



Title: “Teacher strategies for implementing inclusive education in the foundation and intermediate phase classrooms: A South African Perspective”

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By

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DECLARATION

I, Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe, hereby declare that the content of this Master's research report is entirely original. All sources used and cited within this report have been properly acknowledged. This report is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Education (Educational Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree or to any other educational institution.



Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe

15 August 2025

Date

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education in South Africa has gained increasing attention due to its emphasis on ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, regardless of ability, socio-economic background, or learning needs. Despite progressive policy frameworks such as the Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy, the practical implementation of inclusive education remains inconsistent, particularly within the Foundation and Intermediate Phases of mainstream primary schools. This study aimed to examine the strategies that teachers use to successfully implement inclusive education and the challenges they encounter in doing so. Anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model, the study adopted a qualitative, exploratory research design within the interpretivist paradigm. Three mainstream schools (two public and one private) located in Gauteng Province were selected using purposive sampling. Twelve teachers from three Gauteng schools participated in focus group discussions, and data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that although teachers are committed to inclusive ideals, they continue to face considerable contextual, institutional and systemic challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, insufficient training, and inconsistent support from school-based and district-based support teams. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated agency through adaptive strategies, including differentiated instruction, collaborative support networks, and the use of visual and experiential teaching methods.

Mapping these practices against the PPCT model illuminated how teacher characteristics, relational processes, and contextual factors interact to influence inclusive classroom practices over time. The study contributes to existing literature by offering an integrated ecological perspective on inclusive education in South Africa, highlighting the need for sustained professional development, resource strengthening, and policy coherence to enhance inclusive practice in primary schools.

Keywords: *inclusive education, teacher implementation strategies, successful inclusive practices, PPCT model, South African primary schools, teacher perspectives*

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KEY ACRONYMS

DBE: Department of Basic Education

DBST: District-Based Support Team

DoE: Department of Education

FG: Focus Group

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

GDE: Gauteng Department of Education

LP: Learner Profile

PPCT: Person–Process–Context–Time

SBST: School-Based Support Team

SIAS: Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support

SMT: School Management Team

SNA: Support Needs Assessment

UDL: Universal Design for Learning

UK: United Kingdom

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNESCO-IBE: UNESCO International Bureau

WP-6: White Paper 6

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction and Background

Inclusive education is a global movement grounded in the principle of educational equity for all learners, regardless of ability, background, or circumstances. The Salamanca Statement (*United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization* [UNESCO], 1994) laid the foundation for inclusive education globally, advocating that mainstream schools should accommodate all children, including those with diverse barriers to learning. Inclusive education remains a cornerstone of South Africa's democratic vision for equitable and quality education for all learners. Despite progressive policy frameworks such as *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001), the *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)* policy (DBE, 2014), and the *Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity* (DBE, 2018), the realisation of inclusive education continues to face persistent challenges. Teachers are often at the forefront of this implementation process, yet their classroom strategies and contextual responses remain under-examined in the South African context.

South Africa's education system has undergone significant transformation over the past decades, particularly in its efforts to establish an inclusive education model. While numerous studies have explored inclusive education broadly (Engelbrecht, 2021; Walton, 2018), limited research has specifically investigated how teachers in the foundation and intermediate phases operationalise inclusive teaching strategies across differing developmental levels. This study therefore addresses an important research gap by examining teachers' lived experiences and the contextual factors influencing their approaches. Situated within Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how individual, relational, and systemic dynamics interact to shape inclusive education practices. By foregrounding teachers' voices, this research not only contributes to inclusive education scholarship but also informs strategies for strengthening classroom-based inclusion in resource-constrained contexts.

Krischler et al. (2019) state that in order to guarantee equal educational rights for all people with diverse special educational needs, inclusion was proposed as a viable new teaching strategy at the Salamanca International Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 (Haug, 2017). Since its introduction, the phrase 'inclusive education' has drawn both strong support and critique (Messiou, 2017). While its goal is to implement a teaching model that is

considerate and inclusive of all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities within a classroom, there are still barriers which pose a challenge in the successful implementation of inclusive education within the classroom (Krischler et al., 2019).

Over two decades after these policy commitments, South African schools continue to face considerable challenges in the realisation of inclusive education. Despite policy reforms, numerous studies (Donohue & Bornman, 2015; Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2017; Walton, 2017) have shown that many teachers remain underprepared and under-resourced to implement inclusive practices effectively. Structural barriers such as large class sizes, resource shortages, insufficient training, and systemic inequalities continue to undermine progress. Furthermore, under apartheid, the *Bantu Education Act of 1953* systematically denied Black learners access to quality education, reinforcing racial and socio-economic disparities (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Learners with disabilities were particularly marginalised, as special education was segregated and severely underfunded. The post-apartheid era ushered in an emphasis on equity and redress, with the new democratic government prioritising education as a fundamental human right (DoE, 1997). Despite substantial policy advancements, the legacy of apartheid-era exclusion continues to impact the education system today (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). The transition towards inclusive education is therefore a complex process that must address both historical and systemic inequalities.

South Africa's approach to inclusive education is underpinned by several key policies and legislative frameworks. The *Constitution of South Africa* (1996) guarantees the right to basic education for all learners, regardless of disability or background (Republic of South Africa, 1996). *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE, 2001) remains the cornerstone policy advocating for an inclusive education system that accommodates diverse learning needs. This policy envisions a shift from a segregated special education model to a fully inclusive system that provides support within mainstream schools (DoE, 2001). However, challenges in implementation have led to ongoing inequalities, particularly in under-resourced schools (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Furthermore, the *Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy* (2014) was introduced to standardise the processes for identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning (DBE, 2014). This policy emphasises early identification and

intervention, recognising the need for tailored learning strategies and support systems. Additionally, South Africa is a signatory to international agreements such as UNESCO's *Salamanca Statement* (1994) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006), both of which advocate for inclusive education as a means to achieve equity in schooling (UNESCO, 1994; UN, 2006). Despite these commitments, the effective implementation of inclusive education remains a challenge due to systemic barriers and resource constraints (Hay et al., 2017).

A clause ensuring universal access to education was incorporated into the 1996 South African constitution. According to the constitution, the state "must make gradually available and accessible" education using reasonable means, as "everyone has the right" to it (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 12). This access was further improved with the implementation of inclusive education, as outlined in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). In order to create an inclusive educational system that is "the bedrock of a connected and compassionate society," the policy detailed the state's initiative for a single integrated educational structure for all children, regardless of their difficulties (Donohue & Bornman, 2014, p. 2).

South Africa's definition of inclusion is consistent with global perspectives such as those of the British Psychological Society (Seedat, 2018), which reject segregation and embrace the accommodation of all learners, regardless of ability or background. Inclusive education is a dynamic and multifaceted process that seeks to develop schools where all learners can participate meaningfully, and where differences are valued as part of the human experience (DoE, 2001). This is achieved through the continuous improvement of policies and curricula to accommodate different learning needs (Arthur, 2017; Seedat, 2018). Furthermore, local and international research and practice highlight the benefits of inclusive education for every learner (Mag et al., 2017). Each learner participates completely in the teaching and learning process in inclusive education, which is defined as instruction for all pupils without bias. In order to educate children with a variety of skills and learning difficulties alongside their typically developing peers, inclusive education is employed (Hasan et al., 2018).

Additionally, inclusive education recognizes that all children and youth can learn and deserve the suitable kind of assistance (DoE, 2001). It values learner diversity and promotes learning environments where all students are included and supported. It also recognises that barriers to learning extend beyond disability to encompass social inequalities such as poverty,

language barriers, and trauma (Walton, 2017). In this sense, inclusive education in South Africa is closely linked to the nation's broader social justice goals.

Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3) and Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) teachers occupy a critical role in the early identification of barriers and the implementation of inclusive strategies. Yet, little is known about their day-to-day experiences, successes, and challenges. The shift towards inclusive education requires not only systemic support but also teacher agency, adaptive pedagogy, and collaborative practices (Ainscow, 2020). By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers, this study aims to provide insights that can guide practice and policy and promote more sustainable and successful inclusive education strategies in this evolving and often challenging educational landscape. It is important to remember that inclusive education is an ongoing journey to ensure that *education for all* truly means *education for everyone* (Arthur, 2017).

1.2 Problem Statement and Rationale

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, or socio-economic status, receive equal opportunities to access quality education in mainstream schools (Ainscow, 2020). In the South African context, the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) guides the integration of learners with diverse educational needs into regular classrooms. Anecdotal data indicates that inclusive education is frequently linked to negative connotations, despite the fact that it has developed over the past 30 years to ensure that every child receive high-quality mainstream education (Muthusamy, 2015). This is despite policy frameworks such as the Education White Paper 6 and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014), which are aimed at addressing and dismantling barriers to learning created by South Africa's history of exclusion.

The implementation of inclusive education remains a significant challenge, particularly in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases of schooling (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). One of the major challenges in this regard is the lack of adequate teacher training and professional development. While policies provide structured pathways for intervention, it is ultimately the teacher's ability to creatively and pragmatically implement inclusive practices that determines learners' experiences of inclusion (Haug, 2017; UNESCO-IBE, 2016). However, many teachers report feeling ill-equipped due to insufficient practical training in handling diverse

learning needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Although teachers may have a general understanding of inclusive education, they often struggle with differentiated teaching methods, adaptive assessment strategies, and behaviour management techniques necessary for an inclusive classroom (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

Compounding this issue are the resource constraints that many South African schools face. Schools in underprivileged areas often lack adequate learning materials, assistive technologies, and specialized support staff, such as learning support educators, occupational therapists, and speech therapists (Nketsia, 2016). A higher-than-normal learner-to-teacher ratio, particularly in public schools, further strains teachers' ability to meet diverse learner needs (Mahlo, 2017). Additionally, inadequate infrastructure such as a shortage of classrooms, schools, and qualified educators further exacerbates overcrowding and hinders individualised support. In South Africa, the focus is on equitable educational opportunities regardless of a child's socioeconomic status, whereas in the UK, inclusive education primarily targets students with physical or learning impairments (Mag et al., 2017).

Another significant concern is the negative attitudes and perceptions among educators and school communities. While some teachers embrace inclusivity, others resist it, believing that learners with disabilities or learning difficulties are better suited for special education settings (Greenstein, 2015). These attitudes are often rooted in misconceptions, lack of awareness, and fears related to increased workloads or reduced academic performance (Savolainen et al., 2022). Without sufficient sensitisation and ongoing professional development, these attitudinal barriers hinder progress towards inclusive education.

Furthermore, the policy-practice gap continues to be a critical issue. Although policies like the SIAS Policy provide clear guidance, research shows a lack of monitoring and support at school level, resulting in inconsistent implementation across schools and provinces (Florian, 2019; Zwane & Malale, 2018). The SIAS Policy itself outlines specific roles for stakeholders such as teachers, learners, parents, the School-Based Support Team (SBST), and the District-Based Support Team (DBST) in identifying and addressing learning barriers. In addition, the Department of Basic Education has identified nine essential support areas necessary to promote inclusive education, including psychosocial support, curriculum support, and health promotion (DBE, 2014).

Although these challenges are well documented, it is essential to use them as a foundation for developing effective strategies. While much of the literature has focused on the barriers to inclusive education, such as overcrowding, lack of resources, and insufficient legislation (Chitiyo et al., 2017; Epri, 2016; Muthusamy, 2015; West & Meier, 2020), it is equally important to investigate what works. Teachers are at the frontline of this implementation process and bear the responsibility for adapting instruction and identifying support needs in their diverse classrooms (Haug, 2017). As Schuelka (2018) suggests, the success of inclusive education lies at the classroom level, with teachers playing a critical role in either enabling or hindering inclusive practices.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the techniques employed by Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers in implementing inclusive education. These educational phases are vital for early identification and intervention, yet they remain under-researched in the South African context (Haug, 2017). By focusing on teachers' experiences, strategies, and the systemic support available to them, the study aims to bridge the gap between policy intention and classroom realities. Ultimately, it contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the practical, school-level dynamics that facilitate or impede inclusive teaching, thereby informing teacher development, policy enhancement, and improved learner outcomes (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

1.3.1 Aim of the Study

This study aims to understand how foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers implement inclusive education in South African mainstream primary schools, and why certain strategies succeed..

1.3.2 Research Objectives

The following objectives guide the inquiry:

- i. To identify and describe the instructional and support strategies employed by foundation and intermediate phase teachers in inclusive classrooms.
- ii. To explore the contextual, relational, and institutional factors influencing these strategies.

- iii. . To interpret how teachers' experiences and beliefs shape their inclusive practices
- iv. To analyse these practices through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model to reveal how micro- and macro-level factors interact.
- v. To determine the key factors that contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive education practices in mainstream schools.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What strategies do foundation and intermediate phase teachers use to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools?
- ii. How do teachers utilize structures of support such as the School-based Support Teams (SBSTs) and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in addressing learning barriers?
- iii. How may teachers' inclusive practices be guided by the SIAS policy?
- iv. How can educators successfully implement inclusive education in school settings with limited resources?

1.5 Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the study by presenting the background, aims, and objectives of the research. It outlines the central problem, the rationale for the investigation, and the theoretical orientation guiding the study. The chapter also sets out the key research questions and defines the scope of the study.

The literature review, which covers the introduction and conceptualization of inclusive education, is covered in Chapter 2. It explores the evolution of inclusive education and its aim of addressing more than the integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. It highlights South Africa's inclusive education policies, particularly how these policies call for systemic change to accommodate learners with a range of needs regardless of their intellectual, emotional, social, or physical needs. In addition, this chapter also examines the role of teachers as agents of inclusion, including their responsibility to identify and respond to both learner-specific and systemic barriers to inclusion. It also addresses contextual challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient resources. Furthermore, global and comparative perspectives from other developing and middle-income countries are explored to provide broader insights relevant to the South African context.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bio-Ecological Systems Theory, particularly the Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT) model, serves as the conceptual basis for Chapter 3. It looks at the basic characteristics that influence teaching under Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model and characteristics that influence a teacher's participation in inclusive education in general. It looks into how teachers' perspectives on professional competence, inclusivity, and self-efficacy significantly affect their ability to support diverse students. It will look at how having access to opportunities for ongoing professional development and inclusive learning communities enhances teachers' resource characteristics, looking into personal drive and adaptability in educational inclusion. It will explore the professional knowledge and support systems in education, focusing on proximal processes, instructional strategies, collaboration, stakeholder engagement, emotional support, and inclusive classrooms. It also explores differentiated instruction, emotional climate, and classroom relationships, and temporal dimensions in educational contexts.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the methodology used in the study. It incorporates a qualitative, exploratory design that is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. The study was conducted in three mainstream primary schools, two public and one private, located in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs), with purposive sampling used to select participants. The chapter details the thematic analysis approach used for data interpretation and discusses the ethical protocols adhered to, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. It also describes how the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were maintained.

Chapter 5 presents and examines the empirical data derived from focus group discussions with foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers from selected mainstream primary schools. Six teachers (Teachers 1–6) from three distinct schools, two public (rural and semi-urban) and one private, made up the sample. A maximum variation sampling strategy was made possible by this variation, offering a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' tactics and experiences in various educational settings. Four themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Teachers' Understandings of Inclusive Education, (2) Strategies for Inclusion at the Classroom Level, (3) Barriers to Successful Implementation, and (4) Collaboration among Stakeholders and Support Systems. This chapter illustrates that while teachers are committed to inclusion and employ various strategies such as peer support, differentiated instruction, and

collaboration, their efforts are often constrained by systemic and contextual barriers including large class sizes, limited training, and inadequate institutional support.

Additionally, chapter 6 concludes the report by synthesising the key findings discussing their implications particularly the interdependent roles of teacher agency, contextual dynamics, and professional growth in sustaining inclusive education. Furthermore, it outlines limitations encountered during the study and provides practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at enhancing inclusive education practices in South African primary schools—particularly within the foundation and intermediate phases. The chapter draws from the thematic analysis presented in Chapter 5 and aligns these insights with the theoretical underpinnings of Bronfenbrenner’s Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model. Lastly, the chapter offers suggestions for future research and reflects on the broader implications of the study for policy, teacher development, and inclusive schooling in South Africa.

1.6 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter outlined the background, rationale, and significance of the study on the implementation of inclusive education in South African primary schools. It established the research problem by highlighting the gap between inclusive policy intentions and classroom realities, particularly within the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. The chapter also presented the study’s aim, research objectives, and guiding questions, each of which is anchored in the broader national and international discourse on educational inclusion. By situating the research within the interpretivist paradigm, the chapter framed inclusion as a socially constructed and contextually mediated process. Furthermore, it underscored the importance of understanding teachers’ perspectives as the key implementers of inclusion at classroom level. The next chapter builds on this foundation by reviewing relevant theoretical and empirical literature to provide a deeper understanding of the contextual, policy, and scholarly landscape informing inclusive education practices in South Africa.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

Inclusive education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental right and a pedagogical imperative that seeks to ensure that all learners, regardless of ability, disability, or background, are provided with equal opportunities to access quality education. Globally, and particularly in South Africa, inclusive education has become a central component of educational reform. It emphasizes addressing systemic barriers and promoting equity within the schooling system (UNESCO, 2015; Schuelka, 2018). In South Africa, the implementation of inclusive education is rooted in the post-apartheid imperative to redress historical educational inequalities and ensure that all learners can participate meaningfully in the schooling process (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). This chapter explores various dimensions of inclusive education including its conceptual foundations, the South African policy landscape, challenges to implementation, and the critical role of teachers in advancing inclusive practices.

The implementation of inclusive education continues to be shaped by global and local commitments to social justice and educational equity. International frameworks such as the *Salamanca Statement* (UNESCO, 1994) and the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD, 2006) have significantly influenced national policies, including South Africa's *Education White Paper 6* (DoE, 2001). While these policies align in principle, questions remain regarding the extent to which global inclusion ideals are realised in local, resource-constrained classrooms. Scholars such as Engelbrecht (2021) and Walton (2018) highlight tensions between inclusive policy rhetoric and classroom realities, revealing a persistent gap between systemic aspirations and teacher capacity. Recent debates also foreground the importance of intersectionality, post-COVID digital inclusion, and decolonial approaches that contextualise inclusion within African educational realities. This literature review therefore moves beyond descriptive policy analysis to critically synthesise global, national, and empirical perspectives, identifying tensions and gaps that this study seeks to address.

2.2 Conceptualising Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to a dynamic process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners by increasing their participation in learning, cultures, and

communities, and by reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO, 2015; Florian & Pantić, 2017). It is not simply about integrating learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms but about transforming the entire education system to accommodate every learner despite their ability, gender, language, socioeconomic status, or cultural background. In this regard, inclusive education is underpinned by principles of equity, access, participation, and belonging (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the discussion of equality in education has perhaps focused too much on racial and class inclusion at the expense of other marginalised groups because of South Africa's history of social exclusion and the ensuing class divides. However, unlike the nearly exclusive disability dimension that it is frequently associated with in international guidance and literature, the term "inclusive education" as used in the post-apartheid education policy had the inclusion of a variety of previously excluded groups into the mainstream education system as part of its central agenda. In the South African context, inclusion now extends beyond learners with disabilities to encompass those from child-headed households, learners affected by HIV/AIDS, those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and children from diverse linguistic and cultural communities. It also aims to challenge class-based and structural inequalities that have historically shaped access to quality education, thereby promoting a more holistic understanding of inclusion that recognises the intersecting barriers learners face (Department of Education, 2001; Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Walton, 2017).

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) assert that inclusive education should transition from a model centred on conforming the child to the system to a capacity-building strategy that modifies the system to accommodate varied learners. Practically, this means not only modifying the physical environment to accommodate wheelchairs or hearing aids, but also rethinking pedagogical strategies, curriculum content, classroom assessments, and teacher attitudes to ensure that no learner is marginalized (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2017). For instance, using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) frameworks, teachers can create flexible learning environments that accommodate visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners simultaneously. However, it appears that in the years after WP-6 was adopted, South Africa began to associate inclusive education more with disability than with any other reason for exclusion.

In South Africa, inclusive education is defined as the process of identifying and addressing barriers to learning and development and promoting a supportive learning environment for all learners (DBE, 2014). This definition expands the scope of inclusion to encompass a broad range of barriers, including poverty, child-headed households, linguistic diversity, and psychosocial trauma (Schuelka, 2018). For example, a learner who speaks a different home language from the language of instruction may struggle to participate in class. An inclusive approach would provide bilingual teaching materials or peer support systems to assist the learner. Practically, inclusive education is demonstrated in differentiated instruction, where a teacher varies the methods and content based on the learner's needs, or through cooperative learning strategies that encourage peer support and collaborative engagement (Schuelka, 2018). For example, in a Grade 3 mathematics class with learners of varying numeracy levels, a teacher might design tiered tasks namely, basic, intermediate, and advanced, to ensure that each learner is engaged at a suitable level while still participating in the same classroom activity.

Another vital aspect of inclusive education is the establishment of collaborative support systems. Inclusive practices are not the sole responsibility of classroom teachers but require coordinated efforts involving school leadership, parents, community stakeholders, and support services. The South African SIAS policy provides a practical framework in this regard, mandating collaboration through School-Based Support Teams and District-Based Support Teams to address learner needs comprehensively (DBE, 2014).

More still, Inclusive education involves recognizing and valuing the unique learning needs of each learner while ensuring that differences are not treated as deficits (Florian, 2019). As Vindaro (2016) asserts, the essence of inclusion lies in the full participation of learners with varied needs in all aspects of schooling, including academic and co-curricular activities. Haug (2017) further emphasizes that inclusion is about restructuring school cultures, policies, and practices to respond to learner diversity in ways that promote belonging and participation.

While early understandings of inclusive education often focused primarily on learners with disabilities, contemporary perspectives have expanded to include all learners who may experience barriers to learning due to linguistic, socio-economic, or cultural reasons (Florian, 2019). In line with this, the South African Department of Education defines inclusive education

as a means of removing barriers and increasing the participation of all learners, regardless of their individual challenges (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014).

In essence, conceptualising inclusive education requires an understanding that inclusion is not a destination but a continual process. It demands a systemic transformation that focuses on educational equity, learner agency, and contextual responsiveness (Schuelka, 2018). It is about creating enabling environments where every learner feels valued, supported, and capable of succeeding.

Therefore, inclusive education is extensively implemented and recognised as a suitable method for universal education. For education to be inclusive, the framework in which it is provided must be sufficiently broad to take into account the requirements and circumstances of every learner in society. It must, as a matter of principle, neither exclude nor discriminate against any learners (Florian, 2019). Thus, the concept of inclusion as a way to build a more socially just world implies that all children can receive an education and that all students should have access to a curriculum and results that are meaningful, regardless of the environments or modifications that are required.

2.3 Inclusive Education Policy in South Africa

The foundation of inclusive education in South Africa is anchored in *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education – Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (DoE, 2001), which advocates for the transformation of the education system into one that accommodates the full spectrum of learner needs. This policy was developed in response to the historical exclusion and segregation experienced during apartheid, which marginalized learners with disabilities and other learning barriers (Hay et al., 2018). It envisions a single, inclusive system that supports every learner in ordinary schools, no matter their physical, intellectual, social, and emotional needs. Importantly, the policy shifts the focus from learners as deficient to the system needing adaptation (DoE, 2001).

To operationalize this vision, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the *Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy* in 2014. The SIAS policy offers a practical, standardised framework to identify learners who face barriers to learning and ensure they receive appropriate, timely support. Teachers are required to initiate the SIAS policy by screening learners using the Learner Profile (LP), designing an Individual Support

Plan (ISP), and completing the Support Needs Assessment 1 (SNA 1). Where additional support is required, the SBST intervenes through the completion of SNA 2. If further specialized support is necessary, the DBST becomes involved, completing SNA 3 and engaging external professionals as needed (DBE, 2014). For example, in a practical classroom scenario, a Grade 5 teacher who notices that a learner consistently struggles with reading comprehension might begin by adapting instructional materials and providing additional support (Hay et al., 2018). If the learner does not improve, the teacher would complete SNA 1 and refer the case to the SBST, which could involve a learning support educator. If necessary, SNA 2 and 3 would be completed to engage the DBST, possibly bringing in an educational psychologist or therapist (DBE, 2014).

Moreover, in addition to learner-specific interventions, the DBE has identified nine systemic priority support areas that impact learner access and success. These are: (1) nutritional support, (2) health promotion, (3) infrastructure for water and sanitation, (4) safety and protection, (5) social welfare services, (6) psychosocial support, (7) material support, (8) curriculum support, and (9) co-curricular support (DBE, 2018). This holistic framework acknowledges that learning barriers are not only rooted in cognitive or physical limitations but are deeply embedded in the socio-economic realities that many South African learners face. For instance, nutritional support addresses the growing concern that hunger and malnutrition significantly affect concentration, memory, and overall academic performance. School feeding schemes are one practical application of this support area, aiming to ensure that learners receive at least one nutritious meal per day (DBE, 2018).

Furthermore, health promotion includes programs that address common childhood illnesses, vision and hearing screenings, and sexual health education, enabling learners to thrive both physically and academically (DBE, 2018). Access to clean water and adequate sanitation infrastructure is particularly critical in rural and informal settlements, where many learners must navigate unsanitary and unsafe environments. Improving infrastructure not only promotes learner health but also encourages school attendance, especially among girls (DBE, 2018). Furthermore, safety and protection pertain to creating physically and emotionally secure school environments, this includes safeguarding learners from violence, abuse, bullying, and corporal punishment (DBE, 2018).

More still, social welfare services and psychosocial support focus on assisting learners who face emotional trauma, abuse, neglect, or family instability (Hay et al., 2018). For example, learners affected by parental death due to HIV/AIDS or gender-based violence may require counselling services and community-based support networks (DBE, 2018). Material support encompasses the provision of uniforms, stationery, assistive devices, and transport, ensuring that learners are not excluded due to poverty or disability (DBE, 2018). Additionally, curriculum support is vital for adapting teaching content and methodologies to be more inclusive and responsive to diverse learning styles and backgrounds. This may include using multilingual materials or differentiated instruction strategies (DBE, 2018). Finally, co-curricular support fosters inclusion through extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and school clubs, which provide alternative spaces for learner participation, socialisation, and talent development (DBE, 2018).

Together, these nine priority areas serve as a blueprint for addressing the full range of barriers that learners might face (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2018). However, the implementation of these supports remains uneven due to financial constraints, interdepartmental coordination challenges, and varying levels of school leadership capacity (DBE, 2018). Addressing these shortcomings is essential to translating inclusive policy ideals into meaningful change at the classroom level.

Despite the soundness of these policies on paper, their implementation has faced significant challenges. Teachers frequently report limited training on how to execute the SIAS process effectively (Hay et al., 2018). Many schools do not have functional SBSTs, and DBSTs often lack the capacity to provide timely support due to under-resourcing and personnel shortages (Engelbrecht, 2020). There are also cases where forms are completed as a procedural requirement, without the necessary follow-up action, reducing the policy to a bureaucratic exercise rather than a transformative tool (Hay et al., 2018).

Furthermore, policy implementation is often uneven across provinces and schools. For instance, urban schools may have more access to district resources and specialist services, whereas rural schools often lack access to psychologists, therapists, or specialised learning materials (DBE, 2018). This disparity highlights the importance of capacity-building at the local level and tailored support strategies that reflect the specific context of each school (DBE, 2018).

Overall, South Africa's inclusive education policies, particularly White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy, offer a comprehensive vision and framework for supporting diverse learners. However, without robust implementation mechanisms, sufficient training and resource allocation, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, these policies risk falling short of their transformative potential. Strengthening collaboration among all educational stakeholders, including government departments, educators, communities, and non-governmental organisations, is essential to achieving the inclusive ideals articulated in South Africa's education policy landscape.

2.4 Teachers as Drivers of Inclusion

Teachers are widely recognized as pivotal agents in the implementation of inclusive education (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). They are at the frontline of classroom practices, daily interactions, and curriculum delivery that shape learners' experiences and opportunities. As Schuelka (2018) emphasizes, inclusion occurs primarily at the school and classroom level, making teachers the driving force behind transforming inclusive policy into practical, meaningful learning environments.

In the South African context, this role is further amplified due to the country's diverse learner demographics, which encompass a wide range of socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, and ability differences. The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2014) identifies teachers as key stakeholders within the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy framework. They are responsible for initiating support processes by identifying barriers to learning, completing learner profiles, designing Individual Support Plans (ISPs), and collaborating with School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) to implement support strategies tailored to the needs of learners (DBE, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of teachers in this role is closely linked to their attitudes, training, and ongoing professional development (Tebele & Chaka, 2024). To address this gap, the DBE has implemented guidelines and training programs aimed at promoting inclusive pedagogies, such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and curriculum adaptation (DBE, 2018). Differentiated instruction, for example, encourages teachers to modify content, process, and assessment methods to suit diverse learners. A practical illustration of this might be a Grade 6 language teacher who offers multiple reading texts at varying complexity levels to accommodate learners with different reading abilities.

In addition to pedagogical skills, the success of inclusive education depends on teachers' willingness to embrace diversity and believe in the potential of all learners. Donohue and Bornman (2014) caution that negative teacher attitudes, often stemming from a lack of knowledge or support, can severely undermine inclusive practices. Teachers who are confident and supported tend to foster more inclusive classroom environments. This can be fostered through collaborative teaching practices and support structures which further enhances the role of teachers in inclusive education (Mulholland & O'Conner, 2016). Team-teaching, mentorship, and peer support are strategies that can empower teachers to share expertise and manage complex learner needs more effectively (Florian & Pantić, 2017). For example, a general education teacher might co-plan and co-teach with a learning support teacher to ensure that both high-performing learners and those with barriers receive adequate attention during a lesson (Walton et al., 2019; Florian & Pantić, 2017).

Moreover, inclusive teaching extends beyond academic instruction. Engelbrecht et al., (2015) highlights how teachers play an essential role in promoting social inclusion by fostering a sense of belonging and respect among learners. Practical activities such as group projects, buddy systems, and inclusive playground activities can help learners develop empathy and cooperation skills, which are foundational for inclusive schooling (Florian & Pantić, 2017).

To sum up, the core of inclusive education is its teachers. Their attitudes toward inclusion, the support systems in place, the training they receive, and the systemic conditions in which they operate all have an impact on their ability to implement inclusive practices. For inclusive education to advance in South Africa, it is imperative that teacher competence be strengthened through continual professional development, resource distribution, and institutional support (UNESCO, 2015; DBE, 2018).

2.5 Implementation Challenges and Systemic Barriers

Despite South Africa's progressive policy frameworks, such as the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) and the SIAS Policy (DBE, 2014), the practical implementation of inclusive education remains riddled with systemic barriers. One of the foremost challenges is the persistent lack of resources in many public schools, particularly those in rural and underserved communities. These schools often lack basic infrastructure, assistive technologies, and teaching materials essential for supporting learners with disabilities or other learning difficulties (Wapling, 2016; Cooke, 2015). Additionally, overcrowded classrooms and high

learner-to-teacher ratios make it exceedingly difficult for educators to provide the individualized attention that inclusive education requires.

According to Donohue and Bornman, (2014) although the SIAS policy was explicitly designed to alleviate some of these challenges by standardizing procedures for identifying and addressing learning barriers, implementation at the school level is uneven. The policy introduces a structured, three-tier support model involving the use of the Learner Profile (LP), Support Needs Assessment forms (SNA 1–3), and Individual Support Plans (ISPs), intended to guide teachers and School-Based Support Teams to provide targeted support (Donohue, & Bornman, 2014). For example, if a teacher identifies a barrier to learning that cannot be resolved within the classroom, they are mandated to develop an ISP and refer the case to the SBST, which may escalate the matter to the District-Based Support Team (DBST) for specialist intervention (DBE, 2014).

However, evidence suggests that these procedures are not consistently followed due to various factors (Engelbrecht, 2020). Firstly, many teachers report limited awareness or understanding of the SIAS process, which undermines its implementation (Hay et al., 2018). Furthermore, SBSTs are often either inactive or inadequately resourced, and DBSTs face logistical challenges in providing timely support to schools across wide geographical areas (Donohue, & Bornman, 2014). The absence of sufficient educational psychologists, learning support specialists, and administrative personnel at district level also contributes to delays and inefficiencies (Engelbrecht, 2018).

Another challenge lies in the lack of systematic training and monitoring (Savolainen et al., 2011). Teachers frequently express the need for more comprehensive pre-service and in-service training to equip them with practical strategies for inclusive teaching and to help them manage the administrative burden of implementing SIAS protocols (Walton & Nel, 2019). In many cases, teachers are expected to navigate these responsibilities without dedicated time or professional development, leading to inconsistencies in how learners are supported.

Moreover, the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms makes it difficult to assess the impact of policy implementation and identify areas for improvement (Walton & Nel, 2019). Although some provinces have attempted to track the number of learners supported under SIAS, there is limited data on the quality and outcomes of these

interventions. This lack of feedback loops prevents policy refinement and leaves gaps in accountability (Florian & Pantić, 2019).

Attitudinal barriers also continue to obstruct inclusive practices. Teachers may harbour misconceptions about the potential of learners with disabilities or feel that inclusion compromises the quality of teaching for other learners (Walton & Nel, 2019). These attitudes, often rooted in insufficient training and support, can lead to passive resistance or tokenistic inclusion practices that do not genuinely meet learners' needs (Savolainen et al., 2011).

In summary, while the SIAS policy and other supportive frameworks are commendable in their design, their implementation faces substantial hurdles (Cooke, 2015; Wapling, 2016). According to Hay et al., (2018) these include limited human and material resources, inadequate professional development, weak monitoring systems, and prevailing negative attitudes. Addressing these interconnected challenges is essential to bridge the gap between policy intent and classroom reality (Florian & Pantić, 2019).

2.6 Global and Comparative Insights

South Africa's experience with inclusive education resonates with global trends, especially in other developing and middle-income countries where inclusive reforms face similar systemic, cultural, and resource-related challenges (Halinen, 2018). For instance, in South Korea, inclusive education has progressed through policy reforms such as the Act on Promotion of Education for the Disabled, emphasizing infrastructure development, school restructuring, and continuous teacher training (Kim, 2014). Similarly, in Lesotho, inclusive education policy is rooted in community involvement and the development of localized implementation frameworks that support the integration of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009).

In Brazil, inclusive education has evolved through legal mandates and the expansion of multi-professional support teams in schools. Teachers work in tandem with specialists, psychologists, and therapists to support learners with diverse needs (Halinen, 2018). This approach echoes South Africa's SIAS policy framework that leverages School-Based and District-Based Support Teams (DBE, 2014). In Finland, inclusive education is mainstreamed through universal early intervention, flexible curricula, and strong teacher autonomy, supported by sustained investment in professional development (Halinen, 2018). Although the

context differs significantly from South Africa, the Finnish model highlights the role of systemic coherence and policy integration in advancing inclusive practices.

Additionally, in India, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) has led to increased advocacy for inclusive schooling. However, much like in South Africa, implementation is hampered by teacher shortages, limited awareness, and infrastructural gaps (Singal, 2019).

These comparative insights highlight that while inclusive education is a global agenda, its practical realization is context-specific. Common enablers include sustained teacher training, community participation, policy clarity, and intersectoral collaboration. For South Africa, learning from these international experiences can inform the development of more tailored and sustainable inclusive education strategies (UNESCO, 2015; Florian, 2019).

South Africa's experience with inclusive education resonates with global trends. International comparisons highlight the importance of ongoing training, policy coherence, inter-professional collaboration, and cultural transformation in achieving inclusive goals. For example, in South Korea, inclusive education has gained momentum following legal reforms such as the Act on Promotion of Education for the Disabled, which emphasizes teacher training and school restructuring (Kim, 2014). Similarly, Lesotho's policy approach demonstrates how community involvement and systemic reform can enhance inclusion in a developing context (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009). Brazil's model includes the integration of multi-professional support teams into public schools, ensuring that teachers are not working in isolation but rather collaboratively with therapists and specialists (de Oliveira & Lopes, 2015). In Finland, policy coherence and teacher autonomy, supported by continuous professional development, have facilitated effective inclusive practices from early childhood education onwards (Halinen, 2018).

The application of these practices within the South African context, considering its unique socio-economic challenges, holds potential for building more resilient and contextually responsive inclusive education systems (Halinen, 2018).

2.7 Building a Sustainable and Inclusive System

Building a sustainable and inclusive education system requires a holistic, multi-layered approach that goes beyond policy articulation to address long-term implementation, cultural transformation, and systemic coherence. As mentioned before, an essential part of building a

sustainable and inclusive education system is understanding the barriers that come with the concept and implementation of inclusive education. Schuelka (2018) identifies six key elements necessary for the sustainability of inclusive education systems: a clear and shared concept of inclusion, measurable goals and outcomes, recognition of systemic barriers, a well-articulated implementation strategy, robust policy formulation and enforcement, and teacher empowerment. These elements serve as pillars that interlink to support meaningful, scalable, and sustainable inclusive education reforms.

Firstly, achieving a shared understanding of inclusion is vital. Inclusion must be framed not merely as an educational add-on for learners with disabilities but as a fundamental shift in the educational paradigm that addresses the learning needs of all children (Schuelka, 2018). In practical terms, this involves integrating inclusive values into teacher education curricula, leadership training, and school ethos. For instance, schools can promote inclusion by ensuring that all learners, regardless of their ability, language, or socio-economic background, are represented in classroom materials, assessments, and pedagogical practices (UNESCO, 2015; Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2018). Teachers must be well-versed in recognizing the various needs and limitations of their students, given the diversity of South African classrooms. This could be feasible through equipping teachers with the tools they need to execute inclusive education even in a varied setting through workshops or training on inclusive education (DoE, 2001).

Measurable targets and monitoring mechanisms are essential for tracking the effectiveness of inclusive strategies. According to Halinen, (2018) these may include performance indicators such as the percentage of learners supported through Individual Support Plans (ISPs), reduction in dropout rates among learners with barriers, or increased participation in co-curricular activities (Wapling, 2016). For example, a school might track how many learners with learning difficulties complete assessments with accommodations such as extra time or reader assistance.

The recognition of systemic barriers is also critical. These barriers may be infrastructural, such as lack of accessible facilities; institutional, such as inflexible curricula; or attitudinal, such as deficit views about learner capabilities (Schuelka, 2018). Addressing these challenges demands interdepartmental collaboration, for instance, between the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Health, to ensure that learners have

access to healthcare services, nutritional programs, and psychological support that enable learning (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2018; UNESCO, 2015; Schuelka, 2018).

A well-designed implementation strategy must provide both macro-level guidance and micro-level flexibility. According to UNESCO, (2015) this includes professional development for educators, investment in support personnel such as educational psychologists, and the establishment of functional SBSTs and DBSTs. This, in practice, might involve regular cluster meetings where schools share best practices, conduct peer mentoring, and access mobile support services (Wapling, 2016).

Furthermore, Halinen (2018) argues that policy must not only be well-formulated but also rigorously enforced. Accountability systems must be established to ensure that policies like the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) framework are implemented consistently across provinces. This could include district audits, teacher self-assessment tools, and learner feedback mechanisms (Schuelka, 2018). Without enforcement, even the best-designed policies risk becoming performative.

Teacher empowerment remains a cornerstone of sustainable inclusion. Teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, resources, and confidence to manage diverse classrooms (Tomlinson, 2017). This means ongoing in-service training, reduced class sizes, access to teaching assistants, and clear referral pathways (Halinen, 2018). For instance, a Grade 4 teacher working with a learner with ADHD should know how to adjust instructional pace, use visual schedules, and collaborate with a psychologist through the DBST system.

Finally, sustainability also depends on fostering inclusive school cultures. This entails not only structural adjustments but also attitudinal change (DBE, 2018). Inclusive school cultures celebrate diversity, encourage peer support, and involve parents and communities in education (UNESCO, 2015). Schools that host parent workshops on inclusion or support peer-led anti-bullying initiatives exemplify sustainable inclusive environments (Wapling, 2016).

In conclusion, building a sustainable and inclusive education system in South Africa involves aligning policy, practice, and values at every level of the education system. It requires not only technical implementation but also ideological commitment to equity, participation, and belonging (Tomlinson, 2017). To realise this, all stakeholders, educators, policymakers, communities, and learners, must collaborate in a sustained, context-sensitive effort that

recognizes inclusion as both a process and a goal (Schuelka, 2018; UNESCO, 2015; DBE, 2018).

To support sustainability, South Africa must invest in developing school-based leadership for inclusion, empower SBSTs, strengthen teacher education programs, and create a culture of collaboration between educators, parents, and external service providers (UNESCO, 2015). Promising practices, particularly in under-resourced schools that have managed to implement inclusive strategies effectively, should be documented and scaled to inform national policy and practice (Wapling, 2016).

Overall, inclusive education in South Africa is a policy commitment rooted in principles of equity and social justice. However, the implementation of this commitment remains complex and uneven. According to Tomlinson (2017), teachers play a pivotal role in realizing inclusive practices, but they need greater support, professional development, and systemic resources. The SIAS policy and associated frameworks offer a robust model but must be better operationalized to close the gap between policy and classroom reality (DBE, 2018). Future research, including the present study, has a critical role to play in uncovering how inclusive education can be effectively enacted in South African classrooms.

2.8 Teaching Strategies that Support Inclusive Education

The strategies teachers employ to fulfil the various requirements of every learner in their classrooms have a significant impact on how well inclusive education is implemented (Ainscow, 2020; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Scholars and policy frameworks around the world have emphasized that learner-centred, flexible, and responsive techniques should be the foundation of inclusive teaching strategies (UNESCO, 2017). Teachers must frequently use innovative, adaptable teaching strategies to encourage engagement and learning among all students in both developed and underdeveloped situations, like South Africa, where systemic and resource limitations are still present (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2017; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

According to Tomlinson (2017), adapting teaching strategies, learning resources, and assessment tasks to each learner's unique learning profile is known as differentiated instruction, and it is a key strategy for fostering inclusion. In contrast to the conventional "one-size-fits-all" approach, differentiation ensures that every learner, regardless of ability level, is actively involved in the learning process. Differentiation, according to Florian and Black-Hawkins

(2011), is a philosophical approach to recognizing diversity in the classroom as well as a technological adjustment. Teachers employed differentiation in Mamogobo's (2023) study by simplifying worksheets, offering scaffolded tasks, and selecting reading materials based on each learner's level. As a result, this allowed learners with learning difficulties to access the content in the same manner as their peers. Furthermore, one of the most widely used methods of achieving inclusion in education continues to be differentiated instruction. In order to accommodate learners' diverse readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles, this strategy entails adapting the curriculum, strategies for teaching, learning tasks, and evaluation procedures (Tomlinson, 2023). Differentiated instruction, according to Mitchell (2015), is a comprehensive pedagogical paradigm that aims to advance educational equity by tailoring the educational process. For example, Adeniyi et al., (2015) discovered that learners in Nigeria demonstrate higher levels of engagement and academic advancement when differentiated teaching is combined with frequent formative evaluations. Similarly, Mntunjani et al., (2018) showed how concrete tools can support diversified learning in numeracy by documenting the successful use of tangible manipulatives to improve learners' number sense and conceptual understanding in the South African foundation phase.

Moreover, collaboration and peer-assisted learning are also acknowledged as successful inclusive strategies. These methods encourage healthy social interactions and intellectual engagement, especially for learners who are facing barriers to learning. Peer support is crucial for giving students with disabilities a feeling of community and for scaffolding their learning, according to McCullers (2022). Beyond the classroom, collaborative learning fosters inclusive school environments that mainstream shared responsibility and diversity. An inclusive school culture flourishes when teachers intentionally encourage peer collaboration, which reinforces interpersonal connections and respect for one another, according to Nancy et al., (1999). Collaborative teaching, in which teachers jointly develop and exchange diversified teaching strategies, is another new approach for professional learning communities in South Africa (Botha & Nel, 2022). Additionally, inclusive education is not solely about accommodating learners' needs, but also about cultivating a classroom ethos that affirms learner identities and supports equity (Engelbrecht, 2020). Rebuilding curricula and teaching strategies to accommodate learner diversity is a crucial aspect of this perspective. According to Naicker (2014), inclusive classrooms should incorporate learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences into the learning process by drawing on their unique sets of knowledge and skills, often referred to as funds of knowledge. In the same manner, Mugambi (2017) situates

inclusive pedagogy within the framework of social justice, contending that inclusive approaches must address systemic injustices in educational systems in addition to meeting the needs of individuals. Teachers must consciously promote empathy, respect, and cultural sensitivity in their classroom interactions in order to create such an environment.

Early identification and intervention are fundamental to successful inclusion. Teachers can create timely and targeted support strategies that prevent academic marginalization by identifying learning challenges early on. Early detection, according to Mulovhedzi and Mudzielwana (2021), is the first stage in the inclusion process because it guarantees that learning difficulties are dealt with before they become persistent issues. In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Nkomo (2018) highlighted the importance of school-based intervention programs for dyslexic learners, demonstrating how these support systems enabled learners to continue receiving tailored remediation in regular classroom settings. These strategies are particularly important in situations when access to specialized support services may be restricted or inconsistent. More still, particularly when it comes to meeting different learning requirements and preferences, technology-enhanced learning presents valuable opportunities to promote inclusive education. Mun and Abdullah (2016) assert that multimodal engagement is facilitated by devices like Smart Boards, which improve comprehension for learners who struggle with language processing or attention. Simple digital aids or assistive resources, such as flashcards and audio recordings, can greatly enhance literacy results in low-resource environments. For example, Alanazi (2017) showed how effectively flashcards and multimedia can help Saudi Arabian students who struggle with reading and writing. Low-tech and contextually relevant resources, such as printed visual aids, color-coded charts, or recorded instructions, can be affordable substitutes to improve access and participation in the classroom, although South Africa continues to grapple with digital inequality.

The success of inclusive practices is largely dependent on the attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge of teachers. Effective teaching strategies and learner achievement are closely linked to positive attitudes toward inclusion (Monsen et al., 2014). According to Alhassan (2014), teachers in Ghana who had received inclusive education training were more willing and confident to use inclusive teaching practices in their classrooms. The need for well-designed teacher preparation programs that combine inclusive theory with practical classroom practices is additionally highlighted by McCrimmon (2015). In order to implement new strategies,

reinforce inclusive principles, and develop resilience in the face of classroom diversity, it is imperative that teachers engage in ongoing professional development.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided a critical synthesis of the literature on inclusive education, tracing its conceptual evolution from international frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and the UNCRPD (2006) to South Africa's legislative and policy commitments through Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy. It identified ongoing tensions between inclusive policy rhetoric and classroom realities, highlighting how systemic barriers, resource disparities, and teacher preparedness continue to shape implementation outcomes. The review also engaged recent debates on intersectionality, digital inclusion, and decolonial approaches, situating the current study within emerging global and local conversations. Through this analysis, the chapter demonstrated the need for contextually grounded and teacher-informed perspectives on inclusion. The insights gained from the literature directly inform the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in this study. The next chapter therefore discusses the theoretical framework underpinning the research, explaining how Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory and the PPCT model are applied to understand the multilayered factors influencing inclusive education practices.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – BIO-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Bio-Ecological Systems Theory, specifically the Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model, as the conceptual framework underpinning this study. Originally introduced in 1979 and later revised to account for the complex interplay of human development over time, the PPCT model provides a holistic lens through which the techniques employed by foundation- and intermediate-phase teachers in implementing inclusive education in South African primary schools can be explored. Unlike frameworks such as social constructivism or sociocultural theory, which primarily focus on learning through social interaction, the PPCT model situates individual experiences within broader ecological systems, acknowledging that inclusive teaching is influenced by personal, relational, institutional, and policy-level factors. The theory posits that development is a function of interaction between the individual and the multiple environmental systems in which they are embedded, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), these connections are neither one-directional or stagnant; rather, they vary throughout time as a result of reciprocal transfers between social processes, historical and cultural settings, and personal traits. This multi-layered perspective aligns closely with the South African educational context, where teachers' inclusive practices are often mediated by contextual realities such as resource constraints, curriculum demands, and systemic inequities.

The knowledge that human development, including teachers' professional development and strategies for teaching, is influenced by both dynamic interactions between individuals and their various environmental layers as well as individual traits is fundamental to the PPCT model (Xia et al., 2020). Within each system, numerous factors including institutional supports, cultural attitudes, governing structures, and socioeconomic realities, either facilitate or interfere with teachers' ability to promote inclusive education within each system (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Phasha et al., 2017; Walton, 2017). Apart from environmental factors, the PPCT model highlights the important role of processes, which are the routine interactions and relationships that promote development (Siraj & Huang, 2020). Teachers' interactions with learners, collaboration, and communication with parents and support groups are a few

examples of these proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2006). The importance of time is also acknowledged by the model, which recognizes that these relationships and their impact shape and develop over the course of a person's life as well as through historical and policy changes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The PPCT model also guided the interpretation of findings by illuminating how inclusive practices emerge through the dynamic interplay of its four dimensions: Person (teacher beliefs, values, and competencies), Process (daily classroom interactions and teaching strategies), Context (school environments, support structures, and policies), and Time (changes in practice over teachers' careers and policy developments). While the model provides a valuable framework for capturing the complexity of inclusion, its broad conceptual scope limits its ability to offer specific pedagogical guidance. Nevertheless, by emphasising the interdependence of individual agency and systemic structures, the PPCT model enabled a holistic interpretation of how inclusive education is enacted and sustained within South African primary schools.

3.2 Theoretical Foundations of the PPCT Model

Development occurs inside interconnected environmental systems that have an impact on the individual either directly or indirectly, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original ecological systems theory. Person, Process, Context, and Time are the four essential elements that Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) included in the revised PPCT model.

The Person element is concerned with personal characteristics that influence an individual's interactions with their surroundings, such as biological, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Navarro et al., 2022). This includes each teacher's motivation, teaching abilities, inclusiveness beliefs, and perception of efficacy in implementing inclusive strategies into practice (Engelbrecht, 2018). What Bronfenbrenner referred to as 'proximal processes', reciprocal relationships between people and their surroundings, are emphasized by the Process component (Navarro et al., 2022). The development of inclusive practices is influenced by teachers' daily interactions with learners, parents, colleagues, and school officials (Walton et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the Context component is conceptualised through four interconnected systems (Tudge et al., 2022). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), in a particular environment with specific physical and material qualities, the developing individual's experienced

interpersonal relations, roles, and patterns of activities is defined as the microsystem. The mesosystem involves the interactions between several microsystems, such as those between teachers and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) or between teachers and parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner further defines one or more environments where the developing person is not an active participant but where occurrences both influence and are influenced by the developing person's environment as an exosystem (Amali et al., 2023). The exosystem includes contexts, such as district-level education policy or Department of Basic Education (DBE) decisions, in which teachers may not be directly involved but which nevertheless have an impact on their practice (Walton et al., 2019). More still, the macrosystem reflects broader sociocultural influences such as the historical effects of apartheid education, cultural views on diversity and limitations, and national education policy such as the SIAS and White Paper 6 (Phasha et al., 2017).

Time is the fourth component of the PPCT model. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the PPCT model's Time component serves as a reminder that development is not static but rather changes over a variety of time scales. Bronfenbrenner identified three categories: micro-, meso-, and macrotime (Navarro, 2022). "Continuity versus discontinuity in ongoing episodes of proximal process" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 796) is the definition of microtime, which indicates how much the teachers are focused on the episode (Navarro, 2022). For instance, the micro-time of a teacher's career. The term mesotime describes how frequently a developing person participates in a proximal process over the period of days, weeks, and years (Navarro, 2022). The mesotime, for instance, includes the school year and institutional changes. An interaction requires both microtime and mesotime in order to be considered a proximal process since, according to the definition, "the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time in order to be effective" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797). More still, relevant historical occurrences and shifting social norms throughout ontogenesis and generations are reflected in macrotime (Navarro, 2022), such as major historical changes in education policy and social attitudes.

3.3 Conceptualising the 'Person' in the PPCT Model

Understanding the core attributes that influence teaching practice in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, the 'Person' refers to the characteristics of the individual that influence how they engage with their environment. Tudge et al., (2016) categorise these characteristics as demand,

resource, and force attributes. Demand characteristics, such as age, gender, or teaching role, may shape others' responses to a teacher. Resource characteristics include qualifications, teaching experience, and emotional resilience (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Force characteristics refer to personality traits such as motivation, persistence, and belief systems that influence teaching practices (Mahlo, 2017; Amali et al., 2023). These characteristics collectively impact the teacher's engagement with inclusive education, particularly in under-resourced and diverse classroom settings (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). For instance, the implementation of inclusive education could fail if a teacher in a school with limited resources and a diverse student body lacks the emotional fortitude to persevere in providing an equal but inclusive teaching approach. The teacher may feel overwhelmed by the overcrowding in the classroom and the need to accommodate a range of needs while lacking adequate resources. It's possible that a teacher's lack of teaching experience will result in a teaching strategy that accommodates pupils with lower learning demands or challenges while ignoring others who require more individualized attention or a different teaching strategy. Therefore, understanding teachers strategies through the PPCT model allows the study to reveal how personal, relational and systematic factors construct inclusive practices- bridging the gap between policy and lived experiences.

3.3.1 Teacher Attributes and Inclusive Education

Having more than just a teaching degree in South African classrooms, where schools often face overcrowdedness and scarce resources is an essential benefit. For example, teachers with demand and resource characteristics such as financial resource and personality traits that contribute to an overall personal positive attitude (or otherwise known as force characteristics) tend to demonstrate a greater capacity to implement inclusive practices (Walton, 2017). This is seen with some teachers who have financial resources and can purchase specific teaching materials that could improve their students' learning experiences or teachers who are better disciplinarians, making them more skilled to manage an overcrowded classroom. Donohue and Bornman (2014) found that teacher self-efficacy, attitudes towards inclusion, and professional competencies significantly affect their ability to support diverse learners. Mahlo (2017) adds that motivated and resilient teachers are also more open to collaborating with support teams and adapting lesson plans to cater for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

3.3.2 The Role of Professional Development and Learning Communities

Furthermore, access to ongoing professional development opportunities and inclusion-focused learning communities enhances teachers' resource characteristics. Walton (2022) emphasises that teacher training, mentorship, and access to special needs education specialists improve the implementation of inclusive strategies. These professional learning networks serve as platforms for exchanging effective practices, reflecting on teaching experiences, and building confidence in inclusive methodologies (Walton, 2018).

As such, the personal attributes of teachers, shaped by both internal and external factors, are crucial determinants of successful inclusive education and it is crucial to understand the interaction of teacher attributes and inclusive practice (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Personal characteristics, demand, resource, and force, influence how teachers engage with inclusive education. Tudge et al. (2016) argue that these traits collectively impact the educator's ability to initiate and sustain meaningful interactions with learners. For example, a teacher's belief in inclusion (a force characteristic) has been found to correlate with the use of differentiated instruction (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Furthermore, motivation and resilience are critical force characteristics, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Mahlo (2017) found that teachers who demonstrate persistence and adaptability are more likely to collaborate with support teams and use inclusive teaching methods despite institutional challenges.

3.3.3 Professional Knowledge and Support Systems

Building on the resource and force characteristics outlined earlier, professional knowledge and access to institutional support systems play a crucial role in enabling teachers to implement inclusive practices effectively. Teachers who possess specialised training in inclusive education, along with advanced qualifications, are generally more confident in using learner-centred and differentiated strategies in the classroom (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Moreover, when teachers are part of professional learning communities or networks, they are better positioned to share best practices and navigate challenges collaboratively (Walton, 2017).

In the South African context, the availability of support structures such as the School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) is critical for sustaining inclusive education. However, the functionality of these structures often depends on the initiative and capacity of individual teachers to engage with them. Teachers who are

emotionally resilient, motivated by inclusive values, and confident in their professional knowledge are more likely to seek out and collaborate with these support systems (Mahlo, 2017; Amali et al., 2023). Furthermore, support systems not only enhance teacher competence but also reinforce force characteristics such as persistence and adaptability. For example, when teachers receive ongoing mentorship or access to inclusive education workshops, they are more likely to adjust their pedagogical approaches to address learner diversity. Donohue and Bornman (2014) argue that such institutional and peer support is essential for translating inclusive policy into classroom practice.

3.4 Defining Proximal Processes in Education

The 'Process' component of the PPCT model focuses on proximal processes, sustained reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environments that drive development (Amali et al., 2023). In education, these processes include interactions such as teacher-learner engagement, collaborative learning, feedback provision, and classroom routines. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), these interactions must be regular and progressively complex to contribute meaningfully to development. Amali et al. (2023) reinforce that structured teacher-student engagements serve as the foundation for inclusive classroom environments.

3.4.1 Instructional Strategies That Enhance Proximal Processes

Effective instructional strategies such as scaffolding, cooperative learning, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are examples of proximal processes that cater to a wide range of learner needs. Rose and Meyer (2002) observed that these approaches enable participation from learners who may otherwise be marginalised in traditional classrooms. Teachers who integrate formative assessment and continuous feedback into their teaching routines support deeper learner engagement and academic success.

Moreover, proximal processes extend beyond the classroom. Collaboration with parents, therapists, and support staff, such as School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), provides a framework for consistent learner support. Nel et al. (2016) found that such partnerships improve intervention consistency, facilitate information sharing, and align goals across different contexts. These structured engagements reflect the sustained and purposeful interactions that the PPCT model highlights as central to development.

Finally, the affective dimension of proximal processes, characterised by emotional warmth, empathy, and encouragement, plays a pivotal role in inclusive education. Mahlo (2017) found that learners are more likely to thrive in emotionally supportive classrooms where they feel valued and included. Amali et al. (2023) further argue that a teacher's consistent positive emotional engagement enhances learners' sense of security and promotes social-emotional growth. Therefore, the strength and quality of these proximal processes are fundamental to the success of inclusive teaching and learning.

3.4.2 Understanding Proximal Processes in Inclusive Education

It is crucial to consider the fundamental procedures and methods that support inclusive education in the classroom, building on the knowledge that teaching and learning take place within nested systems of interaction. In inclusive classrooms, proximal processes, long-term, reciprocal connections between people and their surroundings, are essential to fostering learner development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These interactions take the form of peer collaboration, teacher-student communication, and positive feedback systems, all of which promote significant engagement and cognitive development (Amali et al., 2023). Effective inclusive education depends on collaborative techniques involving a larger network of collaborators in addition to fostering these dynamic classroom processes.

Furthermore, the continuity and responsiveness of inclusive interventions are improved by structured interaction with parents, professionals, and colleagues, which is made possible by mechanisms like School-Based Support Team (SBST) meetings and the establishment of Individual Support Plans (ISPs) (Nel et al., 2016). Additionally, to accommodate a variety of learner profiles, differentiated instruction and learner-centred pedagogies including scaffolding and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are frequently used. According to Rose and Meyer (2002), these strategies work best when combined with continuous cycles of evaluation and feedback, which guarantees that instruction is adaptable to accommodate the changing needs of learners.

3.4.3 Emotional Climate and Classroom Relationships

A positive emotional climate, characterised by empathy and mutual respect, reinforces proximal processes. Consistent emotional support strengthens learners' sense of belonging and motivation (Mahlo, 2017; Amali et al., 2023).

The ‘Process’ element of the PPCT model refers to proximal processes, recurring, reciprocal interactions between individuals and their environments that drive development. In education, these processes are most visible in teacher-learner interactions, lesson delivery, classroom management, and engagement with support teams and caregivers. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), these interactions must occur regularly and increase in complexity over time to have a developmental impact. This conceptualisation is reinforced by Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, and Mustafa (2023), who highlight that consistent engagement and interaction between educators and learners are critical in fostering inclusive and developmentally appropriate learning environments.

Effective inclusive education depends heavily on the quality and consistency of these proximal processes. Teachers who engage learners through differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and positive reinforcement are building the conditions for academic and social development. Regular collaboration with parents, therapists, and School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) are also key processes that expand the support network around the learner. As emphasised by Hall et al., (2012), structured and inclusive teaching practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and peer-assisted strategies are critical in fostering participation for all learners. Furthermore, Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, and Mustafa (2023) argue that these reciprocal and sustained interactions play a fundamental role in cultivating inclusive and developmentally supportive classroom environments. The teacher’s ability to sustain these interactions with all stakeholders is thus a critical factor in the success of inclusive classrooms.

3.5 The Context

3.5.1 Microsystem: Teacher-Learner Interactions and Classroom Inclusion

The microsystem represents the most immediate context in which teachers operate, involving direct interaction with learners, colleagues, and parents. In inclusive education, this setting is particularly vital, as it forms the core environment where learning happens. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the quality and nature of interactions within this system are essential for learner development. In classrooms where teachers implement practical inclusive strategies, such as peer-assisted learning, visual timetables, or accessible learning materials, learners with diverse needs are more likely to succeed (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). For example, Mntunjani et al., (2018) observed that when teachers consistently used visual support and peer mediation in the foundation phase, learners with communication

difficulties engaged more actively in learning tasks. Furthermore, Amali et al. (2023) argue that the presence of a supportive microsystem enables learners to build self-confidence and enhances their participation in group activities.

3.5.2 Mesosystem: Collaboration Between School Stakeholders

The mesosystem consists of interrelations among different microsystems and plays a crucial role in supporting inclusive education. Effective collaboration between teachers, parents, and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) contributes to coherent planning and implementation of learner support interventions. According to Nel et al. (2016), when schools coordinate efforts across these systems, for instance, involving caregivers in intervention plans or consulting learning support specialists, learner progress is more consistent. Moreover, Amali et al. (2023) stress that a connected mesosystem helps reduce miscommunication and builds trust among stakeholders, fostering a unified commitment to inclusion. For example, a study by Engelbrecht et al. (2015) in Gauteng schools showed that joint planning meetings between educators and therapists led to measurable gains in learner literacy outcomes.

3.5.3 Exosystem: Policy and Administrative Influence

The exosystem includes settings that indirectly influence teachers, such as education districts, provincial departments, and school governing bodies. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) describe this system as one in which decisions made externally have consequences for the teacher's immediate context. For instance, district-level policy on inclusive assessment can determine whether learners with disabilities receive accommodations during national testing. Barnes (2011) found that when SBSTs lacked support from district offices, implementation of inclusive practices stalled due to a lack of clarity and resource allocation. Furthermore, Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) note that ongoing professional development opportunities provided through exosystem channels significantly improve teachers' ability to adopt inclusive strategies. Additionally, Amali et al. (2023) caution that when exosystemic structures are misaligned with classroom realities, teachers may become disillusioned with policy promises that do not translate into practice.

3.5.4 Macrosystem: Cultural Norms and Educational Legislation

The macrosystem represents the overarching socio-cultural context, including national policies, legal frameworks, societal values, and cultural attitudes. In South Africa, frameworks

such as the Constitution and Education White Paper 6 guide the commitment to inclusive education (Department of Education, 2001). These documents are grounded in principles of equity, redress, and social justice. However, despite progressive policy frameworks, Donohue and Bornman (2014) argue that societal stigma around disability and persistent inequality often undermine efforts toward full inclusion. Moreover, Mahlo (2017) found that teachers operating in contexts where inclusive values are reinforced by cultural norms, such as collective responsibility within the philosophy of Ubuntu, tend to be more effective in implementing learner-centred practices. Amali et al. (2023) further highlight that the macrosystem shapes teachers' beliefs about their roles and their expectations of learner success. Thus, macro-level ideologies must align with institutional goals for inclusive education to be sustainable.

3.6 Conceptualising Time within the PPCT Model Understanding Temporal Dimensions in Educational Contexts

The final element of the PPCT model is Time, which refers to the temporal dimension of human development. This includes microtime (moment-to-moment interactions), mesotime (patterns of activity over time), and macrotime (historical and cultural shifts) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2016; Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, & Mustafa, 2023).

In the classroom, microtime is evident in daily teacher-learner interactions, such as responding to questions or providing feedback. When these interactions are sustained consistently over mesotime, such as weekly reading support or ongoing use of visual aids, they contribute significantly to learner development. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) emphasis on the importance of recurring, reciprocal interactions over time. Mahlo (2017) notes that learners in inclusive classrooms benefit from stable routines and repeated exposure to supportive strategies, which are key to sustaining developmental progress. Similarly, Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, and Mustafa (2023) highlight that consistent temporal engagement by teachers enhances learners' sense of structure, belonging, and academic growth.

3.6.1 Microtime and Mesotime in the Inclusive Classroom Enhancing Learner Outcomes through Consistent Interaction

Macrotime encompasses long-term societal and policy changes. In South Africa, the evolution from apartheid-era segregation to a unified inclusive education system reflects

significant macrotime shifts (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Engelbrecht, 2006). These changes influence the training, expectations, and support available to teachers. The historical marginalisation of learners with disabilities still affects how inclusion is perceived and practiced in many schools (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Teachers today must operate within a transitional educational context that continues to evolve in response to social justice imperatives (Mahlo, 2017; Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, & Mustafa, 2023).

To conclude, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the complex and interactive factors that influence the implementation of inclusive education in South African primary schools (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The model illuminates how teacher characteristics, daily interactions, institutional structures, and historical forces converge to shape inclusive practices (Tudge et al., 2016). By applying this framework, the study acknowledges that inclusion is not a static achievement, but a dynamic process influenced by personal, relational, and systemic factors over time (Amali, Ridzuan, Rahmat, Seng, & Mustafa, 2023). This framework will guide the interpretation of findings and support the development of contextually relevant recommendations for enhancing inclusive education in the foundation and intermediate phases.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theoretical lens guiding the study, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory and the Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model to conceptualise the interconnected systems that shape teachers' inclusive practices. It outlined how the model's four dimensions, person, process, context, and time, collectively illuminate the dynamic relationships between teacher characteristics, classroom interactions, institutional structures, and policy environments. The framework was selected because of its capacity to integrate individual, social, and systemic factors, offering a holistic understanding of inclusion in South African schools. The discussion also acknowledged the model's limitations, noting its broad conceptual scope and limited pedagogical specificity. Nonetheless, the PPCT model provides a valuable analytical structure for interpreting how teachers' strategies and experiences are influenced by multilevel ecological conditions. The next chapter translates this theoretical grounding into practice by detailing the research methodology, design, and procedures used to explore teachers' lived experiences and strategies for implementing inclusive education.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology adopted to explore the strategies used by Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Given the complex social, pedagogical, and systemic dynamics of inclusive education, this study adopted a qualitative, exploratory approach situated within an interpretivist paradigm. The chapter details the research design, study setting, sampling procedures, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques. Additionally, it discusses ethical considerations, reflexivity, and strategies employed to ensure research trustworthiness. These elements collectively support the credibility and rigour of the research process.

4.2 Research Paradigm and Design

This study is rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, which posits that reality is socially constructed and contextually grounded (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Interpretivist research aims to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Since the implementation of inclusive education involves subjective experiences, values, and beliefs of teachers, the interpretivist lens is most suitable.

Interpretivism rejects the notion of an objective reality that exists independent of human understanding (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Instead, it embraces the multiplicity of truths and emphasises the role of language, context, and social interaction in shaping meaning (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In the context of this study, teachers' lived experiences in diverse classroom settings are central to understanding the strategies they use and the constraints they face in implementing inclusive education.

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory design, which aligns with the interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative approach is well-suited for investigating complex educational practices, such as inclusive education, as it allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Exploratory research is particularly appropriate when the topic is underexplored or when existing frameworks need contextual adaptation (Swedberg, 2024). Inclusive education in South African primary schools, while mandated through policy, remains uneven in practice, warranting exploration of actual strategies and perceptions from those directly involved.

This qualitative, interpretivist design was deliberately chosen to capture the complexity of teachers' lived experiences and contextual realities in implementing inclusive education. Rather than seeking prediction or generalisation, this approach enabled a deeper exploration of meaning within social and institutional contexts. The exploratory orientation was particularly suited to an under-researched phenomenon such as inclusive practice in South African primary schools, as it allowed flexibility and responsiveness to emergent insights. Each methodological decision, from the choice of design to data collection through focus groups, was informed by the study's goal of understanding inclusion as a contextually mediated, socially constructed process rather than a fixed or measurable outcome.

4.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted across three primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa, two public and one private. This selection ensured diversity in school contexts, including variation in funding models, access to resources, learner demographics, and teacher support systems.

Public schools in South Africa, as defined by the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996), are state-funded and cater to the majority of learners (Sayed, 2016). These schools often struggle with overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials, and high learner diversity (Meier & West, 2020). Private schools, on the other hand, are independently managed and often have greater access to resources and smaller class sizes (Moluayonge & Park, 2017). Including both types of schools provided a more holistic understanding of the realities of inclusive education across contexts.

The schools selected also varied in geographic location, some being in the rural area and some at semi-urban, further enabling the researcher to examine how spatial and infrastructural factors impact inclusive teaching practices. According to Callado et al., (2015) an urban area can be described as an area with a dense population, developed landscapes, and a concentration of human activity, such as infrastructure and jobs like cities and towns, while peri-urban areas are places that transition between urban and rural settings and surround urban districts while normally falling outside the urban development line.

4.4 Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection.

4.4 Sampling and Participant Selection

This study used purposive sampling, a non-probability method in which teachers are selected based on their relevance to the research question (Etikan, 2016). Specifically, maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives from teachers with varying years of experience, teaching roles, and school contexts. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to select individuals with the most relevant insights on inclusive education. The use of maximum variation sampling allowed for the capture of both common and divergent experiences, enriching the data and supporting more nuanced analysis (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The final sample consisted of 18 teachers, six from each of the three participating schools. After receiving approval from school principals, teachers were approached during their staff meeting where the study topic was presented alongside accompanying information and documents such as the consent form (see Appendix A to Appendix C). Those who consented were invited to participate in the focus groups.

Teachers were initially selected based on the following inclusion criteria: currently employed as Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3) or Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) teachers; aged between 30 years or older; with at least three years of teaching experience; demonstrated experience working with learners experiencing barriers to learning; and a willingness to participate voluntarily in focus group discussions.

4.5 Procedure

Once ethical clearance had been obtained from the relevant university structures and the Gauteng Department of Education, formal approval was requested and granted by each school principal. Following this, teachers were approached during scheduled staff meetings at each school. During these meetings, the researcher presented an overview of the study, clearly explaining its purpose, aims, and procedures, as well as the voluntary nature of participation. Information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix A to Appendix C) were distributed, giving teachers time to consider their involvement and to ask any questions. Teachers who expressed interest and provided informed consent were subsequently invited to take part in the focus group discussions. This approach was designed to ensure transparency and respect for

participant autonomy, while also fostering a collegial and open atmosphere for voluntary participation.

However, during data collection, only 12 teachers actively participated in the focus groups. Of the original sample, three teachers were absent on the scheduled day of the focus group discussions, while a further three teachers requested that their information not be used in the study, despite having initially consented. Additionally, the age criterion and the experience levels were based on the available teachers at the time of the focus group meetings. Consequently, this introduced some variation in the sampling criterion used in this study, making it different from the initial inclusion criterion. Therefore, the final data set comprised responses from 12 teachers, seven from the Foundation Phase and five from the Intermediate Phase, with an age range of 28 to 44 years and teaching experience ranging from less than one year to 20 years. Of these 12 teachers, 10 were female and 2 were male. While this flexibility in sampling may have introduced some variation in experience levels, it allowed for the inclusion of a range of valuable perspectives from teachers who were both willing and available to contribute meaningfully to the study.

The use of purposive and maximum variation sampling was therefore not only pragmatic but also conceptually aligned with the interpretivist framework. By intentionally selecting participants with varied experiences across different school types, the study aimed to illuminate both common and divergent meanings that teachers attach to inclusive education. This deliberate inclusion of heterogeneity enhanced the depth and transferability of the findings.

4.6 Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection tool used in this study was focus group discussions (FGDs). FGDs enable group interaction, which can stimulate deeper reflection and reveal shared cultural or institutional norms (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). They are particularly effective when exploring practices, beliefs, and challenges in education settings, as they capture both individual viewpoints and collective discourse (Nyumba et al., 2018).

There were three focus groups. The first one consisted of six participants, the second composed of three active participants, while the third focus group had 3 present participants. Each group is named FG1, FG2 and FG3 all with teachers between 1 and 6. These interviews

were conducted on-site at the respective schools in a private, quiet room (staff room or classroom). Sessions were approximately 90 minutes to 120 minutes in duration and were audio-recorded with teachers' consent. A semi-structured discussion guide (Appendix E) ensured consistency across sessions while allowing flexibility for teachers to raise emergent issues.

Discussion topics included:

- Teachers' understanding of inclusive education
- Strategies used or attempted to support inclusion
- Perceived successes and challenges
- Access to training and professional development
- Institutional and systematic support constraints

To contextualise participant responses, a biographical questionnaire (Appendix D) was administered prior to the discussion, collecting information on age, gender, qualifications, teaching experience, and prior training in inclusive education.

4.7 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Lochmiller, 2021). Thematic analysis offers flexibility and can be used across a range of epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

1. Familiarisation – Reading and re-reading transcripts
2. Generating initial codes – Identifying significant features of the data
3. Searching for themes – Grouping codes into potential themes
4. Reviewing themes – Refining themes to ensure coherence and distinctiveness
5. Defining and naming themes – Clearly articulating the scope of each theme
6. Producing the report – Integrating themes into the findings chapter (Chapter 5)

This is how the six-step process was implemented. I used an inductive method to my study, allowing the data to determine the themes. Using the latent technique, underlying assumptions and subtext of the data that was gathered was examined. From listening to the

recorded audio interviews, transcribing them verbatim, to reading all of the transcriptions from the recordings, the researcher immersed themselves in the data. Notes were taken and analyzed from the transcriptions on a regular basis, which promoted familiarisation with the data. The codes were arranged and unpacked before the write up of the discussion commenced.

Sentences and phrases that recurred frequently in the notes were identified to create codes. Open coding was used to generate and modify codes through the coding process in order to get rid of predetermined codes. Codes were identified that are pertinent to the study's objectives and research questions. New and common codes were created across the paper by comparing, discussing, and condensing the codes after content analysis was complete.

Additionally, codes that had been created were examined, to find patterns before expanding on the themes. In order to uncover important details about the data, potential themes needed to be discovered. Furthermore, these themes were carefully reviewed and modified, in order to verify accuracy and applicability to the initial themes that were found in comparison to the data that was gathered. To see whether the evidence supports the identified themes was discovered through looking at the logical consistency of the themes. In order to enhance the themes' functionality, potential adjustments were investigated and eliminated any overlap.

4.7.1 Ensuring Rigor in Analysis

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher maintained an audit trail of coding decisions, regularly consulted with academic supervisors, and cross-checked emerging themes against raw data. Reflexive journaling was also employed to minimise researcher bias during interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.8 Ethical Considerations

4.8.1 Ethical Clearance and Institutional Permissions

Ethical integrity is foundational in research involving human teachers, especially in educational contexts where teachers' personal experiences and professional opinions are shared (Khan, 2024). Prior to data collection, this study received full approval from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Protocol Number: MED/23/06 (Appendix I), and the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) granted authorization for the study to be conducted in schools (Appendix G).

Principals from each of the participating schools provided written permission (Appendix F), ensuring that institutional gatekeeping protocols were followed and respected.

4.8.2 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

All teachers were provided with information sheets (Appendix A) detailing the aims of the study, what participation would entail, how data would be used, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained in writing before participation commenced.

As Arifin (2018) and Mandal & Parija (2014) emphasise, obtaining informed consent is not only an ethical requirement but also essential in establishing trust and protecting participant autonomy. Teachers also signed a specific consent form agreeing to the audio recording of the focus group sessions (Appendix B).

4.8.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participant confidentiality and anonymity were preserved through the use of pseudonyms during transcription, data analysis, and reporting. Identifying information, including the names of schools, teachers, and locations, was excluded from the final thesis and any potential publications. While true anonymity cannot be guaranteed in a group setting (Denny & Weckesser, 2022), teachers were made aware of this limitation and encouraged to respect each other's privacy.

All digital data, including audio recordings and typed transcripts, were securely stored on a password-protected laptop. Transcription was carried out privately, using earphones to minimise the risk of data exposure.

These ethical measures extended beyond procedural compliance to embody respect for participants' dignity, privacy, and autonomy throughout the research process. By recognising that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings, proactive steps were taken to mitigate potential breaches through clear communication, mutual respect agreements, and ongoing consent reaffirmation. This reflexive ethical stance underscores the study's commitment to balancing the openness required for qualitative inquiry with the moral responsibility of safeguarding participant well-being.

4.8.4 Respect for Human Dignity

Section 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guarantees the right to human dignity. This right was upheld throughout the research process, with the researcher committed to treating teachers with respect, compassion, and cultural sensitivity (Kern, 2022). Teachers were never coerced to answer questions and were provided with space to reflect before responding. Teachers were additionally informed how the study's findings will be used and shared, in accordance with ethical best practices. As a requirement for the Master's degree, the final research report will be turned in to the university, where it will be made available via the research repository. Only the researcher will have secure access to the raw material, which includes interview transcripts and recordings, on a password-protected device.

No identifying information will be published in the final report or any future publications or presentations resulting from this research in order to maintain ongoing respect for participant confidentiality and dignity. An executive summary of the key findings will be provided to teachers and shared by the principals of each participating school. Teachers can email the researcher directly if they would like access to the complete thesis or particular findings. These protocols seek to uphold transparency, respect for the contributions of Teachers, and their right to know the study findings.

4.9 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the findings accurately reflect the phenomena studied. This study adopted the Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for trustworthiness, which includes the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through several measures:

- Prolonged engagement in the field during data collection
- Triangulation of perspectives from teachers across different school types and teaching phases
- Member checking, whereby teachers were asked to validate interpretations of the discussions during and after the sessions

These steps helped ensure that the findings reflect teachers' intended meanings and not the assumptions of the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For transferability, thick descriptions of the school contexts, teacher backgrounds, and thematic patterns were provided

to enable readers to determine whether the findings are applicable in other settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, a clear audit trail was maintained, documenting each phase of the research process, including data collection, coding decisions, and theme development. The use of a semi-structured focus group guide (Appendix E) provided consistency across sessions while allowing for flexibility. Additionally, confirmability was ensured through rigorous documentation of analytic procedures and the use of a reflexive journal to monitor potential bias. Regular engagement with existing literature during the analysis phase also grounded the findings within established scholarly frameworks (Nowell et al., 2017).

To further enhance the study's trustworthiness, reflexive awareness was maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge and manage the influence of the researcher's background and expectations. Credibility was strengthened through transparent documentation of methodological choices, dependability through a detailed audit trail, confirmability through reflexive journaling and supervisor feedback, and transferability through thick, contextual descriptions. These strategies ensured that interpretations were firmly grounded in participants' lived realities rather than researcher assumptions, thereby reinforcing both the analytical depth and ethical integrity of the study.

4.10 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, necessitating reflexivity, a continuous process of examining one's biases, experiences, and positionalities and how these may influence the study (Dodgson, 2019). My longstanding interest in education, shaped by growing up in a Black community that values education, exposed me to early forms of exclusion within schooling. Attending a private multiracial school revealed subtle segregation of children with physical or learning disabilities, while classism was evident in parental preferences for better-resourced, predominantly white schools over local community schools. These experiences heightened my sensitivity to the nuances of inclusive education and the potential for both intentional and unintentional exclusion.

While I brought unique insights to the study, there was a risk of projecting personal assumptions onto teachers' experiences. I anticipated discussions about familiar challenges and

strategies to address them, as well as complex issues such as sexism, racial segregation, and classism affecting the adoption of inclusive practices. To mitigate potential bias, I maintained a reflexive journal documenting emotional responses, emerging thoughts, and assumptions before and after each focus group. This approach allowed participants to share their experiences authentically, independent of my expectations. Consistent with Suffla and Seedat (2015), reflexivity was conducted in an active, systematic, and transparent manner. I discovered that some anticipated challenges were not reported, either due to participants' limited experience or normalization of these issues in their professional practice.

Regular supervision meetings provided a complementary space to discuss ethical dilemmas, interpretive challenges, and tensions between personal knowledge and empirical findings, further ensuring the rigor and integrity of the research process.

Furthermore, my positionality as an educational psychologist-in-training and a Black South African researcher provided both insight and potential bias in interpreting teachers' experiences. This dual positioning allowed for empathetic engagement but also required critical self-awareness to prevent personal experiences from overshadowing participants' narratives. By actively engaging in reflexive journaling, peer debriefing, and supervisory consultation, I was able to identify moments where my interpretations were shaped by personal assumptions and re-centre the analysis on participants' meanings. Reflexivity, in this context, functioned not merely as a procedural safeguard but as an analytical tool, enabling the study to remain grounded, transparent, and critically self-aware throughout the research process.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodology employed in this study. A qualitative, exploratory research design under an interpretivist paradigm was chosen to investigate the lived experiences and strategies of Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers implementing inclusive education. To guarantee the validity, reliability, and authenticity of the study process, focus groups, purposive sampling, thematic analysis, and rigorous standards of ethics were used.

Reflexivity and trustworthiness were actively incorporated throughout to safeguard against bias and enhance the interpretive quality of the findings. The conclusions presented in

the following chapter, which will go into further detail about the main themes that surfaced from the data, are supported by the framework established in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the empirical findings generated from the focus group discussions conducted with foundation and intermediate phase teachers from selected mainstream primary schools. The primary objective was to explore the strategies these teachers employ to implement inclusive education successfully, and their perceptions of the benefits and challenges of doing so. The findings are presented thematically, guided by both the research questions and themes derived from the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis model. The data are interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (PPCT model), integrating relevant scholarly literature to draw conclusions that are grounded in existing academic discourse. Additionally, the focus group participants represented both public and private school contexts. While this chapter presents common strategies teachers employ to implement inclusive education successfully, its benefits and challenges, it also highlights context-specific differences where relevant. These include variations in classroom size, support structures, and access to resources, which influenced how inclusive education was experienced and implemented across school types.

5.2 Demographic Profile of Teachers

Below is a summary of the demographic profile of the teachers. Pseudonyms have been provided for each participant, for example FG1.1 (Focus Group 1 - Teacher 1) and so on.

Table 1: Summary of Demographic Profile of Teachers

Participant Pseudonym	Phase	Grade Taught	Experience (Years)	Inclusive Training	Class Size	Public or Private
FG1.1	Intermediate	4-7	8	Yes	66	Public
FG1.2	Foundation	1	Under 1 year	None	39	Public
FG1.3	Foundation	2	10	None	75	Public
FG1.4	Intermediate	4-6	20	Yes	60	Public

FG1.5	Intermediate	4-6	8	None	55	Public
FG1.6	Foundation	3	5	None	42	Public
FG2.1	Intermediate	5	8	None	17	Private
FG2.2	Foundation	2	6	Yes	22	Private
FG2.3	Intermediate	6	7	None	20	Private
FG3.1	Foundation	1	5	None	45	Public
FG3.2	Foundation	3	12	None	67	Public
FG3.3	Foundation	3	12	None	70	Public
FG3.4 FG3.5 FG3.6 (Absent during FGDs)	N/A					Public

Five teachers were Intermediate Phase instructors (Grades 4–6), and seven teachers were Foundation Phase teachers (Grades 1-3) based on the profile above. With teaching experience ranging from less than a year to twenty years, the teachers provided perspectives from both early-career and experienced teachers. A widespread lack of specialized training is evident from the fact that just three individuals reported having formal training in inclusive education. With an average class size of roughly 65–70 students in public schools and relatively smaller class sizes in private schools, most teachers worked in overcrowded classrooms. These demographic traits provide important context for examining how teachers, across varying phases and levels of experience, have found practical and context-responsive ways to

implement inclusive teaching strategies in both resource-constrained and more supportive environments.

5.3 Overview of the Findings

Key themes that emerged from the data analysis are used to present the findings of the research. The study's aim of exploring the strategies employed by Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers in implementing inclusive education in practice in South African primary schools is strongly related to the themes. The findings, as expressed by the participating teachers, indicate both contextual difficulties and similar practices encountered in various educational contexts. In order to keep the analysis rooted in the teachers' own lived realities, these themes are presented using direct quotes from teachers to illustrate and clarify the discussion. Each of the emerging themes is covered in detail in the sections that follow.

5.4 Themes and Discussion of Findings

Themes were developed based on responses to the focus group schedule (Appendix E) and analysed using thematic analysis. Four primary themes were identified, each with related sub-themes, as presented in the table below (see Table 2). The Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers' strategies, experiences, and contextual realities with regard to implementing inclusive education in South African primary schools are reflected in the themes and sub-themes.

Table 2: Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
1. Teachers' understanding of inclusive education	1.1 Inclusive education as differentiation 1.2 Awareness of barriers to learning
2. Strategies employed to support inclusion	2.1 Use of visual aids and demonstrative teaching 2.2 Integration of learning areas 2.3 Practical and life-skills activities 2.4 Individual goal setting and peer support
3. Barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education	3.1 Overcrowded classrooms resource constraints 3.2 Lack of parental support

4. Support systems and stakeholder collaboration	4.1 Involvement of SBSTs and external agencies 4.2 Peer support and teacher collaboration 4.3 Need for active school leadership
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These themes are interpreted through Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model, highlighting how teachers’ personal characteristics, relational dynamics, and broader systemic contexts shape inclusive practices. By examining these experiences, the study situates inclusive education not only as a pedagogical challenge but also as a social and moral imperative aimed at promoting equity and social justice in South African schools.

5.4.1 Teachers’ Understanding of Inclusive Education

The first theme explores how teachers view inclusive education and how they understand barriers to learning, which has a direct impact on the strategies they use in the classroom. According to the data collected, while some teachers understand inclusive education as access to equal education for all children, regardless of ability or background, some understand it as just inclusion of children with learning disabilities. For instance, teachers explained:

“Inclusive education is about teaching all children, whether they are fast, slow, disabled, or just different in how they understand.” (FG3. Teacher 1).

“Is education that considers all learners even though they are different in terms of abilities and their backgrounds...” (FG2. Teacher 2).

“Inclusive education is for special children that have disabilities and cannot cope in a normal school setting.” (FG2 Teacher 1).

Teacher 2 from focus group 2 (FG2 Teacher 2), additionally, linked inclusive education to social and contextual factors:

“What I know is that it speaks about providing education for children with learning barriers such as disabilities, living situation, race, or social status.” (FG2. Teacher 2).

According to Engelbrecht and Savolainen (2017), inclusive education is a concept of educational equity that encourages access and involvement for all students, irrespective of their background or ability. The teachers’ responses are consistent with Engelbrecht and

Savolainen's (2017) definition. It also supports Florian's (2019) argument that inclusive education needs to consider socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic aspects in addition to disabilities. Individual experiences, educational contexts, and varying degrees of exposure to professional development may all shape such forms of conceptual fragmentation (Mamogobo, 2023). The teachers' inconsistent views and understanding about inclusive education highlight how training institutions and school systems need to define inclusive education more consistently and effectively.

Nevertheless, the information also showed notable discrepancies in the way teachers conceptualised inclusive education. Some had limited viewpoints, while others were in line with a more comprehensive, equity-driven worldview that takes socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic diversity into account (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2017; Florian, 2019). This diversity indicates that what exists is a spectrum rather than a uniform concept of inclusive education among teachers.

It was clear that some teachers still confused inclusive education with special education, understanding it to be solely focused on learners with disabilities. Donohue and Bornman (2023), who observe that many South African teachers continue to work from a deficit-based view of inclusion despite policy changes, resonate with this finding. It seems that a major contributing element to this misperception is a lack of exposure to inclusive education concepts or significant training. This was also evident among the participants in this study, where only a few teachers had received formal training in inclusive education. Most of the teachers indicated in their demographic profiles and focus group responses that they had never attended workshops or professional development opportunities related to inclusive teaching. According to Mamogobo (2023), many teachers are inadequately prepared as a result of the Department of Education's and school-based and district-level administrative structures' (principals, SBSTs, and DBSTs) inability to offer easily accessible and contextually relevant professional development opportunities, such as workshops or continuous training. As a result, some teachers resort to improvising inclusive strategies based on their own definitions of inclusion, while others fall back on conventional, one-size-fits-all teaching techniques (Donohue & Bornman, 2023).

Furthermore, according to Mamogobo (2023) these approaches frequently stem from a dichotomy that students are either "normal" or "special," with "special" being generally linked

to noticeable disabilities. In addition to limiting the extent of inclusion, this binary view of learner diversity has a significant impact on the strategies that teachers employ, which often conflict with the comprehensive and equity-driven goals of inclusive education policy (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Nel et al., 2016). Therefore, the integrity and success of implementing inclusive education are directly impacted by the way teachers conceptualize inclusion, which is influenced by systemic training gaps (Mamogobo, 2023).

According to Tudge et al. (2016), Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model emphasizes how teachers' personal characteristics such as their attitudes, beliefs, and work experiences have an impact on how they understand and use inclusive policies. Teachers with more professional experience, previous training, or exposure in inclusive education conceptualized inclusion more broadly. On the other hand, teachers who had less experience with inclusive pedagogy in the present study had a more limited perspective on inclusion. The environmental systems in which teachers practice also influence this difference. For instance, some teachers showed a stronger understanding of the complex nature of inclusion in schools that have active SBSTs and management that supports inclusive values (mesosystem and exosystem).

Understanding teachers' conceptualizations of inclusive education through the PPCT model reveals how personal beliefs (Person), interactions with learners (Process), and systemic factors (Context) collectively shape classroom practices. These findings underscore that inclusive education is more than a technical exercise, it reflects a commitment to social justice by recognizing and responding to structural inequities affecting learners' access and participation.

Sub-theme 1.1: Inclusive Education as Differentiation

Individual perceptions of inclusive education were closely correlated with the extent to which teachers implemented differentiation in their classrooms. Teachers who believed that inclusion addressed a significantly diverse learner needs, not just physical impairments or disabilities, showed a stronger understanding of how important it is to adapt teaching strategies to accommodate diversity. Teachers who conceptualized inclusion more narrowly, on the other hand, were less likely to mention intentional differentiation in their teaching. As one teacher reflected:

“Inclusive education is when a teacher gives all the learners the opportunity to express themselves in a way that their learning styles work for them, and how they adapt to learning

that works for them. The teacher needs to consider their learning disabilities, backgrounds and needs." (FG1. Teacher 1).

Her use of guided tasks and flexible groupings to engage learners at various levels in the classroom reflected this wider viewpoint. Another participant explained:

"Oh, and we use pictures with the younger ones. We show them a picture and from that picture they narrate a story just by viewing only the picture." (FG3. Teacher 2).

These strategies, which include learner-centred goal formulation, multimodal resources, and visual scaffolding, are in line with what Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) define as essential elements of inclusive pedagogy. Additionally, they demonstrate how long-lasting, reciprocal interactions (proximal processes) between teachers and learners can promote learning and engagement, which is a crucial component of the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Differentiation, however, was frequently inadequate or reactive for teachers whose awareness of inclusion remained limited, focusing primarily on supporting learners with disabilities. One teacher added: *"Did you even see the toilets that the learners have to use? I mean a learner on a wheelchair or with crutches would not even be able to access the toilets, which means that our school is not the right one to provide inclusive education because disabled learners will find it difficult to even use the toilets. These learners will do better in special schools for disabled learners."* (FG1 Teacher 4). This suggests a significant professional development implication: in order to facilitate the effective integration of differentiation strategies across all learner groups, there needs to be increased conceptual clarity surrounding the goals and values of inclusive education (Savolainen et al., 2011).

Sub-theme 1.2: Awareness of Barriers to Learning

Teachers revealed different levels of understanding regarding the complex barriers that affect learners' from fully engaging in learning. Some teachers cited lack of family support, bad living conditions, psychological trauma, and socioeconomic difficulties as major barriers. Crucially, these insights went beyond barriers related to disabilities, indicating that some teachers are gaining a more ecological understanding of the various elements affecting learning. This is in line with the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy (DBE, 2014) and the inclusive education framework described in White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). One teacher commented on the impact of poverty on attendance:

“There are some learners here who don’t have winter uniforms or school shoes... So, now when it’s winter, some don’t come every day, and some don’t come to school at all until it is warm enough to come. And obviously this will affect their marks because they are missing out on a lot” (FG3 Teacher 2).

This is in line with the larger perspective on learning barriers put forth by Engelbrecht (2020), who asserts that a social justice lens that targets poverty and inequality as a systemic learning barrier must be incorporated into inclusive education. Based on the excerpts, teachers acknowledged that parental unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity had a negative impact on learners' attendance and focus. Another teacher noted:

“A lot of the children’s parents are not working... sometimes they have not eaten when they come to school.” (FG1 Teacher 2).

“Even where children are exposed to violence, they are taken out of their home and placed at the local centre for children...Living in the violent environments affects learners’ emotionally which sometimes you will see on their marks. Their marks drop.” (FG3 Teacher 3).

Therefore, a social justice perspective that views poverty and inequality as structural barriers to learning must be incorporated into inclusive education (Engelbrecht, 2020). The argument made by Walton (2019) that inclusive pedagogy in South Africa needs to consider both social circumstances and within-child characteristics is echoed here. According to the PPCT model, teachers' attitudes and classroom practices are influenced by these systemic elements, which are a part of the macrosystem and exosystem. Meeting a variety of needs presents additional difficulties for teachers working in impoverished environments. However, those who have strong inclusive beliefs could still look for ways to lessen these barriers through advocacy, emotional support, and individualized education.

Through a PPCT lens, these systemic challenges (Macrosystem and Exosystem factors) influence teachers’ proximal processes and daily classroom interactions. Recognizing and addressing these barriers positions teachers as agents of social justice, who are not merely delivering curriculum but actively working to mitigate the inequities that learners face.

5.4.2 Strategies Employed to Support Inclusion

This theme explores the strategies that teachers use in the classroom to support inclusion and accommodate the diversity of their learners. The findings show a variety of useful strategies, such as goal-setting, topic integration, visual aids, life skills activities, and collaboration among peers. These strategies align well with Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model's "Process" element, which refers to the routine interactions and procedures that make inclusive learning a reality (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). They also show how proximal processes in the classroom are shaped by the views of teachers and the larger educational setting (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Sub-theme 2.1: Use of Visual Aids and Demonstrative Teaching

Using visual aids, images, and concrete objects to enhance comprehension, especially for younger learners and those experiencing language barriers, was a common strategy across the focus groups:

"I love using colourful pictures and charts... I had a boy who struggled to read... the boy began reading fluently." (FG1 Teacher 3).

"I teach my learners using mind maps to summarise work that has a lot of reading content into one-word ideas or small phrases. I have also taught them to use this technique to organize their ideas before writing their work, especially essays." (FG1 Teacher 5).

"...The report also mentioned that I should make use of visual aids, which is something I have always been doing with my learners, as you can see how our classes have plenty of posters on the wall which help with phonics and numbers. I also have a box with Legos and blocks which are used to learn maths in a fun way." (FG2 Teacher 3).

These visual aids are an example of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which enable the use of numerous representational strategies to reach a diverse learner group (Rose and Meyer, 2022). In South African classrooms with diverse learners, where learners may be studying a second or third language, these strategies are particularly successful (Mamogobo, 2023). From a PPCT lens, the use of UDL reflects the proximal processes of Bronfenbrenner's model, which are defined by regular, reciprocal interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Differentiation, one of the cornerstones of inclusive pedagogy, is also consistent with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles that advocate for flexible

teaching practices to meet the needs of all learners (Rose and Meyer, 2022). However, it is crucial to consider that not all teachers have equal access to these materials. Posters, manipulatives, and printed visual aids are more likely to be accessible to teachers in schools with greater resources, particularly private schools. On the other hand, learners at public schools with limited resources may need to improvise or use homemade materials, and the socioeconomic setting of their school often impacts their capacity to apply UDL strategies. As mentioned earlier, one of the challenges cited by some of the study participants was a lack of sufficient resources, which has a direct impact on the kind of inclusive strategies that they can realistically employ in their classrooms. Consequently, systemic disparities frequently limit the practical application of visual aids, although their use indicates an inclusive objective (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Mamogobo, 2023).

These strategies demonstrate how teachers' proximal processes (PPCT) adapt to learner diversity, reinforcing inclusion as both a pedagogical strategy and a social responsibility to provide equitable learning opportunities.

Sub-theme 2.2: Integration of Learning Areas

Another significant strategy, which was discussed by teachers, was incorporating themes from several school subjects, which maintained learners' attention and assisted them in making connections: For example:

“With my learners, I like to incorporate the themes of the week in their learning. Like, with the theme of ‘My School’ we counted the number of classrooms around the school premises during maths, and we shared stories of ‘what I like about my school’ during the English class.” (FG1 Teacher 4).

“Last week we had pyjama day, and I incorporated it as a theme to learn in class... I chose two activities to do with my class. One included them sharing bedtime stories using ‘Popper the Puppet’. It was funny to hear what goes on in my learners’ heads. Ooooh, and the English! But, I must say, their English language fluency has improved. (Giggles)... And then we did the fun one, the activity where we created our own pyjama fashion show which really boosted the confidence of each and every learner in my classrooms. It was a fulfilling activity because I saw how some of the shy learners came out of their shells, even those who were self-conscious about the kinds of pyjamas they have on. I think I can say that, somehow the pyjama fashion show created a comforting and inclusive space for everyone.” (FG 2 Teacher 2).

“We also have weekly themes with them and then we break it down into the different subjects. Like this week the theme is ‘My Body.’ We learn about the body in every subject.” (FG3 Teacher 2).

Integrated thematic teaching promotes conceptual continuity and is recommended in UDL frameworks (Morina, 2017). Inclusive pedagogy, according to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), involves designing instruction that assumes learner diversity as the norm. In multilingual and under-resourced classrooms, such strategies also reduce cognitive overload and enhanced comprehension (Morina, 2017). Integrated thematic teaching reflects not only instructional effectiveness but also an ethical commitment to equity, ensuring learners from diverse backgrounds can access and connect knowledge meaningfully.

Sub-theme 2.3: Practical and Life-Skills Activities

Life skills lessons were emphasized as a strategy for fostering social inclusion, self-regulation, emotional wellbeing, and inclusion for learners with diverse profiles.

“We learn different topics which cover understanding the self, the environment, and others within the environment. It helps the learners to understand each other’s differences and different backgrounds.” (FG2 Teacher 1).

“In foundation phase life skills subject is also one of the strategies we use because it stimulates the minds of the learners by keeping them active, both mentally and physically” (FG3 Teacher 1).

This reflects Bronfenbrenner’s Process dimension, where regular, reciprocal classroom interactions promote social and emotional development in addition to intellectual growth (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As Kaur (2024) notes, life-skills activities contribute to the holistic development of learners and support inclusion for those with social and behavioural challenges. Life skills lessons exemplify how inclusive pedagogy extends beyond academics to promote social-emotional development, highlighting the moral dimension of teachers’ work in fostering equitable learning environments.

Sub-theme 2.4: Individual Goal Setting and Peer Support

A teacher reported setting individualised learning goals with learners and their families:

“I set goals with them (the learners) and their parents, and we work really hard to achieve those academic goals that we set.” (FG2 Teacher 2).

According to Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), goal setting promotes initiative and personalizes learning, two key elements of inclusive education. In order to support learners, the school and family work together, which is another example of mesosystem interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The links between microsystems, such as the home and school contexts, are represented by the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework. The child gains from consistent support, expectations, and reinforcement across contexts when these systems collaborate and communicate effectively (Mamogobo, 2023). While also supporting learners who encounter barriers to learning, this collaboration builds a sense of shared responsibility between teachers and parents, strengthening the interpersonal processes necessary for long-term academic and emotional development (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Essentially, these relationships are essential to inclusive education because they ensure that the child's experiences both within and outside of the classroom inform the objectives of learning (Adams & Jones, 2018). The learner's developmental pathway is strengthened, and fragmentation is minimized with this comprehensive approach (Mamogobo, 2023).

Another strategy employed by the teachers is informal peer support:

“I also try to pair learners who are better at understanding, with the struggling learners. In this way they help each other.” (FG1 Teacher 3) .

“I sometimes encourage learners to be working in groups . It builds the confidence of each and every learner no matter how good or not they are.” (FG1 Teacher 6).

“Oh, and I have seen how my class enjoys working in groups and learning from each other.” (FG3 Teacher 3).

Putnam's (2015) research, which supports structured peer learning in inclusive classrooms, is in line with this. By encouraging reciprocal learning, peer relationships additionally enhance proximal processes. The emphasis on goal setting and peer collaboration illustrates how teachers operationalize inclusive education in a way that bridges individual and systemic levels (PPCT), reinforcing inclusion as a socially just practice

5.4.3 Barriers to Effective Implementing of Inclusive Education

Teachers noted a number of ongoing challenges that interfered with their attempts to successfully implement inclusive education in their classes, regardless of their dedication to doing so. These challenges included inadequate training, overcrowded classrooms, scarce resources, and low levels of parental participation. These findings demonstrate how teachers' ability to implement inclusive education is limited by constraints at several systemic levels, especially the exosystem and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). According to Schuelka (2018) and Walton (2018), inclusive education needs a supportive environment in order to succeed. A major issue reiterated in South African literature (Engelbrecht, 2020) is the discrepancy between inclusive policy frameworks (DBE, 2014; DoE, 2001) and actual conditions on the ground, which is illustrated by the gaps revealed here.

Sub-theme 3.1: Insufficient Training for Inclusive Practices

Some teachers openly acknowledged that they lack sufficient training on inclusive practices:

“So, it’s difficult to work with them especially since we have no training” (FG1 Teacher 2).

“I have not yet been trained in inclusive education...” (FG1 Teacher 3).

“I don’t think I ever received training.” (FG3 Teacher 2).

This supports the findings of Engelbrecht (2018) and Donohue & Bornman (2014), who revealed that South African teachers frequently receive little to no training on how to engage with diverse learners. Teachers are left to muddle through in the absence of effective pre-service and in-service professional development, which leads to low confidence and spontaneous strategies (Nel et al., 2016). According to Tudge et al. (2016), such gaps limit teachers' individual resource characteristics, or their efficacy, knowledge, and abilities. Additionally, research by Walton (2018) and Nel and Tlale (2014) confirms that teachers across South Africa often feel ill-equipped to respond to meet the expectations of inclusive classrooms. Inadequate professional development is another systemic challenge noted by the Department of Basic Education (2021).

Sub-theme 3.2: Overcrowded Classrooms and Resource Constraints

Teachers, especially from public schools, frequently referenced large class sizes, with learner-teacher ratios exceeding 1:60, and scarce materials as the most pressing classroom-level barrier:

“Like, my register class has 75 kids in it and today the English teacher is not here, and I have to also look after all her 60 kids. How will I then be able to teach my class? (FG1 Teacher 3)”.

“It’s tiring. I’m one teacher with 70 learners in a class. It’s hard to manage. The learner-teacher ratio doesn’t make sense, is 1:70” (FG3 Teacher 3).

According to Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013), systemic barriers in the exosystem, such as resource allocation and teacher development programmes, often prevent the realisation of inclusive education. Furthermore, the macrosystem, including national policy frameworks like Education White Paper 6, remains inadequately translated into practical support at the classroom level (DoE, 2001). Overcrowding limits teacher responsiveness and undermines inclusive objectives (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). According to Pather (2019), structural barriers such as overcrowding reduce opportunities for learner-centred approaches.

Sub-theme 3.3: Lack of Parental Support

Several teachers highlighted parental denial and low involvement:

“Some parents are in denial of their children’s problems... Yes, we also try to involve the parents by sharing the learner’s difficulties, but they are still in denial.” (FG3 Teacher 3).

“Uhm, we also involve third parties like social workers and parents, even though involving parents can sometimes drag the process because some parents are not supportive.” (FG2 Teacher 3).

The difficulties in parental involvement in inclusive education have been well-documented (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Families are frequently unable to collaborate with schools in an effective manner due to socioeconomic challenges, stigma, and ignorance (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). This resonates with findings by Paseka and Schwab (2020), who identify parental attitudes as a crucial variable in inclusive education. The collaborative basis

that is necessary for inclusive education is weakened by this mesosystem breakdown (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, children who experience educational barriers are disproportionately affected by a lack of parental support, which exacerbates their disadvantage (Shaeffer, 2019). According to Arnwine (2019), inclusive education needs to take a social justice stance, addressing both internal school issues and more general family and community inequalities.

These systemic and structural barriers, mapped onto Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model, demonstrate that achieving inclusive education requires more than individual teacher effort, it necessitates addressing inequities embedded within the broader educational system. Failure to do so perpetuates disparities, highlighting the ethical responsibility of schools, policymakers, and communities in fostering genuine inclusion.

5.4.4 Support Systems and Stakeholder Collaboration

For inclusive education to be successful, teachers emphasize the importance of collaborative support structures, such as peer networks, leadership, external specialists, and SBSTs. The findings presented in this section clearly reflect how mesosystem interactions, including intra-school collaboration and partnerships between the school, family, and community, influence teachers' ability to apply inclusive practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This supports the views of Florian & Spratt (2013) and Walton (2017), who argue that coordinated, multi-level effort is necessary for effective inclusion and that teachers cannot achieve it alone. Teachers also identified gaps in the system's response, particularly in cases when school management failed to promote inclusion or School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) remained inactive.

Sub-theme 4.1: Involvement of SBSTs and External Agencies

The presence and functionality of SBSTs appeared more consistent, especially in the private school, where leadership support was more stable. In public schools, however, teachers often reported that SBSTs were inactive or that they were understaffed. Nevertheless, teachers highlighted the importance of external professional assistance, SBSTs, learner profiles, Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms, and teacher collaboration in monitoring and supporting learners:

“We have what we call the SNA 1 and SNA 2... teachers use to write down what they have observed about learners with any kind of difficulties they experience...We use the information in these forms to inform the kinds of interventions needed to be put in place to ensure that the learners are supported appropriately.” (FG2 Teacher 2).

One participant shared: *“...In that way I am able to share learner profiles, for each learner that I had in the previous year, with her [the new teacher] to track any progress with challenges previously experienced by the learner.” (FG2 Teacher 1).*

These findings echo Nel et al. (2016), who emphasize the value of mesosystem-level collaboration between educators and support structures in fostering responsive interventions. These support mechanisms also reflect the resource characteristics in Bronfenbrenner’s Person construct, as professional capacity is strengthened through systemic support.

While some teachers acknowledged the presence of SBSTs, others found them inactive or ineffective. However, third-party involvement, such as social workers and occupational therapists, was seen as helpful:

“Social workers assist in cases that need any kind of social support...Even where children are exposed to violence, they are taken out of their home and placed at the local center for children. The social workers have been very helpful with many cases.” (FG3 Teacher 3).

“Ms. X is an Occupational Therapist who comes here once a week on Fridays. She works mostly with our younger learners by providing therapy. We also have a psychologist who comes here once a week. On Tuesdays” (FG1 Teacher 5).

“And we appreciate that we have these kinds of therapeutic services in our school... We believe that if she can be seen by the psychologist there will be a way forward” (FG2 Teacher 2).

These findings emphasize the value of collaboration at the mesosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which enhances teachers' resource qualities (Tudge et al., 2016) and allows them to provide learners with more tailored, responsive support. Unfortunately, teachers also revealed that such support was inconsistent:

“I think we have a weak SBST. It has been inactive for a while now. Meetings with them happen once in a blue moon and this means as teachers we end up doing things on our own the way we see fit.” (FG1 Teacher 4).

“I agree. But sometimes we can see that it’s not on purpose because no school plans to have a non-existent SBST. I think our school is under-staffed which leaves many of us taking over different roles in the school. Look at now, as a result, our school has kind of neglected the SBST roles which obviously affects how learners are supported by the school.” (FG 1 Teacher 5).

This is consistent with national results (Nel et al., 2016) that suggest that SBST implementation differs significantly among schools and that many teams lack district engagement, leadership support, or training. Although policy frameworks such as SIAS (DBE, 2014) anticipate that these structures will promote inclusive education, this vision is undermined at the exosystem level by resource and capacity constraints (Hay et al., 2018).

Sub-theme 4.2: Peer Support and Teacher Collaboration

Teachers noted that informal collaboration among colleagues enhanced inclusive efforts:

“Fortunately, we sometimes have each other to rely on. Sharing learner profiles with each other helps us see a learner from different sides. For example, I will write down what I have observed about learner X and another teacher does the same. Then we share that information with each other. This makes teaching learner X easier because we now know how to accommodate learner X based on the problems we observed.” (FG1 Teacher 6).

“The teachers here have good relationships among each other which is valuable not only for us but also for the learners.” (FG2 Teacher 1).

“Sometimes we plan together and share ideas on how to handle certain learners” (FG2 Teacher 2).

“These reports also assist us as teachers because they provide us with a full view of each learner’s strengths and weaknesses. This allows us to create a tailored teaching strategy for every learner in need of one, however; being under-resourced makes it difficult to even use

these tailored teaching strategies for just one specific learner in a classroom full of learners who are more capable.” (FG1 Teacher 1).

Such peer-driven professional development is similar to what Walton (2016) refers to as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which are important sites for the promotion of inclusive practice. Villegas-Reimers (2020) asserts that collaboration, particularly in settings with limited resources, promotes reflective practice, increases efficacy, and minimizes teacher isolation. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), these peer networks constitute a crucial proximal process from a PPCT perspective, influencing teachers’ daily experiences and growth as inclusive practitioners. Colleague collaboration becomes an even more important safeguard against burnout and exclusionary practices in situations when institutional supports (SBSTs, DBSTs) may be lacking (Engelbrecht, 2020).

Sub-theme 4.3: Need for Active School Leadership

Although principals are expected to champion inclusive practices, some teachers, especially from the public schools, noted inconsistent support from leadership:

“Sometimes the school head just wants us to go on with work, even when we ask for help and struggle.” (FG3 Teacher 1).

“And we sometimes don’t get any support from the school principal. And it makes it difficult for us to use inclusive education.” (FG 1 Teacher 6).

This supports research by Ainscow (2020) and Makoelle (2021), which suggests a major factor influencing inclusive school cultures is leadership commitment. Inclusive initiatives frequently stay fragmented or abstract in the absence of clear leadership support and resource mobilization (Walton et al., 2019). According to PPCT, School Management Teams (SMTs) and principals’ function inside the mesosystem, impacting how teachers, SBSTs, district actors, and the general public interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These connections are broken by ineffective leadership, which limits teachers' ability to be creative and work collaboratively to solve problems.

5.5 School Contextual Differences Between Public and Private Schools

The findings suggest that although all teachers demonstrated a shared commitment to inclusion, the context in which they taught significantly influenced how this was enacted.

Teachers in public schools were more likely to face overcrowded classrooms, inactive support structures, and limited resources, which made the consistent application of inclusive strategies more challenging. In contrast, private school teachers described smaller class sizes, access to therapists and visual materials, and more active leadership support. These differences underscore that successful implementation of inclusive education is not only shaped by teacher effort, but also by institutional and systemic conditions that vary across school types.

5.6 Visual Representation of Findings

The key themes and sub-themes that developed from the data about the strategies that teachers implement and the challenges they encounter when implementing inclusive education are visually summarized in the thematic map below (see Figure 1). The dynamic interplay among systemic issues, collaborative support systems, and classroom-level practices that affect inclusive education in the participating schools is highlighted in the figure. It provides an overview of the connections between teachers' perceptions of inclusion, the strategies they employ, and the barriers they experience.

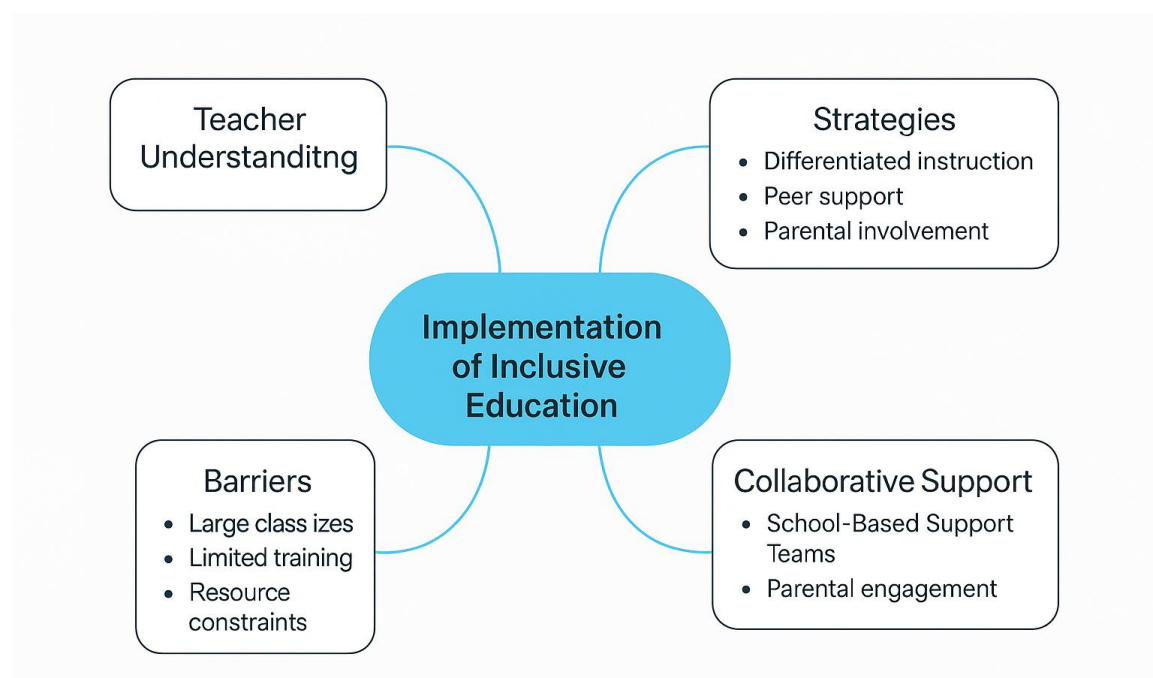


Figure 1

Thematic Map of Strategies and Barriers in Inclusive Education Implementation.

Note: This thematic map illustrates the interrelated themes and sub-themes identified through thematic analysis, including inclusive strategies, teacher knowledge, collaborative systems, and systemic barriers.

5.7 Theoretical Reflection: Interpreting the Findings Through Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Model

The Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model developed by Bronfenbrenner provides a thorough framework for interpreting the study's findings. The model takes into consideration how teachers experienced and applied inclusive education in a variety of school contexts, considering the dynamic interactions between individual characteristics, daily interactions, environmental structures, and temporal development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Tudge et al., 2016).

According to the Person dimension, teachers' personal characteristics, such as their determination, resilience, and views on learner diversity, had a significant impact on how they perceived and implemented inclusive practices (Mamogobo, 2023). For instance, despite lacking formal training, several teachers showed a strong sense of intrinsic drive and a clear comprehension of inclusive principles. These individual traits are similar to what Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) refer to as "force characteristics," which affect the degree and direction of a person's involvement in educational settings. Teachers who were exposed to inclusive environments or had more professional experience seemed to have greater conceptual clarity and confidence in their educational choices (Mamogobo, 2023; Tudge et al., 2016).

Additionally, teachers' use of learner-centred practices, tailored education, peer support, and family participation demonstrated the Process dimension, which is essential to the PPCT model. These regular, mutual exchanges serve as proximal processes that promote inclusion and learner growth (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Peer-assisted learning groups and individual goal-setting with students and parents, for example, established long-term support systems that addressed the emotional and cognitive requirements of students. These tactics support the notion that the steady implementation of inclusive practices over time is what drives inclusive education (Mamogobo, 2023).

Furthermore, throughout the findings, the Context component also showed a strong presence. Large class sizes, language barriers, and limited access to resources all influenced classroom practices at the microsystem level (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Nel et al., 2016). At the mesosystem level, school-family partnerships and teacher collaboration either promoted or affected the achievement of inclusive goals (Nel et al., 2016). While schools without such support structures had to deal with disjointed or improvised methods (Donohue & Bornman, 2023), those with strong leadership and operational SBSTs established conducive conditions for inclusive education (Mamogobo, 2023). Broader systemic limitations, including the application of national policies, frameworks for teacher development, and social norms, affected the interpretation and application of inclusive education in schools at the exosystem and macrosystem levels (DoE, 2001; Engelbrecht, 2020).

Finally, the development of teachers' inclusive competences through experience and sustained participation in inclusive environments reflected the time component (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). More flexibility, self-assurance, and knowledge of inclusive pedagogy were shown by teachers with more classroom experience or ongoing exposure to learners with a diversity of needs (Mamogobo, 2023). Furthermore, from the introduction of Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) to the implementation of SIAS (DBE, 2014), the long-term policy trajectory of inclusive education in South Africa represents a macro temporal context that continues to influence teachers' practices, particularly in areas where policy implementation and training are uneven (Nel et al., 2016; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

This theoretical reflection underscores, using the PPCT model to analyze the study's results reveals the complex connections that exist between individual beliefs, interpersonal relationships, environmental systems, and professional development across time. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), this holistic viewpoint highlights that inclusive education is a dynamic activity influenced by a variety of factors rather than a collection of isolated actions. To achieve inclusive education in South African primary schools, it emphasizes the necessity of contextual responsiveness, systemic alignment, and teacher development (Walton, 2017; Mamogobo, 2023).

5.7 Conclusion

In order to shed light on the intricate reality of implementing inclusive education inside South African mainstream primary schools, this chapter presented and examined the study's

key findings. According to the analysis, teachers' perceptions of inclusive education vary significantly, though they generally indicate support for its principles. This mismatch in conceptualisation is indicative of broader inadequacies in teacher training and continuous professional development, particularly in public schools with limited resources.

Teachers in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases revealed a variety of inclusive teaching strategies aimed to promote the diversity of their learners. These included tailored instruction, peer-assisted learning, visual aids, and the incorporation of Life Skills curriculum. Nevertheless, these methods were frequently implemented informally and without sufficient theoretical foundation or training. This highlights a significant gap between the SIAS policy, and the policy ideals outlined in Education White Paper 6 and the actual experiences of teachers in diverse school environments.

Furthermore, the chapter outlined several persistent barriers to successful implementation. These included overcrowded classrooms, limited access to resources, poor facilities, and teachers' emotional weariness. These difficulties are exacerbated by community-related factors including parental disengagement, poverty, and learners' emotional trauma. These results are consistent with previous research on the contextual and structural barriers to inclusive education in South Africa (Nel et al., 2016; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Despite these difficulties, the study additionally identified potential practice areas, especially in educational institutions with operational collaborative support systems such as School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and engaged external stakeholders. It became clear that multi-agency collaboration was essential to supporting teachers and learners.

Overall, the findings reveal that a complex interaction of institutional, structural, and personal elements shapes inclusive education, which is not just about individual effort or classroom procedures. Although teachers' flexibility and agency are vital, their efforts are likely to be limited in the absence of sufficient institutional support, training, and resources. As a result, dedicated teachers and collaborative efforts from various educational levels are necessary for successful implementation. The following chapter expands on these observations by providing a summary of findings, critical analysis, and practical recommendations to promote inclusive education in South Africa.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive and critically engaged discussion of the research findings outlined in the previous chapter. It begins with a summary of the key findings before interpreting them through a theoretical framework, specifically Bronfenbrenner's Person–Process–Context–Time (PPCT) model. The findings are also examined in light of current literature and policy frameworks, such as the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014) and South Africa's Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). This chapter highlights the complex dynamics that influence inclusive education strategies in mainstream primary schools, particularly in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases, by integrating conceptual viewpoints with empirical observations.

Furthermore, the findings also demonstrated how the conditions of public and private schools differed, which affected the extent and consistency of inclusive education implementation. A critical analysis of the study's implications for teachers, school executives, legislators, and other stakeholders in education is also included in this chapter. It further outlines the study's limitations and offers practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at improving inclusive education practices in South African primary schools. The chapter concludes with recommendations that acknowledge these contextual nuances for future research to address the gaps identified and to build on the insights gathered through this study.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four key themes: teachers' understanding of inclusive education; strategies employed to support inclusion; barriers to effective implementation of inclusive education, and the role of support systems and stakeholder collaboration. Taken together, these themes illustrate a dynamic system in which teachers' understanding, strategies, barriers, and support mechanisms are interdependent. For example, teachers' conceptual clarity about inclusion directly influences their instructional strategies, while systemic barriers constrain these strategies despite teacher agency. Similarly, effective support systems can mediate the impact of barriers, highlighting the importance of coordinated interventions. This

synthesis aligns with the PPCT model, demonstrating that inclusive education outcomes emerge from complex interactions across individual, school, and community levels. The findings illustrate the potential as well as the ongoing challenges that teachers experience in their efforts to create inclusive learning environments.

Interestingly, contextual differences between private and public schools were found to have an impact. Public school teachers, who frequently face difficulties such as large class sizes, a lack of resources, and inactive support teams, have expressed their frustration with applying inclusive principles. On the other hand, teachers in private schools were better equipped to implement inclusive practices due to factors like smaller class sizes, more stable leadership, access to therapists, and parental involvement. The necessity of context-sensitive approaches to inclusive education policy and practice is further supported by these gaps.

6.2.1 Teachers' Understanding of Inclusive Education

While all teachers indicated some awareness of inclusive education, their interpretations of the concept varied significantly. For many, inclusion was equated with the integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (*FG2 Teacher 1; FG2 Teacher 2; FG3 Teacher 1*). Others, however, acknowledged a broader understanding that encompasses socioeconomic inequalities, language barriers, and other forms of learner diversity (*FG2 Teacher 2*). This variation mirrors the findings of Donohue and Bornman (2014) and Nel et al., (2016), who noted inconsistencies in how educators conceptualise inclusion.

The private school teachers in this study appeared to hold more expansive and theoretically informed understandings of inclusive education, likely due to more consistent access to training and institutional support. This fragmented understanding highlights the absence of a coherent conceptual framework for inclusive teaching in initial teacher education and professional development programs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Such gaps challenge the successful implementation of policy goals in everyday teaching practice, which is in line with the progressive objectives of South Africa's inclusive education policies, such as White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy.

This variation in understanding underscores the theoretical contribution of the study: the need for a coherent conceptual framework for inclusive education in South African teacher education. It also highlights the practical implication that professional development must be

context-sensitive, bridging gaps between teachers' intuitive practices and formal inclusive education principles.

6.2.2 Strategies Employed to Support Inclusion

Teachers described employing a range of strategies to support diverse learners. These included the use of visual aids, tactile resources, peer learning, flexible grouping, and integrating themes across the Life Skills curriculum to foster inclusion (*FG1 Teacher 3; FG1 Teacher 5; FG2 Teacher 1; FG2 Teacher 3; FG3 Teacher 1*). Such approaches reflect core principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which advocates for instructional flexibility to cater to diverse learner needs (Florian, 2019). Instead of receiving formal training, several teachers stated that these strategies were developed through intuition, peer interaction, or trial-and-error (*FG1 Teacher 6; FG3 Teacher 2*). This is in line with research by Walton et al. (2009), who said that although a significant percentage of South African teachers are committed and innovative, they frequently lack the official support they need to improve inclusive teaching strategies. Notably, the professional development of teachers in this area is limited by the lack of a specific inclusive education component in pre-service training programs and the restricted scope of focused in-service training (Net al., 2016).

Analytically, these findings reveal that proximal processes, teachers' interactions with learners, are central to fostering inclusion. Teachers' adaptive strategies, though often informal, demonstrate practical insights that can inform policy and professional development. This methodological contribution shows how qualitative approaches can capture context-specific innovations that may be overlooked in large-scale surveys.

6.2.3 Barriers to Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education

Teachers across all schools cited a number of issues that make inclusive education challenging. The three interconnected areas of teacher-related, school-related, and community-related elements can be used to group these difficulties. Emotional exhaustion, low confidence, and a lack of awareness about inclusive strategies were among the challenges faced by teachers (*FG3 Teacher 3; FG1 Teacher 2*). The responsibilities of teaching large, diverse classrooms without sufficient support left teachers feeling overwhelmed. These findings support those of Mahlo (2017) and Mamogobo (2023), who observe that in the South African teaching context, burnout and a lack of training continue to be issues.

Moreover, school-related barriers were among the most pressing. Overcrowded classrooms limited physical infrastructure, and inadequate access to teaching materials emerged as consistent themes (*FG1 Teacher 3; FG1 Teacher 6; FG3 Teacher 1; FG3 Teacher 3*). The lack of wheelchair-accessible facilities and insufficient assistive technology undermines efforts to accommodate learners with physical disabilities. These resource constraints reflect systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect schools in low-income communities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Furthermore, inclusive education initiatives are made more difficult by community-related issues such as poverty, low parental involvement, and psychological pressures experienced by learners. Teachers highlighted how trauma and hunger limit learners' ability to engage in productive class participation (*FG1 Teacher 2; FG3 Teacher 3*). These results support Mamogobo's (2023) claim that educational achievements are greatly influenced by community context, calling for more comprehensive intersectoral interventions.

The interconnection of teacher-, school-, and community-level barriers highlights the systemic nature of inclusion challenges. Reflection on these barriers indicates that policy goals alone are insufficient without aligned resources, leadership, and training. Practically, this suggests that interventions must be multi-layered, addressing individual teacher capacity as well as structural inequalities.

6.2.4 Barriers, Support Systems and Stakeholder Collaboration

The significance of collaboration amongst different stakeholders in promoting inclusive education was a recurring result. Although the functions of School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) differed somewhat, teachers discussed their role. With frequent case discussions, therapist referrals, and coordinated intervention plans, SBSTs appeared to be more successful in the private school context (*FG2 Teacher 2; FG3 Teacher 3*). Teachers in public schools, on the other hand, experienced inconsistent support and inconsistent interaction with District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) (*FG1 Teacher 4; FG1 Teacher 5*).

The limited implementation of the SIAS policy was a major concern. Although teachers were aware of its existence, few had received adequate training to implement it confidently. This reflects findings by Zwane and Malale (2018), who argue that while inclusive education policies are progressive in intent, their practical enactment remains inconsistent. Effective

inclusive education requires systemic coordination between teachers, support teams, families, and external professionals (Florian & Pantić, 2017; Walton, 2017).

Building on these findings, the next section offers targeted, actionable recommendations that address both classroom practices and broader support mechanisms needed to strengthen inclusive education implementation in South African primary schools.

These findings emphasize the critical role of systemic coordination in inclusion. Collaboration between teachers, SBSTs, DBSTs, and external specialists can compensate for contextual limitations and maximize the impact of teachers' strategies. This highlights both a theoretical contribution, supporting the PPCT model's assertion that context moderates processes, and a practical contribution: strengthening multi-agency collaboration is essential for sustainable inclusive practices.

6.3 Recommendations

This section offers practical, contextually based recommendations for improving the implementation and sustainability of inclusive education in South African primary schools, based on the study's findings. These recommendations respond not only to the challenges identified during data analysis but also to the strengths and promising practices demonstrated by participating teachers. To ensure a holistic and strategic approach, the recommendations are organised into five key focus areas: (1) teacher training and professional development, (2) parental and community engagement, (3) resource and infrastructure allocation, (4) leadership and policy alignment, and (5) collaborative and multi-agency support systems.

6.3.1 Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Development

The study revealed that, regardless of the limited formal training, several teachers used their initiative and peer support networks to implement inclusive practices. Strategies such as the use of visual aids, trial-and-error differentiation, and reflective practice were common among those showing commitment to inclusion. These community-based initiatives demonstrate both teacher agency and resilience.

Recommendation: Professional development initiatives should build on these existing strengths by recognising teacher-led innovation. The Department of Basic Education should partner with teacher training institutions to embed inclusive education in both pre-service and in-service training, while also facilitating communities of practice where teachers can share

and refine their classroom strategies. Such programmes should incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL), collaborative teaching, and context-responsive pedagogies to sustain and amplify existing inclusive efforts. Training models need to be adaptable enough to consider the unique characteristics of both private and public-school environments. Private schools could potentially be used as possible test grounds for inclusive practices currently in place, while public schools could employ mobile training teams or modular weekend programs.

6.3.2 Enhancing Parental and Community Involvement

While some teachers expressed concerns about limited parental engagement, others shared examples where collaboration with parents, particularly through individualized goal-setting, improved learner participation and academic outcomes. This shows that meaningful parent-school partnerships, when nurtured, can become valuable support structures for inclusion.

Recommendation: Schools should expand on successful parent engagement practices, such as co-developing learner goals, through structured parental involvement programmes. These may include dialogue sessions, informal learner profile discussions, and culturally responsive workshops. Building on current successes, schools should partner with community organisations and social workers to deepen this engagement, especially in cases where parents face socio-economic or psychosocial barriers.

6.3.3 Improving Access to Resources and Infrastructure

Teachers showed creative adaptability by supporting diverse learners with low-cost teaching aids, wall charts, and peer learning, despite resource constraints being mentioned as a barrier. Their innovative thinking and in-depth contextual knowledge are demonstrated by their capacity to improvise in settings with limited resources.

Recommendation: The Department of Education and provincial authorities should invest in teacher-driven resource innovation by supplying adaptable, low-cost materials that can complement existing classroom strategies. A dedicated Inclusive Education Resource Fund should prioritise not only hardware (e.g., assistive devices) but also support the co-creation of context-relevant teaching aids based on what teachers are already using effectively. Support initiatives should focus on public institutions with the largest learner-teacher ratios because public school teachers faced more resource limitations. Conversely, through cross-sector

collaborations, private schools could potentially be encouraged to share inclusive resources and efficient, low-cost teaching approaches.

6.3.4 Promoting Leadership and Policy Alignment at School Level

Some teachers reported significant support from SMTs and principals in managing referrals, engaging SBSTs, and promoting classroom inclusiveness, irrespective of the inconsistent leadership that was identified as a concern. The examples suggest that practices are more consistent and sustainable when leadership adopts inclusive values.

Recommendation: Leadership development programmes should showcase and scale existing examples of effective inclusive leadership. SMTs and principals should be equipped not only with policy knowledge (e.g., SIAS) but also with tools for building inclusive school cultures. Peer learning among school leaders, through cluster-based support sessions, can ensure practical, policy-aligned implementation that reinforces teacher efforts.

6.3.5 Building a Collaborative and Multi-Agency Support System

The study identified several instances in which learner support was positively impacted by collaboration with therapists, social workers, and SBSTs. Particularly for students with psycho-social problems, schools with visiting specialists (such as psychologists and occupational therapists) and active SBSTs demonstrated a more effective integrated approach to inclusion.

Recommendation: Building on these working models should strengthen multi-agency collaboration. Formalizing referral procedures and fostering ongoing communication between SBSTs, DBSTs, and external specialists is crucial for schools. Scaling coordinated strategies for intervention across contexts can be facilitated by the establishment of district-level Inclusive Support Hubs, which are modelled after schools where collaboration is already successful. Targeted capacity-building is essential in public schools, where SBSTs have been shown to be understaffed or inactive. In the meanwhile, district-wide planning and mentorship programs might be modelled after private schools with effective multidisciplinary teams.

Each of these recommendations responds directly to findings from the research. They aim to bridge the gap between policy and practice, equipping schools, teachers, families, and

policymakers with actionable steps toward building a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive educational landscape.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

A small sample of Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers, participated in this study, and as such, the findings may not be generalisable to all schools across the province or country. The research relied primarily on focus group interviews, which, while rich in depth, were based on self-reported experiences rather than classroom observations or triangulated data from other stakeholders such as learners or parents. Additionally, the scope and duration of data collection were shaped by time constraints and institutional access protocols.

Importantly, these limitations must be understood within the context of the considerable pressure and workload that teachers experience daily. Many participants contributed to this study outside of their teaching responsibilities, often during breaks or after school hours. Despite these contextual constraints, the study successfully met its aims by capturing valuable insights into teachers' lived experiences and practices related to inclusive education, and it contributes meaningfully to ongoing discourse on inclusive schooling in South Africa.

Despite these limitations, the study provides methodological and practical contributions by capturing teachers' perspectives in depth, highlighting context-specific strategies, and identifying systemic barriers. These insights remain valuable for informing future research and policy interventions in inclusive education.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

To have a more representative picture of how inclusive education is implemented across various settings, it is of paramount importance that future researchers engage with a wider range of mainstream schools throughout different provinces. Rural schools and understudied settings, including farm schools, should receive particular attention since they could present unique inclusion possibilities as well as challenges. Furthermore, in order to present a more thorough picture of inclusive education, future research could incorporate the viewpoints of learners, parents, and school officials. The area would also benefit immensely from longitudinal research that examines the long-term effects of professional development on inclusive practices.

Future research could also explore longitudinal impacts of professional development on inclusive practices, providing evidence on sustainability and effectiveness. Additionally,

incorporating perspectives from learners, parents, and school leadership would enrich understanding of inclusive education as a system-wide phenomenon, thereby building on the methodological and practical contributions of this study.

6.6 Conclusion

The study has shed light on inclusive education's benefits and limitations in South African primary schools. Although Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers displayed a desire to embrace inclusiveness, their efforts were often limited by a lack of institutional support, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate training. To fulfil the needs of their learners, several teachers applied innovative, contextually sensitive strategies in spite of these challenges.

Theoretical insights provided by Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model highlight the importance of understanding inclusive education as a dynamic system influenced by several interrelated variables rather than as a collection of isolated acts. The findings also support earlier studies that have called for a closer alignment between policy goals and realities at the school level (e.g., Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Mamogobo, 2023). Robust training programs, flexible support structures, adequate resources, and an ongoing commitment to equity are all necessary for a truly inclusive educational system.

Overall, this study contributes theoretically by applying the PPCT model to understand inclusion as a dynamic, interrelated system; methodologically by using qualitative focus groups to capture teachers' lived experiences; and practically by generating actionable, context-sensitive recommendations. By linking teacher agency, school structures, and policy frameworks, the findings provide a roadmap for enhancing inclusive education in South African primary schools, demonstrating how theory, research, and practice can inform each other.

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Senate Plagiarism Declaration

School of: Human and Community Development

Declaration by Students

I Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe (Student number: 1893664) am a student registered for MEd (Educational Psychology) in the year 2023. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
- I understand that the University of the Witwatersrand may take disciplinary action against me if there is a belief that this is not my own unaided work or that I have failed to acknowledge the source of the ideas or words in my writing.

Signature: 

Date:

APPENDICES

Summary of Themes and Exemplar Quotations

Table 3: Summary of Themes, Codes, and Participant Quotations

Theme	Codes	Participant Quotations
Understanding of Inclusive Education	Varied definitions Lack of formal training Inclusive practices based on instinct or experience	“Inclusive education is when a teacher gives all the learners the opportunity to express themselves...” – (FG1 Teacher 1) “I have not yet been trained in inclusive education, but I know about the concept.” – (FG1 Teacher 3) “Inclusive education is for special children that have disabilities and cannot cope in a normal school setting.” – (FG2 Teacher 1)
Barriers to Implementation	Overcrowded classrooms Lack of resources Lack of parental support Inadequate infrastructure	“My register class has 75 kids in it...” – (FG1 Teacher 3) “Did you even see the toilets that the learners have to use?” – (FG1 Teacher 4) “Parents here at this school do not even care about their children’s education.” – (FG1 Teacher 2)
Teacher Strategies	Use of visual aids Differentiated instruction	“I love using colourful pictures and charts with my grade 3’s.” – (FG1 Teacher 3)

	Peer support Integration of subjects	“We use visual aids... charts and drawings, sometimes.” – (FG3 Teacher 1) “We create questions from different subjects.” – (FG3 Teacher 2)
Support Systems and Collaboration	SBST and DBST involvement External professionals Teamwork among staff	“I am part of the SBST committee, and we have developed systems...” – (FG2 Teacher 2) “We also have a psychologist who comes here once a week.” – (FG2 Teacher 3) “The teachers here have good relationships among each other...” – (FG2 Teacher 1)
Parental Involvement	Limited engagement Denial of learner difficulties Need for collaboration	“Parents do not even bother to pack him lunch.” – (FG1 Teacher 2) “Some parents are in denial of their children’s problems.” – (FG 3 Teacher 3) “Parents solidify that idea [education] to their children.” – (FG2 Teacher 1)



Appendix A: Participant Information Focus Groups

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe and I am a Masters student in the Psychology Department at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education, under the supervision of Dr Anwynne Kern. The aim of this research project is to explore the strategies teachers use in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South African primary schools.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in a focus group discussion. This activity will involve a single focus group interview which will take place at the primary school and will take around 90 minutes to 2 hours. With your permission, I would also like to record the focus group interview using an audio recording device. This data will be stored safely on a password-protected laptop. Only the researchers, Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe, and Dr Anwynne Kern will have access to the data. During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including answers to a demographic questionnaire.

There will be no personal costs for you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to, with no penalties. The focus group interview will be completely confidential, and I will not be asking for your name. The information you give to me will be held securely in my password secure laptop and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research

report. The data may be used in future studies provided the researchers obtain their own ethical clearance.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written as a research report. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe

Researcher:

Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe, 1893664@students.wits.ac.za, Contact No: 063 819 7563/
065 302 1213

Supervisor:

Dr Anwynne Kern, Anwynne.Kern@wits.ac.za.



Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of project: Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive on education.

Name of researcher: Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe

I,, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree with the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
--	-----	----

I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
--	-----	----

I agree that the focus group may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
---	-----	----

I agree that direct quotations from the focus group may be used by the researcher in their research report. YES NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report. YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my focus group (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on. YES NO

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____



Appendix C: Confidentiality Agreement

Consent Form

Title of research project: Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive on education.

Researcher: Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe

As a member of the focus group, I understand that I may have access to confidential information about the research study and other teachers in the group. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibility to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

1. I understand that names and any other personal information about the research study and other teachers in the group are completely confidential.
2. I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
3. I understand that all information about the study or participants (teachers) obtained or accessed by me as a member of the focus group is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons any of this information.
4. I agree to notify the researcher immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or the part of another person.

Signature of participant

Date

Printed name

Signature of researcher

Date

Printed name



Appendix D: Biographical Questionnaire

Biographical Questionnaire

Please tick the appropriate option below

1. Teaching experience (number of years):

2. Age range:

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

60-65

3. Qualifications:

Certificate

Diploma

Degree

Honours

Masters

Doctorate

4. Current position:

Teacher

HOD

Deputy principal

Principal

5. Which grades do you teach?
 6. How many learners do you have in a classroom?
 7. Do you have learners with learning barriers in your classroom?
 8. Have you received any training on inclusive education?
-



Appendix E: Focus Group Schedule

Focus Group Schedule

1. What do you understand about the concept of inclusion in a school setting?
2. What is inclusive education?
3. What do you understand about the concept of 'barriers to learning'?
4. How can you address barriers to learning?
5. What are the benefits of inclusive education in primary schools?
6. What are the strategies you tried to use to implement inclusive education successfully?
7. Which of those strategies have proved to be successful?
8. To what degree do schoolteachers in South Africa believe that all students with disabilities should be educated together with students without disabilities?
9. How do you consider professional development in teaching students with learning and physical difficulties important?
10. What are your prioritised professional development needs regarding special education knowledge and services?
11. What resources/materials would South African schoolteachers need to facilitate the successful learning of all in their classrooms?



Appendix F: Letter of Permission to the School

1144, Maseloane, Zone 1,

Ga-Rankuwa,

Pretoria,

0208

The principal

Gauteng Department of Education

City of Tshwane

To whom it may concern

Permission to conduct research.

My name is Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe and I am an Educational Psychology Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am engaged in a research project in primary schools as a requirement towards the fulfilment of my qualification. The title of my research study is 'Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education.'

I am therefore requesting permission to conduct my research at your school. The study will be conducted in the form of a focus group. The study requires one teacher in each grade in the foundation phase and the intermediate phase to participate. The teachers will be required

to complete a demographic questionnaire. The focus group interview will take place at the convenient time of the teachers. To ensure confidentiality, the name of your school and that of the teachers will not be revealed in my research report. If you wish to see the report, I will be glad to make it available to you.

Your school's participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point and there will be no penalties. For further information about the study, please contact me on, email address: feliciasekgothe@gmail.com, 0653021213.

Yours Sincerely

Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe

Appendix G – Gauteng Department of Education Research Request

2022/2023 GDE Research Request



GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For admin. Use only:

Ref. no.:

Enquiries: 011 3550775/1379

Gumani Mketuni/ Busi Mchunu

2022/2023 GDE RESEARCH REQUEST FORM

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN INSTITUTIONS AND/OR OFFICES OF THE GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER

1.1	Details of the Researcher
a) Surname and Initials:	Sekgothe AF
b) First Name/s:	Amogelang Felicia
c) Title (Prof/Dr/Mr./Mrs./Ms.):	Ms
d) Student Number:	1893664
e) SA ID Number:	9803110523089

<i>f) Work permit no. (If not SA citizen)</i>	
---	--

1.2	Private Contact Details	
<i>a. Home Address</i>		<i>c. Postal Address (if different)</i>
1108 Mothotlung		
Brits		
<i>b. Postal Code: 0268</i>		<i>d. Postal Code: 0268</i>
<i>e. Tel:</i>		<i>f. Cell: 0653021213/0638197563</i>
<i>g. Fax:</i>		<i>h. E-mail: feliciasekgothe@gmail.com</i>

1. PURPOSE & DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

2.1	Purpose of the Research (Place a cross where appropriate)	
	<i>Undergraduate Study – Self</i>	
	<i>Postgraduate Study – Self</i>	X
	<i>Private Company/Agency – Commissioned by Provincial Government or Department</i>	
	<i>Private Research by Independent Researcher</i>	
	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>	
	<i>National Department of Education</i>	
	<i>Commissions and Committees</i>	
	<i>Independent Research Agencies</i>	
	<i>Statutory Research Agencies</i>	
	<i>Higher Education Institutions only</i>	
2.2	Full title of Thesis / Dissertation / Research Project	
Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education.		

2.3	Value of Research to Education (Attach Research Proposal)	
The primary aim of this research is to explore the strategies teachers use in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South African primary schools. In so doing, future research or training may use the identified strategies in professional development for individuals working in education settings.		
2.4		Date
<i>a. <u>Estimated</u> date of completion of research in GDE Institutions</i>		September 2023
<i>b. <u>Estimated</u> date of submission of Research Report /Thesis/Dissertation and Research Summary to GDE:</i>		March 2024
2.5	Student and Postgraduate Enrolment Particulars	
<i>a. Name of institution where enrolled:</i>		University of Witwatersrand
<i>b. Degree / Qualification:</i>		Master of Education (Educational Psychology)
<i>c. Faculty and Discipline / Area of Study:</i>		Psychology
<i>d. Name of Supervisor / Promoter:</i>		Dr Anwynne Kern
2.6	Employer (or state Unemployed / or a Full Time Student):	

a. Name of Organization:	University of the Witwatersrand
b. Position in Organization:	Full-time Student
c. Head of Organization:	Dr Carol Long
d. Street Address:	1 Jan Smuts Avenue
	Braamfontein
e. Postal Code:	2000
f. Telephone Number (Code + Ext):	
g. Fax Number:	
h. E-mail address:	feliciasekgothe@gmail.com

2.7	PERSAL Number (GDE employees only)
------------	---

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

2. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD/S

(Please indicate by placing a cross in the appropriate block whether the following modes would be adopted)

2.1 Questionnaire/s (If Yes, supply copies of each to be used)

YES	×	NO	
------------	---	-----------	--

2.2 Interview/s (If Yes, provide copies of each schedule)

YES		NO	×
------------	--	-----------	---

2.3 Use of official documents

YES		NO	X
<i>If Yes, please specify the document/s: Code of Conduct</i>			

2.4 Workshop/s / Group Discussions (If Yes, Supply details)

YES	×	NO	
Focus group interview with 5 teachers			

2.5 Standardized Tests (e.g., Psychometric Tests)

YES		NO	×
<i>If Yes, please specify the test/s to be used and provide a copy/ies</i>			

3. INSTITUTIONS TO BE INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

3.1 **TYPE** and **NUMBER** of Institutions (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside all types of institutions to be researched)

INSTITUTIONS	Write NUMBER here
<i>Primary Schools</i> ×	3
<i>Secondary Schools</i>	
<i>ABET Centres</i>	
<i>ECD Centres</i>	

<i>LSEN Schools</i>	
<i>Further Education & Training Institutions</i>	
<i>Districts and/or Head Office</i>	

3.2 Name/s of institutions to be approached for research (Please complete on a separate sheet if space is found to be insufficient).

Name/s of Institution/s
Kwa-Phalo Primary School
Holy Family
Mpumalanga Primary School

3.3 Districts where the study is to be conducted. (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside the relevant district/s)

District/s

<i>Ekurhuleni North</i>		<i>Ekurhuleni South</i>	
<i>Gauteng East</i>		<i>Gauteng North</i>	
<i>Gauteng West</i>		<i>Johannesburg Central</i>	X
<i>Johannesburg East</i>		<i>Johannesburg North</i>	
<i>Johannesburg South</i>		<i>Johannesburg West</i>	
<i>Sedibeng East</i>		<i>Sedibeng West</i>	
<i>Tshwane North</i>		<i>Tshwane South</i>	
<i>Tshwane West</i>			

If Head Office/s (Please indicate Directorate/s)

3.4 The approximate number of learners to be involved per school (Please indicate the number by gender: M- Male and F- Female)

Grade	<i>ECD</i>		<i>1</i>		<i>2</i>		<i>3</i>		<i>4</i>		<i>5</i>		<i>6</i>	
<i>Gender</i>	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F

<i>Number</i>														
---------------	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Grade	7		8		9		10		11		12	
<i>Gender</i>	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
<i>Number</i>												

3.5 The approximate number of ECD Practitioners/educators/officials involved in the study (Please indicate the number in the relevant column)

<i>Type of staff</i>	<i>ECD Practitioner /s</i>	<i>HODs</i>	<i>Deputy Principal/s</i>	<i>Principal/s</i>	<i>Office-Based Officials</i>
<i>Number</i>	18			3	

4.6 Letters of Consent (Attach copies of Consent letters to be used for Principal, SGB and all teachers . For learners also include parental consent letter)

4.7 Are the participants to be involved in groups or individually?

<i>Groups</i>	×	<i>Individually</i>	×
---------------	---	---------------------	---

4.8 Average period of time each participant will be involved in the test or other.

research activities (Please indicate time in minutes for ALL participants)

Participant/s	Activity	Time
6 teachers per school	Focus group	90 minutes – 2 hours

4.9 Time of day that you propose to conduct your research.

<u><i>Before</i></u> school hours		<i>During school hours (for <u>limited</u> observation only)</i>		<u><i>After School</i></u> <i>Hours</i>	×
-----------------------------------	--	--	--	--	---

SEE Condition 5.4 on Page 7

4.10 School term/s during which the research would be undertaken.

<i>First Term</i>		<i>Second Term</i>	×	<i>Third Term</i>	×
-------------------	--	------------------------	---	-----------------------	---

5. CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE

Permission may be granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and permission may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:

- 1) *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned, the Principal/s and the chairperson/s of the School Governing Body (SGB.) must be presented with a copy of this letter.*
- 2) *The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and co-operation of the GDE District officials, principals, SGBs, teachers, ECD Practitioners, parents, and learners involved. Participation is voluntary and additional remuneration will not be paid.*

- 3) *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded by the end of the **THIRD** quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
- 4) *Because of COVID 19, pandemic researchers can **ONLY** collect data online, telephonically, or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The letter of approval will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.*
- 5) *The Researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via Fax, email, or telephonically with the Principal.*
- 6) *Research may only be conducted **BEFORE or AFTER** school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal and/or Director must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
- 7) *Items 3 and 6 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
- 8) *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written consent from the SGB/s; principal/s, educator/s, ECD Practitioners, parents, and learners, as applicable, before commencing with research.*
- 9) *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilizing his/her research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones, and should not depend on the goodwill of the institution/s, staff, and/or the office/s visited for supplying such resources.*
- 10) *All research conducted in GDE Institutions is anonymous. The names and personal details of the GDE officials, schools, ECD Centres, principals, parents, teachers, ECD Practitioners and learners that participate in the study may neither be asked nor appear in the research title, report/thesis/ dissertation, or GDE Research Summary.*

- 11) *On successful completion of the study, the researcher must supply the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management, with electronic copies of the Research Report, Thesis, Dissertation as well as a Research Summary (on the GDE Summary template). Failure to submit these documents may result in future permission being withheld, or a fine imposed for BOTH the Researcher and the Supervisor.*
- 12) *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school, ECD Centres, and/or a district/head office level, the Director/s and school/s concerned must also be supplied with a GDE Summary.*
- 13) *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings, and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*

6. DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

6.1 *I declare that all statements made by myself in this application are true and accurate.*

6.2 *I have read, understand and accept ALL the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and I undertake to abide by them. I understand that failure to comply may result in permission being withdrawn, further permission being withheld, a fine imposed and legal action may be taken against me. This agreement is binding.*

6.3 *I promise once I have completed my studies, (before graduation) or on successful project completion, to submit electronic copies of my Research Report / Thesis / Dissertation as well as GDE Summary on the GDE template sent to me with my approval letter or found on www.education.gpg.gov.za*

Signature:	
Date:	26/03/2023
7. DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR / LECTURER / PROMOTER	
7.1 <i>I declare that: (Name of <u>Researcher</u>) ...Miss Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe.....</i>	
7.2 <i>is enrolled at the institution to which the undersigned is attached.</i>	
7.3 <i>The questionnaires / structured interviews/tests meet the criteria of:</i> ● <i>Educational Accountability.</i> ● <i>Proper Research Design;</i> ● <i>Sensitivity towards Participants;</i> ● <i>Correct Content and Terminology;</i> ● <i>Acceptable Grammar;</i> ● <i>Absence of Non-essential / Superfluous items;</i> ● <i>Ethical clearance</i>	
7.4 <i>The student/researcher has agreed to ALL the conditions of conducting research in GDE Institutions and will abide by them.</i>	
7.5 <i>I will ensure that after successful completion of the research degree/project/study an electronic copy of the Research Report / Thesis / Dissertation and a Research Summary (on the GDE template) will be sent to the GDE. Failure to submit the Research Report,</i>	

<i>Thesis, Dissertation, and Research Summary may result in: permission being withheld from BOTH the student and the Supervisor in the future and a fine may be imposed.</i>	
7.6 Surname of the Supervisor:	Kern
7.7 First Name/s of the Supervisor :	Anwynne
7.8 Title:	Dr
7.9 Institution / Organisation:	University of Witwatersrand
7.10 Faculty / Department:	Psychology
7.11 Telephone:	
7.12 E-mail address:	Anwynne.Kern@wits.ac.za
7.13 Signature:	
7.14 Date:	2 April 2023

ANNEXURE A: GROUP RESEARCH

This information must be completed by every researcher/student/field worker who will be visiting GDE Institutions for research purposes, besides the main researcher who applied and the Supervisor/ lecturer / Promoter of the research.

By signing this declaration, the researcher/students / fieldworker accepts the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and undertakes to abide by them.

Supervisor/ Promoter / Lecturer's Surname and Name...Kern.....

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHERS / STUDENTS:

Surname & Initials	Name	Tel	Cell	Email address	Signature

N.B. This form (and all other relevant documentation where available) may be completed and forwarded electronically to Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, please copy (cc) ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za. The last 2 pages of this document must, however, have the original signatures of both the researcher and his/her supervisor or promoter. It should be scanned and emailed, posted, or hand-delivered (in a sealed envelope) to Mr. Gumani Mukatuni, 7th Floor Marshal Street, Johannesburg. All inquiries about the status of research requests can be directed to Mr. Gumani Mukatuni and/or Ms. Busi Mchunu on tel. no. 011 355 0775/1379.

Other Information:

- i) On receipt of all emails, confirmation of receipt will be sent to the researcher. The researcher will be contacted via email if any documents are missing or if any additional information is needed.
- ii) If the GDE Research request submitted is approved, a GDE Research Approval letter will be sent by email to the researcher as well as the Supervisor / Lecturer / Promoter. Please ensure that your email address is correct.
- iii) After successful completion of your research, please send your Research Reports / Thesis / Dissertations and GDE Research Summaries (on the template provided to both the Researcher and the Supervisor with the GDE Research Approval letter) to the same addresses as the GDE Research Request documents were sent to, namely: Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, Busi.Mchunu@gauteng.gov.za and copy Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za and ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za.



UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND
JOHANNESBURG

Appendix H: Gauteng Department of Education Research Approval Letter



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

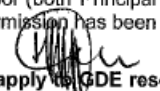
8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	04 August 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/316
Name of Researcher:	Sekgothe AF
Address of Researcher:	1108 Mothotlung
	Brits
Telephone Number:	0653021213/0638197563
Email address:	feliciasekgothe@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education.
Name of University:	Wits
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	3 Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Johannesburg Central

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

 04/08/2023
The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za



Appendix I: Ethics Application Form

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Ethics Application Form for Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical)

(SCHOOL ETHICS COMMITTEES: Revised January 2022)

Instructions

1. This form must be completed by Honours (4th year) and Masters by Coursework and Research Report students who require ethics clearance, or for ethics clearance for coursework activities as part of a taught degree. Note that staff non-degree applications, PhD and research Masters students must complete the online form.
 2. Completed applications must be submitted to the relevant School Ethics Committee.
 3. Applications may be submitted as hard or soft (electronic) copies, but the first page of the application must contain the signatures of the student and supervisor. Final revised versions must be in soft (electronic) copy as all documentation will be archived.
 4. Incomplete or handwritten applications will **NOT** be considered, including where signatures are missing.
 5. Necessary supporting documents (e.g., *Participant Information Sheet*, *Consent Form*, copies of instruments, permission letters, etc), must be provided.
-

SECTION A

Complete this checklist to show what documents you have submitted and that you agree with the conditions of application.

☒	Completed <i>Ethics Application Form</i> .
☒	Copy of the <i>Research proposal</i> .
☒	Copy of proposed <i>Research instruments</i> (e.g., questionnaires/interview schedules).
☒	<i>Participant Information Sheets</i> (for each different sample group and/or instrument used).
☒	<i>Consent forms</i> (for each different sample group and/or instrument used).
☒	<i>Relevant permission letters</i> if required (from, e.g., company's HR department, National authorities such as Government departments, etc.) - consult the <i>Guidance on the Use of Permission Letters</i> document.

SIGNATURES (REQUIRED)

Declaration: We, the signatories, declare that all information on this form is correct and that we will strive to maintain the highest ethical standards in this research at all times, according to disciplinary and university expectations, recognising that ethical practice in research is always a continuing process.

I recognise that it is my responsibility to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to Guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand, according to any laws and/or legal frameworks that may apply, and according to the norms and expectations of my discipline. In preparing this Application for Ethics Clearance form, I have consulted the ***Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application/Non-Medical*** (available on this website <https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/>). In receiving ethics clearance, I agree to abide by the conditions of data collection as outlined in the *Guidelines* document.

☒ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, the researcher and supervisor of this project undertake to ensure that any amendments to this project that are required by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) and School Ethics Committees are made before the project commences.

	Date	Name	Signature*
Applicant	27 March 2023	Amogelang Felicia Sekgothe	
Supervisor		Dr. Anwynne Kern	

*electronic signatures are permitted but there are requirements governing this – please see *Guidelines for Applicants* document.

SECTION B

1. Summary of risk categories of this research project	
1.1 Does this project involve human participants? <i>If NO, an ethics waiver may be appropriate. Please complete the Ethics Waiver application form</i>	☒ Yes ☐ No
1.2 I have read and understood the risk categories table. <i>Applicants must have read the table of risk level category definitions on the final page of this document. This table is also available on the University Ethics Committee webpage.</i>	☒ Yes ☐ No

1.3 The applicant must tick the box for the category that best applies to this project:

Risk category	Tick the appropriate box
No risk	
Minimal risk	X
Low risk	
Medium risk	
High risk	

Medium or high-risk applications must be submitted to the School Ethics Committee to the University of

1.4 Are all of the participants selected as **experts**?

See the Guidelines for Applicants document for the definition of an expert

☐ Yes ☒ No

1.5 Will human participant research involve **vulnerable categories**?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If **YES** state which ones:

If **YES**, how will **existing vulnerabilities** among research participants be addressed?

1.6 Does this research expose either the participant(s) or the researcher(s) to any **potential risks or harm** to which they would not otherwise be exposed?

☐

Yes

☒

No

If **YES**, how will **potential risks or harm** be addressed?

See the Guidelines for Applicants document for guidance on a distress protocol, if needed

NB: Vulnerability is context specific. The term 'vulnerable categories' includes, among others, children under 18, orphans, prisoners, persons with cognitive or communication disorders, people who are traumatised or currently in traumatic situations. Vulnerable categories do not necessarily include poor or marginalised communities, older people, women, people with disabilities (unless it results in diminished capacity to give informed consent). Not all research involving 'vulnerable categories' is Medium or High-Risk research: here vulnerability must be considered in terms of the nature of the research and the context in which the research is carried out. Where necessary, include details of steps to be taken to facilitate data collection across language barriers (e.g., interpretation or translation).

2. Researcher's personal data

Your family name:

Your first name: Amogelang

☐

Mr

☒

Ms

☐

Other:

Title:

School:

Psychology – Human & Community Development

Your student number:

1893664

Your email:	1893664@students.wits.ac.za
Your tel number:	065 302 1213/063 819 7563
Name of supervisor(s):	Dr Anwynne Kern
Your supervisor's Wits email:	Anwynne.Kern@wits.ac.za
Your supervisor's Wits tel number:	Anwynne.Kern@wits.ac.za

2.1 Is this application for a multi-student project (i.e., several students working on exactly the same topic under the same supervisor)?

☐

Yes

☒

No

If **YES**: List the names and student numbers of additional students working on this project: N/A

3. Research project

3.1 Title of research project: Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

3.2 Is this research for degree purposes?

☒

Yes

☐

No

If so, for what degree?

☐

Honours

☒

Masters (research
report)

☐

Other (specify) _____

3.3 Has the proposal been **approved** by the relevant School or Faculty higher degrees committee or other unit?

☐

Yes

☐

No

☒

Submitted and pending

3.4 Will any **additional researchers** be covered by this ethics protocol (including translators/interpreters, research assistants, etc. but not including supervisors)?

☐

Yes

☒

No

If yes, please specify their names, affiliations, and roles:

3.5 What are the **aims and objectives** of the research? (Please be specific) The primary aim of this research is to explore the strategies teachers attempt to use, or use, in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South African primary schools.

3.6 Summary or abstract of the research (100 words maximum)

Give a brief outline of the research plan such that reviewers can understand what the study is about, who the participants are, and how you will collect the data.

This qualitative research seeks to explore strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South African schools. The study will employ a qualitative exploratory research design. Data collection of this study will be collected through focus groups, and the data will be analysed through thematic analysis. Ethical considerations before and throughout the study will be adhered to. Informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, storing and reporting data are examples of issues included in the specific ethical standards.

3.7 Do you have any **financial or material interests or a relationship** associated with your research participants or with the organisations that you will be involved with in your research? (such as a familial relationship; lecturer/student relationship; collegial relationship; employer/employee relationship)

☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, please explain how you will **manage any existing or potential conflicts of interest and potential coercion** during recruitment and data collection, if applicable:

4. Formal permission

4.1 Where will the research be carried out? (Please give a specific location and /or the names of specific organisations or institutions)

At two different primary schools in Johannesburg.

4.2 Has appropriate **formal permission been obtained**, if required (e.g., employer, government department, landowner, etc.)?

☐

Yes (attached)

☐

Not
required

☒

Pending (must be supplied before ethics clearance can be given)

NB: Obtaining permission is often necessary when conducting research *within the premises* of a particular site such as an ethnographic study of the functioning of a supermarket or a school, or the way staff interact with clients in a clinic or how members of a closed social media group interact/post on a specific topic. Permission is also required to use data from personal communication with participants or experts. Please note that any research done on Wits University campuses with employees or students of the University requires formal permission from the Registrar. Please read the detailed guidelines on Permission Letters from the Ethics website <https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/>

5. How will data on human research participants be collected (instruments, methods, procedures)? (tick all applicable boxes) (**NB:** All applicable instruments must be attached to the application)

☒	Hard copy questionnaires or diagnostic tests, etc.
☐	Online instruments (e.g. questionnaires, surveys)
☐	Individual interviews (e.g., structured, semi-structured, etc.)
☐	Personal communication (e.g., email or informal conversation with experts)
☒	Group interviews (e.g., seminar/discussion groups, focus groups, etc.)
☐	Ethnographic observation, participant observation, other informal descriptive, and/or interactive methods (you <u>must explain</u> the ethnographic methods in the box below)
☐	Autoethnography
☐	Community-based methods or techniques such as drama workshops, community theatre, training workshops, participant rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal, etc. (you <u>must explain</u> in the box below)
☐	Research on/in therapeutic or counselling contexts
☐	Putting on your own exhibition / public performance
☐	Observation of public performances, and/or public behaviour observation
☐	Photography
☐	Video recording
☒	Audio recording (e.g., of interviews)
☐	Use of data from social media
☐	Other research methods or techniques (you <u>must explain</u> in the box below)

Explanation of **research methods** specified above, and / or explanation of any other **research methods that are not listed** above:

I will use a biographical questionnaire. The biographical questions (Appendix D) is meant to collect background data of the teachers. This data includes the age of the teachers, working experience, current position, number of learners in class, etc.

Focus groups are group discussions guided by a researcher, who will have instructions to keep the group focused. The purpose of the focus group is to encourage interaction among the teachers and to allow for the unfolding of different themes (facts, opinions, etc.).

A discussion on the strategies employed, or attempted to be employed, by the teachers to successfully implement inclusive education within the classroom or the school, will be facilitated by the researcher, and will be audio-recorded. The audio will be recorded using a voice recording device. The audio will be stored safely, and later, then transcribed.

6. Who will the research participants be?

6.1 List the **different** participant groups (e.g., experts, community members, key informants) that you will be working with in your project:

Teachers

6.2 Description of these participant groups, including **age range** and **sample size**, for **each group**:

Three focus groups each consisting of foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers, from grade one to grade six , all between ages of 30 years to 65 years.

7. How will informed consent be obtained?

7.1 How will **potential participants** be **identified / selected / recruited**?

Potential Participants will be identified through purposive sampling, at schools which I have identified to conduct this study at. Once permission has been granted to me by the school principals to conduct my research, I will provide the schoolteachers participating, detailed information about the study. This information about the study will be communicated in the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) which I will issue to the teachers of the identified primary schools. Through the issuing of this information, I intend to make certain that the teachers have understood and agree to the information, only then can request them to sign the informed consent.

7.2 Will any **incentives** be offered to participants?

(**NB:** it is NOT compulsory to offer any incentives. Please note for any curricula incentives, permission is required from the Registrar's office and DVC. Fiscal incentives are limited to R150 – see *Guidelines* document)

☐

Yes

☒

No

If **YES**, please explain:

7.3 How will informed consent be obtained?

☒	Formal (Signed form)	☐	Informal (e.g., verbal)	☐	Other (e.g., online survey)
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If you cannot obtain **formal written consent**, explain why:

NB: Attach *Participant Information Sheets* and *Consent Forms* for each sample group (please label these carefully), and/or other related materials. It is essential that participants in research be fully informed (irrespective of the method used) and then be able to agree on this basis to participate in the research.

8. Protecting participant identities

8.1 Can **confidentiality** of participants' responses be guaranteed throughout the **data collection** process?

☐	Yes	☒	No
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8.2 Can **anonymity** be guaranteed throughout the **data collection** process?

☐	Yes	☒	No
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8.3 Can **anonymity** be guaranteed in **resulting research reports** or publications?

☒	Yes	☐	No
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8.4 Explain how you will manage issues of **anonymity and confidentiality** in your project (What will participants be told in this regard?): Discussions will take place in quiet private room that will not be accessible by intruders. Transcribing will be done in a private room away from any intruders. I will also make use of earphone when listening to the recordings This is to protect the confidentiality of the information.

I will assign pseudonym names to participants in place of their names. This is to maintain the anonymity of their participation.

Definitions: *Confidentiality*: that any information considered confidential by the participant or researcher will not be disclosed to others. *Anonymity throughout the data collection process*: that you as the researcher will not be able to identify the participant. *Anonymity in the resulting reports*: that the participant's name/identifying data will not be disclosed and that anyone reading your results will not be able to identify the participant. **NB**: While confidentiality may be desirable, it cannot be guaranteed in, for example, focus groups, or ethnographic observations. Similarly, anonymity should be preserved in questionnaires, but cannot be offered in workshop methodologies, focus group research, etc. Participants should have the right to remain anonymous in the final report, and this must be respected in handling of all data relating to them. Participants need to be informed about these issues through the *Participant Information Sheet*.

9. Protection of data during and after the research

9.1 How will the data be protected while the research is **in progress**? (This includes how the identities of participants will be protected). Transcribed data will be stored on a password secure laptop. The audio recording will also be stored in a password secure recording device that only I have access to and will be deleted after the audio has been transcribed.

9.2 What is to be done with the research data **after completion** of the project? Please note that usage of data should be consistent with what is indicated to participants in the *Participant Information Sheet* and *Consent Form*.

☐	Stored in archives (specify below)	☐	Stored in online database (specify below)
X	Stored in password protected computer	☐	Stored in digital form with all identifying features removed
X	Stored for future secondary analysis	☐	Destroyed after ... years (insert numbers of years, if applicable)

Please specify which **archives or online databases** will be used (if applicable):

NB: 'Raw' or unprocessed data, especially **where the identity or personal data of research participants is included, must be safeguarded**, and preserved from unauthorised access. Data may be destroyed after use, but **preservation in an archive or personal collection** may also be

appropriate, desirable or even essential. For instance, datasets that contain **historically important information** or information that relates to **national heritage** must be preserved and should be placed in a public archive where possible and appropriate. An **online database** could include secure databases such as REDCAP, or open access databases (see loadb.org for example). All data should be preserved in a way that **respects the nature of the original participants' consent**. If you are unsure about the procedure of data management and storage, please contact the Data Services Librarian.

10. Summary CV of applicant

ALL boxes in the following table must be completed by the applicant. Do not attach a formal CV to your application.

10.1 List your academic qualifications. Include dates or current registration status	National Senior Certificate Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Social Sciences (Honours in psychology) Currently registered for MEd Educational Psychology
10.2 Describe any ethics <u>content</u> training* you have received in the previous 3 years (e.g., ethics short courses; online courses; ethics CPD courses; ethical input as part of a research methods course)	08/02/2023 – Research Ethics and Data Management

10.3 List of instruments or methods used in this project, as listed in Section 5 of the application form (Tick the appropriate boxes and describe these specific instruments if necessary)	☒	Hard copy questionnaires or diagnostic tests, etc.
	☐	Online instruments (e.g. questionnaires, surveys)
	☐	Individual interviews (e.g., structured, semi-structured, etc.)
	☐	Personal communication (e.g., email or informal conversation with experts)
	☒	Group interviews (e.g., seminar/discussion groups, focus groups, etc.)
	☐	Ethnographic observation, participant observation, other informal descriptive, and/or interactive methods (you <u>must explain</u> the ethnographic methods in the box below)
	☐	Autoethnography
	☐	Community-based methods or techniques such as drama workshops, community theatre, training workshops, participant rural appraisal, rapid rural appraisal, etc. (you <u>must explain</u> in the box below)
	☐	Research on/in therapeutic or counselling contexts
	☐	Putting on your own exhibition / public performance
	☐	Observation of public performances, and/or public behaviour observation
	☐	Photography
	☐	Video
☒	Audio recording (e.g., of interviews)	

	☐ Use of data from social media ☐ Other research methods or techniques (you <u>must explain</u> in the box below)
	Explanation of research methods specified above, and / or explanation of any other research methods that are not listed above:
10.4 Describe your previous experience in deploying the instruments or methods of research which you are applying here (refer to Section 5 and table in Section 10.3)	I do not have any practical experience, but theoretical knowledge in deploying the instruments or methods of research.

*Ethics training is strongly recommended, especially for postgraduate students. Please consult the *Guidelines for Applicants* document for details of training.

Appendix J: Ethics Clearance



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: MED/23/06

PROJECT TITLE:

Inclusive Education: Exploring the strategies used by foundation phase and intermediate phase teachers in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

INVESTIGATOR

Sekgothe Amogelang (1893664)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SHCD/Psychology

DATE CONSIDERED

05 June 2023

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

31 December 2025

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

13 November 2023

CHAIRPERSON

Aline Ferreira Correia
(Dr Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Dr Anwynne Kern (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

A. Sekgothe
Signature

Date

16 / 01 / 2025

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES