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Exploring the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni south district primary schools.

Madibana, Kgothatso

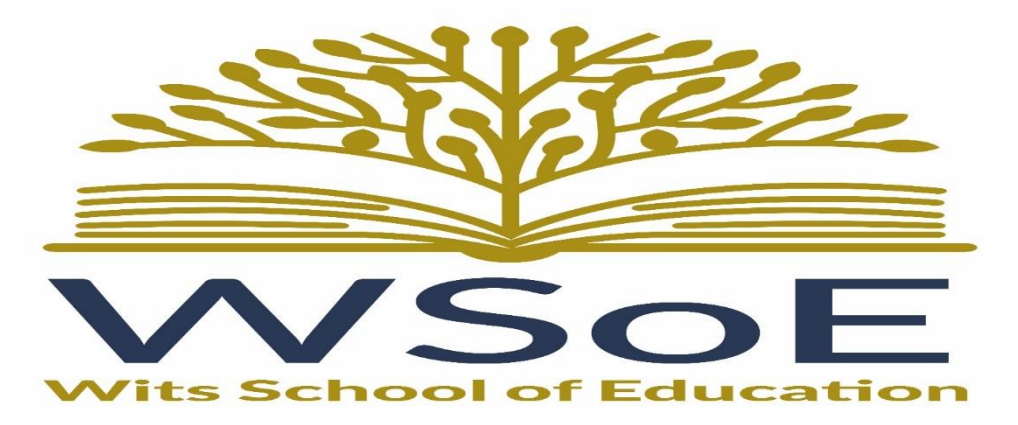
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Masters' Research Report

In

(HCA00- Master of Education by Coursework and Research Report)

Year: 2024(YS2)

BY

Kgothatso Madibana

Student Number: 778699

Supervisor: Dr. Louis Botha

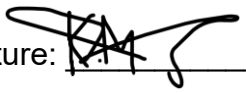
Topic: Exploring the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District Primary Schools.

DECLARATION:

I, Kgothatso Madibana, hereby declare that this research study, titled "Exploring the Collaboration Between the District-Based Support Team (DBST) and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) in ensuring Inclusive Education in Ekurhuleni South District Primary Schools," is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or qualification at any other institution.

I affirm that the data collected, analysis conducted, and conclusions drawn are entirely based on my research efforts. I have properly cited and acknowledged all sources of information and assistance utilized throughout this study.

Furthermore, I confirm that ethical standards were adhered to during the research process, including obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality.

Signature: 

Date: 28 February 2025

DEDICATION:

I dedicate this research report to all my family, especially my daughter, Kgotlelelo Madibana. I hope that this report inspires a love for education and embodies the perseverance reflected in your name.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the universe (God) for guiding and supporting me throughout this journey. Your presence has been a constant source of inspiration and strength.

A special thank you goes to my partner, Xolisile Makhosazana Sokupha, whose unwavering love, encouragement, and understanding have motivated me to pursue my goals. Your belief in me has been invaluable.

I am also profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Louis Botha, for your guidance, expertise, and constructive feedback. Your support has been instrumental in shaping this research.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and colleagues for their encouragement and camaraderie. Your support and understanding made this journey more enjoyable and enriching. Thank you all for being a vital part of my academic and personal growth.

ABSTRACT

The study explores the nature of the collaborative relationship between the District - Based Support Team and the School-Based Support Team as support structures mandated to promote inclusive education practices in schools. It explores how the roles, responsibilities and collaborative efforts of these two support structures were taken up in two public schools in the Ekurhuleni South district of Gauteng, South Africa. Following South Africa's ecological approach to the implementation of inclusive education, the research utilizes Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory as a foundational conceptual framework for examining how these two support structures attempt to create learning spaces that accommodate and support every learner through their 'Community of Practice'. The study follows a qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews and document analysis to gather in-depth insights from DBST and SBST members. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the systemic facilitators and impediments impacting the execution of inclusive education. Despite their shared mandate, the effective implementation of inclusive education is hindered by systemic challenges, including resource constraints, insufficient teacher training, and attitudinal barriers among support structure members. A critical limitation is the shortage of DBST officials, which significantly affects the level of support schools receive. Additionally, inconsistencies in inclusive education practices stem from a lack of clarity among some SBST members regarding their roles and responsibilities. The study also highlights the concerning issue of low parental participation in the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) process, as outlined in the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy.

Another structural challenge lies in the allocation of assistive resources. While full-service and special schools receive direct provisions, mainstream schools must navigate an application process through resource centres, often delaying essential support. Nonetheless, the collaboration between DBSTs and SBSTs has yielded notable successes, such as the establishment of rigorous screening mechanisms that identify learners with barriers and tracking systems that monitor intervention progress. Furthermore, the integration of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) has strengthened district-wide collaboration, facilitating continuous engagement through

structured feedback loops. The strategic use of WhatsApp groups within PLCs has further enhanced real-time communication, ensuring more coordinated and responsive support efforts across schools. This study employs Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory to analyse these dynamics, providing insights into how multi-level interactions affect the process implementing of inclusive practices.

Keywords: Collaboration, Support, Inclusive education, Practices, Relationship, Bronfenbrenner, Ubuntu, Quintile, Environment, Challenges, Successes, Attitude.

TABLE OF CONTENT(TOC) **(Pages)**

i. Declaration: 02

ii. Dedication: 03

iii. Acknowledgement: 04

iv. Abstract: 05

- Keywords

Chapter one: Overview of the study

1.1 Introduction: 10

1.1 1. Background to the study: 10

1.1.2 Problem Statement: 14

1.1.3 Rationale: 15

1.1.4 Aims: 15

1.1.5 Objectives: 15

1.1.6 Research Questions: 16

1.1.6.1 Sub-Questions: 16

1.2 Conclusion: 16

Chapter two: Literature review and Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction: 18

2.1.1 Defining Inclusive Education: 19

2.1.2 Policy framework developments (Salamanca, SDG4, EWP6, SIAS): 21

2.1.3 The challenges of implementing Inclusive Education through support structures: 25

2.1.4 Support structures (DBST and SBST): 27

2.2 Conclusion: 31

2.3 Theoretical Framework: 32

2.3.1 Introduction: 32

2.3.2 Microsystem: 33

2.3.3 Mesosystem: 33

2.3.4 Exosystem: 34

2.3.5 Macrosystem: 35
2.3.6 Chronosystem: 35
2.4 Conclusion: 36

Chapter three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction: 37
3.2 Research design: 37
3.3 Research instruments: 40
3.4 Sampling methods: 42
3.5Data analysis: 45
3.6 Reliability and trustworthiness: 49
3.7 Ethical considerations: 50
3.8 Conclusion: 52

Chapter four: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction: 53
4.2 Discussion of identified themes: 55
4.2.1 Theme 1: The roles and responsibilities of the support structures: 55
4.2.2 Theme 2: The nature of the collaboration between the support structures: 62
4.2.3 Theme 3: Support structures (DBST, SBST) and the Teachers: 67
4.2.4 Theme 4: Feedback and Communication: 70
4.2.5 Theme 5: Resource allocation and Support: 73
4.2.6 Theme 6: Collaboration with external stakeholders: 77
4.3 Conclusion: 82

Chapter five: Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Introduction: 84
5.1.1 Summary of findings: 84
5.1.2 Recommendations: 86
5.1.3 Limitations: 88
5.1.4 Recommendations for Future Research.....89
5.2 Conclusions: 90

References: 92

Appendices:
Appendix 1: Participant information sheet: 105

Appendix 2: Research interview questions: 107
Appendix 3: Permission letter to the principal: 109
Appendix 4: Interview consent form: 112
Appendix 5: Wits Ethics approval: 113
Appendix 6: GDE permission to conduct research: 114

List of Figures

3.4.1 Participant and school site reference: 44
3.4.2 Biographical information: 45
4.1. A summary of identified themes that emerged from coding the interview transcripts: 54
4.2. Extract from school one SBST policy composition:.....57
4.3 School one SBST policy key functions: 58

List of tables

4.1 School two SBST policy composition and key functions.....60

CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The study explores the nature of the collaborative relationship between the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs), School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), and teachers in primary schools within the Ekurhuleni South district, focusing on their collective efforts to ensure inclusive education. This collaboration of support structures is critical in addressing the diverse needs of learners, particularly those with barriers to learning, as mandated by South African education policies such as the SIAS document and Education White Paper 6 (EWP6). The research investigates how these teams work together to implement inclusive education practices, the challenges they face, and the effectiveness of their collaboration in creating learning spaces that accommodate and support every learner. Through this exploration, the study aims to provide insights into the dynamics of these relationships and their impact on the successful inclusion of all learners in the educational system.

This first chapter sets the foundation for the study by exploring the two main approaches to inclusive education and examining the historical and current context of inclusive education in South Africa. It then presents the problem statement, which highlights the challenges related to the collaboration between the DBST and SBST. Following this, the chapter outlines the study's aims and objectives and provides a rationale for conducting the research. Lastly, it introduces the main research question and sub-questions that will guide the study.

1.1.1 Background

There are two dominant approaches to inclusive education. The social model approach and the special approach. The special education approach focuses on the learner’s deficiencies; thus, it is sometimes synonymously referred to as the medical deficit approach (Naicker, 2005). In contrast, the social model perspective “is rooted firmly in the human rights paradigm, arguing for inclusion and the removal of all barriers that hinder full participation of individuals with disability” (& Donohue & Bornman, 2014, p. 4). The approaches stand in opposition to each other and hold completely different assumptions about inclusive education. However, they are both

prevalent in the South African policy and legislative framework of inclusive education; both in policy intent and policy enactment; as noted that Education White Paper 6 is still dependent on a medical approach (Engelbrecht et al., 2016). Engelbrecht and Van Deventer (2013, as cited in Engelbrecht et al, 2016) state that:

> "White Paper 6 depends on the medical approach when support for diverse barriers to learning is proposed. It recommends a continuum of support for learners who experience barriers to learning that distinguishes between low-intense support, those who receive support in mainstream school, learners with moderate support requirements, who receive moderate support requirements, who are accommodated in full-service schools, and learners who require intensive educational support" (p. 2).

The dependence of White Paper 6 on the special model approach shows how difficult it is to achieve a broader conceptualization of inclusive education in South Africa. Landsberg et al. (2011, as cited in Makoelle, 2012, p. 95) show the same correlation of dependence on special education as they state that "the influence of special educational needs which was based on the medical-deficit model is still prevalent in [South African] schools".

South Africa's past was deeply shaped by the harmful effects of apartheid. To build a more just and equal society, the new government had to establish laws grounded in equity, inclusion, and human rights, ensuring that every individual had access to fair opportunities and protection under the law (Sayed & Soudien, 2005). The country has a vision to meet the educational goals set out in the Constitution. Thus, it created a policy framework titled: *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System.* The Constitution of South Africa is the supreme law of the land, and it underpins all the legislature and policy of South Africa.

> "The SA constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) required that education be transformed and democratized in accordance with values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom, non-racism, and no-sexism. It guarantees access to basic education for all through the provision that everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education" (Department of Education, 2001).

Although South Africa has made significant efforts in the pursuit of an inclusive educational system, there are still systemic extrinsic challenges that hinder the principles of human rights in education, barriers such as housing and living conditions, shortage of qualified educators, an inflexible curriculum, and language barriers, and inequality and poverty (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). These barriers give rise to different and complex learning needs. According to Du Toit and Forlin (2009, p. 646):

> "In South Africa, these needs may arise from inaccessible and unsafe built environments; an inflexible curriculum; inappropriate languages or language of learning and teaching; poor communication; inadequate support services; inadequate policies and legislation; the non-recognition and non-involvement of parents and inadequately and inappropriately trained education managers and educators."

Barriers to learning in South African schools are a major concern that require urgent attention (Mestry & Singh, 2007). This is because teachers are not adequately trained in accommodating learners that have been diagnosed and identified to be needing support. According to the medical model, barriers are situated in the individual person but with the movement towards the social paradigm on inclusive education, a systemic viewpoint to barriers was adopted by Education White Paper 6, the viewpoint accepts that individual behaviour is a function of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Potgeiter-Groot, et al., 2012). This viewpoint recognizes the connection between individuals and group interactions within systems like families, classrooms, and schools. It significantly influences diagnostic outcomes and the support process. (Nel et al., 2014, as cited in Nel & Grosser, 2016). According to Nel and Grosser (2016):

> EWP6 (SA, 2001) recommended the use of intrinsic barriers to learning (this includes various disabilities) and extrinsic barriers to learning (i.e. environmental, systemic and pedagogical factors causing barriers to learning). The purpose of this was to move away from the categorization of learners as a result of their disability (medical model) to acknowledging that there are various factors (intrinsic and extrinsic) causing barriers to learning and development for learners (socio-ecological model). These barriers to learning and development affect the effectiveness of support structures on systemic, pedagogical, and cultural level. This paper will therefore elaborate upon this concept of barriers to learning in the literature review chapter.

Education White Paper 6 reflects a commitment to the development of an education and training system which will promote education for all and foster the development of supportive and inclusive 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 participants of society (Education White Paper 6, 2001). Hence, it “outlined the model of inclusive education aimed at responding to learner and teacher needs by establishing institutions and structures of support which will ensure quality education for all” (Makoelle, 2012, p. 96). The structures are the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) and the School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs). The DBSTs' function is to assist and support all educational institutions and identify and address barriers to learning to promote effective teaching and learning (Fourie, 2017).

At the core of an effective working relationship between the SBST, DBST, and teachers is the ability to collaborate. Cook and Friend (1993) define collaboration as a style of direct interaction between the least co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work towards a common goal. “Many advocates of inclusive education urged that educators have to work collaboratively and communicate regularly with each other, and a series of the so-called best practice-related collaborations have been widely recommended to teachers working in inclusive settings” (Deng, 2010, p. 207). It is of paramount importance that the DBST, SBST, and teachers work together effectively to bring inclusive education to fruition because “working in collaborative teams can accomplish more than individuals on their own” (Engelbrecht et al., 2010). However, collaboration is often unattainable because of issues around implementation, lack of training in effective implementation, communication and problem-solving, and lack of time (Montgomery & Mirenda, 2014, as cited in Copfer & Specht, 2014).

According to Nong (2020, p. 1245) “the DBST, like other examples of district and provincial officialdom, appears to lack the capacity and expertise necessary to guide SBSTs in the implementation of an inclusive education policy”. This incapacity impacts the SBST's capacity to implement supportive strategies for teachers and learners. Nevertheless, there are a few successes in these support structures. In a study

conducted by Makhalemele and Nel (2021, p. 310), they discover and mention that “participants from the ILSTs [SBSTs] and district officials expressed their belief that they were successful in effective collaboration. All teams confirmed that they successfully collaborated with different stakeholders when addressing the barriers that learners experience”. The research conducted by Makhelemele and Nel (2021) took place in two districts within the Free State province, whereas Nong's study does not specify a sampled site. There has been limited research on the collaborative working relationship between the DBST and SBST in various districts across South Africa. Consequently, this study seeks to explore the nature of this collaboration specifically within the Ekurhuleni South District in Gauteng.

1.1.2 Problem statement

The DBSTs and SBSTs are established to coordinate all learners, teachers, curricula, and institutional developments. Such roles demand that they identify Institutional requirements, particularly challenges to learning at the learner, educator, and curriculum levels, and the development of strategies to overcome these challenges (Makhalemele & Nel, 2021). However, despite the guidelines for support provided by White Paper 6, studies have shown that both the DBST and SBST experience difficulties with implementation and effective functioning in many schools and districts in South Africa (Mbatho, 2006; Nel et al., 2011; Salmon & Fourie, 2010). Moreover, School Management Teams and teachers in mainstream schools often struggle with what constitutes an effective SBST, and how to manage and support learners who are experiencing barriers to learning (Nel et al., 2014).

According to Nong (2020, p. 1247), “the current state of support offered by the DBST to the SBST is very narrow in terms of addressing learner’s barriers, as many learners have intellectual, hearing, and other barriers that might not be even easy to diagnose.” Furthermore, there are international “research studies on the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa [that] have pointed out that additional complex contextual factors including funding constraints, overcrowded classrooms, and school cultures that influence attitudes towards difference and disability, have complicated the implementation of White Paper 6” (Walton et al., 2011 as cited in Engelbrecht et al., 2016, p. 2).

1.1.3 Rationale

Although there are numerous successes such as the screening processes, referrals, identification, and tracking of learners identified as needing support. There are also some limitations and shortfalls identified from the collaboration between the DBST and SBST in the Ekurhuleni South District. Hence, the motivation and interest in conducting this research. In my experience as an SBST deputy coordinator, as well as an SBST PLC (Professional Learning Community) secretary of Ekurhuleni South Circuit 3, I have come to realize that the collaborative relationship between the DBST and SBST is not fully effective in facilitating schooling cultures that promote teacher and learner support. Thus, I feel that this study will not only provide me with a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the DBSTs and SBSTs but will also provide me with possible insights to the effectiveness of the working dynamics between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education practices in the Ekurhuleni South District, as proposed by Education White Paper 6.

1.1.4 Aims

This study aims to identify the ways in which the composition of the DBST and the SBST potentially affects the efficacy of the collaboration between the two supportive structures. Secondly, it aims to investigate the challenges that emerge within the collaborative relationship between the DBST and SBST in their efforts to achieve inclusive education as stipulated by Education White Paper 6. Lastly, it aims to explore the extent to which the DBST and the SBST are operating successfully in the implementation of supportive strategies for teachers and learners.

1.1.5 Objectives

- To identify the ways in which the mandatory composition of the DBST, and SBST potentially affects the effectiveness of the collaborative working relationship between the two support structures.
- To investigate and analyse the challenges arising within the collaborative relationship between the DBST and SBST in their pursuit of achieving inclusive education, as outlined by Education White Paper 6.

- To identify how the DBST and the SBST are collaborating successfully in performing their supportive roles.

1.1.6 Research Question

Given the above issues on the nature of collaboration between the DBST and the SBST. This research is framed by the following question:

What are the challenges and successes experienced by District Based Support Teams, School Based Support Teams, and teachers in trying to collaborate effectively to fulfil the mandate from Education White Paper 6 in supporting the implementation of inclusive education in two Ekurhuleni South district schools?

1.1.6.1 Sub-Questions

This research intends to address the topic by asking the following sub-questions linked to the overall research questions:

1. How does the composition of the District Based Support Team, and the School Based Support Team affect their effective collaboration in supporting inclusive education?
2. How are the roles and responsibilities performed by the District Based Support Team and the School Based Support Team experienced by their members?
3. What kinds of successes and challenges arise from the collaborative working relationship between the District Based Support Team and the School Based Support?

1.2 Conclusion

This chapter established a foundation for the study by specifying the primary approaches to inclusive education, namely the special approach and the social model approach. The special and social approach are the results of South African apartheid history and post-apartheid efforts to address social inequality because under apartheid, the education system was structured in a manner that marginalized learners with learning barriers. It reflected on the injustices of the past and the efforts of Education White Paper 6. By identifying the challenges associated with the collaboration between the DBST and SBST, the chapter highlighted the critical areas of focus for the research. The chapter outlined and clarified the aims and objectives

which are to explore the roles, responsibilities, and collaboration of SBSTs and DBSTs in promoting inclusive education in Ekurhuleni South district primary schools. It also provided the rationale for the study, underscoring its importance and relevance. The chapter concluded by presenting the main research question and sub-questions, which drive the investigation and contribute to a deeper understanding of collaborative practices between the two support structures within the Ekurhuleni South district.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a fundamental aspect of South Africa's educational landscape, aimed at providing equitable learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of their diverse needs. This approach is grounded in the country's commitment to human rights and social justice, and it is reflected in various national policies and frameworks. The successful implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on the collaborative efforts of multiple stakeholders, including support structures like the District-Based Support Team (DBST) and School-Based Support Team (SBST), which work closely with teachers to address barriers to learning.

This literature review is structured to provide a comprehensive examination of the key elements that underpin inclusive education in South Africa, with a focus on the Ekurhuleni South District's primary schools. The review is organized into three main sections. The first section will be on the South African policies on inclusive education that guide support structures, this section will explore the policies and frameworks that guide inclusive education in South Africa, including the Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education and the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS). It will highlight the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, equity, and access that these policies promote, as well as their objectives in creating a supportive and accommodating learning environment for all learners. Secondly, it will discuss the challenges support structures face in implementing inclusive education policies by showing that despite the strong policy foundation, the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa faces numerous challenges. This section will delve into the obstacles that educators and schools encounter in realizing the goals of inclusive education. These challenges include limited resources, insufficient teacher training, inadequate infrastructure, and the complexities of accommodating diverse learning needs within mainstream classrooms. The review will also consider the broader socio-economic and cultural factors that impact the effective implementation of these policies. Lastly, it will discuss the support structures such as the DBST and SBST. It will analyse how these teams are composed, their responsibilities in supporting schools, and the collaborative relationships they form with teachers, and school management teams (SMTs), and

other school stakeholders. This section will also explore the successes and challenges these teams face in their efforts to provide effective support, and how these dynamics influence the overall implementation of inclusive education in the district.

By examining these areas, this literature review aims to provide a holistic understanding of the factors that influence inclusive education in South Africa, with particular attention to the support structures that are integral to its success. However, it will start by first defining the concept of inclusive education, and barriers to learning because these definitions help to frame the subsequent discussions, providing a clear entry point into the exploration of policies, challenges, and support structures.

2.1.1. Defining Inclusive Education.

Inclusive education is a multi-faceted concept. Nel et al (2016) argue that providing a universal definition of inclusive education is challenging due to the diverse contexts of countries, schools, classrooms, and learners. Most scholars generally agree on two key points when defining inclusive education. Firstly, it involves more than just placing learners in the same physical space (Slee 2008, as cited in Goransson and Nilholm, 2014, p.265). Secondly, most commentators agree that it is a concept that is hard to define and that it is given many different interpretations (Artiles et al, .2006, as cited in in Goransson and Niholm, 2014). This research defines inclusive education from an ecological and community perspective. According to Goransson and Niholm (2014, p 268), a community definition as inclusion as creation of communities with specific characteristics (which could vary between proposals). This means that defining inclusive education from an ecological and community perspective emphasizes the idea that education is influenced by and interconnected with various systems and relationships within a broader community. Hence, Booth et al. (2000 as cited in Goransson and Nilholm, 2014, p. 270) say that “community is sometimes defined extensively as not only involving classrooms and schools but the surrounding neighbourhood and even the whole society”. The ecological perspective draws from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which posits that an individual's development is influenced by different systems, ranging from immediate environments like family and school to broader societal influences. According to Göransson and Niholm (2014)," the operative meaning of inclusion in reviews and empirical research should be much more clearly defined and new types of studies are needed”. Thus, this research defines Inclusive education not only as an approach that ensures all learners,

regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs, are welcomed and supported in the same educational settings, but also as an approach that ensures that it acknowledges the difference between people, and the interconnectedness between the individuals, the environment, and even the broader community structures. It emphasizes the value of diversity and aims to foster a sense of belonging and community within schools and the broader societal structures. White Paper 6(2001, p. 07) further points that, inclusive education is about "changing attitudes, behaviour, teaching methods, curricula, and environment to meet the needs of all learners". It is an education system that is aimed at enabling educational structures, systems, and learning methodologies that are meant to meet the diverse needs of all learners at all levels of the system, and in mainstream schools, full-service schools, and special schools (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016). Education White Paper 6 is a Department of Basic Education policy framework that seeks to give effect to the Schools Act and the Constitution's requirements. It also understands inclusive education as “maximising the participation of all learners in the culture and the curriculum of educational institutions and uncovering and minimising barriers to learning” (EWP6, 2001, p. 07). When viewing South Africa’s inclusive education approach from a community perspective, the impression of learning obstacles is central to the recognition of dialectical relationships between inclusion and exclusion.

Nel et al. (2016) describe barriers to learning as any factors that can hinder the acquisition of knowledge. Barriers to learning encompass obstacles that hinder a learner's educational progress and participation within the broader societal context. These barriers extend beyond the school environment and involve community dynamics that affect a learner's ability to thrive academically and socially. The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2014) defines them as challenges that obstruct learning and development, which may originate within the educational system or the learners themselves. Learning barriers can be categorized as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Extrinsic barriers are external factors that impact the learner's experience (Walton et al., 2009). These barriers often stem from the education system's inability to accommodate the diverse needs of learners (DoE, 2001), leading to learning difficulties. According Engelbrecht et al. (2015), extrinsic barriers are factors beyond a learner's control that impede their learning, such as structural, socio-economic, linguistic, and pedagogical issues. Intrinsic barriers to learning are those internal

factors related to the individual learner that can impede their ability to engage with and succeed in the educational process. These barriers are often related to a learner's cognitive, emotional, or physical state and are crucial for educators to understand to provide effective support.

2.1.2 Policy Framework Developments

There have been numerous policy framework developments in inclusive education both globally and in various countries, including South Africa. Notable examples include the UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of 1994, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education, and within South Africa, the Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) and the SIAS Policy. The Salamanca Declaration initially focused on including learners with disabilities in mainstream schools. Over time, its scope expanded to emphasize that inclusive education benefits all learners, not just those with disabilities. This shift recognizes the need to adapt education systems to accommodate diverse learning needs, ensuring equal opportunities for every learner in an evolving society. The Salamanca Statement initially placed a strong emphasis on what was identified as special needs education (Köpfer et al., 2021). Hence Ainscow et al. (2019) also allege that “the Salamanca statement and framework for action for special needs is arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the field of special education”. However, it is important to highlight that the final conclusion of the statement emphasized the need for mainstream schools to establish an inclusive education system., thus it states:

> “Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society, and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system”. (Salamanca, 1994, p.ix).

The Salamanca Statement has played a pivotal role in shaping South Africa's inclusive education landscape. It has assisted to the development and implementation of practices and policies aimed at ensuring that all learners have access to quality education in inclusive settings (Maphumulo, 2019). Hence Amor et al. (2018, as cited

in Ainscow et al., 2019, p.11) say that “today, inclusive education is overall viewed as “a matter of adopting a socio-ecological approach regarding the interactions between learners ‘capabilities and environmental demands, stressing that educational systems must adapt to and reach all learners – and not vice versa”. This view is because of the fact that inclusive education acknowledges the level of the interconnectedness between the individuals and their surroundings and the societal systems.

South Africa is a signatory to the Salamanca Statement through its participation in the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain, in 1994. Various structures are put in place in the Salamanca statement to provide support at an international, national, and local level. At an international level, the Salamanca Statement, the document says that “international technical operation and funding agencies involved in support and development of Education For All initiatives should ensure that special needs education is an integral part of all development projects” (UNESCO, 1994). This means that for inclusive education to be fully implemented, the international body should prioritize special education needs, and the same time, this approach will strengthen the entire education system to be more inclusive. At a national level, the Salamanca Statement states that “national education policies should take full account of individual differences and situations” (UNESCO, 1994). And it further states that national authorities have a responsibility to monitor external funding to special needs education and working in cooperation with international parties to ensure that policies are aimed at achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994). This suggests that national policies should adhere and work with the international bodies while considering their national context to fully implement inclusive education. At a local level:

> “The local administrators and schools should be given necessary autonomy and adequate training and be invited to develop more flexible management procedures to redeploy instructional resources, to diversify learning, to mobilize child-to-child help, to offer support to pupils experiencing difficulties and to develop close relations with parents and the community” (UNESCO, 1994).

This shows that local level is central and paramount to promote education for all and to attain inclusive education. The local level needs to be given the necessary

resources, training and autonomy so that they can create solutions that are relevant to their communities.

By participating and signing the Salamanca Statement, South Africa committed to the principles of inclusive education, which advocates for schools to accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions. It pursued these goals through Education White Paper 6. Although the White Paper is not a legislated policy. The Department of Education (DoE) then began the implementation of EWP6. This policy outlines how the educational system should be reformed to cater to diverse learning needs and promote a compassionate and humane society (DoE, 2001). The policy details the government's strategy to ensure that learners facing learning and developmental challenges have access to quality education. It articulates a vision that upholds the Constitutional rights of all South African children to receive non-discriminatory, quality education and to be treated with dignity. Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education. EWP6, acknowledges that learners have a wide variety of learning needs at any given time. When these needs are not addressed, it can result in learners struggling to learn effectively or being excluded from the education system. These diverse learning needs can stem from factors such as physical, mental, sensory, neurological, and developmental impairments, psycho-social issues, differences in intellectual abilities, specific life experiences, or socio-economic challenges (EWP6, 2001). Hence the policy underscores the necessity of an inclusive education system that is responsive to the diverse learning needs of all learners, promoting the principles of equity, access, and social justice. This means that implementing this policy requires a commitment from educators, administrators, and policymakers to continuously assess and improve the inclusivity of the education system. This might involve professional development for teachers, revising curricula to be more inclusive, and engaging with communities to better understand and meet the needs of all learners.

According to Makhalemele and Nel (2021)," one of the key strategies of EWP6 is to realize an inclusive education approach and address the diverse education context of South Africa was to accommodate diverse learning needs." Engelbrecht, et al. (2015) argue that a key perspective of EWP6 is that inclusive education involves respecting and acknowledging learner diversity and empowering teachers to address a wide

range of learning needs by focusing on teaching and learning activities that benefit all learners facing barriers. According to these researchers, EWP6 emphasized the need for the education system to transform and support the full spectrum of barriers to development and learning, including those caused by extrinsic systemic issues such as an inflexible curriculum, inadequately trained teachers, language and communication problems, and socio-economic factors, as well as intrinsic medical/organic causes like chronic illness and disabilities.

Hlalele et al. (2020, p.143) alleges that inclusive education policies such as Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) and the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy serve as frameworks for promoting inclusivity. The SIAS policy, in particular, functions as a structured tool within the education system, designed to assist in creating and implementing support plans that cater to the diverse needs of all learners. This suggests that Education White Paper 6 as the comprehensive strategy is complemented by the SIAS Policy, which was implemented to provide a standardized approach to the early identification and support of learners experiencing barriers to learning. The SIAS Policy was enacted in 2008 to advance the adoption of the social model of learner support in South Africa, with its most recent update released in 2014. It is a “policy framework for the standardization of the procedures to identify, access and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school” (SIAS, 2014, p .9). The SIAS policy adopted the social model of disability because it promotes a more inclusive, equitable, and supportive education system that recognizes and addresses the barriers that learners face, rather than placing the responsibility on learners to adapt to the system. This approach aligns with broader goals of social justice, human rights, and inclusive education. The policy outlines processes for the effective screening, identification, assessment, and support of learners, ensuring that interventions are timely, appropriate, and based on thorough assessments. This policy is instrumental in operationalizing the inclusive education agenda set forth by White Paper 6, facilitating targeted support within the mainstream education system.

The SIAS policy promotes the training of the teachers on how to facilitate support to all learners. Educator training and competence are imperative to effective policy application because the effective application of the SIAS policy is not just dependent

on the competence of the DBST, but it is also dependent on the design nature of the policy, as well as the educators entrusted to interpret it (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). This means that the competence of the DBST is important, but it is just one piece of the puzzle. Successful implementation of the SIAS policy requires a holistic approach that involves the SBST, teacher training, school leadership, parental involvement, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, collaborative networks, and an understanding of cultural and contextual factors. Hence the SIAS policy states that "as outlined in Education White Paper 6, the implementation of the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support proposes an integrated community-based model of support provisioning" (SIAS, 2014, p. 25).

2.1.3 The challenges of implementing IE through support structures.

Achieving inclusive education in South Africa is complex and multifaceted, with several interconnected challenges hindering progress. These "complex and wide-ranging factors, such as racial and gender inequality, poverty, substance abuse, chronic illnesses, and orphans impact the quality of education" (Kalenga & Fourie, 2012, p.166). For inclusive education to be a reality in South African primary and secondary schools, educators in South Africa are required to be well-capacitated (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). It is evident that some teachers have not received sufficient training in inclusive education practices. Nel et al. (2016) report that educators in South Africa perceive inclusive education policy practices as frustrating because they do not have adequate skills and resources to support learners who experience barriers to learning. They may lack the skills and knowledge needed to support diverse learners effectively. This perception has a direct impact on the effectiveness of support structures like the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and the District-Based Support Team (DBST).

Inclusive education aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds, have access to quality education. However, there can be confusion or uncertainty among officials about how to effectively achieve these goals, especially when it comes to establishing and maintaining the necessary support structures. Studies have revealed that education officials in South Africa lacked clarity about the objectives of inclusive education. Some expressed uncertainty about the process of transforming both ordinary and special schools into institutions better equipped to support inclusive education (Stofile, 2008). The other officials were confused about

the parameters of barriers to learning and exactly how these barriers would be addressed within inclusive schools (Wilderman & Nomdo, 2007). There also seems to be negative attitudes and a general lack of awareness and understanding of inclusive education principles among teachers, parents, and community members, which can hinder efforts to promote inclusivity. Hence Polat (2011) emphasizes the importance of overcoming attitudinal barriers among teachers, especially in developing countries, to effectively implement inclusive education. Educators who have negative attitudes towards inclusive education may resist adopting new practices or strategies recommended by the SBST and this can undermine the SBST's efforts to implement inclusive education principles effectively. If educators are unwilling to embrace these practices, the SBST may struggle to make meaningful changes within the school. Some educators are noted to be ignoring inclusive education policy practice, such educators do not even do screening, identification, and assessment of learning barriers experienced by learners (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). Ignoring inclusive education practices is an act of exclusionary practice that works against the advancement of inclusive education.

Donohue and Bornman (2014, p. 9) argue that "schools currently lack teachers who have the capacity and knowledge to instruct a diverse body of learners in a single classroom without considerably increasing their workload". This incapacity to instruct a diverse body of learners is against the policy as all schools in South Africa are expected to effectively apply the policy on *Screening Identification Assessment and Support 2014*(SIAS) (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). Its incapacity to instruct a range of learners can also be due to the teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusive education. Teacher attitudes toward implementing inclusive education without proper preparation can have adverse effects on learners' education (Swart & Pettipher, 2005). Cognizance of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are a key factor in the effective use of support structures. Positive attitudes can enhance the implementation support structures, leading to more successful outcomes in inclusive education settings. Conversely, negative attitudes can undermine these efforts, making it essential to support teachers in developing a positive, inclusive mindset.

An inflexible curriculum can significantly impact the effectiveness of both. The SBST and DBST play a crucial role in facilitating inclusive education. An inflexible curriculum can limit the SBST's ability to tailor support strategies effectively. If the curriculum does

not allow for modifications or accommodations, the SBST may find it difficult to offer support that is appropriate to learners experiencing learning barriers. According to Pienaar and Raymond (2013), it can impede learners' development by not addressing their diverse needs effectively. To address this, the curriculum should be adjusted to incorporate support programmes that target learning barriers (Engelbrecht et al., 2010). This adaptation should extend to various aspects of the curriculum, including classroom management, teaching strategies, content, language, and teaching and learning resources, to enhance accessibility (DoE, 2008). It should be emphasised that support networks play a crucial role in shaping and influencing the curriculum, ensuring that it is considerate, inclusive, and accessible to each learner's learning requirements. These mechanisms provide a platform for schools to adapt and execute a curriculum that promotes fairness and the academic success of every learner.

According to Makhalemele, (2011), the full implementation of inclusive education remains a distant goal, as school leaders continue to encounter significant challenges in executing inclusive education policies in primary schools. It is noted in Oswald and Swarts (2011) that the implementers of inclusive education do not view inclusive education expectations as realistic and this may be because inclusive policies have demanded that teachers challenge their existing schemas about practices in the education of learners with disabilities, in some cases leading to cynicism, hopelessness and a rejection of transformation policies (Hlalele & Makoelle, 2023). Teachers with a negative view of inclusive education may be less likely to collaborate with or actively engage support teams. This lack of cooperation can hinder the identification of learners who need support and delay the implementation of necessary interventions.

2.1.4. Support Structures (Implementation)

The educational landscape in South Africa has undergone significant transformation in recent years, particularly in its approach to conventional institutional education and support systems, essential policies and frameworks are central to these advancements, aimed at addressing the diverse needs of learners and ensuring equal access to quality education. Fourie (2017) states that “Inclusive Education was legislated as policy in South Africa in July 2001 with Education White Paper 6 which called for the establishment of various structures within the education system that

would form a network of support for all learners as the foundation towards further advancement of inclusive education". These support structures were designed to function within institutions at both district and school level in collaboration with external agencies. The School-Based Support Team (SBST), and the District-Based Support Team (DBST) stand out as critical components in the nation's strategy to foster an inclusive educational environment. At the operational level, the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and the District-Based Support Team (DBST) are key structures mandated to provide continuous support to schools. The SBST, typically comprising the principal, educators, the SMT (School Management Team), and community stakeholders, is accountable for finding and providing support to learners who experience barriers to learning.

The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS, 2014) guidelines state that members of the School Based Support Team (SBST) are required to assist teachers in creating support plans for learners facing barriers to learning (Makhalemele & Nel, 2021). They review these teacher-developed support plans and provide direction and support regarding additional strategies, programmes, services, and resources to enhance the Individual Support Plan (ISP). The roles and responsibilities of these team members are clearly outlined in relevant policy documents such as the SIAS policy. According to the (Department of Education 2015, p. 7), the main roles of the School-Based Support Team are to:

- Identify the needs and address barriers to learning, which will assist schools in reaching effective teaching and learning.
- Develop strategies to access resources available within and outside the school.
- Ensure that the support programmes and strategies developed will be performed efficiently and be able to reduce barriers to teaching and learning

According to EWP6, SBSTs are intended to provide well-coordinated support services for both educators and learners. These services should facilitate learning and teaching progression by identifying and addressing the needs of learners, educators, and institutions. SBSTs should be strengthened with expertise from the local community, DBSTs, and higher education institutions (Makhalemele, 2011). The SBST is crucial in connecting with district officials and various support services, including healthcare

professionals, community organizations, and government departments. Their main goal is to ensure that their school receives the necessary resources and assistance to address the unique needs of learners effectively (Mkwanazi, 2023). Additionally, SBSTs focus on encouraging teachers to develop preventive and promotional strategies within the "health-promoting school framework" (Makhalemele, 2011).

It is evident that there are clear guidelines and comprehensive plans to implement inclusive education practices. However, with all these efforts through policies and legislation to achieve equitable access to quality education for everyone, Inclusive education in South Africa has been slow to progress. Hence Makhalemele and Nel (2016, as cited in Makhelemele and Van-Staden, 2018) allege that “even though such structures are in place and perform their specific roles as mentioned in inclusive education policies, research has indicated that in South African schools the provision of effective formal support services from the DBSTs remains a challenge. Motitswe (2014) also argues that there remains a lack of direction and guidance on how SBSTs should be established and function, which varies from one school to another. Research by Makoelle (2014), and Makhalemele and Nel (2016) indicates that many teachers are still unsure about the specific roles within the SBST. This uncertainty is critical as the SBST is the primary source of support and assistance for teachers addressing the needs of learners.

Landsberg and Matthews (2019) assert that every school should prominently feature a School-Based Support Team (SBST), ideally led by the Learning Support Educator (LSE) if available. Nel et al., (2016) identified this team as the primary source of assistance for teachers and learners within a school. According to DBE (2014) and Nel et al. (2016), the SBST serves as the initial level of support for teachers and learners. Makhalemele (2011) emphasizes that schools aiming to establish an SBST must clearly understand their community and determine who will recommend and coordinate the team, as well as how the team will collaborate. Clarifying these roles is essential for setting up SBSTs effectively. Adequate learning support is vital for quality daily teaching (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). Therefore, a functional and effective SBST is necessary to meet the needs of both teachers and learners (Makoelle, 2014; Nel et al., 2016).

To carry out its functions, the SBST also needs support. It needs support from the DBST. One of the main duties of the DBST is to ensure that inclusive education is implemented in classrooms by providing support to the School-Based Support Team (Maphumulo, 2019). However, Hodgson and Khumalo (2016, p. 18) allege that “the DBST appears to lack the capacity and expertise necessary to guide SBSTs in the implementation of an inclusive education policy”. This study was done in the uMkhanyakude district of KwaZulu Natal, and their main concern was the “inadequate, unaccommodating infrastructure and poor service delivery” (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016, p. 13). The perspective by Hodgson and Khumalo (2016) affirms Adewumi and Mosito’s (2019) viewpoint and suggestion that when support services are provided for teaching and learning, the schools' capacity to address and recognize learning difficulties is enacted. “Oftentimes, lack of support to children with learning barriers is due to the inadequate training and poor monitoring by the SBST” (Nong, 2020, p. 1246). It is worth noting that without effective monitoring, the SBST may not identify problems or gaps in the support being provided, leading to ongoing challenges for learners with learning barriers. This can result in missed opportunities for intervention or adjustments that could improve learner outcomes.

Despite the establishment of SBSTs in most schools, these teams are largely ineffective. One challenge is that support structures supporting teachers are often ineffective (Nel et al., 2016). In South Africa, school-based support faces numerous challenges in assisting vulnerable learners. For instance, Makhalemele and Tlale (2021) found that the inefficiency of team coordinators hindered SBSTs from organizing meetings effectively. SBSTs are constrained by a severe scarcity of professionals qualified to serve in DBSTs. Makhalemele and Tlale (2021) discovered that although DBST members have embraced their roles, these responsibilities have evolved over time to include providing school resources, evaluating programmes, and recommending changes. Despite this, DBST members still struggle to fulfil these new duties. The DBE (2013) emphasizes that DBSTs are crucial for school success and ensuring high-quality education for all learners. However, a significant challenge is the lack of collaboration within the DBSTs and SBSTs, among other issues. When the SBST and DBST do not work closely together, there can be gaps in communication and coordination, leading to inconsistencies in the support provided to schools.

2.2. Conclusion

In this section, my discussion commenced with offering a comprehensive examination of the key elements influencing inclusive education in South Africa. It began by defining the concept of inclusive education and identifying barriers to learning. It showed that inclusive education is defined in different ways, however, this section has defined inclusive education from a community-based perspective. It defined inclusive education as an approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of individuals with their environments and the broader society. Thereby, establishing a foundational understanding for the subsequent analysis. The review then delved into policy frameworks. It discussed the developments of numerous policy frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement, SGD (04): Quality Education, Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy. It pointed out that the various structures of support that are put in place by the Salamanca Declaration at an international, national, and local level entail an ecological approach to the implementation of inclusive education that aligns with the operative definition of it as community based. This was connected to the South African policies on inclusive education, highlighting the guiding principles and objectives set forth by frameworks like the Education White Paper 6 and the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS).

This section emphasized the promotion of inclusivity, collaboration, equity, and access in creating interconnected, supportive learning environments. Secondly, the review addressed the challenges faced in implementing these policies, acknowledging the significant obstacles such as limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate infrastructure. It also considered the broader socio-economic and cultural factors that hinder the effective realization of inclusive education in South Africa. Lastly, the review focused on the critical role of support structures, particularly the District-Based Support Teams (DBST) and School-Based Support Teams (SBST). It analysed their composition, responsibilities, and the collaborative efforts they engage in to support schools, teachers, and other stakeholders. The successes and challenges faced by these teams are examined, shedding light on how they influence the overall implementation of inclusive education. By integrating these aspects, the review provided a holistic perspective on the factors shaping inclusive education in South Africa, with special emphasis on the support structures that are essential to its success.

2.3 THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.3.1 Introduction

This sub-section reviews the literature relevant to shaping the conceptual framework of this study. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory will be presented as a conceptual framework for developing a generic collaborative support network for DBSTs and SBSTs. According Ravitch and Riggan (2017 as cited in Kivunja, 2018), the conceptual framework reflects the researcher's thought process in shaping the study. It includes identifying the research topic, defining the problem, formulating key questions, selecting relevant literature, and applying theoretical perspectives. It also outlines the chosen methodology, data collection tools, analysis methods, and interpretation of findings, ultimately guiding the study toward meaningful recommendations and conclusions. Thus, this section will argue that to provide a deeper understanding of the collaborative working relationship between the DBSTs and SBSTs in the pursuit to supporting learners and teachers in the Ekurhuleni South district, there needs to be a holistic and operative theory such as the bio-ecological theory to fully comprehend the relationship amongst the people involved in providing support(DBST and SBST), and those being provided with support (learners and teachers). Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory of the five nested system will show that it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the relationships between the individual and the multiple systems they are connected to form a comprehensive perspective. The five nested systems are the Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems, and Chronosystems.

Donald et al. (2010) allege that the theory emphasizes the influence of multiple interconnected systems on an individual's development and functioning. In other words, the theory illuminates the complexities of influences, and interactions between interconnected individuals. Therefore, this section will show how the individual characteristics of team members (Microsystem) and their interactions with each other (Mesosystem) are affected and influenced by broader policies (SIAS, and EWP6) and cultural contexts (Exosystem and Macrosystem).

2.3.2 Microsystem

According to Engelbrecht et al. (2017, as cited in Mkwanazi, 2023, p. 7) "the microsystem is the immediate environment and involves a pattern of roles, activities,

and interpersonal relations experienced among individuals and the systems closest to a person's life". This level allows me to examine the day-to-day interactions between the DBST, SBST, and teachers, exploring how their relationships impact the implementation of inclusive education strategies. Olechowska (2020) says that Bronfenbrenner places particular emphasis on the microsystem by positioning it at the core of his ecological systems theory. The microsystem encompasses the individual and their dynamic interactions with both the family environment and, where relevant, institutional settings that serve as the immediate context for their development. This is the sphere where the individual is physically present and actively engaged. According to Donald et al. (2020), relationships and patterns in the micro-system shape many aspects of cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development. Thus, when the immediate environment of individual members of the DBST and the individual members of the SBST and parents does not allow for a fruitful communication then collaboration is hampered. This highlights how the relationship between the DBST, SBST, and parents interacts at the microsystemic level of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model.

2.3.3 Mesosystem

According to Olechowska (2020), the processes taking place in different environments are not independent of each other. Events taking place in the learner's family home affect their learning at school and vice versa. This type of interaction between microsystems, Bronfenbrenner calls it the mesosystem. For a child these can be interactions between home, school and peers, for adults, interactions between family, work and social life. A mesosystem is created or expanded every time an individual moves into a new environment. In this way it becomes a system of microsystems. So, in simpler words, the mesosystem is the continuous interaction between a set of microsystems. Therefore, in this study, the mesosystem is represented by how the collaboration between the SBST and DBST influences the support provided to teachers, and subsequently, how these collaborative efforts impact the learners' learning environments. Mkwanazi (2023) beautifully illustrates how the mesosystem impacts the collaboration between the DBST, SBST, and teachers by highlighting that the way inclusive education is communicated to teachers can shape their reactions, either positively or negatively.

2.3.4 Exosystem

According to Olechowska (2020) Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls an exosystem one or more environments in which the individual does not actively participate. Although it does not directly affect the individual, the exosystem is also important for their development. The exosystem considers external factors that indirectly affect the individual. In the study, this level explores how external influences, such as policies, community involvement, or service delivery, impact the collaborative efforts between the DBSTs, SBSTs, and teachers in promoting inclusive education. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, the exosystem encompasses the broader social systems and policies that indirectly influence the experiences and interactions within the microsystem (such as schools and classrooms). Policies like White Paper 6 and the SIAS (Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support) policy impact members of the school-Based Support Team (SBST) and the District-Based Support Team (DBST) at the exosystem level by shaping the broader context in which these support structures operate. For example, The SIAS policy introduces a structured approach to identifying and addressing learning barriers, which directly affects the SBST's procedures. SBST members must follow the SIAS guidelines for screening, assessment, and providing support, impacting how they interact with learners and implement interventions.

2.3.5 Macrosystem

According to Olechowska (2020), another system identified by Bronfenbrenner is the macrosystem which refers to the impact of systems further away from the centre (political, economic, educational, social, economic, etc. This means that the macrosystem involves dominant social, cultural, and economic structures and beliefs, values, and practices of a particular society that influence all systems (Engelbrecht et al., 2013). The macrosystem can significantly impact the collaboration between the school-Based Support Team (SBST) and the District-Based Support Team (DBST). The attitudes, cultural beliefs, and values held by the district officials, SBST members, and teachers affect the collaboration between the parties and consequently affect the support to be provided to a learner with learning barriers. These attitudes and beliefs are not values, but they are culturally and politically based belief that could possibly emanate from apartheid. According to Naicker (2000, p. 27) "apartheid education in South Africa promoted race, class, gender and ethnic divisions and has emphasised separateness, rather than common citizenship and nationhood". For example, in a society that prioritizes the principles of inclusive education, there may be greater emphasis on teamwork and integrated support approaches, encouraging closer collaboration between SBSTs and DBSTs to ensure cohesive support for all learners.

2.3.6 Chronosystem

The chronosystem exemplifies the patterning of events and transitions that occur over the course of an individual's life. It considers how the movement of time impacts or influences an individual (Gonzales, 2020). The time spent in collaborative activities between the DBST, SBST, and teachers determines whether it is used effectively to support learners with learning barriers or used ineffectively, consequently failing to provide support. In the context of this study, the chronosystem becomes evident in how time is invested and managed in collaborative practices between the District-Based Support Team (DBST), School-Based Support Team (SBST), and teachers. The frequency, duration, and consistency of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), classroom visits, workshops, and feedback sessions significantly impact the quality of support provided by the support structures to learners experiencing barriers to learning.

2.4 Conclusion

This sub-section demonstrated that a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative working relationship between DBSTs and SBSTs in supporting learners and teachers in the Ekurhuleni South district requires the application of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory. By examining the five nested systems—Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems, and Chronosystems—the theory provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between individual team members of the DBST and the SBST, their interactions, and the broader policies and declarations such as the SIAS, and Education White Paper 6, and cultural contexts that shape these dynamics. This holistic approach revealed how these interconnected systems influence the effectiveness of support structures, highlighting the importance of considering multiple layers of influence in the pursuit of inclusive education.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design adopted in this study, which investigates the effectiveness of the collaborative working relationship between the DBST and SBST in primary schools within the Ekurhuleni South District. It begins by explaining and justifying the qualitative research design approach. The chapter then details the research methods used, specifically individual semi-structured interviews and document analysis (school policies). Following this, the sampling method of the study is highlighted and justified. The chapter proceeds to discuss the data analysis method employed, specifically thematic data analysis. It then addresses the reliability and trustworthiness of the data collected, and finally, it dwells on the ethical considerations involved in the research.

3.2 Research Design

The epistemological assumption of this study is that “the key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Jossey-Bass, 2002). The collaborative efforts to enhance inclusive education by individuals in the support structures (DBST and SBST) is influenced by their shared views on the challenges, roles and successes within their district. According to Crotty, (2003, as cited in Wood, 2022), epistemology is a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know. Therefore, this study takes an epistemological stance of a qualitative research approach based on constructionism. “Constructionism is the view that all knowledge and all meaningful reality is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of the interactions between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially local context” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42). This implies that the concept of "constructionism" holds that all meaningful reality and knowledge are actively constructed through interactions between individuals and their surroundings, rather than being inherent or objective. These constructed understandings are then shaped and transmitted within particular social or ‘local' contexts.

The constructionist view is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory in that it views knowledge and practices of inclusive education as being developed through the interactions of the stakeholders (e. g. parents, teachers, and the support teams) and their local educational contexts. It also emphasises on the need to design inclusive measures that are suitable to the social, cultural and systemic context of Ekurhuleni South district primary schools. The research investigates the realities of the participants through different research instruments such as interviews and document analysis. It takes a constructionist epistemological stance through trying to find answers to the following question: What are the challenges and successes experienced by District Based Support Teams, School Based Support Teams, and teachers in trying to collaborate effectively to fulfil the mandate from Education White Paper 6 in supporting teachers, and learners?

According to Castleberry and Nolen (2018, p. 808)," the primary aim of qualitative research is to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon through the insights of those who have directly experienced the phenomenon, recognizing the value of participants' unique viewpoint that can only be understood within the context of their experience and worldview". Therefore, a qualitative research approach was undertaken to research the effectiveness of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers. Creswell and Poth (2013, p.02) state that "an understanding of the philosophical assumptions behind qualitative research begins with assessing where it fits within the overall process of research, noting its importance as an element of research, and considering how to actively write it into a study". Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that qualitative research is based on the view that social phenomena, human dilemmas, and the nature of cases are situational and reveal experiential knowledge. The perceptions of DBST and SBST members regarding their roles, challenges, and achievements in promoting inclusive education are examined in this study. It is a qualitative approach not only because qualitative research allows for rich, descriptive data that helps understand the complexities of educational support structures but because a quantitative analysis can miss the profound insights that the lived experiences of the SBST and DBST members can offer. Berg (2003, as cited in Maphumulo, 2019) observes that qualitative research helps the researcher to understand and explain the meaning of phenomena with as little disruption from the natural setting as possible. Through a qualitative inquiry, the study was enabled to

explore how the SBST and DBST members perceive their responsibilities, how they collaborate, and what factors enhance or hinder inclusive education. The approach is sensitive to participants' social identities and allows the researcher to engage in systematic reflection (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This implies that this study examines how the SBST and DBST collaborate, which involves relationships, communication, and teamwork—all best understood through qualitative research. Qualitative research takes a naturalistic approach by exploring the firsthand experiences of DBST officials and SBST members in their everyday roles (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This statement suggests that qualitative research is centred to exploring real-world settings and gaining insight into individuals' personal experiences. In this study, by engaging directly with the DBST officials and SBST members, the research prioritized capturing their authentic perspectives in their natural settings. This means the study did not attempt to manipulate or control the environment or participants but instead sought to understand the complexities and nuances of their day-to-day interactions, roles, and challenges in promoting inclusive education.

This study followed an interpretative, constructive, and descriptive approach. Jossey-Bass (2002, p. 06) contends that “a basic interpretative and descriptive qualitative study exemplifies all the characteristics of a qualitative research. The researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, the strategy is inductive; the outcome is descriptive”. Therefore, this research is interested in exploring how the DBST and SBST members understand and navigate inclusive education in their specific context. The study is inductive in nature, meaning insights will emerge from the data, leading to descriptive outcomes that capture the participants' authentic perspectives on collaboration and support structures. The study utilized a component of a case study design approach since it pays close attention to the environment, which is two mainstream primary schools in the Ekurhuleni South district, one school is a quintile three and the other is a quintile four. Van Dyk (2019) alleges that quintiles classify schools into five categories based on socioeconomic status, with quintile one indicating the least affluent schools and quintile five representing the most affluent. It employed a case study because a case study helps to unpack the challenges and successes of the collaboration between the DBST and the SBST. It is context specific. Looking at how policies create and influence their structures allow this study to compare how different environments affect the

effectiveness of policy implementation or non- policy implementation. These differences may be due to different quintile levels of the schools as quintile levels determine the school size, resources and allocation, and sometimes staff expertise. So, it is for these reasons I have a case study element even though my study is not a case study. In addition, cases are valuable in exploring real-life situations where dynamic processes change with time (Fourie, 2017). Thus, making case study designs worthwhile and practical for examining how the DBSTs and SBSTs implement policies. This design allowed the researcher to describe multiple perspectives, to explore conflicting views and the influences of people's interactions. Qualitative methods in a case study offer the space to explore complexities and experiences in depth (Fourie, 2017). The approach allowed the research to consider the lived experiences of all the stakeholders and provides an opportunity to get to understand the participants' roles and how they make sense of relationships with each other. All the participants that took part in this study shared their knowledge, wisdom, and lived experiences regarding the collaboration between the two support structures.

3.3 Research instruments

Research interviews, specifically, aim to generate knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Research interviews, particularly semi-structured ones, aim to generate knowledge by allowing participants to respond to open-ended enquiries using their ideas, emotions, and experiences. Therefore, the study gathered information using document analysis and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interview questions used to guide these interviews are included in Appendix 2. Interviewing, along with document analysis, is one of the major ways qualitative researchers generate and collect data from the research studies (Chenail, 2011, p. 255). Various types of interviews have distinct objectives. In this study, semi-structured individual interviews were used to gain in-depth insights into the experiences, perceptions, and practices of SBST members and a DBST official regarding their collaborative efforts in supporting inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District. According to Madill (2012) the unstructured interview uses a free-flowing conversational style. On the other hand, the semi-structured employ open-ended, nonleading inquiries; however, the narrative style places more emphasis on eliciting personal tales with little assistance from the researcher. This study employed semi-structured interviews because they allow the DBST and SBST members to share their personal

experiences and challenges in promoting inclusive education, providing rich, in-depth insights with minimal researcher influence). According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021, as cited in Xu et al., 2023), one key advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they provide a clear direction while allowing the researcher an opportunity to focus on key subjects while maintaining the flexibility to explore pertinent ideas that arise during the process of the interview.

Interviews were scheduled with questions focusing on the collaborative working relationship between the DBSTs and the SBSTs in township ordinary primary schools. Each interview was conducted for the time period not more than 30 minutes, all interviews ranged between 20 to 30 minutes. Furthermore, careful consideration was taken in the selection of the venue for interviews. The scheduled interviews took place in the staffroom of the school to avoid any interruptions. The interviews were scheduled at a time that was most suitable for the participants, which is after school hours so as to not interrupt teaching time. All the participants of this study were interviewed individually, and they were provided with informed consent forms (Appendix 4) by the researcher prior the interviews' commencement. The consent forms were completed, signed by the participants, and then collected by the researcher.

The interviews shed more insights for the researcher with regards to the sampled participant's aspirations, experiences, perspectives, opinions and experiences of the collaborative working relationship between the DBST and the SBST. Seven (7) of the participants agreed to be recorded and one participant chose to not be recorded and opted that the researcher writes down the responses from the participant. The interviews were carried out by the researcher of the study because "the researcher is the key person in obtaining data from respondents. It is through the researcher's facilitative interaction that a context is created where respondents share rich data regarding their experiences and lifeworld. It is the researcher that facilitates the flow of communication, and identifies cues, and it is the researcher that sets respondents at ease. This also contributes to a therapeutic effect for the respondents because they are listened to" (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003, p. 418, as cited in Chenail.2011, p. 255).

The study also collected data in the form of document analysis. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer based and Internet transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this study, document analysis focused specifically on SBST school policies from the two schools involved. By reviewing these policies, the research was able to gain insights into the formal structures, roles, and responsibilities outlined for SBST teams, as well as any guidelines or procedures for supporting inclusive education. This analysis provided a framework for understanding how the policies align with or differ from the practical experiences of the SBST members.

3.4 Sampling methods

According to Leddy and Ormrod (2014, as cited in Mkwanazi, 2023), sampling techniques fall under two headings: probability and non-probability. The probability approach is supported by randomness. According to Noor et al. (2002), random sampling is favourable in uniformly selected populations. In this selection method, each person has an equal chance to partake in the study, where the selection process is entirely random and based on luck. “Non-probability on the other hand is to investigate a phenomenon in depth” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This highlights that the selected participants are intentionally chosen for their abilities and capabilities so that they can provide information that is rich pertaining the topics of interest. Therefore, this investigation took the non-probability approach, the selection was done purposely in order to explore the collaborative working relationship of inclusive education support structures. Sampling methods for qualitative inquiry are usually assumed to be selected purposefully to yield cases that are ‘information rich (Patton, 2002, as cited in Lawrence et al., 2013). Lawrence et al. (2013) allege that “[purposeful] cases for study are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative. That is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling is aimed at insight into the phenomenon”. Thus, purposeful sampling was employed in the identification of the institutions and the participants. This sampling method is widely used in qualitative research for the selection and identification of rich information cases that are related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002, as

cited in Lawrence et al., 2013). Creswell (2007) shares the same sentiments, as they say purposeful sampling is a key strategy in qualitative research, where the researcher selects specific sites and individuals for the study because they are directly relevant to the central phenomena and can provide valuable insights into the research problem. Additionally, he emphasizes that researchers must carefully decide what or who to sample, determine the number of participants or sites, and choose the appropriate sampling procedure.

This study drew data from two sampled mainstream primary schools from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). The schools are based in the Ekurhuleni South District, circuit three (03). Both schools use the English language as their intermediate phase language of learning and teaching. The schools are non-fee-paying schools, one in quintile three, the other in quintile four. Based on socioeconomic level, schools are categorized into five groups using quintiles; the least wealthy schools are in quintile one, and the most affluent schools are in quintile five (Van Dyk, 2019). The schools were selected purposefully based on the reason that they are reported to have partially functional SBST committees. My access to entry into the schools was through the relationships I have established with the schools and district officials, relationships that I have nurtured through my position as an SBST PLC (Professional Learning Community) secretary. The participants of this study are seven SBST committee members of the respective schools, and one district official. The study was intended to include 9 participants, but only 8 were involved because one of the SBST members holds two positions within the SBST committee at a single school. Consequently, the study interviewed 8 participants: one district official and four participants from one school, and three participants from another school.

The participants displayed all the characteristics the researcher desires. They represent a diverse range of experiences with the phenomenon of interest. They are full-time employees of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE); they are all primary schools' representatives. Moreover, they showed willingness and availability to participate in the study. They are individuals who can express their experiences and opinions articulately.

The participants will be referred to through alpha numeric references to protect their identities. For the educators, this is based on the school at which they are based. For example:

Participants from School one (1):

Participant one (1) = P1.1

Participant two (2) = P1.2

Participants from School two (2):

Participant one (1) = P2.1

Participant two (2) = P2.2

Similarly, school policies are identified according to the school from which they originate. For example:

School Policy from School one (1) = SP1

School Policy from School two (2) = SP2

Finally, the reference designated for the district official is DO1 The figure below illustrates the roles of each of the participants, and how they are affiliated to the support structures associated with this study.

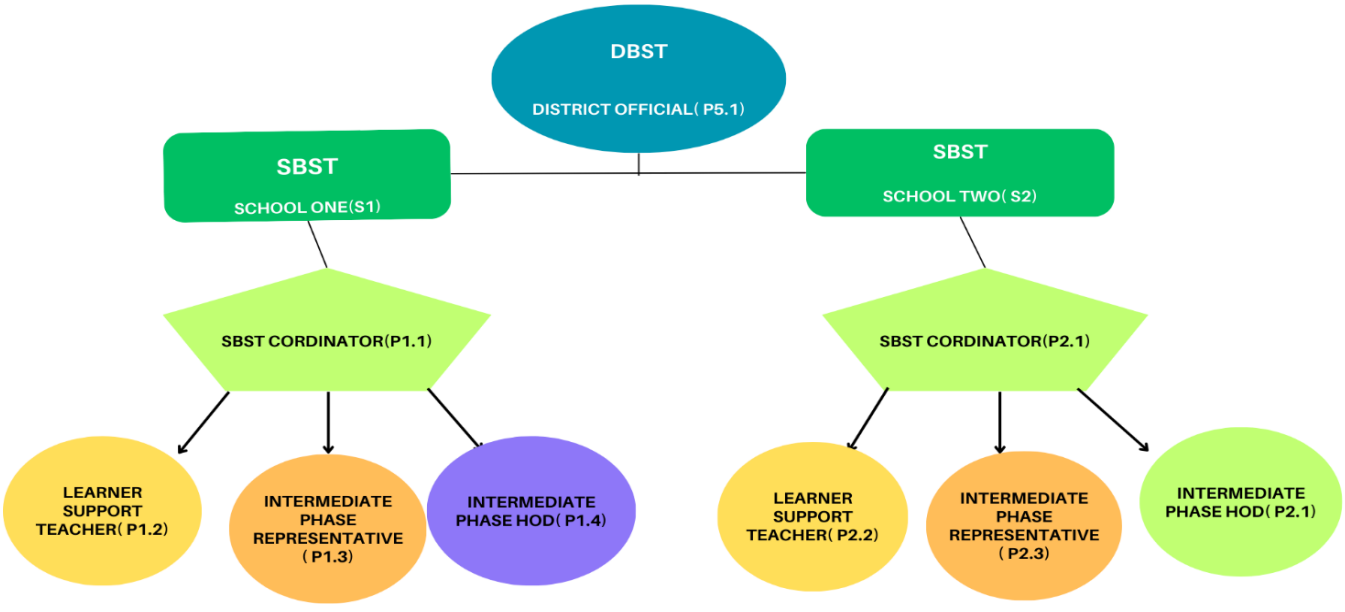


Figure 3.4.1: Participants and school site references.

As can be seen from figure 3.4.1, the first participant from each school is the SBST coordinator, while participants 2, 3 and 4 from each school are the learner support teacher, the phase representative, and the head of division (HOD), respectively. Further information about the participants is offered in Figure 3.4.2, below

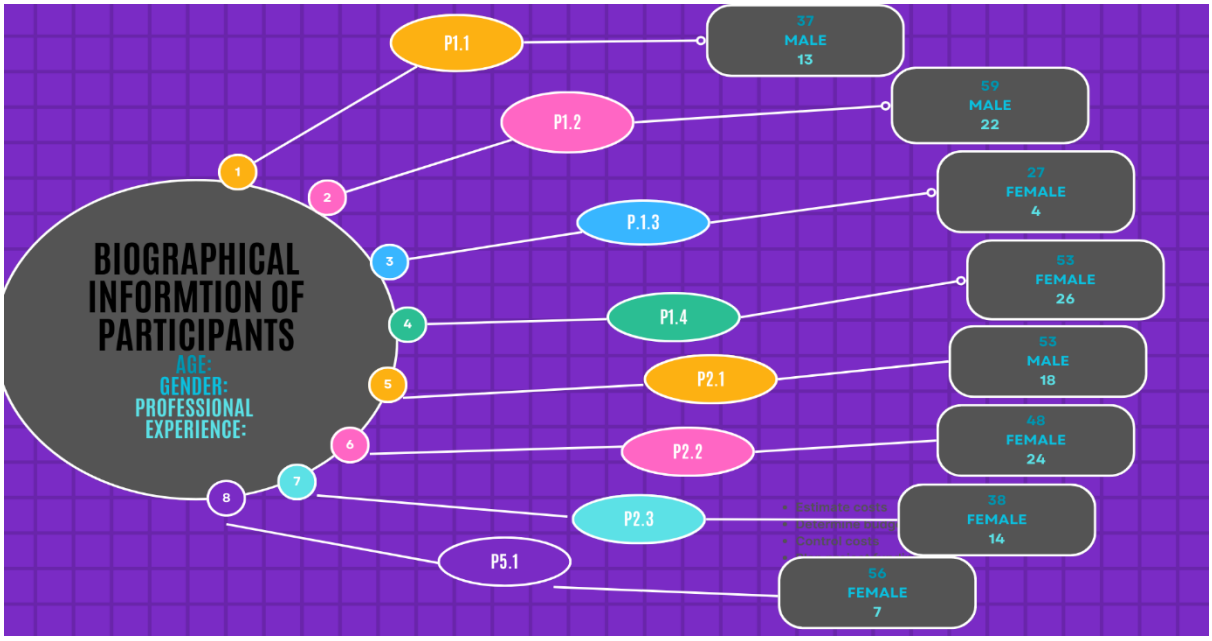


Figure 3.4.2: Biographical information of participants.

Figure 3.4.2 shows the biographical information of the participants. The demographics of participants, such as gender, age, and years of experience, are important because they provide insight into how these factors may influence the perspectives and roles of DBST and SBST members in promoting inclusive education. Understanding these demographics helps to identify patterns and variations in their approaches, ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced interpretation of the research findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data from this study was analysed using a qualitative approach. A qualitative research approach was most suitable for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences, perceptions, and practices of both SBST members and the DBST official. Qualitative data analysis "is a generic term that refers to a group of methods and ways of collecting and analysing data that are interpretations or explanatory in nature and focus on meaning" (Noble and Smith, 2014). This analysis aimed to uncover insights into the implementation and impact of

the local policies such as the SIAS policy and White Paper 6 on the collaboration of the SBST and the DBST. The study transcribed recorded interviews in verbatim using the “Cockatoo” and “Evernote” transcription tools, followed by a detailed analysis of the transcribed data in conjunction with document analysis of the SBST school policies. “Data transcription is an essential and critical stage of qualitative research” (Point and Baruch, 2023, p. 1). This study used two transcription tools to make sure the data was accurate and clear. Comparing the two helped me check for mistakes and correct them. This made the information more trustworthy. Furthermore, I chose two tools because each free trial only allowed four transcriptions before a 72-hour wait, so using both saved time and helped me work faster. Also, because, “manual transcription is a time-consuming process that is often outsourced to external transcribers”(Bokhove & Downey, 2018, p. 1). According to Moore (2015, p. 254) Automatic speech recognition (ASR) provides a way to lessen the workload involved in transcribing audio recordings of speech. Transcription tools refer to the software applications powered by ASR.

Data analysis is a systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting data to provide an explanation of a single phenomenon of interest (Macmillan & Schumacher, 1997, as cited in Ngulube, 2015). This study utilized a thematic data analysis approach. Thwala (2021) states that data analysis is the process of analysing and interpreting data by locating and emphasising recurrent themes or patterns is known as thematic analysis. It facilitates the flexible simplification of vast amounts of data and is simple to incorporate with other data analysis methods, it is regarded as a descriptive approach. It scrutinizes the data collected with the of aim extracting useful information for the study. A consistent method across many qualitative study designs, thematic data analysis is a popular technique for analysing data in qualitative research. (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis is a technique for systematically identifying, categorizing, and analysing meaning patterns (themes) in a dataset that enables the researcher to perceive and understand similar meanings and experiences by concentrating on meaning across that data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, as cited in Mkwanazi, 2023). De Vaus (2013) suggests that organizing data into smaller, manageable sets of meaningful themes and sub-themes helps in shaping the data into a coherent narrative or picture related to the study's objectives. This approach ensures a well-rounded response to the research questions by staying

true to the study's objectives. It emphasizes key themes and sub-themes that directly relate to the roles and responsibilities of the DBST and SBST in promoting inclusive education. It allows for a detailed exploration of how themes are shaped by participants' demographics, warranting the results are both comprehensive and meaningful to the research's objectives.

The study began by coding the data. According to Elliot (2018), coding is a key step in qualitative research, allowing researchers to break down data into meaningful segments. This process is essential for analysis, helping to uncover new insights and patterns from the information collected. Data coding assisted the researcher in identifying themes to ensure that the data collected is organized and managed meaningfully. A code can be viewed as the smallest unit of meaning that can be assigned to data. Hence Creswell (2015, p. 156) alleges that "coding is the process of analysing qualitative data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way". Coding made it easy for researcher to search data so that they can explore similarities and recognize patterns that may need further analysis. For example, in this study, coding the interview transcripts of DBST and SBST members allowed the researcher to categorize responses related to challenges in collaboration and successes in implementing inclusive education. This coding made it easier to compare how different participants—based on their years of experience or roles—described their experiences, helping the study identify common patterns. These patterns included recurring references to delayed referrals, insufficient feedback loops between the DBST and SBST, and disparities in the understanding of inclusive education policies. Coding also brought attention to environmental and contextual factors—such as school quintile levels, community socio-economic challenges, and resource availability—that influenced how collaboration was executed. This allowed the researcher to draw nuanced comparisons between the two schools and to interpret how these patterns reflect broader systemic strengths and gaps in supporting inclusive education within the Ekurhuleni South district.

Data coding was followed by reviewing codes across data sets. For instance, in theme six, which focuses on collaboration with other stakeholders, the data revealed that parental involvement is limited, as they are sometimes invited to meetings to discuss their children's academic performance. However, it was observed that they rarely attend these meetings unless the issue is of serious concern such as behavioural

issues and bullying. This observation was categorized under parental involvement in the study.

The next step was to organize the codes into themes. There is a broad distinction between a code and a theme in data analysis. Themes “are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea. Hence, we have “codes at a primary level and themes at a secondary level” (Creswell, 2013, p.186 as cited in Elliot, 2018). I used a table to help organize the data of the study. Organization of data required me to use numerous techniques to identify themes. The study employed keywords and frequency analysis (word repetition) to identify themes. For instance, SBST members frequently used terms such as *referral, support,* and *intervention.* Another word-based technique used was indigenous categories, as described by Ryan and Bernard (2000), this approach suggests that specialized vocabulary reflects experience and expertise. In this context, support team members commonly used abbreviations like ISP, PLC, and SNA—terms that signify professional belonging within the education sector, particularly among SBST and DBST members.

The study includes a limited number of six themes, each containing a varying number of sub-themes. According to Saldana (2016, p. 25, as cited in Elliot, 2018)” the final number of major themes or concepts should be held to a minimum…but there is no standardized or magic number to achieve”. The following were considered to be the most relevant to this study:

1. The roles and responsibilities of the support structures.
2. The nature of collaboration.
3. Support structures and the teachers.
4. Feedback and communication between support structures.
5. Resource allocation and support.
6. Collaboration with other stakeholders.

These themes provide a structured understanding of how the DBST and SBST collaborate in promoting inclusive education. Examining the roles and responsibilities of these support structures clarifies their mandates in assisting learners and educators. The nature of collaboration highlights how these teams work together to ensure effective intervention. Investigating support structures and teachers sheds light on the extent of assistance provided to educators in implementing inclusive practices.

Feedback and communication between these structures are essential for monitoring progress and addressing challenges. Resource allocation and support reveal the constraints or enablers affecting the teams' efficiency. Lastly, working alongside various stakeholders, including parents, healthcare professionals, psychologists, and policymakers, highlights the vital role that broader networks play in advancing inclusive education. These interconnected themes align with the study's objective of assessing the successes and challenges of DBST and SBST collaboration in Ekurhuleni South district primary schools.

3.6 Reliability and trustworthiness

Merriam (2009, as cited in Mfuthwana and Dreyer, 2018, p. 50) “emphasises the importance of gaining valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner while conducting qualitative research”. Lincoln and Guba's (2007) study shows the same correlation, but they further add that in qualitative studies, researchers use credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability as standards for upholding trustworthiness in the results obtained. ‘Credibility asks "how congruent are the findings with reality?"’ (Stahl & King, 2020). The study's credibility was increased by conducting in-depth and comprehensive interviews with participants. Credibility is mainly attained through adhering to ethical guidelines. This means that the study adhered to ethical guidelines, by following the University of the Witwatersrand ethical application procedures, creating informed consent for the participants, ensuring confidentiality, and avoiding any form of manipulation. Furthermore, the credibility of this study is validated by its findings, which are credible due to the diverse data collection methods employed. The participants, all members of the supporting teams, were experts in the subject matter.

The dependability and confirmability of the study are maintained throughout the study. Dependability is a perspective on trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985)." It is the trust in trustworthy” (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26). This means that credibility serves as an ethical standard based on the belief that the data collected in the research is accurate and dependable, thereby maintaining the principles of integrity and honesty. Confirmability is very important in the validity and trustworthiness of research. “It is getting as close to the objective reality as qualitative research can get” (Stahl & King, 2020, p. 27). The confirmability of the study was

ascertained by the participants and other researchers as they perused and reviewed the data collected. Meaning, the DBST official and interviewed SBST members were provided with their respective interview transcripts so that they can confirm the validity and trustworthiness of the data collected from them. This was an opportunity for the participants to review and verify the accuracy of their responses, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives were correctly represented.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Through my position as an SBST deputy coordinator of my school, I was elected to be an SBST PLC (Professional Learning Community) secretary in Circuit Three, Ekurhuleni South district. This position has provided me with an opportunity to know other SBST members from neighbouring schools. The selected schools as sites of investigation have their representatives in the SBST PLC in Circuit Three, Ekurhuleni South. This is how I managed to gain entry into the schools; through the relationships I have built with the SBST representatives of the selected schools, although I had to send a permission letter to the principal to gain formal entry and conduct interviews. These relationships with the SBST school representatives required me to hold briefing sessions with the representing participants and inform them how our relationship will not influence the processes of data collection. Full disclosure of the ethical considerations was made to the participants. According to Sada and Maldonado (2007), purposive sampling is a process of selecting useful participants that can provide appropriate information for the study purpose. Accordingly, as a member of the SBST PLC, my direct interactions with the SBST coordinators from various schools enabled me to intentionally select participants who could provide essential information for the study. My role facilitated easy communication with these participants, allowed me to explain the study and its objectives. It was crucial that I ensured participants understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. At no point did I use my position to exert any undue influence on their decision to participate or not. Once we reached an agreement, I obtained their informed consent to participate in the study.

Smith (2003, p. 56) posits that “researchers face an array of ethical requirements. They must meet professional, institutional, and federal standards for conducting research with human participants”. This is particularly correct as this study adhered to

the correct and appropriate requirements for obtaining permission to conduct research with human participants. The study ensured that it obtains approval from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand; the official ethics clearance letter can be found in Appendix 5. It also obtained permission from the Gauteng Department of Education, as well as the SGBs and school principals of the sites that are sampled for the research which can be found in Appendix 6. The participants, namely the DBST official, and SBST members, were given sufficient time to review the proposal to be part of the study so that they make informed choices as voluntary participants. They received letters written to them informing them that they are the targeted voluntary contributors of the research. They were given information about the main purpose of the study, and their right to withdraw from the research at any given time (Smith, 2003). As stated by Greaney et al. (2012, p. 39), “the researcher must ensure that the participants have the capacity and authorization, under law to give consent”. The participants in this study are well-educated individuals, which means they possessed a clear understanding of the consent process. They were able to fully comprehend the purpose of the research, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. As a researcher, I was mindful of power relations, ensuring that my position did not influence the participants' decisions.

In accordance with the Belmont report (1978), the principle of beneficence obligates the researcher to prioritize and safeguard the well-being of participants. Thus, there is an obligation to take full responsibility for maintaining the respect, privacy, and confidentiality of the participants throughout the study. The participants were informed on how the data will be shared anonymously, and this was also noted in the consent forms. Alphanumeric representations were utilized to protect the true identities of the participants involved in the study. Identity should be protected unless a participant wishes to be acknowledged for taking part in the research process as a contributor (Greaney et al., 2012). All the participant agreed to remain anonymous. Acknowledgment begs the question of the risks and benefits of taking part in the research. In this study, the participants were informed that there are no benefits or risks that will cause any form of discomfort. However, through the interactions, the processes of data collection might provide the DBST and the SBST with strategies on how to collaborate effectively.

3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the research design employed to assess the effectiveness of the collaborative working relationship between the DBST and SBST in primary schools within the Ekurhuleni South District. It began with a justification for the qualitative research approach, which was well-suited to answering the research questions by allowing for an in-depth exploration of the roles and collaborative efforts of the support teams. The chapter proceeded to detail the methods used in the research, the methods included individual interviews that are semi-structured, and document analysis of SBST school policies. These methods are effective in providing rich, detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of key participants. The study used purposive sampling to select participants who had direct experience with the collaborative efforts of DBST and SBST, offering a comprehensive view of the research topic. The thematic data analysis process helped identify key patterns and themes, revealing the nuances of collaboration and challenges faced by the teams. Measures to ensure data reliability and trustworthiness were also explained, with a focus on the maintaining the ethical considerations involved in the study, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants, were addressed, ensuring that the research was conducted with integrity and transparency. Dependability and credibility were also maintained throughout the research process. Finally, the ethical considerations involved in the study, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants, were addressed, ensuring that the research was conducted with integrity and transparency. Together, these elements aligned with the research aims, ensuring that the study was methodologically sound, ethically grounded, and ultimately provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of DBST and SBST collaboration in promoting inclusive education.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

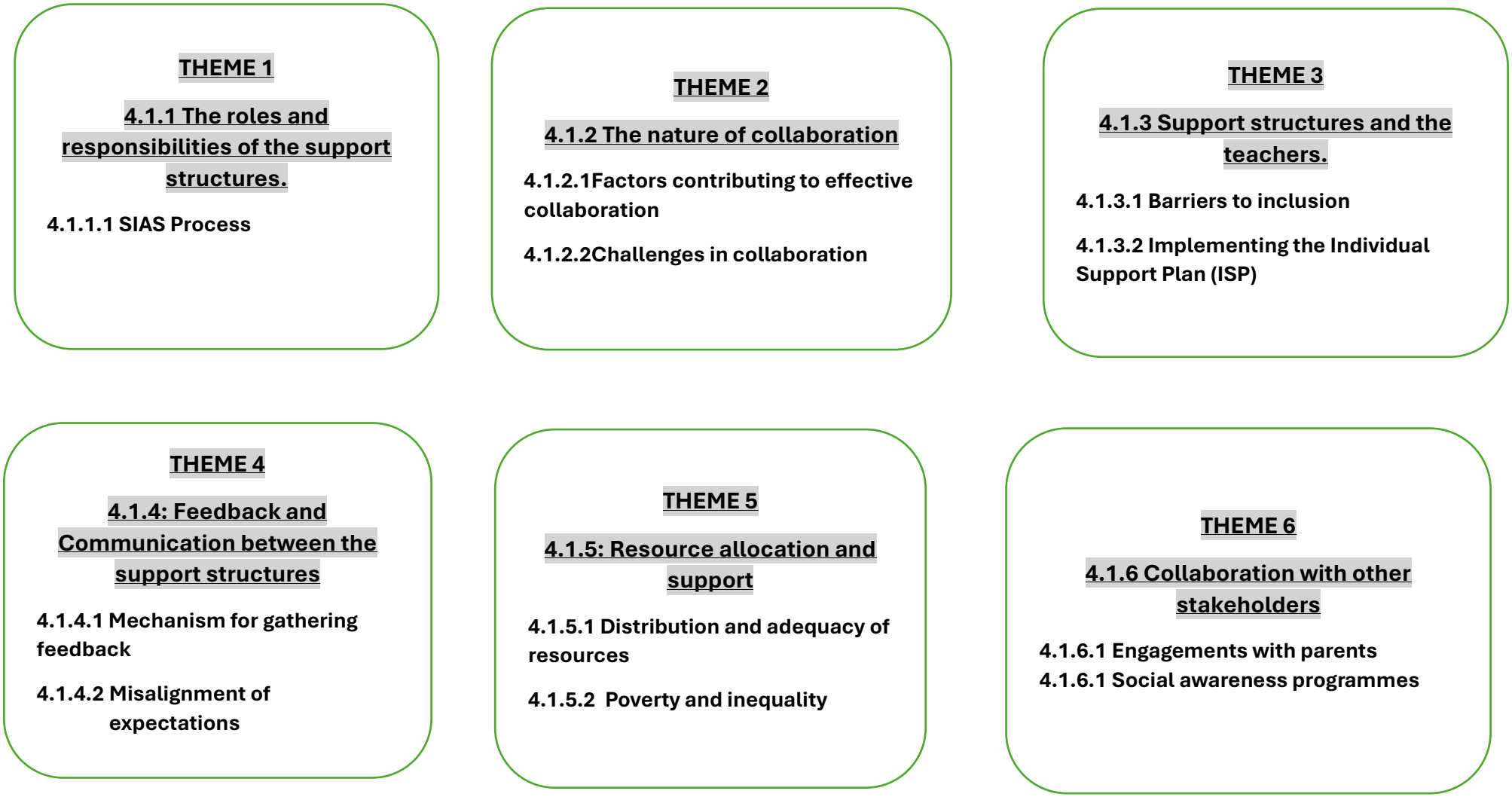
4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the engagement with the empirical data gathered. It delves into the heart of the research by presenting and analysing the data collected on the collaboration between the District-Based Support Team (DBST) and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) in promoting inclusive education within Ekurhuleni South. The focus of this study is to understand how these two support structures work together, the successes they have achieved, and the challenges they face in fostering an inclusive educational environment.

Using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory as the theoretical framework, this chapter explores the interactions within and between the DBST and SBST, viewing these teams as integral components of the larger ecological system that influences the educational experiences of learners, and the teachers they support. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the multiple layers of influence, from immediate settings such as schools to broader systemic and policy contexts, which shape the collaborative efforts of these support structures.

In this chapter, the data will be presented thematically, reflecting the key aspects of collaboration, success stories, and challenges encountered by the DBST and SBST. as mentioned in the data analysis section, there are six themes identified for this study. These themes have sub-themes within them, sub-themes such as challenges in collaboration, distribution and adequacy of resources, and social and awareness programmes; to name a few. The themes are inductively organized around the respective SBST members and the collaboration with the DBST. These themes will not only highlight the current state of inclusive education in the district but also provide insights into how these teams navigate their roles within the complex educational ecosystem. The findings will be discussed in relation to Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework, offering a profound comprehension of the dynamic interactions at play in the promotion of inclusive practices between the DBST and the SBST. In the following sections, the study will present a figure of the "summary of themes" and then it will provide a section on the discussion of the identified themes.

Figure 4.1: A summary of themes that emerged from coding the interview transcripts.



4.2 Discussion of identified themes and sub-themes.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse these interviews and policy documents, combined with the interpretation and discussion of the research findings through the lenses of Bronfenbrenner's bio ecological theory. The themes identified highlight the functioning of the roles and responsibilities, the successes and challenges of collaboration between the DBST and the SBST in the Ekurhuleni South district. This section will interpret the data gathered through discussing the themes identified. The themes are also mentioned in the figure above, figure 4.1. It is worth noting that roles and responsibilities of the SBST and DBST are centred on providing support to teachers and learners, with the SBST focusing on school-level needs and the DBST offering district-wide assistance. Collaboration between these teams is essential for effective intervention. Effective support structures for teachers, including ongoing professional development and access to resources, are vital for fostering inclusive education. Feedback and communication between support structures are crucial for ensuring that interventions are timely and effective. Adequate resource allocation is necessary to empower both teams, but shortages in funding and materials can limit their impact. Finally, collaboration with other stakeholders, including parents, community organizations, and specialists, enhances the overall support system, although it requires clear communication and coordinated efforts to be truly effective. This section presents and discusses the main themes that emerged, focusing on the roles and responsibilities of the SBST and DBST, as well as their successes and challenges in collaboration, it is intended to present and explore each of the thematic sub-sections that follow. It also sets the foundation for the broader synthesis and reflection that takes place in Chapter 5.

4.2.1 Theme 1: The roles and responsibilities of the support structures.

The School-Based Support Team (SBST) and District-Based Support Team (DBST) play crucial roles in promoting inclusive education by offering assistance, resources, and guidance to both teachers and learners. The SBST is primarily responsible for identifying and addressing the specific needs of learners within the school, collaborating with teachers to develop and implement intervention strategies, and ensuring that appropriate support services are provided. The DBST, on the other hand,

offers additional support at the district level, assisting schools in accessing resources, training, and specialized services that are not available at the school level.

The data revealed that the various stakeholders had differing levels of awareness regarding their own roles and responsibilities, as well as those of others, within the DBST and SBST framework. It revealed a general lack of clear understanding among the SBST members and school staff regarding the composition and specific roles of the SBST and DBST. This lack of clarity in articulating the roles and responsibilities of both teams can lead to confusion and inefficiencies, ultimately hindering their effectiveness. While SBST members were generally unable to clearly describe their own roles and responsibilities, they were less informed about the DBST's functions.

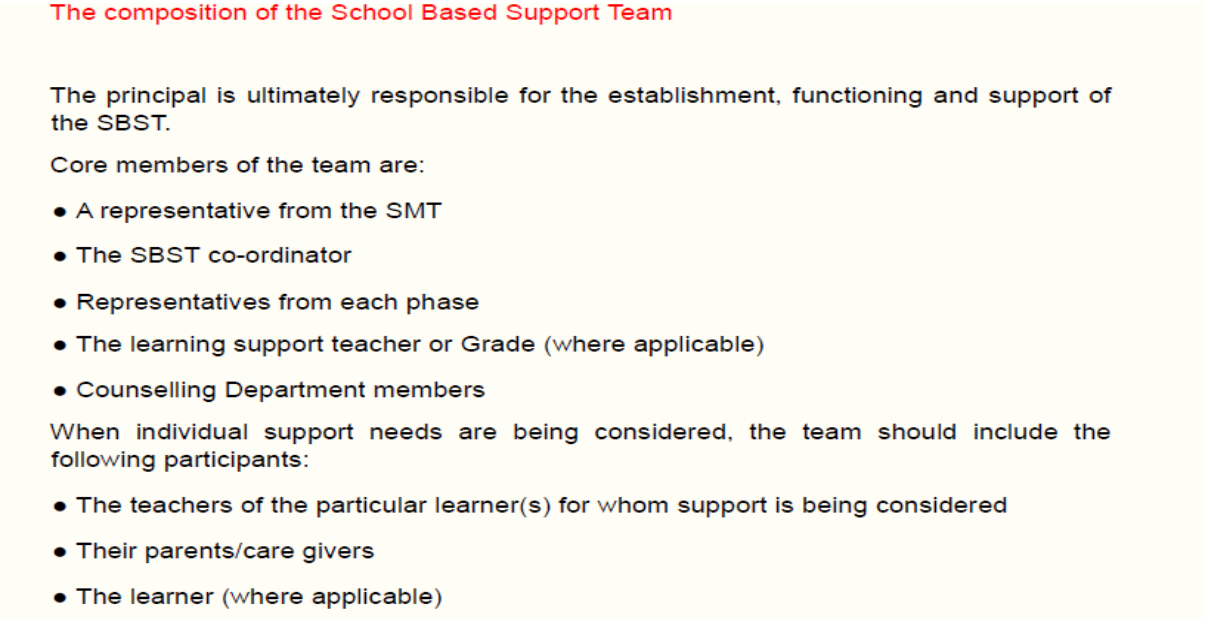
When posed a question about the roles and responsibilities of the support structures, **P1.3** said that: *I think the DBST is responsible for holding training for the SBST PLC and also teachers. They also help us with referrals and other things that are crucial for assisting our learners who are struggling. For us, it's a lot. We screen learners in term 1 and submit to the district, this learner we track them, if they don't do well, we track and submit. We complete SNA form. It's very long that thing. The SNA is also completed by the district at some point. The DBST also sends psychologists to see our struggling learners. Our learners are struggling yoh, its painful but we work with them to support them.*

Participant **P1.3**'s response demonstrates a limited and superficial understanding of the roles of the DBST. Additionally, the participant did not fully or accurately articulate the roles and responsibilities of the SBST, indicating a lack of comprehension regarding the SBST's functions. Furthermore, the participant notes that there is a lot of paperwork and administration to be done through the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) form. According to Mkwanazi's (2023) findings, Several SBST members thought the paperwork was cumbersome and reduced the team's effectiveness. This resonates with the participants, particularly, **P1.3**, in this study as most found the process of completing a SNA form too long and often contradictory.

P1.1 said that: *The roles and responsibilities are many and different, but I can speak mostly on the roles of the SBST, as I am an SBST committee member. Mostly, one of the roles is to come up with intervention strategies for learners struggling with Maths and Languages like Sepedi and English in our school. We follow the SIAS policy, which*

is to screen, identify, assess, and support learners with barriers to learning. The DBST trains us in workshop on how to fill in the SNA form and they also come and assess our kids.

The participant reveals a flawed understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the support structures as she talks about intervention strategies but does not explain the roles and responsibilities. While **P1.1** could not outline the roles and responsibilities of the SBST, the SBST policy outlined a clear understanding of the composition, and roles and responsibilities of the SBST within the school. **SP1** inscribes that:



The composition of the School Based Support Team

The principal is ultimately responsible for the establishment, functioning and support of the SBST.

Core members of the team are:

- A representative from the SMT
- The SBST co-ordinator
- Representatives from each phase
- The learning support teacher or Grade (where applicable)
- Counselling Department members

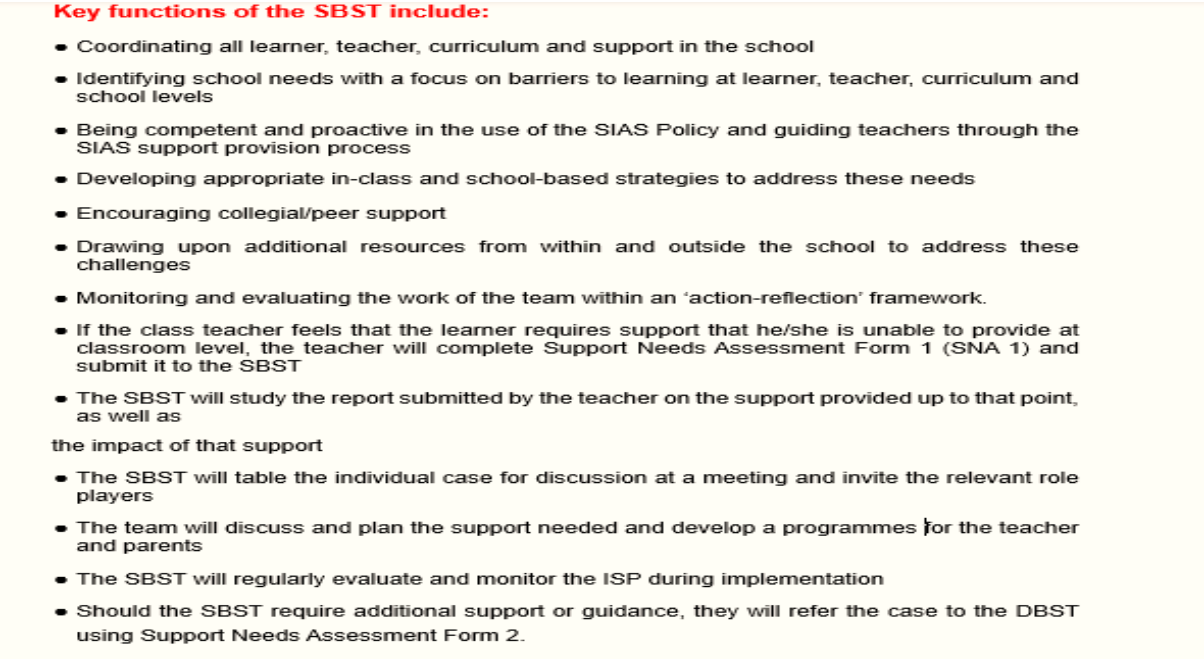
When individual support needs are being considered, the team should include the following participants:

- The teachers of the particular learner(s) for whom support is being considered
- Their parents/care givers
- The learner (where applicable)

Figure 4.2: Extract from school one SBST policy composition.

The above policy extract, figure **4.2** from school one provides a clear framework for how the SBST composition is structured within the school. **P1.1** has direct access to the policy; however, it seems that they have either not read it or are unfamiliar with its content.

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Key functions of the SBST include:

- Coordinating all learner, teacher, curriculum and support in the school
- Identifying school needs with a focus on barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and school levels
- Being competent and proactive in the use of the SIAS Policy and guiding teachers through the SIAS support provision process
- Developing appropriate in-class and school-based strategies to address these needs
- Encouraging collegial/peer support
- Drawing upon additional resources from within and outside the school to address these challenges
- Monitoring and evaluating the work of the team within an 'action-reflection' framework.
- If the class teacher feels that the learner requires support that he/she is unable to provide at classroom level, the teacher will complete Support Needs Assessment Form 1 (SNA 1) and submit it to the SBST
- The SBST will study the report submitted by the teacher on the support provided up to that point, as well as

the impact of that support

- The SBST will table the individual case for discussion at a meeting and invite the relevant role players
- The team will discuss and plan the support needed and develop a programmes for the teacher and parents
- The SBST will regularly evaluate and monitor the ISP during implementation
- Should the SBST require additional support or guidance, they will refer the case to the DBST using Support Needs Assessment Form 2.

Figure 4.3: **Extract from school one SBST key functions.**

While crucial information is provided in policy, **P1.1** appears not to understand the roles and responsibilities. The participant is a teacher from School One, which is the mentioned policy above. In contrast to the unclear understanding of the roles and responsibilities exhibited by **P1.1** and other teachers, the district official provided a clear and comprehensive explanation of the roles and responsibilities for both support structures. **DO1** knew the overall specific function of the support structures, they stated that: *It's very simple, for us, you know, our role is to provide support to the SBST and the SBST needs to support the learners and complete SNA 1 and 2 with the teachers and us we complete SNA 3. We work together, we work closely with the coordinator, normally the Deputy Principal. Rona(us) re swanetse (we are supposed to) arrange training through [di] workshops. You see teachers don't attend these workshops and they need to attend. It's very important that they attend.*

As she implies in the above quotation, the SBST serves as a link between the teachers and the DBST in facilitating the identification and provision of support for learners facing barriers to learning. The district official emphasizes that the primary and most crucial responsibility of the SBST is to collaboratively offer support within the institution. She also emphasized that the vice principal should act as the bridge between the SBST and the DBST. Additionally, the official underscores the

significance of training workshops in fostering effective collaboration. She notes that their primary support is also to provide support to the SBST.

The district official **(DO1)** further states that: *Our roles are very similar because we connect through support.* This statement corresponds with EWP6 statement on DBST functions. According to Education White Paper 6 (2001), the key purpose and functions of the DBST include the following:

"To support all learners, educators, and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus will be on teaching and learning". This quotation differs from the explanation by **P1.1** explanation which implied that it is the SBST's responsibility to come up with intervention strategies, seemingly on its own.

When it comes to the SBST, in Education White Paper 6 (2001) states that, the primary function of the SBST is to:

> "Properly coordinate learner and educator support services. These services will support the learning and teaching process by identifying and addressing learners, educators, and institutional needs. Where appropriate, these teams should be strengthened by expertise from the local community, district-based support teams, and higher education institutions. District-based support teams will provide the full range of education support services, such as professional development in curriculum and assessment, to these institutional-level support teams".

This statement by EWP6 clearly provides the primary function of the SBST and the district official got it correct by stating that the SBST's primary 'duty' is primarily to benefit educators and learners alike.

The policy from school two does not entirely align with the guidance from national policies such as the SIAS policy and EWP6.

SBST Member	Position	Roles and responsibilities
P-01	Principal	Supervise and guide
DP-02	Deputy Principal	Handles all official documents with the

		department, ensures that school documents of learners are complete
IDH-03	InterSen Departmental Head	Gives background of learners discussed and shares information gathered from educators in the InterSen phase
FDH-04	Foundation Phase Department Head	Gives background of learners discussed and shares information gathered from educators in the foundation phase
FPT-05	Foundation phase teacher representative	Gathers all information about learners in a phase and assist deputy principal where needed and necessary
SC-06	School counsellor (SES)	Assist the school with counselling and referring learners
ITR-07	InterSen phase teacher representative	Gathers all information about learners in a phase and assist deputy principal where needed and necessary

Table 4.1: School two SBST policy composition and key functions.

The SBST policy from School Two features a somewhat restricted composition and does not align with the SIAS policy recommendations regarding the SBST's composition and its roles and responsibilities. It does not specify the committee

coordinator or mention a learner-support educator. Even though the title of the policy: "Learner Support Policy," suggests a focus solely on supporting learners rather than addressing the needs of both learners and teachers, as well as other stakeholders, it still falls short on stating the support it provides to learners through the roles of the members.

The data reveals a significant gap in understanding among SBST members regarding their roles and those of the DBST. Participants from School One, particularly **P1.3** and **P1.1**, demonstrate only surface-level knowledge, often confusing processes such as referral and documentation (e.g., SNA forms) with broader responsibilities. **P1.3** acknowledged the emotional toll of supporting struggling learners but showed confusion about the support flow between SBST and DBST. **P1.1** mentioned intervention strategies but did not accurately detail SBST functions, despite being part of the team and having access to the school's SBST policy (SP1), which clearly outlines these roles. This disconnect points to a lack of engagement with or understanding of internal policy documents.

In contrast, the district official **(DO1)** provided a clear and accurate explanation of the roles of both support structures. She emphasized the importance of collaboration, training, and structured support between DBST and SBST in accordance with national guidelines like the SIAS Policy and Education White Paper 6 (2001). The official also highlighted the importance of workshops and the role of the deputy principal as a coordinator—something missing from some school policies.

Further document analysis shows that School Two's SBST policy is not fully aligned with national policy recommendations. The policy lacks clarity on key roles (such as the SBST coordinator and learner support educator) and appears more learner-focused, neglecting teacher and systemic support.

Overall, the findings suggest that institutional policies significantly influence staff understanding, and without proper policy alignment and ongoing training, the SBST's effectiveness is compromised. The lack of clarity around roles, combined with administrative burdens, contributes to reduced collaboration and weakens the inclusive education support system. Teachers are frequently overwhelmed by their workload and administrative requirements, leaving them with limited time and energy

to engage fully with SBST activities. These issues of workload and administrative requirements will be discussed further in Theme Four.

4.2.2. Theme two: The nature of Collaboration.

According to Antinluoma et al. (2018) collaboration is one of the essential features of inclusive school communities which should be consciously cultivated in schools. It is crucial that the SBST and the DBST collaborate for effectively promoting inclusive education. Through collaboration, these two teams of support structures can share resources, expertise, and approaches to effectively meet the varied needs of learners. Collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility and accountability, enhancing the overall effectiveness of support services and contributing to a more welcoming and accommodating learning atmosphere. Many of the partakers in the study pointed out that positive collaboration is key to the success of inclusive education in the district. **P2.1** pointed that: *these structures become more successful if everyone puts the needs of the learners at the centre of their duties.*

One of their effective collaborative strategies is through creating SBST PLCs (Professional Learning Community). The PLC is a continuous process where educators collaborate in repeated cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve improved outcomes (Shanks, 2016). The idea of having PLCs in an initiative piloted by the district in order to encourage collaboration among the SBST coordinators.

P1.1 stated that: *the DBST through regular PLC meetings make it easy for us to be on know about the screening and referral processes.* It is their CoP (Community of Practice). According to Wegner (1999):

> A community of practice defines itself along three dimensions: 1, what it is about, which its joint enterprise as understood and continually regulated by its members, 2, how it functions, the mutual agreement that binds members together ,3 what capabilities it has produced, the shared repertoires of communal resources that members have developed over time.

This nature of collaboration through the PLC, or rather a CoP, promotes inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South as the SBST members will be able to connect at a mesosystemic level as they share their best practices, resources, and experiences. At

a macrosystemic level (Policy framework), the PLC is able to align with national policies such as the SIAS policy.

One participant**, P2.3** made a contrary comment to his colleagues by stating that: *the relationship is non-existent as the DBST officials from district only attend to schools on the basis of formality reason and not to truly provide support to schools… or I don't know, maybe they need more training themselves. So yes, there is no good collaboration. it is just protocols.*

Other participants, such as **P2.1** and **P1.1** have commended the relationship between the two support structures, particularly on the regular PLC meetings. It is important to recognize that, although **P2.3** is the only participant with this differing perspective when it comes to the nature of collaboration between the two structures, acknowledging this variation in response compared to the views of the other participants is significant. According to Nong (2020) the DBST, like other district and provincial administrative bodies, it appears to lack the necessary capacity and expertise to adequately assist SBSTs in implementing inclusive education policies. This is a challenge for the collaboration between the DBST and the SBST. As Mkwanazi (2023) states: SBSTs are constrained by a severe scarcity of professionals qualified to serve in DBSTs. This lack of guidance and professionalism could be the reason for attending schools only for protocol purposes. The district official did indicate that there is a shortage of staff at the district level. However, the participants generally agree that there is good collaboration between the DBST and SBST, especially through the PLC meetings.

P2.1 stated that the collaboration is good between the two support structures when they said that: *They work well because teaching involves the collaboration of all stakeholders. This means that all stakeholders are part of the teaching and learning process. These support structures work well because everyone does what is expected of them and these structures become more successful if everyone puts the needs of the learner at the centre of their duties*. The member highlights the positive collaboration between the two support structures. He stresses the importance of all stakeholders fulfilling their responsibilities, and this requires them to put the learners' needs as the central focus.

P1.3 stated that: *I think since I joined the SBST at my school, I feel like the collaboration is doing its top, or it's doing what it's supposed to do in terms of identifying learners with special needs, barriers to learning. I'm talking from my time since I joined the organisation, I feel like the collaboration is good. Children are identified, barriers are met, not all of them, not all at once, but slowly but surely, we are getting there. And through them implementing the PLC, it is now easier to talk to them about everything and this makes it easier for us as SBST to be creative with support*.

P2.1 and **P1.3** reflect positive perceptions of the collaboration between the District-Based Support Team (DBST) and the School-Based Support Team (SBST), but they highlight different aspects of this partnership.

P2.1 emphasizes the foundational role of collaboration in education, suggesting that inclusive education thrives when all stakeholders actively contribute and prioritize the needs of learners. This response implies that effective teamwork within these structures leads to better implementation of inclusive education policies and support strategies.

On the other hand, **P1.3** offers a more personal and time-bound reflection, focusing on their experience since joining the SBST. They acknowledge progress in identifying learners who experience barriers to learning, albeit gradually. They also highlight the role of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in strengthening communication, making collaboration more effective, and allowing the SBST to develop innovative support strategies.

Together, these perspectives suggest that while collaboration between the DBST and SBST is generally seen as effective, unlike what **P2.3** stated as the relationship between the DBST and SBST being 'non-existent'. This method of collaboration through the PLC, or rather a CoP, fosters inclusive education in Ekurhuleni South since the SBST members can connect at a mesosystemic level by sharing best practices, resources, and experiences. The PLC can align with national policies like the SIAS policy at a macrosystemic level (policy framework). Additionally, the chronosystem, which emphasizes the significance of time and change, is highly relevant in this context. The introduction of PLCs and the improvement of cooperation between DBST and SBSTs did not happen immediately. It developed over time as a result of district programmes, legislative changes, and cumulative professional

learning opportunities. This progress is mirrored by participants like **P1.3**, who see how collaboration has gotten better over time. Repeated exposure to PLC cycles, ongoing conversation over several years, and long-term participation in SBSTs all help to foster trust, role clarity, and more inclusive practices, as revealed by the chronosystem.

It is evident that the strategy to have all SBST coordinators in the Ekurhuleni South district, cluster three, to form and be part of the PLC has created an easy access to requesting support from the DBST. According to Maphumulo (2019), central to the successful operation of both the District-Based Support Team and the School-Based Support Teams is collaboration. This approach represents a modern form of professionalism or a 'Community of Practice,' linking individual teachers with others within their school community.

DO1 articulated that: *You need to talk and to yes collaborate as we say yes, we need to collaborate. There must be that collaboration. If you encounter any challenge you try to solve and you say that ,no, this one is beyond my control, I cannot, I'm[a] phone call away. You call and say "Mme(Ma'am) Cy***a I've got this problem how can I deal with it". You can even send a message on the PLC group if you don't get to me. You see, the other coordinators might be having the same problem as you or one coordinator might solve it before. You use that PLC for communication.*

The district official is also noting the importance of utilizing the PLC for collaboration and communication. It highlights that sharing issues and solutions within the group enables members to benefit from collective experiences and expertise, ensuring that no individual is isolated in resolving problems beyond their immediate capacity.

The sampled schools' SBST policies do not make much reference to the collaboration with the DBST, they only reference the DBST for referral purposes.

SP1 makes reference to the DBST by stating that: "Once the SBST decides to refer a specific learner to the DBST (District Based Support Team) the relevant documentation according to the SIAS document should be completed by the school. The SIAS document states that when a school seeks support from the DBST, SNA 1 and SNA 2 forms should be completed by the school."

SP2 also makes reference to the collaboration with the DBST by stating that: “Should the SBST require additional support or guidance, they will refer the case to the DBST using Support Needs Assessment (SNA) forms.”

The first quote from **SP1** reflects limited information on the nature of the collaboration with the DBST, it only acknowledges the help from the DBST with referrals but not with other collaborative elements such as training, monitoring, and evaluation. The second school **SP2** also shares limited collaborative information with the DBST and acknowledges referring a case and the completion of SNA form. These policies reflect only one part of the collaboration; they reflect a gap in collaboration and communication.

Nel et al. (2016) believe that formal support structures at district and school levels can have a smooth collaboration and that sharing of expertise from these structures can deliver acceptable support within the inclusive classrooms in mainstream schools. It is just unfortunate that the SBST policies only envisions a limited collaboration between the two support structures, which could be the reason for the SBST members limited understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the DBST and SBST. From the transcribed interview data, these support structures seem to collaborate effectively through the strategy of forming a PLC. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological framework emphasizes the importance of various systems and interactions in shaping individual development and learning. Within this context of the PLC, which is the concept of a 'Community of Practice'—where individuals engage collaboratively to share knowledge and support each other—aligns with the collaborative roles of the School-Based Support Team (SBST) and the District-Based Support Team (DBST).

The SBST and DBST operate within Bronfenbrenner’s microsystem and exosystem, respectively. The School-Based Support Team primarily works at the institutional (school level), directly interacting with teachers and learners, while the DBST works at the district level, influencing and supporting multiple schools. Collaboration between these teams reflects the principles of a community of practice by facilitating the exchange of expertise and fostering a supportive network that enhances inclusive education in the district and cluster.

4.2.3. Theme 3: Support structures and the teachers.

The SBST and DBST play pivotal roles in supporting teachers and implementing individual support plans for inclusive education. However, several barriers can impede their effectiveness. Teachers often face challenges such as heavy workloads and inadequate resources, which limit their ability to fully engage with the support provided by the SBST and DBST. Additionally, insufficient training and understanding of inclusive practices can hinder the development and implementation of Individual Support Plans. Barriers such as these can obstruct the collaborative efforts of the SBST and DBST, making it difficult to address the comm of learners and achieve successful inclusion. As stated by Nel et al. (2016, as cited in Mkwanazi, 2023) one challenge is that support structures supporting teachers are often ineffective and insufficient.

According to **DO1,** one main reason for the limited support services from the DBST is a lack of human resources. There are a few district officials in a large district with many schools. **DO1** states that: *I can say maybe we don't support schools as we are supposed to, because when it comes to the issue of supporting, but maybe due to manpower, because we have got lots on our plate, we are dealing with lots of psychosocial issues,[we are] supposed to support, supposed to do assessments, screening and all those.*

P2.2 stated that: *I think it's a bit tricky sometimes to fill in that part ya(of) the Individualized Plan of Supporting…we have not received support on that one.*

The limited number of district officials leads to limited support for the SBST and teachers. And this is a big issue because, according to Hay et al. (2021) the DBST must cope with an overwhelming number of schools and an unclear understanding of the roles of provincial and district offices. This reality coincides with **P2.3**'s view in theme two about the nature of collaboration, that sometimes the district officials come to visit their schools only as a formality and to satisfy protocols, and this is not sufficient as it leads to the SBST struggling with completing Individual Support Plans (ISPs). According to **P2.2** , it appears that the (ISP) of the learners identified for support is 'tricky' and it is not being completed correctly as support from the DBST to the SBST to the teachers regarding ISPs is insufficient, if not ineffective, and some team

members do not understand it correctly, and this lack of support is due to limited district officials**.**

The district official **(DO1)** states that the issue of limited support is also to blame on the teachers' side as: "*The main… main challenge. Acceptance. Change. Acceptance and change. That all schools now are supposed to be an inclusive institution whereby we are all expected to support those learners, irrespective of gender, race, culture. So, we need to accommodate all those learners, we don't discriminate, we support and then we refer where we're supposed to refer.*

The district official emphasizes the challenge of acknowledging that all learners require support when accommodations are necessary. She is trying to say that sometimes the teachers do not need too much monitoring, but they should approach the process of support without discrimination and prejudice towards learners. To address this, there needs to be a shift in attitudes and practices at the microsystem level, specifically within the school. The statement also suggests that while educators can recognize issues, they may be either unable or unwilling to offer the necessary support. This reluctance or incapacity could stem from insufficient training at the mesosystem level, lack of support structures at the exosystemic level, or societal attitudes towards inclusive education at the macrosystemic level. Critically, the chronosystem provides a more comprehensive knowledge of the origins and duration of these obstacles. These issues are not isolated events, as evidenced by the ongoing lack of training on ISPs, the frequent delays in obtaining district-level support, and the gradual change in teachers' perspectives. Instead, they stem from persistent systemic patterns. These time-based changes are taken into account by the chronosystem.

P2.2 stated that: *I think it's a bit tricky sometimes to fill in that part ya(of) the Individualized Plan of Supporting…we have not received support on that one.*

This statement by participant two from school two suggests that sometimes is not the unwillingness or negative attitude towards completing the ISP (Individual Support Plan), but it is because they have not been thoroughly trained on how to complete it and that the school policies do not provide enough detail on the completion of the ISP.

School one SBST policy states that: "When individual support needs are being considered, the team should consider the following participants: The teachers of the particular learner(s), the parents/caregivers, the learner (where applicable)." The

policy suggests that when a learner's support needs are being assessed through the ISP, the team should involve key individuals who play a direct role, mesosystemic role, in the education and well-being of the respective learner. This includes the learner's teachers, who understand their academic progress, the parents or caregivers, who provide insight into their home environment, and, when appropriate, the learner themselves, ensuring their voice is heard in the decision-making process.

School two SBST policy makes no reference to an ISP, although their policy is titled "Learner Support Policy". Which made sense as to the lack of knowledge around filling and completing the ISP, as **P2.2** reflected on not receiving support on how to 'complete' an ISP. **School One** SBST policy does mention the ISP, and this is also reflected in the responses from participants at the school. This could also indicate that the two schools do not receive the same level of support from the district.

In the context of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, support structures such as the SBST and DBST, and their interactions with teachers, play a crucial role in implementing Individual Support Plans (ISPs) for learners with diverse needs. Within Bronfenbrenner's theory, "the microsystem is the innermost level that consists of immediate interaction" (Nembambula, 2022, p. 39). The SBST has immediate interaction with the teachers in the school, therefore, the SBST directly influences teachers by providing guidance, resources, and strategies tailored to individual learners. The DBST, operates within the exosystem, which according to Petrolgiannis, (2003 as cited in Panopoulos and Korea, 2020) "is a third cycle of the ecological model and is governed by environments of contexts in which the individual is not actively involved but is indirectly affected", therefore, the DBST indirectly impacts the school environment by shaping policies and offering additional support that can enhance the effectiveness of ISPs. With regards to the theme of 'Support structures and the teachers', we can therefore conclude that through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, the success of ISPs depends on the relationships between those directly involved in a child's education. At the microsystem level, teachers, SBST members, and learners interact daily, shaping how support is provided. The mesosystem comes into play when these support structures collaborate, ensuring that ISPs are not just implemented but continuously refined.

The next theme is about how open communication and regular feedback help educators and support teams respond to learners' changing needs, creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

4.2.4. Theme 4: **Feedback and Communication.**

The theme of feedback and communication between the SBST and DBST is essential for ensuring the effective implementation of inclusive education strategies. Strong communication channels between these teams enable the timely exchange of information, align intervention efforts, and provide necessary support to teachers. When feedback is consistently shared, both the SBST and DBST can adapt their approaches to better meet the needs of learners and address challenges as they arise. However, ineffective communication can lead to misunderstandings, delays in support, and a lack of coherence in addressing learner's needs, ultimately hindering the success of inclusive education efforts. The participants highlighted the fact that workshops and PLC meetings are a place that afford the members of the teams to provide feedback. There are also online surveys that get posted on the PLC WhatsApp group which provides easy, quick and efficient feedback and communication for the parties.

DO1 stated that: *We do that (provide feedback) when we are having workshops, and our online workshops work very well ka gore(because) ena le(it has) evaluations after the training.*

P1.2 stated: *Like I said seun(son), you see through these workshops. The district hears the problems from the teachers.*

P1.1 stated*: The DBST gathers more information through our SBST PLC. We have regular PLC meetings. That is where we discuss our challenges and problems. The challenges of the teachers and learners. Sometimes, we get to complete surveys on our WhatsApp group of the PLC.*

P2.4 stated: *I'm not sure but in the visits, they make, I'm sure the coordinator shares our problem with the DBST.*

The district official emphasized that they offer feedback during their workshops, which include both online and in-person sessions with evaluation forms being completed.

The evaluations are reviewed, and feedback is provided accordingly. Participants also confirmed that the district is aligned with their needs, as they noted that "more information" is gained from the workshops and PLC groups. This indicates that communication and feedback are effectively maintained through the evaluation sessions and district visits.

P1.3 also shared the colleagues view on the positive feedback mechanisms by stating that: *So, they do (give feedback) that by coming over, conducting interviews to find out from the teachers, from the horse's mouth to say, what is the problem in your subject or learning area? What challenges are you having and how can you assist? They come to our school; they also communicate through social media. That being WhatsApp, we do have group chats where we, they also host seminars and workshop training. Yea.*

This reality differs with most recent studies, Mkwanazi (2023, p. 147) alleges that "regarding the support from the DBST, the experiences of teachers awaiting support from the DBST are that the DBST takes too long to visit the schools for intervention and often that facilitators come to schools only to collect the referral forms and not for intervention. Teachers also get minimal feedback from the SBST regarding learners referred to them". Mkwanazi's statement partially aligns with what **P2.3** had to say below, particularly regarding the limited feedback and the lengthy time it takes to visit the schools.

P2.3 stated that: "*There are just many challenges Meneer, Sometimes, the SBST and the DBST have a hard time working together because they don't always communicate well. The SBST knows what's happening in the school every day, but the DBST looks at things from a bigger picture, it doesn't work like that, these people talk to us like anyhow in these long meeting they call us to. Sometimes. Also, if there are too many learners who need help or, these children cannot read, cannot write. They take time to refer them, it's just a big problem. When you complain they talk about backlog and waiting period. It's a big problem"*

This response from **P2.3** in school two (intermediate phase representative) reflects the frustrations and challenges faced by the particular participant regarding the collaboration between the SBST and the DBST. **P2.3** highlights communication issues, noting that the SBST is more attuned to the daily happenings within the school, while the DBST takes a broader, less immediate approach. She expresses frustration

with the way DBST members communicate during long meetings, which she finds ineffective. Another significant concern is the slow response in providing support to learners who struggle with basic skills like reading and writing. The participant feels that the process of referring these learners for additional help is delayed, often met with excuses about backlog and waiting periods, leading to ongoing problems and dissatisfaction with the system's efficiency. From the two contradicting viewpoints of **P1.3** and **P2.3**, it could be reasoned that the DBST provides more support to some schools than others in the same circuit.

In Bronfenbrenner's theory, feedback and communication between the SBST, DBST, and teachers are crucial for effective functioning within the ecological systems. According to Hayes et al. (2017, as cited in Ponopolous and Korea 2020) "the microsystem comprises of the daily environments in which the person transits and makes reciprocal face to face contacts". In this case, the microsystem is represented by the individual schools and classrooms. The exosystem (e.g., district-level support) must interact dynamically to support the development and learning of learners. Effective feedback and communication ensure that the needs and concerns of teachers and learners are accurately conveyed and addressed by the SBST and DBST. This exchange of information fosters a collaborative environment where all parties are informed and engaged, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of support services and interventions. "At the mesosystem level, it has been observed that teachers' collaboration with other adults is an essential prerequisite for effective teaching intervention" (September & Roman, 2023). By facilitating clear and ongoing dialogue, the teachers, the SBST, the DBST can better coordinate their efforts and resources, address barriers, and refine their approaches based on real-time feedback. This collaborative process supports the interconnected systems highlighted in Bronfenbrenner's theory, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

4.2.5. Theme 5: Resource allocation and support

Resource allocation and support are critical for the effectiveness of the SBST and DBST in promoting inclusive education. Adequate resources—such as training, materials, and specialist services—are essential for these teams to provide meaningful assistance to teachers and learners. When resources are properly allocated, the SBST

and DBST can offer targeted support that addresses the specific needs of learners, ensuring that interventions are both timely and effective. However, limitations in resources can hinder these efforts, leading to insufficient training, a lack of necessary tools, and ultimately, gaps in support for both teachers and learnerss. Artiles and Dyson (2005) contended that although inclusion is a global movement, the practice of inclusive education is locally determined by available resources, practices and policies. The success of inclusive education largely depends on the ability of these support structures to access and distribute resources effectively, ensuring that learners receive the support they need to succeed.

When asked about the resources, the district official **(DO1*)*** stated***:*** *The resources, yeah, when we receive those resources more especially in our currently, the resources that I've seen after joining the district office it's for full-service schools, not for all the primary schools, it's for full-service schools, not for all the primary schools. it's just those SBST policy documents, those files, I'm sure you do have. So, when we receive those, we make sure that we distribute to each and every school. If the school doesn't have enough, they indicate that no, we are running short of screening document, can you please assist, then we go back to the office and look for it. If maybe we do have surplus, we provide.*

The district official makes it clear that the SBST resources are prioritized to Special and Full-Service Schools. This shows an unequal distribution of resources from the district. This inequality does hamper the impact of successful implementation of inclusive practices across the school in the district. However, the DBST does ensure that the resources that are distributed to the Full-Service Schools can be requested by the mainstream schools through an application, but this process is reactive rather than proactive. The kind of intervention highlights that the interaction between the individual schools (Microsystem level) and the decision made by the district (Exosystem level) affect the school operations by controlling resource allocation.

DO1 further stated that: *If you, as a mainstream school, you have a learner who has a challenge of hearing or who needs hearing aid, you refer that learner to us (DBST), for referral purposes*

The district official emphasizes that if a learner has special needs or requires a referral, the SBST should submit an application to the DBST. This process ensures that the

learner can either be transferred to a special school or receive the necessary support. According to DBE (2014), when transferring learners to special schools, a medical examination is necessary to evaluate the learner's support needs, and medical practitioners are required to complete the appropriate form. Viewed through the chronosystem, this referral procedure reflects how the timing and duration of processes—such as assessments, medical evaluations, and the DBST's response—can significantly impact the learner's educational trajectory. If delays occur due to backlogs, insufficient staff, or systemic inefficiencies, the learner's access to appropriate support is postponed, potentially worsening the learning difficulty or hindering academic progress. Over time, these temporal delays accumulate, creating long-term consequences for the learner's development. Parents should then be informed of the assessment results to ensure that learners can take full advantage of the resources available at special schools. These schools are specifically equipped to assist learners with significant learning challenges. This provides evidence that mainstream schools are not well resourced to cater for learners with certain learning difficulties

P1.1 stated that: *For us and our school, there is no clear process of receiving resources from the district because the only thing we get is the normal screening tool and SNA forms that you can download online. But as in the resources, it is not clear as sometimes we are told there is some sort of a form to complete and sign when a school needs assistive devices for a learner, we can only get them through a resource centre. It not always a straightforward thing.*

P2.3 stated that: *In my experience only grade R practitioners/educators are provided with meaningful LTSM directly from the district. All the other grades are provided with piles of DBE books and a few short story books or big books.*

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The statements from **P2.3** and **P1.1** reveal systemic issues in the distribution and communication of resources within mainstream schools. **P2.3** emphasizes that Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) are predominantly directed toward Grade R, with other grades receiving limited support in the form of DBE books and readers. This reflects an unequal allocation of educational resources, aligning with earlier concerns about the prioritization of Special and Full-Service schools over

mainstream institutions. Meanwhile, **P1.1** demonstrates a lack of clarity regarding how to access additional support from the DBST, compounded by the absence of clear policy guidelines or communication channels. This suggests that not only is resource distribution uneven, but that mainstream schools are also left without adequate direction on navigating existing systems—further hindering the implementation of inclusive education strategies.

P2.1 (School two SBST coordinator) stated: *for mainstream schools, we don't get resources from the district, we can only apply and get help from resource centres, very limited resources centres that cater more to special schools*. This statement also resonated with the district's official's response about how mainstream schools need to apply for resources when they need them.

P1.1 stated: *In our school, we get the SNA form and other documents like screening tool and… yes screening tools. We don't get those other resources that need to be bought*.

P1.1(school one SBST coordinator) highlights the gap in resource allocation. He shows that the mainstream schools only receive official documents from the district, and this is not enough as they also need resources that require financial investments. Resources such as assistive devices.

The perspectives shared by SBST coordinators **P2.1** and **P1.1** highlight a significant gap in resource allocation for mainstream schools. Both participants underscore that while official documents such as SNA forms and screening tools are provided, essential support materials—particularly those requiring financial investment like assistive devices—are often not supplied by the district. Instead, mainstream schools must navigate a reactive, application-based process through resource centres, which are few in number and primarily serve special schools. This reflects a systemic inequity in support provision, placing mainstream schools at a disadvantage in implementing inclusive education. Their limited access to critical resources not only hampers their ability to meet learners' diverse needs but also undermines the principles of equity and inclusion at the heart of inclusive education policy.

According to the SIAS policy, mainstream schools are categorized under 'low-level support'. This means that mainstream schools do not require the same level of support as Full- service schools or Special schools. The policy states that "the portable

assistive devices can be accommodated into the LTSM budget of the school". It can only be through an application process should a school require portable assistive devices from the district. By allocating resources such as materials(documents), assistive aids, and expert guidance, the DBST provides essential support to the SBST, which functions within the microsystem, directly interacting with teachers and learner. According to Tahir et al. (2019, as cited in Keller, 2021)" interactions in well-running microsystems are considered to be the provision of high quality, friendly, and diverse learning environments for all". Hence, effective resource allocation from the DBST enables the SBST to implement individualized strategies and interventions that cater to diverse learners needs. This support strengthens the microsystem by empowering teachers with the tools and knowledge they need to accommodate all learners. However, if resources are limited or unevenly distributed, it can create a disconnect between the exosystem and microsystem, leading to inadequate support for teachers and learners. The bio-ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner highlights the significance of these interrelated schemes that are collaborating effectively. Without sufficient resources, the ability of the SBST and teachers to effectively implement inclusive practices is compromised, ultimately affecting the developmental outcomes of learners within the educational environment.

4.2.6 Theme six: **Collaboration with other stakeholders.**

The collaboration between District-Based Support Team and the School-Based Support Team with other stakeholders is essential in fostering inclusive education. These stakeholders include teachers, parents, specialists (such as psychologists, speech therapists, and occupational therapists), as well as community organizations and governmental agencies. By working closely with parents and specialists, the DBST and SBST can ensure a coordinated approach to identifying and addressing barriers to learning, facilitating early intervention, and implementing individualized support strategies. According to the SIAS policy and EWP6, the parents are crucial in addressing development and barriers to the process of learning. Greater collaboration is essential, as it strengthens inclusive education practices and ensures that all learners, particularly those with diverse needs, receive the support they need to thrive in the learning environment. According to Šiška et al. (2019 as cited Nembabula et al. 2023) “the implementation of inclusive education heavily relies on teachers while there are potential opportunities to create a collaborative network of other educational stakeholders”.

Based on the information gathered from a diverse group of interviewees, parent engagement takes the form of general parent meetings where all parents are present, as well as individual meetings. Nel et al. (2013, as cited in Nembambula, 2022) argue that developing a long-term collaboration seems to be a challenge in South Africa; it can also be argued that it is crucial for inclusive practices. As the SIAS policy (2014) highlights there is short term training and outreach programmes for management and teachers on issues of support (nature and strategies), awareness programmes and policy implementation provided by the school’s network of stakeholders or specialists outside the Department. These training programmes can be accommodated within the schools but require resourcing in the inclusive allocation Interactions with other stakeholders, like therapists and district officials, primarily occur through social awareness programmes. The data also revealed a disconnect in expectations and highlighted a lack of parental involvement, largely due to the high levels of poverty and unemployment within the communities where the schools are situated which makes it difficult for parents to participate fully in their children’s education and support processes, because of their educational background, parents often face challenges in securing permanent employment, leading to varying degrees of poverty that hinder

their ability to fully support their children's education(Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). This means that parents may place great importance on their children's education, but the difficult circumstances of poverty and unemployment in their neighbourhoods frequently hinder their active participation. Due to limited educational backgrounds, many find it difficult to secure stable employment, which complicates their ability to offer essential resources, transportation, or even dedicate time for school events. These economic and time limitations inadvertently form obstacles, resulting in children having less support at home, subsequently impacting their academic success.

Hence **P2.1** commented that: *I think the challenges, most of the challenges that we have, it's the community that we are serving, it's a disadvantaged community, remember, and even the parents, when we say they are disadvantaged, illiterate. So, awareness can't reach them the way we expect it*

P1.1 stated: "*As part of the management part of the DBST, and us as the SBST, we make our management plan according to the management plan of the DBST. In our plan, we are needed to host awareness events at least two times a year. These awareness events are normally on bullying and sexuality, but we also have awareness on intellectual disabilities. Also, we are forced to have parents meeting with the parents or guardians of the learners identified to be needing intervention, but our parents do not attend this important meeting.*

P1.1 mentioned that parents often do not attend meetings, particularly meetings that are focused on their respective children. This was observed during the two annual awareness events the school is required to host; it was noted through the low-attendance rate. This low attendance rate negatively affects the effectiveness of collaboration between the parents and the school. Consequently, it affects the implementation of inclusive practices. Policies like the SIAS policy and EWP6 highlight the significance of parental involvement in children's education, while SBST school policies, as local frameworks, align with these national guidelines.

With regards to parental involvement, School One SBST policy states that: "In the case of a learner not having a diagnosis, but where a teacher identifies a need for a concession. The SBST coordinator will contact the parents to have the child assessed by an educational psychologist. The counselling department also takes an active role

to assist the learner and make recommendations to be assessed by an outside service provider."

The policy from School One highlights the importance of helping learners as soon as possible when a teacher notices that a child might need extra support, such as concessions. In these cases, the SBST coordinator takes charge by contacting the child's parents or guardians to discuss the situation. The coordinator explains why the child needs to be assessed and how it will help identify the specific type of support required. This assessment is carried out by a psychologist, who looks at the child's learning abilities, emotional state, or any other challenges they might be facing. After the psychologist provides their findings, the school can make plans to support the child effectively. This might include giving the child concessions during tests or exams to make learning and assessment fairer for them. By working together, the school, the psychologist, and the parents ensure that the child's needs are properly understood and met, creating a better learning experience.

The policy from School two states: "The strategy for assessing and supporting individual learners' needs is always discussed with parents. Parents are encouraged to meet with the school to discuss reports and support. Communication with parents by telephone and email is encouraged and should occur frequently."

School two SBST policy involves parents, particularly when strategizing on the support to be provided to the learner. A key aspect of learner support is ensuring that parents are actively engaged in the assessment and intervention process. Schools work to ensure that parents are fully informed about the methods used to evaluate and support their child's individual needs. Through open conversations, parents gain a better understanding of the challenges their child may face and the interventions available to assist them. To foster collaboration, schools strongly encourage parents to take part in meetings where they can review progress reports, discuss support strategies, and share their views on their child's education. Continuous communication, including phone calls, is also encouraged to keep parents updated, address concerns promptly, and strengthen the link between home and school to support the child's development. However, according to Langsberg et al. (2013 as cited in Mpanza and Govender, 2022 p, 276) "the SBST should, as a matter of necessity, be constituted to comprise mainly of teachers, parents and learners and should provide a relevant teacher or parent with

training and support, in relation to specific curriculum development projects". Parental involvement is crucial to the success of collaboration between the SBST and the parents. Parents have valuable insights into their child's strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Therefore, their contributions are essential in creating and implementing Individual Support Plans (ISPs) that are both highly personalized and effective.

The district official **(DO1)** continued the significance of parental involvement when she stated: *Immediately you have an area of concern, after identifying that learner, you need to invite the parents, in everything you do, the parent must be one hundred percent involved.* According to Mwoma and Pillay (2016), the relationship between teachers and parents has been disheartening. In their study, they found that parents often fail to cooperate with teachers when called to school for educational matters. This is confirmed by **P1.1**'s comments quoted earlier and also by **P2.1**'s comment quoted below. Bronfenbrenner emphasizes that the home, as a microsystem, is one of the closest systems that provides learners with emotional support, academic support, and a nurturing environment. When microsystems like the home and school do not collaborate, it creates barriers to learning.

P2.1 stated that: *It's teachers, learners and the parents. That is why we have got the SGB (School Governing Body) but maybe let me put SGB aside because we call the individual parents who are affected, who their children are affected mara(but) not all come. We can't do anything or maybe a mother, a father and one without the parents. Hence, I said, after identification. And of the challenges that we have, then we go to DBST. DBST also, they come and see the parents and engage with them with our general community meetings…and programmes.*

While **P2.1** does agree that face to face parental contact is important but difficult to achieve, she does offer an alternative opportunity for parents to get involved through awareness programmes. According to the SIAS (2014) policy there should be "once-off or short-term programmes (fewer than 10 sessions), awareness programmes and policy implementation. These training/orientation sessions can be provided by either other teachers/specialists from within the school or surrounding schools; SBST or DBST or from the school's network of stakeholders". Through these awareness programmes, the DBST and SBST are able to effectively deliver their mandates, and this builds credibility and trust from the community, and thus achieving a way of

working toward the philosophy of Ubuntu. According to Phasha (2016) Inclusive Education is the essence of Ubuntu. The concept of Ubuntu affects the way we treat one another because it emphasizes interconnectedness. However, it is worth noting that “Ubuntu has a different meaning to various scholars, especially on how to interpret the defined relationships embedded in Ubuntuism” (Gade, 2012). It reflects how individuals treat one another to improve the well-being of the community (Jojo, 2018). Ubuntu thrives on cooperation, respect collaboration, and justice. These are the ideals of inclusive education.

Through the philosophy of Ubuntu, the social awareness programmes become successful and effective through community engagement. According Masendo (2017, as cited in Kurth et al. 2019, p., 12) “principals in South Africa form a support team, which includes community members, parents, and local leaders to draw on the Ubuntu approach to implement inclusive education. Through the different actors’ awareness raising and support is organized to improve inclusion in the school and community at large”. These awareness programmes can be safe places where the SBST can identify certain parents that can form part of the SBST.

Nel et al. (2014, as cited in Makhalemele and Nel, 2015) describe collaboration within an inclusive learning-support framework functions as a shared and supportive community where open communication thrives. It fosters collective decision-making and problem-solving, encourages shared responsibility for actions taken, and promotes a supportive environment. Members work together toward common goals, hold themselves accountable for outcomes, share resources, and ensure that every individual is respected and valued as an equal partner in the process. This shared responsibility by the stakeholders reveal a complex interplay of multiple systems influencing inclusive education, particularly the support structures. At the microsystem level, the SBST's direct interaction with learners and teachers within the school creates immediate support but may lack the broader perspective needed for systemic issues. Infused with this collaboration between the SBST and the learners and teachers is the chronosystem which highlights how the temporal dimension shapes the evolution of collaboration itself. The strength and consistency of collaboration between SBSTs and DBSTs are not built overnight; rather, they develop through ongoing, long-term interaction, reflection, and feedback

The microsystem level “represents direct, interactional processes as familial relationships and close friendships” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Duerden and Witt, 2010, as cited in Geldenhuys and Wevers, 2013). The DBST, functioning at the mesosystem level, plays a role as a link between two or more microsystems offers a wider view and resources but may face challenges in aligning its broader strategies with the daily realities experienced by the SBST.

This disconnect is shared by participant three in school two **(P2.3)** stated that:” *The SBST and the DBST have a hard time working together because they don’t always communicate well. The SBST knows what's happening in the school every day, but the DBST looks at things from a bigger picture”*. The exosystem, which includes district policies and resource allocation, significantly impacts the effectiveness of both teams. Additionally, interactions with parents, therapists, and community organizations, situated within the macrosystem, which according to Ainscow et al. (2013) “includes the laws and policies that indirectly affect the school life.”

4.3 Conclusion

The results indicated several levels of knowledge across different parties concerning the responsibilities of the SBST and the DBST. SBST members generally had little understanding of their composition and mission, while the DBST official, on the other hand, possessed a broad knowledge of these support systems. The school policies detailed the SBST responsibilities in ways that sometimes did not align with national policies, such as those set in the (SIAS) policy, further reflected this disparity. Seen from Bronfenbrenner's standpoint, this discrepancy emphasized the importance of the mesosystem—the essential level where cooperation between the structures and overarching policy structures (macro-level influences) was required for the promotion of inclusive education.

The data gathered from the participant supported the idea that a Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiated and managed by the DBST had promoted an effective cooperative attitude. The PLC, aligning with Bronfenbrenner's focus on linked systems within the mesosystem, functioned as a forum for open communication and group learning. Through these interactions, institutions became more capable of closing knowledge gaps and improving their support systems for learners, thereby assisting pupils with various needs. Nonetheless, the level of support given to SBSTs was

greatly affected by resource limitations. The district official acknowledged that there is limited support to SBST in schools because there are not enough DBST officials in the region. This limited human resource affects how the SBST understands inclusive practices. Particularly in activities involving the creation and implementation of Individual Support Plans (ISP), this deficit directly impacted how SBSTs were guided. These constraints corresponded with Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, in which external decisions regarding resource allocation had a strong but indirect influence on support team performance and assistance provided to learners with learning difficulties. Efforts aimed at improving communication between SBSTs and DBSTs yielded encouraging outcomes. Although the formation of a WhatsApp group enabled fast and simple information sharing, PLC meetings provided a structured feedback channel. Furthermore, training provided by DBST officials enhanced group efforts.

Another significant issue was the unequal allocation of assistive tools. Unless mainstream schools requested additional funding or borrowed from their Learning and Teaching Support Material (LTSM) budget, mainstream schools generally did not receive these essential resources. Rooted in the exosystem level, this uneven distribution limited SBSTs' ability to offer sufficient support to learners that have different learning requirements.

The data showed that parental involvement only takes place during awareness programmes. One participant linked this to socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment, which could contribute to parents feeling powerless in their children's education. This aligned with Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, where broader socio-economic and cultural factors shaped parental involvement and, consequently, learners’ outcomes.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study on the effectiveness of collaboration between the District-Based Support Team (DBST) and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) in promoting inclusive education within two Ekurhuleni South district primary schools. The research aimed to explore the roles, responsibilities, and interactions between these two support structures in fostering an inclusive educational environment. In this chapter, I will start by providing a summary on one of the key findings of the study about the awareness of the members about the duties and functions of the SBST and DBST. This will be followed by a summarization of the nature of the collaboration between the support structures and how several SBST members expressed concerns about the lack of intensive training, particularly regarding the development and completion of Individualized Support Plans (ISPs). Additionally, the study will summarize how it highlighted successes and challenges related to communication and feedback between the DBST and SBST. Furthermore, the issues of resource allocation to mainstream schools will be discussed and summarized. The chapter will then present recommendations for improving collaboration between the DBST and SBST and then discuss the limitations of the research. Finally, the limitations will be followed by a discussion on recommendations for future research.

5.1.1 Summary of findings

The findings on the nature of the collaborative relationship have shown that SBST members generally lack a clear understanding of the composition, roles, and responsibilities of both the SBST and DBST. While many SBST members struggled to articulate their own roles, their awareness of the DBST's functions was even more limited. In contrast, the district official provided a comprehensive explanation of the roles for both teams. The analysis of SBST responses revealed several challenges, particularly for the SBST, where teachers often experience stress due to excessive workloads and administrative responsibilities. This situation restricts their ability to engage actively in SBST activities, thereby impeding awareness of their roles and responsibilities within their committees. Furthermore, inadequate training and understanding of inclusive practices obstruct the effective development and

implementation of Individual Support Plans (ISPs). These obstacles disrupt collaboration between the SBST and DBST, making it challenging to address the diverse needs of learners and facilitate successful inclusion, inadequate training leads to failure to implement inclusive practices. According Nong's (2020) findings, there is a lack of knowledge and insufficient skills in supporting teachers involved in inclusive education, and proper training for these educators has not been provided.

A shortage of district officials further limits the support available to SBSTs and teachers, resulting in ISPs that are often incorrectly completed as they are poorly understood by some team members. The district official highlighted two primary issues, firstly, the insufficient number of officials to adequately support the numerous schools in the district, secondly, the issue of teachers lacking the skills necessary to identify and assist learners with barriers to learning during the ISP completion process. She also mentioned that the parents need to be "one hundred percent involved" in the ISP process. It is crucial that they are part of the process together with the SBST and DBST. According to Thwala (2023, p. 98)" parents are valuable stakeholders and equal partners in the ISP process". There is a tendency for teachers to inadequately involve parents in this process, which is crucial for addressing learners' needs. The teacher, through the SBST, operating at a microsystem level needs to collaborate with parents in their microsystemic level. They will then operate together at a mesosystemic level. As September and Roman (2023) stated: within the mesosystem, effective teaching interventions rely heavily on teachers collaborating with other adults (parents). Nonetheless, the aforementioned challenges raised by the district official underscore the necessity of enhancing district capacity, increasing training in inclusive education, and fostering improved collaboration among schools, parents, and the district to ensure that all learners receive appropriate support through ISPs.

One of the key findings in this study is that some SBST members expressed frustration regarding delayed and ineffective communication from the DBST, perceiving it as undermining their knowledge and expertise, such communication challenges were identified as barriers to effective collaboration and timely support for learners, especially concerning referral procedures. Nevertheless, this study has shown that forming formal structures like the PLC facilitated communication and collaboration because some members reported positive communication experiences, particularly through social media platforms like WhatsApp groups. According to Fattah (2015),

utilizing WhatsApp facilitates both social and educational communication with ease, minimizing challenges and teething difficulties. Thus, the participants noted that informal channels facilitated quicker responses and more engaging feedback sessions, promoting better collaboration and teamwork between the support structures. This indicates that while formal communication methods may be inefficient, informal platforms like WhatsApp can significantly enhance communication and foster a sense of support among team members. At a macrosystemic level, the introduction of WhatsApp in the PLC structures reflects a cultural and societal transformation in appreciating immediate and accessible feedback and communication.

Regarding resource allocation and support in mainstream primary schools, it was found that assistive aid resources are predominantly reserved for Special, and Full-Service Schools, the mainstream is advised, as per SIAS policy, to use the LTSM budget for resources. Should that not work, then an application should be made to the DBST. The exosystemic level comes into play in this theme. According to Olechowska (2020), this is the level that does not directly affect the microsystems and mesosystems (SBST, DBST, teachers) but it indirectly affects them as the national policy around resource allocation dictates their collaboration around resource allocation. From the study, it was revealed that the SBST members lacked clarity and understanding regarding the resource allocation process and the assistance given by the District-Based Support Team. They were unaware of the correct procedures for acquiring resources from the district. They highlighted the need for improved communication, guidance, and training to ensure that all schools can effectively access the necessary support. Additionally, school-level SBST policies lacked references or guidelines about accessing these resources, further contributing to confusion.

Another key finding from the data collected indicated that parent engagement in mainstream primary schools occurs through general parent meetings, where all parents are invited, and individual meetings focused on discussing the SNA form application and ISPs. According to Landsberg et al. (2013 as cited in Mpanza and Govender, 2022), the SBST must be primarily composed of teachers, parents, and learners and should play a key role in offering training and support, particularly in connection with specific curriculum development initiatives. The data showed that interactions with other stakeholders, such as therapists and district officials, typically

happen through social awareness programmes, and parents are also invited to these awareness programmes. However, the findings also revealed a significant disconnect in expectations between schools and parents, along with a notable lack of parental involvement. This limited parental engagement is largely due to the socio-economic challenges faced by the communities, including high levels of poverty and unemployment, which hinder parents' ability to actively participate in their children's education and support processes. The involvement of parents is crucial for inclusive practices in education. Stofile (2008, as cited in Mpanza and Govender, 2022) states that lack of support by relevant stakeholders can negatively affect the policy implementation of inclusive education.

5.1.2 Recommendations

To address the problem of SBST members not fully understanding their roles and responsibilities, mentoring should be considered. According to DoE (2015, as cited in Scholtz, 2015, pp. 30-31) "it is advised that the DBST also provide training, counselling, and mentoring of educators". Therefore, this study recommends that SBST members could have mentors or work closely with other team members to share their experiences and learn from each other. Hence Msila (2012, p. 48) states that "mentoring needs to be an experience that requires two people in this special relationship to work closely". By creating this close relationship through mentoring, the SBST members will enhance their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the SBST committee. Another way for SBST members to improve their understanding is by attending workshops or training sessions. These could focus on specific topics like emphasizing the roles and responsibilities of the SBST members and the expected composition of the committee.

Since the DBST does not have enough staff, it is crucial to find other ways to offer training. According to Sun and Chen (2016) online platforms provide emergency training for key target areas. Therefore, one idea would be to use online training or workshops run by SBST with experience. Schools could also work with organizations that focus on inclusive education to help train the SBST members. These options would give SBST members the knowledge they need without putting too much pressure on the already limited staff of the DBST.

To make communication and feedback between the DBST and SBST better, using WhatsApp groups and social media is a smart move. These platforms are fast and easy ways to share updates, solve problems quickly, and organize tasks. However, for more serious matters, like detailed feedback, schools should still hold formal meetings or send written reports to make sure everyone is on the same page and stays accountable.

Many SBST members do not fully understand how to apply for resources from the district, so there needs to be better communication and guidance. The DBST could create easy-to-follow instructions in the policies on how to get resources and share them with all SBSTs. They could also offer training sessions to teach members how to properly apply for these resources. This would help schools get the support they need and ensure learners get the help they deserve, because the main reason for the slow progress in implementing inclusive policies is the evident lack of clarity within the policies themselves (Mpanza & Govender, 2022).

The lack of parental involvement in learners' education is another challenge. Schools should find ways to build better connections with parents, such as by holding meetings at different times, making home visits, or using virtual platforms for parents who cannot attend in person. Meyer and Mann (2006) believe that home visits serve as a valuable strategy for strengthening the partnership between schools and families. These visits are a chance to achieve strong, more positive relationships with both learners and their parents. It is also important to raise awareness about how much parents' involvement matters.

5.1.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that one of the participants held dual roles as both an HOD and SBST coordinator. While this provided valuable insights from someone with multiple responsibilities, it may have limited the diversity of perspectives within the data. Also, including more participants from various roles within the SBST might have provided richer and more comprehensive data.

The study revealed that some SBST members lacked a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This lack of clarity might have impacted the quality of their responses, as participants may not have provided accurate or complete information about the functioning of the SBST and its collaboration with the DBST.

Another limitation is that only one DBST official was interviewed because of the district officials' restricted availability. As a result, the data may not represent the broader perspectives or practices of the entire DBST, which could affect the generalizability of the findings. The refusal of the sampled schools to grant access to their SBST meeting minutes further limited the study, while this is understandable. These minutes could have provided important insights into how support teams operate, make decisions, and track progress. Without this data, the research may lack a deeper understanding of the teams' activities.

Another key limitation of this study is that no parents were interviewed regarding their involvement with the SBST and DBST in relation their children's education. While the SBST members provided valuable insights, relying solely on their perspectives may result in an incomplete or one-sided understanding of parental participation. Without interviewing parents, it is difficult to capture their experiences, challenges, or reasons for limited involvement. This could lead to biased data, as the findings are based only on the observations and opinions of the SBST members.

5.1.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Looking ahead, future research should delve deeper into how support structures like School-Based Support Teams (SBST) and District-Based Support Teams (DBST) continue to evolve in supporting inclusive education, especially across diverse school settings. Since this study centred on Ekurhuleni South, expanding research to other districts or provinces would be insightful. This broader scope could reveal regional differences, unique challenges, and successful strategies that could be shared more widely. Taking a long-term view would also be helpful—tracking how ongoing collaboration between SBSTs and DBSTs influences learners' progress, the use of Individual Support Plans (ISPs), and teacher confidence over time could provide valuable lessons. It is also important to examine the training given to members of these support teams. Are they getting the right kind of professional development to truly empower them in fostering inclusive classrooms? Understanding the impact of such training, or the consequences when it is lacking, could highlight ways to strengthen these crucial teams.

Another vital angle for future research is to bring in the voices of learners and their families, who experience these inclusive practices firsthand. Their perspectives can

deepen our understanding and reveal what's working well or needs to be improved. Building on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, especially the chronosystem, future studies might explore how changes over time—such as shifts in education policy, leadership, or resources—affect how well these support systems function at the ground level. Additionally, looking into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and similar collaborative platforms could shed light on how these spaces facilitate teamwork, knowledge sharing, and ongoing problem-solving between SBSTs and DBSTs.

Lastly, focusing more closely on schools facing resource shortages can help uncover how these limitations impact the delivery of inclusive education. By exploring these areas, future research will play a key role in improving support systems and ensuring that inclusive education in South Africa moves beyond policy into real, meaningful practice in every school.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the study's findings on the Partnership between the DBST and SBST in advancing inclusive practices within Ekurhuleni South district primary schools. The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner offers a provides a lens through which to see the difficulties and intricacies of SBST and DBST collaboration. Although SBST members have direct interactions with learners, teachers, and the DBST at the microsystem level, their insufficient comprehension of their responsibilities makes it more difficult for them to offer effective support. Equally stressed is the mesosystem that links various microsystems. Effective collaboration is hampered by the SBST and DBST limited feedback and communication skills, which makes it challenging to execute individualised support strategies (ISPs) for learners. Vulnerable learners run the danger of falling behind because SBST members struggle to bridge the gap between policy and real-world implementation without clear guidance and regular communication.

What the SBSTs can accomplish is constrained at the exosystem level by systemic issues including insufficient training and a lack of resources. The lack of adequate training on ISPs, which are crucial resources for assisting learners with learning

barriers, reflects larger policy flaws that have an indirect impact on how teachers and support personnel carry out their everyday tasks. These issues are made worse by mainstream schools receiving assistive aids, which leaves teachers with little to no tools to establish learning environments that are truly inclusive. Lastly, the degree of stakeholder and parental involvement is influenced by the macrosystem, which includes social values and policies. The home settings of learners, which are vital to their academic achievement, are sometimes disregarded owing to a lack of cooperation with parents. The ultimate objective of inclusive practices is not achieved when families are not actively involved.

The chapter concludes with recommendations aimed at improving the collaboration between these support structures through clearer role definitions, enhanced training through mentorship, and better communication strategies. It also acknowledges the limitations of the study, including the need for a broader range of participants and perspectives to provide a more balanced view. Despite these challenges, the findings offer valuable insights that can guide future efforts to strengthen the relationship between the DBST and SBST, ultimately improving support for learners and fostering greater inclusion in the district's primary schools. Furthermore, it recommends that future research should examine how SBSTs and DBSTs function across different regions to uncover context-specific successes and challenges in inclusive education. Expanding beyond Ekurhuleni South can offer comparative insights, while long-term studies may reveal the lasting effects of collaboration on learner outcomes and teacher support. Investigating the quality of training for support teams and gathering input from learners and families can provide a more holistic understanding. Exploring the impact of changing policies, leadership, and resources over time, as framed by Bronfenbrenner's chronosystem, will further strengthen support structures and help translate inclusive education policies into meaningful practice

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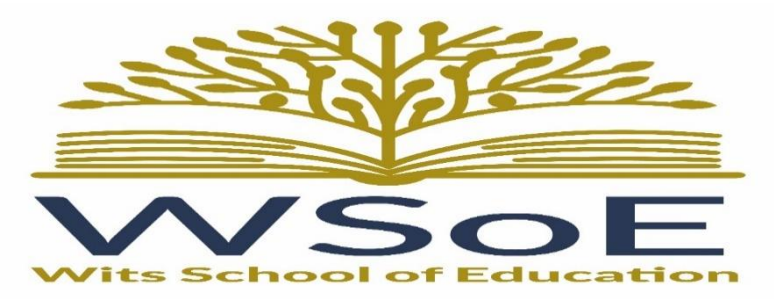
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant information letter



Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Kgothatso Madibana I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am conducting a research study about the collaborative relationships between the District-Bases Support Team (DBST) and the School-Based Support Team (SBST) of which you are a member. The study's title is Exploring the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District Primary School.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project by taking part in a semi-structured interview about your experiences of working with the support teams. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 120 hours over a period of three weeks as we will meet once a week for 30 minutes. The interview will take place at a convenient space at after school hours, each interview will not be more or less than 30 minutes.

With your permission, I would like to record the interview. This data will be stored in a password protected online digital drive for 3 years and deleted after 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, but if some of the questions asked make you feel uncomfortable, I could stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Kgothatso Madibana

Researcher:
Kgothatso Madibana, 778699@students.wits.ac.za, 072 533 4903

Supervisor:
Dr Louis Botha, louis.botha@wits.ac.za , 011 717 3099

Appendix 2: Research interview questions.

The following questions aim to delve into the dynamics of collaboration between the different support structures involved in ensuring inclusive education and to gather insights into their practices, challenges, and successes in the Ekurhuleni South district primary schools.

1. Can you describe the roles and responsibilities of the DBST and the SBST in promoting inclusive education?
2. How would you describe the current collaborative working relationship between the DBST and the SBST in promoting inclusive education in Ekurhuleni South district primary schools?
3. How do the DBST and SBST collaborate with teachers to identify and address barriers to inclusion in primary schools?
4. How do the DBST and the SBST support teachers in implementing individualized support plan (ISP) or accommodations for learners with diverse learning needs?
5. How do the DBST and the SBST gather feedback from teachers regarding their needs and challenges in promoting inclusive education?
6. How are resources allocated and distributed to support inclusive education initiatives in Ekurhuleni South district primary schools?
7. In what ways do the DBST, SBST, and teachers collaborate with other stakeholders, such as parents/guardians and community members to promote inclusive education?
8. Why do the collaborations between the DBST, SBST and Teachers, as well as their collaborations with other stakeholders, work well? When they do work well, why is it that these support structures function successfully?
9. Can you provide examples of successful collaborative efforts between the DBST and SBST that have successfully enhanced inclusive education outcomes in the district's primary schools.
10. In your experience, what are the main challenges or barriers in maintaining a strong collaborative working relationship between the DBST and SBST, and how are/can these challenges be addressed?

11. Can you share instances where feedback from teachers has influenced the decision-making process regarding inclusive education strategies within the district?
12. In what ways does the collaborative working relationship between the two support structures contribute to a positive culture that values and promotes inclusivity for all learners?

Appendix 3 : Permission letter to the school principal

University of the Witwatersrand,
(WSoE, Inclusive Education)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

[Adress]
[Tel. no]
[XXXXXXX Primary School]

08 March 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at XXXXXXX Primary School.

My name is Kgothatso Madibana. I am studying for a Master of Education in the Inclusive Education department at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am seeking permission to do research at XXXXXXX Primary School.

I am conducting research on the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District Primary Schools. The DBSTs and SBSTs are established to coordinate all learners, teachers, curricula, and institutional developments. Such roles demand that they identify institutional needs, more specifically, barriers to learning at learner, educator, and curriculum level; and developing strategies to address these needs and barriers to learning. However, despite the guidelines for support provided by Education White Paper 6, studies have shown that both the DBST and SBST experience difficulties with implementation and effective functioning in many schools and districts in South Africa.

Although there are numerous successes such as the screening processes, referrals, identification, and tracking of learners identified as needing support. There are also some limitations and shortfalls identified from the collaboration between the DBST and SBST in the Ekurhuleni South District. Hence, the motivation and interest in conducting this research. In my experience as an SBST deputy coordinator, as well as an SBST PLC (Professional Learning Community) secretary of Ekurhuleni South Circuit 3, I have come to realize that the collaborative relationship between the DBST and SBST is not fully effective in facilitating

schooling cultures that promote teacher and learner support. Thus, I feel that this study will not only provide me with a deeper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the DBSTs and SBSTs but will also provide me with possible insights in my exploration of the effectiveness of the collaborative working dynamics between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education practices in the Ekurhuleni South District, as proposed by Education White Paper 6.

As a result, this study aims to identify the ways in which the composition of the DBST and the SBST potentially affects the efficacy of the collaboration between the two supportive structures. Secondly, it aims to investigate the challenges that emerge within the collaborative relationship between the DBST and SBST in their efforts to achieve inclusive education as stipulated by White Paper 6.
I have chosen your institution because, apart from location considerations, the school has a strong academic reputation, thus providing a solid foundation for research.

The research will entail collecting data from four participants in the school, and from SBST minutes, and policy. I will invite individuals from your organisation to participate in this study. I will invite the SBST Coordinator, learning support educator, Intermediate Phase teacher representative, and the Head of Department. If they agree, they will be asked to be interviewed individually. The research study will last about 120 hours over a period of three weeks. The interview will take place at a convenient space at after school hours, each interview will not be more or less than 30 minutes. The participants responses will be scribed, and audio recorded.

Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the organisation) will be anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. The results will be communicated as an academic research report, and it will be available on the university library website.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

All research data will be stored in a password protected computer and deleted after five years.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organization.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Kgothatso Madibana

[Kgothatso
072 533 4903
778699@students.wits.ac.za]

[Dr louis Botha
011 717 3099
Louis.botha@wits.ac.za]

Appendix 4: Interview Consent Form

Title of project: Exploring the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District Primary School.

Name of researcher: Kgothatso Madibana

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

1. Participate in an individual interview.

I understand that the interview will be recorded, and I agree to the following:

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview/focus group/other activity may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group/other activity may be used by the researcher in their research report/ manuscript/book chapter.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report/manuscript/book chapter)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 5: With Ethics approval certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | WSoE Wits School of Education

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2024ECE009M**
PROJECT TITLE	Exploring the nature of the collaborative working relationship between the DBST, SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South district primary schools.
INVESTIGATOR	**Kgothatso Madibana**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	WSoE
DATE CONSIDERED	08 April 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report
ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE	23 April 2024
CHAIRPERSON	Dr. Lawan Abdulhamid

cc: Dr. Louis Botha

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

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

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

Signature **Date** 29 / 04 / 2024

Appendix 6: GDE permission to conduct research

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	18 March 2024
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2024– 30 September 2024 2024/672
Name of Researcher:	Madibana K
Address of Researcher:	1449 Poplar Street
	Mapleton Ext 10, Boksburg
Telephone Number:	072 533 4903
Email address:	778699@students.wits.ac.za
Research Topic:	Exploring the nature of the collaborative relationship between the DBST,SBST, and teachers in ensuring inclusive education in the Ekurhuleni South District Primary School
Name of University:	Wits
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	2 Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Ekurhuleni South

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.

18/03/2024

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

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za