

## Exploring Challenges Experienced by Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Education in Classrooms: A South African Perspective

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**Abstract:** The implementation of inclusive education in schools in South Africa has not been fully achieved despite the existence of numerous policies on the same. However, there is very scanty information on current issues that are faced by teachers during the pandemic. Therefore, the present study sought to examine challenges experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in classrooms within a South African context. In this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was adopted. The phenomenological research design was adopted for this study. The selected sample size in this study was eight participants obtained using purposive sampling method. In this study, semi-structured interview was used as the data collection tool. Thematic framework was adopted to analyse data in this study. The study reported that there were four main themes on classroom challenges faced by teachers namely, limited instructional time, inadequate resources, inadequate support and lastly, impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The study recommends that teachers should adopt collaborative practices with school base support teams which had the capacity to mobilise several resources available on the local community to enhance implementation of inclusive education.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Teachers, Inclusive Education, Classrooms, South African Perspective

### 1. Introduction

The South African Education Constitution states that “everyone has the right to basic education” (Department of Education DBE, 2001). This amendment only guarantees every learner's basic learning needs to be met, which may result in many learners with learning disabilities being excluded from the education system. Alongside the dissemination of the Constitution and the Bill of rights, the South African government has moved toward the advocacy of equal rights of all learners (Department of Basic Education, 2016). This implies that more policy formation and implementation have moved towards the issues of special and inclusive education over the years. South Africa has been implementing policies of inclusive education for several years, and this is evident through the revolution of special needs and mainstream education into a converged system (DBE, 2016). This transformation has led to special need learners not only in special education, but also in mainstream education. Therefore, it is prominent that inclusive education is practiced in all educational environments. Although the awareness of inclusive education is

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widely spread, there are rather great concerns on the difficulties of implementing it (Tyagi, 2016). The challenges mostly stem from lack of professional development of teachers (de Clercq, 2013). Teachers are at the forefront of the education system, and for this reason they are not only important role players in academic progression but also in implementing inclusive education. Therefore, professional development training of teachers should be prioritized.

Teachers are required to complete a degree or diploma in education, which takes three to four years to complete. At the completion of their academic final year of study, the assumption is that they are ready for classroom challenges. In addition, the education system has pressurized teachers to effectively teach learners whose learning methods widely vary through the implementation of inclusive education (Dalton, Mckenzie, & Kahonde, 2012). Although the South African government has published a framework of inclusive education policies (DBE, 2014), a study argues that these policies are extremely complex to implement in classroom settings due to various factors (Mahlo, 2017). These factors include overcrowded classrooms, and the lack of skill sets and resources (Mahlo, 2017). Therefore, it is arguable that the problem in inclusive education is not a question of policy formation, but difficulties in implementing the policies. For these reasons, teachers require development training programmes that are focused on the integration of an inclusive education model in classrooms.

There have been numerous efforts by the Department of Education in South Africa to implement inclusive education. For example, Education White Paper 6 (SA DoE 2001) is the post-apartheid government's framework for the development of an inclusive education system. In many respects, it draws on the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) in setting a vision for equal access, participation and inclusion of all learners. In addition, the White Paper 6 (SA DoE 2001) sets a clear policy aspiration towards inclusive education not only for disabled children but for every child who is disadvantaged for reasons of poverty, language and other factors. The Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (SA DBE 2010) confirm that teachers need to know the characteristics of various disabilities, difficulties and conditions, their impact on learning, and appropriate educational responses. Most currently, the Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) builds on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to learning, and further distinguishes between low, medium, and high levels of support that a child might have. The SIAS policy has features that might reinforce past path dependencies, as discussed previously, and features that might enable the realization of inclusive education by disrupting past practices in a number of ways. These include taking a holistic account of the child in context; the expectation that parents/caregivers, teachers and older children are involved in developing support plans; the expectation that support would mostly be offered within ordinary schools and referrals to special schools would be discouraged; and the recognition of school and societal factors as barriers to learning.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

In this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory was adopted. This framework provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the teachers' experiences of in-service training on inclusive education. In 1979 Urie Bronfenbrenner developed ecological systems theory in relation to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner argues that all living organisms can be understood and explored only as the result of continuous, connected and complex interactions between systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this theory, every individual is embedded in multiple nested systems, and that

development is the result of complex interactions between the individual and various systemic factors or components that influence each other (Kamenopoulou, 2016). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses that the general context can be identified in four systems or layers. The four systems are microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; and macrosystem (Mahlo, 2017). The microsystem is the inner most level that consists of immediate interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and mesosystem is a link between two or more microsystems (Visser & Moleko, 2012). The exosystem is defined as two or more settings interacting with each other without the need of an individual's active participation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), while macrosystem is a broader system that encompasses class; culture or race (Visser & Moleko, 2012). The ecological systems theory was relevant in this study because allows the exploration of a phenomenon in its context by focusing on both individual and contextual factors.

### 3. Literature Review

Literature indicates that there exist several challenges that affect the implementation of inclusive education, but the findings are varied in different contexts. Moreover, the previous literature has some current challenges that have emanated from the pandemic. In Kenya, a study by Garbutt et al., (2018) reported that more than 50% of teachers knew how to support learners but still showed limited support towards learners with learning difficulties. Similarly, Mahlo (2017) argues that several classroom challenges but is not limited to overcrowded classrooms, heavy workload, lack of assistance and a negative attitude affect implementation of inclusive education. In another study, Mahlo, (2017) argues that teachers in outlying rural areas are expected to teach in overcrowded classrooms and still support learners with learning difficulties with no assistance. Moreover, Chitiyo, (2017) reiterate that classrooms comprising of learners with different learning needs creates pressure for teachers to attempt effective instructional methods to include all diverse learning needs. For instance, Okongo et al., (2015) argue that there has been a significant increase in secondary education enrolment in Kenya since 2009 which has led to overcrowded classrooms.

In South Africa, a study by Maree, (2021) indicate that some teachers may find it challenging to attend to all learners in an overcrowded classroom and still create the time to implement an inclusive curriculum for learners with remedial needs. Moreover, Mahlo, (2017) reiterate that many teachers in South African schools have to teach in large classrooms that consist of an average number of 40 learners, with some experiencing learning difficulties and limited instructional time and lack of resources form part of the factors hindering the implementation of IE. Mpu and Adu (2021) state that many schools in South Africa experience difficulties with completing the curriculum within the allocated instructional time. Okongo et al., (2015) argue that learners with disabilities require extra instructional time, diverse learning methods and professional knowledge, which can be achieved through an increase in academic resources. This makes it very challenging as various governmental schools experience a profound lack of educational resources. For instance, Okongo et al., (2015) reiterate that schools with adequate resources have been shown to have impeccable academic progression and an inclusive environment. This may not be enough to eradicate the issues of inclusivity; however, having adequate academic resources plays a significant role in the effectiveness of implementation of inclusive education.

Another study in South Africa by Adewumi et al., (2019) reported that the majority of teachers expressed difficulties in implementing inclusion with limited or lack of assistance from the district, community and

parents. In addition, Adewumi et al., (2019) argue that teachers have huge role because they are also expected to be counsellors, parents and managers with little or no assistance. Moreover, Molbaek, (2018) argues that there seems to be a misalignment between the expectations of inclusion and the daily teaching practices in classrooms. Donohue and Bornman (2014) contend that the barriers to inclusion are also a reflection of wider attitudes and beliefs about people with disabilities. On the other hand, Adewumi et al., (2019) argue that teachers' negative attitude towards inclusion could stem from feelings of incompetency. For instance, an online study conducted in the United States of America reported that some teachers were concerned about their lack of skills to identify and support pupils with various learning needs (Reinke et al., 2011). Arguably, the beliefs and attitudes of school personnel may reflect within a school environment. In another study in South Africa, Maree (2021) reported that learners struggle to find sufficient space in the classroom during the pandemic because learners were expected to maintain a 1-meter social distance at school. Maree, (2021) study also argues that there are challenges in implementing inclusive education in classrooms because of weekly learner attendance rotation, online learning and shortening of the curriculum. In addition, van der Berg et al., (2020) reported that during the pandemic, an increase in school dropouts, absenteeism and curriculum repetition.

Studies in South Africa indicates that the implementation of inclusive education in schools has not been fully achieved despite the implementation of numerous policies. Bines and Lei (2011) study argues that disability remains a significant factor in exclusion from education and schooling that is evident in educational policy and practice. Another study by Khumalo and Fish Hodgson, (2017) indicate that there is substantial evidence to suggest significant breaches of such treaties and that over half a million children with disabilities are still not in school. Moreover, Adewumi et al., (2019) reiterate that those children who are in school do not enjoy quality learning opportunities and are not gaining the skills needed to live independent and fulfilling adult lives. The reviewed literature indicates mixed and varied results on the challenges of implementation of inclusive education. However, the results do not show a particular trend, and more so, there is very scanty information on current issues that are faced by teachers during the pandemic. Therefore, the present study sought to examine challenges experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in classrooms within a South African context.

#### **4. The Present Study**

This study examined challenges experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in classrooms within a South African context.

#### **5. Research Questions**

The research question which guided the study was stated as follows:

What are the challenges experienced by teachers in implementing inclusive education in classrooms?

## **6. Methods**

### **6.1 Research Design**

The phenomenological research design was adopted for this study. This design investigates how people experience the world (Patton, 2015), and it entails that researchers that utilize this research design show how words and concepts can distort and give structure to individual experiences (Patton, 2015). In addition, phenomenological design aims to identify human experiences of research participants and understand these experiences objectively from the researcher's own assumptions (Creswell, 2014). This design was relevant in this study because it brings a focus on the description of research participants' experiences with the intention to objectively gain a deeper understanding of the nature of individual experiences.

### **6.2 Study Participants**

The sample criterion for this study was qualified teachers enrolled in a distance education programme known as BEd Honours (Learning Support) at the University of Pretoria. In consideration of data saturation, the selected sample size in this study was eight participants obtained using purposive sampling method. The use of purposive sampling method enabled unique participants enabled the researcher to generate rich information that addresses the research questions of this study.

### **6.3 Research Tools**

In this study, semi-structured interview was used as the data collection tool. Interviews are questions and answers interaction amongst people (Tracy, 2013). This method of data collection was adopted in this study because it provided the opportunity to mutually understand the phenomenon (Willig, 2013). This not only assists researcher with gaining in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, but to also account for their own subjectivity.

### **6.4 Procedure**

First, a letter of permission was submitted to the Dean of the Faculty Education, University of Pretoria. Thereafter, the Dean approved of the study; the Unit for Distance Education (UDE) reached out to teachers enrolled in the BEd honours (Learning Support) to participate in the study. Teachers interested in participating in the research study further reached out to the Student Administration of the UDE to schedule for the interviews. To conduct the semi-structured telephonic interviews, teachers enrolled in the BEd Honours programme were contacted by the Unit of Distance Education, University of Pretoria to participate in this research study. The eight participants that were interested signed the informed consent form to agree to the interview. Thereafter, interviews were conducted and data tape recorded in readiness for transcription and data analysis.

### **6.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic framework was adopted to analyse data in this study. Thematic analysis is a systemic process of searching for themes from the data set (Willig, 2013). This is also a strategy to identify and discuss theme that exist within collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This entails that the researcher identifies common

threads from the information provided by participants, and this can be achieved through grouping information into themes. Thematic analysis design allows the researcher to collectively make sense of data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

## 7. Results & Discussion

This study examined classroom challenges which the participants experienced. Classroom challenges may encompass of various factors that interfere with learning; however, in this study classroom challenges refer to factors that hinder the implementation of inclusive strategies (Tyagi, 2016). Furthermore, these challenges of implementing inclusive education are highly dependent on unique factors that stem from the school environment (Mahlo, 2017). The study reported that there were four main themes on classroom challenges faced by teachers namely, limited instructional time, inadequate resources, inadequate support and lastly, impact of COVID-19 pandemic. These themes are discussed as follows.

### Theme 1: Limited Instructional time

The data set showed a common pattern of instructional time as one of the main classroom challenges that most participants experience. Instructional time is the time or duration allocated for learning and teaching in a classroom context (Osei-Owusu et al., 2018). Different learners have various learning needs and this can be challenging for some teachers. Some participants expressed that they experience challenges giving all learners the special attention they need within the given time at school:

Also time, we are expected as teachers to complete ATP which is Annual Teaching Plan according to circulated time from the district office. We don't have enough time to support learners according to my view and experience (P7, L45-49)

Participant 7 suggested that more individual interactions with the learners who need learning support would be more effective: "I don't have enough time to support those learners; I think there needs to be a one-on-one engagement because it is difficult for me to support them according to time" (P7: L49-51).

Furthermore, participant 3 also pointed out the need for special time allocated for remedial learners in the classroom:

You don't use the time that is put by the school and timetable, because one of the problems is that when the school set the table, they don't have time for remedial. We need 30 or 40 minutes for remedial and that is how it will be much better implemented (P3: L73-76)

Participant 8 further outlined how the element of time affects the implementation of IE:

If I talk about the time aspect and the admin maybe of having to do that, I will have to say is very difficult to get to them and then include all of them with all their separate disabilities or impairments that they have are struggling with (P8: L34-38)

Similarly, participant 2 also explained that every learner has unique needs and that it can be a challenge to cater for all learners' needs: "It is difficult to give all of them the necessary attention because they are all different. They all actually require individual attention, and that for me is quite a challenge when it comes

to inclusivity in the classroom” (P2: L25-28). Most participants showed the frustration that comes with a lack of time to attend to all learners’ needs. In addition, another participant stressed the challenge of time that was highlighted by participant 4: “It is really difficult to give all your attention to that child but still be able to teach the rest of the class. That’s quite difficult to do especially like when you have 24 learners” (P4: L30-32).

Participants in this study further explained that remedial strategies need more time, and school allocated times might not be sufficient to implement inclusivity for all learners. In addition, some participants further stressed the difficulties of juggling other classroom tasks and attending to learners’ classroom needs. It seems implementing inclusivity within the allocated classroom time is easier in theory than in practice.

Literature indicates that many schools in South Africa experience challenges in completing the curriculum within the allocated instructional time (Chitiyo, 2017; Mahlo, 2017; Mpu & Adu, 2021). Participants in this study concurred with this notion. However, they seemed to highlight the difficulties of attending to special needs learners. Okongo et al., (2015) argue that learners with disabilities require diverse teaching methods that need extensive instructional time. Moreover, the majority of the participants in this study expressed the difficulties of attending to all the different learning needs during instructional time. For instance, Ranjeeta (2018) argues that every learning need is unique to each learner. Therefore, it may be a challenge to accommodate all learning needs during the allocated instructional time. One participant argued that to address this, learners with disabilities need allocated time and individual sessions.

Various elements affect the classroom time to implement IE. For example, some participants expressed difficulties in attending to all learners, especially in a large classroom. Studies indicate that many government schools in South Africa average about 80 to 100 learners in one classroom (Mpu & Adu, 2021). As a result, there is an increased number of learners with diverse learning needs, and this has left some teachers under pressure to include all learners with limited instructional time (Chitiyo, 2017). Teachers in this study found it overwhelming to attend to them or allocate the needed time for learners with special needs in a large class.

## Theme 2: Inadequate Resources

Being a teacher that implements effective inclusive education strategies requires resources and tools to enhance teaching practices. Resources are referred to as teaching materials that enhance learning and teaching (Ranjeeta, 2018). Resources to aid teaching and inclusive education seemed to be a classroom need for most teachers. Seven out of the eight participants expressed the need for teaching resources specific to their class needs. Participants also explained that resources not only assist teachers in better implementing IE but also aid learners to learn creatively. Participant 4 explained how a lack of resources creates difficulties in implementing inclusivity: “In a school that lack resources it’s very tough to implement inclusive education, because you need to give every child attention” (P3: L16-17). She further mentioned specific resources she needs to implement IE: “We need space, equipment and also money for toners and printers. You need to have material, resources and a lot of resources. It is what I can think of to make learning easier” (P3: L128-134).

In addition, other participants also listed resources that are specific to their classroom needs.

I think I need technology, the computers to help the learners. Manipulator toys that they can use, like building blocks, beads, the shapes. (P1: L89-92)

Writing tools and teaching aids (P6: L49)

Definitely resources like blocks, the kids can use to help them count or things like that (P4: L72-73)

Those learners are from poor families, they are not supported with expected resources that the schools need, maybe to top up stationery. I think they should consider enough resources in our school (P7: L36-38)

The resources each participant mentioned are unique to their own classroom needs. Participants 1 and 7 further stressed the role that these resources could play in IE:

I think some children still struggle with their small muscle development; you can see them when they are writing and how they hold their pencil. Even the play daw, there are some I was using it on them to train their muscle because they are not fully developed. Even those blocks they help them to think creatively, so I think it will help (P1: L103-107)

Enough resource in infrastructure to create classrooms for special needs, to accommodate learners with severe learning impairment, and to have enough teachers to assists those learners (P7: L103-106)

In essence, participants explained the need for resources and how these teaching resources would make IE much easier to implement:

In a school that lack resources it's very tough to implement inclusive education, because you need to give every child attention (P3: L16-17)

From the interview transcripts, it is evident that most schools have inadequate resources which could assist in implantation of inclusive education. The results indicate that there is inadequate infrastructure and few resources that is meant to aid inclusive education by classroom teachers in mainstream schools.

Classroom challenges are unique to each teacher and school environment, and so are the resources. In agreement to this study finding, Mpu and Adu (2021), reported that the main challenge experienced by schools at the meso-level is a lack of resources, and that, in consideration of large classroom sizes in public schools, resources to accommodate all learners become unattainable. Concerning learning resources, participants in this study expressed that the lack of resources creates difficulty in implementing IE in the classroom. Some of the resources mentioned include printers, infrastructure, learning toys such as building blocks or beads and technical tools like computers. These resources seem to serve a specific learning purpose; for example, one participant argued that clay can be used to help learners develop fine motor skills. Another participant also argued that having functioning printers is time efficient as little classroom time is wasted writing notes on the board. It is important to note that these resources were specific to the teachers' classroom challenge. Nonetheless, they seemed to be a common area of need to implement inclusivity.



In addition, the results also indicated that there is need for personnel resources. The issue of academic personnel seems to be a significant gap for most schools in South Africa. For instance, a study that focused on the experiences of teachers implementing inclusion was conducted in South Africa and the majority of teachers expressed the need for other education stakeholders to assist teachers (Adewumi et al., 2019). Furthermore, Okongo et al., (2015) identified the following as academic personnel: psychologists, social workers, government officials, community specialists and government district support teams. Not only did participants view academic resources as a need, but also viewed them as an investment toward an inclusive environment. Okongo et al., (2015) argue that the education system has failed most learners with learning needs by not providing the resources for teaching and learning to include them within the curriculum. Furthermore, the implementation of IE heavily relies on teachers while there are potential opportunities to create a collaborative network of other educational stakeholders (Šiška et al., 2019). Although, Nel et al., (2013) argue that developing a long-term collaboration seems to be a challenge in South Africa; it is also arguable that it is crucial for inclusive practices.

### Theme 3: Inadequate Support

Support in this study refers to the collaboration of other role players to assist teachers to implement inclusive education (Bhroin & King, 2020). The results indicate that support comes in various ways and that participants expressed how they best believed they could be supported according to their unique challenges in the classroom. Moreover, most participants indicated the need to be supported by parents, the community, teachers' assistants, colleagues and other stakeholders. Limited or no support was expressed as one of the challenges affecting the implementation of IE in classroom settings. The data set shows four types of support; the first type of support evident is the needed support from parents: "Low parental involvement of parents of learners who need extra learning support is another challenge" (P5: L20-22). Participant 3 also stressed the role and importance of parental involvement:

Parents are the first people before us teachers to realise that the child has a learning problem. The parent has already recognised it and instead of dealing with it, the parent will change the child from this school to another school, and then the child comes with a lengthy learner profile (P3: L27-32)

The participant further asked a fundamental question: "If the parents do not give you full support, how are you as a teacher going to support that child?" (P3: L40-42). Participant 3 posed the above rhetorical question to highlight the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents. In addition, participant 7 provided insight into some of the reasons why there is a lack of parental involvement: "The most problem is that parents are in denial of learners' abilities. They don't support, when you call them to meeting about the performance of those learners they don't come" (P7: L39-41). The participant continued to highlight and link the impact of unemployment and illiteracy on the lack of parental involvement: "They don't have that zeal to know about performance, maybe because they are not educated, and they have their own personal problems such as unemployment" (P7: L41-44).

In essence, the majority of the participants agreed on the need for more parental involvement, and the difficulties of having limited parental support:

The parents are also not supporting us, because sometimes you call them and they don't answer the phone, or you ask them to come to school to talk about their child and they don't come, they have excuses. Even if you give the learner homework, they do not help the learner (P1: L40-44)

The second form of support some participants mentioned related to teaching support. Some participants indicated the need to cater for IE by hiring teacher assistants: "Maybe actually assistant teacher would be a really good idea to help. I do not have an assistant teacher, but I am thinking having one would be like amazing" (P4: L73-76). Participant 4 further indicated how having someone in her classroom could be of great help in attending to all learners in the classroom: "In that way it ensures that maybe if you not giving your full attention to a specific child, maybe having an extra set of hands, eyes and ears will be helpful" (P4: L76-78). Similarly, participant 8 also recognised the need for and importance of a teacher's assistant for classroom support:

I know there is a student doing her practical, but even having her in my class, having her like a type of assistant that can assist me, not in explaining the work to them and giving the work to learners, but if I may be busy with one child the assistant can maybe help another child (P8: L71-76)

Thirdly, the type of support also evident in the data set is teacher-on-teacher support. One participant explained how some teachers do not understand the value of collaborating to achieve the same objectives in their classrooms:

I see negative teacher attitude. Teachers necessarily do not have the time to assist colleagues; do not necessarily have the time to assist. They not expressing their eagerness to help the colleagues and other teachers, they keep their knowledge to themselves; they not necessarily want to help better the environment in some case (P5: L16-18)

Lastly, participant 7 also indicated the need for community support and the need to incorporate other stakeholders:

We need to incorporate some of the parents in the community to assist learners who need support, maybe assisting with homework. We need more empowerment to assist those learners in our schools as we have a large numbers of those learners. We need to corporate with different stakeholders or maybe social workers to be employed in the schools. Maybe the problems are socially or emotionally, so we need those social workers who are stable in our school (P7: L106-114)

From the interview results and buttressing the above-mentioned areas of need, learners' academic success is dependent on a complex interactive network of teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the education system. The results also validated this viewpoint by asserting that the community can play a crucial role in empowering learners and assisting with afterschool programmes. Learners exist in a complex interactive system; therefore, learners need to have a support network of education role players (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Unfortunately, most teachers who participated in this study indicated they feel a lack of support which they believe affects the implementation of IE.

One of the commonly mentioned areas of support is parental involvement. Consistent with this view, Adewumi et al., (2019) indicate that the challenges experienced by some teachers often include a lack of assistance from the parents. According to Breyer et al., (2021), the lack of personnel resources in schools led to the employment of teaching assistants. In South African schools, teaching assistants have only been recently adopted with an increased demand for more teaching assistants required in rural schools (Cassim & Moen, 2020). Consistent with this viewpoint, one participant expressed the need for a teaching assistant. The participant further argued that having an extra set of hands would assist her to manage certain classroom tasks through shared responsibilities. Another participant validated this argument by stating that her teaching assistant has been helpful in classroom time management. Even though teaching assistants have bridged the gap in classroom demand, one participant asserted that there is room for teachers to one another support. The participant further stated that some teachers are not interested in sharing knowledge and collaborating with other teachers. Nel et al., (2013) seem to concur with this viewpoint. The authors argue that at the school level, institutional-level support should include teacher-on-teacher collaboration strategies. In addition, Bhroin and King (2020) argue that some of the benefits of teacher-on-teacher collaboration strategies include improving teacher ethics, self-motivation and job satisfaction.

#### Theme 4: Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

There is no doubt that COVID-19 changed the way of living globally. This is evident in the manner some participants expressed the impact of the pandemic on education. Some participants highlighted how the daily rotation of school attendance left some learners excluded, and most importantly, challenged the strategies of implementing IE. Participant 3 explained how COVID-19 negatively affected the implementation of IE:

Right now with COVID, I have 25 learners in my class and they come in a rotation. When the child is coming to school every day, I have time to assess them and I see that this one need a remedial and I try to remedial the child. (P3: L65-69)

The daily rotation regulation implemented as a COVID-19 safety measure left some teachers struggling. Participant 6 also mentioned how the new school regulations positioned learners at a disadvantage: “It is this daily rotation that you are doing at school. Today the learner is here, tomorrow she is not, you know? When she comes back, you start from square one again” (P6: L20-22).

The importance of learners attending school daily was further stressed: “Now because of COVID, the learners are not coming to school every day, some are coming twice a week and some three times a week” (P1: L146-148).

From the interview transcripts above, the results indicate that COVID-19 rotation had a negative impact on teaching and learning and that this left many learners experiencing learning difficulties at a disadvantage. This also left some teachers worried about learners that needed remedial attention. In agreement, Landa et al., (2021) indicate that the pandemic placed education and other sectors under restricted emergency protocols. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school year and the curriculum had to be shortened and this resulted in a higher drop-out rate, absenteeism and curriculum repetition (van der Berg et al., 2020). Participants in this study argued that the irregular attendance of learners created

difficulties in implementing remedial interventions. The irregular attendance was described as daily rotation; this implies that learners attended classes on different days of the week to reduce their exposure to possible Covid-19 infections. This limited face-to-face interaction during the pandemic left many concerns about the impact on academic progression (Engzell et al., 2021).

## 8. Conclusion

The study concludes that experiencing learning difficulties need extra time. Moreover, the study concludes that attending to all learners' needs becomes difficult as there is limited time to cover all aspects of the curriculum. In addition, the study also concludes that teachers also stressed that learners experience various learning difficulties; it then becomes a challenge to cater for various learning needs in the allocated instructional time. Most teachers teach in government schools where overcrowded classrooms worsen the aspect of time. It is within such a context that most teachers reported that limited instructional time and overcrowded classrooms make it even harder to implement IE. The study also concludes that, lack of resources is one of the classroom challenges limiting inclusivity. Teachers in this study stressed that academic resources not only help teachers implement methods of inclusion but also assist learners who need creative ways of learning. The study also concludes that the lack of support from parents, teachers, the community, the DoE and school leadership. Moreover, lack of collaborative practices makes it challenging to cater for diverse learning needs in the classroom. Lastly, the study concludes that teachers found it challenging to address some of the issues brought by the pandemic thereby limiting academic progression.

## 9. Implications & Recommendations

The findings of this study have implications for teachers, principals of schools and Departments of Education. The study recommends that teachers should adopt collaborative practices with school base support teams which had the capacity to mobilise several resources available on the local community to enhance implementation of inclusive education. The Department of Education should prioritize funding of schools to make available resources which could make implementation of inclusive education a reality in schools. The Department of Education should train all teachers on inclusive education to make them well equipped with the skills needed to handle learners with diverse needs. Future studies could be done on intrinsic factors affecting implementation of inclusive education in schools.

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