



Exploring teachers' challenges in supporting learners with barriers to learning

¹Gracia Mahali Litabo 

¹Free State Department of Education, South Africa

Abstract— This study explores the current challenges teachers face in supporting learners with barriers to learning in inclusive educational settings. Despite shifts in policy towards inclusion in educational systems, teachers still face numerous challenges when supporting learners in their classrooms. It used a qualitative research approach to explore these challenges by drawing on previously published peer-reviewed literature. The findings highlight that contextual factors that hinder the progress and effectiveness of inclusive education in schools affect not only learners but also teachers. The study underscores the urgent need for professional development and teacher improvement to ensure equitable learning for all learners.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Learners with barriers to learning, Teachers' challenges, Support

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I. INTRODUCTION

EDUCATION systems used to be constructed in a way that included some learners and excluded others. This differentiation implied that the learners who were excluded could not cope within the ordinary education system or classrooms because of their impairment. The idea of separating special schools from ordinary schools came across as discrimination against learners with barriers to learning and those without (Mowat, 2019). Fortunately, this approach changed after the development of Inclusive education and the introduction of White Paper 6. Since then, teachers in South Africa have been attempting to implement and practice inclusive education in schools by identifying, screening, and providing support to learners who experience barriers to learning (DoE, 2001; DoE, 2014). These policies aim to address a range of barriers to learning and accommodate diverse learning needs by providing support to schools. DoE (1997, p. 12) defines learners who experience barriers to learning more inclusively as those with socio-economic barriers, like inadequate numbers of learning centers. Barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting refer to "those difficulties that arise within the education system, the learning site, or within the learner himself which may prevent both the system and the learners' needs from being met (DoE, 2005). According to Roy and Swargiary (2023), inclusive education is an educational approach that ensures all learners, regardless of background or ability, have equal opportunities to learn. It focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, creating an environment where all learners' unique strengths are celebrated and utilised. It is a pedagogical philosophy that goes beyond providing access to education for all learners. It encompasses a comprehensive approach to teaching and learning that prioritises equity and diversity. It also recognises that each learner is unique and therefore brings their own strengths, challenges, and perspectives to the learning environment. Inclusive education aims to involve and incorporate all learners, including those with disabilities and learning barriers, into the schooling system (Ainscow, 2020). This approach encourages and promotes learning by differentiating instruction and involving all learners (Donald et al., 2014). When learners learn through differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences and various learning

styles are fully considered, ensuring that every learner's needs are catered to while simultaneously acknowledging and developing learners' abilities (Awla, 2014). This method of education rejects the use of special schools to separate learners with special needs from those without. It ensures that all learners participate in the learning process together. Kinder et al. (2020) further explain inclusive education as an educational system that includes a wide range of learners and differentiates education to accommodate this diversity.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research suggests that training and education are critical to the success of identification and inclusion programs (Winter, 2016). If the barriers in the process are identified and addressed, the goal of education will be achieved. According to DoE (2001, p. 24), the inclusive education and training system was to be adopted so that learners who experience barriers to learning can be identified early and supported, while teachers are provided with the necessary skills through training and workshops. However, there has been no evidence that such skills and knowledge have been provided to teachers. Teachers are constantly experiencing challenges when supporting learners with special needs. These challenges include, among others, extra paperwork, insufficient knowledge and resources, and inadequate training from the district-based support teams. Research has shown that supporting learners with learning barriers can lead to improved communication, better performance, and more positive peer interactions. There is not much said about the difficulties teachers encounter when identifying and supporting learners with learning difficulties.

Teachers feel ill-equipped to identify and support learners, as they did not receive appropriate training or professional development to do so effectively (Smith et al., 2003). They are also not trained to provide differentiated instructional methods or to address the needs of diverse learners once identification has been completed. In simpler terms, they are unable to fully support the identified learner in accordance with his/her needs (Nel, 2012). Moreover, teachers often feel that inclusive education is something they are told to do without support and resources, which makes it a burden rather than a collaborative process (Savolainen, 2009). This, therefore, highlights the importance of teacher knowledge and the necessary skills for creating an inclusive classroom.

There is a high demand for teacher training in pre- and in-service workshops on learners' strengths to stimulate a richer learning environment (Haug, 2017). By doing so, they understand their learners' diverse needs, identify their problems, and provide support so they can learn and develop optimally. This will also ensure that teachers do not over-identify or mis-identify learners. According to Ntsanwisi (2008), teachers are expected to possess the necessary knowledge of common disabilities and learning difficulties, as well as the skills to identify them during assessment. However, teachers lack the skills, and quality support is not always available to learners, especially those who experience barriers to learning. Ntsanwisi (2008) further explains that some of these teachers are unable to identify learners in their classrooms because of the large number of learners, and that, if they try, they use intuition to identify what is wrong with a learner by just looking at their class books. The approach employed by teachers shows a lack of quality training. Westwood (2004) also states that many factors make it difficult to identify learners experiencing barriers. These factors include definitions and criteria for categories of difficult and overlapping learning difficulties.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research has shown that inclusive education can lead to positive outcomes, such as better academic performance and improved communication. However, there is not much said about the challenges teachers face in identifying and supporting learners with learning barriers. Teachers are expected to have the skills to identify and support learners with learning barriers, but they currently do not (Ntsanwisi, 2008). There is also a lack of resources to support such learners. The findings of this study will therefore contribute greatly to the development of new policies that support teachers by providing clear guidelines for identifying and supporting learners based on their academic needs. It also contributes to the development of effective strategies that teachers can use to identify and support learners with learning barriers. These findings also inform the district-based support teams of the need for teacher training and the resources they need to support learners. This training provides teachers with the necessary skills, thereby making inclusive education a collaborative and easy approach.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lack of teaching resources

Teaching resources play a vital role in enhancing the learner's ability to overcome or combat his or her barriers to learning. The availability of technological gadgets can also ensure effective implementation of inclusive education and curriculum, so that learners can better understand when learning is practical, and that modern-age learners seem to understand better when gadgets are used. According to Chimhenya (2016), there is an evident lack of resources in schools, which may negatively affect the successful support of learners with barriers to learning. Teaching learning materials are an important tool for the inclusion and support of learners with learning difficulties, as they ensure that learning is as practical, real, and enjoyable as possible. This claim is backed by Charles (2020), who claims that learning resources are of great importance in the teaching and learning process as they have a direct impact on the learner's learning ability or understanding of the concepts taught. The lack of resources in classrooms can negatively affect not only the learner in class but can also have an impact on the teacher who is providing support, leading to an increased number of learners who still experience barriers to learning, which also results in low educational success or academic performance, which also leads to a great number of learners dropping out at a later stage. Zwane and Malale (2018) also highlight the importance of the availability of educational resources in classrooms by drawing on the impact it has on the learner's education. They claim that when resources are insufficient or in short supply, learners who experience barriers to

learning and require support have limited learning opportunities. The learners' learning barriers were not addressed, and they continue to experience them, hindering their optimal academic performance. The learner may therefore be academically excluded and feel inferior to other learners in the same classroom, thereby hindering the effective implementation of inclusive education. They concluded that limited or unavailable resources have a highly negative impact on the support of learners who experience barriers to learning, and that there should be urgent development of technological devices to support learners who experience learning difficulties, thereby enabling the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Lack of teacher training and knowledge of inclusive education.

The findings indicated that a lack of teacher training and knowledge of inclusive education could pose a challenge for learners in schools. Swart et al. (2002) revealed that teachers are the most important component in the implementation of inclusive education and are the primary source of inclusion in classrooms. They are the key to the successful implementation of an inclusive education system; therefore, they require ongoing support and in-service training. This is due to findings that, although teachers are expected to assume new responsibilities and expand their roles as facilitators of inclusive education, they lack the understanding and skills to effectively teach and support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. This contributes greatly to an increased number of learners who continue to experience barriers to learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2001). This lack of skills and training also significantly impairs their ability to support such learners, as teachers feel overwhelmed and unsure where to start. This therefore concludes that teachers require appropriate professional knowledge of the learners in their classrooms. Teacher training is a fundamental element in addressing the various barriers learners encounter. Their training ensures full inclusion of all learners in the classroom, leading to better overall performance (Friesen & Cuning, 2020). Quality and inclusive education require continuous teacher training. They are the most significant part of inclusive education; their training is directly proportional to effective inclusion and supports learners with learning barriers (Hernández-Castilla, 2009). In their study, Moriña et al. (2020) highlight the urgent need for teacher training and for understanding what inclusive education entails, so they can master it and fully support their learners. This would mean they would easily become facilitators of inclusion rather than barriers to it. The training ensures that teachers can create inclusive learning environments, which may help break down barriers within the classroom and for learners. The same views are shared by Engelbrecht et al. (2001), who, in their study, elaborate on the importance of teacher training to say that without the necessary training, teachers continue to feel less confident in their ability to teach, support effectively, and include learners who experience barriers to learning in classrooms. They continue to depict limited knowledge of learners experiencing barriers to learning, which can be addressed through workshops or in-service training, leading them to respond positively to the challenges of inclusive education. In support, Rose (2005) also adds that teachers are not well prepared through professional training to manage and overcome inequalities in their classrooms. This therefore calls for immediate teacher training to ensure learners are fully supported according to their specific needs, given recent research indicating that teachers do not possess the required skills to support learners who experience barriers to learning, as they have never attended workshops on inclusive education.

Overcrowded classes

Research on inclusion highlights the importance of a fair teacher-learner ratio. DoE (2001) defines an overcrowded classroom as one in which the number of learners exceeds the number the classroom is designed to accommodate. According to Nell and Muller (2011), overcrowded or highly populated classes may be viewed as a barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive education and the support of learners who experience them. Overcrowding in classes may negatively affect or slow down efforts to support learners with learning barriers.

Such overcrowding hinders teachers from providing learners with individualised or one-on-one support for their specific barriers. In this regard, Van Reusen et al. (2001) assert that such classes put additional pressure on the teacher to support while also trying to manage the rest of the class, making it more difficult to provide the support needed. Marais and Meier (2010) add that learners with learning barriers need individualised support. Assistance to fully combat their learning difficulties, which seem to be unrealistic or too impossible in an overcrowded classroom. A study conducted by Emmer and Stough (2001) found that teachers find it difficult to monitor behaviour and support learners with barriers to learning in overcrowded classrooms, as class size affects the time a teacher can devote to each learner. In overcrowded classes, this is not possible, as the number of learners who experience learning difficulties does not allow them a fair chance at teacher-learner interaction, which is an important, if not critical, component of teaching and learning. It is only through such interactions that teachers can fully assess the learner, identify the difficulties they face, and thereby provide the necessary support. Nel and Muller (2011) further highlighted that overcrowding in classes not only affects learners but also teachers, leading to teacher absenteeism and stress. It creates stress for them, making it hard for them to meet learners' learning needs. This also strains the relationship between the teacher and learner, leading to disruptions and problems in class. Oliver (2006) shares the same sentiments, asserting that educators experience frustration and difficulties with learners who face barriers to learning. This frustration stems mainly from disciplinary issues, heavy workloads, and resource shortages. This gradually inhibits their ability to support learners effectively and achieve desirable educational outcomes.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by two key theoretical perspectives: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Inclusive Education Theory. The two frameworks provide a clear understanding of the challenges teachers face in supporting learners with learning barriers in inclusive classrooms. Inclusive Education Theory is grounded in the universal belief that every learner, regardless of disability, ability, or background, has the right to access quality education in mainstream classrooms. The theory promotes equal education within the education system and the complete removal of systemic barriers that hinder learners' access to learning. It places the education system under a responsibility to be flexible and responsive to learners' diverse needs. Furthermore, Inclusive Education emphasises the central role of teachers in creating adaptive, inclusive learning environments. It also highlights the challenges teachers may encounter when inclusive policies are not matched with training, institutional support, and adequate resources. Countering this is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which places the individual within a set of environmental systems that interact and influence their development. The system is inclusive of the microsystem, which is the classroom setting, and the mesosystem, which is the interactions between the school and the individual's home. The exosystem, which encompasses the broader influences of institutions such as education departments, and the macrosystem, which encompasses societal beliefs and education policies. An application of this framework helps explain how teachers' challenges are shaped not only by their classroom practices but also by external factors such as the school's infrastructure, policies, and society's attitudes toward inclusion. Additionally, class sizes (microsystem), lack of parental support (mesosystem), insufficient teaching materials (exosystem), and inflexible curriculum (macrosystem) might influence the teacher's effort to implement inclusivity in their classroom.

VI. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the teacher's challenges in supporting learners

who experience barriers to learning and examines the specific challenges teachers face in supporting learners with learning needs.

VII. METHODS

Research paradigm

Creswell and Poth (2016) define a paradigm as an approach, model, or framework for conducting research. Ahsan Ullah (2022) further explains that it is a belief system that shapes how research is conducted and how results are interpreted. The above interpretations reveal that a research paradigm is a model researchers use to conduct research. The research paradigms can be interpretivist or positivist, depending on the nature of the research. This study, therefore, uses interpretivist paradigms. Creswell and Poth (2016) state that this paradigm is based on the premise that reality is socially constructed through the individual's lived experiences, and it is concerned with understanding the deeper meaning of the participant's lived experiences. Ryan (2018) also explains that its objective is to make sense of individuals' meanings and subjective intentions in each context. The researcher understands the phenomenon from the participant's perspective. The interpretivist paradigm is suitable for this study, as it recognises the different experiences teachers have in their classrooms when identifying their learners. It does not object to a single reality or experience. It allows for different teachers' experiences of the same experience.

Research approach

According to Grover and Niederman (2021), a research approach is a detailed description of the steps and procedures a researcher plans to use to collect, analyse, and interpret data. Punch (2013) also describes it as a structured research guide that outlines the steps from broad assumptions to detailed data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring consistent clarity.

In this study, the researcher uses a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research, according to Kelly et al. (2014), is an approach that explores and provides deeper insights into real-world problems. It is used to study the nature of phenomena, encompassing their qualities, different manifestations, where they appear, and their perspectives (Grover & Niederman, 2021). Qualitative research answers the what, why, and how questions rather than the how many or how often questions. Here, the researcher understands the meaning of phenomena through the participant's perspective. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2016) define qualitative research as an approach that provides insight and a deeper understanding of participants, enabling the researcher to delve into the challenges teachers face in supporting learners with diverse learning needs. In this study, the researcher draws on academic journals to examine the challenges teachers face in identifying and supporting learners who experience learning barriers. Existing sources were studied to conclude the study. Due to the nature of the research, the collected data cannot be numbered, as it is based on the different challenges teachers experience. This approach thus assists the researcher in investigating those experiences.

Research design

Research design reflects research ideas. It binds the research together through a structured plan that shows how the parts of this research can be used together to address the research question (Hakim, 2000). Research design determines the analysis to be conducted to achieve the desired results. The study adopts a desktop research design. According to Zhou and Nunes (2016), desktop research relies on existing sources published for the same or a different purpose than the study. Creswell and Poth (2014) further explain it as a design that uses existing data sources to answer the research question. This design was effective in this study, as the researcher used previously published journals to analyze, synthesise, and summarise data reflecting the challenges teachers face when identifying learners with barriers to learning. This study provides an opportunity for triangulation to gain further insight into teachers' experiences with these challenges.

Research site

The study does not have a traditional research site or actual human

participants, as it uses a desktop study design. Instead, it relies heavily on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, education policies, academic books, and research papers. The data collected from secondary sources is therefore used to gain insight into the wide range of challenges teachers face in supporting learners with learning barriers. The research site in this desktop study is conceptual rather than physical. It is the body of knowledge on inclusive education and teachers' experiences in educational settings when supporting learners facing various learning barriers. The study focuses on literature relevant to the South African education system, with particular emphasis on documents that discuss the implementation of inclusive education, such as the Education White Paper 6. Although no live or actual participants were involved, the study explores the challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms, as they are presented in the data already collected. The collected data provides valuable insights into teachers' challenges when implementing inclusive education classrooms. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select relevant literature for inclusion, based on its relevance to the research question and academic credibility. The DoE (2001) was used in the study due to its significance in shaping the current inclusive education policy and practice in South Africa.

Sampling and sample size

Elfil and Negida (2017) define sampling as the process of selecting a sample from a larger population. The researcher, therefore, uses purposive sampling to select journal articles on inclusivity and the challenges teachers face in implementing it. According to Ormrod (2015), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on their relevance to the study's purpose. Adeoye (2023) further explains it as the intentional selection of specific units based on their relevance to the research question, to enable the researcher to gain deep insights into complex phenomena. According to Althubaiti (2023), sample size is the number of participants the researcher chooses to include in the study. Patton (2011) further explains it as the specific group a researcher uses to collect data. In the study, the researcher sampled 10 previously published journals to examine the challenges that teachers face when identifying learners with barriers to learning.

Table 1: Articles to be reviewed

Authors, Years, and Titles
Parveen and Qounsar (2018). Inclusive education and the challenges.
Jardinez and Natividad (2024). The Advantages and Challenges of Inclusive Education: Striving for Equity in the Classroom.
Abongdia et al. (2015). Challenges teachers face in identifying learners with learning barriers: Toward inclusive education.
Jali (2012). Challenges of teaching in the context of inclusive education: An exploration.
Ndlela (2021). Challenges for foundation phase teachers to include learners with learning difficulties.
Engelbrecht (2020). Inclusive education: Developments and challenges in South Africa.
Dhlamini (2022). Challenges experienced by teachers in supporting learners with barriers to learning in the Intermediate Phase
Nthoroane (2020). Teachers' Challenges in Supporting Learners with Socioeconomic Barriers to Learning
Ndinisa (2016). Supporting learners who experience barriers to learning: A case study of a full-service school at Umlazi District.
Naidu, S. (2016). Investigating educators' experiences of teaching learners who have barriers to learning at a public secondary school in Newlands West.

Data collection instruments

According to Althubaiti (2023), data collection is the process of gathering data to gain insight into the research topic. Yin (2014) also explains it as a systematic process of collecting and evaluating data or information from multiple sources to answer the research question or to address the research problem. In a desktop research design, data were collected and information extracted from sources such as journals and books that address the challenges teachers face in identifying and supporting learners with learning barriers. Additionally, the researcher uses academic databases such as EBSCO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to

identify relevant peer-reviewed journal articles on teacher challenges in supporting learners experiencing learning barriers. Only sources relevant to the topic and its objectives were considered in the study. As previously stated, older foundational documents, such as DoE (2001), were reviewed due to their enduring influence on inclusive education policy in South Africa. Once the relevant documents had been identified, they were reviewed, and a conclusion on the teacher's challenges was drawn. This method enables the researcher to identify recurring themes and patterns in the challenges teachers face in creating inclusive classrooms. This approach therefore ensures a transparent, replicable process for collecting and organising data for analysis. The desktop approach also enables the researcher to access a wide range of literature, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of the research problem.

Data analysis

According to Kothari (2004), data analysis is the process of transforming and analyzing raw data. Creswell and Poth (2016) also describe it as a method one applies to describe, draw conclusions from, and evaluate the data. It is also the most crucial part of research, as it allows or supports the researcher in concluding. In this study, the researcher analyses data from previously published research articles to conclude on the challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms. Document or content analysis, according to Rapley (2017), is a systematic procedure employed by the researcher to conclude already published research articles. This method is used to gain meaning and understanding and to develop empirical knowledge of the research topic, making it easier to analyse and interpret the data presented. The use of document analysis in this research was effective, as it helped the researcher easily analyse and interpret the data, thereby narrowing the focus to the teacher's challenges in supporting learners who experience barriers to learning. Trustworthiness is an important aspect of qualitative research, as it ensures credibility and reliability in the study's findings. However, the study does not involve collecting primary data yet maintains trustworthiness by rigorously applying selection methods when analysing and interpreting secondary sources. The study also uses Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness, which are transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability. It ensures credibility by using peer-reviewed journal articles and reputable academic publications. The sources were carefully selected for their relevance to the research question and its objectives, with a particular focus on inclusive education. To further strengthen its credibility, multiple sources were cross-checked to confirm recurring findings and themes, enabling data triangulation. Dependability, on the other hand, was addressed by following a clear, systematic procedure for sourcing, selecting, and analyzing data. This process was documented so that other researchers can replicate this study under the conditions and draw the same conclusions. Confirmability was achieved by maintaining objectivity in the analysis of collected data. The researcher also ensures that data interpretation is based solely on the findings of the reviewed literature, rather than on personal bias. The findings are also supported by citations from the sources used, which allow for transparency in the drawn conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain transferability to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts. Although the study focuses on literature relevant to inclusion in the South African education system, its findings may be useful to other researchers or education departments in other countries researching a similar context.

Ethical considerations

Gajjar (2013) defines ethics as the methods or procedures researchers use to decide how to analyse data. To ensure ethical compliance. The researcher cites every source used in their research to avoid plagiarism. This study also ensures compliance with the university's ethical guidelines. Tugwell and Knottnerus (2018) define research ethics as the guidelines for conducting professional research. It is a code of conduct that must be followed when planning, conducting, and reporting research. In this study, the researcher uses secondary sources, including

peer-reviewed academic literature, policy documents, and journal articles, to reach conclusions. The documents were reviewed and analysed to explore the various challenges teachers face in supporting learners with learning barriers. The key ethical principles to be observed in this study are the researcher's honesty and transparency in data collection and reporting. This was done by ensuring that all research findings were drawn directly from credible sources and that no data were altered or fabricated. Academic honesty was considered in this research through proper acknowledgment of the original authors of the articles and accurate referencing. This ensures that the researcher is not plagiarising by using another person's work as their own. A plagiarism check was done to verify the originality of the findings presented and to ensure that all sources used are cited correctly. Lastly, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of the Free State ethics committee to ensure that all relevant ethical procedures were considered and adhered to during this research. Furthermore, the researcher references all the authors of the sources or journal articles used in the study.

VIII. RESULTS

Challenges teachers face when supporting learners with barriers to learning

Lack of training

Anima (2018) found that many teachers are unable to support learners due to insufficient training. Teachers feel they did not receive sufficient or appropriate training to implement inclusion effectively in their classrooms. In addition, special education teachers feel they were not adequately prepared to plan and make the necessary adaptations for learners with disabilities.

Tshiloane and Sefotho (2025) also found that the challenge of training was the most affecting factor in teachers' implementation of inclusive education. Tshiloane and Sefotho (2025) assert that professional training is a must for teachers, as it helps them assess learners not through personal experience but through pedagogical approaches that support learners with learning barriers. Similarly, Janse van Rensburg (2015) found that for teachers who received training in inclusive education still feel unprepared to teach in inclusive classrooms as they feel they did not understand what they were trained about while some reported that they do not remember the training as it was not clear to them because they were provided with thick manual which was done in only a few hours, it was just a brief training. It was not enough for them to understand and be provided with the right strategies to employ. Additionally, Jerome (2014) found that teachers who did not receive sufficient training lacked confidence in teaching and supporting learners with learning difficulties, leading to negative attitudes towards inclusive education. They continue to show a limited understanding of learners who experience barriers to learning.

Lack of teaching resources

Ndlela (2021) found that many teachers experience having little to no learning materials in their schools, which hinders learner support. He added that this lack of resources negatively affects learners in class, as they are unable to learn according to their individual needs, leading to more learners experiencing barriers to learning. Ndinisa (2016) asserts that the shortage of learning resources in class limits teachers' support for learners, ultimately leading to a decline in learners' academic performance, which, in turn, affects their class participation and makes them feel excluded. Tshiloane and Sefotho (2025) further stated that teachers in schools lacking resources develop a negative attitude towards inclusive education, as they do not know where to start when supporting learners with learning barriers. They experience frustration because they lack the tools they can properly use to support.

Overcrowded classes

Naidu (2016) found that an overcrowded class hinders the teacher's ability to provide individualised learner support in accordance with the type of learning barriers they are experiencing. Nthoroane's (2020) findings depict that overcrowded classes negatively affect the teacher's

well-being, as it leads to many of them being absent from work due to the stress caused by managing large class sizes, leading to difficulties in handling the learners' needs. Ndinisa (2024) stated that in an overcrowded class, teachers' ability to provide individualised support decreases because they spend most of their time monitoring and managing the classroom.

Parental involvement

Phindile (2022) found that the teacher relationship appears to be one of the challenges that teachers experience when supporting learners with barriers to learning. Jerome (2014) asserts that if parents do not work collaboratively with teachers to support learners, learners' academic and social development slows, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the interventions used. Janse van Rensburg (2015) also found that teacher-parent relationships are a challenging aspect of implementing inclusive education for teachers, as this policy works best when implemented effectively through this collaboration. Therefore, if parents do not collaborate with teachers, it can lead to teachers failing to achieve educational equity.

Inflexible curriculum

Phindile (2022) found that the inflexibility of the curriculum affects the teacher's ability to support learners. Teachers are often obliged to cover all the content, regardless of whether learners understand it. This leads teachers to rush to complete and cover the curriculum, leaving them frustrated and incompetent, as they feel they do not know how to address their learners' learning barriers. Ndinisa (2016) asserts that the new curriculum comes with a prescribed timetable that requires teachers to cover content within the given time. This, therefore, poses a challenge for teachers when the time allocated for support hinders their ability to offer individualized support, leaving several learners behind and excluded from learning. Teachers face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to implement inclusive education effectively. These challenges include, amongst others, inadequate learning materials, training, and poor teacher-parent relationships. The district- and School-based support teams play an important role in addressing these challenges, mainly by providing teachers with strategies to address various barriers to learning and by ensuring the provision of learning materials that can be used in conjunction with these strategies. Addressing these challenges enhances the quality of inclusive education and ensures equal access to education for all learners.

IX. DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative study revealed that teachers face numerous challenges when supporting learners with learning barriers. An analysis of the existing literature revealed five major themes: inadequate teacher training, insufficient teaching resources, insufficient parental involvement, overcrowded classes, and an inflexible curriculum. Firstly, the lack of teacher training remains the main barrier to implementing inclusive education and supporting learners. Most teachers report that they are not fully or adequately prepared to work with and support learners with diverse needs. Furthermore, overcrowding in classes often limits their ability to offer individualised support to learners with learning needs, who must also manage the rest of the class, making it hard to meet the demands of inclusive teaching.

This leaves teachers feeling burned out and leads to job dissatisfaction. Moreover, the study highlighted that the unavailability of teaching resources is a major obstacle in supporting learners with learning needs. Teachers often work in overcrowded classrooms with limited teaching aids to support learners with special needs, making it hard to provide differentiated instruction and individual support to learners who face barriers.

Lastly, the findings revealed that many parents are not active supporters of their children's education, which may be due to socio-economic challenges, limited awareness, or a lack of communication between them and the teachers. This lack of collaboration not only affects the learners but also places the full burden of support on teachers, resulting in ineffective support for learners. Also, the

inflexibility of the curriculum limits teachers' ability to create lessons or assessments that accommodate learners' diverse learning needs. The pressure to cover all curriculum content prevents teachers from providing differentiated instruction; as a result, implementing inclusive education is impossible.

X. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's findings have several important implications for education policies, teacher training, and future research. Firstly, it highlighted the ongoing gap between classroom practice in inclusive education and the policy itself. Despite the existence of inclusive education policies, such as the Education White Paper 6 in South Africa, teachers still face significant challenges in implementing inclusive education in their classrooms due to a lack of training and teaching resources, limited parental involvement, and issues with the learner-teacher ratio. This therefore suggests the urgent need for more professional development workshops that equip teachers with practical strategies to support learners effectively and efficiently. It further highlighted the special role of the Department of Education, together with school-based support teams, in ensuring the provision of adequate learning materials and teacher training to reduce the burden placed on teachers.

In the case of inclusive education policies, the study highlighted the need for better monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective implementation in schools. These policies should be matched with actionable support strategies for teachers to use, rather than leaving them to find and use their own. Theoretically, the study reinforced the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in understanding the nature of the challenges teachers face in inclusive classrooms. It demonstrated how these challenges are also shaped by broader external factors such as educational institutions, the school environment, policies, and societal attitudes towards inclusion.

Lastly, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge through triangulating the findings from other credible sources to identify recurring themes in teachers' challenges. It may serve as a point of reference for future researchers researching inclusive education. Desktop research involves using existing sources, such as journals or academic articles, to collect and analyse data. The use of this research approach limited my control as the researcher, as I did not have any control over the data that I gathered, which also limited my ability to explore as many current academic topics as I would have liked. Many of the sources I found were mostly outdated, as they were over 5 years old. This became increasingly time-consuming, as I had to look for other journals published in the past 5 years to draw an accurate conclusion about my study.

XI. CONCLUSION

The study has highlighted the challenges teachers face when supporting learners with learning barriers. These challenges include a lack of training and support from district-based teams, insufficient provision of support materials, and minimal parental involvement. Such challenges not only impact the learner's academic performance but also put pressure on the teacher, thereby affecting their ability to implement and provide meaningful support to learners in the classroom. Despite such obstacles, teachers remain committed to implementing inclusive education in their classes. They are willing to go beyond their teaching responsibilities to ensure that no learner is excluded or left behind during the teaching and learning process. However, their efforts seem to be going in vain, as they do not receive the support they should. This therefore shows the need for continuous systemic support to enable them to implement inclusive education effectively. This, therefore, calls for a collective response from support teams, policymakers, and other stakeholders in schools. The study also concluded that although there is a need to implement inclusive education in schools, its successful implementation depends heavily on

supporting and empowering teachers in this journey to make inclusive education a reality in their classrooms. Addressing these challenges not only benefits the teacher but also ensures equitable education for every learner. Research has shown that many teachers feel unprepared to support learners with special educational needs. Further strategies need to be employed to ensure they are supported, so they can effectively support their learners. The Education Department should also ensure the provision of regular in-service training and workshops for teachers' professional development, particularly in inclusive education. They should also provide learning materials that cater to learners' different learning styles, ensuring that, once identification is complete, supporting learners becomes easy rather than a burden. In addition, schools should ensure that their school-based support teams are trained and active, as they need to collaborate regularly with teachers to support learners with learning difficulties. The school, in conjunction with the Department, should also work to reduce other teacher responsibilities unrelated to teaching and learning. This ensures that teachers have enough time to plan and implement inclusive strategies. Also, the schools should facilitate parent-teacher meetings focused on the learner's progress and support strategies.

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XIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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