

## Teachers' Personal Barriers Hindering Implementation of Inclusive Education in One Mainstream School in South Africa

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**Abstract:** Inclusion in education entails affording all learners access and equal opportunities to education and learning. Several countries, South Africa included, have developed policies on inclusive education. At the centre of the policies are teachers who happen to be the primary implementers of the same policies. Successful implementation of the policies calls for teachers to possess functional knowledge of the policies, be equipped with effective instructional pedagogies, be given all the support they need, and be motivated enough. The objective of this article is to analyse the perception of mainstream teachers towards inclusive education and establish teachers' personal barriers hindering the successful implementation of inclusive education. This qualitative study purposively sampled twelve (12) teacher participants from one mainstream school in the Northern Cape Province, among whom two (2) were members of the school-based learner support team. Data was collected through interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings from the interview responses highlight low teacher buoyancy, low teacher self-efficacy, teacher negative attitudes, and a lack of training on inclusive education as major teachers' personal barriers to the implementation of inclusive education policy. The study thus recommends that departments of education should consider retooling teachers on the policies of inclusive education. This work has the value of providing an insight into teachers' personal barriers which hinder implementation of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Teacher Buoyancy, Teacher Self-Efficacy, Competences, Barriers

### 1. Introduction

Scholars and advocates of inclusivity view inclusive education as a practice in which all students access and gain equal opportunities to learning. Others view it as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all students through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, consequently reducing academic exclusion and from within education (UNESCO, 2017). The suggestion is that educational institutions should create learning environments in which teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenge and benefits of diversity. In a way, diversity should be seen as a resource rather than a hindrance to effective education. An inclusive education approach presents an educational space in which learners' respective needs are met, affording every learner the opportunity to succeed and become responsible citizens. The term "inclusion" is not only about placing learners with impairments in regular classrooms. It's about transforming classroom into a place where all learners learning needs are recognized

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and served without requiring them to be labelled as disabled.

In this view, inclusion is intended for all children, not just those who have previously been excluded from regular schools due to a 'pierced' disability. The goal is to remove all forms of social exclusion caused by attitudes and policies toward diversity in race, class, ethnicity, religion, or gender, as well as ability (Köpfer, Powell & Zahnd, 2021).

Research suggests that different countries have implemented policies on inclusive education at different levels. In Ghana, the inclusive education system has received overwhelming support from teachers since its inception (Opoku et al., 2021). However, there appears a lack of understanding of the content of the inclusive policy among some Ghanaian teachers and this poses a threat to the successful implementation of the inclusive policy (Mantey, 2017). Botswana's Inclusive Education Policy (2011) advocates that all children, regardless of disability, get access to education in any school in the country (Government of Botswana, 2011). Nonetheless Nthitu (2011) submits that this crucial goal is hindered by some teachers' lack of understanding of inclusive education, resulting in many children being denied equal access to learning. In Zimbabwe, a study by Nkoma and Hay (2018) propounds negative teacher attitudes and limited resources as leading barriers to the implementation of inclusive education practices. Similarly, in a study done in Swaziland, Maseko and Fakudze (2014) concluded that although teachers know how important inclusive education is and are willing to do their part in the implementation process, this is affected by a lack of the requisite knowledge and skills. Furthermore, a lack of in-service training on inclusion was identified as a major barrier to the implementation of inclusive education in Oyo State, Nigeria (Akanmu & Isiaka, 2016).

In South Africa another scholar, Letseka (2012:49) propounds that Ubuntu philosophy is at the heart of South Africa's educational policy framework, which necessitates its advancement by the education system in general and inclusive education in particular. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that supports collectivism over individualism asserting that society gives human beings their humanity. Consequently, through the tenets of Ubuntu no child should be discriminated against in the educational system because of their race, gender, colour, or disability. In 2001, South Africa adopted the guiding principles of The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) to address policies and practices that discriminated against children with disabilities. South Africa's Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education (WP6) (DoE., 2001) also establishes a framework for implementing inclusive education in South African schools. In line with the policy, inclusive education is aimed at recognising differences, embracing them, and aiding all children to develop at their optimum level (DoE, 2001). For this purpose, the department of basic education introduced the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy, whereby learners are to be screened, identified, assessed, and supported by their teachers (DoE, 2014). Globally, it is a goal and requirement of nations to implement inclusive education, but many factors may hinder the process of implementation. However, despite the introduced policies on implementing inclusive education in schools, the level of implementation is still below the expected levels in South African schools (Ekins, Savolainen, & Engelbrecht, 2016). One of the factors being teachers' personal barriers towards the implementation of inclusive education. This study was therefore aimed at investigating the experiences teachers in a selected mainstream township school in

the Frances Baard district of Kimberley, Northern Cape Province, have been managing to provide support to learners with learning disabilities and implement inclusive education.

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Social Model of Disability. The social model of disability recognises disability as the genesis of certain restrictive social and economic practices and institutions established in cultural attitudes, with the purpose of deposing the conviction that impairment and disability are indifferently associated (Terzi, 2004; Meltz, Herman, & Pillay, 2014). Through the lens of the social model, it is society that paralyses people with impairments, hence any consequential elucidations must be directed at societal transformation rather than individual adjustment and rehabilitation (Barnes, Mercer, & Shakespeare, 2010). A crucial document in the advancement of this approach is the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation's (UPIAS) manifesto document, *Fundamental Principles of Disability* (1976). The social model centres on managing the 'barriers to participation' experienced by People with Disabilities (PWDs) as a result of several social and environmental factors in society (O'Connell, Finnerty, & Egan, 2008). UPIAS (1976) underscores the prominence of this social dimension in its characterisation of disability: Disability is a situation caused by social conditions that requires, for its elimination, (a) that no one aspect such as income, mobility, or institutions be treated in isolation, (b) that disabled people should, with the advice and help of others, assume control over their own lives, and (c) that professionals, experts, and others who seek to help must be committed to promoting such control by disabled people.

The social paradigm does not dismiss the actuality of disability but instead situates it within society (Oliver, 2018). The social model contests marginalization and discrimination of any sort by advocating for the removal of suppressive barriers entrenched by ascendant social and cultural norms. The social model of disability was justifiable for the current study as it views education as a mechanism for transforming society's attitudes toward those with disabilities (Hodkinson, 2019). This model is thus the fundament of inclusion focusing on establishing strategies to ensure educational equity and freedom from predisposition (Johannessen, 2010). The social model regards education as a vehicle for transposing society's propensity against disabled persons (Hodkinson, 2019). This study was influenced by the social model of disability because it aims to change the unfavourable attitudes that schools, teachers, and other stakeholders in the mainstream have towards learners who have disabilities in order to accommodate them. The theory supports the idea that individuals with disabilities have a right to be educated in regular classrooms. As a natural result of human diversity, the theory forces society to confront its psychological, behavioural, interpersonal, and social components in order to adapt to impairments.

### **2. Literature Review**

Schwab (2019) states that inclusion should be about removing barriers to learning for all learners, as opposed to placing learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms. It is a process involving the identification and removal of barriers to access, learning, and accomplishment for all learners (Ainscow, 2020). Inclusive education is thus "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education." (UNESCO, 2015; P.13). Additionally, the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) (DoE, 2001) being the primary policy document for the implementation of an inclusive education system

in South Africa, views inclusive education as an approach that recognises that all children and youth can learn and will require support. Inclusive education is an initiative that creates a condition, an atmosphere, and the space for all learners, regardless of race, gender, poverty, class, impairment, or lack thereof, to be accommodated and supported in a mainstream school without any form of discrimination, dehumanisation, or labelling. It is not only about accommodating them; it is also about ensuring that each learner's learning needs are attended to and any possible barriers removed so that all the learners can benefit from the outcomes of the lesson in the classroom. On the international front, human rights treaties such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continue to advocate for and promote inclusive education and as a way of facilitating and achieving education for all (Ainscow, 2020).

Apartheid in South Africa left among other things massive inequalities in educational provision for learners defined as having special needs, particularly African learners (Mda & Mothata, 2000, p. 108). These inequalities manifested due to unfair, inadequate and inappropriate provision created by political and economic priorities of the apartheid regime. Subsequently, there was a need for a shift from racially segregating education policies and thinking associated to an inclusive education system based on human rights and dignity, valuing equal rights to quality education without discrimination (Andrews, 2020; Stofile, Green & Soudien, 2018). Following attainment of independence, South Africa enacted regulations and policies aimed at promoting inclusive education, examples being the South African Constitution, which affirms human dignity, equality, and the advancement of human rights (RSA 1996a, section 1(a), freedom from discrimination (RSA 1996a, section 9(4)), and the fundamental right to basic education (RSA 1996a, section 29(1)). The South African Schools Act, passed in 1996, also establishes "universal norms and criteria for the instruction of learners in schools" (Preamble, South African Schools Act, RSA 1996b). In spite of having such important policy documents, Van Rooyen, Le Grange, and Newmark (2002) argue that South African education policies are contradictory to one another and do not align well enough to allow for the smooth implementation of inclusive education. Another scholar, Pather (2011) suggests that, in both policy and practice, there is a tension and contradiction between the individual deficit and social paradigms, which see barriers as being within and outside of the learner, respectively. Again, although the government has rules in place to ensure that learners with special needs have access to school, it is unclear how inclusive policies are applied by teachers to ensure that all learners have access to education (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019).

Dally et al., (2019) are of the view that in order to implement inclusive education, teachers need not only skills, knowledge, and inclusive attitudes but also the ability to support and meet the needs of learners who are different. Loreman (2017) adds that for successful implementation of inclusive education teaching and learning must be a critical issue. It calls for teachers to align their instructional approaches and practices to the needs of their learners (Suprayogi, Valcke & Godwin, 2017) and come up with learning and teaching activities that are inclusive and sensitive to learners' diversity (Ainscow, 2020). A study by Finkelstein et al. (2021) reports that inclusive practices used in classrooms by teachers included collaboration and teamwork, determining progress, instructional support, organisational practises, and finally social, emotional, or behavioural support. This is in line with findings from a study by Coubergs et al., (2017) which suggests that practises such as differentiated instruction and multifaceted teaching are seen as measures to address the needs of students with varying educational needs.

Teachers are the fundamental implementers of any educational policy. It therefore means the successful implementation of any policy within the school system is heavily reliant on the efficiency and effectiveness of the teacher. Teacher personal barriers to inclusive education account for low teacher buoyancy, low teacher self-efficacy, teacher negative attitudes, and a lack of inclusive education training, all of which have a negative impact on policy implementation. One personal teacher barrier to inclusive education implementation in mainstream classrooms is low teacher buoyancy. Teacher buoyancy refers to a teacher's potential to handle and subdue challenges, and obstacles in education (Verrier et al., 2018). Comparable with other conceptions, buoyancy is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors such as self-efficacy, self-confidence, motivation, and agency can influence academic buoyancy. Similarly, external factors among others socio-cultural contexts, educational environments, and stakeholders, can also have a bearing on academic buoyancy (Comerford et al., 2015). A teacher who has a dearth of buoyancy does not have a strong will to overcome challenges in their classrooms and may not be in a position to help learners with learning barriers. Another teacher-personal barrier to implementing inclusion in mainstream classrooms in township schools is low teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy can be defined as a teacher's belief in their capability to attain the envisaged outcomes among their learners. It follows therefore that teachers with a higher level of self-efficacy are better positioned to provide more effective teaching outcomes, which contribute to their learners' higher levels of motivation which results in better academic achievement (Caprara, et al. 2006). Teacher self-efficacy can have a significant impact on classroom management, specifically in dealing with misbehaviour among learners (Tilfarlioglu & Ulusoy, 2012). Conversely, teachers who have a low sense of self-efficacy are likely to become stressed by learners' misbehaviour, which might lead to strict disciplinary action, making them more authoritarian and focused on teacher-centred approaches centred on subject matter rather than learners' achievements resulting in low academic performance.

Cherry (2020) propounds that teachers who possess a high sense of teacher efficacy usually develop an interest in academic activities, a higher sense of commitment to their interests and school activities, do not lose control when faced with difficulties and setbacks, and welcome challenging activities in order to succeed. Alternately, those with a low sense of teacher efficacy shy away challenging activities and make excuses, presuming that challenging tasks eclipse their artistry. Such teachers spotlight on negative results, inculcating themselves, in the end losing faith in their ability to be effective. Research also singles out a lack of inclusive education in teacher training programs as one of the personal teacher barriers to implementing inclusive education. Since teachers play a crucial role in the implementation of inclusive education it is thus critical for them to be enlightened and educated on all aspects of the policies on inclusive education that are in force. In light of this, Bagree and Lewis (2013:2) point out that teachers are rarely trained or supported to teach children with learning disabilities. Zimba (2011:52) identified a lack of teacher training in some inclusive schools in Swaziland as one of the causes of the challenges in inclusive education. In the same vein, Zwane (2016:61) contends that some teachers in Eswatini have a misunderstanding of what inclusive education entails, which affects the identification of learners with special needs in the mainstream classroom. Conclusively, Fakudze (2012:40) posits that while teachers endorse the idea of inclusive education, they are not fully supported and inadequately equipped to provide effective instruction and support for the diverse needs of their students.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research methodology that is closely linked to the interpretivist paradigm, which is subjective. The study provided a detailed narrative description, analysis, and interpretation of phenomena related to teachers' experiences of the implementation of inclusive education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It provided verbal descriptions to portray the richness and complexity of events that occurred in natural settings from the participants' perspectives. The qualitative research methodology was relevant to the present study because it assisted in obtaining an account of the experience of teachers with reference to providing care and support to learners who may be facing difficulties in learning (Litchman, 2010).

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This study adopted a case study research design as its aim was to explore "current phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the lines between the phenomenon and context are not clear" (Merriam, 2015). The design facilitated the exploration of complex situations by allowing the collection of multiple perspectives from a variety of sources, including contextual information (Yin, 2003). The case study answered the question of "how" (Yin, 2009), which was in line with the research questions of the study, which questioned how teachers implement inclusive practice in the classroom and how they support learners who are experiencing learning barriers in their respective classrooms.

#### **3.3 Research Site**

The study was conducted in one secondary school in the township of Kimberley, the Northern Cape province's capital. Kimberley has 139 high schools and five school districts that serve it. Frances Baard, the second largest of the five districts, was the site of the researcher's selection of one secondary school. The selected secondary school is a mainstream school in the Frances Baard district that was established to include learners with disabilities within the regular classroom while giving them the same opportunities as other learners to access instruction, gain knowledge, and grow as individuals. Learners attending quintile 2 schools do not pay school fees; rather, it is the government that provides funding for all the activities of these schools. Most quintile 2 schools, like the selected school, are located within the townships of the cities and are under-resourced. The site was selected for the study because it is a preferred choice for parents to send their children to and hence has high enrolment. Approximately 8% of the learners have disabilities such as learning and intellectual disabilities, autism, and behavioural disorders (personal observation) (DOE, 2001).

#### **3.4 Research Sampling**

The study purposively sampled twelve (12) teacher participants from one mainstream school, among whom two (2) were members of the school-based learner support team. The school employs more than forty-nine teachers, including four department heads, one main principal, and two deputy principals. Purposive sampling means that the researcher makes specific decisions about which participants to include in the sample (Bertram & Christensen, 2004). The study employed purposive sampling because the teacher

participants had specific knowledge relevant to the questions to be investigated, and it was also assumed that these teachers had first-hand knowledge of inclusive practices and could demonstrate a deeper understanding and good inclusive education practices (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019).

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher adopted semi-structured individual interviews to collect data from the participants on their experiences of giving support and implementing inclusion in their classrooms (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviews were face-to-face with each of the participants to explore their experiences of giving support and implementing inclusion in the classroom. Each interview with the participants lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and responses were audiotape recorded to ensure accurate capturing of data. All ethical considerations were observed during the study.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

This study used thematic analysis in analysing the data with the goal of answering the research question. The analysis followed the six-phase guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interview transcripts were read over and over again to get a clear picture of the responses. This was followed by coding the data in a methodical manner to ensure organisation and give meaning to the data collected. The coded data was then categorised under different themes and sub-themes (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013) focusing on teachers' personal barriers towards the implementation of inclusive education in a mainstream township school. The themes were then defined to 'identify the 'essence' of what each theme was about' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.92).

## **4. Findings**

Teacher personal barriers can be defined as the walls impeding the implementation of inclusive education in the classroom. This can emerge from the teacher's own actions, opinions, inabilities, and work reflections. The successful implementation of inclusive education centres on teachers, as key stakeholders in the process. The effectiveness, efficacy, resilience, abilities, and capabilities of the teacher do become a major ingredient in the implementation of the inclusive education policy, which cannot be emasculated. The findings from the interview responses highlight low teacher buoyancy, low teacher self-efficacy, teacher negative attitudes, and a lack of training on inclusive education as major teachers' personal barriers to the implementation of inclusive education policy.

### **Theme 1: Low Teacher Buoyancy**

Teacher buoyancy is defined as a perceived adaptive response to everyday challenges, setbacks, and difficulties (Wong, et al., 2021). In the current study, 3 of the teacher participants (teachers 1, 4, and 8) highlighted their adjudged inability to outdo the learning barriers associated with the successful implementation of the inclusive policy, implying low teacher buoyancy. Their responses highlight that they see themselves as unsure of their capability to overcome the setbacks in their inclusive classrooms, indicating that:

"I don't think it will be easy to overcome the setbacks in the mix of lack of resources and no training; it will not be easy for me." (Teacher Participant 1).

In line with Teacher 1's response, Teacher 4 indicated that:

I will say if the setbacks have to do with the content of the subject I teach now, which is geography, I can tell you with confidence that I have the ability to overcome the setbacks because I have received enough training about the subject. But for inclusive education, I cannot assure you of it because it also needs special training and knowledge, which I don't have. I might, but as to how effective it will be, I can't say. (Teacher Participant 4).

In this context, teacher buoyancy can serve as a psychological regulation mechanism that teachers exhibit to endure difficulties and setbacks in education, and the capacity to maintain a positive mindset. The two responses were echoed by Teacher Participant 8, stating:

As far as my ability to overcome barriers in the classroom is concerned, one of the major problems is these overcrowded classrooms with very little resources and no training, so accommodating learners with learning barriers is really beyond my control (Teacher Participant 8).

As alluded to elsewhere in this article, teacher buoyancy is considered as the teacher's ability to counter daily challenges, frustrations, and difficulties, and to acquire potential resources to deal with continuing challenges in education. From the results of the interview excerpts above, it could be argued that teachers in mainstream township schools are vividly sure of their ability to overcome the setbacks linked to the content subjects. The findings further imply that the ability of a teacher to overcome the setbacks in an inclusive classroom is directly linked to content training on inclusive education, availability of resources, and other factors. Buoyancy plays a critical role for teachers to overcome challenging situations in the classroom.

## Theme 2: Low Teacher Self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as an individual's belief of their capability to carry out the behaviours required to achieve specific performance goals. It mirrors one's confidence in the ability to exert control over their own motivation, behaviour, and social environment. Being confident in one's potential to accomplish required levels of learner learning, especially with challenging or demotivated learners, is referred to as teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Self-efficacy is a very important characteristic for teachers in the field of inclusive education. Justifiably, a teacher's propensity to effectively implement inclusion to meet the needs of all learners depends on their own efficacy. As such low teacher self-efficacy suggests that a teacher has remote belief in themselves to be capable of implementing inclusion in the classroom.

In this study, the responses of two participants (teachers 1 and 4) indicate that due to the nature of challenges found in the mainstream township schools, teachers are unable to affirm their ability to implement inclusion in their classrooms, with one stating that: "I'm not absolutely sure if I am capable of



implementing inclusion. This is because of the serious challenges that are beyond me'' (Teacher Participant 1).

To rectify the situation, some participants are of the opinion that:

Really, I believe if I am giving the needed content training on inclusive education and its implementation, then I wouldn't have any doubt about my capability to implement inclusion in my class. But, in my current situation, I would be lying if I boasted about my firm and effective ability to implement inclusion in the classroom (Teacher Participant 4).

This puts forward the idea that if given the needed support, training and the right working environment, teachers can be able in apposition to assist and support all learners with learning barriers in their classrooms. According to the results of the interview excerpts above, mainstream township teachers do not believe they are capable of implementing the inclusive policy in their classrooms due to the number of challenges that teachers teaching in township schools face on a daily basis. This is a negative indicator of low teacher self-efficacy and a significant barrier to the implementation of inclusive education policy, as these teachers are the policy implementers.

#### Theme 3: Teacher-negative attitudes

Since teachers are the main implementers of the inclusive education policy in the classroom it is necessary for them to have a positive attitude towards the implementation of the inclusive policy. Nonetheless, this is not always the case as some teachers tend to have a negative attitude towards implementing inclusive education. To this effect one participant clearly stated that:

... but to be very honest with you, I don't have a good feeling about this inclusive education implementation thing. Though this is a good policy on paper, I don't believe much is being done by the department to implement it. So, to me, I don't think it has a place, especially in our township schools. So, if you ask me, I will say I have a negative attitude toward it (Teacher Participant 4).

This and responses of other participants suggest that the unsuccessful implementation of inclusive education in mainstream township schools could be due in part to teachers' negative attitude towards policy implementation. The participants are of the opinion that while the inclusion policy is a good policy, it is best on paper but the practice in schools is not coherent with the available policies, support, and resources.

#### Theme 4: Lack of teacher training on inclusive education

Inclusive education implementation in the township mainstream classrooms is a challenge for some teachers, according to participants' responses. This is largely due to the lack of inclusive education teacher training at universities coupled with a lack of staff developing for practicing teachers. Staff development workshops are instrumental as they equip teachers with the required skills which can be helpful in the implementation of inclusive education. The responses from most teacher participants (teachers 1, 3, 9, 10, and 12) indicate that a lack of training is a major obstacle for teachers which in turn negatively affects the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream classrooms. The participants suggest that a lack of

training on inclusive education makes teachers incapacitated to adjust their approaches to cater for learners with diverse needs. For example, one participant reported that "There has not been any workshop or training organized for teachers to enlighten us about inclusive education since I started teaching" (Teacher Participant 10). This was echoed by another participant who stated that "There are no workshops organized for teachers to be able to assist those learners. Not at all; most of the workshops they hold focus on content" (Teacher Participant 12). Similar views were raised by other participants claiming:

The problem has more to do with a lack of knowledge and skills on how to deal with such challenges; no teacher is trained in these skills. I mean, the school doesn't give you, like, some kind of workshop or any kind of education around it, so we lack the training (Teacher Participant 1).

I think training is required; we only have workshops once a term, and that workshop is not about learners' support but about the subject that you teach. Because our learners are going through depression and we are not aware of that, you will see a learner who is bullied, a learner who is aggressive and very loud, and you will never know what the learner is going through at home, so we need training. (Teacher Participant 3).

Ever since I started teaching, I have never attended or been trained for such a thing. The only thing that I have is the background we had from varsity, but here at the workplace, we never had training on how to help those learners (Teacher participant 9).

From the responses above, it is crystal clear that some teachers in mainstream township schools lack the necessary skills, training, and education necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education. Some teachers are even not aware of the content of the inclusive education policy which they are required to implement. This poses serious concerns as the significance of policy education, training, and workshops cannot be overlooked in the successful implementation of any policy. The thesis being defended by the current study is that, for the implementation of the inclusive education policy to be effective, there is a need for teachers to be aware of and have the relevant education and training on the respective policy. The study further argues that if teachers are equipped with the necessary training on how to support learners with various degrees of barriers, they would most likely be in a better position to welcome the concept of inclusive education consequently creating a learning environment where all learners, regardless of their learning ability, capability, or barriers, are integrated and given afforded the possibilities to cognise their life goals.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings from the study suggest that some mainstream teachers have mixed views about their capability to implement inclusive education policies. Some of the participants remain uncertain of their potential to outlive the challenges they encounter in their respective inclusive classrooms. Evident from the interview responses, some teachers in mainstream classrooms have low buoyancy towards implementing the inclusive education policy in their classrooms. Nonetheless, findings from the same interviews also suggest some teachers believe they have the potential and will to overcome the challenges associated with implementing the inclusive policy in their respective classrooms. They also highlighted

the fact that their ability is influenced by both internal and external factors. This is in line with findings from a study by Comerford et al. (2015) which points to the effect of these factors. Some of the factors highlighted by the participants include insufficient training, lack of support, and resource availability. If teachers, who happen to be the principal implementers of the inclusive policy, have low buoyancy, the successful implementation of such policies will be adversely affected.

On another note, the current study also presents low teacher self-efficacy as another personal barrier affecting the implementation of inclusion in the mainstream classroom. The findings from the study revealed that, due to the nature of the challenges persisting in mainstream township schools, some teachers were unable to affirm their ability to implement inclusion in their classrooms. To overcome this obstacle, participants indicated that if they are given the much-needed training and the right working environment, they would be in a position to accommodate and support all learners with learning barriers in their classrooms. This is in line with findings from a study by Coubergs et al., (2017) which suggests that practises such as differentiated instruction and multifaceted teaching are seen as measures to address the needs of students with varying educational needs. Dally et al., (2019) are of the view that in order to implement inclusive education, teachers need not only skills, knowledge, and inclusive attitudes but also the ability to support and meet the needs of learners who are different. Loreman (2017) adds that for successful implementation of inclusive education teaching and learning must be a critical issue. Teachers need to be given all the support they need to overcome low self-efficacy as teacher self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers with a high self-efficacy tend to possess a strong sense of self-confidence, are willing to take risks, are able to solve challenging problems, and are resilient. All this leads to high self-esteem and confidence in the learners, resulting in better academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2006).

The findings also suggest that some mainstream teachers believe the policy has no place in mainstream schools, and as such, the inclusive policy is better on paper than in practice. This is evidence of the negative attitude some have towards the policy. When policy implementers have a negative attitude towards a policy they are bound to implement, this might not yield the desired outcomes. To this, Monsen et al., (2014) put forward the notion that teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of the inclusive policy can be influenced by factors such as a lack of resources, insufficient support, teachers' perceptions of their own competence in managing an inclusive classroom, and the behaviour of learners with learning disabilities. Teachers' lack of education, training, and understanding on how to support children with learning barriers affects teachers' attitude towards inclusion in the classroom (Bagree & Lewis, 2013:2; Fakudze, 2012:40).

Findings from the study also suggest that a substantial number of teachers in the mainstream classroom lack the prerequisite education, training, and knowledge about the inclusive education policy and its implementation.

## **6. Conclusion & Recommendation**

In this article we have defined barriers as all those contextual factors that prohibit or inhibit full access to education and learning opportunities for learners. These barriers appear vis-à-vis their interaction within different contexts: social, political, economic, institutional and cultural. Inclusive education in South Africa is established in a systematic process that channels specific values into action and represents the

desire to overcome the barriers that lead to the exclusion of many learners so as to advance participation and learning. The findings of the current study identified the barriers as teachers' personal barriers (which included low teacher buoyancy, low teacher self-efficacy, teacher negative attitudes towards inclusion, and a lack of teacher training on inclusive education). As a result, it is essential for teachers to have a functional understanding of the meaning of inclusive education, to master inclusive practices and comprehend what inclusive pedagogy is about so that all of them become effective implementers of inclusion and not barriers to it.

Consequently, teachers will be in a better position to create inclusive learning environments, which will help to breaking down the barriers that may have existed in their practice. Teachers need to be given all the support they need, learn instructional approaches that cater for all learners and must know the mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination. Achieving inclusive education in South Africa inescapably involves training teachers and equipping them with the requisite skills to face the challenges present in their practice and classrooms. The study thus recommends that departments of education should consider retooling teachers on the policies of inclusive education. This would further enlighten teachers on the importance of adhering to and ensuring the actualization of inclusive education policies in schools.

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