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# Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education: Impact on primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers

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# Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education: Impact on primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers

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Student No. 2021446

**A research thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in the School of Education**

**Supervisor: Dr. Tanya Bekker**

**Date September 2023**

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**Declaration**

I, Nokuthula N. Dewa, do declare that this report is my own work, and the work of others (from books, journals, and/or internet sources), has been appropriately acknowledged by way of referencing. I acknowledge the intellectual ownership of the thesis and do declare that I never resorted to any form of copying techniques to complete this thesis, apart from support from appropriately referenced extracts. I do declare that this work is submitted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for a Doctor of Philosophy Degree, and has not been submitted before for any examination or degree in any other university.

Name: Nokuthula Ntombiyelizwe Dewa Signature: 

Date: September 2023

**Special Dedication**

To all the special individuals in my life who walked this journey directly and indirectly with me.

My supervisor, **Dr. Tanya Bekker**, you are an endearing soul, principled and meticulous yet full of compassion, with these outstanding qualities among the many that you possess, you have brought light to this journey by firmly holding my hand in walking this journey, always ready to respond to my calls for help, and I will forever remain thankful to you. During this journey, you taught me tough love that at times I did not appreciate, but I am sincerely appreciative of that love now.

Thank you for your patience with me, you taught me to work on this thesis with everything that is within me through your exemplary thoroughness. I learned to work on every part of the thesis with all cautiousness exercising extreme carefulness.

Thank you for believing and trusting in me, these are the attributes that gave me the zeal to keep on moving throughout the rocky phases.

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I say thank you, wena kaMajelimani, kaMagwedlangedlule, KaSheleni, uyiNsizwa phakathi kwensizwa, ngiyayibongela.

**Abstract**

This study investigated how the conceptualisations of Inclusive Education (IE) by primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers impact teaching practices. The study places a high value on participants' IE conceptualisations because they have an impact on teachers' actions in their classrooms, which can either support or limit teachers' inclusive practices in granting epistemic access to learning to all learners. The study addressed the question of how primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualise IE and considered the implications of these conceptualisations on their practice. Conceptualisations inform pedagogical practice, and I argue that a pedagogical shift that takes accountability for providing learning opportunities for all learners regardless of difference is necessary. A qualitative transformational research method was used to collect data, and thirteen Foundation Phase (FP) teachers and three school principals were conveniently and purposefully chosen from three Government primary schools, in Johannesburg South. Individual semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used to collect data, which was then thematically analysed using both inductive and deductive methods. With some extensions and adjustments, two theoretical frameworks were used for this study: the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Although Black-Hawkins (2017) argues for three required inclusive pedagogical shifts for teachers to teach inclusively, this study's findings reveal that teachers in South Africa are currently at three different levels of development toward the required pedagogical shift, which is why IE implementation is hampered despite the numerous IE issues raised by previous studies. According to the findings of this study, there are teachers who have little to no pedagogical shift toward inclusive practices, teachers who have an emerging shift, and teachers who have an established shift. These stages of the pedagogical shift are supported by various conceptualisations that influence teachers' actions, leading to a variety of teaching strategies, some of which do not involve all learners in teaching and learning. The study recommended that the actual stage of shift be considered to support continued progress toward inclusive practice. Teachers who have made little or no

pedagogical shift toward inclusivity should be made aware of IE policies and practices, while those who have made an emerging pedagogical shift should be encouraged and assisted in including everyone in their teaching and learning, and those who have made an established pedagogical shift should be developed further in maintaining and improving inclusive practices.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Foundation Phase, Conceptualisation, Inclusive Pedagogy, difference, Special Needs Education, Epistemological access.

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**List of Acronyms**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CPD** | Continuous Professional Development |
| **CoE** | Council of Education |
| **COVID-19** | Corona virus disease 19 |
| **ECD** | Early Childhood Development |
| **EWP6** | Education White Paper 6 |
| **EFA** | Education for All |
| **FP** | Foundation Phase |
| **GDE** | Gauteng Department of Education |
| **LSENs** | Learners with Special Educational Needs |
| **IE** | Inclusive Education |
| **IPA** | Inclusive Pedagogical Approach |
| **ITE** | Initial Teacher Education |
| **IEP** | Individualized Educational Program |
| **HOD** | Head of Division |
| **HOD – FP** | Head of Division – Foundation phase |
| **SBST** | School Based Support Team |
| **SNA 1** | Support Needs Assessment form 1 |
| **SNA 2** | Support Needs Assessment form 2 |
| **SIAS** | Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| **UNICEF** | United Nations Children's Fund |
| **ADHA** | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |

**Definition of Terms in the Context of the Study**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Accommodation** | The idea of altering the learning environment, curriculum, or equipment that allows LSENs to complete assigned tasks in mainstream classrooms. |
| **Bell curve thinking** | The widely held belief that what is generally available will meet the needs of most learners while others tail behind. |
| **Conceptualisation** | A particular understanding of a concept that impact practices. |
| **Difference** | Diversities that exist amongst humans – learners for the purposes of this study. |
| **Diversity** | Everything that makes people (learners) different from each other, for example, race, background, abilities, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, among other differences. |
| **Epistemological access** | The respect for the rights of all learners to be enrolled in mainstream classrooms, participate, and achieve educational success. This goes beyond formal access to educational institutions to consider access to knowledge, learning and full participation to achieve educational success. |
| **Implementation** | The process of executing or enacting IE policies in schools |
| **Inclusive practices** | Teaching and learning activities that embrace all learners in schools. |
| **Regular classrooms** | Learning environments for everybody that do not discriminate any learner but embrace all learners. |

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

## 1.1. Introduction

> *The idea of viewing each learner as unique dissolves the bell-curve barrier between 'most' and 'some', enabling the problem of difference to be replaced by thinking about human diversity as a fundamental element of one's unique individuality and shared humanity. This is important because when difference is construed as an ordinary aspect of human development, then inclusive education can be considered as that which ensures that everyone has access to a good quality education (Florian, 2019, p.701).*

Inclusive Education (IE) worldwide and in South Africa is concerned with ensuring that all learners get access to good quality education (Florian, 2019). In South Africa this is a transformative agenda which necessitates a shift from the historical system of dual education (Donohue & Bornman, 2023) where learners were separated according to several discriminatory markers. IE therefore, is intended to deconstruct all forms of discrimination and provide equal and fair opportunities for everyone to be supported with teaching that is responsive to their needs to reach their full potential. If education is viewed from the perspective of providing equal and fair opportunities to everybody, a fair start could be afforded to all learners. From this perspective, teaching and learning would be accessible to all learners, enabling all to actively participate in classroom activities, achieve and succeed. However, providing equal and fair opportunities to everyone is not practically happening in all teaching and learning environments, which continues to challenge implementation of IE. This is partly caused by the various ways individuals have conceptualised IE, which translates to various practices. Several studies (Krischler, Powell & Pit-Ten Cate, 2019; Pozas, Letzel, Schneider, 2020; Bills & Mills, 2020) have shown that individuals have conceptualised IE in different ways, leading to varied practices, all in the name of IE. For instance, while some individuals/schools have conceptualised IE to mean including all learners in mainstream classrooms (inclusive schools/classrooms), others have conceptualised it as teaching learners according to capabilities (specials schools/classes). Others view IE as teaching the majority of learners together with their peers while providing for the education of

learners who have significant assistance needs separately. In order to better understand how teachers and principal participants are conceptualising and implementing inclusive practices in their respective schools, this study explored the different IE conceptualisations of teachers at the Foundation Phase level and their principals. This information assisted in making recommendations that have a potential to improve IE practice and research. This chapter introduces the study by first discussing the background and context, followed by the problem of the study, purpose of the study, objectives, main research question and its sub-questions, rationale, theoretical frameworks, and the research design.

The development of inclusive education (IE) has long attracted both domestic and international interest. International conferences, declarations, and frameworks such as the Incheon Declaration and Framework Action 2030 (UNESCO, 2015) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO, 1994, 2018); Salamanca Statement and Education for All (IE) demonstrate the importance of advocating for inclusive education (IE). Since the demand to teach every learner in regular schools/classrooms, with the visionary intention of including all learners, IE has been an ongoing subject of discussion. According to Eloff and Kgwete (2007) cited in Van der Merwe, Fourie & Yoro (2020), the introduction of IE in South Africa was "a direct response to the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996 and a national commitment to the Education for All movement as stated in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement of 1994." (p.351). The introduction of IE in South Africa signalled a shift toward incorporating every learner into the education system in order to provide equitable and just opportunities to all. Despite South Africa's and many other countries' intentions to implement IE, Slee (2018) reports that there has always been a lack of consensus in relation to the definition of IE, its nature, and strategies to increase participation, access, and improved outcomes in education, resulting in difficulties in conceptualising the meaning of IE itself. This lack of agreement on how to conceptualise IE has resulted in policies and practices both internationally and within South Africa that unintentionally perpetuate the exclusion of some learners from the educational system (Dyson, Slee & Phillips, 2001; Tomlinson, 2017; Slee, 2019). One example of unintended exclusion of some learners is the continued

practice of dividing or grouping learners according to capabilities in schools with the intention of providing additional support to the learners viewed as falling behind. Donohue and Bornman (2023) as well as Slee (2018), state that the continued practice of 'diagnosing' categories such as behaviour disorders, multiple complex impairments, cognitive disabilities, and sensory disabilities has the potential to exclude vulnerable learners, but that factors such as poverty and orphan hood may increase the risk of exclusion for vulnerable groups. Exclusion of learners based on ability classification as well as exclusion of learners based on factors such as poverty is a concern given IE's imperative to increase participation for all learners and challenge exclusionary pressures. Exclusionary practices, I argue, may be unintentionally supported rather than challenged as a result of how IE is understood, conceptualised, adopted, and implemented through policy and practice.

Different ideologies complicate the conceptualisation of IE, as does the challenge of implementing these ideologies throughout the world (Haug, 2017; Shyman, 2015; MiskoIci, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2016; Topping & Maloney, 2005; Stubbs, 2008). An ideology is a set of ideas, opinions, or beliefs that influence culture as well as political or policy positions. Regarding the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), which promoted a rights-based anti-discriminatory stance against the historically legalised exclusion of some learners, Haug (2016) agrees with Booth (1996) that values associated with inclusion are linked to ideologies such as interactionism, democratization, access, fellowship, participation, equality, equity, and social justice, among others. However, various organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the African Union (AU) appear to agree on the central ideology that is evident in all definitions of IE: the right to education for all (Hardy &Woodcock, 2015; Kiuppis, 2011; Haug, 2016; Nel, 2019). This implies that the importance of including all learners in the education system is recognised globally in order to open educational doors to all learners as a means of achieving social justice for all.

Shyman (2015) highlights a strong link between inclusion and social justice, arguing that any genuine attempt at implementing IE must consider what it means to practice and promote a socially just society. This means that practicing inclusion and IE cannot be separated from applying and practicing social justice. Ainscow, Slee and Best (2019) define social justice as one of the pillars for justifying the shift toward IE, a shift in which inclusive schools have the ability to change attitudes toward difference through the education of all learners together, thereby forming the foundation for a non-discriminatory society. This implies that a focus on social justice challenges exclusionary practices, such as marginalising learners based on abilities, and instead recognises and embraces differences in welcoming and diverse ways. Saleh (2014), cited in Ainscow and Mosito (2019), expresses similar sentiments, arguing that inclusive schools and communities are critical to achieving social justice and a more equitable society. The UNESCO guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education (UNESCO, 2018) also mentions the importance of educating all learners, stating that its central message is that all learners matter and matter equally. This demonstrates the commitment of various nations and organisations to educate all learners, provide equal education to all, and include everyone in the educational system. However, as Ainscow and Mosito (2019) argue, complexities emerge when theory is put into practice.

IE can be viewed as an approach that brings social justice to all learners, including those in the Foundation Phase. According to Feza (2013): Feza & Chiphambo, (2022), despite the aim of the Education White Paper 5 (DoE, 2001) to provide learners with a solid and lifelong foundation for learning and development, holistically developing them to be efficient contributors to society, poor academic performance is still prevalent at Foundation Phase, revealing limitations in delivering social justice to all learners. This could be due in part to the way IE is conceptualised and practiced at this stage. An individual's philosophy cannot be separated from their practice in the context of social justice, as stated by Foucault (1964), cited in Shyman (2015), "people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do, but they do not know what they do does" (p. 358). This means that the way principals and teachers (for this study) see and think about the world is visible in their practices, community decision-making processes, and job.

As a result, principals' and teachers' consistent messages about how things should be are transmitted to their learners through their management and teaching practices. This study aims to discover what primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers know about IE, how they conceptualise it in relation to policy, and how this affects their practices.

Mokhele (2013); Mokhele & Fisher- Halloway (2022) concur with the South African inclusive approach defined in EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and the country's constitution (RSA, 1996) that IE embraces democratic values, human rights, and social justice, and recognises the rights of all learners through changes in attitudes and teaching methodologies as part of an effort to transform the education system to be responsive to the needs of all. This demonstrates the necessity of offering education that is responsive to each learner's requirements, as well as recognizing and valuing all learners, including those in the Foundation Phase. To accomplish this, Mokhele & Fisher- Halloway (2022) suggest the need not only to train teachers but to retrain them so that they feel supported in their endeavours to teach inclusively. This means that teachers' training does not end in their pre-service training; rather, teachers should be continuously developed and assisted in promoting learner success and positive interdependence in teaching environments. Most importantly, this will act as reinforcement to their inclusive practices because the way IE is conceptualised by principals and Foundation Phase teachers remains key to its successful implementation.

Primary school principals play a key role in the implementation of IE as leaders of schools, from the Foundation phase up to the seventh grade. Some researchers have argued that the role of effective inclusive school principals should focus more on leadership qualities than compliance to promote equitabilities for all learners (Galiatsos, Kruse & Whitaker, 2019; Connally & Kimmel, 2020; Stelitano, Johnston & Young,2020). This shows that schools deserve to be led by principals or leaders who are assertive, skilled, and knowledgeable, among other leadership qualities, to transmit quality education to all learners through classroom teachers. Therefore, this study collected data first from principals and acquired their IE conceptualisation as leaders of the schools, which consequently, positions them as leaders in IE implementation.

## 1.2. Background of the Study

The education of all learners together with their peers at a school of their choice has been advocated by many researchers worldwide (Spratt & Florian, 2014; Slee 2019; Engelbrecht, 2018), to mention just a few. Nonetheless, the separation of some learners, for instance, learners with physical impairments, and learners with intellectual disabilities, from the general schools or classrooms continues despite the growing body of research showing the improved educational outcomes of educating learners together. Ainscow et al., (2019) provide three key justifications for advocating for learners to be educated together namely: an educational justification, a social justification, and an economic justification. An educational justification refers to the obligation for developing all learners in inclusive settings that do away with negative attitudes toward differences, a social justification refers to accommodation of diversities, forming the basis for a just, non-discriminatory society, and economic justification claims that it costs less to maintain single schools than complex types of school specialisations (Ainscow & Mosito, 2019). This means that inclusive schools should teach in ways that benefit all learners, change attitudes toward differences and create a basis for a non-discriminatory and just society, thus reducing the educational cost by maintaining a single system of schools as compared to maintaining different types of schools. Despite all the efforts made in this endeavor, including all learners in the mainstream, and responding to their needs, Thomas (2017) and Slee (2018) argue that inclusion is still far from reality, thus, IE is not yet fully implemented. Segregatory practices are still prevalent or evident in some educational systems around the world as countries grapple with ways to achieve the IE ideal of educating all learners together whilst still providing the necessary support structures to ensure that all learners are fully supported.

Historically, in South Africa there was separate provisioning for mainstream and special education (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019) and this was before the adoption of the social model in South Africa. According to Donohue and Bornman (2023), the training of teachers was based on the medical model which resulted in learners being segregated into general or special education training. The medical model is defined by Tlale et al., (2016) as that which locates the differences or disabilities of

learners “within their individual pathology” (p.31). This meant that the medical model viewed those who were living with impairments as having a deficit or disorder within themselves and needed fixing or cure. This implied that teachers were prepared on the by-products of the medical model tenets which in turn led to attitudes of separating learners, which Ntombela (2011) cited in Donohue and Bornman (2023) views as still strongly embedded in the South African culture of teaching. This explains why some teachers have a feeling that not all teachers can teach all learners and learners with special educational needs should be taught on their own by a special needs teacher.

However, after the introduction of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) the focus shifted from special education to reasonable accommodation of all learners at a school closest to their home, thus, a move toward a social model. McLaughlin and Jordan (2005) concur with Booth and Ainscow (2000) cited in Salleh and Woollard (2019) that the social model advocates that barriers to full participation and learning are created by society and constructed to serve the majority’s interest, at the same time limiting accessibility for those affected by the effects of the medical model (the minority). The social model suggests that all learners have the potential to develop to their full potential if they are given the needed support. It also reveals that the problem lies with the societal constructions, not with the learner. In support of the same argument, Tlale et al., (2016) stipulate that based on Vygotsky’s theoretical perspective, views about disability, “shifted from a deficit and biological view to the view of disability as a mere social construct” (p.32). This implies that humans are the ones who construct disability by separating individuals according to what impairments they have, to remove them from their contexts of development. Accordingly, Nareadi, Phasha and Condy (2016), IE calls for a new approach, which is the transformation of the educational system to cater for the diverse learners’ needs, with the belief that all learners have the capability to succeed. This implies that the educational system should align its practices to the needs of all learners, rather than compelling learners to fit into the system. In agreement, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2016) argue that there is a need for pedagogical content, process, and product that are designed around the learners’ needs, abilities, and characteristics not just for most, but all learners. This shows a

different approach to the traditional teaching and learning approaches, an approach that is centered on the needs of learners, by first identifying their needs and then designing suitable learning activities.

The EWP6's (DoE, 2001) intention was to transform the education system by building a system for all learners, doing away with the historical dual education system that was further segregated according to racial classification with different departments of education, instead of creating an integrated single system (Donohue and Bornman, 2023). There was also a clear shift from the medical model to a social model in the articulation of EWP6's (DoE, 2001) recognition of barriers to learning including systemic; pedagogical; societal or intrinsic barriers, which, made clear the intention to ensure the rights of all learners to be educated alongside their peers. However, in instances where learners were identified as having high-level needs, meaning learners with greater special educational needs or more severe impairments, special education placement remained an option (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Denver, 2016). This meant partial abolishment of exclusionary practices in the education system as the EWP6 left room for some, *high-level needs*, those identified as in need of being taught outside mainstream schools/classes. Thus, Nketsia (2018) reiterates the argument made by Lamptey, Villeneuve, Minnes and McColl (2015) that the conception of the medical model has been so pervasive that its influence is still seen in policies and procedures of assessment. This shows that despite the theoretical movement from the medical model to the social model of viewing differences, remnants of the medical model still resurface in subtle but strong ways, particularly in practices at the classroom level.

Additionally, Acedo, Ferrer and Pamies (2009) argue that the challenge of IE is to overcome all methods of exclusion, from education and within education. Consequently, Hardy and Woodcock (2015) suggest that the South African education system needs to pay more attention to the support of overt and systemic policy for inclusion in school settings and educational policies across and within national and sub-national jurisdictions. This suggests that for the South African education system to be considered inclusive, the understanding of IE should agree with the inclusive educational policies which state that all learners should be

educated alongside their peers, to harmonize with the inclusive school/classroom practices. Therefore, it is argued in this study that the way IE is conceptualised in South Africa contradicts the educational practices in place. For instance, whilst IE policies are embracing everybody, the educational and systemic practices continue with certain exclusionary practices, such as educating some learners in separate units within schools or separate schools known as “special schools”. This is practiced in most countries, schools, or learning settings to the extent that it is accepted as a normal way of teaching and learning. For instance, learners are grouped into what are considered appropriate groups and removed from the mainstream classrooms in several nations, and South Africa is not an exception (Hameed, 2022; Istenic, Bratklo & Rosanda, 2021; Lundberg & Westerman, 2020). This method of grouping learners is said to improve teaching and learning because it allows teachers to better understand the types of learners they are working with at any one time. Studies on IE, however, have shown the opposite to be true (Florian, 2019, Black-Hawkins, 2017). Hence, Thomas (2017) argues that failure to include all learners in general schools and classrooms, simply means inclusion is still in theory and not practiced.

Although there is clear evidence from the international and local calls to move toward IE, there are difficulties with the ways IE is defined and conceptualised. In this vein, Pather & Slee (2018) agree with some earlier researchers (Healy, 2011; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Kauffman & Sasso, 2006), that IE includes several strong currents of beliefs with myriads of practices, thus it is not a single movement, and has no single definition. This explains that IE is understood differently in different contexts, and the issues of local customs and contexts play a significant role in terms of influencing practices. Hence, Mitchell (2005) contends that although IE debates have led to diverse interpretations, responses, and definitions worldwide, it is important to realise that “IE exists in historical contexts in which vestiges of older beliefs co-exist with newer beliefs” (p. 13). This implies that in the journey of the IE movement, it should be expected to see or recognise some remnants/traces of some traditional approaches because the old practices will always take time to completely disappear. The conceptualisation of IE is further complicated by various ideologies and methodologies (Pather, 2019). Taking all of

this into account, research demonstrates that, as was already mentioned, there is a substantial correlation between inclusion and social justice in South Africa (Hlalele & Alexander, 2012; Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn & Christensen, 2006; Dreyer, 2017). Therefore, social justice cannot be discussed separately while discussing inclusion and IE in the South African context.

Furthermore, inclusive education (IE) was built on the principle that every learner, particularly young children, should have access to high-quality education, and numerous inclusive practices show that different people seem to have different conceptions of the approach. Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht and Nel (2016) concur with earlier studies (Ferguson, 2008; Nel, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2014; Florian & Black - Hawkins, 2010) indicating that providing meaningful participation in a number of classroom activities is crucial for being inclusive rather than merely offering diverse learners access to mainstream classrooms. This illustrates how important it is to provide each learner with an equal opportunity to participate in class activities, to have a sense of belonging, and to understand that both their teachers and their peers value them. Donohue and Bornman (2023) draw attention to the fact that, despite the EWP6's stated goal of welcoming everyone, the policy has ambiguous problems related to policy execution. For example, Donohue and Bornman (2023) argued that a lack of clarity in policy is a major impediment to effective IE implementation and has resulted in inaction by stakeholders involved. This implies that policies are not clearly articulated, causing confusion with IE implementation. As a result, Nareadi et al., (2016) agree that this ambiguity has given rise to numerous interpretations of IE, some of which are focused on marginalised learners, such as those with special educational needs or disabilities, rather than on the education of everybody. It can thus be argued that the major factors impeding the implementation of IE in South Africa stem from the policy's ambiguity. These ambiguities appear to have resulted in various conceptualisations of inclusion and IE.

Despite the many different ways that IE has been conceptualised, this study uses Ainscow, Slee and Best's (2019) definition of IE, which refers to the educational, social, and economic components of development. They go on to say that the necessity of education mandates that every learner be taught in a manner that is

sensitive to their needs as learners. Due to the societal obligations, schools have the power to influence how people view diversity by raising awareness among learners and the wider community. The economic aspect explains why building and operating inclusive schools is less expensive than educating learners in segregated environments. This definition embraces the objectives of the Salamanca Statement (Ainscow et al., 2019) and the inclusive policies that advocate for the education of all learners in mainstream classrooms. However, it should be noted that educating all learners in inclusive environments does not necessarily mean that all learners, including those with severe learning challenges can be taught together with their peers. This is evident in the EWP6 as alluded by Ferguson, McKenzie, Dalton and Lyner-Cleophas (2019) who argue that learners with severe impairments cannot be taught in mainstream classrooms. For instance, it would be impractical to include a learner with a severe learning barrier, such as a dysfunctional spinal cord or severe mental handicap in the mainstream classrooms. EWP6 mandated the development of a wider range of educational support services to meet the requirements of learners with impairments in an inclusive education and training system. Accordingly, learners who require less extensive support will receive it at ordinary schools, whilst those who require moderate support will receive it in full-service schools. Learners who need highly intense educational support will get such support in special schools (DoE, 2001). Hence, Florian (2019) argues for the collaboration of special education and IE, stating that special education teachers should work in support of IE in addressing issues of participation and barriers faced by the marginalised groups. The conceptualisation of the IE policy's provisioning for severe barriers to learning for certain learners is what has ignited this study.

Consequently, the IE policy's provisioning for severe needs can be misconceptualised as referring to the outplacement of certain learners who are low-academic achievers leading to being viewed as *different*. On the contrary, the EWP6 recommended the levels of support systems to be established as a way of supporting the IE implementation, and these are:

- the designation of Full-Service Schools (FSS) in every district – the FSS will provide guidelines into how all the schools in the district would provide the

full range of human, material and physical resources, such as staff, hearing aids, Braille writers, voice synthesisers and adapted technologies.

- early identification of learners in need of support, such as through curriculum, assessment, and teaching adaptation; the Foundation Phase level (Grades R to 3) is given priority as it is the first level of formal schooling.
- since learners are more independent after the Foundation Phase level, adoption of the inclusion model or mainstreaming of learners should start from Grade 3.
- the transformation of special schools and settings into resource centers that serve their own growing learner populations while also offering neighbourhood schools specialised professional help in curriculum, assessment, and instruction.
- the establishment of designated positions in every school for the development and coordination of a system of school-based support for all teachers (DoE, 2001).

Therefore, it is evident that the EWP6 policy does not support the removal of some learners who are considered as deviating from the *norm* to be outplaced, with the exception of the highly intensive circumstances. The political, cultural, social, and economic facets of IE are considered in South Africa within its overall backdrop in order to benefit its citizens.

According to Engelbrecht (2020), IE and its implementation in South Africa are viewed in the context of greater political, cultural, social, and economic shifts since 1994. This is primarily because the government and the citizens of South Africa both hold significant overall objectives for the progressive and systematic transformation of education. Therefore, according to Engelbrecht (2020), it is impossible to have a meaningful discussion about IE implementation without considering the country's social, educational, and economic justifications. It is noteworthy that research now focuses more on how the justification of IE (on social, educational, and economic grounds) interacts with South Africa's complex socio-economic traces and cultural-historical factors that reflect the overwhelming legacy of continued inequality (Engelbrecht, 2019; Walton, 2018) rather than on IE implementation constraints and definitional challenges. In focusing on naming IE

as the issue, we may lose focus on the issue of pervasive and endemic educational exclusion, as Walton (2016, p.95 cited in Engelbrecht, 2020) correctly noted, "losing sight of the economic, social, and political power structures that led to exclusion in the first place" in South Africa. This illustrates that rather than focusing on the name of IE, more attention needs to be paid to the political and economic power structures, which are the ones that exclude some individuals.

### 1.3. Problem Statement

South Africa's IE policy as articulated in Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) adopts a social model approach and articulates a view of IE that recognises the diversity and a range of barriers to learning both intrinsic and extrinsic (Department of Education (DoE), 2001; Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale, 2015; Kanjere & Mafumo, 2017). This demonstrates the deliberate shift away from the dual education system that was previously used and divided learners in favor of a single education system that appreciates and embraces everyone. According to Kanjere and Mafumo (2017), barriers to learning are everything that prevents learners from realising their full potential, as stated in the EWP6. Examples include structural, pedagogical, curriculum, and socioeconomic concerns. This then shows that not even the curriculum, teaching strategies, or educational systems, should stand in the learner's way to attain quality education because it is the right of every learner to be in the mainstream school/classroom.

Although EWP6 acknowledges that all learners can learn and seeks to ensure that all learners are supported to learn, ideally in their closest neighbourhood school, it does however make provision for separate types of schooling placements namely mainstream, full-service schools, and special schools as resource centres to meet the needs of learners with low, moderate and severe support needs (DoE, 2001; Engelbrecht & Van Deventer, 2013; Engelbrecht et al., 2015). This provisioning allows separate schools or classes to run alongside mainstream schooling. The policy document on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS), (DoE, 2014) guides the process by which support provisioning is actioned for learners in line with the different types of schooling placements. The problem is that whilst the EWP6 commits to the education of all in an IE system, the fact that the policy makes provision for separate and segregated school placements may

send conflicting messages to the enactors of those policies at the school and classroom levels. For example, the potential exists that the current support provisioning policy, structures, and process articulated in the SIAS policy may be conflated with the historically prevalent medical model where the focus is on the individual deficit (Oliver, 1996; Peters, 2004; Donohue and Bornman, 2023), the identification of that deficit and the remediation of that deficit typically in separate school placements. In this case, the SIAS policy may be conceptualised as a referral tool for the out-placement of learners experiencing barriers to learning and may reinforce the notion that 'some' learners are not the responsibility of mainstream schools and teachers.

In contrast, the SIAS (DoE, 2014) policy may be viewed as supporting the efforts of mainstream schools and teachers to access support provisioning for learners needing support as part of their accountability and commitment to the learning of all. In other words, depending on how teachers and schools conceptualise IE as articulated in the South African policy framework, such policy may serve to support their inclusive practice for all or alternatively reinforce the view that mainstream schooling is for 'some' and not for 'others' and that as teachers and school they are capable of teaching some and not others. Florian and Walton (2017) explain that some learners are marginalised despite the IE principles, due to decisions made about their learning potentials and capacities. Thus, Florian and Walton further explain that although IE's focus is to ensure that everybody has access to quality learning, many learners are still marginalised. Consequently, Engelbrecht et al. (2016) explain that this marginalisation is caused partly by some enactors of IE who remain convinced that "different or additional educational prospects should be provided for learners who are considered to experience barriers to learning and therefore should be released from expectations that they cope under normal circumstances" (p.528). This explains the reservations that some teachers have toward the education of all learners, that there would always be those learners needing additional support, to be educated separately by different teachers in separate settings.

Additionally, Florian (2019) asserts that the special needs education's preoccupation with difference should be replaced with the recognition that there

will always be many differences between different learner groups. According to this, special needs education ought to refrain from identifying learner differences with the goal of excluding them and instead take on the perspective that diversity enriches teaching and learning. This is due to the fact that different learner groups comprise a variety of individuals with distinct demands, despite the fact that they all have special needs. Florian (2019) contends that as this approach challenges the bell-curve barrier of catering to most, some, and not all learners, it should be the beginning point for IE development in the post-Salamanca age. As a result, the difficulty of interacting with difference is replaced by viewing diversity as a "fundamental element of one's unique individuality and shared humanity" (p. 701). By viewing diversity as a normal part of human growth, IE may be seen as a system that extends high-quality education to everyone, not only those who are marginalised. However, this can only happen under educational systems that are non-marginalising, systems that do not sift and sort learners based on predetermined judgements about who they are and what they should learn. It is for this reason that exploring how policy influences teacher conceptualisations of IE and consequently their inclusive practice is important. This is especially important at the Foundation Phase level which is where learners enter formal schooling (Mahlo, 2017; Nel, 2019). It is at this level of schooling where initial evaluations of 'ability' are often made by teachers and where the potential is highest for teachers to being the process of a referral out of mainstream schooling. Additionally, Donohue and Bornman (2023) contend that this is the phase where skills needed for the development and acceptance of diversity are acquired. Teachers, however, do not work in a vacuum but in school contexts guided by school management. It is for this reason that understanding how school principals conceptualise IE as argued by Galiatsos et al., (2019); Connally and Kimmel (2020); Stelitano et al., (2020) are also important as the tone for practice in classrooms is frequently set by management (principals).

### 1.4. Purpose of Research

First, the study explored the different conceptualisations of IE at the Foundation Phase level, which assisted in gaining a better understanding of how teachers and principal participants are conceptualising and implementing inclusive practices in

their respective schools. In this study, the definition of IE by Slee (2018) was adopted as the working definition, as Slee argues that IE refers to, “securing and guaranteeing the right of all children to access, presence, participation, and success in their local regular school. IE calls upon neighborhood schools to build their capacity to eliminate barriers to access, presence, participation, and achievement to be able to provide excellent educational experiences and outcomes for all children and young people” (p.8). This definition explains that all learners should be admitted to general or mainstream schools, acquire meaningful learning, be active participants, and be supported to attain achievement and outcomes of their learning. For the purposes of this study, I explored participants’ IE conceptualisation through carefully crafted individual and focus group interviews to find out how the participants’ conceptualisation relates to and is influenced by EWP6, and the South African policies on IE. According to Kanjere and Mafumo (2017), the South African education system has provided initiatives to transform the education system, such as IE, but lacks implementation strategies. This means that although IE is a good initiative, implementation becomes a challenge if implementation strategies are not put in place and followed through. Thus, Nel (2019) argues, “crossing the bridge to good intentions to actually implementing them is a giant leap” (p. 4). This means that formulating policies alone is not enough; policies should be transmitted into implementation and practiced. Thus, exploring participants’ conceptualisation of IE and how this conceptualisation impacts their practice could shed light on some of the hindrances to the successful implementation of IE.

The study attempted to find out the impact resulting from the participants’ understanding of IE in relation to the EWP6 and the South African inclusion policy. This information was collected through interview questions (individual and focus group), which were carefully structured prior to the interviews. Participants were asked about their views about the EWP6 and inclusion policies in South Africa, whether they find the policies enabling or restricting their practices, and how they feel about handling diverse environments. Three primary school principals and thirteen teachers at the Foundation Phase level in three public schools in Gauteng Province were selected. Both convenient and purposive sampling were used

because the identified schools are closer to my place of residency and I have previously worked with the schools, particularly the Foundation Phase. Additionally, the schools have good reputations of including all learners in teaching and learning and potentially therefore will be able to offer insight on this practice. These participants contributed to the understanding of how IE is understood and implemented in relation to EWP6 and South African inclusive policy at Foundation Phase level.

The study's additional intention was to, after data collection and analysis, draw on insights gained to make necessary recommendations to support implementation of inclusive practice at the Foundation Phase level.

## 1.5 Main Research Question

The study's main research question is:

How do primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualise IE, and how does their conceptualisation influence their practices?

### 1.5.1 Sub-questions

The following sub-questions were used in answering the main research question:

1. How do the conceptualisations of primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers relate to the Education White Paper 6, and subsequent South African policy on IE?
2. How do these conceptualisations of IE influence participants' implementation of IE in the Foundation Phase?
3. What recommendations regarding the implementation of IE in the Foundation Phase can be made considering policy and participant conceptualisations?

### 1.5.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were three-fold:

1. To explore the different conceptualisations of IE at the Foundation Phase held by principals and teachers.

2. To investigate the participants' understanding of IE in relation to the Education White Paper 6 and inclusion policy in South Africa and the influence of this understanding/ conceptualisation on practice.
3. To make recommendations based on insights gained to support the implementation of Inclusive Education at the Foundation Phase level.

### 1.6 Rationale of the Study

This study's intention was to find out how primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualise IE in relation to policy and what influence this has on their inclusive practices. The study was premised on the inclusion policy that all learners should be educated alongside their peers in general classrooms as flagged in the South African IE policy documents (Sampson & Johannessen, 2020; Slee, 2011, 2018; Nel, 2019). This means that the inclusion policy advocates for the education of all learners in the same settings. Getting a better understanding of how principals and the Foundation phase teachers conceptualise and implement IE, and how their conceptualisation relates to the policy on IE, provided insights that allowed me to make recommendations in terms of, in what ways those conceptualisations can be worked with to support inclusive practice in classrooms. Ainscow, Sanchez and Goldrick (2019) concur to what was argued by Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick and West (2012) that inequalities must be challenged by asking the critical question, "What needs to be done to move policy and practice forward?" (p.150). Responding to this question, Ainscow (2022) concurs with Ainscow and Miles (2011) that there is a need to understand the current educational systems and practices through the undertaking of IE research that is in-depth and of good quality. This suggests that IE researchers should engage in studies that try to answer the questions raised by Ainscow and Miles (2011). This implies that researchers have a major role to play in moving policy and inclusive practices forward.

However, for teachers to enact inclusion, they need to be responsive to diversity and feel capable to move policy and practice toward inclusion. Notably, Mahlo (2011) cited in Kanjere and Mafumo (2017) maintain that several teachers in South Africa have not been trained to handle learners with diverse needs, and principals also find themselves in a dilemma as they are expected to provide guidance and

support to teachers on inclusive practices, which Kruger and Yorke (2010) cited in Lenong (2023) view as crucial elements. This means that principals have an overwhelming duty of supporting and guiding teachers on inclusive practices which they themselves are not knowledgeable on. Furthermore, the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA) principles, the second theoretical framework points out that although the framework is clearly expressed by Black-Hawkins (2017), it is presented in black or white terms with the implication that teachers either chose to be inclusive or not. The potential of the findings of this study to develop a more nuanced understanding in relation to South African teachers and principals' understanding justifies the focus of the study. It is not entirely a matter of teachers simply choosing to be inclusive or not, rather, South African teachers' thinking about IE needs a more nuanced understanding which is a rationale for this study (Florian & Black-Hawkins 2017). Accordingly, this study argues that there is very little knowledge on how teachers' behaviors and interactions with the educational system in South Africa are related to their practices. Literature either focuses on systemic issues, a lack of resources, policy direction, or teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge toward difference (Paseka, Schwab, 2020; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Fornauf & Erickson, 2020). There is very limited literature that examines the interaction of these two, and that is the gap this study has identified. Consequently, the goal of the study is to comprehend teachers' ways of thinking and what they believe in relation to the actions that they exhibit at different levels of the educational system in a specific context. The need to find out what primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers know about IE, and how they implement IE justifies this study. This is important to this study because IE is viewed as being about social justice, and Shyman (2015) argues that any real effort at realising IE must consider what is meant by promoting and practicing a socially equal society. It was expected that the principal/teacher conceptualisations and practice would add to the already existing knowledge on effective ways of implementing IE considering ways in which conceptualisations of IE impact practice.

## 1.7 Theoretical Frameworks

Two theoretical frameworks informed this study, namely the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA) by Black - Hawkins (2017) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory by Anderson, Boyle and Deppler (2014). On the one hand, the IPA emphasises three fundamental principles that serve as necessary pedagogical shifts that allow teachers to embrace all learners in their diverse teaching environments. According to Black-Hawkins (2017), to embrace all learners in their teaching spaces, teachers must develop the three pedagogical principles. This theory is important for the context of this study in finding out how teachers have conceptualised and practice IE. Yet in order to be inclusive in their classrooms, teachers must have support because they are also influenced by various factors in the environment within which they work. This demonstrates the need to examine this study through a different lens that emphasises the aspects that either support or impede teachers' strategies. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is an appropriate lens through which to view that. It should be noted that although Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was initially intended to focus on learners' development, it has been modified for the purposes of this study to focus on teachers' professional growth by examining the variables that influence teachers' day-to-day practices in the teaching and learning environment. Therefore, the theory is adjusted to teachers' development instead of learners' development, thus, substituting the learner at the centre with the teacher. This is done to explore the factors that constrain or enable teachers' inclusive practices as they try to implement what inclusive policies advocate as affording epistemological access not just to most, or some, but to all learners. Bronfenbrenner explores how development is influenced at different levels of the system, with the individual at the centre. IPA investigates individual teacher beliefs and thoughts. Using IPA in conjunction with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory allows for a more substantive engagement with how teachers think and believe about IE at the level of the individual's innermost level, allowing for a deeper understanding of this influence on overall development as a teacher and interaction with the broader levels of the system. These two frameworks contribute equal value to this study and are discussed in detail in chapter three of the thesis.

## 1.8 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative transformative paradigm that is deeply rooted in the human rights agenda. The goal of transformative research is to transform society in ways that support a human rights agenda (Thomas, 2017). This paradigm is appropriate for this study because it is a method used by researchers to try to understand people's constructed meaning and experiences about the world, as well as a technique for analysing and describing people's social actions and behaviors, which in this study are the primary school principals' and Foundation Phase teachers' conceptualisations of IE and their experiences (challenges) as they practice inclusive teaching. The study's sixteen participants (three primary school principals and thirteen FP teachers) were chosen using both purposive and convenient sampling, and a researcher journal was kept throughout data collection and analysis to facilitate reflection. Two data collection instruments, individual semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used, and the samples are provided in Appendix A. Data were analysed using both inductive and deductive analysis to strengthen the results, simultaneously paying close attention to the ethical considerations. Detailed discussion of the research design and methodology is provided in chapter four of this thesis.

## 1.9 Thesis Structure

This study titled, “Conceptualisation of IE: Impact on primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers” is structured as follows:

**Chapter One:** This chapter provides the background of the study and problematises the rationale of undertaking the study providing the problem statement, study objectives, purpose of the study, and the main question that is simplified into three sub-questions. The study is premised on the notion that all learners have the right to be provided with quality education alongside their peers, which does away with all forms of marginalisation or exclusion.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter focuses on research that has been undertaken not only in IE, but, more so, in topics that are closely related to the conceptualisation of IE by those who enact or implement IE at the Foundation Phase level – the primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers. Therefore, the history of IE globally and in South Africa is discussed together with the evolution of terminology

that has subsequently led to the coining of inclusion. The discussion of literature in this chapter has informed the two theoretical frameworks – Inclusive Pedagogy and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which are fully discussed in chapter three of the thesis.

**Chapter Three:** This chapter provides a detailed description of the two selected theoretical frameworks, justifies the choice of the frameworks, and attempts to demonstrate how the frameworks are incorporated into the study, using them to get a clearer view during data collection and analysis.

**Chapter Four**: This chapter looks at how the research design and methodology for the study was carried out in terms of the selected research paradigm, data collection, choice of participants, and choice of data collection instruments. Then lastly, the chapter concludes by explaining the ethical considerations followed throughout the study.

**Chapter Five:** This chapter focuses on presenting data from the participants, transcriptions of data are written down as they are without any interference from the researcher.

**Chapter Six:** This chapter focuses on data interpretation, discussion, analysis, and findings of the study. Additionally, the chapter explains how data were analysed using inductive and deductive data analysis, and the incorporation of the two theoretical frameworks in analysing data.

**Chapter Seven:** The study's overall findings are stated in the last chapter, along with the answering of the research question posed in chapter one, the study's knowledge contribution, recommendations, limitations, and finally, the conclusion of the study.

## 1.10 Conclusion

The first chapter has attempted to provide a theoretical background to the study that brought into perspective the justification to undertake this study. The chapter attempted to explain what the study is about and why it is worthy to carried out. It also provided a theoretical overview of the study's rationale, and problem statement, and posed the research questions that need to be answered. The

chapter also pointed out to the literature gap that this study has identified, hence the reason to undertake the study. Additionally, the chapter provides an overview of the study, which bring into perspective how the study is developed from the first to the last chapter. The next chapter looks at the theoretical overview of the philosophical foundations of IE, its developments or milestones from the medical to the social model of viewing humanity, which later informed the theoretical frameworks relevant to the study. Additionally, the history of special education is explored as its role is viewed as important in the development of IE.

## 2.1 Introduction

This study focuses on exploring conceptualisations of Inclusive Education and the impact on practice. This study focuses on exploring conceptualisations of Inclusive Education and the impact on practice. Furthermore, this study explores the history of special education both at international and national levels. Given this, the first section of the literature review considers approaches to IE internationally and in South Africa and discusses relevant policies and the legislative framework. The discussion then moves on to consider the theoretical underpinnings of IE and terminology evolution. These broad key aspects of literature worked as an anchor for the discussion of how primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers have conceptualised IE, which impacts their ways of handling diversity, consequently, identifying the knowledge gaps in IE implementation.

## 2.2 Conceptualisations of Inclusive Education Globally and in South Africa

Although IE is based on the premise that all learners should have access to quality education, different inclusive practices are evidence that IE implementers have different conceptualisations about Inclusive Education. In the same thread, Nel et al., (2016) concur with other researchers (Ferguson, 2008; Nel et al., 2013; Florian & Black – Hawkins, 2017), that being inclusive goes beyond providing access to mainstream classrooms to diverse learners, rather provisioning of meaningful participation in different activities is critical. This shows the importance of ensuring that all learners get an equal opportunity to participate in classroom activities, as they feel a sense of belonging and being valued by their teachers and peers likewise. Donohue and Bornman (2023) point out that despite the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6)'s intention of embracing everybody, the policy has unclear issues in relation to poor policy implementation. It can therefore be argued that the major factors hindering the enactment of IE emanate from the policy's ambiguities in South Africa. These ambiguities have in turn led to various conceptualisations of is meant by being inclusive, and those conceptualisations impact teaching and learning practices.

Similarly, there have been various conceptualisations of IE, which have led to different practices in schools. Messiou (2017) contends with Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006a) that inclusion can be thought of in six different ways, which lead to two broad IE conceptualisations. First, "inclusion can be viewed as about disability and special educational needs, which is the most common approach" (Messiou, 2017. p.147). Viewing inclusion as about only learners with special educational needs is grounded in the medical approach as pointed out by Oliver (1996), and it views learning challenges as within individual learners who need to be fixed. Furthermore, Messiou (2017) argues that viewing inclusion through this lens can hinder the development of inclusion in a much broader view. This implies that viewing inclusion through the medical lens has the potential of creating barriers for some learners to fully participate in teaching and learning. Second, "inclusion is viewed as a response to disciplinary exclusions" (Messiou, 2017. p.148). Like the first way of viewing inclusion, here inclusion is focusing on a certain group of learners-such as those with behavioural changes, not everybody. Third, inclusion is viewed as, "… about various groups that are at risk of exclusion" (p.148). This way of viewing inclusion is like the first and second ways in that it focuses on certain learners – those at risk of being excluded, rather than all. Looking at the first three lenses of viewing inclusion, it can be concluded that these ways of viewing inclusion are in essence, on a narrow conceptualisation. This is because they do not embrace everybody, rather they target certain categories of learners; those with special educational needs, those excluded, and all the vulnerable groups. Yet, understanding what IE is all about is critical for the purposes of this research (Papatheodorou & Moyles, 2009).

On the contrary, IE and inclusion is to be accommodative of all groups of learners, those with learning challenges, behavioural problems as well as those with limited challenges. The fourth way of viewing inclusion pointed out by Messiou (2017) is viewing "inclusion as a promotion of schooling for all" (p.148). This means conceptualising inclusion as meant for all learners to fully develop through full participation, being valued as members of the group, and providing opportunities for all to thrive. The fifth way views inclusion as, "… education for all" (p.148). This is flagged in UNESCO's agenda which focuses not only on improving access to all,

but more so participation improvement. Again, Messiou (2017) in agreement with Allan (2008) states that inclusion can be viewed as “an ethical approach to education and society” (p.148). This shows that issues of ethics, achievement, participation, and values are important to inclusion. Viewing inclusion in this way could mean, further argues Messiou (2017), in line with the thought previously raised by Mitler (2000) and later by Messiou (2022), the delivery of all-inclusive values, such as full participation, equity, respect for differences, valuing all, as well as guiding overall practices and policies. Looking at the last three ways of viewing inclusion shows that they are broad in nature, which makes them fall under the broader conceptualisation of inclusion. It is therefore argued in this study that worldwide inclusion and IE are conceptualised in various ways, and these various conceptualisations impact teaching and learning practices in different ways. Since they are shaped by differing conceptualisations, these various practices are sometimes inclusive and sometimes exclusive.

### 2.3 Global Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion and IE is discussed and implemented worldwide. Dreyer (2017) states that IE has a profound impact on research, policy, as well as practice. This indicates that it is important to understand IE well as it influences how research is carried out, the implementation of policy, and the inclusive practices in schools. Admittedly, Mitchell (2005) cited in KefaIIion, Symeonidou and Meijer (2020) contends that IE debates have led to diverse interpretations, responses, and definitions worldwide, but it is important to realise that “IE exists in historical contexts in which vestiges of older beliefs co-exist with newer beliefs” (p.13). This suggests that certain remnants/traces of traditional approaches should be expected to be seen or detected along the path of IE movement/transformation because old practices will always take time to completely disappear. Nonetheless, research (Artiles et al., 2006; Dreyer, 2017) shows that IE has developed to be much more than simple acceptance of all learners into regular schools, rather, it has transformed the entire system of education, which is a broader conceptualisation. In this study it is argued that IE has not only opened school doors to all learners but also possibilities for all learners, particularly those who were previously excluded. This, in turn has enabled equal opportunities for

everybody, including the previously marginalised learners to achieve their full potential. South Africa's IE conceptualisation is based on global IE policy documents; hence the global IE conceptualisation has a significant influence on the South African IE conceptualisation. As a result, it is pertinent for this study to explore how IE in South Africa has evolved and how international policy documents have informed its conceptualisation.

## 2.4 History of IE in South Africa

The history of IE and how it has evolved in the past should be understood at the international and national levels, argues Dreyer (2017), as such information is important in responding appropriately to challenges experienced by teachers as they implement IE and inclusion in their teaching and learning environments. This implies that, in order to respond appropriately to the IE and inclusion challenges posed by teachers, it is necessary to understand the history of inclusion and its origins both worldwide and nationally. The broad definition of IE is based on the notion that all learners, regardless of exceptionalities, are entitled to be included in mainstream schooling and get the necessary support to achieve their full potential (Shyman, 2015). This conceptualisation demonstrates that every learner, not simply some or most of the learners, has the right to receive education, participate fully, and achieve. Although IE began as a reaction to include learners with disabilities and challenge the traditional special approach to teaching (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011 cited in Sharma, Armstrong, Merumeru, Simi & Yared, 2019), it now has evolved to expressly include all learners, but still has definitional issues. Failing to reach a common definition is considered as problematic since Shyman (2015) argues that "the beginning of every polemic resides in its capacity to identify the essential ideas that the treatise attempts to tackle" (p. 351). This implies that, in response to exclusionary education, IE is required to properly identify the essential concepts and projections that it proposes. Shyman (2015) goes on to argue for a definition that emphasizes, among other things, the importance of quality education, effective instruction, and the provision of individual adequate support for all learners. This demonstrates that the IE definition should be comprehensive, encompassing all areas of human existence.

Thus, it is crucial to explore how different researchers have defined IE and positioned its projections.

Several broad definitions of IE are provided by various theorists, both at international and national levels. IE is defined by Ferguson-Patrick (2022) as a unified public education system that includes all children as active, fully participating members of the school community; accepts diversity as the norm; and ensures a high-quality education for each learner by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for every learner. This is a comprehensive definition that conceptualises IE as including everybody in all facets of development and is in line with the Salamanca Statement recommendations on how inclusive schools should look like (UNESCO, 1994). Accordingly, Shyman (2015) concurs with Ferguson's definition by stating that if learners with exceptionalities are included in general classrooms, as it is their right, that not only indicates an inclusive community, but more so, it reflects a school's philosophical and cultural pervasive alteration with specific respect to learners with exceptionalities. This shows that when all learners, including those with special educational needs (LSENs), are integrated into mainstream learning, that shows a unified spirit and change of traditional mindset from the community.

Furthermore, it can be argued that inclusion goes beyond community and educational-based models. This is revealed by Ballard (2017) who frames concepts of IE within the context of civil rights and social justice, and multifaceted as:

1. Non-discriminatory education in terms of race, gender, disability, or culture.
2. Participation of all learners in a community with no exceptions.
3. Equal rights to each learner to gain access to the culturally respected curriculum as full-time participants of age-appropriate classrooms.
4. Underscoring diversity as an alternative to assimilation.

In addition to issues of social justice and civil rights, this definition shows the element of heterogeneity, accommodating all learners without comparing individuals' capabilities compared to the traditional assimilation of learners into the system. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, Ballard's definition of inclusion and IE was adopted as the working definition.

However, despite efforts made by many countries to have inclusive policies guiding the implementation of IE, many learners are still excluded from education. Perhaps, as argued by Nareadi, Phasha and Condy (2016), this could be attributed to many interpretations of IE. They further explain that some interpretations of IE are focused on marginalised learners, such as those with special educational needs or disabilities, instead of educating everybody. Hence, Phasha and Moichela (2011) in agreement with UNESCO (2018) warn against such a limited conception, which has the potential of confusing IE and integration. This shows that IE is not to be viewed as a new term for earlier approaches to education, such as integration, but it is a different educational approach that embraces everybody.

## 2.5 History of Inclusive Education, Policy and Legislation (related to IE)

According to Nareadi et al., (2016), IE necessitates a new strategy, which is the reform of the educational system to fulfill the needs of heterogeneous learners, with the premise that all learners are capable of succeeding. This indicates that, rather than forcing learners to fit into the system, the educational system should adjust its methods to the needs of all learners. In conjunction with this new approach, Black - Hawkins (2017), citing Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), advocate for "pedagogical content, process, and product that are structured around the needs, skills, and characteristics of not just most, but all learners" (p.6). This demonstrates an alternative approach to traditional teaching and learning strategies, one that is oriented on the requirements or needs of all learners, first assessing their needs and then devising appropriate learning activities. According to Nareadi et al., (2016), because IE's practice is entrenched in human rights principles, it should be represented in policy and legislation. This demonstrates the significance of not only articulating inclusion as stated in international documents, but also contextually positioning it in policies and legislation. According to Dreyer (2017), the roots of IE, both worldwide and nationally, lie in the disability movement. There have been various milestones established and achieved, and Table 1 below is a summary of the significant milestones towards the IE journey that have constituted some of the conventions and declarations that acknowledge the right to education for everyone (Dreyer, 2017).

**Table 1: Summary of key milestones toward Inclusive Education**

| | Milestone (Declarations and Conventions) |
|---|---|
| **1948** | The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26) |
| **1966** | The International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights |
| **1982** | The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons |
| **1989** | The Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| **1990** | The Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) |
| **1993** | Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities |
| **1994** | The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education |
| **2000** | The World Education Forum, Dakar |
| **2006** | The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |

According to Dreyer (2017), the Salamanca Declaration was approved in Spain in 1994, and this signified the "culmination of many motivations to respect the human rights of individuals with disabilities" (p. 385). This might imply that, while there had been previous agreements and declarations on education, the Salamanca Declaration was a watershed or defining moment in which 92 nations spoke with one voice about involving everyone in their educational systems.

According to Table 1, the key concepts that have been regularly legislated from 1948 to 2006 are embracing diversity, no discrimination of any kind, education as a right to everyone without any conditions, implementation of inclusive strategies and policies, and quality education that is free and compulsory. Several nations that have signed international conventions are obligated by its contents and are obliged to follow what has been agreed upon in those laws. South Africa, as a

signatory to several international treaties, including the Salamanca Declaration, has embraced the IE principle of embracing and welcoming heterogeneity. Significantly, the international conceptualisation has an impact on all nations that have signed international treaties, including South Africa's IE conceptualisation.

## 2.6 Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education in South Africa

As previously mentioned, IE has been adopted differently by different countries, some countries have aligned themselves with the broad conceptualisation, whereas others have aligned with the narrow conceptualisation. Each country adopts a conceptualisation that is responsive to its educational needs. And as such, Daniels and Garner (2013) encourage nations to be careful when adopting a particular view as IE can bring celebrations as well as struggles. This could mean that if not properly adopted, instead of emancipation and the joys that go with it, IE can bring woes or further segregation to the education system. They further argue that the Salamanca Statement progresses from human rights declarations to individual needs assertions and educational systems. This implies that the Salamanca Statement, which is hailed by many nations, South Africa included, is on the broad perspective adoption, thus binding all those who adopt it to choose the education of all learners in regular schools. On the contrary, the EWP6, which is the major instrumental drive for IE in South Africa, reveals the South African educational system as aligning its *practices* with only the narrow conceptualisation, posing many challenges for principals and classroom practitioners to teach inclusively, in relation to the broad inclusion conceptualisation. For instance, the access and participation of *all* learners as flagged in the international policies (broad conceptualisations), is impractical in most South African classrooms because not all learners are enrolled in regular schools. And as expected, most educational practices are still excluding other learners. It is as Slee (2011), posits that classroom practitioners struggle within the restraints of inadequate and depleted educational practices designed for ancient times –reductive thinking that is costly and destructive. This shows the difficulties faced by teachers as they try to implement inclusive teaching strategies whilst the educational systems are still fixed in the earlier system of separated education, which is according to the narrow

IE conceptualisation. The development of IE in South Africa is important in this regard as it points out how teaching and learning have transformed over years.

## 2.7 The Emergence of Inclusive Education in South Africa

The concept of IE emerged in South Africa as a response to the exclusion of some learners who were viewed as different by the systems of education around the country. The publication of the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) instilled inclusion as a guiding principle in the education for the development of all, arguing that all learners deserve to be educated in the mainstream schools irrespective of any differences or needs, be it physical, social, intellectual, or emotional aspect. Engelbrecht et al., (2016) concur with Srivastava, De Boer and Pijl (2013) as well as Waitoller and Artiles (2013) that IE is now considered a right to every learner to be a part of mainstream learning, to gain not only access but acceptance, full participation, and achievement in the South African education system.

South Africa, like many other countries, has had milestones that have shaped its conceptualisation of IE. According to Stofile, Green and Soudien (2018), the colonial education tradition that South Africa shares with numerous other Southern African nations has developed IE in a distinctive way. This suggests that efforts to correct various previous injustices inflicted on residents have shaped IE practices in South Africa. According to research, under the apartheid era (before to 1994 democracy), the educational framework institutionalized violations of numerous human rights by differentiating forms of educational providing to its population (Lomosfsky & Lazarus, 2001 cited in Roberts, 2011). As a result, South African citizens received distinct forms of education based on their race, color, gender, and other discriminating markers. According to Msila (2009), an inclusion movement evolved in the late 1980s, advocating for a single education system that educates everyone and eliminates prejudice. This entailed a paradigm shift in education from the old system to a new one that welcomes everyone by providing access, engagement, achievement, and quality education. South African education developments, understandably, contain an equity agenda in their policies and standards for inclusion implementation (Engelbrecht et al., 2016), as evidenced principally by the country's constitution. This demonstrates South Africa's commitment to transitioning from the previous discriminatory education system to

a new non-discrimination one. As a result, South Africa has produced numerous policy documents to demonstrate its determination to provide quality education to all.

As a consequence of the development of international legislation, South Africa has generated what Nareadi et al., (2016) refer to as "a multitude of policy documents concentrating on the provision of Inclusive Education" (p.8). This implies that South Africa has developed several policy documents that emphasize the education of all learners. In addition to the country's constitution, Table 2 contains a series of documents detailing the history of policy and law in the country promoting inclusion in all domains (Dreyer, 2017).

**Table 2: Some of the policy and policy-shaping documents towards South African Inclusive Education**

| YEAR | DOCUMENTS/DEVELOPMENTS |
|---|---|
| Period before 1994 | The time education systems were governed by separate legislation pieces based on education services for the four population groups as defined under the 1950 Population Registration Act<br>The schooling system was further fragmented by separate legislation governing a 'mainstream' system and a secondary 'specialized' system |
| 1993 | The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1992): Framework Report and Final summaries: A project of the National Education Co-ordinating committee. |
| 1995 | The White Paper Education and Training (DoE,1995):<br>• Provided a comprehensive framework for the transformation of the education system into single system.<br>• Outlined principles based on fundamental human rights and non-discriminatory practices in education.<br>• Recognised the inequalities experienced by learners with special needs and the importance of providing educational support services |

| YEAR | DOCUMENTS/DEVELOPMENTS |
|---|---|
| 1996 | The South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, ended the system of separate schooling on race basis, and created a single system for all learners.<br>The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa:<br>• Recognised basic human rights of all citizens, such as the right to education, including adult basic education.<br>Also included an equality clause that recognised the need for measures to address previous inequalities and protects citizens from unfair discrimination on several grounds, including disability. |
| 1997 | The integrated National Disability Strategy (DoE,1997a):<br>• Rejected the traditional 'medical model' of disability and argued for a social model which recognises disability as a human right and development issues.<br>• Provided a framework for the changes needed in all areas of government responsibility, including the provision of education support, services and employment and training opportunities for learners with disabilities.<br>Quality Education for All: Overcoming barriers to learning and development, a report by the NCSNET and NCESS (DoE,1997b) outlined steps towards the restructuring of the education system to meet the full range of diverse needs within a single system. |
| 2001 | The Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education-Building an inclusive education and training system (DoE, 2001):<br>• Provided a framework for the building of an education and training system.<br>• Provided conceptual and operational guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education. |
| 2005 | Numerous working documents (published by the Department of Basic Education [ DBE]) transpired from the Education White Paper 6, including:<br>• Conceptual and operational guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education:<br>○ District – based support teams. |

| YEAR | DOCUMENTS/DEVELOPMENTS |
|---|---|
| | ○ Full-service schools<br>• Draft National Strategy on SIAS<br>Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes. |
| 2009 | Guidelines for Full – service/ Inclusive schools |
| 2010 | Guidelines for Inclusive learning and teaching |
| 2014 | Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) |

Table 2 depicts the significant milestones achieved by IE thus far; nevertheless, for the purposes of this research, the emphasis is on the Education White Paper 6, 2001. (EWP6). This is because, as previously stated, this paper (Dreyer, 2017) forms the foundation of South African IE. The nation's objective for building a welcoming education and training system is summarised as follows:

> *The education and training system should promote education for all and foster the development of inclusive and supportive centres of learning that would enable all learners to participate actively in the education process so that they could develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society* (DoE, 2001 p.5).

This is a comprehensive vision that reveals the country's goal to transition from a discriminatory to an inclusive educational system by giving all learners much-needed support to enable them to attain their full potential and become productive citizens in the future. It is critical to consider the EWP6 principles that drive the construction of an inclusive educational system (Do E, 2001, p.5 cited in Dreyer, 2017):

• Recognition of the Constitution's principles and ideals, as well as the White Papers on Education and Training.

• Human rights and social fairness for all.

• Social inclusion and participation.

• Equitable access to a single inclusive education system.

• Use of the curriculum.

• Equity and redress.

• Responsiveness to the community; and

• Cost-effectiveness.

EWP6 also recognises that different learning needs may occur as a result of social, intrinsic, or systemic reasons (Dreyer, 2017). This implies that learning needs are variable and can be attributed to forces imposed by society, learners, or the educational system. As a result, according to the EWP6 paper, the following have been identified as educational barriers:

- negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference
- an inflexible curriculum
- inappropriate languages or languages of learning and teaching (LOLT)
- inappropriate communication
- inappropriate and unsafe built environments
- inappropriate and inadequate support services
- inadequate policies and legislation
- the non-recognition and non-involvement of parents
- inadequate and inappropriately trained education managers and educators (DoE, 2001 p. 7).

The highlighted barriers demonstrate that there are numerous reasons for learning issues, and hence teachers should be open to possible causes and varied approaches to teaching, rather than perceiving people with learning challenges as undesirable. According to Pasha (2016), the EWP6 acknowledges that each learner has distinctive needs that must be respected, and that each learner is capable of learning; hence, help to satisfy the individual learner's needs should be delivered. This contradicts the previous practice of isolating certain learners since they are not *typically* falling under the expected norm. As a result, the policy encourages the education system to take full responsibility for all learners by remaining flexible in its structures, respecting differences, developing learners' individual strengths, and adjusting curricula, environment, and attitudes, among other things, to meet the needs of all (NDoE, 2001 cited in Nareadi, Phasha &

Condy, 2016). The government demonstrated its commitment to Inclusive Education with this policy document (EWP6) and others. Yet, South Africa, like many other countries, has shifted from one strategy to the next in its quest for providing universal education. The transition from one paradigm to the next, however, has not been straightforward; some hypotheses have been found, tested, embraced, or discarded. According to Dreyer (2017), who agrees with previous researchers (Oliver, 1996; Hornby, Atkinson and Howard, 1997; Thomas and Loxley, 2001; Barton, 2005), conflicting paradigms on learners with special educational needs (LSENs) worldwide have evolved from the medical (segregated) to the social model (inclusive) approach, where social justice and human rights are core values of education and support. This demonstrates that various hypotheses, some of which are contradictory, have been explored and found by academics to include everyone in the educational system, including marginalised learners. It follows that these hypotheses provide a framework for justifying IE.

## 2.8 Theoretical Underpinnings of Inclusive Education, Terminology and Evolution

Inclusion of all learners in the educational system has always been a challenge, and some of these challenges are impacted by people's thinking about IE and inclusion, which is "rooted in community values, social support networks, and sentiments for others" (Tlale et al., 2016, p.31). This demonstrates that certain inclusion issues may be mistakenly or purposely generated by individuals through behavior toward those who are different from them, their beliefs, and their cultural norms and values. As a result, Tlale et al., (2016) believe that it is critical to investigate the influential objective of epistemology as a philosophy in shaping beliefs about knowledge and reality. This implies that the intention of epistemology is to convince humans about the truth which leads to the attainment of knowledge. Makoelle (2012) cited in Ngwenya, Makoelle & van der Merwe (2021) concurs with Fumetto (2009) that epistemology is closely linked to philosophy and is inclusive of ways in which knowledge is acquired, then confirmed because any philosophical claim made inevitably invites question (s) that are epistemological. This implies that epistemology is concerned with how one can examine the truth, and as such, any claim that is philosophical should be accompanied by explanations of how the

truth has been reached. As a result, Thomas and Loxley (2022) suggest that in order to comprehend inclusion, the epistemologies that have existed throughout its history must be deconstructed. This might imply that it is critical to follow the path that inclusion has taken in order to understand how society has formed reality and how it has shaped education. According to Tlale et al., (2016) & Slee (1998), three epistemological views have resulted in inclusion and IE being conceived differently.

### 2.9 Essentialist / Medical or Deficit Model

This is an approach that locates learners' differences or limitations "inside their particular pathology" (Tlale et al., 2016 p.31). This meant that persons who lived with impairments were considered unwell and in need of repair, a fix, or treatment according to the medical model. As a result, Shameem (2000) and Kasanji (1999), quoted in Shameem (2003), write that people who had impairments were considered a threat to society during the period and required cleansing. This demonstrates the epistemology of the period, which drove people to marginalise those who were different, even going so far as to consider them as needing purification. Importantly, Peters (2004) contends that the medical model was criticised because of its adoption of individual deficit theory, which concentrated on identifying the learner as problematic and recommending remedial measures such as medicine, counseling, and special treatment, among others. The shift away from the medical model constituted constituted an important step forward in the evolution of IE conceptualisation.

However, the shift from viewing learners who are different as problematic did not necessarily mean the outright rejection of the medical model as this model is Still utilised in classroom teaching and learning. This is evident in teaching and learning practices where learners are grouped according to capabilities. The justification of this type of grouping is to provide targeted support but the practice may unintentionally lead to the stigmatisation of those falling behind their peers. This is partially influenced by the educational laws that encourages competition amongst schools and learners. Florian (2019), for instance, makes an argument against the current situation in which the majority of national and international education policies support the idea of educational inclusion while maintaining a traditional special needs orientation to inclusion that relies on individualised approaches like

the identification and assessment of individual need, as well as specialist provision. Accordingly, Francisco and Wang (2020) argue for an awareness of special education laws and discriminative ability among teachers on the effectiveness of the approach in relation to human rights and social justice. This implies reflecting on the effectiveness of the medical and social model practices, whether they constrain or improve teaching in the field. If school principals, teachers, parents, and service providers are familiar with special education laws, both international and national, they would be in a better position to judge what is beneficial to all learners and their own rights. This means that as much as the social model has gained prominence, the medical model is still influencing the teaching and learning practices in schools. The reasons for the shift in prominence from the medical to the social model in IE discourse are examined in the next section.

## 2.10 Rationale for the use of both the medical and social models of teaching and learning

Despite the shift toward the social model perspective of acknowledging diversity, both medical and social model approaches are still used in teaching and learning in South African schools. There are various reasons for the medical model practices being employed alongside the social model practices. For instance, the fact that many teachers have been trained using the medical model practices, lack of clarity or ambiguities of the inclusion policy, lack of teacher agency, lack of knowledge, and lack of human/material resources are some of the major contributory factors (Donohue & Bornman, 2023). This explains the many factors that hinder the successful implementation of IE, and these hindrances should be addressed for the sake of IE development. Teachers are still stuck in the medical view of inclusion rather than the social model, as reported by Mabasa-Mangayi et al., (2022). This suggests that despite teachers' best efforts at working toward the social model practices, medical model practices are still prevalent in their classrooms, which is at least in part due to the actions that are currently required of teachers that are based on the medical model of understanding. For instance, bell curve thinking is brought about by grading learners' performance (Bowen & Cooper, 2021). Consequently, despite its drawbacks, the medical model is still employed in teaching and learning since the majority of evaluations and

performance evaluations reinforce the medical model's stance that some learners are average, some are above average and some are below average. In an identical vein, Qu (2022) notes that despite advancements in IE, there are still gaps in the progress by which the conceptual acceptance of IE is translated into practical teaching strategies. For instance, the positivist, medical view of disability underlies support for segregated schools. This viewpoint contradicts IE, which, according to Themane (2017), is motivated by interpretivist, social, and rights-based paradigms. Bowen and Cooper (2021) question the idea of grading and suggest that it be replaced with the concept of ungrading, which encourages the participation of all learners in collaborative work. Despite Janus, Siddiqua, and Noor's (2020) assertion that the medical model has a significant effect on teaching and learning, the model has limitations because it typically disregards the significance of biological and environmental factors for learning. As a result, even while it is important to recognise the learners' real-life experiences, those who work with children with impairments in special education must avoid letting a diagnosis interfere with the social aspects of learning and the learners' interactions with others. This clarifies the reason why it does not restrict or negatively impact a learner's cognitive growth if they have a physical impairment that is not extremely severe.

### 2.10.1 Social Model

Every culture has appropriate behaviors, rules, beliefs, and conventions that distinguish it as such. McLaughlin and Engen (2022) agree with Booth and Ainscow (2000) that the social model supports that society creates and constructs obstacles to full participation and learning in order to suit the majority's interests while restricting accessibility for those impacted (the minority). This might imply that the social model implies that all learners have the capacity to develop to their full potential if the necessary assistance is provided. It also demonstrates that the issue is with society structures, not with the learner. According to Tlale et al., (2016), based on Vygotsky's theoretical approach, perspectives on disability "moved from a deficiency and biological view to the idea of disability as a purely social construct" (p.32). This suggests that humans are the ones who build disability by dividing individuals based on their impairments in order to separate them from their

developmental settings. As a result, in an inclusive educational system, it is critical to identify and eliminate any types of exclusion that have the potential to become hurdles to permitting equitable participation and eradicating prejudice (DoE, 1997b). This might be accomplished by working toward the IE concept (Mitchell, 2005 quoted in Kefallinou, Symeonidou & Meijer, 2020) and avoiding the use of phrases that perpetuate or promote mindsets that maintain segregation. This encourages all interested parties to demonstrate their inclusion and mental adjustment by utilizing inclusive terminology as a means of educational reform that includes respect for all people's rights.

### 2.10.2 Rights-based Model

The rights-based paradigm stresses giving all learners equal opportunity, independence, and self-reliance (Artiles et al., 2006 cited in Kangas, 2021). This might suggest that this paradigm is consistent with a larger restructuring of educational institutions aimed at achieving social justice. According to Dreyer (2017), South Africa's movement toward a social justice and human rights paradigm is anchored on a larger social awareness of oppressed people's needs. This suggests that, while this paradigm was designed primarily for people with disabilities, South Africans benefit the most from it since social issues like oppression are detangled using a rights-based model. Strict adherence to the rights-based paradigm allows teachers to use more inclusive pedagogical strategies in their classrooms and learning environments.

## 2.11 Inclusive Practices

IE advocates for inclusive pedagogies that result in inclusive practices. Hart, Drummond and McIntyre (2007) as cited in Kopfer and Oskarsdottir (2019) identify three fundamental pedagogical principles required for the development of inclusive practices:

• Teachers’ commitment to teach all learners, which states that teachers should be confident that the are capable of teaching all learners

• The co-agency principle, which states that each learner is an active actor in their own learning and that there is interaction between the pupil and their teacher, and

• Trust principle: teachers believe that their students desire to perform their job; failure to do so does not place blame on the learner or the teacher.

The first principle highlights the importance of teachers' commitment to educate all learners, not only those regarded to be exceptional, with the help of other assisting staff members who work with the teacher. The second concept of co-agency emphasizes the roles of both learners and teachers. Teachers provide conducive learning environments and activities, while learners take on the responsibility of completing prescribed tasks, which is a two-way process. The third principle emphasizes that teachers, not learners, should analyse or reflect on their teaching techniques. For example, if learners have difficulties learning, teachers should not assume learners are defective; rather, they should evaluate what must be modified to improve learners' performance, whether that involves learning activities or resources. As a result, Gudjonsdottir and Oskarsdottir (2016) contend that inclusive practices assume that schools and educational systems take responsibility for shaping curriculum and teaching diverse learners in such a way that the education environment is appropriate for the learners' inherent resources. This means that schools and educational institutions must provide learning that is inclusive of all learners' cultures, beliefs, skills, talents, and personal experiences. According to Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) cited in Skerrett (2020), these are stores of knowledge that teachers must recognise and attune their teaching to the resources brought into the classrooms by the heterogeneity of learners. This means that teachers can capitalize on learners' innate resources to assist learning processes, therefore empowering all learners via the provision of quality education. For the purposes of this study, a significant emphasis was made on teachers' conceptualisations of IE during the Foundation Phase of learning in South Africa, which has an impact on pedagogy that encompasses everyone.

### 2.12 Inclusive Pedagogy

Inclusive pedagogy is best understood by first studying general pedagogy and what it encompasses. Some researchers (Lewis & Norwich, 2005 as cited in Cai, Dearden & Jin (2023) have demonstrated that mere pedagogy can refer to the use of a learned technique to deliver an activity or activities by one assumed to be more knowledgeable, usually the teacher, to the other less knowledgeable, usually the

learner, (but not always the case), thus, the reason for teachers to undergo effective training (Wilson, Flodden & Mundy, 2002 as cited in Eversole, 2019). This implies that pedagogy is about mastering the craft of teaching, or how to impart information to learners in a clear and easily understandable manner. Alexander (2001) agrees with Bennett (1999), as quoted in Alexander (2020) that the implementation of inclusive pedagogy is mediated by a range of circumstances and needs, including personal and organisational pressures. This might suggest that classroom teachers have the capacity to promote or undermine the realities of everyday classroom activities. As a result, Alexander (2020) argue that simple pedagogy has limitations since it concentrates on the education of the majority of learners rather than all learners, excluding those who are perceived to be underperforming. It is also good to consider what other scholars have stated regarding pedagogy.

According to Young (2006) and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) cited in Meade and Kwan (2022), pedagogy has also been defined in a number of ways throughout history in connection to politics, culture, knowledge, and the economy. This is congruent with Gupta's (2020) description of pedagogy as the consequence of interactions among learners, teachers, and larger communities. This implies that pedagogy is not a static concept since it adjusts to changing circumstances such as time, the type of teachers, learners, and society at a given time. According to Watkins and Mortimore (1999) cited in Han (2020), pedagogy was conceptualised over time, researchers understood that the teacher's approach and style are substantially influenced by their surroundings and the complexities of the classroom. This indicates the evolving nature of the term's meaning, showing that the concept of pedagogy cannot remain static over time but is fluid.

Pedagogy is interpreted differently depending on when it is defined and utilized. While Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) agree with Watkins and Han (2020) that pedagogy is any sensible activity undertaken by an individual with the intention of improving learning in another through artistic or scientific practice, Papatheodorou & Moyles (2009) define pedagogy as the teacher's focus on the in-between space occupied by those learning. While the most recent work (Papatheodorou & Moyles')

focuses on in-between areas influenced by cultural, human, and material resources, these definitions demonstrate the impact of time and context fluctuations. According to Engelbrecht and Green (2018), movement, language, visual symbols, gestures, and language fill the voids, as do Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009). But great education involves more than simply pedagogy. Research (Ainscow & Miles 2008; Meijer, 2003; Gudjonsdottir & Oskarsdottir 2016) reveals that this has been a concern to educational systems and teachers who must evaluate how to handle diversity. This highlights the crucial role that teachers play in the development of inclusive practices; they choose and make judgments regarding the circumstances in which learners acquire information and operate within school structures. Because teachers have the potential to assist or limit epistemic access, which Bekker (2015) defines as learning access for diverse learners, their pedagogical judgments should be informed. This might mean that teachers' pedagogical decisions/practices can either include or exclude learners from the educational system. As a consequence, Gudjonsdottir and Oskarsdottir (2016) concur with Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) that inclusive pedagogy is concerned with how instructors conceptualise inclusion and how to educate in inclusive situations. This might indicate that to effectively teach in inclusive classrooms, Inclusive Education teachers must understand and accept the concept of inclusion. Universal development of inclusion, according to Gudjonsdottir and Oskarsdottir (2016), encourages instructors to pursue pedagogy that will increase their competence by allowing them to handle various learners in their circumstances. This encourages teachers to be imaginative by adopting a variety of teaching approaches capable of fulfilling the demands of various learners.

Inclusive pedagogy promotes non-exclusive education or teaching that uses a variety of strategies to meet the requirements of every learner. Consequently, inclusive pedagogy, according to Florian and Spratt (2013), is essentially built on rejecting ability labelling, which is a deterministic assumption of unchanging ability that has, regrettably, historically underpinned the educational system. This reflects a change away from previous approaches to teaching that concentrated on labelling learners as competent or incapable of learning and growing toward understanding that all learners are capable of learning and progressing when

provided with approaches that are tailored to their requirements. In this sense, Black- Hawkins (2017), like Grenier (2016), criticises pedagogy that focuses on catering to the majority of learners while providing alternate or extra activities for some. She goes on to say that focusing on differences increases learners' marginalisation and isolation while also raising the likelihood of social impairment. This means that inclusive pedagogy is the art of teaching that caters to all learners rather than the majority (most) of them because doing so would necessitate providing alternate experiences for the select minority who are not embraced. Grenier (2016) contends that this encourages isolation and marginalisation of other learners, resulting in exclusion. As a result, considering inclusive pedagogy in combination with teacher agency and training is sensible.

### 2.13 Teacher Agency and Teacher Education

According to Biesta and Tedder (2007), agency should not be viewed as something inherent in individuals, but rather as "an emerging phenomenon of actor-situation transaction (p.137)". This implies that people who exercise agency act as a result of their environment rather than because of it; it is a trait of involvement that actors exhibit in certain situations. As a result, it is fair to define teacher agency as an action made by teachers in their daily activities that is (are) influenced by individual features and traits. Consequently, Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015), teacher agency is intimately tied to the personal attributes that teachers bring to their profession, which include knowledge, skills, and beliefs. This implies that teacher agency is associated with three aspects of teachers' attributes: knowledge received from Initial Teacher Education institutions, skills developed via experience, and personal values/beliefs. These are the factors that will determine whether teachers use their agency in the classroom to move toward or away from inclusive practices. As a result, Toom, Pyhältö, Pietarinen and Soini (2021) define teacher agency as the ability to reject external norms and regulations when they are judged to conflict with professionally legitimate behaviors, as well as to act creatively and innovatively. This form of teacher agency is critical during the Foundation Phase of teaching and learning because it establishes the correct principles of including all learners from the beginning.

## 2.14 Early Childhood / Foundation Phase Education in South Africa

Quality inclusive early childhood settings do not happen on their own, according to research (Van Rhijn, Underwood, Frankel, Lero, SpaIding, Janus & Hache, 2021; Guralnick, 2008; Underwood & Frankel, 2012), but rather supportive leadership is required within program settings and at the systemic level. This understanding of early inclusive behaviours is consistent with Sen's (1999) explanation of the difference, which incorporates geographic inequities in access to aid services. This shows that governments should play a key role in supporting early childhood development by establishing policies that clearly encourage it. These policies, according to Van Rhijn et al., (2021), include an obligation to enrol a percentage of children living with impairments that is reflective of prevalence population rates, a commitment to transdisciplinary team approaches, and the emergence of global relationships that are designed to advance inclusion. As a consequence of school-inclusive practices, this means offering a support framework to the families of learners with impairments, eliminating exclusion, and encouraging the learner. Guralnick (2008), for example, underlines the significance of integrated service addressing such challenges as education, health, social services, childcare, and early detection and intervention mechanisms as essential contributors to inclusive practice programs (Guralnick, 2008; Van Rhijn et al., 2021). As a result, one of the most significant contributions to inclusive practices is the collaboration of these interconnected service providers. Consequently, early IE can help learners avoid barriers as they go through the grades, while simultaneously providing teachers with additional challenges in unpacking concepts that were supposed to be learned in previous years. As a result, IE in the early years of learning helps to eliminate the exclusion of some learners from the educational system.

Traditionally, the South African government was not responsible for Early Childhood Development (ECD). According to Margetts and Phatudi (2013), preschool phase learning has been a neglected educational sector in South Africa, and until the onset of the democratic era in 1994, early childhood service provision was organized along racial lines. According to the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), (1992), from the 1950s to the early 1970s, there was not a single preschool learning for the Black sector in the country. This might mean that

children from Black families were denied access to critical foundational learning, which serves as the cornerstone for inequality. Following the NEPI recommendation, the government assumed responsibility for ECD education from non-governmental groups (Margetts & Phatudi, 2013), resulting in the development of the formulation of White Paper 5 (WP5). This indicated a break in efforts to persuade the government of its own responsibility to educate all learners, even those in informal settings.

### 2.15 Inception of the Foundation Phase in South Africa

The NEPI recommendation made the South African government to be aware not only of the need of pre-formal education but also of the significance of early childhood education. Consequently, ECD planning has been included in documents for the three National Departments (Health, Education, and Social Development) (Stoberck & Moodley, 2010). This indicated the government's dedication to providing for, learning about, and safeguarding the rights of the country's young citizens. The Department of Education (2001) created a comprehensive Reception Year provision structure that includes three components:

- Reception Year programs (within the public primary schools)
- Reception Year programs (within community-based sites)
- Reception Year programs (Independent provision)

This meant that all preschools in the country, whether public, private, or independent, had to provide for reception year learners, also known as Grade R. As a result, in South Africa, the Foundation Phase encompasses Grades R, 1, 2, and 3 (Green, 2011; Verbeek, 2014). As a result, the Department of Education's major task for all ECD policy developments is to care for and develop early learning to children in conjunction with parents in order to reduce gaps caused by economic distribution, because ECD benefits flow from parents to society (DoE, 2001). This might suggest that the government's involvement in the growth of the young contributes to reducing socioeconomic imbalances and providing high-quality educational services in all ECD settings and throughout the country. Notwithstanding the fact that South Africa has abolished historical racial segregation, Spaull (2013) claims that schools that served predominantly White

learners during the Apartheid era are still operational, whereas those that served Black learners are dysfunctional and unable to teach the skills required. This might suggest that, despite the shift away from South Africa's previously punitive education system, there are still two separate education systems creating two unique data processes. In essence, it suggests that South Africa has two parallel early childhood education systems, one of which achieves the desired outcomes while the other struggles to thrive. According to Msila (2014), dysfunctional/functional schools are driven by parents' socioeconomic status, and hence dysfunctional schools are most prevalent in certain locations. The government highlighting one educational system (when there are two) highlights the catastrophic consequences of this dualistic education system, resulting in false findings and misleading policy conclusions (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). Because the conception and execution of IE do not coexist with systemic practices, teachers have difficulty trying to teach inclusively because of this misperception.

Yet, the education of young learners (pre-formal learning) should be prioritized for the prosperity of any nation. According to Underwood, Frankel, Spalding and Brophy (2018), early childhood experiences are critical for development, and all children should have access to high-quality early childhood education that affects their level of social justice and freedom. This suggests that if all learners, even those in informal learning situations, have access to high-quality education, they would be able to fully develop and become productive citizens of their respective countries. This is consistent with Sen's (1999) statement that "the supply of social opportunities directly contributes to the growth of human capacities and the quality of life; hence, a government that gives health care and education to all may genuinely accomplish higher accomplishments" (p.144). This might mean that if a country invests in early childhood education, future generations will be better able to make informed and knowledgeable decisions about their lives.

Although IE has been recognised in schools as the most equitable strategy for learners of all ages, this has not been the case in early childhood education (Underwood et al., 2018). This shows that IE is not valued in pre-formal learning and that the settings are not inclusive since not all early childhood learning facilities embrace diverse learners. Storbeck and Moodley (2010), for example, feel

that despite the inclusion of the ECD sector in the three primary departments, their requirements may be overlooked owing to a lack of clarity on how the policy would be executed and a lack of a specified budget. Additionally, despite some well-known proclamations, Underwood and Frankel (2012) as quoted in Bagatto et al., (2020) argue that early childhood development inclusive behaviours have not been as clearly linked to equality as previously thought. This demonstrates a lack of clarity on the inclusion of all learners in early childhood learning settings. For example, the United Nations General Assembly (2007) notes that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognises everyone's right to "access inclusive, quality, and free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live" (Article 24, Section 2. b). This right is silent regarding early years learning, the pre-formal schooling that feeds into South Africa's Foundation Phase of learning. It is crucial to take note of the conclusive early childhood definition provided by the Division for Early Childhood (DCE) which states that early childhood inclusion embodies practices, values, and policies that support the right of every infant and young child and their family without any conditions, providing a sense of belonging, positive social relationships, membership to develop learning that will reach their full potential. It is seen from this definition that the defining features for quality early learning are the participation of all age groups, access to all age groups, and supporting everybody, hence the reason to be clear on including early years in learning. It goes without a doubt that early years learning is closely linked to the provision of quality learning, thus, no one should be deprived of quality education. If young children in preformal education are not provided with high-quality instruction, this could lead to their marginalisation and the perception that they will require additional attention when they enroll in formal education. In this manner, it can be special needs education is viewed as an alternative for learners falling behind their peers. However, it should be acknowledged that special needs education provided the groundwork for IE, and as such, its contributions are significant.

### 2.16 History of Special Needs Education at Global Level

Francisco, Hartman and Wang (2020) provide a global overview of how special education has evolved over years. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights was adopted, and this gave a fundamental human right of protection to all people, including those with disabilities. Francisco et al., (2020) further elaborate that Article 26 of the Convention argued for the right to free education in the fundamental years of learning. Furthermore, the Convention argued for the parents' right to choose they type of education for their children. This meant that parents were empowered to choose education that they viewed as appropriate for their children. The 1950s and 1960s, witnessed the rise in the government's federal support of special education, this was partly caused by the parents and interested groups' movements (Francisco et al., 2020). This led to several state laws permitting individuals with disabilities to be educated in ordinary classrooms. 1960s witnessed the Advent of the Civil Rights Movement, this led yet another shift in viewing disabilities – mainstreaming.

Yell (2015) reports of the advent of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in 1968, which was a scientific approach to understanding behaviour. Francisco et al. (2020) reports that this scientific approach was significant in working with learners with disabilities as it provided an alternative way of viewing maladaptive and severe behaviour challenges. The ABA assisted advancing the understanding of the nature of behaviour and that behaviour is not fixed, it can be modified, quantified, analysed, or even be changed (Smith, Eikeseth & Lovaas, 2011) in Francisco et al., (2020). This conscientised teachers at that time that children living with disabilities can learn with other learners if they are provided with the right interventions. Yell, Rogers (1998) cited in Francisco et al., (2020) report of the renaming of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is noteworthy that this amendment was not only about renaming the law but more so, the use of language, for example, the use of the word "disability' from the word 'handicapped'

Additionally, the year 1990 was when the rise of the social model was realised which perceives disability as the result of the disabling environment. This paved way for the rearrangement of the environment in terms of ramps, hallways, doorway provisions, and other physical environment access arrangements. The 20$^{th}$ Century saw the amendment of the several existing public laws internationally concerning special education.The way societies look at people with disabilities changed in

2006, according to Florian (2019), because contemporary special education practices were impacted by human rights, social justice, and educational equity. Table 3 demonstrates a tabulated representation of some of the special education milestones at a global level.

**Table 3: Some of the Global Special Educational Milestones**

| Year | Milestone |
|---|---|
| **1948** | Universal Declaration of Human Rights |
| **1950s, 1960s** | A rise in policy documents allowing individuals with disabilities to be educated with 'normal' learners |
| **1960** | Civil Rights Movement – Integration to Mainstreaming |
| **1968** | The rise of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) |
| **1969** | Normalisation |
| **1970** | Adoption of Humanistic Approach |
| **1990** | Enactment of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) |
| **20th Century** | Amendment of existing public laws on special education |
| **2006** | Adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |

Francisco et al., (2020) highlight the changes throughout the historical years as perspectives of disability and consequent way in which learners are viewed evolved. This justifies why in the early years practice focused more on the welfare of the majority, which resulted in the isolation or exclusion of some individuals from the society. Eventually, with the rise of the rights movement, the philosophies of social justice emerged, leading to a shift from individual focus to how school placement were determined (Francisco et al., 2020). It should be acknowledged that the school placement of learners with impairments (not severe) was considered a humane practice. This also includes the use of the term compulsory education, compulsory was not inclusive of those with disabilities. Later in the 1970s, the focus shifted to include even those with disabilities to be included in compulsory education. It was in 1990 when the focus further shifted to individual, not their disability. This implied a shift in how society perceived education and development of those living with disabilities by emphasising not only access to

education but more so the quality of instruction and progress of the individuals with disabilities. This meant that learners with disabilities would not only be included in regular classes with their peers, but that the schools would also be held responsible for their progress. The learners with disabilities would be assessed using the same grade-level standards as their peers to determine progress through individualised instruction that was centered on measurable objectives.

Despite the fact that equity for people with disabilities is commonly thought to be achieved through special education, Francisco et al., (2020) claim that it appears that the current special education system of education does not support equity. The authors continue by asserting that traditionally, the functional limitations model has dominated the field of special education. These beliefs place a strong emphasis on the limits that exist for individuals with disabilities and the efforts made by teachers to develop instructional methods that would close the gap left by those challenges. But when you look more closely at the underlying presumptions that underpin special education, this is essentially the same as trying to fit square pegs into round holes. Florian (2019) makes the case that the system should accommodate learners rather than forcing them to fit into the rigid structure that already exists, as doing so would imply that individuals who do not fit are excluded from learning. The deficit model of education needed to be replaced with a learner-centered approach in order for the educational system to acknowledge learner diversity and stop trying to fit learners into the system.

Physical, sensory, intellectual, and emotional challenges were used to characterise special education in the early 1900s (UNESCO, 1994). All children who are unable to benefit from school have been included in the notion over time (UNESCO, 1994). The use of assessments like intelligence testing is problematic, there are negative effects with labelling children with special needs, and there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of special education, according to Farrell (2010). These are some of the major criticisms of special education. Through special education, a learner's unique demands are seen as undesired and tragic, which further oppresses and marginalises a person, according to Naraian and Schlessinger (2017) in Koloto (2021). Thus, according to Koloto (2021), special education has developed since the 19th century to provide education for learners

with special needs apart from the general population. Jenson (2018), cited in Koloto (2021), claims that school placement choices for learners with special education needs were based on a medical diagnosis. This explains why special needs education has been built on the medical model approach, which perceives the problem as residing within the individual. This has resulted in their separation in order to educate the diagnosed learners separately, either in other schools or separately inside the mainstream schools. Koloto (2021) rejects the notion that IE or special education must be chosen, and instead contends that an education system must be created that has the potential to integrate IE concepts with local cultural values. This is a recognition that both special education and IE have their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, combining the best elements of both approaches may be more advantageous than picking just one. More information about the difficulties teachers encounter managing diversity in their classrooms is provided by the history of special education in South Africa.

## 2.17 History of Special Education at South African Level

The history of education in South Africa is useful in either providing insights or shedding light on the current educational situation. According to Mthukrisshna and Schoeman (2000), during the apartheid era, legislation and educational policy were entrenched along racial inequality and segregation. This describes how the apartheid system divided people into four racial categories—Whites, Indians, Coloureds, and finally Africans—which had an impact on each person's entire life. Mthukrishna & Schoeman (2000) go into more detail about the disparities brought about by the administration of social services and educational programs along racial lines with evident imbalances. This explains why Black learners received the worst educational provisions while their White counterparts received the most favourable ones, as the provisions were dependent on racial lines. Mthukrishna and Schoeman (2000) in agreement with White and Van Dyk (2019) claim that these disparities resulted in extremely specialised and expensive special needs education and support services for a small group of learners, the majority of whom were White and Indian learners. This meant that the Black learners, since they were given the least educational provision, they were excluded from equal and quality education. This trend has permitted to the modern age despite the shifts

made as the current state of the provision for Black learners, especially those in rural areas, is extremely inadequate.

Apartheid laws that enforced separation along racial lines as well as legislation and policy that differentiated between 'regular' learners and learners with 'special needs' all contributed to the fragmentation of special needs education (Donohue & Bornman, 2023). As a result of their separation and marginalisation from the main stream of educational opportunities, learners with impairments and those who struggle with learning have been relegated to a second system of education. Donohue and Bornman (2023) argue that these learners were cast aside as a secondary focus in schooling and the nature of support services they were provided with revealed a considerable emphasis on the medical paradigm for 'learner deficits' diagnosis and treatment. The issue arises when the medical model is viewed negatively, despite the fact that it was helpful back then and that it is still applicable to modern teaching and learning (Mpontshane,2022). Negative perceptions of the medical model result in stereotypes, the exclusion of some learners (particularly those who struggle) from mainstream classes, and other unwanted consequences. For instance, it would not be necessary to remove a learner out of the regular class because they are having difficulties with some academic subjects. On the other hand, it would be necessary to remove a learner who has a significant impairment (such as severe Cerebral Palsy) and is unable to sit, walk, feed themselves, or use the toilet by themselves. At this point, a medical model must be applied to determine how to best help the individual, possibly by placing them in a special needs school that would meet their needs.

## 2.18 Conclusion

This chapter has explored and engaged with other researchers' pertinent literature. It examined the evolution of Inclusive Education from the international to the national levels. Inclusive Education has been investigated in terms of its origins in South Africa, including the six approaches to inclusion that resulted in two major Inclusive Education conceptualisations, as well as the evolution of its language, which led to the development of knowledge. The chapter also delved into the history of special education that capitalises the use of the medical model. Special education history has been traced from the global level to the South African level.

This has shed some light in understanding how teachers handle diversity in schools as the influence from the apartheid era has permeated into the modern teaching and learning. In terms of policy and inclusive practices, the legislative and policy documents that resulted in diverse learners being permitted to enroll in a school or institution of their choice were evaluated. The next chapter will concentrate on the theoretical frameworks pertinent to this study as informed by the evaluated literature.

# CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the two theoretical frameworks that were employed in this study: Conceptualisation of IE: Effect on Primary School Principals and Foundation Phase Teachers. The theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Black - Hawkins' Inclusive Pedagogical Framework are aligned with the key facets of the literature research for this study, and therefore employed as lenses to examine how primary teachers and school administrators conceptualise IE. This chapter illustrates the relevance of the two theoretical frameworks and how they were used during the data collection, analysis, and discussion sections to answer the research questions and, finally, to provide recommendations.

## 3.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was initially an ecological theory, which Anderson, Boyle and Deppler (2014) incorporated into an IE framework. This signifies that the model was not initially designed for IE, but it has been integrated into it. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, first introduced in 1976, provides an essential framework for organizing the environment and attempting to comprehend the environment's effect on the child's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976 cited in Anderson et al., 2014). This indicates that this theory recognises that all efforts to accommodate everybody, including guaranteeing full participation and providing quality education, are all centred on the learner. According to Bronfenbrenner (1976), an individual's (child's) development is determined by their relationships and surroundings. This implies that the people with whom learners interact are significant to their development because they shape development (negatively or positively). As a result, Bronfenbrenner (1976) identified five systems that impact the learner and depicts these settings where the learners exist like a "nested arrangement of structures" (p.5). Bronfenbrenner recognises that a learner does not thrive in isolation but is supported or impacted by various structures surrounding him/her, such as the family, group, community, and nation.

Moreover, Anderson et al., (2014) claim that all decisions or activities performed by the family, school, or country at various levels are premised on enriching the

learner, thus IE's determinants are viewed as involvement, accomplishment, and value. This demonstrates the need for all five systems working together to deliver quality education to all learners. Along the same vein, Evans (2013) asserts that participation necessitates a learner's active involvement (academically and socially), as well as a curriculum that is relevant to working cooperatively with peers. This suggests that participation entails more than simply placing learners in schools/classes; rather, learners ought to be provided with experiences that are tailored to their specific needs. According to Aspin (2007), learners should have a sense of belonging and the confidence that their teachers and peers believe in their ability. This has a significant impact on teacher' practices: if learners are valued in inclusive environments, they have the chance to develop and bring out their best.

Yet, the three determinants or drivers of IE (participation, accomplishment, and value) do not occur in a vacuum of education (Anderson et al., 2014), but rather within a variety of ecological systems. This demonstrates that learners' engagement, valuing, and accomplishment do not occur at random, but are influenced by external influences (intrinsic and extrinsic). The following is Bronfenbrenner's five structures that have a significant impact on teachers' practices in assisting learners to learn effectively (Anderson et al., 2014):

### 3.2.1 Microsystem

This is the learner's immediate core system, with structures with which the learner directly interacts, and the existing formal and informal variables include families, schools, churches, and neighbourhoods. This system addresses the most fundamental interactions and relationships that the child/learner experiences with their immediate surroundings, which can have a positive or negative impact. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), relationships have a bi-directional impact; they occur in both directions, away from and toward the child. This implies that teachers may impact how learners respond to their teaching and vice versa. For example, a teacher who strives to accept diversity in their classroom enables every learner to experience a feeling of belonging, appreciation, and worth as members of the class. But, if a teacher demonstrates a marginalising attitude, the marginalised learner (s) as well as others will suffer. The mesosystem, the very

next level of influence, is intimately connected to and dependent on the microsystem.

### 3.2.2 Mesosystem

The second system that follows the micro-system considers the interdependence of main systems in the micro-systems. This system differs from others in that it supports the notion that the factors within the micro-system do not exist in isolation from one another, but rather that there are dynamic relations and connections between them that occur on a continual basis, changing and revolving, and thus impacting the teacher's practices, thereby affecting the learner. Interactions between parents and teachers, parents and health services, parents and the community, and parents and the church are examples of links. These connections have a direct impact on how the learner learns and develops, thus it is critical to cultivate strong positive relationships. Teachers, for example, can take responsibility for fostering strong relationships between educational institutions and learners by promoting inclusive practices. The mesosystem connects what happens in the microsystem to the next level of effect, which is the exosystem.

### 3.2.3 Exosystem

The third system refers to the larger social system in which the learner does not directly participate and is considered to include both official and informal systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Leadership structures, workplaces, mass media, school culture, teaching/non-teaching personnel, beliefs and ideology, patterns of collaboration and authority, support structures, school rituals, school policies/procedures, and the cohort of learners are all exosystem influences. The structures in this system may have an indirect influence on the learner's development; for example, the learner may receive a positive or negative impact from their parents, depending on how they are treated at work. As a result, Anderson et al., (2014) contend that this system is comprised of variables that exist outside of the school's physical environment but nevertheless have an impact on the inner systems, which in turn impact the learner. They go on to discuss the many settings in this system as include political, social, historical, global, and other elements such as educational system (s), mandatory curriculum in certain circumstances, and current agendas. For example, political unrest in a nation might

drive investors to withdraw their investments, prompting a parent to be retrenched, resulting in constrained use of scarcity of resources and the family resorting to changing location and class of living and child's schooling. The exosystem is followed by a system that has a greater influence on the learner despite its positioning.

### 3.2.4 Macrosystem

This is the largest and most distant system from the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), yet it nevertheless has impact over the learner. This indicates that the macrosystem is made up of people and places that are distant from the learner yet nonetheless influence their development. This system is considered to be made up of cultural values and patterns, prevailing ideas and behaviours unique to the learner, and economic and political institutions. This implies that because learners are varied and come from various backgrounds, their developmental experiences will differ. A six-year-old learner, for example, whose parents have fled from their place of origin owing to economic insecurity would develop differently than their classmate who is developing in an economically solid state. The macrosystem is followed by the chronosystem, which completes Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.

### 3.2.5 Chronosystem

A system that is unique from other systems and is situated on the outskirts of the learner's surroundings, (Anderson et al., 2014), addresses the passage of time and how it affects the learner. This means that the chronosystem takes into account the kind of routine that the learner is subjected to, such as if parents/teachers are orderly and predictable, or whether they alter patterns abruptly. For example, if the school timetable/schedules are followed appropriately or there are abrupt alterations now and then, do parents take their children from school at the appropriate time, or are they highly unpredictable? This system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) includes changes and transitions that may alter the learner's development and behaviour. This indicates that events such as parental divorce, parent(s) death, or loss of work might have a detrimental influence not just on the relationship but, to a greater extent, on the learner. It should be mentioned that, because the framework of the IE ecosystem is developed with the learner as its primary concern,

the timeframe is considered from the moment a learner enrols in school until the end of their secondary schooling (Anderson et al., 2014). It should be recognised that each system is interconnected to and connected to other systems, and that these ties and connections exist amongst the variables included inside each system. The five systems that impact an individual's development are depicted in Figure 1.

### 3.3 Five Cycles of Influence to Individual's Development

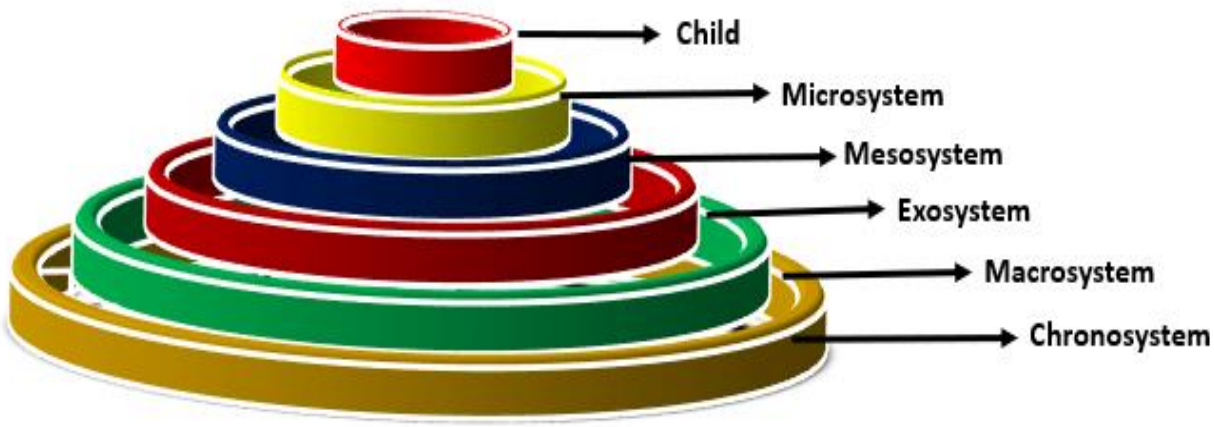



***Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of IE Framework***

The diagram above depicts the systems that comprise the learner's contextual development. As previously mentioned, the learner is at the centre, and the five systems work on the individual's development (most of the systems have an indirect influence on the learner), and they can have a positive or negative effect on the person in question.

Although Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is intended for the development of learners, it will be adapted to the development of teachers for the purposes of this study by substituting learners in the centre with teachers. This will be beneficial in realizing that no one works alone; rather, everyone is accountable to higher bodies. Teachers, for example, work in a certain society with its own particular challenges. The principals, in turn, work under a framework provided by the Department of Education, which they must comply. The Department of Education has also provided them with policies and directives that are conceptualised in a particular way. Yet, the Department of Education operates inside a larger circle of legislation in the country that is much larger than the policy.

International laws and regulations, which the country must follow as a signatory, also have an impact on the country's legislation. As a result, all of these circles of influence have an impact on the inclusive practices of principals and teachers, and I was looking at what the participants do know, how they conceptualise IE, what challenges they face, if any, and what helps them face those challenges, and how what they think about IE affects the decisions they make when teaching throughout data collection. So, basically, I was interested as to what participants knew about IE, and how this impact their practices in their teaching spaces. This was done through carefully listening and analysing participants'' responses on how they work within the different circles of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (*adjusted*). For the purposes of this study, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory will be referred to as the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development from this point on.

The *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development has its limitations, which will be compensated by the Inclusive Pedagogical Framework. For instance, the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development mainly focuses on the constraints or enablers of teachers' and principals' influences in their teaching and learning spaces. This theoretical framework overlooks the beliefs and knowledge of the Foundation Phase teachers and the principals of the primary schools. This oversight results in the unintentional exclusion and marginalisation of certain learners by disregarding concerns related to the underlying beliefs and knowledge of Foundation Phase teachers and primary school principals. Therefore, the Inclusive Pedagogical Framework compliments this gap as it allows engagement with the underlying beliefs that teachers and principals hold which the other Theoretical framework has limited engagement with. As a result, combining the two theoretical frameworks strengthens the lens of this study, viewing what enables or constrains Foundation Phase teachers and primary school principals in their endeavours to implement inclusive practices. The rationale for including the Inclusive Pedagogical framework is explained in detail below.

### 3.4 Inclusive Pedagogical Framework

Because of its emphasis on diversity, the notion of inclusive pedagogy has gained widespread acceptance among IE academics. Specific inclusive pedagogical

works were traced for the purposes of this study from the works of Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), Florian and Spratt (2013), and Florian and Walton (2017), which eventually built up to the work of Black-Hawkins (2017), which is the second theoretical framework for this study. It is worth noting that the three authors stated above established the inclusive pedagogical framework based on three essential facts that are applied in this study. The first is to provide epistemic access to all learners by considering diversity as a part of humanity. The second is to address learning challenges as professional challenges, rejecting deterministic conceptions regarding learners. The third element is ongoing professional development for inclusive teachers, along with motivation to collaborate. These three IE foundations must be reinforced by legislative policies that promote the existing educational institutions.

Numerous governments throughout the world have implemented legislation to promote more inclusive educational systems over the years (Black-Hawkins, 2017; Artiles et al., 2006), but IE developments and practices have proven challenging to implement. This implies that, despite the country's efforts to reform education toward IE, inclusive practices have not yet been accomplished efficiently. Perhaps this is why Black-Hawkins (2017) asks how one can contribute to an understanding of everyday knowledge in relationship to classroom practices, acknowledge and respond to all learners, and avoid excluding other learners. How can research findings demonstrate respect for teachers' expertise and experiences while also promoting their professional development? These concerns imply that significant research findings concentrating on approaches of developing inclusive practices and teaching inclusively, respectfully recognizing the hard work performed by teachers striving to fulfill the demands of educating everyone, are needed to aid teachers.

Recalling the focus of IE at this point is important to understand the concept of inclusive pedagogy. Florian and Walton (2017) contend that IE’s focus is to ensure that all learners, including those previously marginalised, have access to quality education under educational systems that do not exclude anyone. To achieve this, they further argue, the educational system should do away with organisational structures: and curricula that “sift and categorize learners based on predetermined

judgments about what learners can and ought to learn" (p.161). This could mean that in inclusive learning, everybody is given an opportunity to thrive by provisioning of needed educational structures: and curricula that are responsive to needs of diverse learners, without pre-establishing learners' capabilities. Research has shown that in Southern Africa, predetermining learners' educational outcomes has had bad results, (Engelbrecht et al., 2015; Florian & Walton, 2016), eventually leading to exclusion of some learners, despite the commitment to IE principles. This suggests that the practice of presetting what learners can, cannot, and ought to achieve has led to the exclusion of many, especially exclusion that happens within schools/ classrooms that claim to be inclusive. For instance, Engelbrecht et al., (2015) report that in South Africa, in the case where some learners are viewed as, "not normal", they are considered learners who cannot cope under normal circumstances, and less is expected from them. This leads to the separating of classes, (special needs classes), which is not only viewing difference as problematic but creates injustice when achievement gaps related to social and structural deprivation are credited to a learning deficit within the individual (Florian & Walton, 2017). This means that when some learners are separated from their peers with the view that they are not matching their peers' performance standards, in other words, it implies that teachers view differences through the medical lens, which is explained in the literature review, as an individual problem (rejection of diversity). This also puts those identified learners at a further disadvantage as they are deprived of the quality education their peers are getting under conducive, social, and structural conditions.

Hence, Hart, Dixon, Drummond, and McIntyre (2004) as cited in Wright (2023) argue for an alternative approach to pedagogy, pedagogy that substitutes fixed ability notions. This suggests the need for an approach that would appreciate that learners' learning capabilities are not static, they can change for the better, with the provision of the right materials and positive teachers' mental attitudes. Inclusive pedagogy is considered the exact approach to achieve this because its aim is to simultaneously improve all learners' achievement and ensure that everybody has access to education (Florian & Walton, 2017). This implies that inclusive pedagogy's aim as a teaching approach, is twofold, that is, to help every learner to

gain epistemological access to education as well as to ensure that the marginalised groups of learners are included in the same system. It is remarkable that inclusive pedagogy goes against the strong and widely used practice of “offering different pedagogy to some learners to that ordinarily offered to others of the same age” (Florian & Walton, 2017, p.170). This, they further argue, can be achieved by practices of extending to everybody what is ordinarily available in classroom activities, thus, offering an alternative to the bell-curve thinking perspective. This means that even though the practice is widely accepted, inclusive pedagogy rejects that some learners should be taught using a different pedagogy. Useful information to teach inclusively could be derived, more specifically, from those who have been practicing inclusive teaching for some time.

Most approaches have an origin that influences their prosperity or failure. Inclusive pedagogy emerged from the craft knowledge study of classroom practitioners in the UK, who were committed to the IE principles (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Florian & Spratt, 2013). This suggests that the named researchers studied how experienced teachers practically handled the issues of raising the achievements of all learners while at the same time supporting the vulnerable from all forms of exclusion. Craft knowledge is defined as the “accrued wisdom derived from classroom practitioners, and practice-orientated researchers” (Florian & Walton, 2017, p.171). This implies that craft knowledge is effective teaching skill that teachers or researchers have accumulated over a period of years. The study of craft knowledge revealed that inclusive pedagogical principles unsettle some of the practices and assumptions related to teaching and learning (Green, 2016). This shows that adhering to craft knowledge goes against the “norm” as one would find that some practices which have been taught and accepted as the right thing to do are working against inclusion and IE. For instance, the practices mentioned prior by Hart and Drummond (2004) of deciding in advance what learners can and cannot do. Using teachers’ craft knowledge coupled with research discoveries led Black-Hawkins to formulate a working theoretical framework.

Building on their previous articles, Black-Hawkins and colleagues (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Florian et al., 2016) developed a theoretical framework that

focuses on teachers' practices and educational policy in their most recent work. As a result, this theoretical framework (Black-Hawkins, 2017) is even more trustworthy because it is based on studies conducted by Black-Hawkins and other researchers in the past. As a result, according to Black-Hawkins (2017), inclusive pedagogy should be characterized in terms of how teachers employ their selected teaching strategies, rather than how they choose those strategies themselves. This shows that even though certain of their actions might be advantageous to learners, teachers occasionally lack the ability to explain why they take a particular action. Thus, Black-Hawkins (2017) recognised the necessity of developing a framework that will explain to teachers what they can do and why they ought to do it. This is due to the fact that, as she goes on to explain, educating all learners requires a slight educational pedagogical shift, therefore the examination of three crucial principles.

Applying the work done by Florian and Walton (2017), which focuses on inclusive pedagogy in the South African context, Black -Hawkins (2017) argues that teachers need to adjust their thinking about differences among learners by creating learning opportunities for everybody. This suggests that teachers should desist from creating learning opportunities for some learners they perceive capable of achieving their potential, then, afterward, making provisions for those they assume are not as capable as those falling in the most group. Admittedly, for teachers to shift or adjust their thinking in this area, is not an easy task because it goes against what teachers and almost everyone has been made or conditioned to accept as the proper and acceptable way of teaching. The first teachers' mental adjustment identified by Black-Hawkins (2017) is:

### 3.4.1 Shifting Focus Away from Learners' Differences to the Learning of All

This is concerned with changing teachers' thinking from differences presented by the diversity of learners towards the education of all learners (Black – Hawkins, 2017; Hart & Drummond, 2014). This suggests a change in teachers' naturalised mental attitude to prepare for and teach most of the learners, and then prepare something different for those facing challenges. Concurring with the same sentiments, Black-Hawkins (2017) states that it is moving away from a traditional, or individualized, approach to learner diversity that starts by making provision for

most learners, and then offers something more or different for some learners identified as having needs that are outside the norm, and towards a pedagogical approach that starts with the learning of everybody. This suggests that the enactment of inclusive practices goes against what is usually accepted as “normal” because people have normalized that no matter how one teaches, there will always be those who will fall into the two extremes and those in the majority. In the same vein, Florian, and Spratt (2013) state that inclusive pedagogical approach teachers work on creating rich learning spaces to give everybody opportunities to thrive, thus, supporting all rather than most learners, and offering added, separate help to those identified as having challenges. Instead, Black -Hawkins (2017) advises teachers to aim at developing their classes into rich inclusive communities where a range of opportunities to learn are provided for all to take part, thus attention is on what to teach and how to make the teaching accessible, not who can/cannot learn. Offering learning opportunities to everyone is grounded on the idea that everybody can learn which the following key area of the framework is.

### 3.4.2 Refusing Deterministic Beliefs about Ability as Fixed and the Notion that Presence of Some Derails Progress of Others

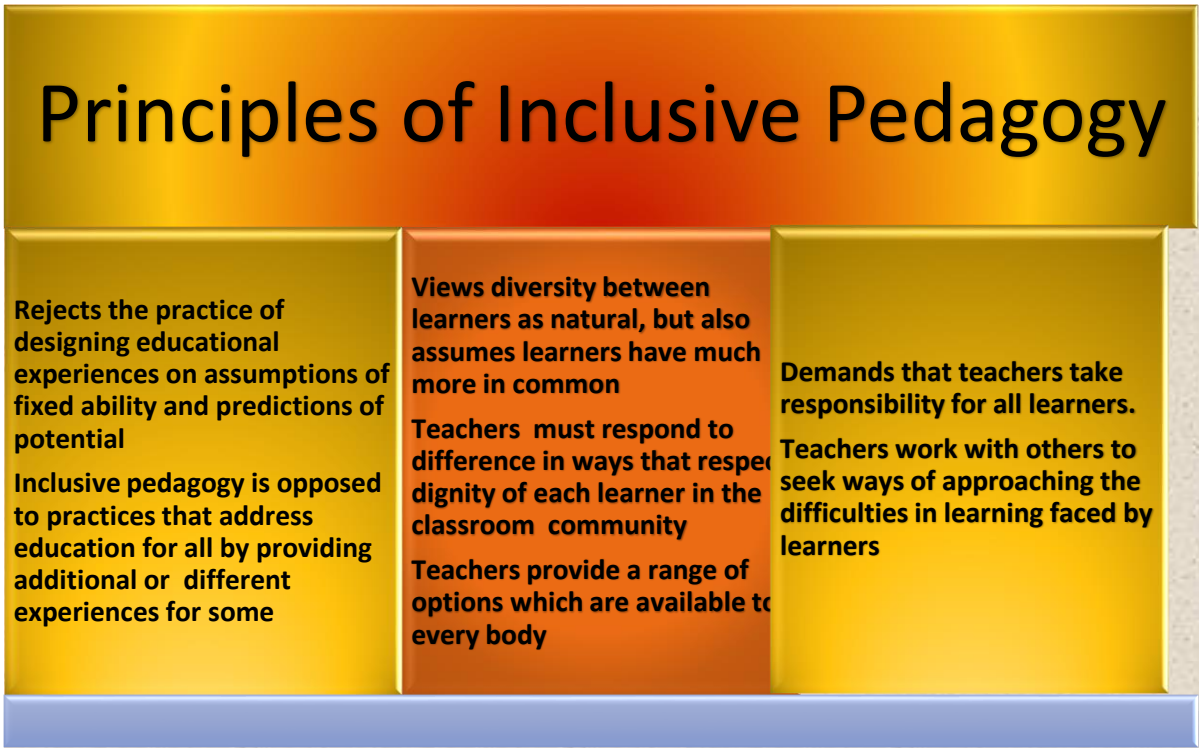
This is the second identified key area in this framework – the belief that everybody has the potential for learning, progress, and achievement, which Hart and Drummond (2014) say is the rejection that ability is fixed. This key area has an associated idea that the presence of learners with learning difficulties has a negative effect on others’ progress, Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) as cited in Majoko and Dudu (2023). This could mean that some teachers/parents believe that teaching all learners together, including those facing learning difficulties, can derail the progress of others, so learners should be separated in terms of classes or grouping. Looking at Kirshner’s (2009) discoveries, teachers need to recognise, embrace, and celebrate diversity as it comes with a range of achievements, besides academic ones. This implies that teachers need to realise that learners’ achievement should not only be measured in academic terms but in other aspects of development as well. Consequently, Black -Hawkins (2017) says that teachers should make pedagogical decisions based on what learners can do, not on what they cannot do. For instance, she further elaborates, grouping learners to support

everybody's learning, not relying on achievement grouping, thus acknowledging the social learning aspect and ways learners learn from each other. This leads to the idea that learning challenges are an invitation for teachers to be more creative, use their craft knowledge, or seek help from other teachers on ways of overcoming the challenge (s).

### 3.4.3 Perceiving Challenges in Learning as Challenges for Teachers, (Not Deficits in Learners), Supporting the Development of New Ways of Working

The third and last key area also identifies another slight shift in teachers' pedagogical thinking – when learners experience learning difficulties, learners should not be viewed to be at fault and neither should teachers (Black -Hawkins, 2017), instead, learning challenges should be approached as professional challenges. This shows that it is not right to blame the learner when learners underachieve, instead, teachers should try new teaching methods, and derive approaches from their experiences and the experiences of other teachers. Additionally, Rudduck and Flutter (2004); Rogoff, Turkanis & Barlett (2001) cited in Rawson (2022) state that teachers do not have to face this alone, but they learn together with learners as they find out what does, and does not work for learners, drawing on knowledge from colleagues, as well as continuous professional development. This suggests a harmoniously collaborative series of work between teachers and learners, as well as between teachers themselves and support workshops. Conclusively, EADSNE (2012) argue that overall, this requires a commitment to continuously develop as a professional in learning, both formal and informal, to create more inclusive practices. This suggests the need for teachers to be prepared and open to learning if they are in the profession and if they are to develop more and better inclusive environments. In summary, Table 4 summarises the three key theoretical underpinnings of pedagogical inclusive principles.

***Table 4: Diagrammatical Representation of Principles of Inclusive Pedagogy***




### 3.5 Relevance of the two theoretical frameworks to the study

This study focused mainly on how participants conceptualise IE in relation to EWP6 and South African policy, and how this conceptualisation impacts classroom practices. The study was viewed through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks (the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development and the Inclusive Pedagogical Framework). Whilst the adjusted Bronfenbrenner's theory (adjusted *version*) puts emphasis on the teachers' practices in relation to the environment shaping the child's development and the interconnectedness of the systems surrounding that affect inclusive practices, the Inclusive Pedagogical Framework emphasizes three pedagogical shifts that need to happen to transform teachers' practices. The two theories were used not to tell participants what they should do or not do to be inclusive, rather, the theories were used as researcher's yardsticks to find out the participants' conceptualisation of IE and weigh their understanding against the two theoretical frameworks.

On the one hand, the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development conscientises teachers to look beyond the basic developmental standards set in

place, as it informs teachers that the development of individuals is affected in addition to their surroundings, by relationships and connections between each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This means that the researcher sought to see if the participants, as part of their inclusive pedagogical practices, demonstrate that they value the promotion and support of policy development, relationships, and connections. Mahlo (2017) argues that Bronfenbrenner believes that the growth and development of an individual are affected by five environmental factors. This means that the five systems that surround the individual, (principals and teachers) according to this study, (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem), can either enable or constrain inclusive practices, which affect the learners in the end. Hence, Anderson et al., (2014) reiterate Mahlo's (2017) sentiments that Bronfenbrenner's model views the (learner), *principals, and teachers for this study,* as thriving within a complex context that consists of several systems that are intrafamilial and extrafamilial influence the execution of inclusive practices. This suggests that participants' practices are affected by the contextual systems that they work within, and these systems can work as barriers or support sources in the implementation of IE.

Additionally, the extent of influence a factor can exert on the IE experience for the [learner], a *teacher in this instance*, is dependent on the location of the systems, and the importance of that factor attachment (Anderson et al.,2014). This could mean that some factors have more impact to the participants' practices than others, depending on their significance. For instance, the macrosystem can be more influential, considering that it has the potential to control the educational system through a mandatory curriculum. Furthermore, for teachers to teach inclusively, they should be supported by the policies, these policies are made at international, national, and at departmental levels. *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development informs teachers that decisions made at different levels (systems), although far from them, influence their practices, which in turn affect the learner. This suggests that teachers should be aware of the current IE developments (both at international and national levels), to align their practices accordingly. The *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development informs the principals and Foundation Phase teachers that learners' development is influenced, in

addition to the individual's makeup, by the environment, different people in children's lives, cultural background, and the decisions made at macro levels.

As aforementioned, although Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory traditionally is about the learners' development, in this study the interest is about using the theory to understand teachers' professional development. Therefore, the immediate circle of influence next to the teacher will be his/her interaction with other teachers in the school (the microsystem). Teachers as individuals are shaped by many factors like, but not limited to, their own background, upbringing, schooling, educational training, religion, values, and beliefs. The next level of influence (the mesosystem) will be substituted with the schoolteachers or workmates within a particular school context. Within a school, there are factors like; school culture, policy, principal with their own principles, who guides teachers' practices. The next level (exosystem) will be substituted with the Department of Education. The education department handles the smooth running of the schools by relaying information and expectations through the principals (Mncube, 2008) as cited in Yu and Shay (2022) who in turn direct and guide teachers. The department of education is also acting under the directions from the superior body, the country's national policy (macrosystem), which includes the legislation, the Constitution of the country, and the Schools Act as eluded by Sayed (1999) cited in Soudien and Sayed (2019). This means that the department of education operates under the guidance or influence of the country's legislation. Then the overall body (the chronosystem), becomes the global and international laws, which have a profound influence on the teachers' practices and their professional development.

Xu (2019) argues that because the model suggests that all learners develop in a complex social world, it is important therefore to observe and study interactions at multilevel contexts with the advent of time (chronosystem level). This implies that (for the purposes of this study), teachers' professional development is shaped and influenced by the five systems that surround them, albeit in different ways, highlighting the importance of understanding that they do not operate in isolation. As a result, Mahlo (2017) quoted in Nembambula, Ooko and Aluko (2023) contends that IE and Bronfenbrenner's ecology systems theory have a dialectical relationship because this theory aids in understanding IE policy issues. This could imply that IE

and Bronfenbrenner's ecology of systems theory share ideas that aid in the resolution of many Inclusive Education complex issues. According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2005) cited in Morelle and Tabane (2019), the education system's challenge is understanding the complexity of the influences, and interrelationships and the challenge is to realise the complexity of the impacts between teachers' professionalism and the many other systems connected to them. This shows the importance of understanding the complexity of influences that exist between the individual teachers and the surrounding systems.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of systems theory is suitable for this study because it affirms the IE vision – ecological human development. The theory demonstrates how the microsystem (teachers within a context), is intertwined with the mesosystem (school principal), as well as society at large, in determining the degree of solace and contentment people experience as they go about their life courses (Mahlo,2023). More significantly, Mphwina (2020) state that the theory explains the individual differences in terms of knowledge, abilities, and skills, as well as the role of support systems in scaffolding and structuring the learner. This could mean that this theory recognises and appreciates that although individuals are diverse, they all need support, and differences should be valued as they are natural and form part of humanity. Additionally, Mphwina (2020) state that the first four systems (excluding the chronosystem), contribute to making the whole, a whole that shapes the teacher's practices as enablers or constrainers of their inclusive practices. Hence, Mahlo (2023) concludes that the education system can be viewed as a representative of various microsystems that form the mesosystem, such as teachers, district, school environment, provincial departments, support, and resources. This could mean that these various systems could be important in explaining teachers' experiences, motivation, attitudes, or even frustrations as they implement inclusive strategies.

On the other hand, the theory of inclusive pedagogy by Florian and Black –Hawkins (2016) is equally significant for this study as its focal point is on the three key pedagogical shifts in teachers' thinking. If these three key areas are adhered to, inclusive practices can work toward inclusive educational goals. For example, working on the first principle (of rejecting the worldly accepted practice of preparing

lessons for many, and providing something for those with learning challenges), would mean that teachers have accepted inclusion, not only in words but through actions as well (Black – Hawkins & Florian, 2012). Undeniably, from the current educational standpoint, this can seem like a daunting and impossible task, considering that people have been naturalised to think this way, however, it is possible if everybody is committed to moving toward inclusion. The second principle (of viewing disability as fixed and thinking the inclusion of those with learning difficulties will derail the progress of others), can open teachers' eyes to see that every learner has the capability to reach their full potential, the key is to provide every learner with responsive learning materials (Hart & Drummond, 2014). This will encourage teachers to view diversity in a positive way, knowing that all learners have the potential of progressing and achieving, therefore, everybody should be valued. The third key (viewing difficulties as challenges to the teachers' profession as opposed to viewing it as learners' problems), helps teachers to be creative as they try to find other teaching methods, with learners and amongst themselves, that would respond to all learners' needs (EADSNE, 2012). This suggests that teachers will become more creative as they explore various teaching methods and work collaboratively with other teachers, giving and gaining advice.

Indeed, Black-Hawkins (2017) concurs with Thomas (2013, 2017) that IE is complex and diverse, so much so that it has been enacted in various ways in relation to policy and practices. This suggests that IE has been subjected to various interpretations, depending on factors, such as contexts, experiences, or values of the interpreter. Nevertheless, besides the differences in conceptualisations, argues Black-Hawkins (2017), there is a common foundation in much of the work carried out in the area. This common foundation is explained by Slee (2011) who says, "IE invites people to think about the kind of world they live in, the world they envisage or dream about, and the role they should play in shaping the two worlds" (p.14). This suggests that IE is about working collaboratively to transform the kind of world we live in currently (segregating educational systems with their practices), into a new world that we want (inclusive educational system with inclusive practices). This theory will help teachers to see that different conceptualisations should not stand in the way of transforming education systems and their practices to what we want.

Thus, Bekker (2015) contends that it is upon classroom practitioners as implementers of IE in general classrooms to change the “world” we live into the “world” that we dream of or prefer, a world that will act in harmony with policy and practices.

The two theoretical frameworks were additionally useful in providing a lens to view data collection and make sense of the information that will be shared by the participants. On the one hand, the semi-structured and focus group interviews (Brinkmann, 2014) because of their nature, allowed participants to engage freely in conversations, ask the researcher to clarify other questions, and give the researcher the opportunity to probe answers. The researcher had the opportunity to refer to the effects of what is argued by Bronfenbrenner in his theory to find out from participants the following: What are the participants’ views on what factors they feel impact on their practices as they enact inclusion? The researcher also used the opportunity to get a sense of the participants’ awareness in relation to the system’s influence, what were their thoughts, and how their thinking related to their IE conceptualisation. The intention was to find out what principals and teachers know, do, and think, in terms of working with IE policy and practice. This information also helped the researcher in getting insight into participants’ pedagogical practices and drawing a distinction between their practices’ alignment with or against policy.

Additionally, the inclusive pedagogical framework proved to be equally useful in data collection. This is because the process of data collection positions the researcher with a major role in the process, I was able to use this opportunity to probe participants’ answers (Thomas, 2017), which revealed as closely as possible what happens in their daily spaces of work. And how they have conceptualised IE in terms of the three fundamentals of the framework (Black-Hawkins, 2017). This assisted with revealing whether they conceptualise ability as fixed or with the potential to change if they view the inclusive practice as their professional responsibility or still coming from a traditional view of special education type of thinking where it is someone else’s responsibility to educate those considered uneducable. This information allowed the researcher to relate this to what participants described as their inclusive practices and what they said about what

makes enacting inclusive practices easier or difficult (Ainscow, 2022). This is crucial as it relates to how participants are affected by practices, current educational systems, and structures as they try to include everybody in their teaching.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the two theoretical frameworks (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory Framework and Black-Hawkins's Inclusive Pedagogical Approach) for this study. This chapter explained how these two theoretical frameworks are used as lenses for this study, and how the theoretical frameworks assist the researcher to draw participants' insights and gain access to their conceptualisations of IE. Additionally, the chapter justified the choice of the two theoretical frameworks by indicating their strengths and weakness that led to the decision to combine the two for the purpose of this study. It has been stated in this chapter that Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory would be renamed the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development henceforth. Therefore, the next chapter will further focus on how these frameworks are integrated into the study and the research methods implied.

# CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter explains how the research study was conducted, the data collection tools that were employed, and why those tools were thought to be the most pertinent to the study. The study employs a transformative qualitative paradigm and explains why it was chosen. The first plan was to collect data from the five schools in the province of Gauteng. Nevertheless, three of the five schools consented to engage in the study, and sixteen volunteers (five, five, and six individuals from schools A, B, and C, respectively) agreed to take part in the study. In accordance with the criteria provided by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the university's ethical considerations, data were collected virtually since this was done during COVID-19 lockout restrictions following the guidelines from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and the university ethical considerations. Throughout the procedure, a data collecting plan was created and implemented. To improve the study outcomes, data were analysed utilising both inductive and deductive coding.

## 4.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has been defined in several ways by different authors (Adhabi and Anozie, 2017; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014), but most of their definitions have one thing in common, that is, qualitative research is a method used by researchers to find reality. Creswell (2014) and Saldana (2018) agree with Patton (2002) that qualitative research is viewed as an effort of understanding situations in their distinctiveness as part of a specific context as well as the interactions there. Thomas (2017) agrees with Merriam (2002) that qualitative researchers try to understand people's constructed meaning about their world and experiences. Thus, researchers conducting qualitative research try to find reality by going to participants, engaging them on a certain topic by asking carefully crafted questions, listening to their responses, and analysing data for deeper understanding. Hence, Juta and Van Wyk (2020) define it as a technique that analyses and describes people's social actions and behaviours. J.W. Creswell and J.D. Creswell (2017) view qualitative research as a process of exploring or investigating a problem, then developing a detailed understanding of a central

phenomenon. From these definitions, it can be concluded that qualitative research follows certain procedures in its endeavour to understand how individuals or people exhibit certain behaviours. To carry out this process, in line with J.W. Creswell and J.D. Creswell's (2017) thoughts, this study has identified the problem to be with the way IE has been conceptualised in the South African context in relation to policy and practice. To do this, the study relied mostly on the principals and Foundation Phase teachers' experiences about the way their conceptualisation of IE has impacted the daily inclusive practices in their workspaces. First, the research adopted an inductive process, which Thomas (2017) explains as a process of collecting data and analysing it to build concepts, theories, or hypothesis, thus producing a rich descriptive product at the end. Second, data were analysed through deductive analysis, employing as codes the two theoretical frameworks' guiding principles (the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach and the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development). The results of the data analysis were strengthened by employing the technique of hybrid data analysis (Xu and Zammit, 2020; Clarke, Braun and Hayfield, 2015).

### 4.3 Research Paradigm

The word paradigm was first mentioned by Kuhn (1962) in his work as referring to a philosophical way of thinking, whilst in contemporary times, the term is used in educational research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006 cited in Singh, 2020) to describe and explain the researcher's world view, which is the thinking or perspective that informs the research interpretation or meaning. This suggests that Kuhn (1962) viewed a paradigm as referring to the nature of knowledge or reality, and the choice of a paradigm as largely influenced by the researcher's personality. More precisely, Wilson, Mura, Sharif & Wijesinghe (2020) concur with Guba and LincoIn (1994) on the view that a paradigm is a fundamental set of beliefs or worldviews constructed by humans that conduct research investigation. This shows that the choice of a paradigm reveals how the researcher views the world in relation to their epistemological beliefs, background, and interests.

There are various ways of conducting research in education at the disposal of researchers. Although there are many ways of knowledge acquisition, Jenkins (2019) contends that the inherent challenges around research methodological

guidance often start with quality concerns, research focus, as well as considerations of what makes up empirical precision or fidelity. This suggests that the choice of a paradigm is largely dependent on the type of inquiry, research focus, and best suitable methods of empirical research capable of producing precise knowledge on the subject. It is for this reason that the qualitative transformative paradigm is adopted for this study because of its intention, to find out from the participants how they conceptualise IE in relation the EWP6 and the South African policy on inclusion, and how this conceptualisation impact on their daily classroom activities or practices.

Additionally, the qualitative method is defined by Glesne (2016) as premised on two assumptions: the disposal that the truth is constructed socially, and that variables in a condition are highly interwoven, and complex, and measuring them is not easy. This could mean that the researcher then must apply the situation in an understandable context, to interpret the situation. Hence, Thomas (2017) states that qualitative research starts with an inductive inquiry which can result into a theory that is generated by participant (s) where the researcher plays the role of a main instrument, under settings that are natural. This implies that the researcher plays a major role of coming up with a problem to be solved, invites participants to collaborate in answering the inquiry through use of relevant data collection instrument(s). The researcher must select a suitable strategy for the research with specific data collection instruments (Thomas, 2017) producing what Liamputtong (2020) view as a description that is very thick. StaIIer (2021) contends that it is the duty of the researcher to construct, analyse, and interpret data in a fashion that does not follow any linear of chronological style. This implies that the researcher is not expected to progress in a pattern during construction, analysis, and interpretation of data, as the process can go forward and backward.

The reason for aligning the study towards the transformative paradigm, (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), is because the study focus is situated in issues of social justice and seeks to tackle issues that lead to social oppression at different levels. This suggests that the use of the transformative paradigm is to address oppressive issues to improve social justice amongst members of society. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) further argue that the transformative paradigm takes a “transactional

epistemology, a historical realism ontology, which is dialogical in nature" (p. 10). This implies that the paradigm undertakes a position of finding reality through interaction between the researcher and the study participants, which can be physical or virtual. According to Williams (2020) in the same thought with Martens (2015), research conducted under the transformative paradigm addresses issues with power dynamics within educational structures, respect for people's cultural norms, treating research as construction rather than knowledge discovery, uncovering agency hidden by social practices, promoting human rights, increasing social justice, and reciprocity, among other things. In this study, the transformative paradigm's qualities helped the researcher build knowledge from participant interviews, which were then examined to address problems with educational structures and practices in relation to policy.

### 4.4 Research Design

The search for social justice within a transformative paradigm challenges dominant forms of inequality, human oppression, poverty, and social justice (Flick, 2017). This explains that when pursuing social justice, one should not expect everything to unfold smoothly, but prevailing forms of inequalities, oppression, and social injustices would be met. Charmaz (2017) concurs with Mertens, Holmes, and Harris (2009) that transformative qualitative inquiry is a paradigm that is strongly rooted in the human rights agenda, requires an ethical framework that is based on rights and social justice, as well as redressing inequalities by giving priority to the voices of the socially disadvantaged groups. This implies that the transformative qualitative inquiry is aimed at respecting human rights through awareness of and addressing social inequalities in society, hence the reason for adopting this type of qualitative research inquiry as it aids in conscientising teachers on how IE conceptualisation can affect educational practices.

Additionally, Kravia and Pagliano (2015) argue that the transformative paradigm is important in exploring if the needs of learners are met adequately. Hence, Mertens (2007) cited in Kravia and Pagliano (2015) describes the transformative paradigm as a framework for addressing inequalities and injustices using culturally effective and competent strategies. It is for this purpose that the transformative paradigm will be used to guide the researcher in the clarification of issues related to the nature

of reality (ontology), the role of ethics (axiology), the relation between the knower and the known (epistemology), and the research paradigm (methodology) as postulated by Kravia and Pagliano (2015). This indicates that this paradigm was selected for this study because it uses social justice-promoting approaches and thus has the potential to create an organisation for social change that will deal with the problems faced by the underprivileged, or LSENs in this study's setting. As a result, data gathered from this study is intended to raise awareness among all parties involved about the rights of all learners to access, participation, and success in teaching and learning.

Phelps (2021) concurs with Kravia and Pagliano (2015) that the transformative paradigm consists of four tenets namely axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology as illustrated in the figure below.

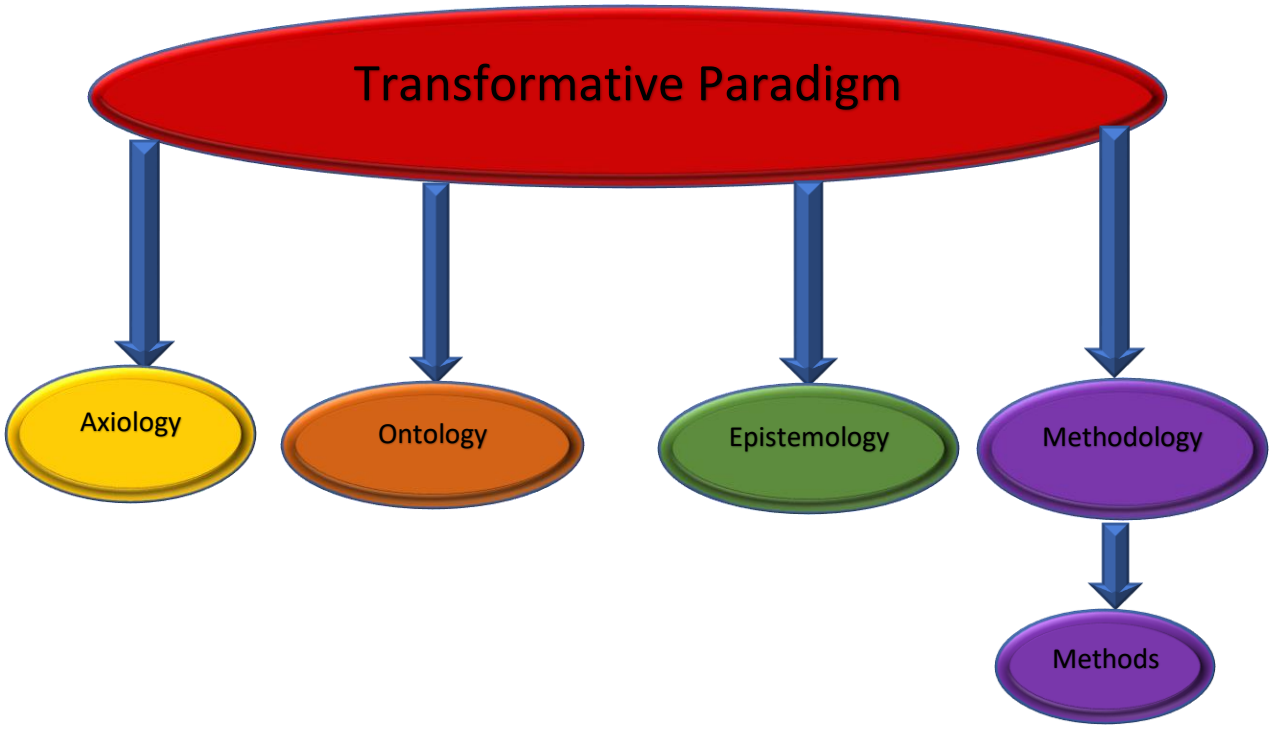



**Figure 2: Four transformative paradigm tenets**

Figure 2 shows how the four transformative paradigm tenets are related to one another and how they are applied in this study to address social justice concerns

by using semi-structured individual and focus group interviews as data collection instruments. An illustration of this is as follows.

### Axiology

Phelps (2021) states that axiology is an Attic Greek work meaning value, worth, or logical discourse, but in a paradigm context, it is about research principles or theory of ethics that influences the phenomena under study. This implies that axiology intends to understand the nature, meaning, and origin of the notions of values and value judgement, and in this study, the researcher focused on social justice issues regarding the dissemination of findings that honor ontology, epistemology, and methodology as informing decision making throughout the study.

### Ontology

Ontology is derived from the Greek word *roots* and *logia* that mean *being* and which *concerns knowledge* respectively (Phelps, 2021; Kravia & Pagliano, 2015). Hence, Thomas (2017) defines ontology as concerning what you are investigating, the types of actions that exist in the social world. This has a denotation that there is more than one reality, the world is viewed in different ways. This means that in a transformative paradigm researcher assume that there are multiple realities that can be socially constructed, and therefore, researchers should be open to various participants' constructions or understandings of a phenomena. In this study, the researcher did not go into the field with preconceived ideas of how IE is conceptualised, rather, tactfully drew out from the participants their various conceptualisations of IE. This then leads to the tenet of *how to look and find these different ways* of viewing the world.

### Epistemology

Thomas (2017) expounds that epistemology is the study of how researchers know of the world that they have ontologically defined. This implies that epistemology is interested in questions that define reality or knowledge and how knowledge is derived as well as procedures for knowledge discovery. For the purposes of this study, knowledge is derived from the study participants using the individual and focus group interviews following closely all ethical considerations. Additionally, the

researcher went beyond mere collecting data from participants, rather, to closely monitor the influence of own assumptions and biases, positioned the participants as equals with the researcher by employing a reflexive journal throughout data collection and analysis process. This is postulated by Agboka (2014) cited in Kravia and Pagliano (2015) who argue that when the study is designed only form the researcher ‘s position, adjusting the design to accommodate local contexts and questions becomes a challenge. Thus, a transformative paradigm encourages researchers to constantly question their own assumptions, potential gains, stakes, to avoid falling into the pit of self-serving.

**Methodology**

According to Thomas (2017), methodology is a research design, an explanation or justification for why one has chosen to conduct the study in a particular way. According to Kravia and Pagliano (2021), methodology is the systematic and consistent selection, design, and application of methods to suit the investigation of a specific set of problems. This explains that methodology is not the data collection methods selected, rather, it is a carefully and ethically crafted strategy of how data will be collected, and which methods are best suited to extract data. In this study, data were collected virtually following the GDE Guidelines for collecting data in schools as the conditions at the time did not allow physical contacts with the participants – COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

### 4.5 Participants and Research Site

Data were collected from the three schools in the Gauteng Province close to the researcher’s place of residence, thus, convenient, and purposive sampling was applied in choosing schools to work with. From the initially five selected schools, three primary school principals and the Foundation Phase teachers were formally requested to be participants, and these were purposively selected. The purposive selection here was applied because the researcher has knowledge about these particular schools, having previously worked with these schools and discovered that they have a good reputation of adhering to inclusive standards, such as accepting and embracing learners from diverse backgrounds. Considering the relationship, the researcher has with the schools calls for carefully considering the influence of positionality. Thomas (2017) argues that the researcher as the main

participant of the study should be aware of their own biases. This means that researchers should guard against their own influences throughout the study by continuously reflecting on their own thinking, inclinations, and assumptions during interviews. Therefore, in this study, since the study is viewed through the transformative paradigm, the researcher kept a researcher journal to support reflection during data analysis.

The COVID-19 outbreak compelled the collecting of all data via internet communication routes. The online platforms were chosen by the participants, and the researcher was responsible for all expenditures involved with data collection. All selected participants from the three schools were expected to participate in focus groups and at least 30 minutes of individual semi-structured interviews. All of the primary school principals chose not to participate in the focus group interviews, and instead opted for individual semi-structured interviews. Originally, the plan was to form one focus group for principals and four focus groups for teachers, each one with five teaching staff members. As an outcome, only Foundation Phase teachers consented to participate in the semi-structured and focus group interviews. The study's objectives were first mentioned, as well as the fact that participants might withdraw at any moment and that there would be no rewards or disadvantages to participating. Furthermore, detailed information forms were provided for all participants to read before providing informed consent through the principals. Participants were given a comprehensive explanation of ethical implications. All participants signed the consent forms after being requested to do so. Those who agreed to participate were asked to provide their assent by signing the forms and sending them to the researcher, or by having audio recordings produced prior to the interview. All participants signed consent forms, which were dropped off in the principals' offices and sent to the researcher.

### 4.6 Data Collection and Methods of Collection

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the three schools in the Gauteng province for principals and Foundation Phase teachers after giving their informed consent to be participants. Individual interviews for teachers then began with questions on their biographical information to find out more about the training they received. Semi-structured interviews are defined by Spates, Evans, Watts,

Abubakar and James (2020) as intentional conversations where the researcher knows what they intend to find out. This suggests that semi-structured interviews are more than mere conversations because the researcher will control the conversation with an objective. Brinkmann (2014) concurs with Warren (2021) that semi-structured interviews make better use of the knowledge possibilities by permitting much more flexibility for follow–up questions. This implies that the researcher has the freedom to simplify questions whenever there is a need to. Hence, Brinkmann (2014) states that in semi-structured interviews the researcher can focus or steer the conversation on issues that they perceive critical in relation with the study. There are various factors considered when selecting data collection tools.

Data collection tools play a critical role in a research study and as such, careful thought should be taken before selecting them. According to Spates et. al., (2020), data collection tools are determined by the research question. This means that data collecting tools are not randomly picked but are informed by the type of research question. Spates et. Al., (2020) agrees with Blee and Taylor (2002) that semi-structured interviews are suitable for developing a much deeper understanding of the research question and allow scrutiny of meaning. This implies that semi-structured interviews are suitable for finding out the underlying causes and gaining insight into the people's visions, imaginings, as well as their critiques of the present and future projections. Semi-structured interviews are therefore suitable data collection tools for this study because the study is investigating the present experiences, hopes and criticism of the educational systems in relation with policy and practice.

Although the two data collection tools may appear alike, it is noteworthy that semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews are not the same. Hence, to distinguish focus group from semi-structured interviews, Akyildiz and Ahmed (2021); Oduro (2021) put emphasis on the leadership role and interaction in three components; (i) a technique devoted to data collection, (ii) interaction as a source of data, and (iii) active researcher's role in creating group conversations for data collection. This implies that the researcher plays a pivotal role of assigning groups to the participants so that there will be interaction and exchange of ideas,

experiences, and beliefs. The researcher and participants, however, have roles to play in focus group interviews.

The researcher and participants still have duties to play in focus group interviews, although they are not the same as those for semi-structured interviews. Thomas (2017) states that participants behave differently when placed in groups, some may be talkative, helpful, stroppy, take the lead, or make decisions that are riskier, which they could not make as individuals. This shows the benefits of acquiring information from a group, as group members can change behaviours, leading to acquiring more data than data collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher also plays a different role of facilitating or moderating role among participants (Thomas, 2017), whilst allowing individuals to lead. This means that the researcher facilitates the discussion by smoothing tensions if they arise, rather than leading the discussion as in semi-structured interviews. Researchers are also expected to respect their participants as they conduct interviews. Data were collected following the steps shown in the data collection plan shown in Figure 3 below.

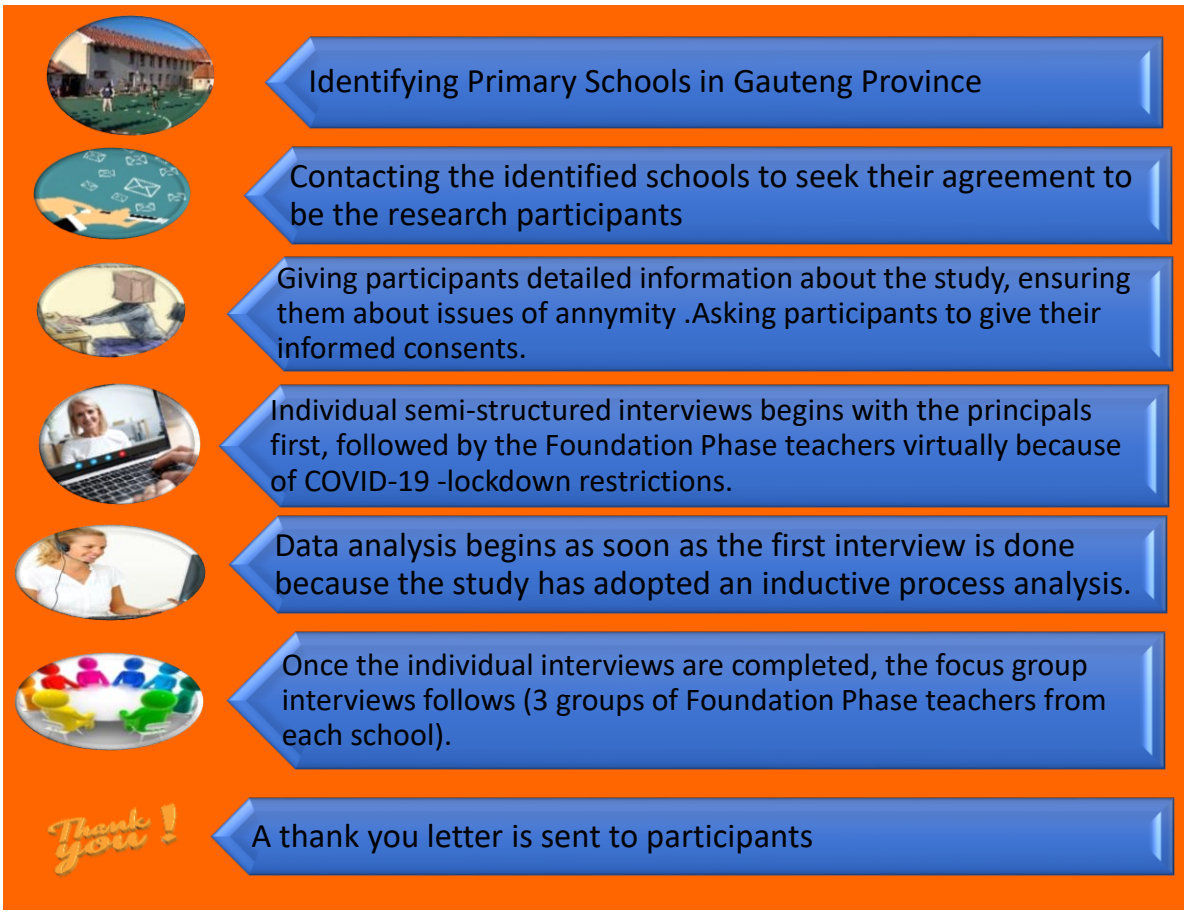


***Figure 3: Data Collection Plan***

## 4.7 Data Analysis

Because the study intended to adopt a transformative qualitative type, both inductive and deductive data analysis strategies were implied. Merriam and Grenier (2019) explains inductive data analysis as a process whereby “data analysis is simultaneous to data collection” (p. 14). This means that the researcher does not need to complete the process of data collection before embarking on analysing data. Merriam further explains the advantages of analysing data as soon as getting the first survey or interview response as allowing the researcher in making needed adjustments along the way. Waiting until all data collection is completed poses the risk of facing the frustration of being overwhelmed with many transcripts or notes from the fieldwork without a hint of where to begin (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, in this study, data analysis commenced as soon as the first interview response was received. The data analysis procedure below was followed.

### 4.7.1 Inductive Data Analysis Process

This is said to be a bottom-up coding whereby coding starts without any predetermined codes but allow data to develop or create codes that would develop into categories which would eventually be merged into form themes (Thomas, 2016). This means that this coding approach allows the narrative to emerge from the views of the participants of the study.

The five-step procedural process by Thomas (2013) was used in analysing data, the procedures are as follows.

- Preparation of raw data files
- Closing text reading (reading text in detail to familiarise and gain more understanding)
- Creating categories
- Overlapping or intersecting coding and uncoded text
- Continuing with revision and refinement of category system

Adopting Creswell's (2002) coding process, Thomas (2013) illustrates how the inductive coding analysis proceeds. As shown in Table 5, the intended outcome was to produce between three to eight categories, which are considered by the researcher as key facets of the themes and as the most important themes (in relation to the objectives of the study). In the event, there are more than eight main themes created, Thomas further cautions that like categories need to be combined, or else the coder has not made tough decisions about the most critical themes/categories. As previously stated, this study utilized the use of both coding approaches (inductive and deductive) to get the best results from both methods.

**Table 5: Diagrammatic Representation of the Inductive coding process Overview**

| Initial read through text data | Identify specific segments of information | Label the segments of information to create categories | Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories | Create a model incorporating most important categories |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Many pages of text → | Many segments of text → | 30-40 categories → | 15-20 categories → | 3-8 categories |

Note: Adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p. 266

### 4.7.2 Deductive Coding Analysis

Pearse (2019) concurs with Rishi, Jauhari, and Joshi (2015) that deductive coding is a process of coding that begins with assigning predetermined or a priori codes to categorize extracts of data that are eventually turned into patterns and themes for the actual data analysis. This means that this a top-down approach whereby codes are developed or created before data is reviewed to find extracts that fit into the predetermined codes, and for this study, the codes are derived from one of the theoretical frameworks, the IPA, and are developed from the three principles of the IPA. These codes (IPA three principles) are closely linked with the main research question posed in chapter one of this study. Notably, this kind of coding has a narrow focus that only considers elements that adhere to the predetermined codes

(IPA criteria). Therefore, the addition of inductive data coding counteracts the shortcomings of the deductive coding approach's tightness.

## 4.8 Trustworthiness

According to McGinley, Wei, Zhang and Zheng (2021), trustworthiness in data collection is critical, and it has four criteria that must be met. The four criteria that must be followed and observed closely during the investigation are as follows:

### 4.8.1 Credibility (Value of Truth)

McGinley, Wei, Zhang and Zheng (2021) define credibility as a trustworthiness criterion that addresses Merriam's (2009, p.213) inquiry, "how congruent are the findings with reality?" This explains why the study's findings should be grounded in truth rather than speculative. Lincoln and Guba (2016) propose five strategies and functions for establishing credibility in qualitative research, which are as follows:

- ❖ Prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation

This technique ensures that the study's findings and interpretations are credible.

- ❖ Peer debriefing

The technique is intended to provide an external check on the method of inquiry.

- ❖ Negative case analysis

This strategy is intended to aid in the refinement of working hypotheses as new information becomes available.

- ❖ Referential adequacy

This is used to allow preliminary findings and interpretations to be checked against archived "raw data."

- ❖ Member checking

This technique is intended to allow for direct testing of results and interpretations with the human sources from whom they have come—the constructors of the many realities under investigation.

Furthermore, credibility refers to the study findings' trustworthiness, persuasiveness, and plausibility (Tracy, 2010). This indicates that the study's conclusions must be trustworthy, accepted, and credible in order to be considered for adoption. As a result, Lincoln and Guba (2016) concur with Lincoln and Guba (1998) on the need of credible research, research that compels readers to trust and act on the basis of its results. As a result, the goal of this research was to produce findings that would be recognised, believed, and considered for implementation in the educational system. This was accomplished by adopting Golafshani's (2003) proposal, as cited in Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021), that credibility does not arrive on its own. As a result, this was achieved in this study by offering a comprehensive overview of the data discussion and analysis, which included in-depth examples and abundant details.

### 4.8.2 Transferability (Applicability)

According to McGinley et al., (2021), transferability is the extent to which the findings of a study may be transferred to other contexts with different participants. This implies that an effective study should allow its findings to be applicable to various contexts while also providing detailed descriptions. As a way to address the importance of data gathering and analysis transparency, I provided an in-depth account of the data collection tools and analysis processes, as well as how participants were selected, how interviews were conducted were executed. Individual semi-structured interviews, for example, were carried out for no more than 30 minutes. Participants were allowed to take breaks in-between interview sessions, respecting their time and closely observing that they are not mentally or physically exhausted. When participants requested breaks, the interview recordings were halted at varying intervals. This is one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews: flexibility, which allows for unexpected adjustments and enables to get the most effective output from the participants. According to Suryani (2021), a reliable study should be transferable to various situations with minimal variances in results. If the same study is conducted in a different setting, the results should be almost identical, if not identical.

Furthermore, Tracy (2010) as cited in Yadav (2022) defines sincerity as transparency and honesty in terms of biases and intentions and how these

influenced the study's techniques, delights, and mistakes. This suggests that the researcher retains sincerity (honesty) even when the results are unpleasant. Although the researcher was subjective to the study in this case, all measures were faithfully kept to ensure honesty and transparency, which precisely measures the honesty of the research study. To avoid personal bias, this was accomplished through the use of a journal and ongoing self-reflection throughout data collection and analysis.

### 4.8.3 Dependability (Consistency)

Dependability is a technique for ensuring that a study is adequate for future research and can be replicated. It is a method of addressing consistency, the third component of trustworthiness (McGinley et al., 2021). Although dependability is a quantitative research criterion that takes into account the study's stability, consistency, and equivalence (Sandelowski, 1986 in McGinley et al., 2021), it can also be used in qualitative research. This can be accomplished by describing everything in a well-structured and rich description so that other researchers can properly comprehend and follow the researcher's decision trial.

### 4.8.4 Confirmability (Neutrality)

Confirmability measures the research's objectivity, that is, if the results are only attributable to the participants and research circumstances and not to extra biases, motives, or viewpoints. According to McGinley et al., (2021), Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in Stahl and King (2020) suggested a confirmability audit as the primary technique, while Halpern's (1983) quoted in Carcary (2020) work that specified the audit's components and procedure served as the basis for operationalising the audit. Halpern outlined six different types of audit trails, including: (a) raw data (field notes, video, and audio recordings); (b) data reduction and analysis products (quantitative summaries, condensed notes, working hypotheses); (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products (thematic categories, interpretations, and inferences); (d) process notes (procedures and design strategies, trustworthiness notes); and (e) materials relating to intentions and dispositions. Therefore, a study using these various trustworthiness criteria is conducted with the intention of understanding them and providing suggestions for ways to enhance academic dialogues in the future.

Furthermore, Kalu and Bwalya (2017) state that qualitative research promotes the understanding of human experiences and situations, as individuals' cultures, values, and beliefs. This could mean that qualitative research can be useful when exploring phenomena that cannot be measured using quantitative techniques. However, despite the qualitative research advantages, warns Kalu and Bwalya (2017), its trustworthiness is often questioned by some readers and researchers. Therefore, in line with this thought, the study clearly described all decisions made during the research process. To carry out this, this study followed a model proposed by Tracy (2010) known as the Eight Big -Tent Criteria, a guideline that represent the core values of a good qualitative research. According to Tracy, high-quality qualitative research has the following eight markers:

### 4.8.5 Worthy topic

This is the first marker of qualitative research advocated by Thomas (2017) who agrees with Tracy (2010) as cited in Yadav (2022) that the title of the study should be relevant, significant, interesting, as well as timely. This suggests that a good qualitative study should have a title that is significant, interesting, relevant, and timely. In this study, these four elements were observed by providing a study title that is significant, interesting, timely, and relevant. This study's intention was to engage in research that has a potential, to use Tracy 's (2010) words "to shake the readers from their common-sense practices and assumptions" (p. 846). This suggests that this study tackled issues that have been accepted as natural (for example, preparing to teach most learners and providing something additional for those facing challenges), by inviting people to look at things with fresh eyes. Hence, Murray and Chu (2015) argue for research that would be accepted as interesting, not just obvious. This shows the importance of producing research that would arouse readers' interest, leading to high chances of adopting its recommendations.

### 4.8.6 Rich rigor

Second, Sampson and Johannessen (2020) agree with Warren (2021) that qualitative research that is of high quality is demonstrated by a rich complexity of abundance, rich descriptions as well as explanations. This suggests that qualitative research should provide thick descriptions and explanations that are a result of wide reading from the researcher's side. In this study, various practices were

employed to achieve rich rigor by going beyond what is convenient, opportunism, or taking an easy way out, (Tracy, 2010). This means that this study carefully considered theoretical constructs, samples, contexts, as well as the processes of data collection and analysis. This was achieved by adhering to what Tracy (2010) emphasize regarding the amount of data to support made claims, the amount of time spent during each interview session, harmonizing the context with the study's aims, as well as utilizing the appropriate procedures during data collection and analysis.

Nevertheless, it should be observed that while rich rigor is essential, it does not automatically convert into a qualitative quality marker that is sufficient on its own. Tracy (2010) provides a clear analogy by asserting that "following a recipe does not guarantee perfect presentation or completing a vigorous training plan does not guarantee race-day success, rigor does not guarantee a brilliant final product" (p.842). Thus, according to Tracey's further explanation, rigor does increase the likelihood that a product will be of a high quality, and the methodological craft skills acquired through diligent practice transcend the scope of any one research study, establishing a foundation of qualitative fitness that could benefit subsequent studies.

### 4.8.7 Sincerity

Third, Tracy (2010) as cited in Yadav (2022) defines sincerity as being open and truthful about one's biases and intentions and how they affected the study's methodology, successes, and failures. This suggests that the researcher remains sincere (honest) even when the results are not in his or her favor. All measures in this study were rigorously upheld to ensure honesty and transparency, which precisely measures the honesty of the research study, notwithstanding the researcher's subjectivity to the study. In order to eliminate personal bias, this was accomplished by keeping a journal and engaging in ongoing self-reflection during the data collection and analysis.

### 4.8.8 Credibility

Fourth, according to Tracy (2010) as cited in Yadav (2022), credibility refers to how reliable, convincing, and plausible the study's conclusions are. This indicates that in order to be taken into consideration for adoption, the study's conclusions must

be credible, acceptable, and convincing. Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (2016) concur with Lincoln and Guba (1998) regarding the significance of credible research, namely research that compels readers to believe it is reliable and act in response to its findings. As a result, the goal of this study was to produce conclusions that the educational system would accept, believe, and take into account for implementation. This was accomplished by following Bans-Akutey and Tiimub's (2021), recommendation that credibility does not occur on its own. This was accomplished in this study by offering a comprehensive overview of the data discussion and analysis that provided in-depth examples and a wealth of specific information.

### 4.8.9 Resonance

Fifth, resonance refers to the ability of the researcher to meaningfully resonate and affect an audience. This means engaging in practices that will promote identification, empathy, and soundness of the study by readers who have indirect experience with the topic under discussion. In the same manner, this study will demonstrate this marker by transforming the emotional dispositions of readers and promoting what Boldireff's (2021) terms -empathic validity. This could mean that the researcher would be vigilant of any signs that might indicate that the participants could be overwhelmed by work pressures and avoid forcing data collection process but delay it if there is a need to. For instance, rescheduling interview times if the participant (s) are under pressure to meet certain work deadlines. This was applied in one of the schools where teachers had to rush somewhere on the individual semi-structured interviews, and scheduled interviews were rescheduled.

### 4.8.10 Significant contribution

Sixth, good quality research should contribute not only knowledge, but knowledge that is significant. According to Mapes et al., (2020), good research's contribution is judged on current climate of practice, knowledge, and politics, by asking critical questions such as "Does the research extend existing knowledge? – Improve practice? – Generate on – going research? – Empower or liberate?" (p.254). Answers to such questions, states Tracy (2010), will point to the ways in which the study will contribute to the understanding of social life, unsettle confusion, make

clear the invisible, as well as generating a sense deepened understanding and shading light. Additionally, participants' views, attitudes, beliefs, and mindsets were also examined. This study examined how participants conceptualised IE and how their conceptualisation affected their actions to significantly advance knowledge.

Consequently, this study revealed that participants have conceptualised IE differently and as such, they are in different pedagogical shifts toward inclusivity. Thus, the existing knowledge about IE implementation has been extended as shown under the knowledge contribution section in chapter six of the study.

### 4.8.11 Ethics

Seventh, Tracy (2010) defines ethics as more than a means, but rather including a universal end goal of quality qualitative study. Miles and Huberman (2020) note the need to take into consideration the wrongness or rightness of researchers' actions in relation to the lives of those we are studying, colleagues, and the sponsors, because being naïve about ethics is unethical. This shows the seriousness of handling ethics with all honest as violating the ethics code will not only lead to producing unethical work, but more so will have severe impacts to the lives of participants, other researchers, and those who would have sponsored the study. Ethical protocols were observed recognizing the limitations brought by the Covid19 pandemic, so no physical data collection was carried out as stated above. Instead, all data were collected through online platforms and the data costs were the researcher's sole responsibility.

### 4.8.12 Meaningful Coherence

Lastly, the final part of good qualitative research is meaningful coherence. Tracy (2010) argues that "meaningfully coherent studies: accomplish their affirmed purpose; carry out what they advocate to be about; use methods and representation practices that associate well with espoused theories and paradigms; and alertly interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings" (p.847). This suggests that meaningfully coherent research has and achieve a clearly stated purpose, make use of right data collection methods, as well as make a connection between reviewed literature and research methods and findings. To achieve meaningful coherence, this study investigated how principals

and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualised IE in relation with EW6 and the South African policy on inclusion.

Conceptualising quality qualitative research in this way, argues Tracy (2010), works as a shield to alleviate disregard from power keepers who usually misinterpret qualitative work. This means that adopting the eight markers as explained by Tracy gives the research study more weight and value.

## 4.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are another crucial component of the empirical research process, and as such, all ethical protocols were observed in this study. To obtain permission to collect data from schools, emails were addressed to the principals of the selected primary schools, seeking permission to collect data at their respective schools. The school request letters were written using the Wits Ethics template and placed on a university logo to describe how the data collection process would proceed if permission to gather data was given. Furthermore, communications to principals requesting permission to gather data indicated that the identities of schools and names of participants would be concealed throughout the study by utilizing pseudonyms. The letters further said that data would be stored in a password-protected computer that only the researcher would have access to. Some of the contacted primary schools contacted the researcher for additional explanations, which were supplied over the phone, and permission was granted; hence, letters from school principals granting permission to collect data were submitted to the Wits Ethics Committee along with the Ethics Application form. After the Wits Ethics Committee approved the study's application, data collecting began by emailing information sheets to potential participants in order for them to offer their voluntary informed consent, to which sixteen participants (three primary school principals and thirteen Foundation Phase teachers) from three of the originally planned five schools responded. Following that, data collecting began with the scheduling of appointments for individual semi-structured interviews with primary school principals, Foundation Phase teachers, and lastly, the focus group interviews with teachers. Appendixes A and B provide the samples of semi-structured and focus group interviews (for principals and teachers) as well as ethical clearance certificate acquired from the Wits Ethics committee. It should be

mentioned that ethical issues are important in qualitative research, hence the four fundamental ethical concepts are highlighted.

According to Arifin (2018), while ethical considerations are crucial in all research disciplines, they are especially important in qualitative research involving at-risk groups of participants. Although my study did not include disadvantaged groups of participants, I took it upon myself to ensure that the freedom and identity of the study participants were protected throughout the data collection procedure. This was complemented by honest and transparent research reporting throughout the interviewing and dissemination processes. As a result, Pietila, Nurmi, Halkoaho and Kyngas (2020) suggest that major ethical principles such as autonomy, fairness, nonmaleficence, and beneficence are essential. According to Pietila et al., (2020), these ethical principles form the foundation of ethical considerations in qualitative research and, as such, are worthy of study. Donoghue (2023) defines malfeasance as an inability to carry out role responsibilities in a way that respects participants' rights and property without exploiting or abusing power dynamics. This was rigorously observed throughout the data collection procedure and especially during analysis, where the participants were not present but the researcher still had to adhere to the ethics as promised in the information letters requesting participants' consents. Non-malfeasance is defined as vowing to do no damage and instead collaborating with others to do good (Donoghue, 2023). This implies that when a researcher conducts study, their primary goal is to co-create knowledge with participants in surroundings that promote and support educational growth. Donoghue (2023) defines autonomy as freely studying, conversing, investigating, teaching, conducting research, and publishing while adhering to the rules of the academic community. Additionally, autonomy involves the engagement in continuing education and teachers' continuous professional development (Arifin, 2018). This idea was especially implemented during the data collection process by examining, discussing, and clarifying questions during semi-structured interviews, and lastly creating a report to be published. Pietila et al., (2020) emphasis the principle of beneficence, which they define as engaging in humane attitudes and behaviors with the purpose of promoting goodness to others. This entails treating

participants with respect, taking into account their opinions and feelings, and working for positive and useful outcomes for teaching and learning.

## 4.10 Conclusion

This chapter covered the data collection procedure used for the investigation. The study's qualitative methodology and transformative paradigm, which confronts numerous dominating forms of inequality amid human diversity, were explained. Data were gathered virtually since this was done amid COVID19 lockdown constraints, and study participants were purposefully chosen. The procedure for gathering the data, which was closely followed throughout collection, analysis, and discussion, was described in this chapter. The chapter also described how data were analysed using deductive and inductive coding, which improved the analysis's findings. The following chapter will concentrate on the presentation, discussion, and analysis of the data while adhering to all ethical guidelines. It will then conclude by addressing the research questions provided in chapter one and provide recommendations based on the study's findings which used hybrid coding that strengthened the findings of the analysis.

# CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

## 5.1 Introduction

The study's fifth chapter focuses on the presentation and interpretation of data which leads to the emergence of themes. The chapter pays particular emphasis to upholding the ethical standards of anonymity by utilizing codes rather than participants' names to represent them. The chapter begins with a description of the participants. Focus group interviews with participants and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the participants' opinions that are prominently emphasized in this chapter. Line-by-line transcription, which entails listening to audio recordings, was used to translate the raw data from the recordings into written form before data analysis. Then, using a hybrid methodology that combines inductive and deductive coding, the data are coded, the latter of which makes use of the three inclusive principles from the Inclusive Pedagogical Framework. It should be noted that the three primary schools' principals and teachers' responses were originally intended to be presented separately. However, after some consideration, it became clear that their responses fit into the same categories, therefore the distinct categories from the various interview groups were compacted and consolidated.

## 5.2 Description of participant key

Participants in this study have been given the assurance of anonymity, and to ensure this, as previously said, they have been assigned codes. The identifying code and biographical details for each participant and research site are listed in the key below. Notably, all three primary school principals, the Heads of Divisions – Foundation Phase, and some of the teachers of the Foundation Phase, have been teaching in the schools for a considerable amount of time before the introduction

of EWP6, and some younger teachers have been exposed to IE modules during their preservice training as shown below.

**Table 6: Biographic information of participants in schools A, B, and C.**

| CODE | TITLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| **A** | School A | Government primary school in Gauteng serving the middle-income community.<br><br>The English Language is used as the language of instruction.<br><br>The school has adequate resources and learners are diverse in terms of race, cultural background, language, and gender. Public quartile 5 fee-paying school (learners who cannot pay are not excluded in any official programmes participation). |
| **AP** | School A Principal | PA is a white female in her 60s with over 35 years of teaching experience. She has been the principal of the school for 30 years |
| **AT1** | School A, Teacher 1 | AT1 is a White female Grade 2 teacher with four years teaching experience. |
| **AT2** | School A, Teacher 2 | AT2 is a White female Grade R teacher with seven years of teaching experience. |
| **AT3** | School A, Teacher 3 | AT3 is a White female Grade 3 teacher in her mid-60s, with |

| CODE | TITLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| | | 37 years of teaching experience. |
| **AT4** | School A, Teacher 4 | AT4 is a White female Grade 2 teacher with 12 years of teaching experience and Head of Foundation Phase |
| | | |
| **B** | School B | Government primary school in Gauteng serving middle-income community.<br><br>The English Language is used as the language of instruction.<br><br>The school has adequate resources and learners are diverse in terms of race, cultural background, language, and gender.<br>Public quartile 5 fee-paying school (learners who cannot pay are not excluded in any official programmes participation). |
| **BP** | School B Principal | A White female teacher with 28 years of teaching experience and has been a principal at the school for the past 3 years. |
| **BT1** | School B, Teacher 1 | A White female Grade 1 teacher with eight years of experience. |
| **BT2** | School B, Teacher 2 | A White female Grade 2 teacher, Head of Foundation Phase with 14 years teaching experience. |

| CODE | TITLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| **BT3** | School teacher 3 | A white female Grade 2 teacher with nine years of teaching experience |
| **BT4** | School B, Teacher 4 | A White female Grade 3 teacher with seven years of teaching experience and studying toward attaining a Bed Honours degree |
| | | |
| **C** | School C | Government primary school in Gauteng serving middle-income community.<br>The English Language is used as the language of instruction.<br>The school has adequate resources and learners are diverse in terms of race, cultural background, language, and gender.<br>Public quintile 5 fee-paying school (learners who cannot pay are not excluded in any official programmes participation). |
| **CP** | School C principal | A White female in her 60s with over 20 years of teaching experience.<br>She has been the principal of the school for almost 18 years. |
| **CT1** | School C, Teacher 1 | A White female teacher who recently graduated with a Bed Honours degree in education |
| **CT2** | School C, Teacher 2 | A White female teacher currently studying toward attaining a Bed Honours in education |

| CODE | TITLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| **CT3** | School C, Teacher 3 | A White female Grade One teacher with five years of teaching experience |
| **CT4** | School C, Teacher 4 | A White female Grade two teacher with twelve years of teaching experience |
| **CT5** | School C, Teacher 5 | A Black female teacher who trained as a Grade R teacher and is passionate about learners with physical impairments, developed this love after the experience of caring for her nephew who is physically impaired. |

## 5.3 Categorising and Identification of Themes Inductively

As indicated in chapter Four, this study adopted a qualitative data analysis, utilizing both inductive and deductive data coding system to identify the three themes that were finally presented. Therefore, to find out how the participants conceptualised and practiced IE, raw data were first inductively coded to find out what comes from data. Thereafter, data were deductively coded using the three principles from the IPA theoretical framework as codes to determine what the participants' views reflect in relation with the inclusion policies. The IPA theoretical framework provided this study with strong ideas regarding the themes to emerge from the data. As a consequence, in order to begin the analysis inductively, the five stages described by Thomas (2017) in chapter four were implemented, and it was through executing these five stages that the justification for combining all participants' responses was realised.

## 5.4 Preparing Data

All collected data were transcribed into written form through listening to the recordings and transferring every recorded word into written form. Once all recordings were transcribed, raw data was printed and the printed sheets were organized according to the three schools, starting with the principal of the school,

followed by the Foundation Phase HOD, and the Foundation phase teachers. This was followed by the familiarization with raw data.

### 5.4.1 Familiarising with Data

Once all data was organized according to the three primary schools that participated in this study, data familiarization commenced. This was done through reading and re-reading the transcribed sheets of raw data to gain more understanding of the transcriptions, leading to the next inductive coding step.

### 5.4.2 Creating Codes from Data

Once familiarization with raw data was gained, codes were created by grouping participants' views according to the views that are closely related. Several codes were categorized, fifteen to be precise, came out at first, then they were regrouped, and further regrouped, until eight categories were formed. However, a closer scrutiny revealed that there was need to continue working on the eight categories, which led to the next step of inductive coding.

### 5.4.3 Overlapping/ Intersecting Coding and Uncoded Text

The eight categories were further worked to find out which categories were intersecting, and this resulted into the identification of five categories, which were later refined in the next and final step of inductive analysis.

### 5.4.4 Revision and Refining of Categories

This is the final inductive analysis step that further researched the five categories to find out if there were any of the categories that spoke to the same views and need to be combined. It was finally discovered that some of the categories could merge as they were pointing to the same views, or views that can go together, therefore, inductive coding concluded with three themes that were adopted for the actual analysis.

## 5.5 Categorisation and Identification of Themes Deductively

As was previously mentioned, raw data was also deductively coded using the three IPA principles. The three principles listed below therefore functioned as predefined codes that were utilized to discover excerpts meeting the specified codes,

enhancing the themes that were revealed through inductive coding. Shifting focus away from learners' differences

- Belief that teachers can teach all learners.
- Engagement in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to improve teaching strategies.

Thereafter, the identified themes – types of schooling, knowledge and implementation of policy, and challenges and constraints, were presented as follows.

## 5.6 Presentation of Themes

Interview transcripts were analysed following a Thematic Content Analysis approach and three themes emerged and these are:

i. Types of schools,
ii. Knowledge and implementation of policy, and
iii. Challenges and constraints.

## 5.7 Types of Schools

Participants expressed different views on separate types of schooling. There were those that had strong views that learners with special needs should be taught separately and those who had the view that learners should be taught together in mainstream schools. However, regardless of which view they aligned themselves with, they all talked about common concerns associated with teaching learners together.

### 5.7.1 Separate Schools

The majority of participants believed that learners should be taught separately, and that mainstream schooling was not appropriate for all learners. The first clearly defined rationale from participants who believed that separate schooling was better was that grouping based on capabilities promotes learning. Participant (AT2) stated,

> *So, uh, there should be classes for learners with special educational needs (LSENs) and classes for "normal" learners because they learn better when they are grouped according to their capabilities.*

This view was supported by others, for example, (AT3) said, “It’s easier to work with the same type of students because you get to be prepared for those particular learners”. Participants in School A attested to this by stating that teaching learners according to abilities has shown to work better as they have seen proof of this with COVID19 lockdown restrictions when they adopted this approach when learners were attending school at 50% full capacity. AT4 stated:

> *So, because of COVID-19 restrictions, our school has divided learners into two groups. Group A consists of slow learners and Group B is for fast learners, of the course, learners do not know this information, we have seen that it makes teaching very easy as you know what kind of learners you are dealing with per week*.

A second argument forwarded by participants was that separating learners is helpful not only to learners but also to teachers. Responding to the question about separate schooling, AT2 argued,

> *I think it's very beneficial because like you know, children work well in small classes, so if they could go into small groups, uh, with a given like one on one, uh, attention. I think that they would benefit and not miss out. Like fill the gaps that they've missed, so I think it is a good benefit and I personally think it's a good idea for teachers too.*

This view was welcomed by other participants in School A as they strengthened this argument by giving justifications on how teachers are trained for certain types of schooling.

A third argument forwarded by participants with this view argued that learners should be separated because teachers are trained differently, and this is done because not all teachers can teach all learners. An example of this sentiment was expressed by AT3 who explained,

*So, we have general teachers and specialized teachers for LSENs. It is like, doctors – there are general doctors and specialist doctors, not all doctors can treat any kind of disease, the same applies to teachers, they cannot teach all learners.*

This same view was also reiterated by some participants in School A during a focus group interview.

A fourth point focused on the difficulty of educating all learners together, as well as policymakers' lack of knowledge of these difficulties. Those who agreed with this viewpoint felt that educating all learners in mainstream classrooms is difficult, if not impossible. This was corroborated by AT1, who said unequivocally that incorporating all learners in mainstream classrooms is a challenge for both teachers and earners. AT1 explained that learners can almost always sense that they do not belong to that class, no matter how much teachers try to include them. AT1 stated,

*Including all learners in mainstream classrooms is impractical. Slow learners are having a difficult time, we can try as teachers to treat them equally, but they can sense that they are given simplified tasks, and ask why? This negatively affects them, whilst when they are on their own, they will not see that.*

AT4 added to this point by pointing out that the challenge is coming from the policymakers. She argued:

*The problem is that those people in offices do not know what is actually happening in the classrooms, some of them – you will find that, it has been a long time since they were teaching in schools, they do not understand the challenges of including everybody in mainstream schools, with such large numbers of learners, really it is a challenge. Perhaps, if they consult with teachers before coming up with policies.*

A final argument was raised that parents were not always comfortable with enrolling their children with special needs in separate or “special” schools. As much as most participants had this strong view, they acknowledged that if parents are reluctant to enroll or keep their children in mainstream schools, they, as the school have no right to prevent them to do so. This was echoed by AP, the principal who said,

> *We do advise our parents to take their children to the schools that have resources that will be responsive to the needs of their children, but if they are reluctant to take their child elsewhere, the policy does not allow us to reject anyone, we will keep the child.*

It also came out from most of the participants with the view of educating learners separately that although parents can exercise their rights and insist on mainstream schools enrolling their child, the child will not get the needed assistance. Although most participants had strong views about educating learners separately, there was a minority group that had a different view.

### 5.7.2 Inclusive Schools

Although most of the participants were for the view of teaching learners in separate schools/ units according to capabilities, there was a minority group that was for the view of teaching all learners together. First, participants expressed views that all learners have a right to be educated in mainstream schools and that teachers should respect children’s rights. AT3 argued,

> *We should teach all learners well, it is our duty as teachers to include all learners, in our school we are inclusive, we include everyone because we need to respect the right of every child to access education.*

The same sentiments were echoed by the school principal (AP) who argued that they practice inclusivity in their school and elaborated using an example. She stated,

> *Yes, Ok let me think of an example, so in FP Grade R we’ve got a new kid – X and we don’t know what side of the spectrum this boy is on-and he acts out, when he initially started, you know a lot of*

*kids do not want to be touched, don't want to be looked in the eye, that kind of thing, so I supported the teacher with X, we supported the teacher and we gave her steps to slowly integrate the child into the class, and she is very fortunate that in grade Rs we have learners with assistants and the boy is tied to the assistant, and she does one-on-one with the boy. And every week teachers have meetings, and they have a weekly minute book, and they have their concerns in there. We try to separate him from others when it happens and encourage other kids not to provoke him, we try to calm him down using therapy, rather than punishment.*

Second, those participants with the view of teaching all learners in mainstream schools demonstrated some sort of sympathy toward LSENs. CT1 stated, "These learners also have a right to education, we should at least teach them how to write their names. Given an opportunity to choose between teaching *normal* learners and those with special educational needs, I would choose special needs learners, I love working with them". The same sentiments were echoed by other participants in school C, for instance, CT2 argued that separating learners according to abilities is a discriminatory practice which is against inclusive policies, it demotivates them as they can sense that they are not like other children and that this is the reason they are pulled out of their classrooms.

### 5.7.3 Common Concerns

Notwithstanding their variations in separate or mainstream schooling, all participants cited shared challenges. There is no group that totally supports educating learners alongside their peers in mainstream schools or teaching them separately without expressing concerns. On the one hand, proponents of separate schools claim that LSENs are overwhelmed by what is taught and the rate at which instruction progresses in mainstream settings. For instance, CT5 argued, "Including slow learners in mainstream schools is a contribution to school dropouts, learners with special educational needs will see their peers completing given tasks and progressing whilst they are stuck in one thing, they get frustrated. Thus, these learners should be educated separately from their peers to protect them and protect

the normal ones". Another teacher in school C who is responsible for a program for "struggling learners", as she explained it, CT2, echoed the same sentiments:

> *LSENs get overwhelmed by the curriculum for normal learners and end up falling behind their peers. This can embarrass them as they feel inferior and question why they cannot perform like their peers, which can lead to school dropouts, so, it is better for them to be taught separately.*

Participant CT3, supported this viewpoint by arguing, "LSENs cannot match the speed in the mainstream classrooms, and they fall in cracks because they are slower than other children". Other participants, CT1 and CT5, also stated that LSENs fall behind because they cannot keep up with the pace of normal learners and if teachers focused more on them that would cost the rest of the class.

On the other hand, the participants who demonstrated the willingness to accept all learners, including those with educational challenges, also expressed some reservations, which are common to those raised by the majority group. The first concern was that Inclusive Education is a new concept to them, and as such, sometimes they are not quite sure if they are doing the right thing in assisting the learner. Responding on behalf of the views of the majority in the focus group discussion, AT4 stated:

> *I really want to be inclusive in my classroom, but we lack knowledge of this new approach to teaching, sometimes you get a child with a certain challenge, like ADHD, you are not sure if this is the right intervention you are implementing, it is trial and error, because when we trained we did not do much on inclusion, yes, I remember some policies when I was doing my Honors, but you know, I was reading to obtain my degree, since then I haven't touched those policies, so, if we could get some workshops, I mean workshops that are related to inclusion, not just general education workshops, that would help us.*

This concern was raised by several participants with the view of educating all learners together. Some were even stating that because they are not sure how to handle diverse learners, they resolve to give those learners simplified work. The participants were further asked to explain what they meant by giving some learners simplified work and they said that they were referring to differentiation. However, with the use of follow–up questions, it was discovered that their conceptualisations of differentiation are slightly different from what is meant by differentiated teaching. For instance, responding to her understanding of differentiation, participant, AT4 stated:

> *We make work easier for learners who are struggling academically by simplifying concepts so that they can tackle them. You know, yes, teachers can simplify work for those learners, but the challenge comes when it is assessment time, uh, all learners are to write the same assessment, and this is when the struggling learners fall. So, even if teachers simplify work for them during the term- when it's time for exams they will fail because they all write the same paper.*

The same sentiments were echoed in school C by participants in individual interviews as well as in the focus group discussion. For example, participant CT5 argued:

> *As much as I said I would prefer to have learners taught together, if LSENs are taught on their own, teachers get the opportunity to simplify work, make it easier compared to what is done in mainstream classes so that these learners can manage. This is possible as they will be learning at their own pace, but the problem comes when it is assessment time because assessment is not inclusive, all learners write the same paper, and these ones usually fail.*

The second concern was that LSENs slow down the progress of other learners because teachers would spend more time with them at the expense of others. One of the participants argued:

> *LSENs learn differently, they follow the same curriculum but theirs is simplified, so it is different from the normal curriculum and progresses at a slower rate to match their needs. So, as much as I want them to be mixed with others, mixing them with normal learners will mean the teacher spends more time on them trying to help them understand at the expense of the rest of the learners.*

A participant in another school BT2 raised the same concerns with regards to slow learners affecting others in a negative way by stating:

> *To be very honest with you, I think they do slow down the progress of others. Yeah, I'm talking from experience. So, like I said I've got this little boy in my class, so he's had brain damage. A lot of my time is focused on him and trying to help him and trying to support him and trying to remediate him. You don't spend as much time with your average and strong learners you know, and I feel, uh, I feel they do demand a lot of your time you just feel like you need to help them to try and help them achieve something because you don't want them feel down, their self-esteem. Like crashes so you give your all to help the learners in your class, especially the ELSEN learners. And it does take away from the other children.*

Third, several participants who supported mainstream schooling raised concerns about the number of learners per class. BT4 stated, “I have no problem with teaching all learners, but the challenge is big numbers, there are too many learners in my class, 40, it is such a challenge to cater to everybody’s needs”. Some participants with the view of mainstream schooling view raised their concerns with regard to large class sizes. For instance, CT2 alluded, “Teaching all learners together is a good approach, my main worry is the large numbers, how are we

expected to teach everyone inclusively with 40/45 learners, it is a difficult, but doable". Some of them were even suggesting being given assistant teachers, rather than handling a class of 40 or more learners single-handed. A participant in one of the schools, AT3, suggested, "This thing of inclusive education was not properly planned, like, if you look at what is happening in European countries, teachers have teaching assistants to help them".

Additionally, some participants with the view of mainstream schooling raised further concerns about inclusivity in implementation, such as LSENs being overwhelmed by the curriculum in mainstream schools. A participant AT3 stated, "LSENs use a different curriculum which is more simplified, yes, they would learn the same content as that of normal learners, but their curriculum is simplified and progresses at their pace. So, when they are taught together with the normal learners, they fall between the cracks". Others supported this viewpoint by stating that as much as they want to include LSENs in mainstream classrooms, it is difficult in practice.

A lot of concerns were raised by both groups about the lack of medical facilities to cater to the needs of learners, participants stated that LSENs should be in schools where there are medical facilities to assist them. It was argued that there is no point in including LSENs in the mainstream classrooms because they will not benefit as much as their peers because their needs will not be met in "normal environments". For example, AT2 argued:

> *Our schools do not have the right medical facilities needed by LSENs, for instance, we do not have therapists, psychologists, you know, uh, people specialized in certain ailments to help those learners, so, better take them to schools where their needs will be met. In ordinary schools, they will not get the needed assistance, they can come but it is no use to them.*

Additionally, participants stated that mainstream schools do not have trained personnel who are specialized in teaching LSENs. It was stated:

> *So, we have general teachers and specialized teachers – just like we have general doctors and doctors who are specialized in certain*

*types of illnesses. So, during preservice training, mainstream teachers are not trained to teach LSENs, only specialized teachers are able to handle them.*

One participant raised the importance of working together with parents, emphasized the need for parents to be part of their children's learning. She stated that they do try to inform parents of LSENs about these challenges, but, in the event, the parents are reluctant to take their children to the suggested special schools, school personnel have no right to deny them enrollment, they would be enrolled but their needs will not be met. One of the principals (AP), stated:

*So, we try to reason with parents of LSENs that their child is not going to fully benefit from mainstream schooling because we are not able to meet the child's needs. It is up to the parent to make a final decision, we cannot do that for them, if the parent refuses to take their child elsewhere, there is nothing we can do - the policy does not allow schools to deny anyone enrolment in a school of their choice, hence, if parents are insisting that their children be enrolled in a mainstream school, the child would be enrolled but their needs will not be met.*

This perspective was also raised by another principal, BP, who elaborated:

*We explain to parents that if their child is not going to cope, I think it's detrimental to the child, you're placing the child in this situation, where they're going to feel more overwhelmed and inadequate. So, we try and convince the parents that you know what, we can assist, but, if you're really adamant and you want your child to be enrolled in the mainstream we can keep your child, but in the long run it's not simply benefiting your child's education and the career that they have to follow., but at the end of the day, they all write the same exam, or they all write the same assessment and it's usually there where the children struggle, they struggle with the assessment. So, with the classwork the teachers will change the*

*work and try and make it easier. For them, but unfortunately with the assessments, everybody writes the same assessment, and those children usually fall through the cracks.*

### 5.8 Knowledge and Implementation of Policy

Data has revealed that participants have conceptualised Inclusive Education policy in diverse ways. Some of the conceptualisations are influenced by policies whilst others are not, and these are:

i. Arrangements for provisioning of support,
ii. Knowledge of Inclusive Education Policy, and
iii. Implementation of Policy.

#### 5.8.1 Arrangements for Provisioning of support

Participants in school B mentioned that their school no longer has special separate units because that was a practice that discriminated against other learners. For instance, BT5 stated:

*Our school does not have special classes for LSENs anymore, what we have are pull-out programs where learners who are struggling are given more attention by creating an individualized program known as Individual Educational Programme (IEP) to support them, learners can be in the IEP class for a term, year, or years, depending on their responses before they are returned to general classes.*

When asked to clarify the difference between the traditional special units for learners with barriers to learning and the IEP practiced at their school, the participant BT5 struggled to separate the two approaches. She argued, “There is a difference between the IEP and the traditional separate classes for LSENs, but it is difficult to explain it”. The participant added that at their school, they decided to create this IEP to assist struggling learners after the department encouraged schools to do away with special classes, and she is the teacher in charge of the IEP class. This idea of running IEP class/unit along with mainstream classes was also reiterated by the school principal (BP), who mentioned that their learners are

benefiting a lot from (BT5), the teacher manning this class. The participants also expressed their knowledge and or lack of knowledge of the Inclusive Education Policies.

### 5.8.2 Knowledge of Inclusive Education Policy

There were however those participants that felt that Inclusive Education can work only with some not all subjects. For instance, participant BT2 stated:

> *Inclusive Education sounds very good on paper but not in reality. For instance, it is easier to include all learners for subjects like Art and Music, but it is difficult when we come to subjects like Mathematics. Science or Geography.*

Most participants showed keen interest in Inclusive Education and its practices, but several of them said that they were not conversant with the Inclusive Education policies, both international and South African policies. Some of the participants stated that they do not know of any inclusion policies whilst some said they do have a clue but have not yet taken time out to study them. One Foundation Phase Head of Department BT3, confessed, “One of the things this interview has taught us is to revisit the policies, almost all of us have been found wanting in that area”. When asked how they practice Inclusive Education, she justified, “Inclusive Education is about including everyone, so the basic principle is not to marginalise any learner unless their needs cannot be met at our school, uh, like if a learner needs braille and the school does not have it or does not have teachers who can speak Sign Language”. Another participant, (BT1), added, “We do have policy documents in the office, but we are too busy to read them”. Whilst (BT4) said:

> *The last time I did policies was when I was doing my Bed Honors, did to pass my degree. I know the EWP6 is about including everyone, but if you ask me - I cannot tell you much about what it says, and again we did not do many policies during preservice training.*

The Head of Foundation Phase at School B, (BT3), commented, “The fact that some of us are not aware of what inclusive policies are saying, I think this is a contributory factor to the differences between what policy states and what is actually happening on the ground”. AT3 raises the point that she trained as a teacher a long time ago before inclusion. She stated:

> *You know nana (baby), it's been so many years ago we did not really concentrate on, I mean, uh It is like more than how long ago? You could have been a baby yourself. Well, I could hear some people (teachers) really talking about inclusion. Inclusive teaching was not a big issue ...yeah.*

There were, however, participants who stated their opinions about the implementation of inclusive education regarding policy.

### 5.8.3 Implementation of Policy

Although some participants claimed not to know of any Inclusive Education policies, they demonstrated some knowledge of inclusion. The few participants who claimed to be knowledgeable on Inclusive Education policy and its implementation did raise their concerns that the drafted policies are good, but implementation is a challenge. One of the participants who openly claimed to be knowledgeable of the Inclusive Education policies, CT4 stated:

> *What policy says is practically impossible, the policy looks good on paper but implementing it is not easy. The challenge is those people have not been in the classrooms for a very long time, they do not really understand what really takes place on the ground.*

Participant CT2 added that there is a need for teachers as implementers of policy to be consulted whenever policies are decided. She argued:

> *The people making policies should consult us as teachers before passing these policies, right now policy says everyone should be included, which is good, but this is not easy, or it is even impossible to do that with the large numbers of learners in each class.*

BP raised the same argument that one of the issues that hinder the successful inclusion policy is lack of communication between stakeholders. She stated:

> *And I think the communication between the schools and the district and what they want from us - That's where there's a big gap cause, like I said before, they, it looks amazing on paper, but it's not always, you know you can't apply it. The application is difficult.*

Most participants were adamant that what the policy says is impractical as there are many hurdles in the implementation process leading to several challenges. This view came out strongly when participants were talking about both the knowledge about policy and the challenges of implementing Inclusive Education.

Participants in all schools emphasized the importance of working collaboratively to counter the challenges in the inclusion implementation stage. They stated that working together helps them to be more inclusive as they get a platform to share inclusion ideas. For instance, AT4 said:

> *We realise that practicing inclusion is not easy, so we come together often now that it is COVID-19 restrictions we do it less. So, we share ideas, discuss challenges and possible solutions as a Foundation Phase, and in the event, it is beyond our capabilities, we consult our principal who is very supportive.*

Participants in School A echoed the same sentiments, adding that their principal (AP), organizes workshops for them from the Department of Education, Teachers' Unions, or even any trained personnel who can offer that workshop training. This was also revealed by the principal herself in school A, (AP), who explained:

> *In our school, we have organized workshops for various stakeholders, sometimes if one of the teachers learns about an*

*inclusive educational program, they are free to pass it through me, yes, as long it is something to benefit our learners.*

In support of collaborative workshops, AT3 stated that this is where they get information on how to handle retained learners and those with problematic behavioral disorders. One of the participants in school A, AT2, was asked what kind of assistance she has sought from the principal, she responded that she has never asked for any help, but she is certain that if she does, the principal will give her the needed assistance. Participants reiterated that although they welcome Inclusive Education it does not come without its challenges.

## 5.9 Challenges & Constraints

Welcoming Inclusive Education to most participants translates into finding ways of handling its accompanying challenges. The following challenges were raised:

### 5.9.1 Challenges with Regards to Being Responsive to Diversity

First, participants stated that Inclusive Education means accepting a variety of learners from diverse backgrounds together with their problems. CT1 stated, "Inclusive Education is about welcoming learners from different backgrounds, languages, and cultures, and that means more work and vigilance on the part of the teacher". Another one added that differences should be embraced but that is a challenge, thus the school prefers to handle learners with moderate challenges, not severe ones. The principal AP mentioned how they, as a school handle difficult learner to embrace diversity, "We have a child who curses here but we try to accommodate him, so, what we do is – we use therapy to help calm him down, not to reprimand the child". One participant CT1 admitted that teaching all learners is not impossible, but it is a challenge and teachers should always remember that it is every child's right to acquire quality education.

However, the majority of the participants raised concerns on the number of learners per class as something that challenges their ability to be inclusive of all learners. For instance, the principal of school A, AP argued:

*We try to embrace diversity but is not always easy with the number of learners in a class. Uh, teachers are siting with 36/37 learners*

*per class, and that becomes very difficult considering that there would be some additional LSENs in that 37 number. So, it becomes a challenge for the teacher to respond to the needs of all her learners. If only the department could give us teacher assistants, uh, that would be better.*

Participant BT2 raised almost the same sentiments, when she said, “It is … uh, I don’t want to use the word – impossible, but yeah almost impossible to respond to the needs of all learners in a class when we have such large class sizes”. This was taken further by another participant, BT1 who argued, “Responding to the needs of all learners could be doable if the teacher-learner ratio was lower or we are like European countries where teachers have qualified teaching assistants”.

### 5.9.2 Challenges related to Accessing Support for both Teachers and Learners.

Second, some participants raised concerns about handling slow learners, which they said challenges the smooth progress of teaching and learning. This is exacerbated by the department’s slow procedures for intervention. One participant, (BT1), stated:

*The Department takes a long time to intervene, it can be years before the child is placed in an appropriate school, so, I would be forced to stay with the child whom I am not trained to help. I am not trained to work with a blind child but there are teachers trained to deal with that.*

An almost similar sentiment was echoed by one school principal, AP, when asked if they, as a school, are getting any support from the Department of Education, with opened palms facing upward, she responded:

*They (Department) do try to run workshops here and there, but they tend to focus on the management of the process and the paperwork and deadlines, we must look for schools of*

*specialization, or the unions or the people who can offer workshops to support us, so there is limited support. Even if we send documentation to them for a child who needs assessment, who needs placement, they lose the paperwork or they take too long, it's extremely frustrating.*

To show the importance of acquiring training support, CT1 stated that she and others in the school have been trained recently to deal with trauma because of several learners losing parents/caregivers due to COVI19, making them better equipped to deal with mild cases and provide support, but not to handle serious ones. Another participant, (CT4), added, "Yes, we do have support, but it is for general therapy not serious cases".

### 5.9.3 Challenges related to Unrealistic Expectations and Workload.

Third, several participants raised challenges that have to do with what is expected from them and what they can do. For instance, BT2 argued, "As we implement Inclusive Education, I think a lot is expected from teachers, because one has to meet the demands of the curriculum, and this curriculum is so demanding, but at the same time you are expected to include everyone". This challenge was raised by several participants, who argued that there is a lot of paperwork that takes up all the time for teaching. In relation to this, a participant in the same school BT3 argued, "Take, for example, the documentation that we have to go through completing the SIAS, Learning Profile, marking, to mention a few, for 40 learners or more, it's too much really, and we are expected to have completed the CAPS document in a stipulated period".

### 5.9.4 Challenges related to Curriculum and Assessment.

Fourth, closely related to the above challenge, another participant in a different school, CT5, stated, "The curriculum is very prescriptive, and I can say it is not inclusive, uh, because where do you get the time to attend to individual needs, especially for those learners lagging behind when you are told that you should have completed this concept by the end of the week?" Stroking her chin, she further elaborated:

> *LSENs are educable, it's just that when they are mixed with others the smooth running of teaching and learning gets affected in that even within the separated learners, it also depends on what support they need, they do not all need the same kind of support, uh, but because of pressure from the curriculum they have to finish and keep up with others, so, you have to apply to everyone the majority rule, and it's a sorry for incomplete work you have to try again tomorrow. And work is piling on their side.*

The same sentiments were raised by one school principal, AP, who argued:

> *And the other challenge is the department's uh, curriculum- it's very specific and its aligned to days and weeks, so, on this day/week you 've got to do this, and what we finding – is there is very little time to teach and reteach stuff- the whole time you are teaching is you are focusing on completing this curriculum, this is content for this term, you have to finish it by the end of the term - and this hampers the progress of a lot of learners in a class- from the slow/ weak learners. We have raised this with the department, and they have raised it with the head office, you know that's how they must go.*

AP elaborated by stating:

> *It is extremely prescriptive because if you are given more of a gap, you could give all learners extended support, say a week of extension, and would focus on those needing more time, but there is very little time for that.*

Supporting this challenge, others, CT2 and CT4, argued that as a result teacher are forced not to include all learners. In agreement with CT's sentiments, another participant in the same school, CT1, raised an almost similar challenge by stating that the South African education system has hindrance to the development of some learners because it only tests in

certain ways. When asked what she meant by that CT5 responded to the question by stating:

> *I find it very difficult and heartbreaking, like at this time of the year when I am doing assessments, there are some kids who are brilliant at oral work. They really do well in the oral and come back with a zero in written comprehension. And, so, the testing mechanisms should also consider differences in learners, needs to be addressed and accommodated, uh, because it then puts everybody under one umbrella, and yet we are saying that they are different. They are excluding others, and this is when we demotivate children who have high learning potentials in another learning style that is not recognised. We have the likes of Bill Gates, who are known to be dyslexic, yeah, all their lives were probably marked wrong, but have made it in life.*

Throughout this elaboration, CT1 kept on nodding her head, demonstrating her agreement with what CT5 was saying.

BP further explained how she perceives the curriculum:

> *It (curriculum) struggles to accommodate the children that maybe are not academically inclined because our curriculum is more structured for children that do well academically and children who struggle with academics, or those that they struggle with reading or writing, like for example, Math, I'm taking math as an example, Math is compulsory up until Matric and not all children are mathematically inclined, but yeah, they force the children to take subjects. So, I think our curriculum has its advantages, it's not a bad curriculum, but I also think that there is room for improvement.*

### 5.9.5 Challenges related to Lack of Training

Fifth, participants raised the challenge of the lack of relevant workshops from the Department. Opening her palms wide and glaring at the ceiling, AT3 stated:

> *The department does some workshops time and again but, in most cases, those workshops are not related to Inclusive Education, or if they do, they are being repeated.*

Several participants echoed the sentiments on the need to be taught how to handle learners with special educational needs. Linked to this challenge, there were issues of uncertainties about handling diversity. One of them said:

> *We are not sure if we are doing the right thing or not. We need to be properly trained to handle diversity. Or better yet, the Department should organize relevant workshops that will provide us with continuous development on inclusion. As much as we want to include all learners, we are not sure if we are doing any justice to these learners because we are not trained for them - we do not know if we are helping them or not.*

Others supported this by stating that there are a lot of things they are not clear about, which makes it challenging to be fully inclusive in their workspaces.

This was also reiterated by a principal in school A, AP, who argued:

> *… and the other challenge that I should have added to question 12 is that certain teachers don't have experience or exposure to kids like these. On very few occasions, uh we do not have that now, but we did have a teacher who was not prepared to work with learners with challenges, like impairments, I know some teachers in some schools would not go the extra mile to help children with special needs like they would tell you that there are not trained for this.*

BP echoed sentiments in agreement with AP by arguing:

*But when it comes to other children, we can. Of course, we've got some children that might be autistic or suffer from ADHD. Or it can be, some behavior issues, then we could manage it, but you must also keep in mind that our teachers. Uhm, as a mainstream school was not trained to be remedial, and we were not trained to facilitate children with special needs. So, when it comes to special needs, I personally feel that the children need to be in an environment which will enable them to do well. If you put a child like that in a mainstream school, I think it does make them feel inadequate and it makes them feel overwhelmed because the curriculum that we follow is much different.*

However, one principal, CP, argued on the differences in how teacher training used to be done (trained *a long time ago*) compared to modern teacher training that it is a contributory factor to the IE implementation challenges. She argued:

*I have a passion for education, and I feel very despondent sometimes when I see the way that education is being handled in South Africa specifically. When it comes to teacher training and I know you know you shouldn't look back to the good old days like they say, but if I compare the standard of which the teachers were trained from 20 years ago and the standard that the teachers are being trained now, it's a huge difference. And I also think the way they train the teachers makes a huge impact when they eventually graduate because when I went for my training it was more hands, it was more practical. Universities are more interested in research, not teacher preparation, as a result, teachers graduate underprepared for teaching.*

This challenge, she claimed, can be alleviated by holding continuous professional development organized by teachers' unions in unison with the Department of Education.

### 5.9.6 Challenges related to Resources and Finances

The sixth challenge raised by participants related to the constraints of resources and finances. The principal, CP explained that one of the reasons their school is not running special classes is the lack of finances to supplement the LSEN's classes and the remuneration of the teachers manning those classes. The principal argued:

> *Even if we create a class for LSENs, there are no finances for remedial classes, we are not sure if the Department of Education would provide us with the right teachers and assume responsibility to pay those teachers, otherwise, it would be our responsibility – like paying the teachers who will run those classes and buying the needed materials.*

Another principal, BP, raised an almost similar argument by stating that the department is not providing more teachers and classrooms, but *demands* that schools to continuously increase enrolment. She argued:

> *And because of the demand, because the department wants us to take more kids. Like this year, for example, we were supposed to enroll 160 grade ones. Yeah, we already siting on 1800 so every year they're trying. Yeah, they're trying so which means our classes are becoming bigger, but we don't get more teachers.*

Several participants in school B were stating their reluctance to include all learners as emanating from the school infrastructure. One of them, BT2, stated, "Our classes are double/triple storey, and they are not suitable for LSENs. In addition to that is the large class sizes that we are supposed to manage". They mentioned that LSENs would not manage to maneuver their way to the third storey like other learners. The principal of this school, BP, went on to further explain the challenges of managing large numbers of learners and teachers. She explained that their

school is even bigger than the high school situated on the following street and raised her concerns regarding management issues. Her sentiments were:

> *Management challenges are worse when the school is big – it is even more so when we include LSENs, so, we do not have special classes because our school lacks infrastructure –school X is the one that runs special classes along with mainstream classrooms – we take LSENs there.*

Additionally, CT1 stated:

> *I would say no – inclusive policy is not in harmony with resources, structures, and practices. The reason is - in our government schools we don't have enough resources we don't have, uh, and some teachers like - uh I explained previously can't handle the pressure of this child bouncing up and down. And with resources, with the ADHD child with some schools...uh will get the balls and some will give them fidgeting stuff to let them calm down and we don't have it because there's no additional money to help those learners with uh… I don't want to call it disability…*

Although BP demonstrated some acknowledgment that all children's rights should be respected, including the right to education, she expressed her concerns regarding infrastructure by arguing:

> *Yes, obviously all children have the right to a good education and to be treated equally so when it comes to enrolling children in a mainstream school, I think it is a bit difficult to accommodate children. Maybe with a physical disability because we don't have the infrastructure to be able to accommodate children, for example in a wheelchair. So, I do think that children that have physical disabilities, like being in a wheelchair or needing certain medical facilities should be in mainstream school.*

Below is a diagrammatical presentation of the identified themes from the data and their sub-themes.

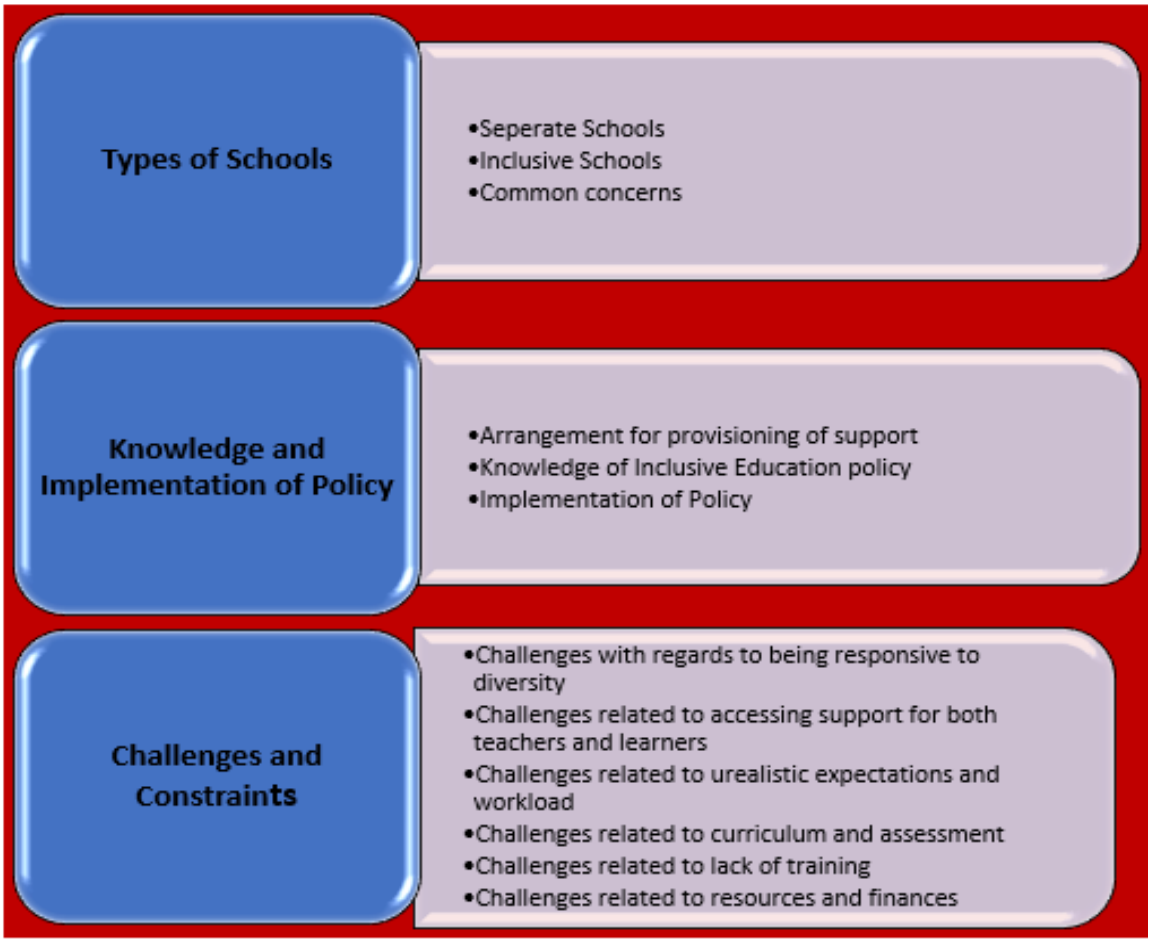



**Figure 4: Diagrammatical presentation of data according to themes**

### 5.10 Discussion of Data Based on Inductive Coding

Early inductive analysis, according to Corbin and Strauss (2015), is about gaining insight and generating initial concepts. To understand data, one must first "chew" on it and "feel" it (p.127). Similarly, Thomas (2017) defines inductive analysis as a qualitative research term used to describe the process of beginning with specific observations and then detecting regularities or themes. This implies that the researcher must assume the role of the other and attempt to comprehend the world through the eyes of the participants. In this study, the researcher used memos (written records of analysis) and journal entries to stimulate and document the analytic process for later retrieval or modification of information. According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), this is to facilitate the analytic process because these (memos) can revolve and turn out to be more complex as the research progresses.

Consequently, the inductive analysis followed a critical thinking frame of identifying and grouping common themes/patterns as illustrated below.

- ✓ Looking at a whole
- ✓ Identifying recurring items, patterns, and themes
- ✓ Arranging like items into groups
- ✓ Describing the whole in terms of groups
- ✓ Grouping patterns that emerged and informed observations
- ✓ Allowing categories to evolve and change throughout observation
- ✓ Tabulating
- ✓ Finally, composing a write up.

### 5.10.1 Looking at the Whole

Following a thorough review of all the transcriptions on paper, line-by-line coding was then resumed. According to Mohajan, D. and Mohajan, H. (2022), coding is a process that involves dissecting, contrasting, evaluating, conceptualising, and categorising data. This process may be broken down into three stages, open, axial, and selective coding. I started with open coding, which is line-by-line coding to discover concepts and key phrases from participants' responses, and this was carried out throughout the coding process. This is consistent with VoIIstedt and Rezat's (2019) assertion that in this style of coding (open coding), the process entails splitting up data into smaller portions with the objective of in-depth analysis.

### 5.10.2 Identifying Recurring Items, Patterns, and Themes

By describing in terms of groups or categories which data belong together, quantifying the same groupings of data, and imposing order on a field, I used the second strategy to organise a field of data. This is the axial coding that Mohajan, D. and Mohajan, H. (2022) describe as a technique for creating links between data in a qualitative study by contextually, naturally, casually, and interactionally examining the relationships within data. This demonstrated that there were data sets that could be grouped based on similarities, which prompted the next coding step.

### 5.10.3 Arranging like items into Groups

Third, identical items were all grouped together for easy identification by assigning similar items a specific color. Choosing the core category and connecting it to additional categories from the axial coding is known as selective coding in this step, according to Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019). Accordingly, this kind of coding takes place when the researcher (analyst) determines the fundamental categories and then creates meaning from the categories.

### 5.10.4 Describing the Whole in terms of Groups

Fourth, in an effort to give the data significance, I tried explaining the same coded objects. Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) define this process as a descriptive record of analytical debate that takes place between the researcher and the data during the data collection and analysis phase. This indicates that this procedure involves comparing data, categories, and codes, and it gives the researcher a place to interact. Throughout the course of the study analysis, I participated in this process, interacted with the data, and recorded data interpretations.

### 5.10.5 Grouping Patterns that Emerged and Informed Observations

Fifth, groups of items emerged and these assisted informing what was been observed. This means that I did not have any preconceived codes/categories/themes, basically, I did not exactly know what will emerge. Corbin and Strauss (2015) call this process “thawing”, meaning the cognitive fluidity that not only allows thoughts to move, but to move in unanticipated and sometimes different directions. They add that allowing thoughts to thaw, provides the researcher with the opportunity to “actively wander and wonder” (p.129). This shows that allow data to emerge on its own opens wider spaces for analysis that can result into rich findings as never anticipated direction emerge.

### 5.10.6 Allowing Categories to Evolve and Change Throughout Observation

Sixth, it should be noted that the identified categories continuously evolved, and instead of being rigid, I allowed the changes of categories as they evolved throughout the analysis process.

### 5.10.7 Tabulating

In preparation to draft a report of what emerged from the data, information was presented in a table format which made writing of the report more manageable.

### 5.10.8 Finally, Composing a Write Up

Finally, a report was written describing the results of the inductive data analysis, which were compared to the results of the deductive data analysis, the results from deductive coding confirmed the themes identified through inductive coding.

## 5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented data as collected from the study participants. The chapter paid close attention to the ethical considerations of keeping the anonymity of all the participants through the use of pseudonyms. After transcribing the recordings, the researcher studied data to be familiar with all the contents, this was followed by line by line transcribing to make sure that all information is captured correctly. Coding was first done inductively to allow codes to emerge from the data itself, closely following the coding procedures provided at the beginning of this chapter. The three main IPA principles—a shift in teachers' attention away from difference, rejection of deterministic beliefs about ability, and emphasis on ways to work with and through others in continuous professional development—were then used as codes in deductive coding, which was what came afterward. These preset codes helped to categorise the participants' responses based on their conceptualisations of IE, which influenced their practices. The fifteen categories obtained through inductive and deductive coding were then repeatedly improved to produce the three themes that were ultimately adopted. The following chapter will provide the discussion and analysis of the data.

# CHAPTER 6: DATA DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS BASED ON DEDUCTIVE CODING

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on discussing the data analysis by comparing responses from participants' comments with what prior academic studies have revealed. The merging of two theoretical frameworks—the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach and the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development—to serve as the study's lens was one of the study's main focuses. The assertions stated in the literature review chapter will be examined and integrated with the theoretical frameworks in relation to what has been said by the participants. Analysing participants' responses through these two lenses provide insights into how the Foundation Phase teachers and the primary school principals have conceptulised IE, which impacts on their practices. This will provide the researcher with greater insight to reach relevant conclusions and offer recommendations for further study. The discussion of data will commence by deductive coding, utilising as codes the three fundamental principles of the Inclusive Pedagogical Approach.

## 6.2 Discussion of Data Based on Deductive Coding Analysis

The IPA is a shift away from the traditional thinking about teaching to a new way of teaching that responds to the needs of all learners, rather than some or most, consequently, avoiding the marginalisation that can occur with individually designed differentiated instruction (Florian and Black- Hawkins, 2017; Florian & Beaton, 2017). This agrees with what Florian and Black - Hawkins (2011) initially argued that teachers who practice inclusive pedagogy face a primary challenge regarding "*how to simultaneously respect and respond to learners*' differences in inclusive ways, rather than exclude them from, what is ordinarily available in everyday classroom life. The IPA, unlike the traditional teaching approaches, as earlier pointed out in chapter two of this study, argues against the idea that some learners necessarily need *something additional* or *different from* that which is generally available to the rest of the learners (Florian and Linklater, 2009; Florian and Black-Hawkins, 2011, 2012, 2017). This means that if a teaching approach is still maintaining the identification of individual learners' needs as a way of teaching, that approach is excluding other learners and is still stuck in the medical model of deficit teaching and learning. An inclusive approach should create rich learning

opportunities that are available to everyone. Accordingly, an inclusive pedagogical shift is built upon three fundamental principles which were used to align the participants' responses regarding how they view diversity. It was discovered that the participants' responses to this study were varied, and three categories or sub-themes clearly stood out in all three principles.

### 6.2.1 Principle One: Difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning which requires: Shifting focus away from learners' differences to the learning of all

Three sub-themes emerged from the first IPA principle namely, the perspective of those who focused on the learning of all, those who focused on learners' differences, and those whose focus was split between the two opinions. These three sub-themes are discussed below.

### 6.2.2 Focus on Learning of All

The participants whose responses were categorized in this group under the first principle demonstrated a shift away from focusing on differences amongst learners (Loreman 2017; Molbaek 2018; Saloviita 2018). These participants displayed positive views on the importance of all learners acquiring epistemological access (Morrow, 2009; Muller, 2014), through the provision of equal opportunities for learning. Such participants expressed a belief that differences amongst learners should be accounted for as part of human diversity, consequently enabling learning for all. In this vein of thought, CT3 stated:

> *What I liked about diversity, it gives children awareness of what is out in the world. They're not staying in the little box. Yeah, I think children definitely need to learn more about what is out there so that they know how to interact with other children who might have a disability. You might think that there's something wrong with them or that they can't be included in the games that they play, yeah. it would help those who are normally separated.*

This participant spoke from lived experiences and was certain that diverse learners bring a rich learning environment that benefits everyone. Everybody gets the opportunity to learn about the diversity of humanity, which reflects the future world they are growing into (De Bruin, 2020). This is important as today's learners, in all their diversities, are prepared to form the future generation, where they would be expected to live and work inclusively, whether they have or have no barriers to learning, hence the reason to be taught together in mainstream schools. Additionally, CP's initial response displayed explicit positivity toward difference by stating:

> *Yes, I do believe difference is part of humanity, can you imagine, If we were all the same well, no, I don't know that you would want lots of me around. So yes, we all have to be different, we are different in different ways. And our personalities are different. Our intellects are different. Everything is different, so yes, it's a very important thing. And yeah, you must have people with strengths, you must have people with weaknesses in all areas and that's just how we work, so yeah, definitely.*

The principal, CP demonstrated a clear position regarding differences amongst learners, that these should be expected as they form part of humanity. CP 's response demonstrated that she is inclusive and is willing to include all learners in mainstream teaching and learning. This kind of reasoning tallies very well with AT2's argument that teachers should never single out any specific learner but should always embrace all learners. Another participant, BT1 also reiterated her strong commitment to including all learners in teaching and learning by stating how she sees her profession:

> *I would describe my profession as a passion. I would describe my profession as an inclusive profession. I would also describe it as a hard-working profession, and you must be very meticulous. So meticulous and very organized, I think as a teacher you must wear many caps, so you must be very organized here so, that's very true, yeah.*

There is evidence of inclusive teacher attributes in this participant's response that translates to inclusive practices. This response agrees with what was picked up by another participant, AT3, who stated that teaching is a 24-hour profession because even after official working hours one still thinks of ways of including all learners as they reflect on a day's activities. This perspective of viewing the teaching profession in this way to the point of reflecting on areas needing improvement really shows the commitment to include all learners in teaching and learning. Another participant in school C, CT1 emphasized the awareness of operative professional standards guiding teachers' actions by stating:

> *I'm at a government School, so to include everybody you have no choice. Oh, trying our best to facilitate everybody I mean it is difficult. But you know, you do have to try and include everybody that's in the in the classroom, so I'd stay being calm being prepared and we do have very good, good resources. So, whether they have issues with learning, we need to be able to include all of them. Absolutely doesn't matter any whatever differences we have, it's all up we'd be all different and I think that's what makes the world go around. If we were all the same if all my children came to school and will have robots, I could just go home because what's the point in being?*

Although CT1 initially stated that she has no choice with regards to including everyone, her expressions later were appreciative of including everyone and she demonstrated that she is willing to include all learners.

Nevertheless, participants do face challenges in their endeavors, and some of those challenges are further exacerbated when it comes to teachers that trained many years ago before the introduction of Inclusive Education in South Africa as shown in AT3's sentiments:

> *I always try to understand the needs of all my children too. Yeah, because especially our kids today are all different. You must*

*respond to their needs differently because they are all different. It is different from the old days we would use one method to teach all learners. Every child should be included no matter their ability, the barriers of learning, or the race, they all must be included in teaching and treated with the same dignity. But it's sometimes It's texting its difficult. Because you must work with this group or this child that's got this problem and that one that's got that form and you know they come from different backgrounds and there's also emotional issues and so you know it becomes difficult sometimes. But it is important that you try.*

These words show that the teacher is very much aware of diversity brought by a shift from the medical deficit to a social model of viewing learners and is prepared to embrace all different learners in teaching and learning, but there are challenges. Her statement that it is challenging and difficult working with diversity shows that she is not quite prepared how to handle diversity. This makes sense considering that she trained way before the introduction of Inclusive Education, hence even though she is willing to embrace diversity she lacks the needed skills, which AT1 previously stated as one of the challenges to including all learners. Consequently, the principal in school B, BP said:

*We really must include all learners, especially for those children whose parents might not have the financial means to send them to a remedial school - because it is costly. So, being able to give them a good quality education, we try and include these children as well in in our schools.*

AP realises that if learners living with barriers to learning are excluded from mainstream schooling, they face additional challenges with inflated payment for their education, hence her reason to include them. The mentality of trying to include them as well shows that the participant views including learners with barriers to learning as a show of sympathy toward them, rather than a right. Arguably, BP stated that practically mainstream schooling is not inclusive in all aspects, she said:

*Yes, I think differences and diversity should be embraced and its part of humanity, it would be quite boring if we were all the same, and that is why actually, - You know, with mainstream schooling, I do think that they cater for a specific child, so they don't include, the different needs of the children. It's more academic based if I can put it that way and not all children are academics, so definitely there's a lot of differences and diversities in the schooling system. And in our in our sector, of course where we're working.*

This response demonstrated dissatisfaction with how assessment is done in schools as it only focuses on academic performance and ignores other learners' achievements, which is a discriminatory practice. The same sentiments were alluded to d by a teacher in school C, CT5 who said that although Inclusive Education says that teachers should include all learners, the curriculum and its assessments are not inclusive as they focus only on academic achievements.

Another participant, BT1 mentioned something closely related to the importance of inclusivity with regards to assessment, she argued:

*I'm also the grade leader for grade One, so I think that helps me because I'm able to make decisions based on the entire grade so I can see which learners are struggling and adjusts the preparation accordingly. I can also see which different cultures they are and adjust the preparation accordingly to that as well, to include all the cultures, all the levels of differences of the kids. And I think it'll be to include all learners of different academic abilities. for instance, like in some cultures looking into your eyes is a sign of disrespect. That being in a rubric for speech, it's marked down if they cannot maintain eye contact. So, you need to be able to adjust accordingly -this child is not going to have eye contact because of their culture. So, I think it's to include all aspects of the child.*

This participant 's observation demonstrated some deeper thought into how some actions that are not given much consideration can amount to exclusionary

practices in teaching and learning. This kind of reasoning – to include the holistic development of the child by modifying some assessment areas regarding cultural differences, demonstrated genuine interest to include all learners in mainstream classrooms. Additionally, this participant stated her confidence in teaching diverse learners by saying:

> *I feel quite confident teaching diverse learners, I've been teaching for quite a while though, so I do feel confident in teaching all those different types of learners, and I think it's also quite interesting to see the way that different learners respond to certain instructions and pursuits and academic goals. So, I do think that I can do it.*

This statement shows the participant's passion, knowledge, and experience to teach diverse learners. She also mentions the pleasure that is derived from seeing different learners responding differently to instruction as they pursue their academic goals, thus the reason to teach them inclusively. Another participant echoed almost the same sentiments when they said:

> *I think what when I was training, it was to make sure that when we teach, we incorporate all learners holistically and regardless of the socioeconomic background or their culture or their language, and that we always try to make sure that every child in their classroom during that lesson feels included in the class. And that they don't feel like they're being left out. So, even in my teaching today, I always try and make sure, that every child is included. I'll also make sure that you simplify your lessons for those that are a little bit weaker or those that are stronger, so things like that.*

Although this participant had good intentions of including everyone, the issue of simplifying work for some learners demonstrates that the teacher expects less from such learners compared to their "stronger" peers, which leads to predetermination of learners' abilities (Florian, Black- Hawkins, & Rousse 2016). These sentiments are like BT3's reasoning which were:

*Uh, my best inclusive skills would be like dedicating my time to the weaker, the weaker children and including them and making them feel part of the class because you don't really know that they're battling, and you don't want them to feel left out. Up and including them and positive, reinforcing them and just working with them just to help them achieve a goal you know, just to see something small, even if it's not big, just choose something small.*

Although BT3's reasoning regarding assisting learners with barriers to learning seems positive, there is a sentiment of viewing them as only capable of reduced achievement when she says - just to help them achieve something small, and this kind of reasoning negatively affects teachers' practices.

As mentioned earlier, not all participants' responses agreed with the shifting focus away from learner differences to focusing on the content to be taught, which translates to the teaching of all, there were those whose views were against this perspective. These participants demonstrated a strong belief that learners' differences should be used as a way of grading the needs of learners.

### 6.2.3 Focus on Learners' Differences

There were those participants who expressed strong feelings about focusing on differences amongst learners as a way of grading learners' needs. This strong perspective was raised despite policy documents and literature that show the negative effects viewing ability as fixed has on teachers, learners, and the curriculum (DoE, 2001; Hart & Drummond, 2014; Kirby, 2017). A clear positioning point was raised by one participant in school A, AT1, who bluntly stated that because she is in a government school, she must teach all learners, she has no choice. This is an indication that given a choice, this participant carries the same views as those of her school principal, AP, they would refuse to accept some learners. AT1 strongly supported the view of using learner differences as a way of grading the needs of learners. Consequently, BT2 argued:

*I think it would be better, you know to run them separately. Obviously in a mainstream school we don't have, you know that privilege. We have our ELSEN schools for that and we have our mainstream schools separately. It would be nice if we were able to, you know, have them both running together. But I do think there is a benefit when we do run them separately, because obviously also a teacher in an outside school is qualified for those learners and learning needs. And she's able to assist those children better, whereas in our mainstream school and only some of our teachers might have that understanding of all needs so it can become quite difficult for them to teach. So then having two separate classes also just helps.*

These sentiments reveal that even though this teacher in her opening remarks said all learners should be taught together in mainstream schools, she views some learners through a pathological lens (Hammond, 2019) and believes teachers are trained according to learners' differences. She further affirmed this position by stating the following:

*I don't think it is possible to teach all learners in mainstream or regular classrooms. Because unfortunately I think with our amounts of children per classroom, and even though we, you know, we want this inclusion in our classrooms with everybody, regardless of their barriers but I do think that there are specialized teachers that can teach those children better than in a mainstream school where we don't have teachers who have specialized in that. They've maybe just specialized in the foundation phase but haven't gone in further into special needs and that, so I think that we're not set up for that, just yet.*

This was a clear indication of the participant's position on including all learners in mainstream classrooms as she stated that these learners need to be educated in separate environments where they would be provided with "specialized teachers".

This is a widely conceptualised idea that there are teachers specialized to teach learners with barriers to learning, despite literature findings that there is no “special pedagogy” for some learners (Norwich & Lewis, 2005; Corbett & Norwich, 2013).

Consequently, even though the school has a teacher, CT4, responsible for running what the school calls - the Individualized Educational Program (IEP), which school A call a pull–out program, her practices are like the traditional special classes. She explained how she works with learners:

> *I use different ways to help learners understand the missed concepts, sometimes it can mean going back to basics, and using concrete materials until they understand. It could be going back to using pictures, then words, and lastly helping them to write phrases until they are able to construct a full sentence. It needs patience, a lot of it.*

When examining the “special needs teacher’s” explanation of how she works with academically struggling learners, it is apparent that the name is the only difference from the traditional LSEN units. Schools A and C have termed their special classes as pull–out and Individualized Programs respectively, but the practices are still in the medical deficit model of viewing difference. On investigating the practices in those programs, it was evident what Dudley-Marling and Burns (2014) in Cartagena and Pike (2022) argue as deficit thinking continues to cloud and stifle the teaching of all learners, which provides effective teaching and learning. Participant CT4 added:

> *Well, I am an IEP teacher. So, I am very much trying to be including all the kids that I have because, without a lot of skill to diagnose any child, I do work with dyslexic, I do work with ADHD, I do work with an anxious child, and kids who have processing issues. It could be auditory, it could be anything, so I use my title and what I've learned in my training to be able to include all those children in the learning journey. To keep the children’s concentration, we have breaks after every subject we try and stand up to stretch. the curriculum, so already the curriculum is not saying here’s a Braille*

*every teacher should at least go through it just in case one day you'll end up with a child who's blind, yeah. Yeah, so it is needed, and we don't have it.*

In addition to stating what happens in the IEP class, the participant raised a concern regarding the curriculum. She claimed that the curriculum is not inclusive because teachers need to be first trained, rather than waiting for a challenge to emerge (ADHD, Tourette syndrome, anxiety), then it is when the department starts to see the need for teacher training in that area. Although, Swancutt, Medhurst, Poed and Walker (2020) recommend the importance of proactively addressing and accessing barriers to learning, this does not necessarily mean that teachers should be trained in all human disorders. Rather acting proactively helps to avoid singling out some learners and adjusting the traditional mindset that some learners need special pedagogy.

In addition to the pull–out program for supporting learners, AT1 emphasized the importance of working together with parents, which she calls a “complete chain”. She stated that the school cannot function without parents playing their part because the complete chain consists of learners, parents, and teachers. “If any part of the chain dysfunctions, she further explained, the chain is broken, and fortunately at our school most of our parents are involved in their children’s learning”. This is an honorable observation by AT1 that if properly implemented with the view of shifting focus away from difference to knowing well what is to be taught and how to teach it, has the potential of enabling epistemological access to all learners. This led to the third perspective of those participants who were caught in between focusing on or moving away from differences in learners to the learning of all.

### 6.2.4 Split Focus (on/away from differences)

The third view under the first principle was of those participants who were caught between two perspectives – either shifting focus away from learners’ differences or focusing on learners’ differences. As a result, these participants pointed out the advantages and disadvantages of both perspectives demonstrating that they were

limping between the two opinions. For instance, the principal of school A, AP stated that their school is inclusive because they accommodate learners with various learning challenges by affording them opportunities to progress with others. She also stated that they are guided by the EWP6 principles, hence, it is part of the norm at the school to accept all learners, provided the challenges are manageable. This response indicates that AP has some knowledge of inclusive education policies and is aware of different types of schooling systems in the South African education system. However, the notion of "accommodating" has the potential impact on seeing difference as outside the ordinary, something to be done as extra work. This can also be confirmed by her latter statement that makes one question her initial statement - "we accept all learners", because she said that as a school they can accommodate some challenges, provided, they are manageable, if not, they would consider placing the learner at a school where their needs would be met. This kind of thinking is influenced by the medical deficit reasoning that there are learning places suitable for certain types of learners where they would be taught by special teachers (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2017). It can be deduced that AP is caught in between shifting focus away from differences and simultaneously focusing on differences amongst learners because she points out the pros and cons from both perspectives.

Although AP mentioned the need to place some learners at schools that would respond to their needs, she also appreciated the advantages of giving learners opportunities to learn together. She added, "I will also think it is beneficial to let them learn together because they are not limited to one group but exposed and that enhances their learning". This showed that this principal, AP, is not taking a strict position regarding viewing learners' differences. Additionally, AP gave evidence that they indeed do enroll some learners with learning challenges by stating that they do have children with bipolar, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and some in wheelchairs. She explained that when they get such children coming for enrolment at their school, they first try and advise parents to take the children somewhere, where their needs would be met, however, if parents are adamant about not taking their children elsewhere, they enroll them because the law does not allow school personnel to refuse any child to be enrolled at a

school of their choice (EWP6). This shows that the principal is not very sure about focusing on differences that exist among learners or shifting focus away from the differences to the learning of all, additionally, even if the school preferred to select which learners to enroll at their school, AP is aware that the inclusive education policies do not permit them to do marginalise some learners on any grounds.

Nevertheless, AP stated that all human beings are different and claimed that they, as a school welcome and embrace diversity. She further stated that she believes that despite human differences, everyone has the capability to learn, thus, in their school, they do not make difference a big issue but treat it as normal, and if there is a need to explain the condition of a certain learner to others, they do that. This kind of viewing difference was pointed out by Kim and Aquino (2017) who argued that difference is nothing but a difference until people makes it a problem. Therefore, they further argue that instead of segregating and sorting learners, teachers should set different assumptions, such as cooperation, not competition, inclusion, not exclusion, but ordinary human diversity. AP further elaborated that at their school, they no longer run special classes as directed by the Department of Education, but they have what they call a “pull-out” program where struggling learners are pulled out from their classes and given intensive support by the Foundation Phase Head of Department (FP-HOD) with the assistance of a remedial teacher, and this can be a period of days, weeks, months, or even years, depending on how the learner is responding. Although this school uses a different name from the traditional special needs class, it is evident that they are still following the traditional way of teaching (Donohue & Bornman, 2023), where learners are separated according to abilities with the impression of offering them something “additional or extra” (Florian, 2014). Therefore, although AP admitted to being inclusive, her actions (which she explained through the school practices) indicate otherwise, and it can be concluded that she is limping between the two opinions.

The same kind of thinking was displayed by the principal in the third school, CP who despite her demonstration through her initial speech that she views difference as part of humanity which should be embraced, the latter part of the speech reflects otherwise, she reasoned:

*OK, so inclusive education is what we are talking about - taking all difficulties that learners have into consideration. And it also includes any physical disabilities. So, it's basically looking at a child as a whole and being. Able to accommodate them so it doesn't matter, you know, academic, emotional, physical, whatever it is they must be accommodated.*

Although she referred to Inclusive Education as about the holistic development of the child, the use of "accommodating them" denotes the action of fitting in something that is not part of, a connotation that they are outside the norm. Therefore, although this participant claimed to be inclusive, there are remnants of medical - deficits in her reasoning that has an impact on practices, consequently rendering the participant's response to be categorized as "limping between two opinions". BT3 also expressed her concerns regarding identifying and handling difference by stating:

*I know I should not treat those with challenges differently, but we lack knowledge about Inclusive Education, I mean we are not sure how to deal with such learners. Like when you provide them with something differently – they are discriminated against, and when you don't – they are excluded from learning. We really need to be taught because we did not cover this during our training.*

This genuine concern indicates that as much as learners need to be afforded responsive teaching that meets their needs, so do teachers. In fact, teachers really need to be provided with continuous teacher development programs that will arm them with the right skills to enact Inclusive Education, because if teachers, the Inclusive Education implementers, are not sure of how to teach inclusively, then all the efforts to include all learners will be futile. This participant has shifted focus away from difference to the learning of all but is unsure how to do it as she finds herself caught in between handling some learners differently or ignoring difference, which Black – Hawkins (2017) calls – a "teachers' dilemma". Teachers' dilemma is developed by Black – Hawkins (2017) from the earlier study she and Florian (2011)

conducted on teachers' craft knowledge. They pointed out that teachers find themselves not sure whether to identify differences and provide needed assistance or pretend not to see the difference (s) a learner could have, because in both cases they fear excluding, labeling, or marginalising a learner. Once teachers do away with the medical-deficit kind of reasoning, they are likely to view themselves as capable of teaching all learners, as shown in the following second principle of the IPA.

### 6.3 Principle Two: Teachers must believe that they can teach all learners which requires: Refusing deterministic beliefs about ability as fixed and the notion that the presence of some derails the progress of others

This is the second principle of the IPA that conscientises classroom practitioners to assume their rightful responsibilities for all learners in schools. Three perspectives emerged from participants' responses that were aligned with this principle. There were those participants that believe they can teach all learners, those that do not believe they can teach all learners as there are teachers specialized for LSENs, and those that are not sure if they can teach all learners.

#### 6.3.1 Can teach all learners (refusal of deterministic beliefs - ability is fixed, presence of some derail others)

Participants under this category expressed a determination that they can teach all learners by providing equal opportunities to all and demonstrated that they reject the belief that there are learners who can derail the progress of other learners. In this line of thought, CT2 argued:

> *I don't agree with that they slow others' progress in the sense that you know it's more like the teacher's job. Unfortunately, again, like I mentioned, they might sometimes go by the wayside, but you know we can't say that they slow down the progress, for instance of a ELSEN learner can only do five sentences, as opposed to 10, allow them to just do five, if they're well-constructed sentences. Again, it's more about your understanding than just having the pumpkins in the book, so the rest of your class must do ten sums or change sentences. Tie your fast and your slow learners in*

*groups/pairs, stronger than your average children are usually capable of siting and working independently for X amount of time. Where you will be able to just go and assist that child and support them winning so I don't feel that they hold back other learners.*

This participant explicitly demonstrated that she could teach all learners and showed strong evidence that LSENs can derail others in mainstream classes. Furthermore, she gave examples of inclusive practices that demonstrate that it is practical to teach learners of different capabilities. In her response, she mentioned the importance of achieving the set objective (s) for all learners using different avenues, which the Department for Basic Education's (2011) guidelines in agreement with Tomlinson (1999) explain as differentiating curriculum through the process. Interestingly, CT4 raised a point of variations amongst LSENs:

*The thing that I have found with the separation even within this separation it also depends on what support they need. I am finding that some still need more support. That happens and even a little time, little more time they will catch up with everyone.*

This participant showed that separating learners according to capabilities does not mean that the separated group can be taught using one method. This participant showed that even amongst LSENs, diversity still exists, for instance, two ADHD students do not have the same needs, and as such, they respond differently to different methods of teaching. This indicates that it is pointless to separate learners because even under those segments, different methods of teaching are still needed, which is more reason why teachers should assume responsibility to teach all learners. Additionally, BT4 expressed the same view that all teachers should take responsibility to educate all learners by stating her experience regarding learners from different backgrounds:

*I am just a foundation phase teacher. There are some kids coming into class that can't even speak - language barriers. They are huge language barriers that we deal with every day. it's amazing for me, especially in the foundation phase to see these kids how far they've grown in a short period of time. I think for each child as a teacher,*

*I can pick up where child needs more support or more help and then to customize the why of teaching to help the specific learner in the specific field where they need help with the flexibility, I think. And it doesn't matter where the child is and, in the development, or what issues I got is to in a mainstream school to assist them to the best of your ability to be able to do schooling with the mainstream school. That's what I understand of inclusive education.*

This participant demonstrated great appreciation regarding how learners progress in learning and development and overcome language barriers in the Foundation Phase.

She observed the importance of providing responsive support to each learner by building on their prior knowledge. Nevertheless, this participant also raised the concern of large numbers of learners per class as a challenge to teachers' capabilities to teach all learners. This was also raised by another participant in school C, CT2 who said:

*Sometimes I feel that the department focuses too much on content, I understand curriculum is important, but again, whether a child has written 20 pages in their book or 5 pages what matters is that they have understood the work. That's what's important, and, again, classroom numbers, numbers are so high. So, it makes teaching sometimes a little bit difficult with COVID too, it's so difficult because of social distancing to be able to walk around the whole classroom and see what's going on so it is definitely possible, but I'd say it's more of an advantage for your strong and average learners. Your weak learners, often fall behind and simply not because of what the teacher is necessarily doing, but just because the teachers rushing again cause of time constraints - has got so much content and numbers are high in class. So yes, that one for me is, you know it's possible. But there are ways that it could be improved.*

CT2's response shows that the participant is prepared to teach all learners, although she has concerns that she wishes could be addressed – too much content and large class sizes. This participant stated that learners should not be pushed to cover a lot of content because according to her what is important is that learners grasp the concepts, whether they do more or less content. She also raised concern about unwillingly leaving some learners behind because the time allocated for each learning unit in the curriculum constrains teachers' decisions. To show her determination of teaching all learners, BT1 raised a concern regarding how the SIAS document is administered to learners:

> *We get given the screening documents to do in the beginning of the year. I don't always see the correlation between the screening documents and a child that is struggling academically. Because sometimes the Screening documents, it will say the child can tie their shoelaces if they can button, they should and children, it's sometimes, you pick up on the screening document that actually extremely intelligent children, but then children that are struggling academically are able to do all the fundamental things like tying shoelaces, like battling shoes, like be able to kick a ball. Their gross motor skills are good. Their fine motor skills are good, but academically they are struggling so it doesn't correlate in my opinion. Sometimes the children that are obviously poor learners, but you don't give them a lot. You might have them once every 6 odd years through Screening and be academically, uh, but I've had that I have often screened. So, in the first two weeks when you do the screening you get an opinion on the child because they've done badly in the screening process, but they're incredibly intelligent, so I don't think there's a correlation between those.*

This participant expressed her views on what she has observed over the years when screening is conducted, and she felt that the way this document was administered was not helpful to teachers and learners. She stated that it was administered too early, as a result, it did not serve its intended purpose. Rather, the SIAS document became like an instrument for marginalising some learners for

referral purposes. As earlier argued in chapter two of this study, the SIAS document's purpose is mis conceptualised to a referral tool for removing some learners from mainstream classrooms. Hence, Walton (2016) argues against the South African education system's practice of identifying, sorting, and grading learners using differences through the SIAS document, which perpetuates the medical model of education. On the contrary, the SIAS document is meant for assessing the needs of all learners with barriers to learning, thus, the document assists teachers in implementing responsive approaches for all learners (Mkhuma, Maseko & Tlale, 2014; Dryer, 2017). Another participant in school C, CT1 also expressed almost the same views toward the application of the SIAS document:

> *The screening, identification, assessment, and support document? I think the early identification document is not beneficial because like I said, there are 40 children in our class and we expected in the second week to determine where the issues are, so I think that's quite challenging. I just don't think it's a true reflection.*

CT1 also explained that the SIAS document early administration did not provide a true reflection about some learners because by the end of the second week of term one there is no way teachers could be able to give information about learners in their classes. As a result, contrary to its honorable intended purpose, the SIAS document acts as a constraining tool that deprives teachers of the opportunity to teach all learners. Arguably, it can be said that it is how this tool (SIAS) is administered that confirms in some teachers' minds the engraved belief that they cannot teach all learners.

### 6.3.2 Cannot teach all learners – admission of predetermined beliefs (fixed ability, presence of some derail others)

There were those learners under the IPA 's second principle that held strong beliefs that some learners are not their responsibility, they should be taught by "special teachers". A participant, CT4 raised concerns that make it difficult to teach all learners, which is because of discrepancies between what policy says and what is happening on the ground. CT4 argued:

*Policy is not in harmony with practices, structures, and resources. Right now, I don't think I can accommodate a blind child in my class. I cannot accommodate a child on a wheelchair in my class. I cannot accommodate the children with wheelchairs because of the infrastructure ----It's not made for children like that, we have a ramp, but that's in the in the public area, so we're not looking at the children at the school. And sign language, we don't have qualified teachers now, so maybe, if there are such children in a class maybe they will employ, but it's not something that they're teaching every teacher so that if you'll end up with a deaf child, you know how to sign so there will be no communication breakdown there. So, it's not going to be inclusive at all, because it means to literally build another school, but puts so much into the infrastructure for you to accommodate any other kind of disability.*

As much as this participant raised her concerns that she thought some learners are hindering the smooth progress of others, she sounded against that all teachers are responsible for the teaching and learning of all learners in mainstream classrooms. She picked a few examples of resource challenges, (deafness, blindness), and claimed that there are no specialized teachers in these areas. This perspective explicitly showed that this participant was against the view that all teachers can teach all learners. As argued earlier in this study (literature review section), some learners are marginalised partly because of some Inclusive Education enactors' practices, as they are convinced that different/additional educational opportunities should be provided (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smith & Van Deventer, 2015), which leads to teachers expecting less from these learners.

Additionally, CT1 stated her reduced expectations regarding LSENs by arguing:

*We could accommodate them. But I feel that they wouldn't achieve their best in a class that has, let's say 40 children. OK. I don't think that they would be able to reach their full potential because I couldn't give them our full attention because there are so many other children in the class. And then I think that that can be*

*beneficial also to get the children to mainstream because you can bridge all the gaps that those children have there are children who need extra attention in certain areas, and they can it. It stops you as a teacher from giving the rest of the class the attention that they need because you are so focused on the children who are struggling one should be with a teacher who's qualified enough to teach them individually.*

This participant showed that LSENs are not every teacher's responsibility, but they are for "special teachers". She made it clear that if LSENs are included in mainstream classes, they will not reach their full potential and would have a negative impact on the progress of other learners because in the mainstream classes they are simply accommodated. These practices constitute what Mahlo (2017) and Nel (2019) argue as initial evaluations of ability, consequently, rendering teachers as referrals for out-of-mainstream schooling as pointed out earlier in this study. Additionally, another participant, AT1 stated the challenges of mixing learners of different abilities by arguing:

*It is difficult to have some learners with barriers and some learners without barriers. You can explain something once and they can just continue with the work and then you've got the learner that's slower. So, it is difficult, and we don't always get the help from the department because they will tell us you need to do this curriculum. And you need to do it. I always try my best to help those learners, but sometimes it's - I don't want to use - the word impossible. But it's uh ---difficult.*

This statement shows that the participant believes that working with diverse learners is almost impractical as she thinks the "fast learners" do not need support, which leads to neglecting them, and as for the "slower learners", she expects less from them. This kind of reasoning views ability as fixed which is contrary to the inclusive pedagogical approach, and this is confirmed by the participant's giving

up attitude. Walton (2016) argues against this practice as resulting in a belief that some learners' needs are beyond the capabilities of some teachers or schools. In the same vein, participant AT3 explicitly argued:

> *The full the class is, it becomes unfortunately the more difficult it becomes because it affects the progress. Because unfortunately you spend more time with the children that have problems to try and help them and the stronger ones can go ahead, but the middle group sometimes need help, but sometimes they can go onto there, and I think they fall out a little bit , but you know, we must try to focus on them also because I mean you can understand if there's 4 children in a class of 36 and you attend to, you know which children need extra help and so you know - It's difficult, but you can, yeah.*

This participant is convinced that handling diversity is extremely difficult when one has a full class (37 learners) as the teacher will tend to focus more on the struggling learners simultaneously neglecting others, hence other learners' progress is slowed down. This comment reflects the belief that some learners' needs are beyond the capabilities of a general classroom teacher, thus resulting in the derailment of the whole class. This was confirmed by BT3 who gave her experience with LSENs that derail others by stating:

> *I think they do slow down the progress of others. I'm talking from experience. So, like I said I've got this little boy in my class, so he's had a brain damage. And you know what? A lot of my time is focused on him and trying to help him and trying to support him and trying to remediate. You don't spend as much time with your average and strong learners, and I feel they do demand a lot of your time, even though they're not demanding, but like you just feel like you need to help them to try and help them achieve something because you don't want them to get this picture. And it does take away from the other children.*

This comment shows the inability to handle diversity as the participant explains that she spends more time on the learner who she supposedly views as needing more time than others, which results in her neglecting other learners. Consequently, BT4 showed a giving-up spirit by pointing out that she has no control over the type of learners she gets per year as they are simply given to her. She said:

> *I feel like I have no choice because I just put them in the class, like the children really, really struggle. It's more like, you don't get a chance like they put you in the class and from there on out you need to plan. You need to change your list. And you need to change the assessments and you need to get their parents for them to get a face and, uh, that is the moment you give so much support to the weaker learners that you forget about other children. It's better if there can be both mainstream and separate class, because then we can establish which child or which emotional ready child can be in a class that, I mean a normal or special class, and who can support them so I would find, uh, I think it's very necessary for children to be placed at a school or class that is, uh, that the school that can help them in their need, a school which is going to provide to their needs, which is going to come up with strategies that are responsive to those learners' needs.*

These comments demonstrated that if this participant had a choice, she would choose not to take responsibility for all learners because she clearly pointed out that she would prefer to have learners taught separately – "normal or special classes". This is an indication that she is still stuck in the traditional medical thinking (Byrd & Alexander, 2020), that some learners (LSENs) are not her responsibility, but someone's (special needs teacher). She is of the belief that there are teachers trained to teach learners with barriers to learning and general teachers, which Byrd and Alexander (2020) argue can be addressed by communication between teachers through professional development, and it is then that teachers can see that they are indeed capable of teaching all learners. To confirm her line of thinking, BT4 supplemented her comment by saying:

*I think you get teachers, then there are teachers that want to study further. And it's there's teachers that feel uncomfortable teaching children with disabilities. So, if you've got those learners in your class that have got a disability, it could be in a wheelchair or the child got autism, or it's a behavior problem, it's something you going to have to handle it. And some teachers they want to do it. Like for example I love to work with autism children, so I'll go into autism school, and I'll want to work there. Whilst with teachers that did the Foundation phase qualification, and they will never teach an autism child because I feel uncomfortable doing it so I'm not going to be able to handle them. Yeah, I agree, if it's a foundation phase teacher who came here for foundation phase teaching, but I'm just more interested in the barrier of the child, and then there is an issue where you get teachers could say I just want to come to school, I just want to teach, and my day is over.*

Therefore, this participant demonstrates a lack of knowledge about Inclusive Education policy documents that supports the inclusion of all learners in schools (Donohue & Bornman, 2023). She is of the view that handling diverse learners is a choice teacher can make, not that all learners have the right to access, participation, and achievement in learning, and they are responsibility of all teachers. This lack of knowledge with regards to Inclusive Education policy documents was admitted by one HOD in school B who said, “If there is one thing, we have learned from being participants in this study – it is the encouragement to revisit policy documents because we have been found wanting in that aspect”. This was true considering that most of the participants stated that they know nothing, if not very little about inclusion policy documents, be it national or international. A few of the participants could name the EWP6 and SIAS documents, but nothing more. This meant that most teachers practice Inclusive Education not according to policy documents, but according to their own terms, which sometimes is not in line with inclusive policy guidelines, for instance, the belief that not all teachers can teach all learners.

As a result of the inclusion policy ignorance, BT4 argued that it is very difficult to be inclusive by stating:

> *I would say that it's very difficult to practice inclusion in my class because we have such a big class. I've got 33 in my classroom and the 12 of them are support children. It's just like the moment when I give him a pen and say - please write me a paragraph about your weekend news. That is when he struggles a lot because now, he needs to put that information in his mind on paper. And he struggles to use a dictionary as well because he can't identify words. He's also Zulu, his whole household, is do you and that's why he struggles with the writing. But that's the thing, he struggles with Afrikaans and the English language he struggles to put words together in a sentence.*

This participant explained several learners in her class of thirty-three learners and their challenges, but she pointed out that twelve of them are support learners, which makes it difficult to practice inclusivity. The participant found it difficult to assume responsibility for all learners when she has twelve LSENs, which indicates that she views them as additional work, which is outside her responsibilities. Again, it makes one wonder whether the participant has a clear conceptualisation of what inclusion is all about. This second sub-theme under IPA's second principle led to the third sub-theme where respondents were not clear about which spectrum, they fell in.

### 6.3.3 Limping between two opinions – (can/cannot teach all learners)

The third group of participants' responses showed that they were not sure whether they are capable or not, to teach all learners. These are the participants who contradicted themselves and as a result, could not take a firm position. Responding to the question regarding whether she views learners with barriers to learning as slowing down the progress of others, AT3 said:

> *That's a yes and no answer for me, if learners with special educational needs, slow down the progress of other learners, it depends on the specific subject. Because that learner can love*

*Creative Arts. So, if they are doing Creative Arts they won't slow the class down, but with Math, if the child cannot do Math, he will sometimes slow the progress down because you will have to focus more on that learner to explain to them what you want while the other learners in class will grasp the concept immediately. Uhm, so that's a yes answer for me.*

Although this participant's response is divided between whether some learners derail others or not, her comment on viewing learners' abilities regarding subjects reveals predetermination of abilities that translates to the conclusion that some learners indeed derail others. She said with subjects like Mathematics, teachers will tend to focus more on slower learners, demonstrating a view that she does not believe in the cognitive capabilities of some learners regarding more challenging subjects. Another participant, AT1 also demonstrated uncertainty with regards to taking a position on the same matter by stating:

*I know they did it long ago they had the separate classes. But then they felt they were labeling those children in the classes. It is a very difficult question (she frowns) for me because I am thinking about it nicely. I would be OK for the separate classes if you take those learners out of the classroom, just because you can support them. It is better, the teacher is more qualified to teach that specific learner while in a mainstream school the teacher doesn't get the support that they need for children with barriers or whatever might be and so I feel if you separate them, yes, they might be labeling to the learner, but they're labeling in class as well if you have the learners, uh, will know that there's a problem with the child, even you don't even have to tell him so I would just feel it is better to take them out. The teachers are more qualified because the teacher wants to do Honors in inclusive of education.*

This participant also sounded caught between admitting or refusing that some learners do derail others because both her comments displayed reservations of either side. Perhaps to alleviate such uncertainties amongst teachers, they should

share their classroom challenges and successes through collaborative working and refrain from thinking them (teachers) or their learners are problematic.

## 6.4 Principle Three: Continual professional learning and developing new strategies for working with others which requires: Perceiving challenges in learning as challenges for teachers, (not deficits in learners/teachers), supporting the development of new ways of working

The third principle of the IPA addresses the importance of continuous learning amongst professionals that enable the creation of new ways of teaching and learning, consequently, avoiding the danger of labeling neither learners nor teachers as deficits (Black-Hawkins, 2017). It was noted that under this principle, three participants' perspectives emerged. First, there were those participants that demonstrated a lack of personal agency, those who were beginning to exercise agency, and those that were exercising agency, holding developmental workshops to improve their teaching and learning practices.

### 6.4.1 Lack of Personal Agency

These were participants who showed through their responses that they were not prepared to try any teaching strategies to embrace all learners until they receive external assistance in terms of training from the Department of Education or from the neighboring special schools. Some of the sentiments were:

> *I know I feel they need to have separate classes, but in the same sentence, I feel that while they are here… yeah, we need to support them. Because some children with severe disabilities, like with especially the LSEN learners sometimes I can't do anything for them, but they are just waiting for placements in special schools, but our special schools are full. They will wait here till grade seven but, … So, I think those learners we just need to, uh we shouldn't just make them go, we should still try, even if you can teach them to write their name, at the least. We still need to take care of our children, yes.*

Although this participant sympathized with academically challenged learners, she made it clear that she is not prepared to create any learning strategies to embrace LSENs in her teaching and learning because they are just waiting for placements – consequently displaying the belief that they are someone else's responsibility, not a general teacher's. Although out of sympathy, she saw it fit to at least teach these learners merely how to write their names, which Allan (2008) in agreement with Oliver (2013) argue that it is a misconception to think that LSENs need that protective bubble. Arguably, these researchers point out that rather LSENs need to be treated as any other human being. In the same line of thought, another participant stated by sharing her personal experience:

> *No, I don't think the inclusion policy is in harmony with structures, resources, and practices. I've had children - A severe special needs and I've contacted the department for extra systems with them and nothing's been given. So, although they're saying you need to teach children with special needs, they don't give any sort of assistance and that will say expect the same activities to be done, but it can't be done if they're looking at books they want to know why? They've only done half sounds they need to do all of the sounds, but they don't understand it. It's impossible for the same child to do 20 sums as a child that's siting with a 90% average. It's impossible so that I don't think that they're saying it must be done, but they offer no support at all.*

This response further supports the initial participant's response that shows an expectation to get external support/training. There is a tendency of overreliance on external support, to be told what to do, and, how to do it, rather than individuals coming up with strategies of taking responsibility for all learners. These participants' responses are not indicative of any individual or colleague strategies as sources of development, instead, they are waiting for the Department of Education to come and tell them what to do, which shows a lack of teacher agency and autonomy. This is surprisingly contradictory to the several claims raised that the curriculum is too prescriptive (AP, AT1, AT3, BT3, BT4) thus, negatively impacting on teachers' agency to embrace all learners. However, some responses

demonstrated a slightly different view from a “waiting for external help” attitude to a shift in thinking towards taking a more responsible professional role.

### 6.4.2 Becoming an Active Participant in Continuous Professional Development

Second, there were those that had begun to exercise agency by trying new ways of teaching and learning in their spaces as a way of handling diversity, although, they still had some misconceptions. Therefore, despite the concerns surrounding the capacity to deal with diversity, there is tremendous work done by teachers to include all learners in their teaching and learning as evidenced by AT1 who explained how she tries to include all learners in her teaching:

> *Well, the work, let us say some learners are doing 10 sums. Then the children that can do the 10 sums will do the 10 sums, the ones that can't do the 10 sums -I will help with more concrete materials to say, come to my desk let's quickly. Let's explain it and I won't tell you in the class, but you can only do 5 because obviously you'll know the other children ask - Why can't you do that far but I need to do it. So, I'll call the child or the children to my table. I will explain in concrete ways, and I'll tell them in like this - you can only do five, meaning you can do. But with the other children – I also call them to my desk to check if they can also do it.*

These sentiments demonstrate the extent to which this teacher is willing to go into including those who are academically struggling by trying to incorporate a differentiation teaching strategy. Although the teacher tries to protect struggling learners from the risk of being bullied by peers by creating implicit ways of giving them additional support, the issue of planning individualized work is against the inclusive pedagogical teaching approach as it marginalises some learners (Florian & Black- Hawkins, 2017; Florian & Beaton, 2017). Teachers should rather start by planning teaching activities that will embrace all their learners, to avoid preparing something additional to or extra for others. Another participant in school C, CT4

who oversees the IEP class clearly emphasized implementing different ways of teaching and learning and provided an example to support her point by saying:

> *I think my job speaks for it. Yeah, running the separate classes alongside helps the children to be learning the same item or the same level grading using various ways because they are not making something different. You're not trying to defer from the script. But I find that they can cope. But their coping speed is different to a normal classroom, so when they started, they were not able to read. But you can see the maturity and you can see their work now that they can. They are doing so much better than the normal class and, in many cases, they're passing more than the normal class.*

CT4 gave a narration of how she helps struggling learners grasp the concepts in their grades through changing teaching strategies. She also stated that this has yielded positive results as some who were initially labeled as struggling learners have progressed to the point of excelling better than their peers in the mainstream classes. From this participant ‘s explanation, it was evident that she is not using any special pedagogy that is meant for LSENs, rather she varies the very methods that are applicable to all learners. This participant also raised some points that LSENs should be taught using different ways that are responsive to their needs. However, there are some misconceptions about using different teaching strategies as CT4 elaborated her point:

> *Inclusive education is saying that everybody should be embraced, but the practices are something else because when you look at the assessment procedures, the assessment is not inclusive, LSENs fall between the cracks when it is assessment because they all write the same paper. Because it's only looking at one aspect, not other aspects, so as a result, the assessment practices are excluded.*

It was at this point that it was explicit that although CT4 has shifted from being ignorant - waiting to get support from external personnel and is taking responsibility

to strategise ways of teaching and learning, she still has some misconceptions about differentiation. Her concern about some learners falling between the cracks when its assessment time demonstrates that her conceptualisation of differentiation is fragmented. Despite her initial correct definition of differentiation, it means she views differentiation as simplifying concepts for some learners. On the contrary, differentiation is defined by Stavrou and Koutselini (2016) as a way of thinking about teaching and learning that does not affirm learners achieving prescribed norms, but rather, aims to enable learners to maximize their potential. Viewing teaching and learning this way prompts teachers to initiate various ways of teaching and learning.

### 6.4.3 Participants Actively Involved in Continuous Professional Development

Third, some of the responses demonstrated that there is a minority group of participants in all the three schools who are taking initiatives to strategise ways of teaching and learning, rather than waiting for external support. The third principle of inclusive pedagogical thinking states that when challenges in teaching and learning arise in terms of learning barriers, it is very important to avoid falling into the medical deficit thinking of viewing learners as problematic, neither should one find deficit to be with teachers (Florian, 2014; Black - Hawkins, 2017). Rather, what is required is to find different strategies that would be responsive to the needs of learners. Therefore, as a way of supporting the development of different and innovative ways of learning, the principal of school A, AP stated:

> *So our team is very active at our school, so what happens is the first involvement with the child is the teacher, if a teacher finds that they cannot give a support, they go to the SBST that meets monthly, and then we as a team discuss the next step what to do to support the child, once we have exhausted all the steps that are at our school we fill in what is called the SNA- School Needs Assessment form that goes to the District, and we ask the District to come and do the assessment of the child and they will tell us what kind of learning difficulty or challenge the child has, if they can. And then sometimes we do have external people coming in,*

*if parents can afford it to assess the kid, and sometimes the kid gets placed in special schools, but we must work with parents and get their consent, but we only do that once we have exhausted all the steps we have in the school.*

AP demonstrated her knowledge of the SIAS document and that they, as a school, do make use of the policy document to assist learners. As much as the diagnosis process is followed here, it looks like the focus is on quickly going through the assessment stages and consequently referring the learner to a "special school". In that sense, the SIAS policy document assumes a referral document position, because the principal did not dwell much on how the learner is supported from the time the class teacher completes the Needs Assessment 1 (SNA1), the SBST completing the SNA2, to the time when the district completes the SNA3 form. Additionally, the mention of having external people coming in to do the child assessment at a cost is on its own discriminatory, because if the parent (s) do not afford the cost the child is at a disadvantage. Even though these measures are viewed by the school principal as innovative ways of supporting the development of learning, they are in fact perpetuating the traditional medical deficit ways of learning. AP also highlighted that the school gets professional assistance in handling diversity from the neighboring special schools who collaboratively work with a school-based support team (SBST) occasionally and offer teachers workshops. She stated:

*We are very into professional development of our staff, ok, so we do it at different levels, so internally our school support-based support team meets monthly like I said but monthly they also meet with teachers, And if there is something that needs a workshop, they will workshop to the teachers. But we also have close contact with Belvedere and Canmore special schools, and they do courses, and mostly under COVID19 they do those on webinars online, you know. But anything like that NAPTOSA, one of the teachers' unions, also offers something like that, so teachers go to that. And yeah, sometimes we do use third parties, if we can see that it's a good, structured course and we pay for the staff.*

These comments demonstrate that there is evidence of efforts to workshop teachers on inclusion in the classroom/grade/within schools/between schools, such as getting assistance from the neighboring special needs schools. A participant in school C, CT3 alluded to the importance of getting professional assistance by stating that in their school, they are provided with a professional assistant by saying:

> *Yes, we do quite a few professional developments and we work together as a grade, so we'll have a weekly meeting to discuss, uh, where the children haven't grasped the concept and what can we do to help them. Come up with different ways of teaching it so that maybe they could help us more with the discipline. If there's bullying, going on about anything. She does the positive reinforcement as well, so there's good work. Yeah, she sees them and congratulates them to encourage them to do good work and things like that, but she doesn't help much in the class she provides management.*

While teachers in this school are relying on the leadership of a professional assistant, they do hold workshops as a grade on a weekly basis. They share challenges they come across in their different classes and strategise ways of working around the identified challenges and learn from how the assistant handles some learners with identified barriers. Additionally, a long-time serving teacher, AT3 argued that in modern teaching and learning there is even more need to differentiate teaching considering that modern classrooms have diverse learners by arguing:

> *Yeah, so, we do a lot of meetings and share and help one another. Because we might find out that you're struggling with something and the next-door neighbor has an easier way of dealing with that challenge, say they have an easier way of teaching multiplication and their children, and they understand it. Especially, from my experience, the newer teachers, might not always have the knowledge, they still need to learn the practical side of teaching,*

*and they need to learn how to carry it over to the kids, so we all share. And then if you see something works well then you speak to your colleagues and, or often if you have a problem you say, oh, you know what ---- I've tried this, and I thought that might find that.*

This participant demonstrated the willingness to share her knowledge and experience with other teachers, and she also showed the value of learning from others. Through collaborating with others, there is a potential to exchange ideas, thus assisting each other in developmental ways and exercising teacher agency, instead of waiting for external help. Additionally, emphasizing the importance of collaborative working, the principal of school B, BP stated:

*We need to work as a team, we let the teachers meet every second week to discuss learners who are struggling. This is called - a group or SGC committee, So, the teachers try and meet at least every second week and then we discuss the children and the challenges that they're struggling with and how we can try and accommodate these children have often- we have had good parents. We have meetings, we discuss the challenges with their parents, so it is a team effort. It comes from the children's side. It comes from the parents' side and the teachers' and together we try and manage the differences and the challenges that we might encounter at school and in the classroom.*

The principal elaborated on how they work together with parents to find ways of helping struggling learners. Although there is evidence of personal agency, the view of accommodating some learners reflects a mentality of trying to fit them into the system, (Price & Slee, 2021; Adewumi, Rembe, Shumba & Akinyemi, 2017; Kanter, 2017) rather than the system accommodating learners. Again, it is implicitly explained from BP's response, what measures are taken before teachers involve the School Based Support Team (SBT) regarding learners with barriers to learning, as this is the second stage of working with barriers.

However, one cannot stop wondering why despite all these consented efforts to develop professional inclusive practices, most respondents expressed the need to get external assistance to be taught how to be inclusive. As demonstrated through the participants' responses, significant evidence shows that although developmental workshops are held in all these schools, not all participants are actively engaged, as some lack personal agency. They would, rather, prefer to get external assistance compared to collaborative working and strategizing inclusive classroom practices.

**Table 7: Visual Organisation of the Section According to the IPA framework**

| | ***IPA Principles*** | ***Sub themes*** |
|---|---|---|
| ***Inclusive Pedagogical Approach (IPA) Principles*** | *Difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning which requires: Shifting focus away from learners' differences to the learning of all* | *Focus on learning of all* |
| | | *Focus is on learners' differences* |
| | | *Focus is limping between the two opinions (on/away from differences).* |
| | *Teachers must believe that they can teach all learners which requires: Refusing deterministic beliefs about ability as fixed and the notion that the presence of some derails the progress of others*. | *Can teach all learners (refusal of deterministic beliefs - ability is fixed, presence of some derail others).* |
| | | *Cannot teach all learners – admission of predetermined beliefs (fixed ability, presence of some derail others).* |
| | | *Limping between two opinions – (can/cannot teach all learners).* |
| | *Continual professional learning and developing new strategies for working with others which requires: Perceiving challenges in learning as challenges for teachers, (not deficits in learners/teachers), supporting the development of new ways of working* | *Lack of personal agency* |
| | | *Awareness to become active participants in continuous professional development* |
| | | *Participants actively involved in continuous professional development* |

## 6.5 Integrated Inductive and Deductive Analysis

The second theoretical framework for this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework which establishes how different circles of influence have an impact on a learner's life. It should be noted that for the purposes of this study, as earlier stated, the child at the center of this framework is substituted by the teacher because the focus of the study is on how teachers, not learners, are affected by different circles of influence, which has the potential to either enable or constrain their practices of affording epistemological access to heterogeneous groups of learners. Bronfenbrenner's five circles of influence on teachers and their practices are applied in this study as a way of bringing together what came out from both the thematic inductive data analysis as well as from the IPA deductive data analysis. Evidently, interpreting data using the two methods - the hybrid thematic analysis approach, which is argued by Xu and Zammit (2020) concurring with Clarke, Braun and Hayfield (2015) has the advantage of getting the most out of both methods, thus, it has revealed that the challenges that came out of inductive data coding speak to what came out of the IPA's first principle, stressing a strong emphasis on difference as an important aspect of human development in any learning conceptualisation. Consequently, viewing teachers' beliefs, knowledge of IE, conceptualisations of IE, challenges they face in implementing IE, and ways of overcoming those challenges, inevitably constituting their practices, through this lens resulted in the following inferences at the five intertwined circles that influence teachers' practices. Prior to the discussion is the visual representation of the adjusted Bronfenbrenner's framework and what falls within each of the five levels. Figure 5 shows the visual representation of an Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's five teacher developmental levels.

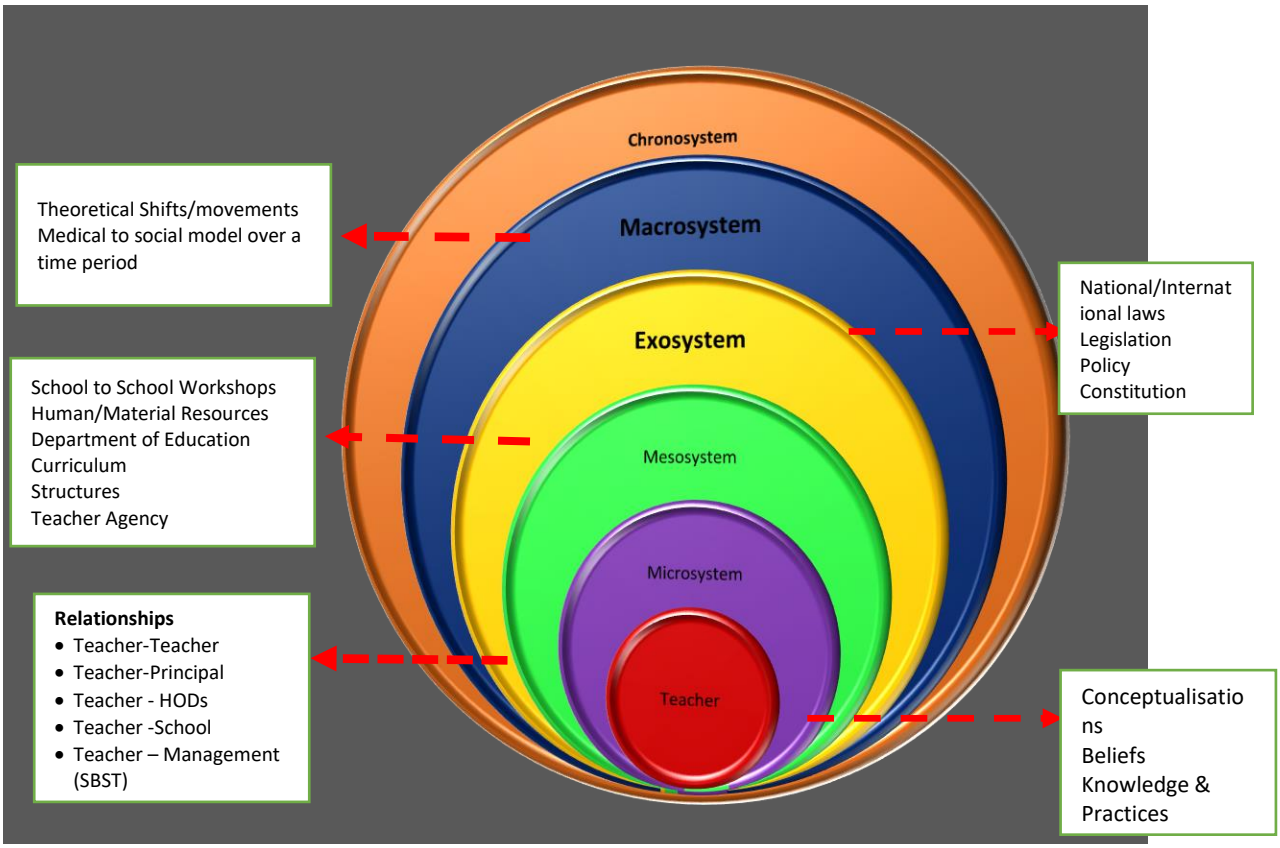



**Figure 5: Five Levels of Influence and Development on Teachers as Adjusted**

The above figure shows the adjusted five levels of influence on the teacher's development which impact practices. It should be noted that the child at the center has been replaced by the teacher to suit the interests of this study. While Saleh (2014) cited in Ainscow et al., (2019) concurs with UNESCO (2019) that inclusive schools and communities are key aspects to attaining social justice and equitable society, Ainscow et al., (2019) also remind that complexities do arise in the process of putting theory into practice. These complexities manifest themselves mostly at the implementation level as IE enactors put theory into practice. Therefore, teachers' practices, as IE enactors, are crucial for this study as earlier argued by Foucault (1964) that in a social justice context, and individual's philosophy cannot be separated from their practice. Hence, the study's participants, through their responses revealed what they know about IE, how they have conceptualised it,

and how they practice it, and these were demonstrated in the five circles of influence according to the adjusted Bronfenbrenner's five circles of influence.

### 6.5.1 Microsystem

This is the inner first circle of influence that Bronfenbrenner (1979) says has a direct influence on the individual, and usually, face-to-face interactions happen in this circle. For the purposes of this study, I argue that the microsystem as the first and closest circle to teachers considers teacher conceptualisations of IE, beliefs, their knowledge, as well as their own practices through the choices they make in their teaching spaces. Noteworthy, this is in contrast with the learners in Bronfenbrenner's ecological levels of influence on the child, but my justification is that these (conceptualisations, beliefs, knowledge, and their own practices) are personal to teachers, and can either impact their practices positively or negatively. Bronfenbrenner (1979) cited in Leonard (2022) explains that it is in the microsystem where an individual lives their everyday life and develops, in the same way, the microsystem is the circle where teachers live their daily lives and develop as they interact with learners through teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important to create conducive environments for teachers to strive in this circle which will result in the successful implementation of IE and embracing all learners. It then follows that teachers' opinions or perspectives regarding IE conceptualisations are important in this regard.

According to the participants' responses, it was discovered that teachers' practices varied regarding IE conceptualisations which has a profound effect on how they practice the implementation of inclusion policies. Whilst there were participants who strongly advocated for a separate schooling system, there were also those who favored the inclusive schooling system. Therefore, it follows that on the one hand, the strong advocates of separate schools (inductive coding) were focused on learners' differences in the IPA (deductive coding). On the other hand, strong advocates of Inclusive schools (inductive coding) consisted of those who have shifted their focus away from differences in IPA (deductive coding). Surprisingly, these two differing views had common concerns namely, challenges related to

unrealistic expectations and workload, accessing support for both teachers and learners, lack of training, and resources and finances.

Accordingly, it can be argued that on the one hand, the participants whose views were strongly aligned with separate schooling system viewed difference as a key identifying factor in their teaching and learning. At a microsystem level, or classroom teaching and learning, their focus is centered on learners' differences as a way of identifying learners' needs, consequently viewing learners' abilities as fixed through what Hammond (2019) calls the pathological lens as cited earlier in the literature review section. Additionally, it was noted that amongst the participants who had a separate schooling perspective, several of them admitted having little or no knowledge about IE policies whatsoever. Perhaps, this explains why their practices are still more aligned to the traditional medical model of teaching and learning (Tlale, Ntshangase & Chireshe, 2016), because it is partly through acquiring information from the IE policies that teachers are conscientised to transform ways of viewing difference, which creates conditions for more effective implementation of IE and inclusion policies. Furthermore, these participants inadvertently admitted to deterministic beliefs (Hart et al., 2014; Black-Hawkins, 2017) and displayed a lack of personal agency and confidence in teaching all learners. This led to the widely accepted misconception, stated by Black – Hawkins (2017), that some learners' needs are beyond other teachers' capabilities, and as such, they are not their responsibility. These participants were so concerned about the disruption of teaching and learning progress in their classes which, they claimed, was caused by some learners, (Engelbrecht et al., 2016), thus, stating that they derail others, in a sense, viewing challenges as within learners.

On the other hand, those who advocated for inclusive schools focused mainly on the content to be taught to everyone and ways of effectively delivering that content as argued by Florian and Black-Hawkins (2017). This meant that these participants proactively planned lessons that embraced everyone, which has the potential of shifting focus away from differences amongst learners to an adjusted focus on the learning of all. This came out under the second IPA principle which argues that teachers must believe that they can teach all learners. The sub-themes of the

second IPA demonstrated that if teachers hold this belief, they can reject deterministic beliefs about ability and move to assume the role of embracing the teaching of all learners. This kind of viewing difference is inclusive as it enables all learners access, participation, and achievement, which Morrow (2009) cited in Muller (2014) calls epistemological access. Developing on Morrow's (2007, 2009) concept of epistemological access, Bekker and Carim (2021) in line with what was previously picked up by Bekker (2015), the significant aspect of enabling epistemological access is "related to teaching practice that enables all learners to engage substantively with concepts, theories, and knowledge in order to develop understanding through the organisation of systematic learning", (p. 60). This shows the important role played by teachers in the microsystem as they apply their knowledge, beliefs, and own practices in their teaching spaces through planning and organizing teaching and learning. Accordingly, the microsystem level of an adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development puts much emphasis on teachers' influence (for the purposes of this study) as the focus is on what teachers know and do, their conceptualisations, and their beliefs, which impact their IE practices and implementation, consequently, enabling or constraining epistemological access.

Subsequently, participants who aligned their perspective with the inclusivity of all learners demonstrated knowledge of inclusion policy and could recall some IE policy documents and explained how they implement those policies. Notably, several of the participants who were keen on including all learners in their teaching and learning demonstrated some level of knowledge regarding IE policies, although limited knowledge in some cases. For instance, a few of them stated that they do know some of the inclusion policy documents and they could name some inclusion policies but admitted that they are not very conversant with policy documents. Arguably, this could have been attributed to limitations on time as a hindrance to acquiring what inclusion policies require. For example, one participant, BT4 argued that there is too much workload for teachers to the extent that they do not have time to read all policy contents. In such instances, then, teachers' practices vary as each one practices inclusion on their own terms, regardless of whether the practices are including or excluding other learners. In

some instances, teachers find their beliefs and attitudes influencing their practices. Nevertheless, it should be noted that teachers do not work in isolation, but there is the next circle of influence that impacts teachers' practices.

### 6.5.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem is the second level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological circle that exists beyond the microsystem as it is the interaction between microsystem (s) that innately encompass the individual - the teacher in this case, (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lee, 2011; Dobson & Douglas, 2020; Edelen, Bush, Simpson & Cook, 2020). For the purposes of this study, I argue that these are interactions beyond the conceptualisations, beliefs, knowledge, and practices of the teachers themselves, as they interact with other teachers, Foundation Phase Head of Department (FP - HOD), the principal, the school-based support team (SBT), and the parents. This means that the mesosystem is formed and can even extend to whenever teachers work with the mentioned stakeholders, thus, influencing and being influenced by them. For instance, some participants stated that they come together and share ideas on challenges they face in their spaces of work, which, in most cases, are resolved by their colleagues who could have faced the same challenge(s) in the past and successfully handled it. Henceforth, Crawford (2020), Neal and Neal (2013) agree with Bronfenbrenner (1979) that at this level, relationships are bi-directional, meaning the teacher (in the case of this study), can get influenced by other teachers they interact with, and they are equally capable of influencing the practices of other teachers. In line with this thought, one participant who is a grade leader in school A, AT1 had this to say, "As a grade leader I use my authority to share with other teachers' various ways of using different methods of teaching to include everyone, and in most cases, other teachers share strategies they use in their classes". This interchange of teaching strategies helps teachers to practice IE implementation in supportive and effective ways. Some participants also stated the importance of parents by likening teaching and learning to a three-set of angles- teacher, child, and parent. They mentioned that if anyone is not playing their part, there is no effective learning, and admitted that at their school they have cooperative parents. Additionally, as argued earlier in this study, principals play a pivotal role in guiding and supporting teachers' inclusive practices because they

set the IE tone (Zwane & Malale, 2018; Billingsley & McLeskey, 2014), which shows the critical role played by the school principals in supporting and guiding teachers in inclusive practices.

Admittedly, Kanjere and Mafumo (2017) cited earlier, claim that several teachers have not been trained to handle diversity, and this was raised in several of the participants' concerns, which puts an overwhelming load on principals. This is because principals find themselves in a dilemma as they are expected to guide teachers on implementing inclusive practices when they themselves have many uncertainties regarding IE and its implementation. Thus, this, as earlier argued, is the gap that this study has identified (Shyman, 2015; Kruger & Yorke, 2010), and is confirmed by the principals' responses. These uncertainties stand as a barrier to embracing everyone, consequently, Shyman further argues that IE is about social justice, therefore, earnest efforts of realizing IE must be about promoting and practicing a socially just society. In the same vein, Ainscow and Best (2019) argue that social justice is one of the important pillars for justifying the move toward IE. This shows that when teachers embrace and include everyone in teaching and learning through implying inclusive practices, they are in fact practicing social justice, and this can only be achieved if teachers get the needed support from the circles of influence.

Therefore, I argue that if Foundation Phase teachers get the right kind of support and guidance from their principals, they will strive in practicing and implementing IE. Subsequently, it was demonstrated (under the third IPA principle- *Continual professional learning and developing new strategies for working with others which requires: Perceiving challenges in learning as challenges for teachers, (not deficits in learners/teachers), supporting the development of new ways of working*), that three sub-themes emerged; participants who lacked personal agency, those who were beginning to exercise agency, and those who actively exercised personal agency. In agreement with Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015), Lil and Ruppar (2021) state that agency is a progressive, communal participation in active decision-making about the curriculum, everyday practice, and evaluation in order to combat practices that support inequalities and ability norms. Accordingly, Biesta

et al., (2015) propound that agency should not be seen as a skill or competency that teachers possess but rather as something that teachers carry out. This explains that agency signifies a characteristic of how actions interact with their temporal-relational circumstances, rather than a characteristic of the actors themselves. This harmonises with what Hamid and Nguyen (2016) stated that agency is not necessarily an exercise of free will, rather, it is what compels teachers to exert themselves if they want to help learners to reach their full potential. In order to overcome any obstacles to including all learners in teaching and learning, everyday inclusive practices, decisions, and choices, some of the Foundation Phase teachers were able to exercise agency by acting on their own initiative and sharing various strategies, rather than waiting for external support. According to the data, several participants did not have an active interest in using their own agency, which had a negative impact on their practices.

Participants who demonstrated a lack of personal agency heavily relied on external support for their inclusive practices, they waited for aid to come from other special schools, the department, or teachers' unions, rather than being innovative and deriving strategies of embracing all learners. In addition, it was noted that these participants did not show zeal for accepting all learners, some of them stated that they will not do anything for those learners until they are trained on how to handle them, as these learners are awaiting placements. It was also noted that these participants fell under the group that admitted to not knowing any inclusive policy documents, and even stated that they were practicing IE on their own terms. Inevitably, this "practicing of IE in their own ways", in most cases led to epistemological constraints for some learners. As previously shown by data (IPA), not all participants share this perspective, in this same circle of influence, it could be seen that there are participants who demonstrated a shift from viewing learners pathologically by beginning to be active participants in continuous professional development. These participants stated that they have started holding workshops with other teachers, and neighboring schools, to gain inclusive strategies for assisting LSENs. Commendably, this group of participants demonstrated that they had begun to exercise agency - a shift in inclusive practices toward viewing difference, in comparison with those who lacked personal agency. However, it was

noted that this group of participants was getting discouraged in their endeavors to engage actively in exercising agency as they had several uncertainties regarding inclusive practices and implementation of IE. These are the participants who were limping between two opinions – separate and inclusive schooling. They could not take a firm position because they had many uncertainties about IE and its implementation. The last group of participants under the third IPA principle is a group of participants who demonstrated active participation in continuous professional development, and these are discussed in the next circle of influence because their participation extends interaction to the exosystem.

### 6.5.3 Exosystem

This is the third level of influence on teachers' development and extends beyond the relationships between teachers and other teachers, FP-HODs, principals, SBST, and parents. I argue that this circle consists of influences from outside the school that impact the school and create particular challenges or opportunities for inclusive practice. These include influence from the Department of Education in which teachers should operate within, such as the curriculum, human and material resources, and systemic structures, as well as teachers' agency from those teachers who exert themselves to develop their profession by taking courses outside the school that can influence their practice. For teachers to strive in their endeavors in IE implementation, these influences should be enabling inclusive practices, as earlier quoted, Anderson et al., (2014) concur with Mahlo (2013) that Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory model views the learner (teachers and principals), as striving within a complex of the context of several systems that are infrafamilial and extrafamilial that influence the execution of inclusive practices. Therefore, the curriculum in the exosystem, although extrafamilial, can constrain teachers' development or practices if the human and material resources are not in harmony with inclusive practices. For instance, several participants complained that policies say that all learners should be included in the teaching and learning, which is impractically considering that the curriculum is too prescriptive and demanding, and teachers find themselves racing against time to complete the curriculum as this is what the Department of Education demands from teachers. Arguably, this could be attributed to the way some teachers have conceptualised

IE (separate schooling), in the sense that their practices are based on the medical view of teaching and learning, where they plan for the most and provide something additional to other learners, (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Spratt, 2013; Florian & Walton, 2017). This practice (separate schooling) is bound to clash with the curriculum structure which is based on social model teaching and learning as the curriculum calls for proactive planning that embraces everybody. It was discovered through the participants' responses that teachers need a lot of intervention in this aspect. For instance, data revealed that participants, (separate and inclusive schooling system), had the same reservations which stood out as challenges to their practices.

Furthermore, as much as some teachers demonstrated personal agency by taking it upon themselves to find ways of working with all learners, they mentioned some challenges (influences) that affect their practices (Ainscow et al., 2019). For example, it was pointed out that the structures, curriculum, and resources are not in harmony with practicing IE, posing challenges for the implementers – the teachers, which constrains their inclusive practices. A principal in one school (BP) argued that the very structure of their school is not conducive for all learners because it is a triple story and as such, learners in wheelchairs cannot access the upper classrooms. Admittedly, as stated earlier in this study, Florian and Walton (2017) argue that IE's focus is to ensure that all learners attain quality education under educational systems that do not exclude anyone, including those who were previously marginalised. This can be achieved, they further elaborate, if the educational system does away with organisational structures and curricula that segregate learners based on predetermined judgments about what they can and cannot do.

As much as there were concerns raised about teachers not getting the required support from the Department of Education or the slow processing of documentation, analysing data through the IPA revealed otherwise. Inversely, it was equally noted that participants expected swift action from the Department of Education in support of placing learners in what is viewed as the right schools that will meet the needs of some learners. Therefore, this delay in placement caused

teachers and principals lots of frustrations and unintentional neglect of the supposed learners awaiting placement. It could be argued that this is partly attributed to by different ways IE is conceptualised, for instance, the second theme in which IE is conceptualised under inductive coding – knowledge and implementation of policy, supported by Florian and Walton (2017), who argue on the influence a particular conceptualisation has on teachers' practices. For example, some participants (CT4, CT2) stated that what policy says looks good on paper but is practically impossible, hence, the need for teachers to be consulted in policy making. This can to some extent, demonstrate a separate schooling perspective, a conceptualisation that views IE as impossible to practice, which impacts practices in the classroom teaching and learning – exclusion of some learners. Therefore, for some participants, as argued earlier, the SIAS document is viewed as a referral tool for removing some learners from the mainstream classroom, rather than identifying needs and creating support plans. Research in South Africa (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smith & Van Deventer, 2015; Florian & Walton, 2016) shows that this kind of conceptualisation of IE has yielded bad results, the separation of classes, which views learners as problematic and perpetuates injustices. Therefore, responses from the Department are taking longer because the SIAS document is viewed as a referral tool, rather than a needs-identifying tool to strategise support and the identified learners are only in the class awaiting an official placement statement from the Department of Education. Referring to the deficit educational systems that have organized structures and curricula that "sift and categorize learners based on predetermined judgments about what they can and cannot learn", Florian and Walton (2017, p.161) argue for the shift to an inclusive perspective that provides access to all. This reveals an information gap between the Department of Education and teachers in terms of IE conceptualisation, and this knowledge gap poses dire consequences as policy implementation gets intercepted. There is a communication breakdown in terms of relying on accurate IE information from the Department of Education to schools, and it is in schools, through teachers, where IE and policies should be enacted. This could mean that all efforts from the Department of Education of implementing IE in mainstream schools could be wasted unless this communication gap (IE conceptualisation) is resolved.

However, it is evident that not all teachers are missing accurate IE information from the Department of Education, because there are participants who demonstrated active agency in strategising ways of including all learners and these are participants who demonstrated knowledge of IE policies. Therefore, since there are those who take it upon themselves to read and acquire knowledge about IE through policies and those who are not keen to do so, and practice inclusion on their own terms, this means there is a need for the Department of Education to engage in extensive strategies for educating all teachers about accurate IE and its policies for effective implementation to happen. This is beyond the exosystem level of influence and could be addressed at the next circle of influence – the macrosystem.

### 6.5.4 Macrosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), this is the largest and furthest system from the learner but still has a significant influence on the learner. At the macrosystem, I am looking at the impact the decisions made at the national and international levels have on teachers and their practices. These consists of the country's legislation, curriculum, and international laws. I, therefore, argue that the macrosystem consists of the national and international laws governing IE and the inclusion policies, dominant beliefs, political systems, laws and legislative framework, country's constitution. It is where decisions are made (at the national and international level), and although all that is done far away from the teacher in the classroom, they impact on teacher's practices. These could be decisions about the mandatory curriculum, and mandatory enrollment of all learners, as brought out by a participant who expressed challenges with teaching learners coming from outside the country. For example, some participants raised concerns regarding learners who speak a foreign language as parents have migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa (AP, AT1). The concerns suggested that it is difficult to work with such learners as they derail the progress of the class. Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework, Anderson et al., (2014), under this circle of influence, explains that diverse experiences should be taken into consideration as same-age learners can be at different developmental levels due to issues of

migration. For example, in the case of a seven-year-old learner whose parents have migrated from their country of origin to another country not at the same level of development compared to their peers developing in an economically stable environment. Through inductive data analysis, it became evident that participants who advocated for separate schools had limited or no knowledge about IE and its implementation policy, and these were the participants who aligned their responses with the first and second IPA principle under deductive data analysis. Those who advocated for inclusive schools displayed knowledge of IE and its policy implementation in inductive data analysis and these are the participants that demonstrated knowledge of IE and its implementation policy. It can be argued then that this circle of influence – macrosystem enables teachers to practice IE as shown by the participants under the Inclusive Schools theme. Furthermore, the South African inclusion laws are driven by the IE international laws, to which South Africa is a signatory (Naicker, 2018; Nel, 2018), and operates within its guidelines. This circle of influence is followed by an outer circle that completes Bronfenbrenner's five different influences despite its difference from all the other circles.

### 6.5.5 Chronosystem

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) cited in Anderson et al., (2014), this circle is found in the outermost of the learner's environment and is different from others, as it is concerned with the passing of time and the effects it has on the learner. For the purposes of this study, I argue that this is the furthest and outer circle of influence on teachers' development that has to do with the developments and changes over time. Although historically there have been great improvements or paradigm shifts in literature research in South Africa, like many other countries, where the movement from medical to social model has been documented, the same cannot be said with practices (Oliver, 1996; Tlale, Donohue & Bornman, 2023; Black - Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Ntshangase & Chireshe, 2016; Florian & Walton, 2017; Engelbrecht et al., 2015). Pragmatically, there are vast situations where the operation of both the medical and social models stands on par, creating an unclear conceptualisation (fragmented conceptualisation). Perhaps, this could be partly the reason why some participants demonstrated a limping position

between the two perspectives - separate and inclusive schools, which reflects a confused or fragmented conceptualisation. Justifiably, teachers are caught between following what theory says through policies and what practices imply as the structures, resources, and practices are not harmoniously matching theory. As earlier pointed out, Slee (2018) argue that classroom practitioners struggle within the restraints of inadequate and depleted educational practices designed for ancient times –which is reductive thinking that is costly and destructive. This shows the difficulties faced by teachers as they try to implement inclusive teaching strategies whilst the educational systems are still fixed in the earlier system of separated education. Thus, one of the participants (BT3) even stated that what theory says is practically difficult if not impossible because change is in theory and not in practice.

This echoes what has been picked by research as earlier stated, (Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2016), that a gap exists between IE classroom implementation and the inclusive policies supporting the implementation. Nel et al., (2016) further argue that the policies focus on the benefits of an IE implementation but disregard the shortfalls that come along when IE is put into practice. For instance, Donohoue and Bornman (2023) cited in Nel et al., (2016) concur with Nareadi et al., (2016) that the EWP6 policy's ambiguity regarding how IE should be implemented regarding its implementation goals stands as a barrier to successfully implement inclusive practices. This policy ambiguity has created various IE conceptualisations that have led to the learning needs of some learners not being adequately met, (Strogilos, Lim & Buhari, 2021). This is evidenced by the increasing number of heterogenous learners enrolled in mainstream schools but not getting epistemological access (Nel et al., 2016), consequently thwarting the IE objectives. Supporting the same point, Mfuthwana and Dryer (2018) agree with Dryer (2017) that there is an urgent need to continuously support teachers to implement IE because teachers are expected to implement IE despite the many implementation uncertainties coupled with inadequate skills to handle diverse environments.

Admittedly, research (Mfuthwana et al., 2018; Mokaleng & Mowes, 2020; Adewumi, et al., 2019; Zwane & Malale, 2018; Naparan & Castaneda, 2021) have

revealed that most schools in South Africa and neighboring countries face challenges with a lack of resources, limited training for teachers, and inadequate skills for working with diverse learner needs to successfully implement IE, leaving teachers struggling to successfully implement inclusive teaching practices. Consequently, classroom practitioners find themselves practicing inclusion in particular ways which impact practices in a certain way which creates achievement gaps between learners from different backgrounds. As was argued earlier that many nations are struggling to close the achievement gap between learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and those from privileged backgrounds. Research shows that failure to close this achievement gap creates social inequalities which are partly caused by the educational systems that unintentionally continue to encourage inequality by delivering exclusionary practices (Anderson et al., 2014). Thus, this, suggests the need for supporting IE enactors to work toward closing the gap of achievement between the haves and the haves not, which is partly caused by the practices of educational systems arising from certain IE conceptualisations.

Furthermore, Anderson et al., (2014) point out that the chronosystem emphasizes the development of an individual with the passing of time and its impacts. For instance, some participants (long-time serving teachers) raised concerns about how modern teachers are trained. One long-time serving member even suggested that modern teachers are not adequately trained to be practicing teachers as they graduate without knowing how to handle learners in their teaching spaces. Contrary, to this view, it should be noted that the third principle of the IPA analysis, shows the importance of continuous professional development, which is key to scaffolding, establishing, and developing teachers to be effective IE implementers. This has the potential to counteract the many challenges and constraints raised under inductive data analysis, the third theme by both advocates of separate and inclusive schooling systems. Admittedly, one long-time serving member was appreciative of the IE knowledge acquired through continuous professional development, stating that she is adjusting to changes through continuous professional development as she realises that learners are increasingly manifesting diverse needs. For teachers, this circle of influence can either

constrain or enable their development and practices, for example, depending on how long-time serving teachers view the latest developments in education, they can be willing to learn inclusive ways of handling diversity from younger teachers (enable) or view them as amateurs who cannot contribute anything to their professional development (constrain). The same concept can be applied to how newly qualified teachers view their long-time serving counterparts; thus, continuous professional development is beneficial both ways.

## 6.6 Conclusion

The two theoretical frameworks – the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development and the IPA have been combined in chapter six to examine and analyse data. Inductive analysis was therefore used to first identify categories and then themes from the raw data. The three IPA key principles were then employed as codes in the data analysis process, which facilitated in the identification and validation of the three themes. After that, the second theoretical framework - a modified version, the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development was included to complete the study analysis. This was done to demonstrate how teachers' teaching and learning environments are impacted by the various levels, which may prohibit or enable inclusive activities. The seventh and final chapter summarises the main conclusions of the study, responds to the research question, describes the knowledge contribution made by this study to the implementation of IE in the field of education in South Africa, and outlines the study's limitations.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by restating the purpose and objectives of the study as stated in chapter one to recollect the arguments made from the onset of the study. The study's main conclusions, the answer to the research question that was posed in chapter one, the contribution of new knowledge, the study's limitations, suggestions, unexpected findings, and a summary of the entire study are all covered in this last chapter. The chapter provides recommendations based on how the participants conceptualised IE after outlining the study's claims and any new knowledge that was found. The study provides the justification for using the two theoretical frameworks as lenses for the research and how they come to inform the results and recommendations of the research. Each of the three IPA principles contains three examples of pedagogical adjustments toward inclusive practices, along with suggestions on how teachers might make the necessary adjustments or shifts toward being inclusive.

## 7.2 Restating the Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The study purpose was to explore various ways IE is conceptualised by primary school principals and teachers at the Foundation Phase level. This was done to enhance understanding into how participants of the study have conceptualised IE, which impacts how they implement it. Participants' conceptualisation of IE were explored using carefully crafted semi-structured and individual interviews to find out how the participants' conceptualisation relates to and are influenced by the EWP6 and the South African polices on IE. Therefore, examining participants' conceptions of IE and how these conceptions affect their practice may reveal some of the challenges to IE's effective application. Additionally, the study sought to determine how participants' perceptions of IE in relation to the EWP6 and the South African inclusion policy would have an impact.

The study attempted to find out the impact resulting from the participants' understanding of IE in relation to the EWP6 and the South African inclusion policy. Interview questions (both individual and focus group) that were carefully crafted before the interviews were conducted were used to gather this information.

Participants were questioned on their opinions of the EWP6 and inclusion policies in South Africa, how they feel about working in diverse environments, and if they see the policies enabling or restricting their practices. In three public schools in Gauteng Province, thirteen teachers in the Foundation Phase and three primary school principals were chosen. Because the identified schools are closer to my residence and I have previously worked with the schools, especially the Foundation Phase, convenient and purposeful sampling were both used. Additionally, the schools are known for including all learners in their teaching and learning, so they could possibly be able to provide insight on this practice. These participants helped shed light on how IE is interpreted and put into practice in relation to EWP6 and the South African inclusive policy at the Foundation Phase. The study's secondary goal was to use the knowledge gathered through data collection and analysis to develop the appropriate suggestions to aid in the implementation of inclusive practice at the Foundation Phase level.

The objectives of the study are restated:

- To explore the different conceptualisations of IE at the Foundation Phase held by principals and teachers.
- To investigate the participants' understanding of IE in relation to the Education White Paper 6 and inclusion policy in South Africa and the influence of this understanding/ conceptualisation on practice.
- To make recommendations based on insights gained to support the implementation of Inclusive Education at the Foundation Phase level.

## 7.3 Key Findings of the Study

Although Florian and Black – Hawkins's (2017) IPA identified that there are three key principles that teachers require to teach inclusively, the findings of this study have revealed that currently in South Africa, teachers are at three different stages of pedagogical shift in relation to each of the three IPA principles. Thus, this finding means that the required shifts for teachers to teach inclusively are in three different stages of development for individual teachers. The identified three different types of thinking (*separate schooling perspective, fragmented perspective, and inclusive*

*schooling perspective*) are reflected in different types of knowledge and beliefs teachers hold about inclusive teaching (*focus on learner differences, fragmented focus, and focus on all learning*). The fact that teachers are at different stages of thinking demonstrates that teachers are in different types of pedagogical shifts regarding inclusive teaching (*little or no shift, emerging shift, and established shift*), and these are reflected in the different ways of actions and responses that teachers make when they react to or manage challenges in teaching and learning *(responses that reinforce traditional ways of thinking, inconsistent responses, and responses that support shift and development*). Remarkably, the differences in teachers' pedagogical shifts are largely informed by what happens at the five levels of the *adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's' ecology of development. Consequently, the key finding of this study is that in addition to the identified IPA principles (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2017), teachers' pedagogical shifts are at different levels of development in each of the IPA principles as shown below.

### 7.3.1 IPA Principle #1: Difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning which requires - Shifting focus away from learners' differences to learning of all

This study has revealed that the first IPA principle has three stages of development regarding the view of difference, teachers in the first stage of development focus on difference, those in the second developmental stage are uncertain whether to focus on difference or not, whilst those in the third developmental stage focus on the learning of all. Teachers in three different stages of development practice IE in certain ways. Figure 6 shows the v*isual representation of the pedagogical stages of development in IPA#1 principle.*

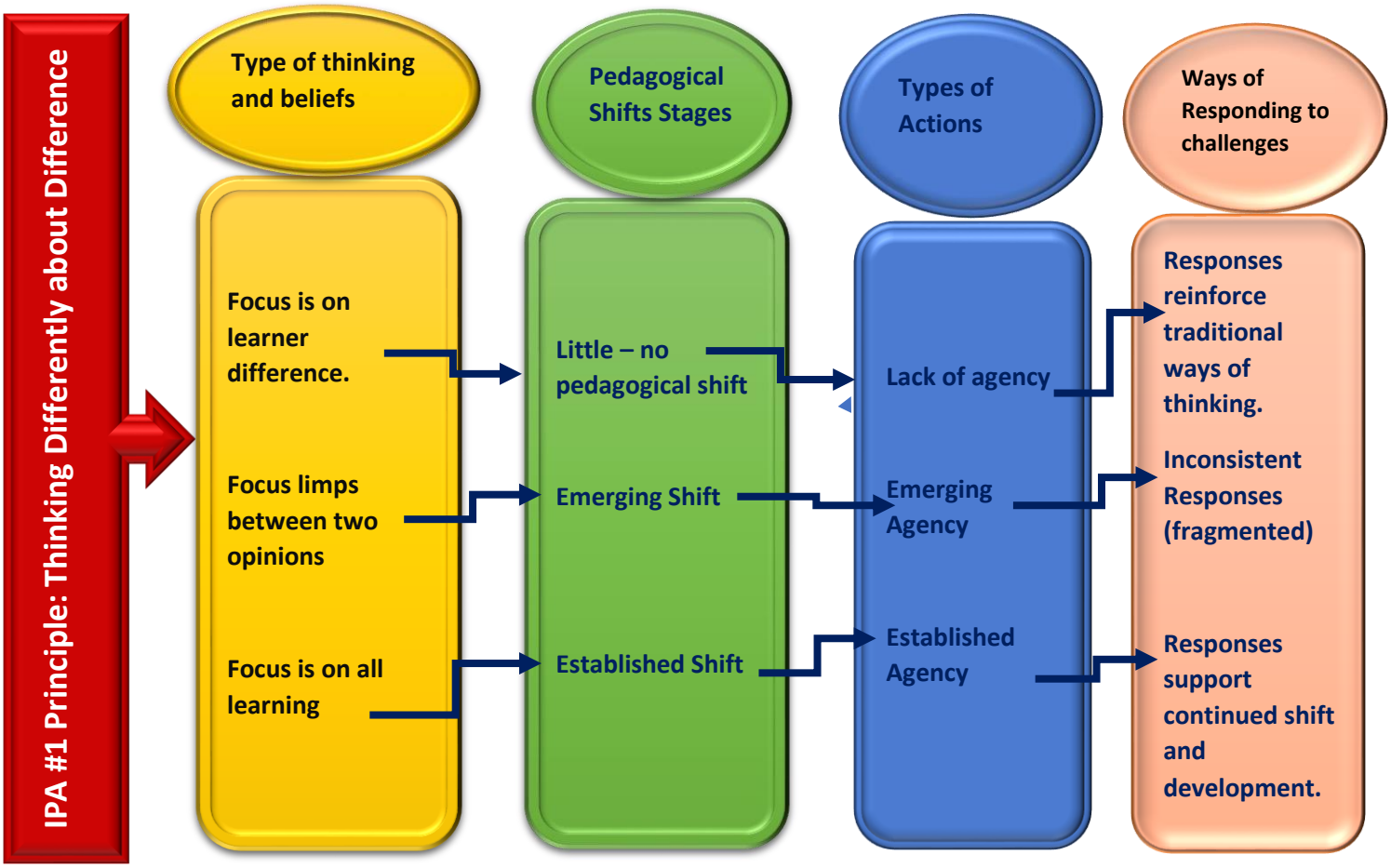



***Figure 6: Pedagogical Stages of Teachers' Development in IPA#1 Principle***

**First Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The first IPA principle stipulates that teachers should move focus away from differences among learners and start thinking differently about difference (Black-Hawkins, 2015; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2017). In addition to this principle, this study has revealed that teachers are in three different stages of development in relation to this first IPA principle. The first stage of development consists of those teachers that focus on learners' differences and use this as a way of determining learners' capabilities. It should be noted that the first IPA principle emphasizes that difference is an essential aspect of humanity, and as such, it should be embraced, rather than being used as a measure of separating some learners from mainstream classes. On the contrary, this principle directs teachers' focus on the content, knowing the content well and ways of delivering it, consequently, shifting focus away from learners' differences. According to the adjusted levels of

Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development, teachers' practices are influenced by what happens at each of the levels, for instance, the microsystem is about teachers' knowledge and beliefs about IE. Therefore, if teachers' beliefs and knowledge are stuck in the traditional ways of thinking, this would resurface in their practices. Consequently, teachers at the first developmental stage under the IPA's first principle demonstrate little or no pedagogical shift in thinking through the type of actions they take in their day-to-day teaching and learning. Their pedagogical thinking is revealed through their lack of agency in terms of actions they take as they interact with diverse learners, and this is particularly reflected in how they respond to and manage challenges, as their responses are more aligned to ways that reinforce traditional ways of thinking, which works away from teaching inclusively.

**Second Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The second stage of development under the first IPA principle shows those teachers whose type of thinking and beliefs about IE are divided or limping between the two opinions. These are the teachers who sometimes embrace diversity and at other times separate learners using their differences, and as such, their focus is fragmented, they are not sure whether to focus on learners' differences or not. These teachers' knowledge and beliefs about how they view difference are demonstrated through an emerging pedagogical shift which manifests itself in teachers' fragmented actions as they have inconsistent ways of responding to challenges. This is explained through the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development 's levels demonstrating that at the microsystem level, teachers' beliefs and knowledge about IE is limited. Of course, they are aware of the IE policies, but they are not very clear of what the policies entail, therefore, they neither align their practices strictly to inclusive or separate schooling perspective. This leads to teachers practicing IE in their own ways, which are bound to be varied as individuals rely on their own discernment, which could either work toward or away from inclusive practices. Subsequently, their responses are inconsistent as they sometimes respond inclusively and in segregating ways at other times, resulting in confused or fragmented practices. The teachers at this developmental stage need to be scaffolded to develop toward the third pedagogical established shift with the potential of exercising agency to embrace diversity.

**Third Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The third stage of development under the first IPA principle consists of teachers whose focus is on the learning of all in relation to the thinking and beliefs they hold about IE. These are the teachers who are conscious about the IE policies and have established a pedagogical shift toward inclusive practices as they welcome and embrace differences amongst learners and view diversity as enriching learning environments. The teachers at this stage of development have acquired an established focus which is demonstrated through responses that support continued shift and development when reacting to and managing challenges in teaching and learning. Although teachers at this stage of development have acquired the required pedagogical shift toward inclusive practice, they still need to be assisted to maintain and improve this shift. This will enhance them to progressively exercise agency and continue supporting the required pedagogical shift and development, consequently, working toward inclusive practices and the required assurance and confidence that they can teach all learners.

### 7.3.2 IPA Principle #2: Teachers must believe that they can teach all learners which requires- Refusing deterministic beliefs about ability as fixed and the notion that the presence of some derails the progress of others

*Figure 7* depicts the visual representation of the pedagogical stages of development in IPA#2 principle.

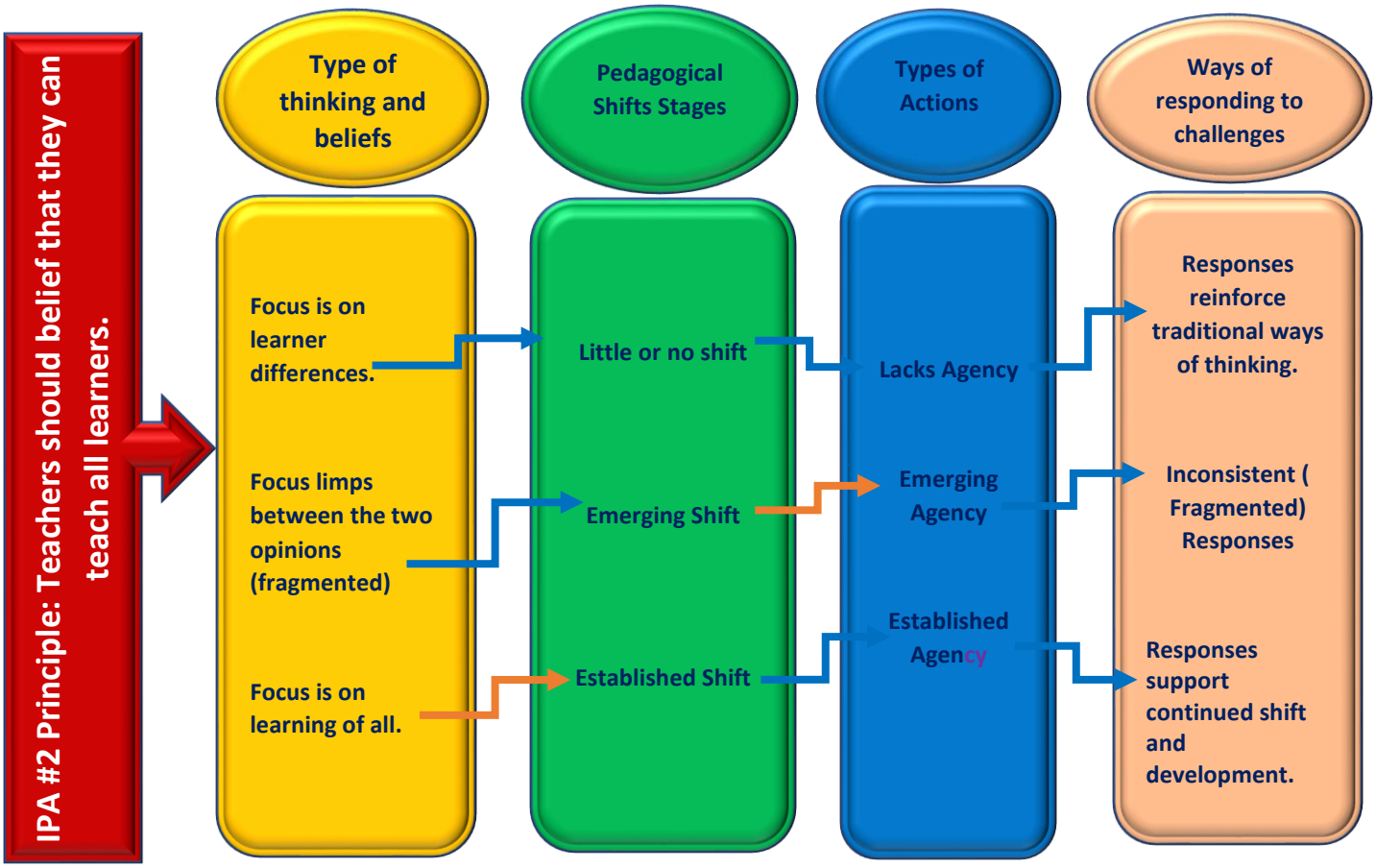



***Figure 7: Pedagogical Stages of Teachers' Development in IPA#2 Principle***

**First Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The second IPA principle stipulates that teachers should believe that they can teach all learners (Florian & Black - Hawkins, 2017), which challenges the view that there are deficit learners to be taught in separate settings. In relation to this principle, this study has found out that there are three stages of development in this principle, which demonstrates teachers' certain levels of thinking and doing. Accordingly, teachers at the first stage of development have their focus on learner differences,

which is demonstrated in their little or no pedagogical shift toward inclusive practices. This means that these teachers strongly believe that they cannot teach all learners because they hold the belief that some learners, particularly LSENs should be taught by special teachers in separate settings that are responsive to their needs. This kind of thinking is personal to individual teachers as shown in the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development levels in the microsystem that consists of individual teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and how they have conceptualised IE. Their little or no pedagogical shift is shown through the lack of agency in terms of the type of actions they take, particularly, when they face challenges regarding LSENs, they quickly dismiss any efforts to help the struggling learners. This is largely due to the widely – held belief that LSENs are not every teacher's responsibility, but a special teacher's responsibility, and when taught in mainstream classes they have the potential of derailing or slowing down the progress of other learners. Consequently, when teachers at this stage of development face teaching and learning challenges, they react to or respond in ways that reinforce traditional ways of thinking, unintentionally, shifting away from inclusive practices. Closely linked to this developmental stage, there are those teachers who at times believe that they can teach all learners, but, at other times, believe that ability is fixed, and as such, they are incapable of teaching everybody.

**Second Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The focus of teachers in the second developmental stage of the second IPA principle is limping between the two opinions, it is a fragmented focus that demonstrate an emerging pedagogical shift which is shown by a fragmented focus as these teachers sometimes lean toward inclusivity and at other times pull away from inclusivity. Teachers at this stage of development hold the view that ability is fixed, but in some cases, they feel the need to provide responsive teaching strategies for LSENs, which leaves them with a divided focus. This fragmented focus moves them to react to challenges in ways that are inconsistent because they can sometimes separate learners on the basis that slow or LSENs can have a negative impact on other learners, and in some instances want to include LSENs on the basis that they also deserve to be provided with quality education. I argue that this confusion in practice is partly caused by the ambiguities of the IE policies

as shown in the macrosystem of the *adjusted* levels of Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development. If IE policies are clarified, teachers at this developmental stage are likely to come out of the confused pedagogical state that results in fragmented and inconsistent practices and work toward the required pedagogical shift.

**Third Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

Lastly, teachers in the third developmental stage of the second IPA principle whose focus is on learning of all have reached an established pedagogical shift toward inclusive practices and this is demonstrated through their established focus in relation to the type of actions they take and their responses to challenges that support continued shift and development. Teachers at this stage of development believe that they can teach all learners, and as such, they take responsibility for all learners. They refuse deterministic views about learners' abilities which are based on viewing differences amongst learners. According to the first level of the *adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development - the microsystem, the teachers' knowledge, and beliefs about IE enable them to teach inclusively. Subsequently, they engage in proactive planning, teaching, and learning that afford equal opportunities to all learners.

### 7.3.3 IPA Principle #3. Continual professional development learning and developing new strategies for working with others which requires: Perceiving challenges in learning as challenges for teachers (not deficits in learners/teachers), supporting the development of new ways of learning

Figure 8 is the visual representation of the pedagogical stages of development in IPA#3 principle.

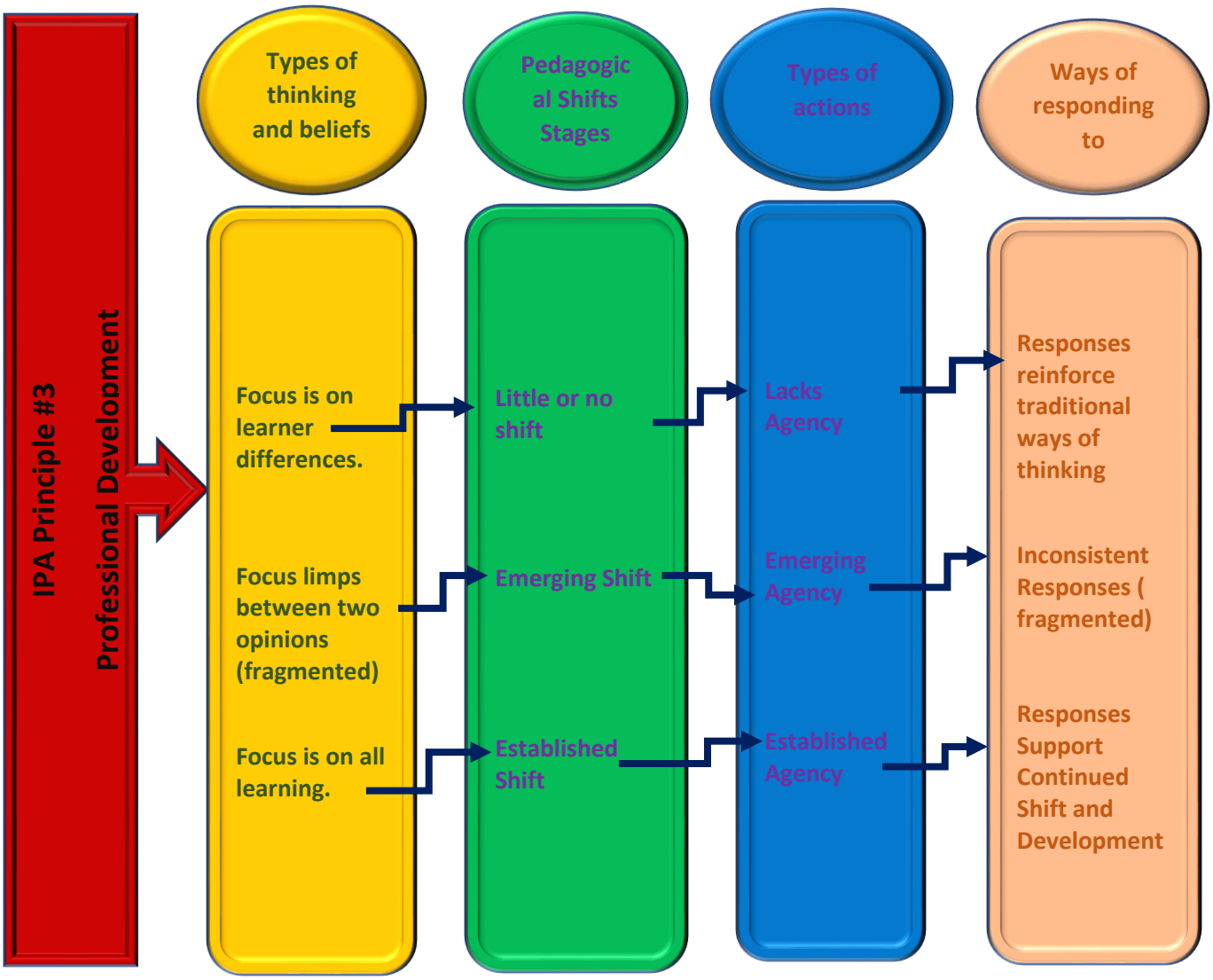



***Figure 8: Pedagogical Stages of Teachers' Development in IPA#3 Principle***

**First Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

The third IPA principle states that teachers should engage in professional development so that they get confidence in teaching all learners and view learning challenges as professional challenges (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2017). Likewise, in relation to this principle, this study has revealed that teachers are in three stages of development in this third IPA principle. There are teachers whose thinking and beliefs influence them to focus on learner differences, and in the event learning challenges arise, teachers at this stage of development tend to shift the fault/deficit to learners. This kind of thinking is demonstrated in the teachers' little or no shift toward inclusive practices, which affects the type of actions they take regarding learners who might be struggling academically. For instance, teachers at this first

level of development (little or no shift) have shown lack of agency, and as a result, they respond to teaching and learning challenges in ways that reinforce traditional ways of thinking, which is a move away from inclusive practices. Outside this developmental stage is a stage of development where teachers want to simultaneously focus on learners' differences and embrace diversity, resulting into confusion.

**Second Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

Teachers at the second level of development in the third IPA principle consists of teachers whose pedagogical shift is limping between the two opinions, and as such, these teachers' actions often get confused resulting in a fragmented focus, which is eventually reflected in the inconsistent or fragmented responses that are sometimes working toward or away from inclusive practices. These are the teachers whose pedagogical shift is beginning to emerge but at the same time, they are not sure of ways to handle diversity. The teachers at this developmental stage have a "waiting attitude" that they should get external assistance on ways of teaching inclusively. This attitude is demonstrated in their beliefs and knowledge (microsystem) as they sometimes lean toward the belief of separating learners, and at other times lean toward including all learners. Teachers in this stage sometimes do demonstrate willingness to engage in developmental workshops to strategise new ways of working, whilst at times, they are reluctant to do so. This is shown through their participation in becoming active participants in continuous professional development, which has the potential to lead them to the required pedagogical shift.

**Third Pedagogical Developmental Stage**

Lastly, the third level of development under the third IPA principle shows a focus on all learning which is reflected in the type of thinking and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the third IPA principle. In line with the first level of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development levels - the microsystem, teachers at this stage of development view learning challenges as challenges to their profession. This prompts them to engage in various strategies to improve their professionalism and strategise ways of including all learners. Therefore, these

teachers have established a pedagogical shift toward inclusive teaching, and this is reflected in their established pedagogical thinking regarding the actions they take when handling teaching and learning challenges. It then follows that teachers at this stage of development demonstrate their established focus by responding to challenges in ways that support continued shift and development toward inclusive practices. Additionally, teachers at this developmental stage, do actively participate in continuous professional development workshops, both organised by their schools and those outside their schools.

Conclusively, the key finding of the study claims that the required inclusive pedagogical shifts in thinking are at different stages for each teacher even within the same school, working with the same policy, under the guidance of the same principal, using the same curriculum, and working with the same kind of learners. Consequently, I argue that the required inclusive pedagogical shifts are related to the level each individual teacher is at in terms of IE conceptualisations, rather than the policy and curriculum requirements. The different stages of shifts under each of the IPA's principles are influenced by several factors, such as individual teachers' conceptualisations, beliefs, knowledge/ training, experience with particular challenges, and reaction to and management of certain challenges, such as management of learner differences and learning challenges. Data demonstrated that all teachers are faced with certain challenges but that their responses to and ways of managing those challenges displayed variations and those reactions could be either supporting a shift in thinking, confusing or reinforcing the traditional ways of learning. Additionally, data revealed that there are not only three different stages of pedagogical shift in relation to each IPA principle, but more so, it that there are factors affecting teachers' variations in reaction to certain challenges, and this is shown in the adjusted levels of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development. Below is a visual representation of the different developmental stages/pedagogical shifts for inclusive teaching and their influences.

Figure 9 shows the different developmental stages of pedagogical shifts toward inclusive teaching and learning.

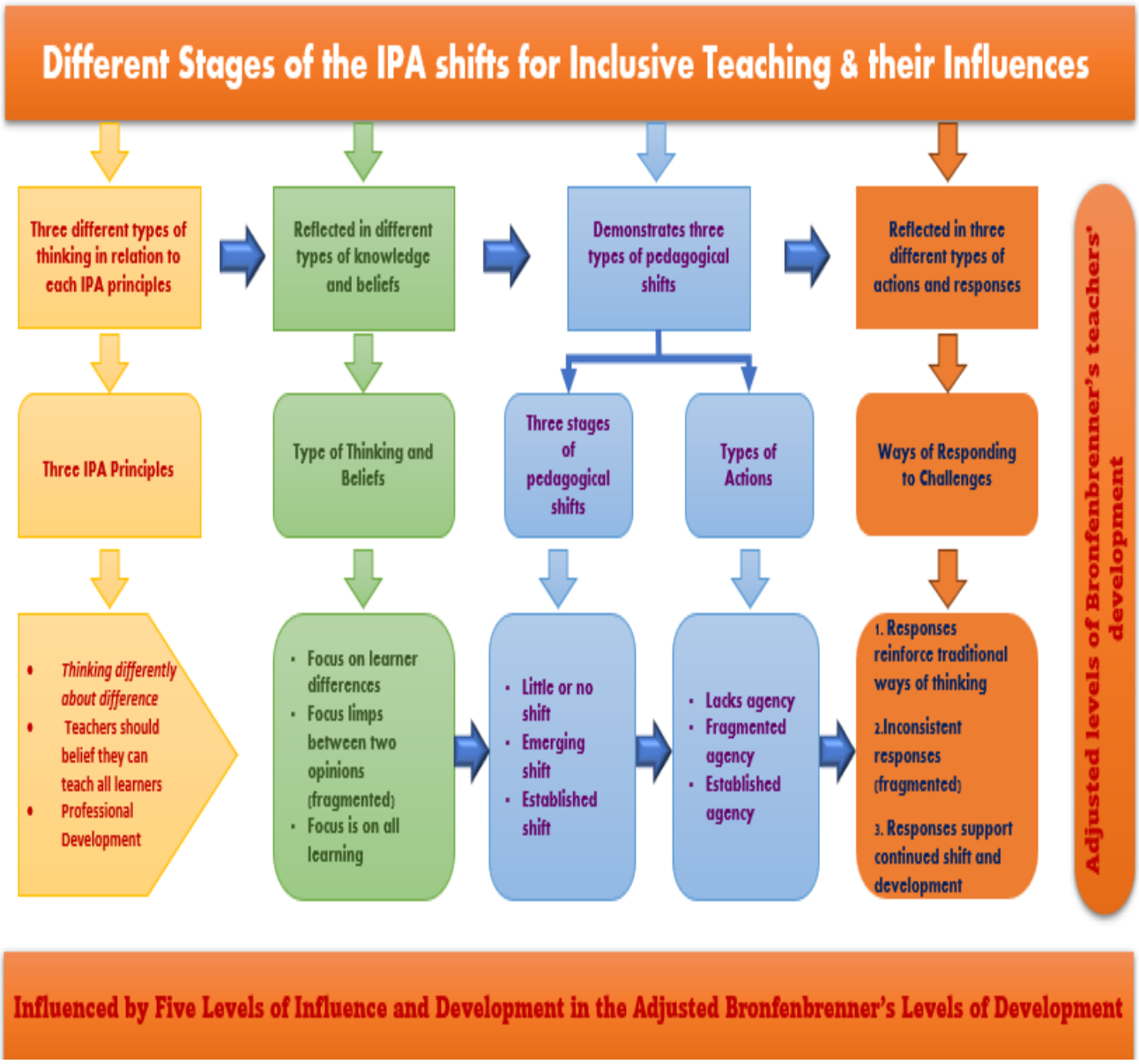



**Figure 9: Different Developmental Stages of Pedagogical Shifts Toward Inclusive Teaching and Learning**

However, it should be noted that the variations in teachers' stages of development are influenced by what happens at each of the five levels of the *adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's levels of teachers' development, and as such, the recommendations of this study speak to what should be done regarding the impact the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development stages have on teachers' development. Nevertheless, before that, the rationale for using two

theoretical frameworks and the study's research question raised in chapter one need to be addressed.

### 7.4 Rationale for Integrating the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development and the IPA Theoretical Frameworks

As previously stated in chapter three of the study, the two theoretical frameworks are equally employed as lenses in this research. On the one hand, adjusted Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, focuses on the circles of influence on teachers' professional development, actions, and interactions with one another. Teachers' interactions may occur within or outside of the workplace, and these connections may constrain or enhance teachers' professional development, which in turn influences their practices. To understand teachers' interactions, one must first understand their beliefs, values, and knowledge that I argue can be understood by applying the IPA, which outlines the three main concepts (Black - Hawkins, 2017) that teachers should adopt to teach inclusively. This research found that the three essential IPA principles that teachers should adopt are at different developmental stages and are varied. As a result, these differences in teachers' professional advancement towards inclusivity are the result of what happens in different circles of influence (the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development) that teachers operate within. At the microsystem level, for example, a teacher's interactions with other teachers in the grade, phase, or even school determine whether they develop their professionalism. At the mesosystem level, it is determined by the inclusive support systems in existence inside schools whether teachers strive or struggle to apply inclusive practices in their teaching contexts. Teachers' development can be enabled or constrained at the macrosystem level depending on how national inclusive legislative policies are framed in relation to inclusion implementation. Teachers' professional development may be enhanced at the chronosystem level if IE policies are consistent with practices. For example, as demonstrated in this study, there is a theoretical shift from the medical model to the social model of seeing disparities among learners, but the same cannot be true in practice. As a result, teachers' development is restrained as they try to adopt IE practices (social model) in contexts that are hostile to inclusive practices (medical model). Hence, Anderson et al., (2014) bemoan Mahlo's (2017) assertion that Bronfenbrenner's

model views the (learner), principals, and teachers for this research as thriving within a complex framework in which numerous intrafamilial and extrafamilial systems impact the execution of inclusive policies.

## 7.5 Response to Research Questions

The main research question has been raised at the onset of this study, “How do primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualise IE, and how does their conceptualisation influence their practices?” This question has been dismantled into three sub-questions, which would be answered at this point.

1. ***How do the conceptualisations of primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers relate to the Education White Paper 6, and subsequent South African policy on IE?***

The study has revealed that the primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers have conceptualised IE in three different ways.

First, there are the participants who view IE as a form of separate education for learners with exceptional needs. Participants in this conceptualisation group have the opinion that IE practice in their teaching environments is challenging or impractical. Even though a few of these participants are aware of the inclusion policies, they believe that IE only exists in principle and not in actuality. As a result, the conceptualisation of this group is not guided by the EWP6 or South Africa's IE policy.

Second, there are those who view IE as being intended for all students, which translates to inclusive practices in both teaching and learning. The inclusion policies have an impact on this group's conceptualisation, and they demonstrated that they use their agency to find ways to include all students in their teaching and learning. These are the participants whose IE conceptualisation showed a connection to the positions supported by EWP6 and South African policy.

Thirdly, there are those who are toeing the line between the two viewpoints; they are unsure of whether IE is intended for separate or inclusive teaching, and as a result, they fall under a fragmented conceptualisation that translates to confused or fragmented practices. Participants who have little to no knowledge about IE

policies are those who fall under the fragmented conceptualisation. Due to ignorance about IE policies, this group is unable to take a definite stance between the two perspectives (separate/inclusive schooling). The conception of this group is further complicated by policy ambiguities as practices do not follow what the policy is proposing because what the policy says should be done conflicts with the structures.

2. ***How do these conceptualisations of IE influence participants' implementation of IE in the Foundation Phase?***

The three above-stated conceptualisations of IE have a profound effect on teachers' practices in their teaching spaces, each conceptualisation affects practices differently as shown in the table below.

**Table 8: Three Different Conceptualisations of IE by Participants**

| IE Conceptualisation | Influence on IE implementers |
|---|---|
| Separate Schooling | The focus is on learners' differences, leading to viewing different learners through the medical lens. |
| Inclusive Schooling | Focus is drawn away from learners' differences leading to embracing everybody, a shift toward the inclusive pedagogy. |
| Fragmented perspective | Inconsistent practices that sometimes work toward inclusion, but at times work against inclusive practices. |

3. ***What recommendations regarding the implementation of IE in the Foundation Phase can be made considering policy and participant conceptualisations?***

The findings of this study have illuminated three facets as recommendations.

**Policy Ambiguities** - Policies should be clarified to avoid creating confusion for the IE implementers.

**Teacher training** - Rethinking the way ITEs are training teachers, and

**Teacher Development** - Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

### *4. Conclusive Response to the Main Research Question*

The research question "***How do primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers conceptualise IE, and how does their conceptualisation influence their practices?"*** is answered as below:

The primary school principals and the Foundation Phase teachers have conceptualised IE in three different ways.

i. Conceptualisation One - Inclusive schooling
ii. Conceptualisation Two - Separate schooling
iii. Conceptualisation Three - Fragmented

These three different conceptualisations impact teaching practices differently. Those falling under the first conceptualisation (inclusive schooling) work on strategizing various ways to include all learners in their teaching and learning.

Those falling under the second conceptualisation (separate schooling) view themselves as qualified only to teach the "*regular learners*", which translates to qualified to teach some but not all learners.

Finally, those whose conceptualisation is fractured are conflicted between the two viewpoints, which results in inconsistent practices. They sometimes exclude LSENs, and at other times, feel they should include them; therefore, their practices are inconsistent, and these conceptualisations help to answer the third research question that influence recommendations.

## 7.6 Recommendations and Future research

This study has found that there are three different understandings of IE that lead to different practices and different types of responses to ways of managing challenges. Additionally, the study has not only revealed the three pedagogical shifts (little or no shift, emergent shift, and established shift) but more so, the reasons for the variations in IE conceptualisations. Therefore, the following are recommendations that speak to the findings of this study.

First and foremost, ideally for IE to be fully implemented all teachers should acquire an established pedagogical shift, therefore, there is a need to maintain and improve the established shift and find ways of moving the two shifts (little to no shift and

emergent shift) toward an established shift. As earlier stated, the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development underpin teachers' development of the pedagogical shifts in relation to teachers' IE knowledge, beliefs, interactions, and policy as shown below.

### 7.6.1 Microsystem Level of the *Adjusted* Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development

Stakeholders (teachers) at the first pedagogical shift (little or no shift) rely on their own knowledge to practice IE, which results in a lack of agency because teachers' conceptualisation at this stage of development focus on learners' differences. Teachers at this stage need to be conscientised of the IE policies and practices that discourage the focus to be on learners' differences, as such focus leads to a lack of agency and responses that reinforce traditional ways of thinking. Accordingly, Bronfenbrenner's levels of teacher development, show that teachers at the microsystem level work with what they know, believe, and have conceptualised about IE, hence, the need for a shift in the kind of professional development for teachers that pays more attention to working with what people know, believe, and do so that they are moved from the known (teachers *can teach most learners*) to the unknown (teachers are capable of teaching all learners). One of the major ways to do this is through Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions, there is a need to rethink how teachers are trained. Teacher training should be wholly inclusive, rather than including an Inclusive Education component. In-service teachers should be assisted through organised workshops that are tailored to meet specific teachers' needs. Teachers with little or no shift toward inclusive practices should be assisted to move away from the traditional kind of checklist of identifying learning barriers for the purposes of pulling out the identified learners, rather it should be explicit that the SIAS document is administered for the purposes of creating learning support plans, and this has a potential of moving teachers to the next pedagogical shift.

Although teachers in the second pedagogical shift (emergent shift) have started shifting toward inclusive practices, they sometimes practice inclusivity in traditional ways of thinking as they are not sure of how to teach inclusively. This is further compounded by the lack of clarity in terms of policy implementation, which results

in inconsistent practices. These teachers need to be assisted with specific workshops that are tailored to affirm their emerging shift to develop into an established shift. This would call for workshops that will alleviate all their anxieties and questions about teaching inclusively as pointed out by the school principals that there are a lot of unanswered questions that they have about IE. Admittedly, there are various challenges at the implementation stage, nonetheless, IE should be implemented, and I argue that the starting point could be the clarification of IE policies. IE policies should be unambiguous, hence the need for policies to be clarified to pave way for working with what is known and understood by IE, and this would be a way of creating space for what individual people believe. Having clear policies regarding the implementation of IE would be the basis of the development of the third pedagogical shift.

The established pedagogical shift is the shift that is the ideally envisaged stage of development for all teachers for inclusive teaching to happen. Teachers at this stage focus on embracing everyone which results in a good exercise of agency and enables teachers to respond to challenges in ways that support continued shift and development. However, teachers with an established shift do need to be supported so that they not only maintain the established pedagogical shift but also improve it, and one of the ways of doing this could be through continuous professional development at a school level for this level of development.

### 7.6.2 Mesosystem Level of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development

At the **mesosystem** levels of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development, teachers at this shift need to be made aware of the inclusive practices through interacting with other teachers, the Foundation Phase Head of Division, the principal, as well as the SBST. These interactions will enlighten teachers and help shed light on their perspectives about learners' differences, and this means that these interactions should be conscientised about IE. For instance, for the SBST, the principal, HOD, and others, to be supportive to teachers, they should be educated about IE so that they all work toward the same goal. Therefore,

the IE conceptualisation of these stakeholders are key to the development of teachers as their actions can either constrain or enable teachers to develop toward or away from the required pedagogical shift. I argue that these stakeholders (principal, HOD, SBST) enact IE indirectly, and as such, they need workshops that would conscientise them of their role in the IE implementation because they should be fully knowledgeable to support teachers' inclusive practices. Otherwise, if these stakeholders are not conscientised on IE policies and practices, they will not be able to provide support for teachers to teach inclusively.

### 7.6.3 Exosystem Level of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory pf Teacher Development

At the exosystem level, teachers could interact with teachers from other schools through organised workshops and get different strategies other teachers implement to handle diversity in inclusive teaching and learning. This could afford teachers the opportunity to share and ask how other teachers from different schools manage challenges such as limited human and material resources. Furthermore, teachers at this level get to share the directions they receive from the Department of Education in relation to implementing the curriculum, maneuvering the educational structures, and exercising teacher agency in teaching inclusively at the Foundation Phase. Therefore, it is recommended that the school management afford teachers with opportunities to interact and provide incentives to encourage full participation and engagement.

### 7.6.4 Macrosystem Level of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development

Then, at the macrosystem level, teachers could be assisted to move from the little to no shift toward an inclusive pedagogical shift through the provision of workshops that are channeled into conscientising them about what national and international laws' objective is in line with inclusive teaching practices. These could be the kind of workshops that are not only meant to dismantle the traditional ways of thinking in teachers' minds but more so, to replace teachers' minds with IE knowledge as stipulated in the South African constitution and IE policy framework. Admittedly,

teachers are aware that the separation of some learners is discriminatory, but they do not have knowledge of handling diversity, which shows the awareness of the shift from the medical model, but there is lack of what and how the medical model is replaced with. The last level of the adjusted Bronfenbrenner's' levels of development explain the medical model substitution, which is the last level of development.

### 7.6.5 Chronosystem Level of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development

At the chronosystem level, awareness should be made clear to teachers that indeed, as they argue, there have been theoretical shifts regarding teaching inclusively, but the shifts are not so much seen in practice. It is at the chronosystem level where teachers should be conscientised that indeed there are commendable shifts theoretically to viewing differences amongst learners, but that theory should be practiced, and it is them, the teachers who should play the pivotal role in the implementation of IE, therefore, they should view this as a challenge to their profession. Theoretically, the movement from medical to social model has been accomplished by researchers, it is now upon the IE enactors (teachers) to fully accomplish this shift into practice. Commendably, as revealed in this study, there are developments in terms of shifts (three different stages of pedagogical shifts), and what is required is to strengthen those shifts.

To strengthen these recommendations, I argue for the application of key inclusive learning competencies that have the potential to provide teachers and stakeholders support to create inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity. These competencies are tailored to help teachers self-reflect on their practices to implement transformations in their classrooms, consequently, shifting toward the required inclusive practices. Accordingly, Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, Van De Pute and Van Hove (2010) state the key competencies of inclusive learning that can help teachers at all levels in multiple ways, however, four of the fundamental practical ways they serve are highlighted as follows.

- **Informing Teachers' Practice** – as teachers develop the reflection practice into their daily practices, areas of strength and need are identified, and promotion of goal setting in a specific competency.
- **Teachers' Professional Development** – As stakeholders work to build teams where they co-teach, a shared vision of inclusive practice is developed among a school, team, or district.
- **Teachers' Training and Education** – As teachers and trainers work together (with preservice, or in-service teachers), a common conceptualisation of IE and expectations is built, and most importantly clarifications in relation to ambiguities with policy.
- **Building-wide Audit** – helps with the auditing of current practices to inform system transformation/change when quantifying the extent of inclusive practices (p. 1).

Therefore, these key inclusive competencies are not only important for informing teachers about various ways of handling diversity, rather, more so, they also help teachers to acquire a *shift in identity* by shifting beyond their long-held assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge about difference, progressively, leading to the required pedagogical shift. Figure 10 shows a visual representation of the key competencies that create inclusive learning environments.




**Figure 10: Summary of the Key Competencies for Inclusive Learning**

For teachers to achieve these key competencies, the two theoretical frameworks used for this study demonstrate the rationale for being integrated.

## 7.7 Knowledge Contributions of the Study

As earlier stated, the study has adopted two theoretical frameworks – Bronfenbrenner's ecology and the IPA. However, the two theories have been modified and extended to fit the purposes and context of this study.

### 7.7.1 Theoretical Adjustment

First, Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory's five levels have been *adjusted* to suit the developmental needs of the teacher instead of those of the learner, consequently, substituting the *learne*r at the center with the *teacher*. This then led to the readjustment of the five levels of influence to either enable or constrain *teachers' development* in their teaching spaces, rather than the *development of learners.* Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has been renamed to the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development as a result of this shift in emphasis from learners to teachers' development. Accordingly, this study has shown that in order for Foundation Phase teachers to successfully implement or enact IE, the circles of influence should help teachers teach inclusively by reconsidering how they prepare incoming teachers, offering CPD workshops, and making clear any ambiguous policies.

### 7.7.2 Theory Extension

The second theoretical framework's (IPA), from Black – Hawkins (2017) argument is further developed (extended) in this study. In this study, I argue that, despite the numerous obstacles cited by various researchers as impeding the implementation of IE, IE implementation is hampered by the fact that teachers' levels of mastery of the necessary pedagogical shifts advocated by Black - Hawkins (2017) are at different developmental stages across the three key principles she identified. Hence, this study has revealed the different stages teachers are at as follows.

i. little or no pedagogical shift
ii. emerging pedagogical shift, and
iii. established pedagogical shift.

This shows that not all teachers have developed to the required level for inclusiveness, and it shows that not all teachers are successfully putting the inclusive guidelines into practice when they teach. Numerous factors that limit teachers' abilities to practice inclusive teaching may be partially to blame for this. However, for IE to be effectively implemented, all teachers must be supported in making the necessary pedagogical shift that will enable them to manage a variety of settings. In order to accept, embrace, and be able to manage many teaching and learning environments at the Foundation Phase level, teachers have to make the shift that is necessary and is the recognised pedagogical advancement.

## 7.8 Surprising Elements of the Study

According to participant data, I never expected the participants to demonstrate that some of them were unaware of the IE policies. Even though all three of the schools I worked with acknowledged their inclusive status and adherence to EWP6 and other inclusive policies, several of the participants made it clear during interviews that they were unaware of the IE policies in place, despite the presence of written policy documents in the offices. Due to time constraints, many of them stated that they are unable to read the policies. As a result, the question of how participants can practice inclusion and IE without the knowledge described in the policy papers arises. This is the reasoning behind the study's recommendations for CPD seminars and a rethinking of ITE for preservice teachers. These five circles of influence are critical to teacher development to achieve the established pedagogical shift, as they determine whether teachers strive (teach all learners) or simply survive (teach some/most learners) in their working environments.

## 7.9 Limitations of the Study

All studies have limitations, and this study is not an exception. The conclusions of this study cannot be applied to all South African primary schools because they only represent the opinions of the participants in the Foundation Phase of the three participating primary schools and their administrators. More participants could have contributed more insights than the sixteen study participants I worked with, which would have increased the study's findings. Additionally, Thomas (2017) contends that a longitudinal rather than a cross – sectional study, in which every study

participant is interviewed several times over a predetermined period, could have improved the quality of the information gathered.

The comprehension of IE conceptualisation from a learner viewpoint, acquisition and being open to different constructions of a phenomenon may have been balanced by interviewing learners in addition to teachers and primary school principals. The use of a triangulation of data collection techniques could have improved the study's validity, transformability, and generalizability (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, because data was only collected from the quintile five schools - implying that the sample size is skewed toward one demography, resulting in less representativeness - it is probable that data from the other quintiles could have differed.

Lastly, because of COVID-19 lockdown rules that prevented physical interaction with study participants in the schools, the observatory method of data gathering, which could have further enriched the data collection, was abandoned by the researcher. All data were gathered virtually because of COVID-19 lockdown constraints, which prevented me from seeing parts of the participants' body language, such as facial expressions and gestures, among other things, that emphasize what is being said orally.

### 7.10 Future Research

This study’s participants were limited to a single quintile in South Africa (Quintile Five), therefore, the views from the participants cannot be generalized for the whole country. Accordingly, as previously argued in chapter two of this thesis, White and Van Dyk (2019) propound that since 1994, South Africa's first democratically elected government has been working hard to change the apartheid-era system's unfair political, economic, and social structures. The uneven distribution of resources among schools of various racial groups was a defining feature of this racially fractured and divided system. The state required to fund public schools from public funds on an equitable basis in order to correct historical inequalities in education provision and to ensure the proper exercise of learners' rights to education. To achieve this, South African schools are ranked from Quintile One to Quintile Five. Quintile One indicates a poor/impoverished school, while Quintile Five indicates a wealthy/affluent school. Thus, this classification is based on the

unemployment rate and literacy rate of the neighborhood in which the school is located. As a result, only Quintile Five schools were included in this study, limiting the responses that participants from Quintiles One through Four could have contributed. Future studies can be undertaken where the focus is broadened, inviting participants from different demographic areas, such as the other four quintiles to get a different perspective from participants outside quintile five schools. This is likely to provide a different perspective on how teachers in various South African contexts have conceptualised and practice IE. This would also enrich the recommendations in relation to the South African inclusion policy and EWP6.

## 7.11 Conclusion

The main argument of this study was based on the premise that all learners have the right not only to be in mainstream classrooms (enrolment), but, more so, the right to epistemological access (enrolment, participation, and achievement) as enshrined in the South African policy documents (Constitution, S.A, 1996; EWP6). Ironically, there are some learners in South Africa who are enrolled in mainstream classrooms but not provided with epistemological access to education, which, Mortier (2020) argues disputes the purpose of inclusion as a human right and should be continuously challenged.

The problem statement articulated that despite the country's commitment to embracing all learners in mainstream classroom teaching and learning, there are still some learners excluded from acquiring quality education in South Africa. The study claimed that the exclusion of some learners could be attributed to the way IE has been conceptualised by primary school principals and Foundation Phase teachers, which in turn impacts teaching practices. These stakeholders' conceptualisations of IE have the potential of enabling or constraining epistemological access to learning for all. Moreover, the study argued that the exclusion of some learners is attributed to the ambiguities in the inclusion policy, for instance, as earlier argued, although the EWP6 embraces the inclusion of all learners in mainstream classrooms, it also allows for the provision for separate types of schooling placements to meet the needs of learners with low, moderate, and severe support needs. This provisioning allows separate schools or units to run alongside mainstream classroom schooling, consequently, resulting in sending

conflicting or confusing messages to the implementers of IE at the school level - the Foundation Phase, for the purposes of this study. The policy ambiguities have led to the unintentional misuse of the SIAS document at the Foundation Phase level as a referral document to out-place learners viewed to be academically struggling.

Consequently, the study's purpose was to explore the ways IE has been conceptualised at the Foundation Phase by primary school principals and teachers. This was done through conducting virtual (due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions), individual semi-structured, and focus group interviews with sixteen participants who gave their informed consent to be interviewed. Data were analysed using the thematic data analysis approach, a hybrid data coding was implemented to attain the strengths from both the inductive and deductive coding, and lastly, the two theoretical frameworks were infused in the discussion and analysis process. Inductive data analysis adhered to the five-step procedural process advocated by Thomas (2017) in agreement with Creswell (2002) which eventually led to the identification of three categories, which were adopted as the key facets informing the outstanding themes. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, therefore, all the decisions undertaken during the research process were described by adhering to the eight makers of quality research to maintain the study's high-quality regard as advocated by Tracey (2010). The eight markers are a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

The study's additional intention was to make some recommendations based on the findings of how participants have conceptualised and practice IE in relation to policy. Hence, the study concluded by stating a summary of the key findings, which argued that teachers are at three different stages of the required pedagogical shift in all the three key principles identified by Black – Hawkins (2017), namely: little or no pedagogical shift, emerging shift, and an established shift. These findings acted as an anchor for answering the research questions, consequently, leading to the study's recommendations.

The study recommended that all teachers need to be supported through the establishment of communities of practice. This study recommended that teachers, particularly, those at the no or little pedagogical shift and those at the emergent

shifts should be assisted to develop the required established pedagogical shift. This could be done by supporting teachers' development of inclusive practices in all five levels of the Adjusted Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Teacher Development. Subsequently, the study argued for the application of the five key inclusive learning competencies that have the potential to provide teachers and stakeholders support to create inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity (Mortier et al., 2010; Mortier, 2020). The five key inclusive competencies fundamentally support teachers' inclusive practices by informing their practices, professional development, education, and training, and building a wide audit. Supporting teachers in this way can have the potential of moving teachers in the little or no pedagogical shift to progress to an emergent shift, and lastly, attain the required established shift, which should be maintained and improved over time through continuous communities of practice.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Samples of Individual semi-structured and focus group interviews

### Interview Schedules

### Individual semi-structured interview schedule (Principals)

1. What is your understanding of Inclusive Education as a school principal and what is your school's policy on implementing Inclusive Education in the school?
2. What is your take on enrolment of all learners to be educated alongside their peers, even those with various forms of disabilities?
3. Do you believe that difference is an important part of humanity?
4. How do you think difference should be managed in schools?
5. How do you manage diversity in your school?
6. What do you think of the inclusive education policy in relation to the implementation of Inclusive Education policy?
7. Do you afford professional development opportunities for your staff members to develop their professionalism amongst themselves? If yes, please elaborate.
8. Do you as a principal give any support to your Foundation Phase teachers on working with diverse learners in this environment? If yes, please elaborate.
9. Do you, as a school have a support services structure in place for supporting inclusion?
10. Are you as a school getting any support from the department on managing diversity? If yes, please elaborate.
11. Does your school run parallel classes for learners with learning challenges (LSEN)? If so, why? If not, what are the school reasons behind that?
12. I your opinion, what do you think is a challenge in implementing Inclusive Education?
13. Do you have anything else that you want to contribute to this interview or questions?

**Focus group interview schedule (Principals)**

1. How do you understand Inclusive Education?
2. Does your school implement Inclusive Education at Foundation Phase? Please elaborate.
3. Do you believe difference is a critical human component which should be welcomed and embraced?
4. Does your school embrace difference? Please elaborate.
5. Do you feel that you and your Foundation Phase teachers are confident and prepared to teach all learners?
6. How do you and Foundation Phase teachers feel about teaching all learners in regular classrooms?
7. What can you say about inclusive Education policy in relation to policy implementation?
8. In your opinion, do you think policy acts in harmony with Inclusive Education implementation?
9. What is your opinion of including all learners in the regular classrooms, including those with learning challenges?
10. Does your school run parallel classes for learners with learning challenges (LSEN)? If so, why? If not, what are the school reasons behind that?
11. What opportunities do you as a principal, provide for your teachers to sharpen each other's skills within the school, outside the school?
12. How do you assist your teachers to be more inclusive as inclusive practitioners?
13. Are you getting any assistance as a school from the Department of Education in terms of teaching in inclusive environments? If so, please elaborate.
14. Do you have anything to ask, or comment on Inclusive Education discussion?

**Individual Semi-structured interview schedule (FP teachers)**

***Biographic questions***

i. What is your level of qualification?
ii. When did you train as a Foundation Phase teacher?
iii. Have you continued your education past college/university first degree?
iv. Have you always wanted to be a Foundation Phase teacher, or did you develop the interest later?
v. Do you belong to any professional organisation? If yes, please elaborate.
vi. What is the most inclusive valuable lesson you learned from your college/university?
vii. What is your current job title, and how do you use it to practise inclusion?
viii. How would you describe your profession in a few words?
ix. What are your best inclusive skills you bring to your profession?

1. What is your understanding of Inclusive Education as a Foundation Phase teacher?
2. What is your honest opinion in relation to Inclusive Education policy of teaching all learners in regular classrooms?
3. Do you think you can manage difference in your classroom as a Foundation Phase teacher?
4. What are your feelings about teaching diverse learners? Do you feel confident teaching diverse learners, or do you prefer it otherwise?
5. What do you think about difference, do you think it is an essential part of human to be welcomed and embraced?
6. Do you think some learners, particularly LSEN slow down the progress of other learners?
7. What are your thoughts on running separate classes along mainstream classrooms?
8. Do you think it is possible to teach all learners in mainstream/regular classrooms, and why?

9. The Inclusive Education policy says that all learners should be taught in mainstream classrooms. Do you think this policy is in harmony with educational structures, resources, and practices?
10. How confident are you of your knowledge of South African Inclusive Education policies, like the Education White Paper 6 and its impact on education?
11. What can you say about some educational instruments administered on learners, such as the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) document?
12. How do you ensure that all learners feel included in the classroom activities?
13. What activities do you do in your classroom to ensure complete inclusion of all learners?
14. Do you as Foundation Phase teachers work together in professional development workshops within your school?
15. Are you getting any help from your colleagues or from the principal on Inclusive Education?
16. What assistance are you getting from the Department of Education, maybe in the form of workshops, to improve your inclusive practice?
17. Are you aware of any National or International policies that enable or impede your inclusive practices?
18. Do you have any additions, comments, or questions regarding including all learners in regular classrooms?

**Focus group interview schedule (FP teachers)**

1. What is your understanding and feeling about Inclusive Education as a Foundation Phase teacher?
2. Do you believe you can teach all learners?
3. What are your opinions about difference, do you believe difference is an important part of human?

4. How do you think Foundation Phase teachers should manage difference in their classrooms?
5. Do you believe working collaboratively as teachers within a school is important? Please elaborate.
6. Are you getting any continuous training in terms of organized workshops in your school?
7. What support do you receive from your colleagues and from the principal?
8. What do you think about the Education White Paper 6 inclusive policy? Does it enable or impede your inclusive practices?
9. In your efforts to implement Inclusive Education, have you encountered any challenges? Please elaborate.
10. What inclusive practices do you practice in your class to ensure everybody is included?
11. In your view, what practices can exclude some learners?
12. What measures should you take to ensure all learners acquire quality education?
13. In your opinion, are there policies you think enable or constrain the implementation of Inclusive Education?
14. What can you say about separating learners according to abilities in classes or schools, for instance, ability grouping, separate classes for learners with special educational needs?
15. What do you suggest could be done to include all learners in the education system?
16. Do you have anything to add, comment, or ask on this discussion?

## Appendix B: Wits Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Dawa

| | |
|---|---|
| CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE | PROTOCOL NUMBER: H21/08/03 |
| PROJECT TITLE | Conceptualisation of Inclusive Education: impact on primary school principals and Foundation Phase classroom teachers |
| INVESTIGATOR(S) | Mrs N Dawa |
| SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT | Wits School of Education/ |
| DATE CONSIDERED | 20 August 2021 |
| DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE | Approved<br>Risk Level: Minimal |
| EXPIRY DATE | 11 October 2024 |

DATE 12 October 2021 CHAIRPERSON J Knight

(Professor J Knight)

cc Supervisor : Professor T Bekker

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and ONE COPY returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

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 to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.

Signature 13 , 12 , 2021

Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

GDE Approval letter

**GAUTENG PROVINCE**
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

**GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER**

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | 03 September 2021 |
| Validity of Research Approval: | 08 February 2022 – 30 September 2022<br>2021/212A |
| Name of Researcher: | Dewa NN |
| Address of Researcher: | 4784 Matuka Street, Albertsdal Ext 31 |
| | Alberton, Johannesburg |
| | 1448 |
| Telephone Number: | 0812344218 |
| Email address: | 2021446@students.wits.ac.za |
| Research Topic: | Conceptualization of Inclusive Education: Impact on Primary School Principals and Foundation Phase Classroom Teachers |
| Type of qualification | Doctor of Philosophy |
| Number and type of schools: | 5 Primary Schools |
| District/s/HO | Ekurhuleni North |

***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.

03/09/2021

**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. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*



**Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management**
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