers develop their own resources. No remedial classes. We are left to our own devices to help ourselves and learners. A combined school makes it difficult. Less focus on primary.*

T2: *We have a school counsellor who we refer learners to, to try to get to the bottom of the difficulty. We have educator-assistants at the moment who help these learners with some of the work.*

T3: *Visual aids such as tablets, projector...*

T4: *We have adequate resources for Grade R.*

All the SMT's focused on the physical challenges from a logistical viewpoint. The lack of wheelchairs, proper ablution facilities, and accessibility ramps does not allow learners with physical impairments to access classrooms, toilets, and sporting facilities. The school was built without considering the eventuality of catering for impaired learners. The school is terraced and consists of blocks that are two to three storeys high with only one flight of stairs as an access point. The suggestion from SMT5 was plausible - the only solution is to place learners with physical challenges in ground-floor classrooms. The overcrowding in classrooms due to the high learner population in the area, exacerbated the problem. Also, teachers cannot dedicate adequate time to learners because of the unmanageable number of learners in a class. Lastly, SMT4 noted that the external personnel appointed by the DoE such as counsellors, therapists, and caregivers were never readily accessible or available to the school.

The responses below support the above findings:

SMT1: *Our school cannot cater for learners with physical disabilities. Our schools are not constructed for, nor conducive for these learners. The lack of facilities like ramps for wheelchairs and toilets does not enable us to accommodate special learners.*

The school has not been constructed to cater for learners with physical disabilities. There are no ramps, neither is it wheelchair friendly. Also, the lack of special toilets, sports facilities ... do not accommodate learners with these barriers.

SMT3: *The school environment does not cater for learners or educators who may have physical challenges, although classrooms on the ground-floor in block A are allocated for grades with learners with physical challenges due to the stairways leading to the rest of the school. The classes are too large in terms of pupil-teacher ratio; not allowing time to be spent with those learners who experience challenges.*

SMT4: *The infrastructure is not designed for people with physical disabilities; special toilets not available. Caregivers, counsellors, and other therapists are never available, even if employed by the Department.*

SMT5: *We do have practical challenges because our school is terraced and has 2 and 3 storey buildings. Learners with physical challenges will have a problem. The only way the SMT can help is to place these learners in ground-floor classrooms.*

The DoE (2015) recommends that all schools whether ordinary, full-service or special schools have an SBST as a pivotal structure. The SBST serves as a management component linked to the SMT. The responsibility for the application of the SIAS policy and the planning support lie with the learner, the teacher, and the institution.

Teachers have indicated that as part of the process, learners are referred to by the teacher, after which the school counsellor will assist the learner who may be experiencing learning challenges. Initially, teachers' responses to which policy document they referred to did not include the SIAS policy which is the core policy. However, there seems to be an inference that only parts of the SIAS policy are utilised. Moreover, teachers recorded their concern about the availability of resources and facilities needed for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

The SMT and teachers alike expressed their concerns surrounding the lack of wheelchairs, proper toilet facilities, and accessibility ramps. The lack of resources does not allow learners with physical impairments to access classrooms, toilets, and sporting facilities. The school was built without consideration for impaired learners. The findings contradict what the EWP6 policy document stipulates; that is, it emphasises the availability of resources and tools, particularly assistive devices

like hearing aids and wheelchairs, among others. More resources were promised to be made accessible to learners who face barriers in accessing education. Sutton and Shields (2016) agree that school environments should furnish teachers with supplies and comprehensive preparation tools to ensure they are sufficiently equipped to support learners with diverse requirements. It has, however, been 22 years since the first rollout of the EWP6. Unfortunately, as evidenced in this research study, the availability and accessibility of resources promised by the DBE have not materialised, leaving inclusive learners in a desperate state.

4.9.2 Sub-theme 2: Support Structure Challenges

The data analysis focused on examining teachers' perspectives regarding the difficulties encountered in implementing inclusive education, as well as the support structures in place to address them. Additionally, the study analysed the views of SMTs regarding the available support structures for teachers to assist learners facing barriers to learning in regular classrooms. Furthermore, the SMTs' perceptions regarding the collaboration between the school-based support team (SBST), the district-based support team (DBST), and the entire teaching staff in ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive education, were also investigated.

4.9.2.1 Teachers' views on support structure challenges

There were many challenges encountered regarding the support structures for inclusive learning. These included finance, lack of support from the DBE, minimal support for learners experiencing difficulties, and insufficient resource books.

Participant T1 indicated various concerns regarding challenges emanating from support structures including financial constraints, and not being able to communicate in isiZulu in the classroom as the LoLT is English. The resource books which are consulted in many lessons are not sufficient, and the general support from the DoE is poor. Additionally, T2 inferred that though learners were referred to the DoE psychologists, there was little improvement noticed, but these learners are promoted at the end of the year mainly due to them being over the age limit for their class. Moreover, T3 believed that SMTs as the first support structure level was capable of assisting teachers adequately, but financial constraints restricted them; for instance, the supply of resources. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented learners from attending school affected the payment of school fees to manage the school, in addition to learners missing out on subject

matter. Lastly, T4 noted that the challenges arising from dysfunctional school and District support structures were minimal; this was somewhat in contrast to other responses.

The verbatim enunciations below support the above assertions:

T1: *Finances. Restriction of isiZulu as a language to code-switch to. LoLT is English. Minimal support from DOE. Resource books used but are not adequate.*

T2: *We have referred learners to psychological services before, but observed that not much is done with these learners. They pass through the system year to year based on age ruling.*

T3: *I believe management would do their best to assist with the implementation of inclusive education. However, money for necessary resources could become a challenge due to non-payment of school fees especially during and after COVID-19.*

T4: *Not much.*

4.9.2.2 SMTs' views on support structure challenges

The SMTs concurred with teachers that there is an absence of support structures available for teachers. The SMT1 and SMT2 pointed out that teachers are the ones who identify at-risk learners. They are then allocated to an intervention class run by the DBE with the assistance of teacher-aides. Further, SMT2 stated that due to the absence of support structures, the school does not accommodate learners with disabilities. Moreover, SMT3 confirmed that no support structures were in place, while SMT4 believed that minimal support structures existed. Challenges such as large class numbers and the absence of resources obstruct any possible meaningful support. On the positive side, the appointment of a guidance counsellor by the school assists learners with behavioural challenges. This is supported by SMT4 who points out that the services of a guidance counsellor is a privilege, but other schools may find it costly to do so. Furthermore, assessments of learners with barriers to learning are extremely minimal. Lastly, SMT5 praised the SMTs and the SGB whose collaborative efforts, though minimal, was encouraging to teachers and learners.

The verbatim transcriptions below support the above findings:

SMT1: *No structures. We as educators identify these learners and work with them by having intervention classes and using the educator-assistant sent by the Department. Very sad.*

SMT2: *Nil, except for educators being continually informed to identify at-risk learners or those with educational shortcomings, and thereafter provide support in the form of additional tuition; nothing else is done. We don't really cater for learners with disabilities.*

SMT3: *None that I know of!*

SMT4: *Not much, class sizes and lack of resources prevent any real, tangible assistance. Some educators (e.g. in English) due to their initiative, make attempts to assist learners. Our school has appointed a guidance counsellor to assist learners who have behavioural problems. Not all schools can afford this. Assessment of learners with special needs is almost non-existent.*

SMT5: *There is not much support although our SMT always try to assist wherever they can with the help with of the SGB.*

4.9.2.3 SMTs' views on collaboration between SBST, DBST and the teaching staff

Firstly, SMT1 and SMT2 believed that teamwork involving the SBST, DBST and teachers should be implemented as it can be beneficial to learners facing challenges to learning. They agreed that the relationship can only be beneficial provided that there is a reasonable budget, supplementary staff, adequate resources, manageable class numbers, ongoing workshops, and continuous consultation with the DoE. Issues preventing learners with barriers from receiving assistance include financial mismanagement which has a ripple effect on learners and resources alike. The SMT3 was silent on this matter, while SMT4 pointed out that teachers do not have the right skills and training to work independently with learners with barriers. Further, financial constraints, voluminous paperwork, and large classes hindered interventions to help both teachers (training) and learners with barriers to learning. Additionally, SMT4 complained that due to the absence of assistance from DBST and the DoE, resources became extremely scarce such that the school must now buy its own resources. Lastly, SMT5 agreed that the support from the DBST was minimal, but was optimistic that a collaborative effort by all stakeholders will improve circumstances.

The verbatim responses below reinforce the above evidence:

SMT1: *I think it is a very good idea, but it can only be effective with additional staff, resources, small classes, workshops, and DoE visiting schools regularly for constant interaction with schools.*

SMT2: *It's a paper exercise only. Theoretically the ideas are excellent, but the implementation shows badly; the reality is that like many other ideas, they can only be effective with capital injection for resources, additional educators, etc. The lack of finance or rather its mismanagement, has led to the most vulnerable learners falling along the wayside. The reality is that those families that can afford better schooling get better results.*

SMT4: *Educators are not equipped to work on their own with learners with special needs. The current environment in schools is paper-driven, budget-driven, and hardly caters for efficient co-operation. The current conditions in schools are mass-based and affects catering for individual needs of learners. Resources for special needs learners are also almost non-existent in schools, unless the schools procure their own.*

SMT5: *There has to be more collaboration on an ongoing basis, but I am not sure this is possible. We have had very little help from DBST.*

Judging from the participants' responses, it can be concluded that the combined school does not have a functional SBST in place. There exists a dissonance since teachers assist in the process of identifying at-risk learners, yet there is no mention of utilising the SIAS policy. Hence, support structures such as the SBST are useful for addressing challenges. The guidelines provided to schools by the DBE consist of a School-Based Support Team (SBST) section that advises collaboration with the District Support Team (DBST), which will in turn offer assistance to teachers teaching inclusive education in accordance with the EWP6 (DoE, 2001). The findings indicate that though these guidelines and top-down support exist in theory, the implementation has not, on many levels, filtered down to the school to effect a positive change. The SBST and DBST should play a critical role in supporting and assisting teachers to attend to the challenges they experience in teaching inclusive classes. As stated by the DoE in 2001, the operational unit responsible for providing support within the school context is known as the School-Based Support

Team (SBST) comprising of the principal, deputy principal, and other managers. The SBST is established and supervised by the school principal. It is the principal's duty to encourage the SBST to support school matters and ensure its effective functioning with necessary backing.

4.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter (4) presented the findings of the research investigation that pertained to teacher-preparedness to implement inclusive education in a selected combined school in the Pinetown District. The data analysed SMTs' written responses during interviews, teacher responses to open-ended questions, and the document analysis of the SIAS, EWP6, and lesson term plans (English, Mathematics and Life Skills). Also, this chapter outlined an array of relevant themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings. The findings from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that a significant number of teachers expressed a sense of unpreparedness to effectively implement inclusive education in the mainstream classroom. It was noted that teachers do not have the requisite training, neither have they been workshopped on the requirements and implementation of the EWP6 and SIAS policy documents. The next chapter (5) provided the summary of the study's findings, as well as the recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four presented the analysis and outcomes of the research. The study aimed to examine teacher-preparedness to implement inclusive education in a selected combined school in South Africa. This was attained through:

- Determining teachers' understanding of an inclusive education framework;
- Determining how teachers support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms;
- Understanding the impediments that prevent teachers from effectively implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms; and
- Establishing what support structures are available for teachers to support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms.

The researcher selected a single qualitative case study. The data was collected through SMT written interviews, teacher responses to open-ended questionnaires, and document analyses of the SIAS, EWP6, the CAPS document for the Foundation Phase, and the Grade 3 lesson plans for English, Mathematics, and Life skills.

The purpose of this chapter (5) was to offer a concise overview of the whole study, present conclusions and recommendations emanating from the research findings, and conclude the thesis as a whole. One of the main goals of this research was to suggest constructive recommendations to the Department of Basic Education, school principals, Foundation Phase teachers, SMTs, parents, communities, and other relevant role-players in inclusive education. Lastly, additional research opportunities are recommended, the limitations and value of the study are outlined, followed by the conclusion to the study.

5.2 THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY

The research results were based on the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory. To comprehend the impact of teacher-readiness for inclusive education implementation, it was necessary to analyse Bronfenbrenner's four system levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The research's objective was to grasp the mutual interconnection and interdependence of teacher-readiness and its impact on inclusive learners at a mainstream combined school in South Africa. An individual's development, growth, and progress are influenced and shaped by the interaction of the systems and subsystems as theorised by Bronfenbrenner (1977).

Teachers' attempts at integrating learners with learning difficulties within a mainstream educational environment should not be considered in isolation. The experiences of teachers in relation to the interconnected systems (of Bronfenbrenner) must be explored. The progress of learners is linked to the teacher who shares an interconnected relationship to improve the quality and value of his/her classroom practice (Adegoroye, 2004). Support is demonstrated in the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory which is key to research as teachers' educational experiences and teaching responsibilities, do not occur in isolation; it is embedded into a wider structure that is interconnected with other social institutional spheres including learners, their families, institutional management, relevant departments, and the larger community which is inclusive of the DoE. These connected components impact each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

5.3 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research examined teachers' comprehension and experiences of an inclusive education framework within a combined school setting. The main theme that emerged focused on teachers' grasp of the inclusive education framework. It became evident that numerous teachers expressed a sense of unpreparedness to effectively execute inclusive education practices within the mainstream classroom. Training seemed to be the main missing link for the successful application of inclusion.

5.3.1 Perceptions of Inclusive Education

Half the number of participants had a reasonable grasp of the concept of inclusive education, whilst the others had a blurry perception of it. A study conducted by Ainscow (2008) emphasises the importance of having a strong theoretical foundation, professional development that is ongoing, and collaboration in enhancing teachers' knowledge to promote inclusive practices. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) reiterate the importance of teachers possessing a profound grasp of inclusive teaching methods and the continuous refinement of their expertise through professional development, as a means of augmenting their knowledge and skills. The findings revealed that though teachers understood some lexical concepts, it is still insufficient. Importantly, teachers must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of inclusive education concepts and its implications as it forms a strong theoretical foundation that leads to best practice.

5.3.2 Preparedness in Implementing Inclusive Education

Teachers have diverse views on their state of preparedness in addressing inclusion effectively. The majority of teachers (75%) indicated that they lack readiness to effectively facilitate inclusive education in conventional class settings, while 80% of SMTs considered that teachers were not fully prepared and trained to teach differently abled learners in mainstream classrooms. The implication of the findings corroborates with Hay et al. (2001) study's finding that it is alarming that teachers do not have the requisite skills, ability, knowledge, competence, and are not familiar with the inclusive education system and practices. Similarly, MacPherson-Court et al. (2003) confirm that if teachers don't necessarily have the required competence, ability, and knowledge, they do not feel prepared and confident about their teaching capabilities. Teachers attest that their unpreparedness in practising inclusion is predominately due to inadequate teacher-training.

5.3.3 Use of Policy Documents

Teachers apparently consult the CAPS and EWP6 policy documents on a regular basis. Half the number of teachers refer to CAPS, while the others rely on the EWP6 policy document. The SMT members provided a range of views related to teachers' utilisation of relevant policy documents.

It was inferred from the findings of this study that teachers may not be au fait with the SIAS process. The SIAS policy expects teachers to complete the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms on admission of all learners enrolling at the school in each phase; this form should include

learner requirements, strengths, competencies, and preferences in the learner's profile (DBE, 2014). Findings revealed that this process may not be occurring.

The implication of the findings is that teachers do not necessarily recognise the SIAS policy and thus do not heed its procedures. Although the utilisation of the SIAS guidelines to facilitate inclusive education within the classroom is stipulated by the DBE (2014), this research indicated that the valuable advantages of this policy are not fully adopted in practice. By possessing knowledge of, and following SIAS procedures, learners with diverse needs can be accommodated, such that their needs can be unequivocally met. If teachers are not au fait with this core policy document, the opportunity to indulge inclusive education learners gainfully in daily teaching and learning activities is highly unlikely.

5.3.4 Encouragement, Willingness and Attitude towards Implementing Inclusion

The findings of this study validate the research by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) who found that teachers' attitudes, beliefs and opinions in achieving the goals of inclusive teaching-learning processes are crucial. Teacher-attitude is seen as a key predictor of positive inclusion when compared to teacher-training (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007). Further, the responses elicited from the relevant participants indicated that they are all encouraged and supported positively by the SMT to implement inclusion.

It was discovered that teachers' willingness to accommodate learners encountering learning challenges is weakened by an absence of teacher-training, DBE support, and a positive attitude towards challenging classroom environments. This is supported in literature that teachers are the primary drivers of producing value in inclusion (Swart & Pettipher, 2016). It is proven that teachers can, when part of a functional support structure, play a crucial role in transforming the school environment; however, if they are not motivated by a sound support structure, they may not produce the required contribution to enhance inclusive practices (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

5.3.5 Current Implementation of Inclusion

In the preparation phase for the implementation of inclusion, learner needs were considered, and new teaching strategies were adopted from literature and experiential knowledge. Teachers also highlighted the adherence to proper planning procedures specifically focusing on learners with challenges. Further, SMT members found that in order to comprehensively prepare and apply

inclusion principles gleaned from education policies, teachers must routinely apply inclusion policies in the classroom. The SIAS Participant Manual for Educators (2015) states that a committed teacher prepares by adapting and modifying lesson plans to reach every learner to grasp knowledge and skills to steer them to the next level of learning and understanding. The priority should be the adoption of curriculum differentiation techniques to accommodate all learners in the class, especially those struggling to cope in mainstream classes. Implementing effective inclusive education in Foundation Phase schools is dependent on delivering quality education standards, specialised acquisition of knowledge, and the ongoing training of teachers at pre- and in-service levels (DBE, 2015). Engelbrecht et al. (2015) state that the continual preparation of teachers provides updated knowledge, incisive understanding, improved skills, and expert competencies to satisfy the requirements of a diverse classroom. However, the onus lies on the teacher in modifying the curriculum in a way that it becomes tailor-made for all learners' needs.

Additionally, the DBE must prioritise continuous professional development workshops, provide the necessary teacher resources, and recommend hands-on and innovative methods to demonstrate how to support learners with learning barriers. A report published by the DoE (2002) on the pursuit of inclusive education supports that the benchmark of teaching and learning in schools can only be enhanced, provided teachers acquire the required competencies and knowledge to teach learners who encounter barriers to learning. The findings of this study align with those of the research study conducted by Armstrong et al. (2011) which highlights that professional development plays an important part for teachers in recognising how to deal with learning barriers in an inclusive classroom environment. In support, Horne and Timmons (2009) affirm that without sufficient training, teachers are incapable of providing suitable support to learners with barriers in mainstream schools.

5.3.6 Training Acquired for Inclusive Education

According to this research's findings, some participants attended workshops organised by the DBE. Teachers alluded to being trained on differentiated learning, but the training was not sufficient, whilst others completed some modules at university level which comprised of teaching methods pertaining to supporting learners with disabilities and barriers to learning. Teachers noted that training by the DBE was not provided in recent years, thus exacerbating inclusive education

challenges. Ongoing and modern training techniques inspire teachers to assist inclusive learners in overcoming barriers to learning.

Additionally, teachers indicated that the relevant education authorities from the DBE have not made an attempt to make teaching and learning for learners with specialised needs accessible, and that teachers only received minimal training related to inclusion from the DBE. Written excerpts provided by teachers indicated that teachers were not familiar with an SBST structure within their school environment. Moreover, some participants indicated that the SBST and DBST were not structured, or they were not fully functional. In this regard, it was evident that teachers appear to be unaware of any internal support programmes or school support structure that assist learners with barriers to enhance their performance.

The study's findings imply that the assistance provided by the SBST and DBST is either non-existent, highly limited, or severely inadequate. As per the guidelines of the DBE (2001), it is emphasised that the main role of SBSTs and DBSTs is to guarantee assistance to both educators and learners through the identification of challenges to create programmes aimed at resolving the barriers confronted by teachers and learners. Disturbingly, the evidence from this research exposes the fact that such support is non-functional. Even the mandatory training promised by the DBE is not being rolled-out to teachers. Most urgently, a functional SBST and DBST must exist to actively support learners with barriers to learning.

Due to the absence of training by the DBE, coupled with teachers not having upgraded their qualifications, teachers have resorted to using outdated methods to teach learners who were experiencing barriers to learning. Younger teachers who have not had exposure to inclusion face the gargantuan task of dealing with huge class numbers, an expansive curriculum, lack of support material, and no training from the DBE. Whilst there are some teachers who have been trained in the new era of democracy and have the requisite knowledge to manage an inclusive classroom, they too face a deluge of hurdles that disturbs the effective implementation of inclusive education. Accordingly, Subban and Sharma (2006) advocate the importance of teachers to acquire early exposure and experience to inclusive environments which will progressively influence them to assimilate within inclusive spaces. Further, Subban and Sharma (2006) confirm that past exposure in this field enables regular teachers to feel comfortable in an inclusive classroom environment. Moreover, Naicker (2008) reiterates that teachers need ongoing training to acquire the essential

knowledge, skills, and principles for effectively guiding learners who are differently abled, and those who have diverse requirements.

5.3.7 Identifying Learning Barriers

Identifying learning barriers in the new democracy requires ongoing training as part of being an inclusive teacher. Besides identifying learning barriers, teachers at this combined school were confronted with a range of challenges emanating from the application of different learning styles, socio-economic factors, learners struggling with reading and comprehension, language issues, and learner discipline. The DBE (2001) states that inclusion primarily concentrates on surmounting obstacles within the education system that hinder accommodating the full range of learning requirements. The SIAS document stipulates that the identification of learners' learning difficulties must emanate from thorough observation, dialogues, discussion, reflection, and previous records. The findings concur with Mfuthwana and Dreyer's (2018) contention that educators in regular schools lack adequate preparation to effectively circumvent learning obstacles within inclusive environments. Hence, Thwala (2015) confirms that in order for teachers to accurately address barriers to learning in inclusive contexts, it necessitates appropriate training and resources.

5.3.8 Assessing Learning Barriers

It emerged from this research that teachers have a basic idea of different assessment strategies for learners experiencing varied challenges. While this is laudable, they are unfortunately not acquainted with the precepts of the SIAS policy which they are obliged to follow. One of the recommended steps in the SIAS policy is that after a learner has been categorised as being at-risk, the teacher must complete the SNA 1 form which assists in assessing learning barriers. In consultation with the parent or caregiver, the teacher must identify the area of concern, and then draw up an inventory of the strong points and requirements of the learner. Once the information has been tabulated, an action plan should be structured and effected (DBE, 2014). Since, teachers play a critical role in inclusive assessment, they must have a solid grasp of inclusion, and an incisive knowledge of varied learning needs of all learners, including those with disabilities. Therefore, when assessing learning barriers, it is crucial for teachers to apply diverse teaching-learning approaches to alleviate them.

5.3.9 Assessment Strategies

The CAPS document mentions that the requirements for each formal assessment and informal assessment are clearly indicated and suggested accordingly (DBE, 2001). Teacher-participants and SMT members indicated that since assessment policies were set by the DBE, there is, however, insufficient leeway for teachers to conduct assessments using different strategies. Teachers are expected to follow the CAPS lesson outcomes according to the time allocation per term, in line with recommended text resources. The DBE suggests assessment strategies for teachers to follow to achieve learner outcomes. The implication of the finding pertaining to learner-assessments corroborates with the research undertaken by the DBE. Teachers in the present study can follow the DBE guidelines to cater to the varied needs of learners who encounter barriers to learning. Teachers should also ascertain that all learners are involved by detailing the teaching, learning, and assessment strategies, thus catering to the learners' varied needs, and ensuring the provision of maximum learning opportunities for all learners in the teaching space (DBE, 2011). Olivier (2017) maintains that the main duty of a teacher involves tackling learners' difficulties by adjusting the curriculum to cater to the heterogeneous learner-body present in the class. Salend (2011) supports this notion by adding that teachers have the capability to provide learners with an array of structured learning materials, but that teachers should also acknowledge that certain learning materials may require adjustments to accommodate learners who encounter learning obstacles.

5.3.10 Adapting Teaching Methods for Different Learning Styles

For teachers to be responsive to learners' varied needs, they are required to select, adapt, and hone their teaching methods and strategies used in the classroom. Teachers indicated that differentiated teaching methods are used involving the visual, tactile, linguistic, and musical aspects to accommodate different learning styles in an inclusive classroom. Concurrently, the modification of the curriculum for learners experiencing learning challenges is necessary in an inclusive environment. This research revealed common and differentiated teaching methods that were applied; they are practical, accommodating, visual, tactile, linguistic, and musical. This is in line with Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences which identifies nine intelligences that can pluralise instruction to enrich learners' experiences (Gardner, 2006). Further, the DBE (2015) mentions that teachers should be cognisant that learners come to mainstream classes with divergent abilities, skills, knowledge, learning styles, socio-economic circumstances, and personalities.

Surprisingly, the SMT members were under the impression that the school does not follow an inclusive programme; they stated that the school focuses on the academic aspects by consulting the CAPS document and the annual teaching plan which does not include inclusion, but there are intervention programmes implemented at the school to assist learners with barriers. Additionally, a teacher mentioned that the teaching method is not different from mainstream learners. To meet learner needs and apply inclusion principles, the teacher needs to be au fait with the SIAS policy which clearly recommends teachers to follow its guidelines when identifying the needs of learners. These may stem from conditions in the learner's home and school environment. Such a process assists in determining the extent and scope of extra assistance that may be needed (DBE, 2014). Whilst the teachers in this study aimed to accommodate the multiple intelligences of learners, further functional and tangible provisions must be instituted to accommodate inclusive learners.

5.3.11 Impediments Affecting Teachers from Implementing Inclusive Education

Teacher-participants unanimously indicated that obstacles that prevent the application of inclusion in the classroom include large class numbers, the LoLT, an extensive curriculum, and the shortage of amenities. The findings also revealed that time-constraints regarding the teaching of subjects and implementing inclusion are difficult to circumvent. Hence, the DBE that is responsible for making inclusive practices more accessible so that learners receive the support they need, must adjust the time-allocation per subject. Also, Thwala (2015) agrees that for teachers to be adept to address barriers to learning and assist learners in inclusive environments, they need training and adequate resources. Moreover, the reality of not having a visible SBST/DBST as a guiding structure at school on a regular and ongoing basis becomes problematic and weakens teachers' support which affects the performance of learners with challenges. Functional SBSTs and DBSTs play critical roles in supporting and assisting teachers to attend to the challenges they experience in teaching inclusive education (DoE, 2001). Lastly, the lack of a basic, appropriate, inclusive infrastructure has a snowball effect on learners and teachers alike.

5.3.12 Teacher Challenges with Inclusive Education Policies

It was observed that teacher-participants did not have the requisite training and were not workshopped on the EWP6 and SIAS documents. Since the absence of training impacts learner support, the DBE is obliged to provide pre- and in-service professional growth workshops, but this

has not materialised. Hence, teachers, according to their own understanding, presently conduct the process of identifying at-risk learners, which is the first step in filling in the SIAS forms. Filling in the SIAS forms overwhelms teachers as they have subject-teaching overloads, in addition to wanting much-needed training to cope with SIAS requirements. Moreover, teachers do not recognise the significance of the SIAS document, and are unaware of the importance of using SNA forms when identifying learners with learning barriers. This is partially due to teachers not having the requisite skills, training, resources, and support from the DBE. Mkhuma et al. (2014), in a prior research study, found that teachers were discouraged by the SIAS materials, thus it was proposed that teachers should acquire skills and expertise to identify learners with challenges to learning in order to eliminate bias and misclassification.

5.3.13 Extent of Availability of Resources and Facilities

The SMT members and teachers expressed concern regarding the absence of wheelchairs, inadequate toilet facilities, and the lack of ramps. This hampers learners with physical impairments who have to access classrooms, toilets, and sporting facilities. The findings contradict the EWP6 policy document (DoE, 2001) which stipulates the adequate provision of materials and equipment, specifically hearing aids and wheelchairs. These were promised by the DBE but many resources only became gradually available and accessible. However, many resources and facilities have still not been provided for impaired learners. Sutton and Shields (2016) agree that educational institutions should themselves attempt to provide teachers (via fundraising efforts) with ample resources and guidance enabling them to effectively support learners with diverse requirements. It has been 22 years since the first rollout of the EWP6, but the availability and accessibility of resources promised by the DBE have not yet materialised, leaving inclusive learners in a disadvantaged state.

5.3.14 Support Structure Challenges

It was inferred from the participants' responses that the combined school does not have a SBST in place, but fortunately teachers do conduct the identifying of at-risk learners. Participants in this study made no mention of utilising the SIAS policy to its fullest. Since support structures are crucial for addressing inclusion challenges, the guidelines provided to schools were supposed to lead to the setting up of SBSTs and DBSTs (EWP6, DoE, 2001). This did not filter down to the

school level to effect a positive change. The onus rests with the principal of the school to initiate the structuring of the school-based support team, and to make certain that the team is operational and supported.

5.4 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE STUDY

The researcher reflected on the pros and cons of the research study.

5.4.1 Strengths of the Study

The research data may be used to advise and enlighten the combined school's management on:

- The hurdles that teachers experience while planning their readiness to embrace inclusive education within conventional classroom settings;
- Perspectives on the assistance required by teachers to successfully implement inclusive education at a combined school. The data could aid the school's management team in identifying teachers' concerns and offering essential future support in conventional classroom settings;
- Determining teachers' knowledge of an inclusive education framework;
- Investigating how teachers in mainstream classes assist learners who face learning challenges;
- Identifying the impediments that hinder teachers from embracing inclusive education in mainstream classes; and
- Establishing what support mechanisms are available to teachers to aid learners with learning difficulties in mainstream classes.

5.4.2 Limitations of the Study

Constraints faced by the researcher are outlined below:

- The researcher gathered information from teachers and SMT members at a combined mainstream school in the Pinetown District. There was no other combined mainstream school included in the study. As a result, no generalisations can be made beyond the sample because teachers at different integrated mainstream schools may have differing viewpoints on the topic of teacher-preparedness.

- The segment of the sample population is narrow. Other limitations include availability of time for teachers to undertake the interview, notably amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the protest action in the KZN area.
- An additional constraint observed was the limited size of the sample group (9). However, in-depth data was collected from the study participants. Therefore, as indicated above, the findings cannot be generalised beyond the sample.
- Training for teachers was limited or non-existent, thus posing a challenge for teachers to utilise relevant teaching methods, and to offer the necessary support for inclusive learners at the combined school.
- The devastating flood in the area further delayed the research duration period, and limited the study. Face-to-face contact was minimal; however, this challenge was successfully resolved through communication with the school by utilising email, telephonic discussions, and online data-gathering processes.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Infrastructure Review and Change (alteration/restructuring)

At its inception in the late 1980s, the combined school was not expected to accommodate inclusive learners. Parts of the school campus were terraced, and buildings consist of two to three storeys blocks that have only one staircase as an access point, which makes it challenging for impaired learners. The current solution is to place learners with physical challenges in ground-floor classrooms; however, this does not fully address the essence of inclusivity.

An urgent meeting with the departmental officials, the SMT, teachers, the SGB, community, and other concerned parties must be initiated to structure an action-plan to build and/or modify existing infrastructure to fully accommodate inclusive learners. Funds must be made available at a departmental, district, school and community level to support a collaborative vision of inclusivity. A portion of the school's fund allocation, provided by the provincial DBE, must be allocated to the SGB to support inclusion-driven infrastructure projects. The onus is on the SGB, supported by the SMT, to plan for the physical renovations and maintenance of the school campus.

5.5.1.1 Practical recommendations:

Accessibility

- Construct and install permanent wheelchair ramps to gain access to the second and third floor of some school blocks and sports fields in accordance with the South African National Standard for Building Regulations. Permanent ramps offer gentle inclines that are more easily navigable, have handrails, and are sheltered, durable, slip and weather resistant. It will allow all persons (not only learners, but teachers, and all community members) with disabilities to access classrooms, libraries, and laboratories which were previously inaccessible to them. Stepped access (e.g. a staircase) also offers convenience to people with physical disabilities (Disability Info SA, 2023).
- Installation of threshold ramps gives wheelchair access into any venue that has a step at the entrance.
- Ensure obstacle-free paths of travel around the school so that no obstacles impede access, especially to those with visual impairments and wheelchairs.
- Modify toilets into disability-friendly ones that are large enough to manoeuvre a wheelchair, and to have wheelchair-height handrails, basins, toilets, and emergency rope alarms. Schools should also ensure that their physical infrastructure such as entrances, hallways, and classrooms are constructed in a way that allows learners with disabilities to navigate them with ease (DBE, 2010). As part of the requirement, schools should have at least one toilet that is suitable for learners using a wheelchair. This safeguards learners with mobility impairments to have equal access to restroom facilities (DBE, 2010).
- The International Symbol of Access (ISA), a white wheelchair image on a blue square, can be displayed at the school to show where the school has made improvements for persons with disabilities.
- Reserve a designated wide parking spot specifically tailored for vehicles transporting persons with disabilities. The parking spot should have ramps leading to the pavement.

5.5.2 Necessary Teaching Resources

- The school should be supplied with the necessary teaching and learning resources, including teaching aids and tangible hands-on methods to assist learners with impairments.

- The school should ensure that all its teachers and staff in general (not only those in the Foundation Phase), have access to the same inclusive education training and resources.
- The school must create a conducive and supportive environment where teachers feel comfortable to seek help from other professionals when they need it. A migration to collaborative and knowledge-sharing attitudes will ensure the promotion of inclusive practices and knowledge.

5.5.3 Professional Development

- The DBE must also prioritise continuous professional development workshops, provision of teacher resources, and hands-on instructional methods to demonstrate to teachers how to aid learners who are experiencing learning difficulties. Training sessions, conferences, and meetings can be beneficial, but only if we transition from expert-driven delivery to collaborative peer-teacher-driven learning which focuses on active learning allowing teachers to address actual classroom experiences. Donohue and Bornman (2014) recommend that the DBE should evaluate teacher-preparedness to teach a varied group of learners within a unified classroom as a means to enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education. Moreover, teachers should be offered comprehensive training programmes that focus on areas where there are deficit practical skills such that they become effective in addressing learning barriers.
- The introduction of sustainable initiatives to fortify ongoing professional development at all levels instils a mindset of constant learning to keep up-to-date with the latest trends in inclusive practice.

To achieve the above, the following should be done:

- In keeping with 21st century teaching and learning practices, teachers, through their own volition, may attend online professional development programmes to boost their pedagogical skills. The internet presents many online opportunities, some of which are internationally recognised in inclusive education. A number of them are credit-bearing, carry CPTD points, or are Continuing Education Units (CEU). The benefits include acquiring relevant and new information in an ever-changing

teaching-learning climate that may help advance careers, gain new perspectives on how to make astute decisions, and how to problem-solve in an inclusive classroom.

- Professional learning committees (PLCs) can be formed to work collaboratively with the school management to improve inclusive education practices school-wide. The school management must create a culture of professional development and collaborative learning to provide the necessary conducive environment with tacit and tangible resources. The PLCs must meet regularly to discuss inclusive strategies, resources, and lesson plans. The innate potential of each staff member can be developed through self-development and communities of practice.
- An action research approach is a key strategy that will allow teachers to identify issues encountered in an inclusive classroom, provide an action plan to resolve it, and thereafter reflect and provide feedback. The action research plan can be recorded, transcribed, and documented which can be used as a case study, or be part of a teacher's professional development plan.
- Peer-coaching is yet another strategy and professional development opportunity where two teachers can observe each other's classes to learn from each other, and then provide feedback. This strategy can be coupled with action research and school collaborative learning initiatives.
- Each teacher should create POEs (Portfolios of Evidence) that showcase, amongst others, inclusive practices, reflections, and inclusive strategies that worked in their particular setting. A PoE of this nature can be employed as case studies intra-school, inter-school, and for district-wide teaching and learning.

5.5.4 Training and Assistance

- Teachers should be provided with comprehensive continuous teacher-training, and DBE support. Teacher-training programmes should be more comprehensive to include expert skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to instruct learners with impairments in an inclusive setting. Nishan (2018) emphasises the critical need of providing teachers with proper and effective inclusive education training in order for them to be more confident while delivering inclusive education lessons in the classroom.

- The introduction of a functional SBST and DBST is not just to support learners with learning impediments, but also to provide teachers with the required skills to support such learners.
- The DBE should solicit training and assistance from a full-service school that is in close proximity to this combined school. Since it is a combined school that includes 3 phases, the school and SGB must approach the DoE for additional assistance, and to consider operating the school as a full-service school because it is the only combined school in the area.
- The DBE should institute a collaborative programme comprising of training related to the dissection of the SIAS and EWP6 policies to address barriers to learning for inclusion; teachers' complete all assessments in this programme to be awarded a certificate of completion. In this way teachers feel empowered, knowledgeable, and able to deal with inclusive education confidently.
- There should be a change in the culture of education in order to better support inclusivity at schools. This means that we need to transition from a deficit model of disability towards a strengths-based model. This should lead to the creation of a more inclusive culture in schools, where all learners feel a sense of belonging and are valued as individuals.

5.5.5 Qualification Update

- Teachers must update their qualifications to keep abreast with new knowledge and trends in teaching and learning for inclusion so that they may better be better prepared and supportive of learners who encounter learning difficulties.

5.5.6 Avenues for Further Research

- A similar research study should be conducted at an alternate Foundation Phase site in a mainstream combined school in the area to see if teachers and SMTs have similar or different perceptions of teacher-preparedness.

5.6 CONCLUSION TO THE STUDY

This study aimed to assess the readiness of Foundation Phase teachers in regular schools within the Pinetown District to address the challenges linked to the introduction of inclusive education.

The research findings revealed the real-life experiences of teachers regarding their preparedness to implement inclusive education at a combined mainstream school in the Pinetown District. Despite the sample not being representative, the results were typical of the reality that teachers face on a daily basis. It was evidenced in the research that the SIAS policy was not utilised to its fullest. It was heartening that all teachers were encouraged and supported positively by the SMT to implement inclusion. However, the responsibility lies with the teacher in modifying the curriculum to tailor it for learners with special needs. The DBE must also come to the party by arranging continuous and sustainable professional development seminars to assist teachers to cope with learners with barriers to learning. In addition, the apparent absence of the SBST and the DBST which exacerbates learning problems within inclusive settings, is alarming but should urgently be structured by all role-players to circumvent learning challenges. Also, the SIAS policy needs to be interrogated incisively and critically to elicit a clear understanding of it for better implementation. Moreover, the burdensome workload, overwhelming administrative duties, time-constraints, poor infrastructure, few resources, little support from DoE, and inadequate training derails intervention efforts and demotivates teachers from effectively assisting learners with challenges. An engaged, tangible, and concerted collaborative effort between the DBE, the school, the SMT, teachers, the SGB, and the greater community must be initiated to promote the ideals prescribed in the EWP6 policy. The realisation of the vision created about 22 years ago can only be achieved with a streamlined, rapid for-action-now (FAN) approach to implement the insightful findings of this research study that recommends ‘side-lining’ its reliance on bureaucracy to deliver quality education to learners with barriers. It is envisioned that if all stakeholders treat inclusion with the urgency it deserves, then this study would have achieved its objective of being beneficial to those learners who need support the most.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Unisa Ethical Clearance Certificate



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2022/04/14

Ref: **2022/04/13/32154984/18/AM**

Name: Mrs K GOVENDER

Student No.: 32154984

Dear Mrs K GOVENDER

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2022/04/13 to 2025/04/13

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs K GOVENDER
E-mail address: kavithagovender140@gmail.com
Telephone: 0792228763

Supervisor(s): Name: DR JS RUBBI NUNAN
E-mail address: rubbijs@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 4416

Title of research:

**Teacher preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms
in a selected combined school in South Africa**

Qualification: MEd INCLUSIVE 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 2022/04/13 to 2025/04/13.

The medium risk application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2022/04/13 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 will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



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Appendix B: Permission Request & Permission Approval from KZN DOE



3 May 2022

The Research Unit; Resource Planning
KwaZulu Natal Department of Education
Private Bag X9137
Pietermaritzburg
3200
(T): 033 392 1000/04/41
(E): Phindile.Duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Dear Ms Phindile Duma


Request for permission to conduct research at [REDACTED] Combined School

I, Kavitha Govender, am undertaking research under the supervision of Dr J.S. Rubbi Numan, a senior lecturer at the Department of Early Childhood Education towards an MEd in Inclusive Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee has granted approval for ethical clearance with reference number 2022/04/13/32154984/18/AM. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS IN A SELECTED COMBINED SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA

The aim of this study is to determine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. [REDACTED] Combined school has been selected because it is in a unique position as it finds itself at the fringes of a rural and urban settlement. A combined school is in a unique position as the school services learners from grades R – 12, often carrying a learner throughout their schooling career. The school accommodates learners from challenging environments such as an orphanage, informal settlements, and a youth care rehabilitation center.

The study will entail 21 participants, (16 foundation phase teachers and 5 School Management Team Members). The benefit of this study is envisioned to address teachers' skills, efficacy, and preparedness in managing inclusivity in mainstream classrooms. The study will pose no risks to participants or the school. A summary of the research findings will be made available to the participants via an online platform and electronically to the principal upon completion of the study.

Yours sincerely 


Mrs Kavitha Govender
Researcher

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Pretoria Street, Maitland (K. Ridge), City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
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Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 392 1063

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Ref.:2/4/8/4067

Mrs K Govender
PO Box 1020
LA MERCY
4405

Dear Mrs Govender

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "TEACHER PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS IN SELECTED COMBINED SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 06 May 2022 to 02 April 2025.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

PINETOWN DISTRICT

Mr GN Ngcobo
Head of Department: Education
Date: 11 May 2022

Appendix C: Permission Request & Permission Approval from the School



3 June 2022



Dear Principal

Request for permission to conduct research at Combined School

I, Kavitha Govender, am undertaking research under the supervision of Dr J.S. Rubbi Numan, a senior lecturer at the Department of Early Childhood Education towards an MEd in Inclusive Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee has granted approval for ethical clearance with reference number 2022/04/13/32154984/18/AM. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS IN A SELECTED COMBINED SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA

The aim of this study is to determine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. Combined school has been selected because it is in a unique position as it finds itself at the fringes of a rural and urban settlement. A combined school is in a unique position as the school services learners from grades R – 12, often carrying a learner throughout their schooling career. The school accommodates learners from challenging environments such as an orphanage, informal settlements, and a youth care rehabilitation centre.

The study will entail 21 participants, (16 foundation phase teachers and 5 School Management Team Members). The benefit of this study is envisioned to address teachers' skills, efficacy, and preparedness in managing inclusivity in mainstream classrooms. The study will pose no risks to participants or the school. A summary of the research findings will be made available to the participants via an online platform and electronically to the principal upon completion of the study.

Sincerely,

Mrs Kavitha Govender

Researcher



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[Redacted]

Combined School

P.O. Box 124
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

TEL: 031 272 933082
031 272 933152
www.combinedschool.co.za

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Please be advised that permission has been granted to Mrs K Govender (Student No.32154984) to conduct her research at [Redacted] Combined School.

[Redacted]

|

23 June 2022

PRINCIPAL

KWA ZULU DEPT. OF EDUCATION
[Redacted] L
[Redacted] 5
TELEPHONE: [Redacted]

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



APPENDIX D – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

3 June 2022

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Kavitha Govender, and I am undertaking research under the supervision of Dr JS Rubbi Nunan, a senior lecturer at the Department of Early Childhood Education, Teacher Education towards an MEd at the University of South Africa.

We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

TEACHER PREPAREDNESS TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS IN A SELECTED COMBINED SCHOOL IN SOUTH AFRICA

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to determine the preparedness of teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

Why am I being invited to participate?

You are invited to participate in the study as you are a foundation phase teacher or SMT member. I obtained your details from the Principal [REDACTED]. The Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013, necessitates the disclosure of how access was gained to the personal information of prospective participants). The study will entail 21 participants, (16 foundation phase teachers and 5 School Management Team Members).

What is the nature of my participation in this study?

The study involves online questionnaires for teachers and semi-structured interviews for SMT members. Participants would need to answer online, open-ended questions relating to the delivery of inclusive education. The data from the semi-structured interview and online questionnaire will be securely recorded. The duration of interviews will be short and arranged at a convenient time.

Can I withdraw from this study even after having agreed to participate?

The principal will assist by providing a staff list of the prospective participants for the study as he is familiar with the teachers at the combined school and has expert knowledge in selecting the teachers. The teachers themselves need to be willing to participate in the questionnaires and they need to be available. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. As a participant, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

The benefit of this study is envisioned to address teachers' skills, efficacy, and preparedness in managing inclusivity in mainstream classrooms.



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Are there any negative consequences for me if I participate in the research project?

The study will pose no risks to participants or the school. The researcher aims to ensure that participants' feelings, emotions, confidentiality and dignity are not brought into disrepute in the study.

Will the information that I convey to the researcher and my identity be kept confidential?

The researcher aims to ensure that participants' feelings, emotions, confidentiality and dignity are not brought into disrepute in the study. Upon gathering data, the researcher will endeavour to use the principles of confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. While the identities of participants in the semi-structured interviews will be known to the researcher, participants will be given the assurance that all information provided by them would be handled with strict confidentiality. The data will be protected and taken care in line with the highest security measures.

Participant's data will remain anonymous and may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

How will the researcher protect the security of data?

The data will be protected and taken care with the highest security measures. The information will be stored on the researchers Google One subscription service cloud storage facility. The cloud infrastructure is protected 24/7 and is SSL encrypted. The data will be stored for a period of 5 years and thereafter archived securely. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Adherence to data protection and POPIA act will be strictly enforced.

Has the study received ethics approval?

This study is pending written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the (identify the relevant ERC), Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

How will I be informed of the findings/results of the research?

A summary of the research findings will be made available to the principal upon completion of the study.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Mrs K. Govender on 0792228763, kavithagovender140@gmail.com

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research will be conducted, you may contact my supervisor Dr J.S Rubbi Nunan on 0124294461, rubbijs@unisa.ac.za

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

Sincerely,



Mrs Kavitha Govender
Researcher



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PO Box 392 UNISA, 2003 South Africa
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Appendix E: Consent Form



APPENDIX E – CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

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 (or had explained to me) 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~~ / Questionnaire).

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement/ participant information sheet.

Participant Name & Surname (please print): _____

Participant Signature _____

Date

24/06/2022

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print): _____

Researcher's signature _____

Kavilha Govender

03 June 2022

Date

University of South Africa
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Appendix F: Interview Schedule



APPENDIX F – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The following questions will be asked during in-depth interviews with the 5 SMT members:

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA			
All responses and data will remain anonymous and confidential.			
Name		Job title	
Gender		Age	
Years of experience		Qualifications	
Mobile number		Email address	

1. Teacher understanding of inclusive education

- 1.1. How prepared are teachers to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?
- 1.2. Do teachers make use of policy documents in implementing an inclusive classroom? Which policy documents do they consult?
- 1.3. How important is it for teachers to apply inclusive education policies in their daily interaction with the diverse learners in their classrooms, or should they adhere to the old system of education? Give a reason for your answer.
- 1.4. What is your perception about the willingness of teachers you work with, concerning the need for the implementation of inclusive education?

2. How teachers support learners with barriers to learning

- 2.1. What training did teachers receive to assist in acquiring knowledge and skills regarding the implementation of inclusive education? Explain the nature of the training? Was the training adequate?
- 2.2. Which assessment strategies do teachers apply to ensure that inclusive education in your school is being effectively implemented?
- 2.3. What teaching methods do teachers use to accommodate different learning styles in an inclusive classroom? Provide practical examples.



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3. Factors that prevent teachers from implementing inclusive education

- 3.1. Many teachers in South Africa were trained in accordance with the old apartheid education system. How serious do you think such teachers are affected by the newly introduced inclusive system of education in their mainstream schools?
- 3.2. How does your school environment such as the school infrastructure, buildings, facilities, etc., pose a challenge towards the implementation of inclusive education?
- 3.3. What challenges do the teachers in your school face with regard to the implementation of inclusive education policies such as the SIAS and the EWP6?
- 3.4. The year 2021 is the culmination year of 20 years of the first policies of EWP6. What do you think prevents teachers from implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?

4. Support structures available to teachers to support learners with barriers to learning

- 4.1. What support structures are available for teachers to support learners with barriers to learning in mainstream classrooms?
- 4.2. What is your opinion concerning the collaboration between the school-based support team (SBST), the district-based support team (DBST) and the entire teaching staff towards the effective implementation of inclusive education?



Appendix G: Questionnaire



APPENDIX G – QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire will be filled online by the 16 teachers.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Kindly respond to all questions
2. The questionnaire consists of two sections.
3. Mark with an "X" where relevant

SECTION A

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

1. Gender

Male	
Female	
Other	

2. Age

--

3. Years of experience in teaching

0 - 5 years	
5 - 10 years	
10 - 15 years	
15 - 20 years	
20 - 25 years	
More than 25 years	



4. Educational level

Diploma	
Degree	
Honours	
Masters	
Doctorate	
Other	

5. What qualifications do you have?

6. Did your tertiary studies include inclusive education?

Yes	
No	

7. If yes, what aspects were covered?

8. Have you completed any other training or workshops in inclusive education since graduating from your tertiary institution?

Yes	
No	

9. If yes, please explain the nature of the course? Indicate the topics covered.



SECTION B

Teacher understanding of inclusive education

1.1 What do you understand about inclusive education?

1.2 How prepared do you feel to implement inclusive education?

1.3 How do you currently prepare to implement inclusion?

1.4 Do you make use of policy documents in implementing an inclusive classroom? Which policy documents do you consult?

1.5 How does your school management team encourage the implementation of inclusive education in your school and what are their attitudes towards its implementation?



How teachers support learners with barriers to learning

2.1 What training did you receive to assist you with acquiring knowledge and skills regarding the implementation of inclusive education? Explain the nature of the training? Was the training adequate?

2.2 How do you assess learners experiencing barriers in your classroom?

2.3 What learning barriers do your learners face?

2.4 Which assessment strategies do you apply to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education?

2.5 What teaching methods do you use to accommodate different learning styles in an inclusive classroom?
Provide practical examples



Factors that prevent teachers from implementing inclusive education

3.1 What factors prevent you from implementing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms?

3.2 What challenges do you face with regard to the implementation of inclusive education policies such as the SIAS and the EWP6?

Support structures available to teachers to support learners with barriers

4.1 To what extent does your school have adequate resources and facilities necessary for inclusive education? Provide practical examples.

4.2 What support structure challenges are you faced with in implementing inclusive education?



Appendix H: Turnitin Originality Report

Full Dissertation 14 August 2023-Edit 2

ORIGINALITY REPORT

22% SIMILARITY INDEX	20% INTERNET SOURCES	15% PUBLICATIONS	8% STUDENT PAPERS
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Appendix I: Language Editing Certificate

699 Miami Road
Hibberdene
KZN
4220
Cell: 0842848401
brian.naidoo26@gmail.com

**PROFESSIONAL
LANGUAGE
EDITING SERVICES**



*STRIVING
FOR
EXCELLENCE*

Brian Naidoo (BA Hons English; BA Hons TESOL; BEd Hons
BA- English major; Univ. Dip. in Ed[English special]; UCT Cert in
Legal and Business Writing; UCT Cert. in Copy-Editing; Master's
coursework in Research. Umahsi Evaluator of schools.

**SPECIALISING IN THE LANGUAGE EDITING OF THESES, DISSERTATIONS,
JOURNAL ARTICLES, PROPOSALS, POLICIES AND PUBLICATIONS.**

CERTIFICATE FOR LANGUAGE EDITING AND CRITICAL READING OF DRAFT MASTER'S
DISSERTATION
Teacher preparedness to implement inclusive education in mainstream classrooms in a selected combined school in South Africa

KAVITHA GOVENDER
Student number: 32154984
University of South Africa

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
This certificate confirms that the above-mentioned student submitted her draft master's
dissertation to me for critical reading and language editing, which included correcting in-text
citations and the mistakes in the list of references. This was duly edited by me and returned
to the student for revisions as per suggestions from me. I make no claim as to the accuracy
of the research content. The text, as edited by me, is grammatically correct. After completion
of my critical reading and language editing, the student has the option to accept or reject
suggestions/changes prior to re-submission to the supervisor who will check the content and
instances of plagiarism, if applicable.

B. Naidoo ID: 5606255134081 DATE: 21/09/2023

**Professional
EDITORS
30 Guild**
1999-2023
Promoting excellence in editing

Brian Naidoo
Associate Member
Membership number: NA001
Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024
084 264 8401
brian.naidoo26@gmail.com
www.editors.org.za

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Appendix J: Technical Editing Certificate

