International Journal of Studies in Psychology
E-ISSN: 2710-2327, P-ISSN: 2710-2319
Vol 5, No. 3, pp 132-141. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijspsy.v5i3.2224
GAERPSY Publishing, 2025
Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivatives (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence.

History of the article
Submitted 09 September 2025
Revised 03 October 2025
Accepted 15 October 2025
Published 30 October 2025

Exploring educators' challenges faced when teaching learners with learning barriers in the senior phase

[1*]Ntombizonke Lucia Nxumalo and [2]Mokgadi Moletsane
[1,2]Department of Educational Psychology, University of the Western Cape, South Africa
[1*]Primary author: 4324726@myuwc.ac.za

***Abstract*—** The research uncovers systemic, instructional, emotional, and resource-related constraints that hinder the realisation of inclusive education. This study examines educators' challenges in teaching learners with learning barriers in the Senior Phase within the King Cetshwayo district of South Africa. Despite inclusive education policies, schools face implementation gaps due to inadequate resources, limited teacher preparedness, and weak institutional support. These challenges often leave teachers overwhelmed, under-supported, and unable to effectively address learners' diverse needs. The study explored and understood educators' lived experiences in implementing inclusive teaching practices and identified the barriers that constrain their efforts to create supportive and equitable learning environments. Using a qualitative phenomenological design within an interpretivist paradigm, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations with purposively selected Senior Phase educators across different schools. The qualitative approach provided deep insight into teachers' personal, contextual, and systemic experiences of working with learners with barriers to learning. The data were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2021) framework, which enabled the identification of recurring patterns and meanings within participants' narratives. Findings revealed persistent shortages of teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, high learner-to-teacher ratios, and limited institutional support, all of which impacted teacher morale, classroom management, and learner engagement. These findings highlight that while educators are committed to inclusive ideals, they remain constrained by practical and systemic limitations. The study offers practical recommendations to enhance teacher capacity and strengthen inclusive learning environments by addressing professional development, resourcing, and policy support issues. It concludes that sustainable inclusion requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving schools, districts, and the Department of Education to ensure that teachers are adequately empowered to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

Keywords: Educator challenges, Inclusive education, Learning barriers, Learner engagement, Teacher training, Support services

To cite this article (APA): Nxumalo, N. L., & Moletsane, M. (2025). Exploring educators' challenges faced when teaching learners with learning barriers in the senior phase. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology, 5*(3), 132-141. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijspsy.v5i3.2224

I. INTRODUCTION

INCLUSIVE education in South Africa is guided by policies that promote equitable access to learning for all students, including those with learning barriers. However, the implementation of these ideals remains inconsistent, particularly in under-resourced contexts (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2023). Educators often find themselves on the frontline, navigating complex classroom dynamics without adequate support. This study investigates the lived experiences of educators in the Senior Phase as they attempt to implement inclusive teaching practices within the King Cetshwayo district.

Learning support services involve implementing interventions that aim to improve learner performance. Learning support aims to enhance the teaching and learning process, enabling learners with learning difficulties to achieve adequate academic performance and enhanced learning and development (Magongwa, 2020). Despite these commendable policy frameworks, research from 2020 to 2025 has consistently shown that inclusive education implementation remains uneven. Learners with diverse needs often face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in mainstream classrooms (Makoelle, 2020; Donohue & Bornman, 2021); however, there has been a growing recognition that these learners are an integral part of the education system and must not be excluded from educational opportunities. The drive for inclusive education in South Africa aligns with a global shift toward equity-focused schooling that acknowledges and accommodates learner diversity in all its forms (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2023).

Learners with diverse needs refer to individuals who require additional support to learn effectively due to various factors influencing their development and learning processes. These include learners with visual, hearing, physical, intellectual, or psychosocial impairments. It also includes learners with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia, ADHD, or autism spectrum disorder, as well as those who are gifted and require advanced learning interventions (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2021). Learners from marginalised backgrounds, such as those affected by poverty, living with chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS, or dealing with trauma and neglect, are also considered part of this group. Linguistically and culturally diverse learners, including those whose home language differs from the language of instruction, fall within this category too (Makoelle, 2020).

The characteristics of learners with diverse needs are multifaceted. Cognitively, these learners may process information at different paces or require alternative instructional strategies to grasp concepts. Emotionally and behaviourally, they may display anxiety, withdrawal, hyperactivity, or aggression due to internal or external challenges, such as trauma, neglect, or sensory sensitivities. Physically, they may have mobility challenges, require assistive devices, or need accessible

learning environments. Linguistically, they may need bilingual support or differentiated instruction to succeed in a second-language classroom. Socially, many of these learners face stigmatisation or peer exclusion, which can further affect their learning outcomes (Donohue & Bornman, 2021; Engelbrecht et al., 2023).

Learners with diverse needs benefit significantly from inclusive teaching strategies such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and assistive technologies. Collaboration between teachers, parents, specialists, and school communities is essential for creating environments where these learners can thrive; however, research emphasises that teachers often feel underprepared to support such learners, pointing to the need for more focused teacher training and resource provision (Du Plessis, 2021; Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2022). Equity in education requires policy and practical commitment at the school level to accommodate every learner's unique needs.

As Smith et al. (2020) noted, providing tailored support to students with diverse learning needs is essential to levelling the playing field in education. By offering individualised instruction, such as personalised learning plans and accommodations, learning support programmes can approach the specific challenges hindering these students' academic progress (Van der Merwe et al., 2021).

Learning support programmes refer to structured educational interventions and services designed to assist learners who experience barriers to learning. These programmes are grounded in the principles of inclusive education and aim to ensure that all learners, particularly those with diverse learning needs, can access, participate in, and benefit from the curriculum equitably. Learning support may be delivered through in-class accommodations, pull-out sessions, specialised instruction, or supplementary services such as speech therapy, psychological counselling, and assistive technology (Nkosi & Maseko, 2022).

Operationally, learning support programmes function at multiple levels within the education system. At the classroom level, they include differentiated instruction, curriculum adaptation, and formative assessments to identify learner needs early. Teachers may implement scaffolding techniques, peer-assisted learning, visual aids, or tactile materials to enhance understanding. At the school level, learning support teams (LSTs) or school-based support teams (SBSTs) are established to coordinate intervention strategies, monitor learner progress, and liaise with external specialists where necessary (DBE, 2021). These teams play a pivotal role in identifying at-risk learners and designing individualised support plans.

At the district or systemic level, learning support programmes are guided by the district-based support teams (DBSTs), which provide professional development for teachers, allocate resources, and ensure that inclusive policies are implemented. Support may include assistive technologies for learners with physical or sensory impairments, structured reading interventions for learners with dyslexia, or behavioural support plans for those with emotional and behavioural challenges (Du Plessis, 2021). Moreover, learning support programmes also extend to parental involvement and community engagement to ensure holistic support.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges of learning support services for learners with learning difficulties

Although inclusive education may reflect the principle of "appropriate support" in the classroom, the realities of regular education continue to pose several challenges for teachers (Goba & Nel, 2023). In addressing the challenges of implementing learning support to learners' limitations and deficits (a medical deficit model), rather than focusing on barriers to learning (a social-bioecological model) due to the system, it will be imperative to address learning support challenges (Mokoena, 2021). The child is not a problem or handicapped, but their learning must be observed systematically, considering family, peers, school, district, and community factors.

Maphalala (2017) observes that learning is the construction of knowledge through collaboration. This is how classrooms can be transformed into communities of learning. The National DoE is responsible for formulating policy. It should ensure that learning support services are successfully implemented and customised for each learner to meet their diverse needs (UNESCO, 2022). This should be conducted in collaboration with relevant role players in the education system, and curriculum delivery and teaching strategies should complement learners' educational needs to improve learner attainment; however, the department has been encountering several challenges in providing quality education for all since implementing the support policy on the SIAS policy (2014). Leepo (2021) concurs that creating and sustaining a stimulating and supportive teaching and learning environment in underperforming schools remains challenging.

The study by Dreyer (2021) evaluated the learning support model introduced in primary schools. Findings indicate that the existing learning support model employed in the West Coast/Winelands area may have provided more effective learning support to learners encountering barriers to learning in mainstream primary schools. Yet, DBE has transformed all aspects of the education system to promote education for all and develop inclusive and supportive learning centres.

Leepo (2021) emphasises the need for teachers to understand learner diversity and that barriers to learning negatively affect educational access, learner retention, and achievement. The literature is limited in providing adequate learning support to progressed learners in secondary schools. This is evident in full-service schools, mainly primary schools, which implemented the SIAS policy (2014) and introduced early identification of learners experiencing barriers to learning; however, there is no evidence of inclusion or continuity of the policy implementation in secondary schools; therefore, no evidence exists of identified full-service schools or inclusive schools in secondary schools at King Cetshwayo.

The divergence is in the lack of learning support in high schools for at-risk learners, particularly learners with learning barriers. This calls for attention to the resources, such as physical, human, and financial resources in schools, which can help to facilitate learning support for learners with learning barriers (Becker & Lutz, 2021).

Mkhuma et al. (2022) remark that identifying learners who experience barriers to learning is a critical step towards providing adequate support; however, the challenges teachers face in providing additional support remain unresolved. The need for additional classrooms and teachers may affect implementation, potentially resulting in large class sizes. Overcrowded classrooms are one of the systemic barriers that may frustrate schools.

The National Minister of Education (DoE, 2022) acknowledged that the education system lacks the additional support required for learners to succeed, stating, "We need to strengthen our support programme for learners with challenges". There is a divergence in the effective identification and support of learners with challenges in secondary schools. Learners with learning challenges need to be identified early so that early intervention can help them achieve their full potential. The positive effects can be long-lasting when early identification is completed, and learning support processes are followed.

A model of learning support services is well-defined regarding "what works" to ensure learning achievement in schools, focusing on school plans and support practices that promote effective learning and development. It is about what schools can do to encourage effective learning rather than concentrate on learners' attributes (Goba & Nel, 2023). Learners' attributes promote discrimination and stigmatisation. Some learners experience barriers to learning because of social problems, such as abuse and violence. Everyone involved in the educational setting should understand that it is not about the learner but about the systems surrounding the learner. From a sociocultural perspective, barriers to learning extend beyond individual learners to the social system, encompassing peers, educators, the education system, and society. The support system for learning achievement seeks a

collaborative approach across various system levels to eliminate the recurrence of the problem.

Educational stakeholders' role in learning support provision in schools

Providing effective learning support within schools is a collaborative effort that requires the active involvement of various educational stakeholders. These include district officials, school management teams (SMTs), teachers, parents, and external support professionals such as psychologists and social workers. Each stakeholder plays a distinct but interconnected role in ensuring that learners with diverse educational needs are adequately supported.

District officials serve as critical intermediaries between education policy and school-level practice. Their responsibilities often include providing training, monitoring the implementation of inclusive education strategies, offering resources, and supporting schools in navigating bureaucratic processes (Makoelle, 2021). By equipping educators with relevant knowledge and skills, district-level support helps to create enabling environments for the effective inclusion of learners experiencing learning barriers.

SBSTs, often coordinated by SMTs, are central to identifying learners who require additional support and developing intervention strategies. Teachers, as the frontline implementers of learning support, are tasked with adapting their instruction to accommodate learners' diverse needs; however, research consistently emphasises that teachers often feel overwhelmed and underprepared when such support systems are inadequately resourced or poorly coordinated (Donohue & Bornman, 2021).

Parental involvement also significantly enhances the effectiveness of learning support. Parents provide crucial insights into their children's learning difficulties and can reinforce strategies applied in the classroom; however, challenges such as low literacy levels or limited awareness of support structures can hinder parental participation, especially in under-resourced communities (Makoelle & Engelbrecht, 2023).

A coordinated, well-supported approach involving all stakeholders is essential to the success of learning support programmes. Where these roles are clearly defined and adequately executed, learners are more likely to experience improved academic outcomes and emotional well-being (Muthivhi & Mampane, 2024).

Implementing best practices for supporting learners

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education aim to provide inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities by 2030 (UNESCO, 2022). To achieve this, alternative strategies that address the root causes of mediocre performance are essential for helping all students succeed. These strategies include intensifying learning, providing professional development to ensure skilled teachers, expanding learning options (such as extra classes), assessing students to assist teachers, and timely interventions to address mediocre performance.

Schools are crucial in enhancing their effectiveness and implementing strategies to reduce academic failure. For instance, a study conducted by Bojuwoye et al. (2014) identified several essential forms of learning support necessary to improve education. These included extra classes for each subject, enhanced learning and teaching support materials, increased parental involvement and support, organised sports activities with coaches, security personnel on school premises, and additional school-based psychologists and social workers to address students' emotional needs and personal challenges.

According to Thomas and Whitten (2021), learning support significantly enables learners to engage fully with the curriculum at their grade level. With the implementation of effective learning support practices, no learner is left behind. This support not only helps improve academic performance but also cultivates positive self-esteem and attitudes towards school and learning. Learners are empowered to become independent, taking charge of their learning and accessing supplementary teaching, additional support, and resources in critical subjects such as English and mathematics.

There is evidence of the compelling nature of support in Australian schools. As a developed country, it has dedicated learning support services in well-resourced, separate rooms. There are digital and non-digital resources targeted to support needs; human resources include special teachers, trained school support staff, teacher aides, volunteers, parents, and therapists as part of the learning support programme (Thomas & Whitten, 2021). This confirms the power of training and development to support teachers in implementing the policy.

Teachers need to be well-trained in managing learner challenges that affect learning. Some teachers may inadvertently cause more harm to learners' development due to a lack of knowledge. They require support from other levels of the system, including education offices (district, provincial, and national) and sister departments (Social Development, Health, and the South African Police Service). Mahlo (2020) concurs that teachers need diverse knowledge and skills to approach various issues, including social problems.

Hauser (2023) agrees that an ideal educational system should have adequate learning support, test-based promotion standards, and effective identification, diagnosis, and support for at-risk learners. In such a system, well-designed and carefully aligned curricular standards, performance standards, and assessments will accommodate diverse learning needs. This suggests that aligning best practices with system development and adequate resourcing enriches learners' learning support. Bojuwoye et al**.** (2014) also affirm that recognising capacities, skills, behaviours, and assets within a social system is the best strategy for mobilising and maintaining these resources for effective learning.

The learning support programme enhances learners' self-esteem, improves academic performance, and cultivates better social relations (Kriel, 2022). The most important aspect of providing learning support is acknowledging and appreciating what schools can achieve with the resources available to and within their control, as well as how a school context can be conducive to learning, promoting learner access and retention. Enhancing learners' psychological traits is central to motivation in all areas of learning. There is a robust relationship between motivation and academic achievement, as motivation correlates with academic performance and links to mastery, understanding, high achievement, and personal responsibility (Kriel, 2022).

There is a growing demand for learning support programmes in schools, and this can be achieved with significant benefits through collaboration with parents. Parents have rights and responsibilities in their children's education (Mahlo, 2020). Teaching is demanding; therefore, schools must take responsibility for making parents feel accepted as partners in their children's education. Much can be achieved by promoting parents' active involvement in discussing assessment outcomes and implementing elements of the learning programme, such as home reading**.**

When parents are involved from the earliest stages of a challenge, they can play a crucial role in screening and diagnostic assessment. They provide valuable insights into their child's development and learning difficulties, discuss the assessment outcomes, and plan the learning support programme for their child (Mahlo, 2020). Parents and learners should be involved in school matters to have the opportunity to communicate and understand what is expected of them regarding assessment standards and performance, and to assist learners in avoiding underperformance.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to explore the importance of providing learning support to learners with learning barriers in the Senior Phase and to identify the challenges educators face in delivering such support within the King Cetshwayo District.

IV. METHODS

Research paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to explore the importance of learning support for learners with learning barriers in senior-phase schools within the King Cetshwayo District. The qualitative research design was particularly suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to gather detailed, descriptive data from teachers, principals, and other relevant school personnel through interviews and observations. These methods enabled a deep understanding of how learning support is provided to learners facing barriers and how teachers perceive and address these needs in inclusive classroom settings. The design supports exploring participants' lived experiences and the contextual factors influencing the implementation of learning support. This approach provided rich, meaningful data that aligned with the study's aim to explore the importance and practice of learning support in senior-phase classrooms.

Research approach

This study used a qualitative approach to explore phenomena in their natural contexts, aiming to understand how people made sense of their experiences and social realities (Marshall & Rossman, 2021). This method was well-suited for in-depth explorations and understanding of complex phenomena. Qualitative research is characterised by its systematic procedures for collecting evidence and producing findings that may not have been predetermined. This facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the research topic. This approach was particularly suitable when collaborating with individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives. It enabled the collection of rich, contextually relevant data.

Research sites

The study participants were teachers. The targeted teachers were teaching or teaching learners in the senior phase. The researcher believed that such teachers were experienced enough to express themselves and share insights about the learning support offered to learners with learning barriers in the senior phase, compared to those teaching other phases. The study was conducted on four King Cetshwayo District (KCD) sites. KCD, with its administrative headquarters in Richards Bay, is in KwaZulu-Natal, 150 kilometres north of the eThekwini central metropolitan area. The district is bordered by uMkhanyakude to the north, Zululand to the northwest, uMzinyathi to the northwest, and iLembe District to the south. KCD comprises the Mthonjaneni, uMlalalazi, Mfolozi, UMhlatuze, and Nkandla local municipalities. The district is well-provided with schools. The facilities are well-distributed, with 452 primary and 204 secondary schools. No information is available regarding the quality of the facilities or the availability of water and sanitation at the schools. The number of people without schooling in KCD accounts for 12.37% of the province's total and 2.85% of the national total. In 2019, the number of people in the district with a matric was only 178,000. This represents a share of 7.94% of the province's total number of people who have obtained a matriculation certificate. The number of people with a matric and a postgraduate degree constitutes 8.54% of the province and 1.38% of the nation.

Within KCD, the number of people without schooling decreased from 2009 to 2019 at an average annual rate of -2.82%. The number of people within the 'matric only' category increased from 126,000 to 178,000. The number of people with a matric certificate and a diploma increased at an average annual rate of 2.33%. The number of people with a matric and a bachelor's degree increased at an average annual rate of 7.76%. Improvement in education is evident with an increase in the number of people holding a matric or higher education qualification.

Participants

In this study, the participants consisted of teachers who educate learners in the senior phase, as they are directly involved in delivering the curriculum and providing learning support to learners with barriers. A sample is a pre-selected group from the general population participating in the study (Bertram & Iben, 2015). Twelve senior phase teachers were conveniently from four high schools in KCD. The senior phase comprises two grades in high school: Grade 8 and Grade 9. Each school had three teachers representing these grades.

Data collection tools

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with voice recording equipment to ensure accuracy, enabling detailed transcription and analysis. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible qualitative data collection method in which the researcher uses open-ended questions rather than strictly following a scripted questionnaire, encouraging participants to express their views in depth (Alshenqeeti, 2020). This method enabled participants in the study to share specific insights, personal experiences, and perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews aim to uncover the story behind participants' experiences and gather rich, descriptive data on the research topic (Adams, 2020). While this method is valuable for exploring meaning and gaining context, it is also time-consuming, especially during scheduling, transcribing, and analysing the responses (Jamshed, 2014). In this study, semi-structured interviews were beneficial because they encouraged participants to reflect on their roles and to articulate the learning barriers encountered by learners in the senior phase, as well as the support strategies they implement. In qualitative research, interviews are often described as purposeful interactions in which the researcher seeks to uncover participants' knowledge, thoughts, and feelings about a topic (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This aligns with the approach adopted in this study. In accordance with ethical principles, care was taken to ensure that no harm came to the participants during data collection. The researcher selected four high schools, interviewing three teachers per school, specifically those teaching Grade 8 and Grade 9, to gather data on the types of barriers to learning encountered and the interventions provided. This was essential in understanding the support needed by struggling learners in the senior phase.

Data analysis

The study employed thematic content analysis to interpret and organise data. This approach involves identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data sets. Themes represent recurring ideas and experiences participants express (Caulfield, 2021). Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase model, the analysis included data familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and final write-up. This process allowed the researcher to capture the essence of participants' experiences concerning the research questions (Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021). Open-ended interviews offered flexibility, allowing participants to shape the conversation according to their lived realities. Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the extent to which findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 2020). Credibility was ensured through member checking and audio-recording, allowing for accurate interpretation of participants' voices. Transferability was supported by thick descriptions and purposive sampling, enabling the findings to be applied to similar contexts (Mtshali & Khoza, 2023). Dependability and confirmability were achieved by maintaining a detailed audit trail, which made the research process transparent and reproducible (Sibanda & Mthiyane, 2024). This approach aligns with the methodological rigour standards expected in qualitative inquiry (Maree, 2020).

Ethical considerations

The University's Policy and Procedures on Research Ethics and Policy and Procedures on Managing and Preventing Acts of Plagiarism were read and understood. The University of Western Cape pursued ethical approval. The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education is authorised to conduct the study at King Cetshwayo schools. Each participant signed informed consent forms before engaging in the research. This ensured they knew what was expected of them and their rights. Assurance was provided that all volunteers would be safe and that no toxic or risky substances would be used throughout the investigation. Confidentiality was maintained to protect participants' privacy. The participants' details in the study were confidential and not

disclosed to anyone. Informed consent occurs when a participant voluntarily agrees to participate in a study and acknowledges their understanding of the terms of participation. Voluntarism was employed in this study, and participants were assured that they were participating because they wanted to, not because they were being forced. They had the option to opt out. Permission letters were solicited and distributed to participants as part of the study.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biographic results

Table 1: Biographic results

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Education	Teaching Experiences	School	Residence	Subjects Taught
PA	Female	34	B. Ed.	10	School A	Emp.	Engl. IsiZ.
PB	Male	45	B. Ed.	15	School B	Esik.	L.O., Eng
PC	Female	29	B. Ed.	6	School C	Emp.	Lang,So.Sc.
PD	Female	52	B. Ed.	20	School D	Esik.	M.N.S.T.
PE	Male	39	B. Ed.	12	School A	Emp.	Engl. IsiZ.
PF	Female	48	B. Ed.	18	School B	Esik.	L.O.Eng.
PG	Male	33	B. Ed.	7	School C	Emp.	Lang.So.Sc.
PI	Female	40	B. Ed.	14	School D	Esi.	MN.S.T.
PH	Female	44	B. Ed.	16	School A	Emp.	Eng., IsiZ.
PO	Male	50	B.Ed.	22	School B	Esik.	LO, Engl
PP	Female	31	B.Ed.	8	School C	Emp.	Lang,So.Sc.
PQ	Male	37	B. Ed.	3	School D	Esik.	M.N.S.T.
D1	Male	46	M.Ed	20	Dist.	Emp.	Psy.
D2	Female	40	M.Ed	18	Dist.	Emp.	Soc. Work
D3	Male	42	M.Ed	15	Dist.	ESik.	L.Sup.Adv.
D4	Female	38	M.Ed	14	Dist.	ESik.	Curr Adv.
D5	Male	50	M.Ed	25	Dist.	Dlan.	Psy.
D6	Female	45	M.Ed	22	Dist.	Dlan.	Soc. Work.
D7	Male	39	M.Ed	20	Dist.	Dlan.	L.Sup.Adv.
D8	Female	44	M.Ed	18	Dist.	Emp.	Cur. Adv.

Esik: Esikhawini, Emp: Empangeni, Dlan.: Dlangezwa, B.Ed.: Bachelor of Education, M.Ed.: Master's in Education, LO, Engl.: Life Orientation, English, Cur. Adv.: Curriculum Adviser, M.N.S,T.: Maths, Natural Sciences, and Technology, Lang., So. Sc.: Languages, Social Sciences, L. Sup. Adv.: Learner Support Adviser, Soc. Work: Social Worker, Psy.: Psychologist, Dist..: District

Challenges educators experience in teaching learners with learning barriers in the senior phase

Educators in the senior phase face many challenges that profoundly define their ability to support learners with diverse educational needs. These challenges are not isolated incidents but are deeply embedded within broader systemic, institutional, and relational contexts. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, it becomes clear that issues such as resource shortages, learner diversity, professional development gaps, and lack of parental involvement operate across various levels of the system from the immediate classroom environment (microsystem) to broader socio-political structures (macrosystem). Additionally, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasises the critical role of social interaction and scaffolding, which are often hindered by these systemic barriers, thereby affecting learners' development within their ZPD.

Resource constraints

A significant theme from the data was the severe constraint on educational resources. Educators and district officials expressed concern that inadequate teaching materials, limited funding, and staff shortages compromise effective instruction and support for learners with barriers. One participant stated this.

"We often lack basic teaching materials and support, which makes it difficult to provide effective instruction" (PA).

This was further echoed by one participant, who noted:

"The funding is just not enough to cater to the varying needs of our learners" (PB).

These findings reveal that mesosystem and exosystem levels, such as district budgeting and provincial education support, fail to adequately equip schools, leaving educators in rural and under-resourced areas at a disadvantage. Within Vygotsky's framework, the lack of appropriate tools and materials undermines the scaffolding process for learners to move from actual to potential development levels. Educators cannot provide differentiated instruction or hands-on support for learners with barriers without sufficient resources.

Learner-specific challenges

Educators also reported struggling with the wide variability in learners' academic and behavioural profiles.

"Every learner comes with different needs, and it can be overwhelming to meet them all" (Teacher P C).

This complexity is heightened in contexts where training and support are limited, as acknowledged by a district official who explained,

"The diversity of learning needs requires a tailored approach, but often, teachers are not equipped with the necessary strategies".

From a Bronfenbrennerian perspective, learner-specific challenges reflect interactions within the microsystem, particularly between teachers and students; however, these interactions are weakened by inadequate support from the exosystem (district and departmental resources), which hinders individualised intervention. Vygotsky's theory similarly emphasises that without targeted social mediation and scaffolding, learners with barriers may not effectively access developmental opportunities, widening educational gaps.

Professional development needs

The participants strongly expressed the need for continuous, targeted professional development to help them adapt to the growing diversity of learning needs. One participant explained,

"There are gaps in our training, especially regarding new teaching methods for learners with barriers"(PD).

District officials agreed, asserting,

"*Investing in professional development for teachers is vital to equip them with the skills needed to support diverse learners"*(D8).

These reflections suggest that, at the exosystem level, teacher training policies and structures have not kept pace with the evolving demands within the microsystem (the classroom). Teachers struggle to serve as effective mediators in Vygotsky's sociocultural learning process without this professional scaffolding, leaving learners unsupported in their developmental zones. Enhancing professional capacity is thus necessary for ensuring academic access and success for learners facing barriers.

Parental and community engagement

Parental and community disengagement also emerged as a significant obstacle in supporting learners. One participant noted,

"Many parents are not involved in their children's education, which affects learners' performance"(PF).

The lack of family-school collaboration often results in missed opportunities to reinforce learning at home and to communicate learner needs effectively. A district psychologist affirmed,

"Building strong partnerships with parents and the community is crucial for supporting learners effectively"(D5).

According to Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem, which includes the interactions between home and school, plays a vital role in a learner's development. Learners may lack the consistency and reinforcement needed to thrive when these relationships are weak or absent. Furthermore, Vygotsky's perspective underscores the importance of social interaction in the classroom and within the broader learning ecology. Without the involvement of more knowledgeable others, parents, mentors, and community members, learners may lack essential cultural and social capital that contributes to their cognitive and emotional development.

Effect of limited materials

Beyond general resource challenges, the lack of essential teaching materials, such as textbooks and learning aids, was repeatedly identified as a core issue. One participant A emphasised,

"We do not have enough textbooks or learning aids, which makes it hard to engage the learners effectively"(PA).

In response, educators often resort to improvisation, which compromises instructional quality and exacerbates learning

inequalities. This resource deficit within the microsystem and exosystem limits educators' ability to scaffold learning appropriately, a key requirement in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Learners with barriers, who often rely on visual or adapted material for comprehension, are particularly affected, further entrenching exclusion and disengagement.

Funding challenges

Funding emerged as a significant structural barrier that impedes the delivery of quality education, particularly in under-resourced rural schools. Both teachers and district officials consistently described how constrained school budgets hinder the procurement of necessary materials, tools, and additional personnel. As one participant emphasised,

"*Our school budget is tight, and we often cannot afford the resources we need*" (PC), illustrating the daily financial decisions that limit instructional capacity.

This underfunding forces schools to prioritise basic operations over enriching or inclusive educational resources, ultimately widening the equity gap for learners with barriers. District officials echoed this concern:

"*Many schools struggle with budgeting, which restricts their capacity to invest in necessary learning materials and staff*" (D8).

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, such financial constraints reflect dysfunction within the *exosystem,* the external systems like government budgeting and policy structures that indirectly affect the learner. When these systems fail to allocate adequate support, the *microsystem* (classroom-level teaching and learning) suffers. Thus, systemic underfunding disrupts the ecology of learner development, reducing the ability of educators to scaffold learning effectively, a principle aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

Staffing shortages

Shortages of qualified staff were emphasised as a core issue affecting educators' capacity to meet individual learning needs. Teachers often carry overwhelming workloads, hindering differentiated instruction and learner support. One participant noted,

"We often operate with fewer teachers than we need, which means we cannot provide individualised attention to learners" (PD).

Such staffing deficits translate to high learner-teacher ratios and diluted support, especially for learners who need more targeted interventions. One participant confirmed the following.

"Teacher shortages in certain subjects hinder the ability to deliver a comprehensive education" (D7).

Within Bronfenbrenner's framework, staffing inadequacies illustrate a breakdown within the *mesosystem* where school structures interact with district policies and teacher development programmes. When these interactions are weak or ineffective, learners, particularly those with barriers, experience diminished support. From Vygotsky's perspective, insufficient staffing undermines the teacher's ability to function as a more knowledgeable other (MKO), which is essential for guiding learners through their ZPD. Hence, without adequate staffing, opportunities for effective scaffolding diminish, limiting learners' academic and social-emotional growth.

Implications for educational equity

The cumulative impact of limited learning materials, chronic underfunding, and persistent staff shortages presents a systemic threat to educational equity in the senior phase. These resource constraints impede the delivery of high-quality teaching and entrench disparities, particularly for learners who require additional support. One participant noted,

"Without the right resources, we are not giving our learners a fair chance"(PE).

Educators across the study echoed this sentiment, underscoring how uneven resource distribution hampers inclusive teaching practices. One participant mentioned this.

"To ensure equity, we need to address these resource constraints urgently" (D8).

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these barriers represent failures within the exosystem and macrosystem, where broader policies, economic conditions, and institutional priorities indirectly yet powerfully shape school environments. Vygotsky's theory further clarifies that without appropriate tools and mediated instruction, learners are denied access to their ZPD, limiting cognitive growth. Addressing these constraints is a policy imperative and a moral obligation to foster a more just and enabling educational landscape.

Learner-specific challenges

In addition to systemic challenges, educators identified learner-specific issues as substantial obstacles to effective teaching in the senior phase. Participants A, G, and I, along with district officials, outlined how these challenges complicate teaching strategies, classroom management, and learner outcomes. These concerns relate to the heterogeneity of learners' abilities and behavioural issues, which intensify classroom dynamics and demand nuanced pedagogical responses.

Variability in learning needs

One of the most frequently cited challenges was the significant variability in learners' cognitive and academic abilities. One participant explained,

"Every learner has different needs, and it was challenging to tailor my teaching to meet all of them"(PF).

This reality reflects a classroom ecology where learners are at vastly different stages of readiness and ability. Such heterogeneity strains teachers' capacity to provide differentiated instruction, especially in overcrowded or under-resourced settings. From Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, each learner requires interaction with an MKO to advance through the ZPD; however, when teachers cannot adapt instruction effectively due to class size or lack of support, the ZPD remains underused, resulting in limited academic progression for many students. Bronfenbrenner's framework also emphasises this issue as a breakdown in the *microsystem*, where contextual constraints dilute learner-teacher interactions.

Behavioural issues

Behavioural disruptions were also raised as a prominent concern affecting teaching efficacy and learner progress. Teacher Participant H observed, "Some learners struggle with behavioural issues that disrupt the learning environment, making it hard for others to focus". These issues reduce instructional time and negatively affect peer learning and classroom cohesion. One participant echoed the following.

"Behavioural issues in the classroom can hinder learning outcomes and require additional strategies for effective management" (D1).

Such challenges necessitate more than disciplinary measures; they require psycho-educational support and behaviour management strategies that align with inclusive education principles. Within Bronfenbrenner's model, such behavioural issues often reflect dysfunctions in the *microsystem* (family, peers) or *mesosystem* (school–home collaboration). Furthermore, Vygotsky would suggest that poorly supported behavioural challenges may interfere with scaffolding, impeding academic development and social-emotional learning.

Funding challenges

Funding emerged as a central barrier to the availability of resources in rural senior-phase education. One participant emphasised the persistent budget constraints that limit access to necessary teaching resources:

"Our school budget is tight, and we often cannot afford the necessary resources"(PC).

This financial strain forces schools to prioritise essential expenditures, often at the cost of learning materials and enrichment programmes. One participant echoed this.

"Many schools struggle with budgeting, which restricts their capacity to invest in necessary learning materials and staff"(D8).

These challenges underscore a systemic issue where inadequate funding perpetuates educational disparities and undermines the quality of learning environments, particularly in under-resourced

communities. Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective highlights the influence of the exosystem, government budgeting, and policy decisions on the school environment, thereby indirectly shaping learner outcomes.

Emotional and social factors

Participants acknowledged that learners' emotional and social experiences strongly influence their academic performance. One participant states this.

"Many of my learners come from difficult backgrounds, impacting their focus and class engagement"(PH).

These emotional burdens extend into the classroom, where teachers must navigate not only cognitive development but also their learners' psychological well-being. The need for a nurturing school climate aligns with Vygotsky's belief that social interactions are fundamental to learning and with Bronfenbrenner's emphasis on how external environments, such as the home, shape the learner's functioning in school.

Strategies for directing challenges

In response to these multifaceted challenges, educators employed a range of strategies to support their learners. One participant described efforts to differentiate instruction:

"I try to differentiate my instruction as much as possible, using group work and peer tutoring to address varying levels of understanding"(PK).

Such practices aim to cater to various learning needs and foster collaborative learning. One participant states this.

"Teachers need training in differentiated instruction and classroom management to effectively address these challenges"(D4).

These strategies align with Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding and reinforce the need for capacity-building initiatives within the teacher preparation and development programmes.

Limited materials and funding

A persistent theme reiterated across participant responses was insufficient materials and financial support. One participant lamented this.

"We often lack basic resources like textbooks and teaching aids, making engaging learners challenging"(PA).

Teachers struggle to provide engaging, relevant, and inclusive education without these foundational tools. This resource scarcity limits curriculum delivery and diminishes learner motivation and participation. The exosystemic influence is evident here, where district-level or governmental funding priorities define school-level decisions about resource allocation.

Staffing concerns

Staffing shortages remain a pressing issue that exacerbates the difficulties experienced in resource-constrained settings. One participant remarked this.

"With large class sizes and not enough teachers, it's nearly impossible to give individual attention to learners who need it most"(PC).

The resulting educator fatigue and learner neglect negatively impact teaching quality and learner outcomes.

"We recognise that staffing shortages are a significant barrier to effective teaching and learning"(D4).

This acknowledgement underscores the systemic nature of staffing challenges and emphasises the urgent need for policy-level responses to improve staffing levels and support systems. The chronosystem also becomes relevant as these issues persist and evolve, often worsening due to delayed or inadequate policy responses.

Effect on educational equity

The impact of resource constraints extends beyond individual classrooms and has far-reaching consequences for educational equity.

"When we cannot provide the same resources as urban schools, it perpetuates inequality in education"(PD).

This statement reflects the inherent disparities between rural and urban schools, with rural schools often lacking the same resources, such as teaching materials, infrastructure, and technology. Such disparities create an uneven playing field, leading to long-term consequences for learners in rural areas who are denied the opportunities that their urban peers might receive. One participant highlighted this.

"Addressing resource disparities is crucial for levelling the playing field for all learners"(D8).

Therefore, systemic changes in policy and resource allocation are paramount to ensure that all learners, regardless of geographic location, receive equitable opportunities for educational success. This emphasises the crucial role of the macrosystem, as government policy and societal structures heavily influence how resources are distributed across schools, affecting learners' educational experiences and outcomes.

Professional fulfilment

Resource constraints also profoundly affect educators' professional fulfilment and job satisfaction. Teacher Participant E shared, *"It was disheartening to see my learners struggle because I do not have the tools to help them succeed"*. This emotional strain is compounded by the frustration of being unable to provide the support learners need, directly affecting teacher morale. One participant added this.

"When we lack resources, it feels like we're fighting an uphill battle daily"(PF).

This sentiment reflects educators' daily challenges when they cannot meet learners' needs due to resource shortages. The toll on teachers' emotional and professional well-being can result in higher turnover rates, as educators seek more well-resourced environments where they feel more effective. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, this represents a conflict between the teachers' microsystem (their immediate school environment) and the macrosystem (broader economic and policy environments), where inadequate resources in the former lead to decreased job satisfaction and eventual attrition, creating a cycle of instability in the workforce.

Professional development needs

Professional development remains a critical factor in equipping educators with the skills to meet the diverse needs of learners; however, participants in this study emphasised significant gaps in training and resources that hindered their ability to provide adequate support. One participant mentioned this.

"I did not receive enough training on how to teach learners with learning disabilities, which makes it challenging to provide effective support"(PG).

This lack of preparedness undermines teachers' confidence and competence in managing diverse classrooms, leading to frustration and decreased effectiveness. Participants acknowledged this gap, affirming that targeted professional development is essential to address the varied learning barriers faced in rural settings:

"Teachers need training in differentiated instruction and classroom management to address these challenges effectively"(D8).

Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD underscores the importance of appropriate scaffolding, not just for learners but also for teachers. Educators require continuous, tailored professional development to help them meet the diverse needs of their students. Ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped to handle the challenges of teaching in rural environments is vital to improving educational outcomes for all learners.

Training gaps

Participants identified significant gaps in their training, particularly regarding inclusive education and strategies to support learners with diverse learning needs.

"I did not receive enough training on how to teach learners with learning disabilities, which makes it challenging to provide effective support"(PG).

This lack of preparation affects teachers' confidence and ability to manage diverse classrooms effectively. Such gaps underscore the urgent need for professional development programmes that address the unique challenges educators face, especially in rural settings, where resources and training opportunities may be scarce. Bridging these gaps through targeted training is essential for improving the quality of education and ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped to support all learners.

Desire for ongoing training

Participants expressed a strong desire for continuous professional development opportunities. One participant remarked,

"I would benefit greatly from workshops focusing on differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching methods"(PI).

This statement reflects a proactive mindset among educators who recognise the importance of ongoing learning to improve their teaching practices. One participant acknowledged this need.

"We are committed to providing more professional development opportunities tailored to the needs of rural educators"(D3).

This emphasises a pathway forward in which sustained, targeted professional development can address existing training gaps, empowering teachers to better serve their students.

Collaboration and peer support

Many participants emphasised the value of collaboration and peer support in professional development. One participant shared this.

"Working with colleagues allows us to share strategies and learn from each other's experiences"(PJ).

This collaborative environment fosters professional growth and builds a sense of community among educators facing similar challenges. There is a shared recognition of the benefits of learning from one another, particularly in rural settings where resources may be limited. Peer support is a valuable resource for overcoming obstacles and improving teaching practices.

Directing specific learning needs

Educators emphasised the importance of tailoring professional development to meet specific learning needs.

"Training on cultural responsiveness and understanding diverse learner backgrounds would be incredibly beneficial"(PL).

This focus on cultural competence is vital in rural settings, where educators work with learners from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"We aim to create training programmes that reflect the diversity of our learners and the challenges educators face"(D3).

Customising professional development to address these specific challenges is critical for ensuring that educators are prepared to meet the diverse needs of their learners. By focusing on such targeted areas, professional development can enhance teaching effectiveness and support the overall development of both educators and students.

Learner-specific challenges

Educators in the senior phase frequently face learner-specific challenges that significantly impact their teaching effectiveness and students' academic success. These challenges include variability in learning needs, academic levels, and behavioural issues, which create substantial barriers to providing adequate support. Teachers in rural areas often manage classrooms with students with diverse learning profiles, requiring more flexible teaching approaches and individualised support.

Diverse learning needs

One of the most prominent learner-specific challenges participants emphasise is the wide range of academic levels and learning needs among students.

"In my classroom, learners are at different academic levels, complicating lesson planning and individualised support" (PA).

This variability in learners' needs necessitates differentiated instruction, a strategy several educators feel underprepared to implement effectively. The lack of resources and training in this area further complicates efforts to address the diverse learning profiles within classrooms. Teachers in rural schools, particularly, require more targeted strategies and resources to support such variability and ensure that all students receive the individualised attention they need.

Behavioural issues

Several participants identified behavioural challenges among learners as a significant concern. One participant noted this.

"Some learners come from difficult backgrounds, which often translates into behavioural issues in class" (PC).

These issues not only disrupt the classroom environment but also hinder the progress of other learners. The need for classroom management training strategies tailored to address behavioural challenges linked to diverse learner backgrounds is evident. Teachers require targeted professional development to effectively manage these challenges and foster a conducive learning environment for all students.

Effect on teaching strategies

The variability in learners' needs, combined with behavioural challenges, directly affects the teaching strategies educators employ. One participant stated,

"I often find myself relying on traditional teaching methods because I am unsure how to accommodate all learners effectively"(PE).

This reliance on conventional teaching approaches can limit the potential for personalised and differentiated learning experiences. One participant recognised this challenge.

"We understand that the diversity of learners requires innovative teaching approaches, and we aim to support educators in this regard"(D4).

This underscores the importance of adopting more adaptable teaching strategies in rural schools to meet learners' diverse needs.

Need for additional support

Educators strongly desire additional support to address the learner-specific challenges they face. One participant observed this.

"Access to educational psychologists or specialists would help us better understand and support our learners" (PG).

This plea emphasises the need for specialised resources to help teachers effectively manage complex student needs.

"We are exploring partnerships with local organisations to provide more comprehensive support for teachers and learners"(D2).

This initiative could help bridge resource and expertise gaps, enabling educators to better support their students.

The diverse learning needs, behavioural challenges, and academic levels presented by learners in rural settings necessitate the development of targeted strategies, additional resources, and continuous professional development. By addressing these learner-specific challenges, educators can improve their effectiveness and provide more equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Professional development needs

Professional development plays a crucial role in equipping educators to support learners with diverse learning barriers; however, participants noted significant gaps in their training, which hinder their ability to effectively meet their students' needs.

Training gaps in supporting diverse learning needs

Participants expressed a clear need for more comprehensive training to address the varied learning barriers in their classrooms. Teacher Participant A shared,

"I feel that our initial training did not adequately prepare us for the realities of teaching in a rural environment with such diverse learners".

Several educators also mentioned that existing professional development opportunities tend to focus on general teaching strategies, rather than the specific needs of rural educators.

"Most training sessions I have attended focus on general teaching strategies, but I need more targeted support for learners with learning barriers"(PC).

This emphasises the gap between the current professional development programmes and educators' specific challenges in rural settings, underscoring the need for more specialised training.

Desire for ongoing support and resources

There is an intense desire among educators for ongoing professional development tailored to their specific needs. One participant affirmed this.

"We need regular workshops that not only teach us about learning barriers but also provide us with practical strategies we can implement in the classroom" (PD).

"It is not enough to have one-off training; we need continuous support and resources to help us improve" (PH).

This reflects a desire to create a culture of continuous learning, where teachers can access the support and resources needed to refine their practices and better serve their students.

Collaboration and peer learning

Several participants emphasised the potential benefits of collaboration and peer learning for their professional development. Two participant observed the following.

"Working with other teachers to share strategies and experiences could help us all improve our practices" (PF).

"We recognise the importance of tailored professional development and are looking into more collaborative models to support our teachers"(D3).

This response demonstrates a commitment to adapting current professional development frameworks to better meet educators' needs, with an emphasis on collaborative learning environments.

Effect on educator retention and effectiveness

The lack of adequate training and support can have long-term consequences on educator retention and effectiveness. One participant remarked,

"When teachers feel unsupported, it is no surprise that many leave the profession after a few years" (PH).

This underscores the importance of addressing professional development needs to enhance teacher satisfaction and retention. The evident gaps in training, especially regarding diverse learning barriers, highlight an urgent need to ensure educators remain effective in their roles. Participants emphasised the need for targeted training, ongoing support, and opportunities for collaboration as key factors for improving educator effectiveness and retention. Addressing these needs will ensure that all learners receive the support they need to succeed.

Cultural considerations

Cultural factors play a crucial role in parental engagement. One participant noted this.

"In some cultures, parents might not feel comfortable speaking up or attending school meetings, so we must find ways to make them feel welcome" (PH).

This statement underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in schools' outreach efforts. Recognising and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds is vital for building trust and cultivating a sense of belonging among parents. Schools must actively create inclusive environments where all families feel welcome and valued.

Parental and community engagement

Engaging parents and community members is essential for cultivating an effective learning environment, particularly in rural settings. Educators in the senior phase encounter significant barriers when attempting to involve families and communities in the educational process.

Barriers to family involvement

Participants identified several factors hindering parental involvement.

"Many parents work multiple jobs and do not have the time to engage with the school, which limits their ability to support their children"(PA).

"In rural areas, there's often a disconnect between what the school wants and what parents understand" (PB).

This reflects many families' socioeconomic challenges, where financial pressures prevent parents from dedicating time to school-related activities. One participant stated this.

"There is a cultural disconnect; some parents don't understand the importance of involvement in their child's education" (PB).

This emphasises schools' need to educate families on the benefits of engagement and how active involvement can positively impact their children's success. Effective communication strategies and ensuring accessibility of materials are key to overcoming these barriers and cultivating parental involvement.

Community support challenges

The role of the community in supporting education is undeniable; however, participants noted challenges in mobilising this support.

"The community is not always aware of the school's needs, so they might not provide the support we need" (PD).

This lack of awareness can lead to missed opportunities for collaboration that could enhance learners' educational experiences. One participant acknowledged this.

"We have identified that many community members feel disconnected from the school system, which hampers our efforts to engage them"(D4).

This acknowledgement at the administrative level reflects the complexity of cultivating strong community involvement, underscoring the need for intentional efforts to strengthen the bond between schools and their surrounding communities.

Cultural and social factors

Cultural attitudes toward education can complicate parental engagement. One participant confirmed this.

"In some cultures, there is a belief that education is solely the teachers' responsibility, so parents may not feel the need to be involved" (PE).

This emphasises the need for schools to promote a shared understanding that education is a collaborative responsibility. One participant pointed out this.

"Some parents may have had negative experiences with schooling themselves, which can discourage them from getting involved" (PF).

Understanding these social dynamics is essential for crafting strategies encouraging positive parental involvement. Schools must address these factors by cultivating a more inclusive and supportive environment for parents to engage with their children's education. This version provides a more structured flow, clarity, and professional tone while maintaining the essence of the participants' views. Would you like to add any more details or adjustments?

Strategies for overcoming barriers

To address these barriers, participants suggested several strategies. Teacher Participant G affirmed,

"We need to host events convenient for parents, perhaps even at different times or in different formats" (PG).

This suggestion reflects an understanding of Vygotsky's ZPD**,** where learning is most effective when support is provided beyond the learner's current abilities. In this case, providing flexible events acknowledges the scaffolding necessary to support parents in becoming more engaged, even if their current social roles or time constraints limit their participation. One participant emphasised one of the following.

"Using platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook groups could help us communicate more effectively with parents and keep them informed" (PH).

From a Vygotskian perspective, technology is a tool for mediating social interaction and knowledge, enabling parents to remain engaged in their children's education, even from a distance. It also emphasises how the social context (one of Vygotsky's key ideas) influences learning and development.

The flexibility in event formats and digital tools reflects a Bronfenbrennerian approach. These strategies create an enabling environment within the microsystem (home, school, and community), thereby strengthening relationships among students, parents, and educators. The mesosystem, which involves interactions among these layers, can be strengthened by facilitating better communication through technological tools.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the urgent need for systemic changes to support educators in inclusive classrooms. Key recommendations include providing targeted professional development, improving access to teaching resources, and integrating support personnel, such as learning support assistants. These measures are critical for realising the goals of inclusive education and ensuring all learners can thrive.

VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this article.

VIII. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available upon request.

References

Adams, W. C. (2020). Conducting semi-structured interviews: Practical guidance for program evaluation. *SAGE Publishing*.

Alshenqeeti, H. (2020). Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review. *English Linguistics Research, 9*(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v9n3p1

Becker, B., & Lutz, C. (2021). Resource constraints in inclusive schooling: A systematic review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(12), 1364–1382. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1750812

Bertram, C., & Iben, C. (2015). *Understanding research: An introduction to reading research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Bojuwoye, O., Moletsane, R., Stofile, S., Moolla, N., & Sylvester, F. (2014). Learning support interventions for inclusive education in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education, 44*(2), 1–18.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology, 9*(1), 3–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000196

Caulfield, J. (2021). *How to do thematic analysis (Step-by-step guide)*. Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2014). *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2021). *Guidelines for School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Department of Basic Education (DBE). (2023). *Inclusive Education Policy Implementation Review*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Donohue, D. K., & Bornman, J. (2014). The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education, 34*(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.15700/201412071114

Dreyer, L. M. (2021). Evaluating a learning support model in mainstream primary schools. *Perspectives in Education, 39*(3), 1–18.

Du Plessis, P. (2021). Inclusive education in South Africa: A literature review of policy and practice. *African Journal of Disability, 10*, a843. https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v10i0.843

Engelbrecht, P., & Savolainen, H. (2021). How teachers understand inclusive education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(7), 795–807.

Engelbrecht, P., Nel, M., Smit, S., & Marais, P. (2023). Advancing inclusive education in South Africa: Progress and persistent challenges. *South African Journal of Education, 43*(1), 1–15.

Goba, T., & Nel, N. (2023). Barriers to learning support in South African schools. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 13*(1), a1235.

Hauser, C. (2023). Accountability and support for at-risk learners in diverse classrooms. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 35*(4), 367–389.

Jamshed, S. (2014). Qualitative research method—Interviewing and observation. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy, 5*(4), 87–88. https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-0105.141942

Kriel, N. (2022). Motivation and academic achievement in South African secondary schools. *South African Journal of Education, 42*(4), 1–12.

Leepo, M. (2021). Creating supportive teaching and learning environments in underperforming schools. *Journal of Education, 83*, 112–130.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: SAGE.

Magongwa, L. (2020). Learning support for learners with barriers to learning in mainstream schools. *Journal of Inclusive Education, 14*(2), 101–118.

Mahlo, D. (2020). Teachers' roles in supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning. *African Journal of Inclusive Education, 4*(2), 55-72.

Makoelle, T. M. (2020). Inclusive education in South Africa: Emerging perspectives. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(12), 1268–1286.

Makoelle, T. M. (2021). District-level support for inclusive education: Policy into practice. *Africa Education Review, 18*(6), 1–20.

Makoelle, T. M., & Engelbrecht, P. (2023). Parental engagement in inclusive schooling: A South African perspective. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 27*(4), 432–450.

Maphalala, M. C. (2017). *The communal construction of knowledge in classrooms*. Richards Bay: University of Zululand Press.

Maree, K. (ed.). (2020). *First steps in research* (3rd ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2021). *Designing qualitative research* (7th ed.). London: SAGE Publications.

Mkhuma, M., Maseko, P., & Nkosi, S. (2022). Identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning: Teacher perspectives. *Journal of Education, 88*, 1-20.

Mokoena, S. (2021). Teaching learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools: South African teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 223–237.

Mtshali, N., & Khoza, S. (2023). Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research through thick description and purposive sampling. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231123456

Muthivhi, A., & Mampane, R. (2024). Multi-stakeholder collaboration and learner wellbeing: Evidence from South African schools. *South African Journal of Education, 44*(1), 1–15.

Ndlovu, L., & Sibanda, B. (2021). Using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to thematic analysis in education research. *Journal of Education Studies, 20*(3), 45–60.

Nkosi, S., & Maseko, P. (2022). Learning support programmes in South African schools: Structures and practices. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 12*(1), a1172. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v12i1.1172

Pillay, J., & Di Terlizzi, M. (2022). Teachers' preparedness to support learners with barriers to learning. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26*(5), 523–540.

Sibanda, M., & Mthiyane, N. (2024). Audit trails and dependability in qualitative research: Practical guidance. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 23*, 1–12.

Smith, J., Brown, A., & Naidoo, P. (2020). Customised assistance for diverse learning needs: Levelling the playing field. *Educational Review, 72*(6), 789–806.

Thomas, K., & Whitten, L. (2021). Learning support provision in Australian schools: Policy and practice review. *Australian Journal of Education, 65*(3), 284–301. https://doi.org/10.1177/00049441211012345

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (UNESCO) (2022). *SDG 4–Education 2030: Progress report*. Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). (2023). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2023/4: Technology in education-A tool on whose terms?* Paris: UNESCO.

Van der Merwe, S., Kruger, D., & Botha, M. (2021). Individualised instruction and learner outcomes in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education, 41*(3), 1–12.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The views, statements, opinions, and data expressed in all publications are solely those of the individual author (s) and contributor (s) and do not necessarily reflect those of GAERPSY or the editor (s). GAERPSY and the editor (s) assume no responsibility for any injury to persons or property arising from using any methods, instructions, products, or ideas in the published content.