

Teacher Related Challenges Experienced in The Implementation of Inclusive Education in One Selected Mainstream School in South Africa

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Abstract: The realization of inclusive education in South African schools has been controversial. Despite enacted policies, inclusive education implementation remains low in schools. The study aimed to explore teacher related challenges experienced by teachers in implementation of inclusive education in one selected mainstream school in South Africa. The social model of disability approach served as the theoretical foundation for the current investigation. The present study was conducted using a qualitative research methodology with a case study as the chosen research design within an interpretivist research paradigm. The researcher used non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews to gather data. Interviews with just six individuals and one classroom observation were conducted. The study reported that teacher related challenges include negative attitudes, inadequate knowledge of inclusive education policies, low self-efficacy towards inclusive education, and a lack of teacher training on inclusive education aspects. The study recommends that the Department of Education prioritizes in-service teachers' initial and ongoing training on knowledge of disabilities, identification and their effective management.

Keywords: Teacher Related Challenges, Implementation, Inclusive Education Mainstream School, South Africa

1. Introduction

This study aimed to explore teacher related challenges experienced in the implementation of inclusive education in one selected mainstream school in South Africa. The Salamanca declaration pushed for the adoption of inclusive education, focusing on how to include students with disabilities in regular classrooms. "National goals for achieving education for all should include the practice of mainstreaming students with impairments" (UNESCO, 1994, p. 18). This idea emphasizes the importance of making sure that the injustices of excluding students with disabilities are addressed and that students with disabilities are regarded as equally significant as students without disabilities. While there has been tremendous investment in South Africa's transition from a segregated to a more diversified educational system, there are still opportunities for success and obstacles to overcome in the implementation of inclusive education. It is also critical to capitalize on South Africa's progress towards inclusion.

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While it is clear that the movement towards inclusion is developing, there are still many obstacles standing in the way of a dynamic realization of inclusivity in South African schools. This realization of inclusive education has sparked a debate.

According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), despite a sizable transition from a segregationist system in the past to a more egalitarian system, a substantial percentage of learners with disabilities are still not in school. As a result, it is difficult to realize the expanding inclusive education movement due to inequities. While establishing policies that advocate for inclusion has been an exceptional success, it is vital to note that ensuring that learners with disabilities are placed in schools is still a major predicament. Learners with disabilities are still out of school, facing severe barriers to access (UNESCO, 2020).

Inclusive education is deemed an imperative driving force behind a more equitable and just system of education (Ainscow, Slee & Best, 2019). It is crucial to understand that during the Apartheid era, the system of education was based on racial and discriminatory practices that forced black people to be on the receiving end (Tomlin, 2016). Hence, the struggle against poverty is still an immense challenge that is inevitable. Before South Africa's national independence, black people were bound under the shackles of the black education system, which denied them a fair and equitable education (Tomlin, 2016). However, once South Africa was declared a democratic country in 1994, the system of education experienced a dynamic shift and became a more inclusive system. The government that was democratically elected attempted to close the gaps of the past by ensuring that education is equally accessible, and that education is deemed a basic right (Naicker, 2014). After the enactment of the new South African government in 1994, it was expected that all schools should implement inclusive education to cater for all learners. However, from previous research in South African schools, full implementation of inclusive education remains a mirage. In addition, despite the policies of inclusive education in South Africa, implementation remains low in Ekurhuleni North district, South Africa. This study aimed to explore teacher related challenges experienced in the implementation of inclusive education in one selected mainstream school in South Africa.

2. Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The Social Model of disability is one of the most important theories in inclusive education literature was adopted to guide the study. Understanding inclusion as an agent of social justice and as a fundamental right has been influenced by ideas of the social model. The social model of disability entails viewing barriers to inclusion as social constructs rather than medical deficits. To support this view, Lisicki (2013) argues that the social model frames disability as something that is socially constructed. It alienates practices that blame the individual for their shortcomings rather than attributing learning barriers from a social perspective. In this sense, the social model aims at identifying socially constructed barriers and then advocating for getting the barriers fixed rather than mainly expecting the learner to fix themselves to fit in (Lisicki, 2013).

Within the social model of disability, there are numerous approaches such as the transformative and emancipatory approach, the critical theory approach, and the disability model approach. The

transformative approach is one of the most prominent approaches, as it advocates for the transformation of various societal structures as a method of inculcating inclusion. Mertens (2010) defines the transformative approach as a model that is distinct, as it draws its views from a critical perspective and advocates for transformation. The transformative approach is more than just ensuring that learners are comfortable in the classroom; it focuses on offsetting systematic barriers and inequalities. It also seeks to disrupt power hierarchies in teaching and learning by advocating for transformation across different spheres of education (Daniels & Schoem, 2020). The Social Model was significantly relevant to the present study as it also advocates for mainstreaming rather than excluding learners with disabilities in mainstream schools in South Africa. The social model was significant in this study as the study aimed to thoroughly engage with South African educators in understanding their reality in classrooms by mainly addressing the low level of implementation of inclusive education. In addition, the social model of disability was appropriate for this study because it has varied learners with disabilities and those without all-in-one school with inclusive strategies. From the historical context of implementation of inclusive education in South Africa, it is argued that schools have varied contexts in terms of socio-economic aspects, and this might impact on the implementation of inclusive education. Thus, the Social Model of disability is applicable to this study because it presents the school environment as the key determinant of implementation of inclusive education. In addition, the Social Model of disability theory was appropriate for this study because since it advocates for mainstreaming in schools and teachers play the critical role in enhancing inclusive education, it helped to analyze teacher related challenges that hamper the implementation of inclusive education.

2.2 Literature Review

Literature on the teacher related challenges of implementing inclusive education exists, but with varied results in different contexts. For example, Cenci et al. (2016) study in Brazil indicated that inclusive education has been a challenge because teachers found it extremely difficult to teach inclusively, as most of the educators were dealing with it for the first time. According to the findings, educators believe that inclusion is a fallacy because learners with disabilities were allowed to attend school but did not learn anything. In another study Ludago (2020) reported that other challenges faced by teachers include a lack of adaptations to allow mobility to learners with disabilities, fear of responsibility, negative views of students with disabilities participating in their classes, and finally, a lack of professional understanding and capacity to treat these gifted children fairly. According to Leyser et al. (1994) cited in Avramidis and Norwich (2002) a study that was conducted in several nations revealed that teacher attitudes were much less positive in Ghana, the Philippines, Israel, and Taiwan. Teachers were also said to have negative feelings regarding inclusion and low attitudes.

To guarantee that educators are properly qualified to instruct students with hurdles, teacher training is required. While teacher education is important, it is important to remember that most South African instructors lack comprehensive training in teaching students who have difficulties. Many teachers claimed they had received appropriate training to recognize and teach inclusively, according to a study by Zwane and Malale (2018) conducted in Swaziland. Unfortunately, individuals who received training were not sufficiently prepared to teach in regular classrooms, therefore their training was insufficient. According to Mncube, et al 's (2020) study in South Africa's Northwest, Mafikeng Molema district, there is insufficient

teacher training on how to deal with students who have barriers, and educators' main concern is committing acts of injustice due to a lack of understanding on how to deal with students who have a variety of barriers to access. Mpanza and Govender (2021) study in South Africa discovered that teachers viewed the district support teams' assistance as unproductive and inefficient since they did not provide the schools with enough help. In addition, Mncube, Lebopa and Titus (2020), study in South Africa indicated that, teachers working in underprivileged areas are more likely to have a poor opinion of parental participation. Based on the literature reviewed above, there are various gaps in research in relation to understanding the challenges experienced by teachers because there are inconsistencies in the results obtained due to the variations. Moreover, there is very scanty literature on the context of township schools in South Africa, and this is a research gap that was filled by this study.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm, which contends that reality and truth are formed rather than discovered, was employed in the current study (Rehman & Alharti, 2016). Furthermore, from an interpretivist perspective, a researcher's goal is to attempt and understand how people interpret the social phenomena with which they interact rather than to discover universal, context-free knowledge and truth (Rehman & Alharti, 2016). The interpretivist paradigm was appropriate for this study because it assists in helping one comprehend various phenomena in practices, difficulties, and accomplishments encountered by teachers in the implementation of inclusive education.

3.2 Research Design

A case study research design was used to lead this investigation. Case study research design is a crucial technique for examining and comprehending difficult situations (Zainal, 2007). A case study enables a researcher to comprehend the behavioural conditions from the actor's point of view (Zainal, 2007). Case studies, in essence, help the researcher understand social phenomena through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions (Zainal, 2007). For this study, the case study research design was appropriate since the researcher wanted to engage with and comprehend important components of inclusive education. So, the case study research design approach is the most suitable and significant for gaining an in-depth understanding of the practices, triumphs, and obstacles in the implementation of inclusive education in mainstream schools.

3.3 Sample size & sampling methods

In the present study, the researcher engaged with 6 teachers to avoid sampling a large group of them, which may lead to data becoming repetitive and superfluous. The sample size of 6 teachers from the selected school was appropriate because Mason (2010) suggests that for case studies, between 5 and 25 individuals are adequate to enhance saturation of data. For the most part, this study was appropriate for a purposive sampling technique. According to Showkat (2017), the purposive sampling approach entails the researcher selecting the study participants based on his or her own judgement and keeping the study's goal in mind. Thus, to successfully answer the research questions, it required well experienced educators, educators in the SBST committee, educators who understand inclusive teaching, and departmental heads.

Thus, purposive sampling method was suitable and various factors such as age, gender, teaching experience and department were taken into consideration to select the 6 teachers. Therefore, purposive sampling employed to select the 6 teachers ensured that teachers of varied ages, years of teaching experience, and different departments were sampled as the research participants. The adoption of purposive sampling method to obtain 6 participants ensured that adequate data was obtained to analyze teacher-related challenges experienced in the implementation of inclusive education in one selected mainstream school.

3.4 Data collection Instruments

Structured interviews and outside observers' observations were two of the data gathering techniques employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews allow for the discovery or elaboration of material that is significant to participants but may not have previously been considered relevant by the research team, this interview format is primarily used to stimulate debate (Gill et al. 2020). Six educators were interviewed for the current study, and each interview was recorded. Each research subject had an hour-long interview session. In the interview schedule, to ascertain teacher related challenges that affect implementation of inclusive education, questions that guided data collection include, *What types of barriers of access do you think have affected your teaching experience in this mainstream school? What are your experiences with how learners with barriers have been dealt with in the school?* In the observation framework for this study, aspects of teacher related challenges such as understanding of Inclusion, understanding of learning styles, and willingness in teaching Inclusively were considered. The researcher then made physical observation of educators, and the general school set up and annotating challenges encountered by the educators, and recorded all observations that were made.

3.5 Trustworthiness of Qualitative data

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it's critical to consider a research study's reliability when determining its value. Establishing credibility, transferability, reliability, and confirmability are necessary for trustworthiness. In the current study, the researcher used member checking to ensure the validity of the interview data by allowing participants to review the interpretation of their written interviews and participant section descriptions in order to check for factual errors, provide the necessary summaries, and assess the appropriateness of the analysis. In addition, the researcher ensured transferability by providing sufficient detail, then evaluated the extent to which the conclusions drawn were transferable. In addition, member checking was done by presenting the interview transcripts to the 6 teachers so that each of them would confirm if the results are true responses that they provided during data collection. During member checking, the research participants affirmed the transcripts that they confirmed to have originated from them and made clarifications on other data after which they were validated as true responses.

3.6 Procedure for data collection

The Wits School of Education Ethics Research Committee carefully monitored the study's ethical considerations throughout the process, and the Gauteng Department of Basic Education granted approval for research to be conducted in the chosen school. This research was granted full permission by the principal of the selected school, permission from the 6 educators that the researcher will engage with was also granted. The researcher requested permission from the one selected educator for observation purposes.

Lastly, the researcher requested permission from the Wits School of Education Ethics Research Committee and the Gauteng Department of Education. Each interview session lasted 45 minutes and were tape recorded. To guarantee the anonymity of the participants in this study, pseudonyms were used and no names of the participants were revealed. In addition, the participants' were informed that recordings would be kept securely in a secured location with a special password known only to the researcher and the supervisor in order to preserve the confidentiality of the data obtained.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis is defined as the process of putting facts and figures to solve the research problem (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The study employed a thematic content analysis to analyze the data generated through the interview transcripts and non-participant observations. Van Zyl (2011) defines a thematic content analysis as a very common qualitative method involving identification of recurring themes. In conducting a thematic analysis of data, the researcher must do preliminary processing of material, which includes paraphrasing, identification and characterization of recurring themes (Van Zyl, 2011). Maguire and Delahunt, (2017) described steps in conducting a thematic analysis of data. Generating of initial codes was done and this involved organizing data in a systematic and meaningful. This step helped reduce large chunks of data to a much a synthesized form. The present study utilized the deductive coding method, as the researcher was aware of the themes that are required to be analyzed. Thereafter, themes were generated from data presented, for example, from this interview excerpt, *"I really do not know any, I am blank, I cannot think of any, I don't want to lie. The only thing I know is that learners should be treated equally"* (Participant 3), the theme of inadequate knowledge of inclusive education policies emerged.

4. Result and discussion

4.1 Result

Teacher related challenges are issues that emanate from teachers, and this affects the implementation of inclusive education in one selected school. According to the findings of the teacher participants, there are numerous personal challenges that teachers face that impede the implementation of inclusive education. The sub-themes reported include negative teacher attitudes, inadequate teacher knowledge of inclusive education policies, low teacher self-efficacy towards inclusive education, and finally, a lack of teacher training. The sub-themes are discussed as follows:

4.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Negative teacher attitude

Ewing et al. (2017) claim that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education have a significant impact on its implementation in traditional institutions. As a teacher's mood often impacts the students they teach, it is imperative that educators adopt a positive outlook to ensure students with hurdles are accepted in the classroom.. An illustration drawn from interview quotes that address unfavorable teacher attitudes in the implementation of inclusive education. *It has affected me a lot, I ended up developing an attitude towards this particular learner because of how the parents are handling the whole issue of the learner who cannot really see* (Participant 1).

Below is another interview excerpt that echoes the issue of negative teacher attitudes:

I don't think so, because when we include them in the same class, we cannot go through the lesson fast, we need to teach and think about the slow learners and you need to teach at their pace which bores the gifted learners, I highly doubt it's good for me it needs more time, we usually have only 30 minutes, we need more time (Teacher Participant 4)

From the obtained results, it is prevalent that there were only two educators who possessed a negative attitude out of frustration, while other educators mainly felt that it is pivotal not to allow any predicament to affect how the learner with a disability is treated. It is also vital to note that expressing a negative attitude towards a learner is quite detrimental as it may affect their efficacy and performance. It may also result in the learner's further exclusion. Thus, learners with disabilities require patience. Thus, a negative attitude towards learners is as attributed to other factors rather than educators generally having a negative attitude. It is also of great significance to note that these are very limited results of negative attitudes. This shows that in general, educators from the selected mainstream school have a positive attitude towards learners with disabilities.

4.1.2: Sub-theme 2: Inadequate teacher knowledge of Inclusive education policies

According to Du Plessis (2013), the advent of inclusive education in South Africa has resulted in significant philosophical changes for the entire system of education. As a result, it is said that new policies in place have embraced an ecosystem viewpoint, which suggests a shift away from identifying problems within learners and instead places them in all the systems that function as barriers to learning. One of the major issues prevalent is inadequate teacher knowledge of inclusive policies; this has to some extent had a major impact on understanding the significance of enhancing inclusive education to break the societal stigma of disabilities and other barriers in the classroom. An example of inadequate knowledge of inclusive education policies is: *I really do not know any, I am blank, I cannot think of any, I don't want to lie. The only thing I know is that learners should be treated equally.* (Participant 3).

From the results stipulated above, it is of great significance to note that, the educator spoke in all honesty about not being familiar with any inclusive education policies, while there was only one educator who spoke in all honesty, other participants noted that they were only familiar with the White Paper Six but could not fully elaborate on what the White Paper Six entailed. Thus, one can strongly deduce that familiarizing yourself with only one policy also indicates a limited and inadequate understanding of inclusive education policies.

4.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Low teacher self-efficacy towards inclusive education

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is a future-focused perspective and belief related to one's level of competence that they might exhibit in circumstances that have an impact on their emotions and thoughts (Zainalabadin & Ma Rof, 2021). The success or failure of implementing inclusive education over the past three decades has been proven by research, and Soliman (2020) asserts that self-efficacy is crucial to enhance the inclusion of learners in the mainstream. This is because research has shown that for the past three decades, implementing inclusive education has been proven to depend on many factors, such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills and other characteristics, including self-efficacy. This primarily

demonstrates the significance of educators raising their self-efficacy, as inclusion practices in the classroom are negatively impacted by low self-efficacy, as shown in the interview sample below:

The recent one was seeing a learner in my class who was autistic, I referred the learner to the district, because of following procedure, I had to keep the learner in my class made me feel bad, watching a learner who cannot write, communicate, read, express themselves was so challenging for me. I really struggled. I also noticed that the learner had a problem with their muscles when holding a pencil, so I had to try and make sure that I sit down with the learner and use fine motor skills to help them improve. It was challenging, he usually expressed himself in one word, so I tried my best but it was difficult (Teacher Participant 2)

I don't think so, because when we include them in the same class, we cannot go through the lesson fast, we need to teach and think about the slow learners and you need to teach at their pace which bores the gifted learners, I highly doubt it's good for me it needs more time, we usually have only 30 minutes, we need more time (Teacher Participant 4)

From the obtained results, it is evident that some educators appeared to have low self-efficacy as the educator has never come across an autistic learner, despite several attempts to assist the learner, the educator was not fully confident and was uncertain of how to support the child who was diagnosed as autistic. Another teacher felt that teaching different learners in the classroom is generally not comforting for them as it creates problems among the learners who are fully competent. Thus, this affected how the educator would attempt to teach learners with disabilities. From these results, it is evident that educators with low self-efficacy require support to ensure that they are fully competent to deal with learners who have differing abilities and barriers.

4.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Lack of teacher training

According to Mokaleng and Mowes (2020), for inclusion to succeed, educators need training that is efficient and consistent. So, the implementation of inclusive education will suffer if educators only obtain insufficient or limited training. However, it is crucial to recognize that teacher training is necessary to improve the classroom learning environment for the students. In addition, Ozel et al. (2018) made the case that teacher preparation must be considered as a crucial element when it comes to guiding education initiatives in the development of inclusive schools, a foundational training for inclusion. Although training is essential, the Department of Education has not given all instructors' ongoing training the priority it deserves to teach inclusively. Below are excerpts from educators who found it challenging to educate some learners with disabilities, while others lack proper training. Examples of educators who explored the lack of teacher training stated the following, *in fact, back in my college years, I was not trained to teach inclusively, I was just trained to teach in a general classroom. So training was divided into two (Participant 3)*. While another educator reported that, *my experience was not easy at all, I discovered along the way of how to teach inclusively. I was never formally trained in college. So inclusive education was honestly a self-training (Teacher Participant 5)*.

Thus, from the data collected, some of the educators lack sufficient teacher training and a background of inclusivity. This caused numerous challenges for the educators as they found it challenging to enhance inclusive education. Lack of teacher training refers to training at the college level. It is vital to note that from the collected data, some educators were not trained at the college level to teach inclusively. Low self-efficacy is also problematic, as it makes it difficult for the educator to confidently accommodate learners with disabilities in the classroom.

4.2 Discussion

The study findings reported that some teacher related challenges include a lack of teacher training in inclusive education, which hampered their implementation efforts. As a result, teachers lacked knowledge of inclusive practices for the various disabilities that learners have in the mainstream primary school. In agreement, Zwane and Malale (2018) reported that educators were not adequately trained at both the service level and the university level. Moreover, in the present study, the few educators that reported having been trained argued that it was not adequate as they had never received formal training on how to identify learners with disabilities and how to teach inclusively. Thus, this lack of knowledge has led to low implementation of inclusive education in the school. Educators who were chosen to participate in the study displayed a limited and hazy grasp of inclusive education, according to a different study by Phiri (2021) on the experiences of educators in the implementation of inclusive education in conventional schools. Lack of training, more specifically a lack of in-service training, was one of the factors cited for the lack of clarity surrounding inclusive education. None of the teachers at the chosen school had undergone any official inclusive education training (Phiri, 2021). Finally, according to Jali (2014), a lack of training and skills is a major contributing factor to the difficulties encountered while implementing inclusive practices in the classroom. The implication of this finding is that there is need to provide additional support to special schools to make them resource centers, which would positively impact mainstream schools in diverse ways and benefit learners with disabilities and other challenges.

In addition, Leyser et al., (1994) cited in Avramidis and Norwich (2002) reported that educators in several countries had a less positive attitude towards teaching inclusively and struggled with adopting inclusive education due to poor self-efficacy. Similarly, Alhassan, (2014) reported on the teachers' negative attitude towards teaching learners with disabilities, such as speech disorders, and learners who needed more professional skills to read and write. In addition, another teacher argued that they were more willing to teach learners with social problems than those with visual and auditory impairments. According to the studies discussed thus far, negative teacher attitudes do contribute to the segregation of students in schools. According to Leyser et al., (1994) cited in Avramidis and Norwich (2002) instructors struggled to adopt inclusive education because of their poor self-efficacy. Based on the data and comments presented above, the researcher makes the case that, while efforts may be made to establish inclusive education, obstacles that prevent its successful implementation are unavoidable. Even though very few of the instructors in the current study had negative teacher attitudes, they still put a lot of effort into implementing inclusive practices and achieving success with inclusion. The implication of this finding is that principals should make teacher collaboration a formalized program in the school rather than collaboration between specific individuals in the school.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study aimed to explore teacher related challenges experienced by teachers in implementation of inclusive education in one selected mainstream school in South Africa. The findings reported that teacher related challenges reported include negative teacher attitudes, inadequate teacher knowledge of inclusive education policies, low teacher self-efficacy towards inclusive education, and finally, a lack of teacher training. The study concludes that despite the inclusive education policies in South Africa, schools are yet to fully implement inclusive education. This is because there still exists myriads of teacher related challenges which hamper the full implementation of inclusive education.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends that school governing bodies provide additional support to special schools to make them resource centers, which would positively impact mainstream schools in diverse ways and benefit learners with disabilities and other challenges. This is because the findings indicated that some educators in the selected mainstream school experienced a lack of self-efficacy in supporting learners with disabilities such as autism; thus, if educators at special schools trained and supported mainstream educators, the implementation of inclusive education would be enhanced. When the challenges of inclusive education are addressed, this would provide best school environments for the implementation of inclusive education policies. In addition, the Department of Education should provide more school-based support to teachers to ensure full implementation of inclusive education in classrooms. Moreover, this study recommends for re-evaluation of policies on inclusive education in south Africa, to ascertain aspects that have been achieved by most schools. This would provide critical information that would lead to the modification of the policies on inclusive education in schools.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

One potential limitation of this study is that the data collection was done in one mainstream school and thus this provides a bias in the single context. However, in qualitative studies, the aim is to provide results in certain contexts, and not to generalize other contexts as in quantitative studies. Future studies could adopt mixed methods design and involve large number of participants.

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