Investigating the psycho-social challenges of Implementing Inclusive Education among Learning Support Teachers at Metropole East Education District, Western Cape

A dissertation submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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DECLARATION

I, *Nkepeng Esther Khoboko* understand what plagiarism is and aware of the university's policy with this regard. I therefore declare that this dissertation, ***Investigating the psycho-social challenges of implementing inclusive education in the Metropole East Education District, Western Cape*** is my own original work.

Where other people's work has been used, I have properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with APA method of referencing.

Signature:  Date:…….

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my fellow learning support teachers who are psychosocially challenged and have felt as though their efforts have been in vain. To those who are dealing with personal family issues but continue supporting our learners. To those who have burnt out and mental health facilities support wasn't enough to help. I saw you colleagues!

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ABSTRACT

The Implementation of inclusive education in schools is yet to reach expected levels in South African schools. Previous research has focused on teachers but very scanty research has been done among learning support teachers. This study examined psychological and social challenges of implementing inclusive education among South African learning support teachers. The following research questions were addressed in this study: (a) What are the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers? (b) What are the social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers? (c) What kind of support do learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education?

The study adopted a qualitative approach and a multiple case study of five primary schools in the Metropole East Education District, Western Cape, was conducted. Through semi-structured interviews, data from ten participants was gathered. The five criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity were used to assure the trustworthiness of qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study found that learning support teachers are psychologically and socially challenged when they have to implement inclusive education. The learning support teachers did get some support from the district officials but this was not sufficient to make them fully implement inclusive education in schools. Teachers expressed their deep concern about the lack of parental involvement, as it makes the SIAS policy referral process challenging. Moreover, teachers expressed that they were stressed out and burned out as a result of a variety of events that made their job to be stressful.

The study concludes that the learning support teachers' psychosocial challenges when implementing inclusive education remains a major concern for teachers in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Although the education department has implemented a number of strategies to help manage the psychosocial challenges of teachers, these methods mostly focus on the learners, leaving teachers with ongoing social and mental health issues. The study recommends that social workers, psychologists, and therapists

should be stationed in schools, or alternatively, ordinary mainstream schools should be transformed into full-service schools.

Key words: *Psychosocial challenges; mental health; learning support teachers; inclusive education implementation; primary schools.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADHD:	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
DBST:	District Based Support Team
DoE:	Department of Education
IEPB:	Inclusive Education Policy of Botswana
EWP6:	Education White Paper 6
FSS:	Full-Service Schools
GSP:	Group Support Plan
IDDC:	International Disability and Development Consortium
IE:	Inclusive Education
ISLES:	Inclusive Specialised Learner & Educator Support
ISP:	Individual Support Plan
LSEN:	Learners with Special Education Needs
LST:	Learning Support Teacher
MEED:	Metropole East Education District
MOET:	Ministry of Education and Training
NSIE:	National Strategy on Inclusive Education
PFA:	Psychological First Aid
PWDs:	People With Disabilities
SEN:	Special Education Needs

SBST:	School-Based Support Team
SIAS:	Screening Identification Assessment and Support
UK:	United Kingdom
SBST:	School-Based Support Team
SIAS:	Screening Identification Assessment and Support
UK:	United Kingdom
UKZN:	University of Kwazulu-Natal
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
VI:	Visually Impaired
WCED:	Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

According to Swart (2005), inclusion is a complex conception. Inclusion is defined as the process of placing learners in the mainstream as a matter of human rights, transforming the human values of integration into the immediate rights of learners who are excluded (Clark, 1995). Inclusive education is an approach that allows all children to be taught in the same classrooms and schools. It also means real learning opportunities for traditionally excluded groups, such as children with disabilities and minority language speakers (UNICEF, nd). The World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000, declared that Education for All must be an obligation and prerogative for the state. The forum also called for the UNESCO to organise international action on educational needs of every child. Their efforts are focused towards the development of education systems that are authentic, affordable and modern, and accessible to all without exclusion or discrimination (World Education Forum, 2000). Together the motivation of the World Conference on education for all and the 1994 Salamanca statement on special needs education have contributed to the international debates on what schools can do to be more inclusive. The Salamanca statement of the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) appealed for schools to be designed in a way that their educational programs implementations take into account the wide diversity of each individual child's characteristics and needs. Hence, many countries have revised their traditional ways of providing education for all the young learners.

In Africa, different countries have put efforts to implement inclusive education policies in schools and also develop own guidelines towards the same. For example, in Nigeria, the inclusive education policy provides free access to education for children with special needs, regular census and monitoring, and special education equipment

and materials (Adetoro, 2014). However, a cursory examination of the policy itself reveals inconsistencies and gaps. The establishment of "special schools," which enrol learners who have a high level of need for support, for instance, contradicts the principle of inclusive education, which is to provide equal access to education regardless of any barrier (Adetoro, 2014). In Ghana, teacher training in respect to inclusive teaching has not received the recognition it deserves, leading to challenges in personnel preparation, curriculum, pedagogy, learning environments, funding, and management (Deku & Vanderpuye, 2017). In Kenya, regular teachers struggle to provide quality services to SEN (Special Education Needs) learners due to lack of training and seminars, which could improve academic achievement (Mabele & Kennedy, 2019). According to Souza (2022), Malawi's National Strategy on Inclusive Education (NSIE) too failed the test as a viable guide plan for inclusive education due to teachers' lack of experience, skills and knowledge to teach diverse classrooms.

In Egypt, the amount of in-service training for teachers who work with Students with Disabilities (PWDs) regarding modern and advanced care for PWDs, including modern educational theories and methods of teaching, is insufficient. The majority of teachers lack adequate academic qualifications (Elhadi, 2021). In Lesotho, Mosia (2014) found that supporting Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) in the mainstream and special education settings may not result in academic and social success because educationalists do not understand inclusive education. In addition, resources for inclusive education are scarce, and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is taking too long to develop a special needs policy. In Botswana, the Inclusive Education Policy of Botswana (IEPB) requires that all children regardless of their disability be given equal access to general education schools, but there are barriers to this (Mangope et al., 2020). In Swaziland, Gama and Thwala (2016) argue that teachers also felt that they were not getting enough support from parents as learning barriers plainly imply the need for support by both teachers and parents.

The South African education system has always been heavily influenced by international trends. For instance, in the 1960s, South Africa followed the leading American model by creating categories of exceptionality for physical, sensory, and cognitive disability (Joorst, 2010). According to Bornman and Donohue (2014), of the

70% of the children that can go to school, the majority of them are placed in separate special schools for learners with disabilities. The system of education by then was accredited to the legacy of education policies introduced under apartheid. As a result, schools were segregated along disability lines, with white learners with disabilities receiving more funding than black learners (DoE, 1995).

In the latter years, the South African department of education made efforts to launch a system where learners with barriers can learn alongside their peers in the same school and classroom, but with the assistance of appropriate support from the teachers (Bornman & Donohue, 2014). Bornman and Donohue (2014) study further stipulates that the new inclusion policies demand teachers to bring about their best performance in educating learners with disabilities. They are expected to not only support policies that make education more inclusive, but also to give up old beliefs that make education less inclusive. However, Murungi (2015) notes that there are still considerable challenges in the conceptualisation and implementation of inclusive education, especially at the basic education level in South Africa. These challenges are mainly attributable to the evolutionary background of the concept of inclusive education at the international level.

In a similar way, Ubuntu, as an African epitome of inclusion, finds its relevance to higher education challenged by the lack of access and inclusion of marginalized groups, especially women (Shanyanana & Waghid, 2016). Ubuntu refers to acting in a manner that is considerate of others and beneficial to the community (Thompsell, 2019). In South Africa, Ubuntu came as the belief that one can only be a complete person in community with other people and that one's existence is intricately linked to the fate and well-being of others (Van der Walt & Oosthuizen, 2021). Masondo (2017) contends that Ubuntu is best suited for inclusive education studies, which aim to increase the effectiveness of implementing inclusive education in schools, given that it encourages cooperation, participation, and collaboration among individuals. Ubuntu values provide a useful basis for re-evaluating social relationships and institutional practices that continue to denigrate those most in need of acceptance and recognition of their humanity (Chiwandire, 2020).

As stated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and on Education for All, people with disabilities have a right to express their preferences for their education, as far as it can be acknowledged (The Salamanca Statement and Framework on Special Needs Education, 1994). In 1994, the Salamanca Statement on principles, policy, and practice in special education proclaimed an education for all and indicated that every person with a disability has a right to education (UNESCO, 1994). Since that proclamation, South Africa's education system has changed in terms of learner population as schools became more culturally diverse. Additionally, the adoption by the World Convention held in New York in 2006 served as a landmark for recognition of the human rights of persons with disabilities. This called for other countries to also change their schools to accommodate every child, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Following this call, international countries like the United Kingdom launched Save the Children UK, a policy that is aimed at identifying and reducing learning barriers for all children as well as identifying and providing support to both teachers and students (Save the Children UK, 2006). In African countries, Lesotho's Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) also drew up a new learning direction (Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy) for Inclusive Education (IE) to meet the diverse educational needs of all learners at all levels (MoET, 2018). Since 1994, South Africa has also changed its education system. As a result, schools became culturally diverse in terms of curriculum as their learner population changed. In support of all the efforts needed to implement IE in South Africa, a framework policy document, the White Paper 6: Special Education Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, was issued by the department of education (White paper, 2001). The policy's aim is to accommodate all learners, regardless of their disabilities or barriers, as "equal members of society." In 2014, the Department of Education further set out clear guidelines for implementation of IE through the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy. Although the SIAS policy provides the framework for the standardized procedures for the implementation of IE, it is imperative to recognize that its success is determined by different contexts and factors.

In the Western Cape province of South Africa, each district has Inclusive Specialised Learner & Educator Support (ISLES) comprising of learning support, psychologists and social workers. In a setting called Inclusive Education Team, some specialist teachers, also known as Learning Support Teachers (LSTs), are assigned to resource centres (special schools), while others are assigned to ordinary public schools. The role of learning support teachers in resource centres is to provide support to learners referred from public ordinary schools due to scholastic or cognitive learning barriers. Outside of resource centres, their primary role is to support Full-Service Schools (FSS) and ordinary public schools, because the White Paper 6 states that FSS should be equipped to support learners in the mainstream (White paper, 2001). Other than this external support from the IE team, the FSSs have the LSTs based at the school and are not itinerant like those in ordinary public schools. Certain itinerant LSTs in the public ordinary help grade 8s in the selected high schools as needing consolidation in grade 8 foundation. This study has been conducted at the Metro East Education District (MEED) of Western Cape province, South Africa where there are about two hundred government primary schools, nine Learning Support Advisors and ninety learning support teachers. Each LSA (Learning Support Advisor) is allocated a range of seven to fifteen schools in different circuits, with about ten learning support teachers. The LSTs work on an itinerary basis, supporting two schools. Harker (2010) in Dreyer (2013) identified the roles of learning support teachers in primary schools as serving as change agents, collaborative team leaders, and information-consultation agents, and these roles are still relevant at the time of this study.

During the time period of the study, the researcher was employed by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) as an itinerant learning support teacher. Her responsibilities included training, sustaining, and promoting a School-Based Support Team (SBST) within the schools, as well as supporting learners with learning, psychological, and social barriers that impede their ability to fully access the curriculum. The researcher also assisted mainstream teachers in the early identification of learning barriers as well as implementing IE in the classrooms. No matter how hard the district tries to make IE work in primary schools, there doesn't seem to be enough support for LSTs, who face both psychological and social challenges because of the changing roles of their job and the environment in which

they work. Several contexts highlight the importance of adequate support for professionals who face psychological and social challenges in their roles. In healthcare, for example, providing support to healthcare professionals can reduce burnout and improve patient care. Similarly, in the education sector, supporting mainstream teachers through professional development and mentoring improves their ability to deal with classroom challenges effectively. Furthermore, learning support teachers could benefit from professional development and collaboration to address diverse learning needs.

This study was carried out in Khayelitsha township which is one of the circuits in the Metropole East Education District. Khayelitsha is a place widely known for having the second highest number of murders in the province (Super, 2015). It is mentally challenging for both teachers and learners who work and study in Khayelitsha, an area identified as the top crime hot-spot in Cape Town (Manaliyo, 2014). The researcher is therefore concerned about the experiences of LSTs and strongly believes that there would be effective evidence of implementation of IE if greater focus was on the psychosocial challenges and support services for LSTs. According to a study conducted by Phasha and Majoko (2018), teachers in South Africa are not well informed on appropriate IE theories. Relatively few studies have documented the psychosocial challenges of LSTs to enhance the implementation of inclusive education. Recent research on inclusive education in the province of Western Cape has been limited. Even those that have been undertaken have centred on learners; for example, Joorst (2010) investigated the implementation of learning support strategies by teachers in the intermediate phase of one school, with "support for learners" as the primary focus. Additionally, in a selection of Western Cape schools, Bojuwoye (2014) investigated the experiences of learners who received learning support. For the purpose of this research, the focus was on the psychosocial challenges of LSTs as the implementers of IE because much has already been written about inclusive education, learners with special education needs, and the roles of LSTs with regard to IE implementation.

In inclusive education, support is considered a very critical and important factor (Dhuny, 2021). However, LSTs always experience challenges that directly affect them.

In Lebanon, a recent study by Ahmad and Kawtharani (2022) corroborated that although IE is implemented in a lower elementary school, there is poor development and support for teachers. In South Africa, Engelbrecht (2003) attest that in schools, support teams are not all functioning effectively when it comes to IE. Though schools have become fully inclusive, there are still many gaps in the implementation of IE IN South African schools. Therefore, the researcher argues that a void in schools' specialized support for LSTs that must be filled. In light of this, this study psycho-social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers in Metro East Education District primary schools in South Africa.

1.2 Problem Statement

Following the world declaration that all children deserve equal education, The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act no. 108 of 1996 set the basis for successive legislation and policy. By the year 2005, the policy of inclusion as a tool for the promotion of social wellbeing and a better understanding of others was being implemented in different education institutions in South Africa (Ladbrook, 2009). Nationally, provinces had to outline their own strategies on how they would implement inclusive education in schools. The implementation of inclusive education in the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) primary schools faces significant challenges, particularly in the Khayelitsha region. Learning support teachers (LSTs), who are change agents in promoting inclusive practices (Dreyer, 2013), confront a multitude of challenges that impede their effectiveness and well-being. Nearly every day, teachers are robbed in Khayelitsha. One teacher who once got robbed wailed, “I don’t want to be here. Being at school brings back the trauma,” said the teacher to the parent (Hendrik, 2022, para.4). The prevalence of teacher robberies in Khayelitsha contributes to a traumatic work environment for teachers, leading to emotional distress and hindering their ability to support learners effectively. As a consequence, inclusive education struggles to be fully realized, with the majority of schools in Khayelitsha underperforming, evident through the discouraging trends of learners' admissions to universities (Silbert, 2016).

LSTs find themselves under immense pressure as their support may not yield the desired outcomes in situations where it could significantly benefit learners and improve their educational experience. They play a crucial role in the referral process to the District Based Support Team (DBST). However, the overwhelming workload often hinders the referral process, leaving rejected learners without appropriate placements, leading to high dropout rates.

The current shortage of special schools in the province exacerbates the situation, causing learners to be placed on waiting lists, further obstructing their access to appropriate education. Consequently, LSTs are burdened with managing rejected learners, leading to increased rates of absenteeism and rendering learning support a fiasco. The cumulative impact of these challenges takes a toll on the mental well-being of LSTs, resulting in their placement in and out of mental health facilities. Additionally, they face stigma from the schools they serve, further amplifying their stress and undermining their impact.

To mitigate barriers faced by teachers in MEED, Silbert and Mzozoyana (2021) introduced a pilot short course in Khayelitsha schools, aiming at mentally fatigued and overburdened teachers. The course, centered on Psychological First Aid (PFA), intended to equip teachers with tools to support learners effectively. While the course emphasizes skills for learners, the researcher asserts that teachers' psychological well-being is crucial for effective support. Recognizing the interconnectedness of teachers' and learners' mental health, the researcher contends that fostering a psychologically healthy teacher orientation is pivotal. Similarly, Kidger et al., (2021) argue that teachers' poor mental health has a negative effect on the mental health of their learners. According to Ahmed (2017), support for teachers and the school environment in general is most effective when offered through community-led methods such as parent associations and School Improvement Plans. There is evidence that in conflict and post-conflict settings, communities place a high value on education and are willing to help and support local schools in a variety of ways, such as by giving teachers emotional and material support (Burde et al., 2015; Gladwell & Tanner, 2014 as cited in Ahmed, 2017).

In this regard, the researcher asserts that while research on some mental health interventions have been implemented and evaluated in schools, none has focused on addressing the teachers' mental health. The researcher therefore argues that a comprehensive approach is required to address the challenges of implementing inclusive education in Khayelitsha schools. This includes providing trauma-informed support to LSTs (Gross et al., 2020), enhancing school safety measures (Mayhew & Grunewald, 2019), streamlining the referral process (Cohen et al., 2019), expanding access to special schools (Rouse et al., 2018), offering professional development for LSTs (Peters et al., 2021), as well as encouraging collaboration and lowering stigma (DiPaola & Hoy, 2017). Hence, the researcher considered it significant to investigate the psychosocial challenges of LSTs with regard to implementing inclusive education in the Metro East Education District.

1.3 Rationale of The Study

In response to the South African national policies on inclusive education (SIAS, 2014), each provincial department has their own way of managing and coordinating the implementation of the national framework. The researcher is a qualified teacher with specialization in inclusive education and at least a newly gained experience in learning support. In the course of this study, the researcher was employed by WCED and worked at Metro East Education District as an itinerary LST at two primary schools in Khayelitsha. In MEED, the primary schools have learning support teachers who assist mainstream teachers to implement inclusive education in classrooms. The general roles of LSTs in WCED are to demonstrate lessons in the mainstream, particularly to foundation phase teachers, assist teachers in identifying learners with barriers, support learners by withdrawing them from their classes to the learning support classroom, train or give workshops to teachers and parents and do many other things. These roles are basically what the researcher did in both the schools she worked at. According to Dreyer (2013), the LSTs being the key role players of inclusion in schools have changing roles that are more comprehensive and complex within an IE system. The researcher was motivated to carry out this research because she experienced overwhelming challenges at the beginning of her career as a learning support teacher

in Khayelitsha. The researcher experienced culture shock and was traumatized by working in an area where crime stories were almost daily occurrences. The researcher had to figure out how to adapt to the framework of the WCED provincial learning support model while simultaneously ensuring her safety in the research area. As a result, she got curious as to how inclusive education can be effectively implemented under such varying, mentally straining daily challenges of working in a township like Khayelitsha. Other than the covid-19 being the main psychosocial challenge of teachers today, the interest of the study emerged from this kind of curiosity.

According to Kidger et al. (2021), teachers are more likely to experience poor mental health and well-being, which could affect the support they render to learners and the results of those learners' academic outcomes. Further to this, currently no research is published about the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers in South Africa. The majority of South African studies focused on learners' well-being and the need for psychosocial support. For example, in South Africa, Mahlo (2011) generally investigated the experiences of LSTs in inclusive education implementation, while Nel et al. (2016), Silbert and Mzozoyana (2021), as well as Namone et al. (2021), share almost the same view that teachers are stressed and need psychosocial support. Significantly, The White Paper 6: Building an Inclusive Education System (DoE, 2001) urges further research on inclusive education to be undertaken. It stated that the key levers for change must be identified. As a result, the researcher thought it was important to investigate the psychosocial challenges that learning support teachers face when implementing inclusive education in primary schools in MEED.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the psycho-social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers in Metro East Education District primary schools.

1.5 Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study were:

(i) To establish the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers.
(ii) To explore the social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers.
(iii) To examine the kinds of support that learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education.

1.6 Research questions:

The following research questions guided the study:

(i) What are the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers?
(ii) What are the social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers?
(iii) What kind of support do learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education?

1.7 Clarification of Concepts

The following concepts are related and integral part of this study's topic and as such they have been defined as used in the study:

Inclusive Education: It is the education system whereby learners are placed in the mainstream as a matter of human rights, transforming the human values of integration into the immediate rights of excluded learners (Clark & Dyson, 1997). In the present study, this refers to education system that caters or supports learners who experience barriers to learning and development academically, emotionally and socially. The

system sought to include all learners through the acknowledging diversity and using differentiation in the classroom.

Learning barriers: These are factors that make the learning of a child difficult. These may include home-related factors such as poor economic background of parents; school-related factors such as poor school management; uncommitted and poorly educated teachers; and other professional behaviors of teachers (Bojuwoye, 2014). In the present study, this refers to academic, psychological, emotional, and social difficulties that hinder children's ability to learn effectively.

Learning Support: Learning support refers to all activities at school and inside the classroom that promote learning diversity. These include strategies and practices that provide physical, social, emotional, and intellectual support in order to provide all students with an equal opportunity for success at school by addressing barriers to and promoting engagement in learning and teaching. With support, even weak learners are helped to reach their maximum potential.

Psychological challenges: In this study, psychological challenges are mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress that were examined at some point in life. They negatively impact a person’s life so much that they cannot cope with handling emotions and, in turn, hold them back from normal functionality.

Social challenges: They are problems that people have when interacting with other people in a society or by merely engaging in normal social behaviors. For the purpose of this study, these challenges could be school, community or home related aones and they make it difficult for teachers to do the work they are required to do, like supporting learners as well as mainstream teachers.

Learning support teachers: They are educators who have specialised competencies and are employed by selected districts in the Western Cape to support learners, educators and the system to ensure effective learning by all learners. These teachers include educators who were referred to as remedial, special class, or special needs teachers (DoE, 1997). The teachers refer learners they have identified as having barriers to the LSTs, and they provide support to learners according to their needs.

For some learners, they draw up Individual Support Plans (ISPs) that educators have to implement in the classroom.

Mainstreaming: It refers to when a schools integrate learners with special needs/barriers to learning into regular school classes (DoE, 2005). In this study, this refers to normal learning and teaching at school, and there is no segregation of learners with barriers, everyone is taught in the same classroom.

1.8 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

The outline of the study is presented as follows:

Chapter 1: *Introduction*

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research topic and its background, the problem statement, the rationale, and the aim and objectives of the study. In addition, it includes research questions and a glossary of terms utilized in this study.

Chapter 2: *Review of related literature*

This chapter presents review of related literature on psychological and social challenges of implementing inclusive education. The literature is presented from a global, regional and local context in South Africa. It also discusses the type of support teachers need to implement inclusive education successfully. Moreover, this chapter also highlights the research gaps from the reviewed literature.

Chapter 3: *Theoretical framework*

This chapter provides an explanation of the theoretical framework, which served as an explanatory framework for the research findings provided in subsequent chapters of the dissertation. The focus of the study was on two theories: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and constructivist theory.

Chapter 4: *Research design and methodology*

This chapter outlines the research design and describes the research methodology employed for sampling strategy, data collection methods, instruments, and analysis methods. In addition, the chapter also presents the trustworthiness of qualitative research and ethical considerations adopted in this study.

Chapter 5: *Data presentation and Findings*

This chapter's fundamental purpose is to describe the results of collected data and data analysis procedures. The themes are presented in line with the research objectives of the study.

Chapter 6: *Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations*

This chapter provides a summary of the study findings, including conclusions and recommendations practice and policy. The chapter also presents the limitations encountered during the study and directions for future research possibilities.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review of the current study which examined the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education in schools. The literature is reviewed from a global, regional and local context in South Africa. It also discusses the type of support teachers need to implement inclusive education successfully. Moreover, this chapter also highlights the research gaps from the reviewed literature as well as the kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education in schools.

2.2 Inclusive Education

Inclusion is the process of placing learners in the mainstream as a matter of human rights, and is an approach that allows all children to be taught in the same classrooms and schools (Clark, 1995; UNESCO, 2005). Moreover, it is a form of support for all learners, teachers, and the system at large in the South African context so that the full spectrum of learning needs can be met (UNESCO, 1994). For Kirschner (2015), inclusive education is a non-segregationist approach that places a strong emphasis on attempting to meet the various learning needs of every learner without removing them from the classroom. For Nilholm (2021), inclusion involves the establishment of school communities. The Salamanca statement of the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) appealed for schools to be designed in a way that takes into account the wide diversity of each individual child's characteristics and needs (UNESCO, 2005). Hence, many countries have revised their traditional ways of providing education for all young learners and most schools are striving to be inclusive.

2.3 Inclusive Education in South African context

In the South African context, inclusion is a form of support for all students, teachers, and the system at large so that the full spectrum of learning needs can be met (DoE, 2001). The South African department of education tried to create a system where

learners with disabilities could learn in the same school and classroom as their peers with teacher support in recent years (Bornman & Donohue, 2014). Minister Motshekga approved the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS), which aims to ensure all children of school-going age are able to access inclusive, quality, free, primary and secondary education (DoE, 2001). However, the policy still faces challenges that must be addressed in order for it to be implemented successfully. Among the challenges is the lack of support for teachers, which is the concern that this study sought to address.

2.4: Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers

The World Health Organization has predicted that by the year 2020, depression would be the single most burdensome disease, costing individuals, families, communities, and the economy as a whole through decreased productivity, absenteeism, and unemployment (Rothi et al., 2010, p. 7). In psychology, an individual suffering from depression is unable to function normally in any aspect of their lives, including work, social interactions, or relationships with loved ones (McLeod, 2015). Recently, it became apparent that inclusive education was challenging for teachers dealing with numerous emotional concerns of learners (Adewumi, et al., 2019). Jimenez (2021) stipulates that teachers are the Department of Education's frontline in delivering its curriculum, services, and mastery of skills to learners. Therefore, the mental health of teachers and the amount of stress they experience are two important factors that allow them to develop into holistic classroom managers and leaders (Jimenez, 2021). The study by Warnes et al. (2022) revealed that the behavioural issues that some respondents associated with IE and perceived as an additional source of stress for teachers demonstrate the need for a higher level of paraprofessional and external support.

Literature on psychological challenges among teachers hindering implementation of inclusive education at schools exists but with varied results. According to Sibai (2018) being a teacher can be exceptionally stressful, tiring and emotionally strenuous and

this can lead to teacher burnout. In a study conducted by Johnson (2015) in South Africa, the most commonly reported diagnoses in the five years prior to the study were stress-related disorders. According to Kidger et al. (2021), the causes of school-related stress include an excessive workload, challenging learners' behaviour, and pressure to meet a growing number of externally determined goals. In a study cited by Jimenez (2021), it was discovered that teachers experience mental health-related sleeping difficulties less frequently than once per week. The fact that they do have trouble sleeping may hinder their ability to be productive at work because they would be overtired. Sibai (2018) further stipulates that the changing roles and demands of teachers can make them feel overwhelmed and disorientated.

In a study report from Syria and neighbouring countries, Hassan (2017) asserts that in the times of crisis, many teachers as well as learners may suffer from the psychological effects of trauma, loss of separation from family members and any other circumstances that may bring severe stress to them. In the Western Cape of South Africa, sixty-five percent of teachers in high-risk secondary schools on the Cape Flats cite a lack of learner discipline as their greatest source of stress and burnout (Johnson, 2013; as cited in Johnson & Naidoo, 2016). Burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization, and it can be caused by prolonged exposure to stress (Johnson & Naidoo, 2016). Thakur (2018) found that in India, special education teachers have a higher risk of burnout compared to teachers who work in mainstream classrooms. It is a commonly held belief in England that levels of stress and anxiety rise in proportion to the amount of input required from teachers in order to implement inclusive education, and it is possible that this is the cause of some of the school-related challenges (Warnes et al., 2022). In Poland, Mojsa-Kaja et al. (2015) found that teachers face psychological issues such as burnout, symptoms of exhaustion, and cynicism as a result of a misfit between teacher expectations and their actual situation in the areas of workload, control, and fairness. Similarly, in Finland, Savolainen et al. (2020) reported that teachers' self-efficacy has a positive effect over time on both types of attitudes, and this implies that increasing teacher efficacy for inclusive practices is likely to change their attitudes in a positive direction. According to Kazanopoulos et al. (2022), "self-efficacy" is a person's perception of their ability to produce the desired outcomes and circumstances

in life. Training on inclusive education had an effect on the positive attitudes of Korean educators toward inclusive classrooms but not on their self-efficacy (Song, 2016). In Greece, Kazanopoulos et al. (2022) found that teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs can plan and organize effective teaching, set specific, attainable goals, and have high expectations, while teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy are pessimistic, have low self-esteem, experience stress, can't finish their teaching tasks, are less organized and systematic, are strict and critical, and impose external control in the classroom. Saloviita (2020) argues that attitudes towards inclusion have only weak associations with variables other than the teacher category and that their self-efficacy has low associations with their attitudes towards inclusion. Another study in Belgium by Bagree and Lewis (2013) indicated that regular teachers need psychological preparedness to meet the learning and participation needs of children with disabilities.

In the special education sector, dealing with the emotional, behavioural, and educational needs of children who need support on a daily basis makes teachers' jobs more demanding. In Botswana, Mukhopadhyay et al. (2013) reported that teachers were operating within the deficit model, which views learners with disabilities as "incapable of learning." Likewise, Sibai (2018) affirms that when teachers are burnt out, they fail to develop and maintain positive attitudes towards the learners and their individual needs, which may result in children being less motivated to learn or study. In South Africa, a study by Namone et al. (2021) argues that there is a gap in psychosocial and well-being programs in education policies and that the Departmental Basic Education policies focus more on treatment and prevention measures than on psychosocial health and well-being. Hence Loreman et al. (2010:3–7), as cited in Nel et al. (2016), concur that even if teachers start off their careers motivated, they end up becoming frustrated and unsettled due to psychological factors they experience at work. Moreover, a study conducted by Duncan et al. (2021) reported teacher motivation and attitudes as impediments to the implementation of inclusive education. Although the South African Department of Education has made an effort to create policies that are inclusive for all children, their implementation efforts have not led to a fully inclusive educational system, and they have not yet succeeded in achieving their nationwide goal of "education for all." In the Western Cape province of South Africa, psychological challenges still exist for learning support teachers who implement

inclusive education in various schools. Hence, Silbert and Mzozoyana (2021) reiterate that psychosocial support is now more critical than ever for both teachers and learners, especially in communities that constantly face multiple crises. This includes the community where the study has taken place.

Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding learners with disabilities and inclusive education have been examined in a number of quantitative and qualitative studies (Dua & Dua, 2017). Attitudes are defined as an individual's prevailing inclination to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, group of people, institution, or event (Soibamcha, 2016). Similarly, they are further defined by Nel et al. (2011) as the propensity to react positively or adversely to a certain thing, be it a person, concept, or situation. Teachers' attitudes can change depending on their work environment or the circumstances they confront in the classroom. In South Africa, Nel et al. (2011) found that there is a correlation between the good attitudes of teachers toward the mainstreaming of learners with special needs and the managerial assistance they receive, as well as other more technical variables like resources. In the Maldives, Nishan (2018) discovered that teachers with specific training in inclusive education do not embrace inclusion, but completing a course on inclusion may enhance their attitudes toward inclusion as well as their general attitude towards learners with special needs.

According to the study of Singh (2014), as cited by Dua and Dua (2017), in India, not all teachers have the necessary skills and positive attitudes toward learners with special needs; consequently, it is unlikely that learners will receive a satisfactory education. Regarding the ability of learners who need support to study, negative attitudes and behaviors on the part of teachers provide a particularly difficult challenge. The challenge is that, in South Africa, teachers don't take their role seriously, don't value the professional development opportunities they are given, and even try to dishonor them (Adewumi et al., 2019). According to the findings of a study by Hassanein (2021), the vast majority of teachers in the Arab region hold negative views regarding inclusive education. Hassanein (2021) further argues that even if the government provides all the materialistic, opulent necessities for inclusion, their efforts will be ineffective so long as the majority of teachers maintain their current attitude

towards inclusion. This is consistent with Swaziland's study findings reported by Zwane and Molale (2018), who contend that only when teachers cultivate a mind-set that is acceptable to all students and when they have adequate support and resources to teach all learners successfully can inclusive education be considered a success. In Pakistan, the issue that children with disabilities face while attending a regular school is teachers' attitudes toward them. Regarding the challenges encountered in Ethiopia, a study revealed that there are many barriers to the implementation of inclusive education, including the attitudes of teachers and parents toward learners with learning barriers, the lack of attention from the education office at both the zone and woreda (district) levels, and large class sizes, among other things (Mitiku et al., 2014).

In Korea, Song (2016) found that a teacher's qualification and training in the field of special education were significant predictors of that teacher's attitude toward inclusion in the classroom. In Pakistan, Khalid and Othman (2022) found that if teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusion, they will be more willing to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate a variety of students with varying learning needs. Positive attitudes toward inclusion are crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices and the development of a positive learning environment for all learners (Sannen et al., 2020; Abraham, 2021).

In Swaziland, Phiri (2021) discovered that the attitude of teachers was another barrier to the implementation of inclusive education in Swaziland schools. This was not only because teachers did not receive formal training in relation to inclusive education, as stated in the Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011) regarding teacher training, but also because their attitude toward inclusive education as a means to embrace change is fueling the issue (Phiri, 2021). Similarly, quantitative studies in South Africa and Botswana discovered that teachers' negative attitudes toward IE were associated with inappropriate and uncontrolled learners' behaviour (Genovesi et al., 2022).

There are several research gaps in the literature on the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers. Many of the studies reviewed concentrated solely on special schools, ignoring mainstream school settings. The current study fills this void by examining mainstream school contexts and providing

valuable insights into the challenges that these settings face. Furthermore, previous research often focused on teachers' perspectives without taking into account the perspectives of specialists such as SBST coordinators. The current study fills a gap in the literature by including the perspectives of SBST coordinators.

Despite these initiatives to close gaps in the literature by concentrating on mainstream school contexts and enlisting specialists, the body of knowledge on the psychological issues that teachers face that impede the implementation of inclusive education in the South African context is still lacking. This points to the necessity of more investigation to gain a thorough understanding of the psychological challenges that South African learning support teachers face.

2.5 Social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers

In the South African policy documentation on inclusive education, the empowerment of teachers appears to be disregarded. The lack of support that educators receive from both the local school district and the communities that they are tasked to educate is a matter that causes them concern (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Family poverty also sets in motion a series of events that, collectively, impede academic progress. Hence, Burstein et al. (2014) advise that retraining, which must be both theoretical and practical, is a prerequisite. Multiple developments have necessitated the management, coordination, and integration of countless changes in schools today. These numerous societal developments have repercussions for the implementation of IE, including making educational change more rapid and intricate, thereby intensifying teachers' work and raising the challenges they confront (Jali, 2014). Jimenez (2021) contends that the physical setting of a school is critical to its ability to provide quality education. That is to say, the environment in which a learner is raised and educated plays a significant role in both the upbringing and education of the learner. Nevertheless, teachers face numerous difficulties throughout their careers. Regarding their social well-being, they face social challenges nearly every day (Jimenez, 2021).

Studies conducted on teachers' social challenges in the implementation of inclusive education showed certain pertinent issues.

A recent study in Lebanon reported poor development and support for teachers and the lack of involvement by parents and the community as factors that hinder the practice of inclusivity in schools (Ahmad & Kawtharani, 2022). Jali (2014) contends that when a change is made, teachers are typically held accountable for its unsuccessful implementation. In Kenya, a study discovered that reluctance to transition from segregated settings to inclusion, serving the needs of both learners with disabilities and less-challenged learners in regular classrooms, illustrates some of the challenges to effective implementation of inclusive education (Osero, 2015). In Ethiopia, a study by Ludago (2020) confirmed that implementing inclusive education is difficult because of the lack of support from stakeholders. Ludago (2020) also argued that learners with special education needs may necessitate additional instruction time, alternative teaching strategies, and professional expertise. In such a scenario, educators fear the need for additional time to perhaps conduct extra classes, create teaching materials, and be more knowledgeable. While this may be a serious situation, Bibiana et al. (2020) found that in Kenya, working in partnership with professional peers leads to more diverse teaching skills and fewer referrals of learners to special schools. The principals who participated in the Ethiopian study reported that teachers' understanding of the inclusion philosophy presented some difficulties. They further added that limited school community awareness, ineffective teaching and learning strategies, and other factors contribute to a number of the challenges (Ludago, 2020). When parents aren't aware of their children's learning difficulties, they may be in denial when they discover that their children are unable to learn.

Another study in Zimbabwe by Majoko (2018) established that some principals do not support teachers, and parents of children without disabilities have negative attitudes. This may be the reason that some communities in Ethiopia do not support inclusive education. Parents prioritize sending children without special needs to school and only consider the one with special needs if there are still funds available. Thus, low expectations from LSEN result in low self-esteem in the learner (Ludago, 2020). In Swaziland, teachers complained about having insufficient time to support learners and

also felt unsupported by parents of learners with dyslexia (Gama & Thwala, 2016). Zwane and Malale (2018) discovered that educating learners with learning difficulties using mainstream methodologies creates challenges for both the teacher and the learners in an inclusive classroom.

Another study conducted in Botswana by Mangope et al. (2020) indicated that teachers felt frustrated that they were working in isolation and not as a team, everyone pursuing their own agenda, and that the inclusion process was hectic and more time-consuming. Mangope et al. (2020) argue that teachers had difficulties implementing inclusive education because they had to create time to design specific tasks for the students with learning barriers while they provided regular tasks for the other students without barriers. One of the challenges of inclusive education is class size. Due to the large pupil-to-teacher ratio, classrooms are overcrowded, and students do not receive sufficient individual attention (Ludago, 2020).

In South Africa, a study by Adewumi et al. (2019) revealed that some teachers do not have qualifications or training in special needs. The study also established that teachers reported a lack of parental participation, a heavy workload, inadequate training for teachers, multi-grade challenges, and a lack of resources, all of which negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education. In another study by Mahlo (2011), the SBST lacked the knowledge and skills to assist learners and teachers in the implementation of inclusive education. In South Africa, teachers may receive support from the District Based Support Team (DBST); however, there is a lack of personnel at the district offices to support inclusion (Adewumi et al., 2019). Moreover, Mweli (2009) attests that district teams are not well established, and this obstructs the smooth functioning of the IE in South Africa. Hence, this causes teachers to experience social difficulties in their efforts to implement inclusive education. Some teachers complained that their university training only provided them with limited knowledge about a single type of disability, making them feel helpless and less eager to teach learners with SEN (Mangope et al., 2020). It is therefore important for this study to investigate this topic intensively, as not much research over the past years has focused on the social challenges of learning support teachers.

According to the sources given, the current state of research on the social challenges of implementing inclusive education emphasizes a number of deterrent factors that negatively effect teachers' opinions about the inclusion of learners with SEN in mainstream schools. Important evaluative criteria to consider include: Lack of training, shortage of teaching and learning materials, large number of pupils in classes, large number of periods per teacher, shortage of time per period, poor governmental and parental support, poor working environment and difficulties in supporting pupils with different disabilities especially in primary schools, poor cooperation with other teachers, special staff and generally with the various public and private entities are some of the underlined deterrent factors that could have negative impact on teachers' beliefs about inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools (Amr et al. 2016; Polat 2011; Rakap & Kaczmarek 2010; Anastasiadou 2016; Leatherman and Niemeyer 2005 in Pappas, 2018). Furthermore, there are challenges such as a lack of adequate human and material resources, negative attitudes of teachers and the community, non-disabled peers and their parents (Niti & Singh, 2021). These challenges require comprehensive strategies that involve targeted training, increased resource allocation, improved cooperation among stakeholders, and efforts to promote positive attitudes towards inclusion at all levels of the education system. Addressing these challenges is essential to foster a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students.

2.5.1 Teacher related challenges

The evolution of education over time has brought with it new challenges. Teacher challenges are the hurdles and difficulties that teachers confront in successfully teaching learners in their classrooms (IGI Global Dictionary, 2023). Although they are not the same, both mainstream and inclusive teachers face challenges in their teaching profession. Special needs training Education is still an issue that must be addressed if IE implementation is to be successful. For example, a study conducted in the Maldives discovered that teachers did not know how to address the various needs of learners with SEN in the mainstream classroom (Nishan, 2018). The reason for this is that when it comes to implementing inclusive education in schools, teachers are not adequately supported.

In Spain, Trivino-Amigo (2022) found that there is insufficient continuing support to assist teachers in meeting the educational needs of all learners in schools that implement inclusive education. In addition, the findings of the study conducted by Mokaleng and Mowes (2020) revealed that in Namibia, the majority of teachers who participated in the survey believed that there was a lack of support for teachers, which exacerbated negative attitudes toward inclusive education. If teachers are not supported, they may lose interest in inclusive education practices in schools or develop negative attitudes. Mainstream and learning support teachers need to work closely together and share their knowledge and experience in order to accomplish the common goals of inclusive education (Zwane & Malale, 2018). In another study by Duncan et al. (2021), principals suggested that the lack of staff knowledge was a result of teacher preparation programs that did not adequately prepare teachers for inclusive education settings, a lack of system support in offering free professional learning opportunities, and the unwillingness of some teachers to assume individual and personal responsibility for professional learning. According to Hassanein (2021), teachers in Qatar are concerned about inclusive education and do not fully support it. Similarly, Warnes et al. (2022) argue that expanding the teacher workforce may be a more logical response to the expressed concerns regarding planning time, heavy workloads, additional responsibilities, and peer collaboration.

Overcrowded classrooms and heavy workloads are challenges to teaching and learning around the world, and as a result, education suffers. As described by Thakur (2018), workload refers to the amount of work that one person must do in order to complete a task, and it is linked to a variety of psychological issues. The teachers' large workload and responsibilities, especially in relation to the demand for a dense and quite ideal education plan, were identified as a further unique challenge to the implementation of inclusive education (Sari et al., 2022). According to the findings of some recent research carried out by Jury et al. (2023), French teachers appear to be concerned about rising workloads. In addition, the reasons for the high turnover rate of teachers in Punjab Special Education Schools have been identified as a heavy and unjustified workload (Thakur, 2018). Support teachers in Lesotho reported being overworked as well (Ralejoe, 2019). Likewise, Matebese (2021) contends that in

addition to their multiple responsibilities and multitasking, teachers have an increased workload, which, according to Lavian's (2015) study, leads to stress and burnout.

In France, teachers reported an increase in workload, classroom management difficulties, and/or a decline in quality teaching or education due to the inclusion of learners with special educational needs (Jury et al., 2023). In England, increasing the number of teachers would have been a more logical response to the concerns expressed about planning time, heavy workloads, additional responsibilities, and collaboration with peers (Warnes et al., 2022). In the Western Cape province of South Africa, Johnson and Naidoo (2016) confirmed that the administrative load of educators was the most stressful factor, followed by overcrowded classes and work overload.

When discussing the capacity of teachers to meet the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms, educators and researchers frequently raise concerns about teacher training (Warnes et al., 2022). For instance, the low confidence of Korean special education teachers in collaborating with other teachers reflected problems with Korea's dichotomous teacher preparation and qualification system (Song 2016). Lewis and Bagree (2013) state that in the policy paper for the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), teacher preparation for regular teachers rarely prepares them for working in diverse classrooms and, in particular, does not give them the confidence, knowledge, or skills to support learners with disabilities in an effective manner. Furthermore, Yoro et al. (2020) confirm that the primary reason why current teachers are unable to support and accommodate learners with learning barriers is that they lack the necessary knowledge and abilities. Even though some schools are inclusive and have learning support teachers who put inclusive education into practice, it is possible that some of those teachers have not received adequate training on the many learning barriers that learners face. Nishan (2018) contends that it may be challenging for teachers to meet the educational needs of various learners, including those with a wide range of disabilities. For instance, learners exhibit a variety of problems; some have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and teachers are unable to maintain their concentration for an extended period of time. According to Krstic (2016), many teachers do not have the specialized knowledge and skills necessary for this kind of work with learners in the classroom. This may be the case

because teacher preparation programs for learners with special needs are dispersed, poorly coordinated, and conducted in a segregated manner at all grade levels (Dua & Dua, 2017).

One of the most significant challenges to inclusion is frequently cited as being a lack of knowledge on the part of classroom teachers, which can be attributed to a lack of training (Tyagi, 2016). In 15 international studies, teachers' inadequacies in inclusive education skills and confidence were reported (Genovesi et al., 2022). For instance, in Palestine, teachers lacked confidence to teach in inclusive settings, training, feedback, links to special schools, adequate leadership, and community mobilization (Aladini, 2020). Similarly, in Australia, a significant number of respondents cited teachers' lack of knowledge and skills in inclusive education as a significant barrier to its implementation (Duncan et al., 2021). A study conducted in Romania by Petre et al. (2022) found that study participants had learners with SENs but lacked a diagnosis; hence, they were unable to seek professional assistance (psychologist, speech therapist) in order to develop an individualized intervention plan. This may be due to the teacher's inability to provide the necessary additional support for learners to participate fully in the learning process, as expected. Consequently, the teachers feel unprepared to implement inclusive education in the classroom (Yoro et al., 2020). Learners who have learning barriers typically wind up falling behind their peers and eventually dropping out of school.

According to Niti and Singh (2021), the majority of school personnel in India do not have the necessary training to design and implement educational programs for learners with disabilities in regular schools. In the United Kingdom, the severe lack of well-trained teachers who are adequately supported and managed throughout their careers is a primary cause of low-quality education (Lewis & Bagree, 2013). Teachers also lack the training and qualifications necessary to address the needs of learners who need support (Khaled & Othman, 2022). Another study done in Pakistan by Ambarin et al. (2023) found that elementary school learners with learning disabilities benefit a lot from having teachers who have been trained in special education. In Kenya, a study by Owino et al. (2022) revealed that regular schools with special needs continue to have inadequately trained teachers, as up to 56.5% are secondary school

dropouts employed by a board of management and 8.7% are incompetent P1 teachers. These findings imply that the ministry has failed to devise a system for identifying teachers with additional training in SNE and placing them in inclusive education schools (Owino et al., 2022).

The study by Adewumi et al. (2019) found that some teachers in South Africa lacked the necessary expertise to implement inclusion for learners with special education needs, as they had not received the proper training in this area. As a result, it was challenging for them to provide adequate accommodations for such learners. However, Engelbrecht (2021) noted that a number of changes in South Africa have the potential to address the disparate outcomes that were previously brought about by teachers' insufficient training for effectively supporting the learning of all the children. According to Khaled and Othman (2022), qualified teachers are needed for the effective implementation of inclusive education because they must accept and be accountable for the learning processes of learners with learning barriers and other disabilities. In line with that, a recent study by Ambarin et al. (2023) found that teachers who had adequate training were better able to accommodate the needs of their students with learning disabilities in the classroom by implementing a variety of strategies and modifications.

2.5.2 School related challenges

In India, mainstream teachers viewed resource or learning support teachers as the ones responsible for special education students, and they viewed learners who needed support as a "disruption" to the classroom and as causing distractions that slowed lesson completion. Therefore, they choose to disregard their presence and focus on implementing their lesson plans (Dua & Dua, 2017). Again, Pappas et al. (2018) discovered that in other studies, some teachers believed that only children with mild special educational needs should be allowed to attend general school. In Indonesia, there are numerous challenges to the successful implementation of inclusive education in schools, the most significant of which is a shortage of qualified

teachers who are also skilled in inclusive education and have experience working with learners with barriers (Sari et al., 2022).

When it comes to inclusive education policies, teachers see them more as a directive than a process, and they are expected to accept new policies and adjust to them without much consideration for their own rights and opinions. Sari et al. (2022) contend that there are no proper guidelines or rules that teachers can use to guide them through the education and learning steps for learners with barriers in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, in the UK, Schuelka (2018) discovered that it is crucial that inclusive education policies and guidelines are developed in collaboration and consultation with organizations of disabled persons (DPOs), nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), parents of children with learning barriers, learners with learning barriers themselves, and other community stakeholders.

Although inclusive education policies exist, Hassanein (2021) argues that they neither guarantee positive experiences for learners with learning barriers nor ensure that teachers, who are mainly responsible for the policy's successful implementation, support them. Consequently, learners are often considered to have "additional support needs" when there is a discrepancy between what a schooling system typically delivers and what the learners require to support their learning (Phiri, 2021). Therefore, rather than concentrating on how to make education more accessible for everyone, professionals tend to focus on what is "additional to or different from" the generally available provision (Florian, 2007 as cited in Phiri, 2021). Khalid and Othman (2022) argue that educational policies can be formulated by policymakers with inclusive learners in mind, and additional policies can be formulated specifically for the inclusive education system. Despite the existence of policies that emphasize the importance of inclusive education in the country, the theory of those policies has not been met by their implementation in Botswana. Another issue with Botswana's educational policies is that they are inconsistent and incoherent in their implementation (Jonas, 2014). In Lesotho, Ralejoe (2016) discovered that teachers seemed to know little about Lesotho's inclusive education policy, and those who did had never actually read the policy document. In South Africa, however, Walton and Engelbrecht (2021) asserted that it is too soon to determine the effects of SIAS. It may result in a system of

accountability that is less strictly regulated, characterized by creative exploration and decentralized decision-making, or it may be implemented in linear, inflexible ways that re-inscribe exclusion and reinforce route dependencies.

In a study conducted by Adewumi et al. (2019), a district official indicated that teachers do not want to implement inclusive education because they believe they are unqualified due to their lack of special needs qualifications. Furthermore, it is asserted that teachers frequently feel ill-equipped to deal with diversity in their classrooms (Hassanein, 2021). Though training for teachers in inclusive practices is necessary, inclusive education remains a contentious notion, with researchers and teachers expressing worries about the impacts of inclusion (Pappas, 2018). In Indonesia, for instance, Sari et al. (2022) contend that the government has undertaken multiple trainings and workshops to educate mainstream teachers to become inclusive education teachers, but the program has not satisfied the needs of teachers in terms of skills that will be employed in inclusive classrooms. In Ethiopia, school principals revealed that there is a lack of professional, material, and resource support for schools, as well as a lack of motivation to promote inclusive education (Ludago, 2020). With regard to that, it is important for both teachers and learners to have access to teaching and learning resources since, without them, learning cannot take place in an easy and natural way (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

The availability of sufficient human resources, instructional materials, and pedagogical expertise is often crucial to the successful implementation of inclusive education. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the lack of resources to support learners with learning barriers is a global problem. Schools in Germany have the ability to turn away students who have special educational needs on the grounds that they do not have sufficient resources (Klemm, 2015). The term "resources" encompasses not only teaching techniques and materials but also the time available for instruction, the knowledge and abilities of teachers obtained through training and experience, and the teachers' training and experience (Okongo et al., 2015). In terms of resources, research, both qualitative and quantitative, conducted in France demonstrates that teachers almost uniformly and frequently report that they do not have sufficient resources to accommodate learners who have special educational needs (Jury et al.,

2023). Furthermore, in Ethiopia, some research has revealed that a substantial barrier to the successful inclusion of all learners appears to be either a lack of resources (Mitiku et al., 2014) or resources that do not address the specific requirements of individual learners (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

Similarly, many teachers in Greece reported that they do not have access to the necessary educational equipment to teach learners with SEN (Pappas, 2018). If resources are available to facilitate inclusive education, they raise some challenges too. In Switzerland, there was an issue with resources that addressed concerns with resources (financial or human) and included statements like "There will be insufficient para-professional staff available to support learners with disabilities (e.g., speech pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists)" or "There will be insufficient administrative support to implement the inclusive education program" (Lozano et al., 2022). Moreover, a recent study by Jury et al. (2023) discovered that in France, a lack of resources is definitely the number one concern for teachers when it comes to implementing inclusive education (a result that is less visible from the learners' perspective). To make it possible for learners with special needs to receive an education in Ghana, inclusive schools are required to have support in the form of human resources, materials, and equipment, and all three of these things must be in place (Opoku et al., 2020). Only the human resources, which consist of parents, teachers, and resource teachers, are available; all other resources are woefully insufficient (Opoku et al., 2020).

The lack of resources in Lesotho's schools made it challenging to effectively teach learners with VI (visually impaired), and the teachers there appeared to be very concerned about it (Ralejoe, 2019). They also complained that their curriculum required them to cover too much ground in a short period of time in order to prepare students for exams, and they believed that alternative teaching strategies would be time-consuming and/or necessitate the use of equipment they did not already have (Ralejoe, 2019). Similar to that, Adewumi et al. (2019) discovered that class size, multi-grade classrooms, and heavy teacher workloads led to stressful working conditions for teachers, which in turn influenced teaching strategies and other classroom activities. Because of this, it is possible that a significant number of children who start

primary school will not finish the first cycle due to insufficient support and unfriendly learning conditions in the mainstream classes (Ludago, 2020).

According to Niti and Singh (2021), the rate at which learners are dropping out of school is rising, particularly in regions that are plagued by high levels of poverty. Learners do not simply wake up one day and decide to drop out of school; rather, dropout is the outcome of a long, cumulative process (Branson et al., 2013). The primary reason why so many learners with learning disabilities drop out of school is that teacher preparation programs do not always adequately prepare teachers to work in diverse classrooms (Lewis & Bagree, 2013). According to research carried out in South Africa by Nhlengethwa (2021), the primary cause of early school dropout is a lack of parental involvement. About 200 000 students missed six months of school, according to data from the Basic Education Department (DBE) released in November 2021.

Before COVID-19, roughly 40% of students who began in grade 1 dropped out of school before completing grade 12 (Cloete, 2022). According to Stats SA (2022), in 2021, illness and disability (22.7%), poor academic performance (21.2%), and lack of funds for school fees (19.6%) were the most prevalent reasons for learners dropping out of school. Krstic et al. (2016) concur that although the immediate reasons for learners dropping out of school are typically personal ones, such as poor academic performance, grade repetition, a lack of motivation in learning, and low educational goals, they only result in dropout when there is inadequate support from the school. The results of a study conducted in the Western Cape province of South Africa by Roman et al. (2022) revealed that dropping out of school is not an impulsive, spur-of-the-moment decision made by learners but rather a process that develops over time and culminates in their dropping out. This perception of inadequate support that causes learners to drop out leads some learners to seek a social reputation based on non-conformism, rebellion, and aggression in an attempt to compensate for what they perceive to be a lack of support (Jimenez & Estevez, 2017).

According to a recent study by Perumal (2021), in the Kwazulu-Natal province of South Africa, incidents involving aggressive learner behaviour have increased alarmingly in schools. In Mexico, Jimenez and Estevez (2017) found that learners' dissatisfaction

stemmed from their negative relationship with teachers, who are viewed as the formal authority and protective figures at school. A further explanation for the prevalence of aggressive behaviour in primary schools is that these learners come from diverse backgrounds, which affect their emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing (Perumal, 2021). In Serbia, Krstic et al. (2016) discovered that poor teacher-student relationships, in which teachers occasionally do not support students' learning but instead belittle and discourage them, worsen learners' feelings of insecurity and disinterest in school. At the classroom level, reviewed studies in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that disruptive or aggressive behavior is a cause of individual-level barriers to inclusion, such as negative teacher attitudes, low self-confidence, and poorer teacher-learner relationships (Genovesi et al., 2022).

It is possible that the process learners have to go through in order to disclose their disability could be considered a barrier in and of itself. Melian and Meneses (2022) contend that the fact that learners need to shed stigmatized identities and appear "normal" is a compelling justification for learners not disclosing problems, and other factors that contribute to this behavior include learners with mental illnesses' experiences of stigma and discrimination. In some cultures, such as the Dutch in the Netherlands, adults are expected to keep their feelings, thoughts, and emotions to themselves, which can run counter to the cultural norms of communication (Verhulp et al., 2013; as cited in van de Ploeg et al., 2022). Furthermore, in Spain, Melian and Meneses (2022) found that learners who are hesitant to disclose their information frequently express the belief that the schools do not provide sufficient support or follow-up for them, leading them to believe that they must "fend for themselves." Moreover, once students are aware of the steps to take in order to disclose their disability and, as a result, gain access to accommodations, the manner in which the process itself is carried out can be disheartening (Melian & Meneses, 2022). Learners are understandably discouraged by such reasons, which ultimately results in them dropping out of school.

The research conducted in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that teachers in several South African studies appeared to be unaware of the following statement from the Department of Education: "Taking learners out of classes should be reduced to a

minimum." (Department of Education, 2005: 15; cited by Genovesi et al., 2022). One of the participating teachers in South Africa in Meltz et al.'s (2014) study stated that learners would need separate tuition if they were too diverse or if they had "psychological problems [and] learning problems." Meltz et al. (2014) argued further that this special education approach saw a system for these learners as one with a separate identity, boundaries, staff, budget, and authority, which the school was not able to provide, and this merely suggests that schools are unable to provide inclusive education as a result of the system that they adhere to. Since teachers in South Africa's Western Cape province withdraw students for support, Kriel and Livingston (2019) propose that the LST exercise caution when withdrawing learners for learning support.

According to Kriel and Livingston (2019), self-esteem is just as crucial to academic success as intelligence, and age, teasing by more intelligent peers, and labeling due to withdrawal are all factors that can lower self-esteem. Schools are the setting where labeling happens most frequently, according to Lacourse (2022), after which labeled learners are routinely required to demonstrate that they can benefit from inclusive academic instruction in order to remain in the mainstream class. According to the South African research findings of Roman et al. (2022), learners in low socioeconomic schools are more motivated than learners in high socioeconomic schools. Roman et al. (2022) concur that it's possible that students in low-socioeconomic schools are more driven to pursue objectives other than academic ones.

It is crucial that the curriculum be adaptable enough to accommodate the needs of all of the learners in the classroom; failing to do so could result in a failure of learning (Ludago, 2020). Morena and Nkoane's (2021) study in Lesotho reported that the curriculum is a problem because teachers are not involved or consulted when it's developed. As a result, some local governments give mainstream teachers or subject teachers who lack special skills the authority to act as inclusive teachers (Sari et al., 2022). In Indonesia, Sari et al. (2022) further found that to support the achievement of inclusive education, curriculum modifications are also urgently needed. For instance, more time should be set aside to repeat or reissue learning materials that have traditionally been finished and repeated specifically in accordance with student needs.

In Lesotho, teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the curriculum's lack of support for inclusive teaching methods, claiming that the syllabus content was too challenging for slow learners and learners with VI (Ralejoe, 2019). In this context, it is understood that this statement means that no two learners are alike, but the curriculum does not accommodate students with special educational needs (Morena & Nkoane, 2021). In line with that, Ludago (2020) discovered that in Ethiopia, schools have a limited degree of flexibility in their curricula because learners are exposed to the same material and are expected to pass the same exams.

2.5.3 Community related challenges

All learners and their families benefit tremendously from the community's participation in the preparation and quality education that is provided for them. However, there remain challenges in the communities that stand in the way of the successful education of all learners, particularly with regard to inclusive education. There is a disparity between what parents do for their children and what the school expects them to do for their children. Some parents, for instance, refuse to engage in assessments of their children and refuse to acknowledge the possibility that their children have problems (Petre et al., 2022). However, Adewumi et al. (2019) perceived that the denial of many parents was due to their ignorance of inclusive education.

In the Philippines, a recent study by Sari et al. (2022) found that one of the biggest challenges is how parents and teachers react to the different abilities of the learners, while other difficulties include a lack of information about the inclusive education system, a lack of attention from provincial and district education offices for the implementation of inclusive education, and insufficient budgets. Hence, the majority of schools are unable to accommodate learners from diverse backgrounds because of the negative attitudes of teachers and school communities' low expectations of learners with special needs, leading to low self-esteem in the learner (Ludago, 2020). Paseka and Schwab (2020) concur that parents' attitudes regarding the inclusion of learners with barriers became more favourable as their educational level and income

improved. In other words, those parents who were uneducated and poor had negative attitudes.

Environmental insecurity in schools appears to pose a significant challenge to the education sector in the present day. According to Obiechina et al. (2018), insecurity is a social disorder that poses a risk to the lives of individuals as well as the operations of organizations like schools. The lack of a perimeter fence makes schools vulnerable to attacks, which were deemed to have the greatest perceived effect on teachers' productivity. On the other hand, classrooms that are conducive to teaching and learning were thought to have the least noticeable effect (Obiechina et al., 2018). The environment's receptivity facilitates the implementation of inclusive education. According to the study's findings in Kenya, there was a good chance that IE would be implemented in a remarkable way when the environment was more conducive to teaching and learning (Koskei et al., 2020). In Nigeria, Nwogu et al. (2022) found that school environmental insecurity negatively impacted science teaching and learning at the secondary school level by leading to school closure, which hindered science teaching and made learners afraid to attend school. According to Johnson (2015), traumatologists in South Africa face challenges such as intergenerational trauma caused by political injustices and ongoing trauma on the Cape Flats caused by a variety of ongoing factors such as violence and poverty.

In order to encourage a child's growth, it is crucial that parents, who are the people who know them best, and teachers work together (Vural et al., 2021). Naong and Mateusi (2014) concur that when both parents are working, it might be difficult to find sufficient time to support their children's educational endeavours in an effective manner. It has been determined that families in Turkey with poor children, particularly those with children who have special needs, have a difficult time accepting the circumstances of their children and, as a result, do not respond positively to cooperation efforts (Vural et al., 2021). In the Western Cape of South Africa, the study of Johnson (2015) revealed that the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) is facing significant structural and organizational issues since the legacy of apartheid is still being felt in high-risk communities, and that is one of the reasons why the challenges are so many.

From the reviewed literature above, there are research gaps that have been identified. The existing literature primarily focused on school-related challenges, with a glaring lack of attention to other significant challenges. Previous studies may have missed important elements that affect the success of inclusive education by concentrating largely on these challenges. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of addressing broader challenges, which this study effectively aims to do. Moreover, some reviewed studies were quantitative in nature and lacked in-depth findings that could have been brought about by qualitative research. The lack of nuanced insights from qualitative approaches impedes a thorough understanding of the complex social challenges inherent in inclusive education. In this regard, the present study brings a unique and valuable perspective by adopting a qualitative research approach, thereby bridging the gap and providing in-depth insights into the multifaceted challenges faced during inclusive education implementation.

The unique contribution of this study is its capacity to fill these gaps in the literature. The study contributes knowledge of the complex social issues inhibiting successful inclusive education by putting light on a wide variety of issues beyond simply those pertaining to schools and by using qualitative methodologies to collect rich and contextualized knowledge.

2.3 Kind of support that learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education

According to Ludago (2020), teachers and the educational environment in schools need a coordinated support structure. This is particularly important for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The importance of teachers' psychosocial support in the implementation of inclusive education has gained reputation in recent years. For example, Hind et al. (2019) and Desombre et al. (2021) have demonstrated that teachers do not always feel supported in their efforts to implement the inclusive education policy, and this perceived lack of support is connected with negative attitudes. According to Woods (2020), special education teachers deal with a variety of challenges that their colleagues do not, which can be challenging for other people

to understand. Frequently, in the United States, school administrations do not understand the challenges of special education and do not support teachers by attending meetings regarding individualized education plans and helping with learner interventions (Woods, 2020).

The lack of support for teachers with regard to implementing inclusive education is not a South African problem alone; other countries are also experiencing difficulties supporting teachers in an inclusive setting. In Botswana, a study by Mangope et al. (2020) revealed that teachers rely solely on the support from the District Based Support Team (DBST) for the implementation of IE and that teachers might feel differently if they were given the adequate support they need. Jimenez (2021) attests that teachers may participate in wellness programs (such as yoga, Zumba, and others) to enhance their mental attitude toward work. In Swaziland, a research study conducted by Phiri (2021) revealed that the interviewed teachers received little to no support for the implementation of inclusive education in their schools. One participant speculated that the school's support for the inclusive education implementation was solely on paper because they had observed no evidence of support for the inclusive education initiative.

A Zimbabwean study by Makamba (2016) recommended that the heads of schools adopt a black time-tabling approach so that there could be enough time for lessons, as teachers were complaining about inadequate time. The study further suggests collaboration between parents or guardians, teachers, specialists, administration, outside agencies, and sufficient funding so that schools could develop programs for students based on student needs rather than on the availability of funding. Jimenez (2021) proposes that schools construct a teachers' service center to provide psychosocial support and mental health wellness education. In South Africa, the classroom teachers were frustrated by situations that they were unable to handle, such as abuse that children had experienced. Dhuny (2021) perceived support for teachers as an important factor in IE, and it was regarded as critical. Mahlo (2011) reported that teachers need intensive training in inclusive education so that they are able to support learners with special educational needs (SENs) in their classes. Likewise, Mpu and Adu (2021) claimed that teachers need initial teacher preparation and ongoing

professional learning and that those who experience the initial preparation are more likely to pursue ongoing opportunities to advance in their teaching practice and engage in professional development throughout their careers. In addition, teacher training should include but not be limited to in-depth courses that focus on accommodating learners with special education needs, periodic seminars and workshops for learning diversity, as well as promotional videos of inclusion in action at the school level (Mpu & Adu, 2021).

In another study, Loreman and Harvey (2005) asserted that teachers are unable to meet the demands of modifying and delivering an appropriate curriculum to children with diverse educational needs because of incapacity. Landbrook (2009) concluded that in South Africa, the IE concept calls for a network of support involving the school and the district offices. Support should be adequately provided for teachers. According to Mahlo (2011), one cannot claim to practice support unless they support, are supported by, or collaborate with stakeholders; thus, LSTs should be appropriately utilized to fulfill their purpose if the division of inclusive education is to be realized. Teachers who implement inclusive education in the Gauteng province are frequently unsure of how to support learners who need it. This being the case, they require the district office to provide them with additional workshops on a regular basis (Phala & Hugo, 2022). In light of the above, the study seeks to find out from teachers what kind of support they require in order to successfully implement inclusive education.

One of the most crucial components of support for learning support teachers is collaboration, or cooperation. Paseka and Schwab (2020) state that cooperation has two purposes: first, it involves fostering positive relationships with learners; second, it involves fostering relationships among members of the pedagogical staff, particularly between mainstream teachers and psychologists or teachers of learners with special needs. In Spain, a study by Muoz-Martnez et al. (2021) found that when teachers collaborated, they started to develop a level of pedagogical fluency. The study also reaffirms the complexity of the learning support needed to participate in ongoing curriculum development in order to have a positive impact on students' learning in this way, with the accompaniment of collaborative methodologies being used in the implementation.

Reupert et al. (2022), citing the American Psychological Association (2020), state that psychologists employed in schools intervene at the systemic and individual levels to support the creation of positive learning environments for children and youth from a variety of backgrounds. Services provided by psychologists in schools include counselling, assessment, consultation, intervention, and the provision of professional development programs (Reupert et al., 2022). In Reupert et al. (2022), it was found that in Australia, psychologists who work in schools help learners, parents, and staff feel better. These services can include group and individual counselling, finding students at risk of mental illness or suicidal behaviour, helping parents, assessing cognitive, adaptive, educational, and mental health, working with the whole school to improve the well-being of staff and students, and consulting with school staff.

Learning support teachers require social support in order to successfully implement inclusive education in schools. In France, studies done in various contexts (professional, health, and social networks) have demonstrated that social support helps to lessen depression and physical pain and supports psychological well-being (Desombre et al., 2021). Additionally, in the Arab region, it has been discovered that training helps teachers improve their attitudes about inclusive education and supports them in implementing it (Hassanein, 2021). Hassanein (2021) further argues that offering thoughtful courses on inclusion and diversity in teacher education programs would allow for adequate addressing of teachers' challenges and negative attitudes. This necessitates ongoing teacher education, classroom support, and the improvement of teachers' abilities to mobilize support in the classroom and at the district level (Adewumi et al., 2019). The need for more paraprofessional and outside support for teachers in England is underscored by the behavioural problems that some respondents identified with inclusive education and saw as an additional source of stress for teachers (Warnes et al., 2022).

Teachers frequently feel that inclusive education is something they are told to do, often without adequate support or resources, and it becomes a burden rather than a collaborative endeavour. Because of this, it is crucial that teachers have the knowledge and skills to design inclusive classrooms and that school administration foster an inclusive, creative environment where teachers can thrive (Schuelka, 2018).

An effective inclusive education depends on the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion, and taking part in the right professional development can help teachers feel more positive about inclusion (Krstic, 2016). In a study by Bemiller (2019), teachers also stated that they require more specialized support staff in order to be effective in their teaching. In addition, qualitative responses from teachers indicated a need for personnel to assist with the behavioural needs of many learners in their classrooms (more counsellors, more one-on-one aides) (Bemiller, 2019).

Participants in the research study of Smit et al. (2020) expressed their opinion that there is a significant gap between the governing systems that directly affect the person system due to the lack of accountability and optimal interaction between many of the DBE systems. Qeleni (2013), cited in Mokaleng and Mowes (2020), observed that school leaders affect inclusive school development when they offer teachers adequate support. Because system interactions are reciprocal, many of the issues at the micro level have their roots in the macro system. Additionally, factors like poor teaching and difficult family situations put additional strain on the micro and exo systems' support networks (Smit et al., 2020). In Greece, it was thought that the training had a significant impact on teachers' attitudes toward their own ability to implement inclusive practices. Teachers with special education training or at least some training or conference participation demonstrated higher levels of efficacy when using inclusive teaching practices, working together, and handling disruptive behaviours (Kazanopoulos et al., 2022). In Ghana, where teachers have negative attitudes towards learners with special needs, the Division of Special Education should work with teacher training institutions like the University of Education, Winneba, and the University of Cape Coast to give teachers in inclusive schools' information-sharing workshops and in-service training on current issues in disability and inclusive education to help them learn more about disability challenges (Opoku et al., 2015). The DOE was emphasized as the main distal support source in South Africa. Although the DOE is perceived as helpful, it appears that more support for teachers is still needed (Matebese, 2021).

Furthermore, the results of the study by Adigun (2021) suggested that pre-service teachers from South Africa had more knowledge about inclusive education, which may have been based on South African dynamics. However, learning support teachers

would still require support from the district in order to support efforts in inclusive education implementation and to establish concurrent, practical procedures and routines for dealing with learners with barriers. There is a recognition that, as stated in EWP6 (2001), all children need support to varying degrees at different times, and all children need flexible support systems that will enable them to become better learners (Mckenzie & Dalton, 2020). This could also imply that inclusive education policies may not be as widely implemented if they do not receive sufficient support.

From the reviewed literature above, there are research gaps that have been identified. First, the majority of reviewed studies focused solely on the lack of support-related challenges or social support and not on the specific psychological support needs of learning support teachers. This particular void in the literature highlights a critical gap in understanding the unique psychosocial challenges that these teachers might face in the inclusive education context. The under-recognized importance of psychosocial support strategies is another significant gap. Although the research acknowledges the challenges in providing support, it frequently falls short in its thorough examination of the solutions intended to meet the complex psychological requirements of learning support teachers in inclusive settings. This void underscores the significance of research endeavours that systematically identify, evaluate, and present holistic support strategies capable of effectively addressing the diverse challenges encountered by learning support teachers.

The current study helps close these gaps by taking a unique approach. It actively involves participants and gives them the opportunity to offer psychosocial support techniques based on their personal experiences. This method not only gives the suggested ideas more realism, but it also captures the complex viewpoints of people who are actively involved in the inclusive education setting.

2.4 Conclusion of the chapter

The preceding literature review chapter presented various literature in the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education, social challenges and the kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement

inclusive education. The subsequent chapter examines the theoretical framework, which serves as the explanatory framework for the later-reported research findings.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework for this study is presented in this chapter. This research was guided by two theories namely, the constructivist theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. Moreover, the justification of the theoretical framework is discussed. The theories are presented and discussed as follows.

3.2 Constructivist theory

Constructivism is an epistemology, a learning theory that explains the nature of knowledge and how individuals learn, and it asserts that real understanding can only be constructed based on the learner's prior knowledge and experience (Ultanir, 2012). According to Donald et al. (2010), the constructivist perspective, associated with the works of Piaget, Burner, and Vygotsky, is the foundation of the inclusive education approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) further describe constructivism as a theory that believes that the mind is actively constructing knowledge and that knowing is not passive. Knowledge and truth are not discovered by the mind; they are created. Thus, in this research, each Learning Support Teacher (LST) is a knower, and their knowledge can therefore only be shared by exploring their views, meanings, experiences, and actions. In this study, particular attention is given to the constructivist theories formulated by Piaget and Vygotsky, both of which offer valuable lenses to view the intricate dynamics of inclusive education.

The use of constructivist theory in this study may have some drawbacks worth noting. These include potential subjectivity and bias in data interpretation, limiting the generalizability of findings due to unique participant experiences, complex data analysis processes, challenges in maintaining objectivity, ethical considerations surrounding privacy, time-consuming data collection and analysis, the potential for varying interpretations among researchers, and the researcher's influence on participants. Although constructivism offers useful insights into participants'

perspectives, these drawbacks called for the researcher to carefully consider ensuring the study's validity and reliability.

3.2.1 Piaget’s psychological constructivist theory

According to McLeod (2023), one of the first psychologists to conduct an in-depth analysis of cognitive development was Jean Piaget in 1936. Hence, Piaget is considered the father of the constructivist school of thought on learning (Miller, 2019). Piaget asserts that two central principles govern both biological and intellectual development: organization and adaptation, and that in order for people to survive in a given environment, they must be able to respond appropriately to both physical and mental stimuli (Bhattacharya & Han, 2001). Moreover, according to Piaget (1964), there is actually a reciprocal relationship between the two; a stimulus can elicit a reaction, and that response can influence how the next stimulus is perceived.

Further to this, Bhattacharya and Han (2001) propose the idea of the schema, which is a mental image of a potential action on an item, occasion, or phenomenon. This schema forms the foundation upon which an individual's understanding and interactions are built. Hence, understanding how these schemas function and evolve is vital to comprehending cognitive development. Therefore, the researcher employed interview techniques to collect data for this study so that follow-up questions could be asked to better comprehend participants’ responses. This methodological decision makes it possible to examine the unique schemas, experiences, and viewpoints of participants. By conducting interviews with participants, the research endeavour goes beyond the surface level and makes it possible for incisive follow-up questions to reveal the nuances of their responses.

According to Piaget (1964), learning involves modelling, transforming, and comprehending an object's construction. In other words, the researcher in this study had to take the time to comprehend the responses of the participants in order to identify their main challenges. Piaget’s theory also states that knowledge is not a snapshot of reality; to comprehend something, you cannot simply look at it and create

a mental image of it (Miller, 2019). In lieu of assuming that learning support teachers have psychosocial challenges based solely on their behaviour or environment, it was crucial that this study be conducted. In this approach, the study supports Piaget's claim that the process of knowledge formation is closely related to the active interaction with and interpretation of stimuli. Piaget's constructivist ideas have influenced the researcher's methodology, which places a strong emphasis on the value of probing participants' subjective realities in order to comprehend the intricacies of cognitive development and learning processes.

Piaget's psychological constructivist theory, although influential, presents several limitations. Its developmental stages oversimplify cognitive growth and may not consider individual developmental variations adequately. The strong age-dependent focus overlooks the role of culture, context, and individual experiences in cognitive development. Ignoring individual differences and failing to account for sociocultural factors are further limitations. In order to fully comprehend cognitive development and improve this current study, the researcher felt that Piaget's theory needed to be supplemented with additional theories.

3.2.2 Vygotsky's Social constructivist theory

In 1968, Lev Vygotsky proposed "social constructivism" as an educational theory. However, Liu and Matthews (2005) contend that the philosophical rigor underlying Vygotsky's works is not widely acknowledged in popular literature. Language and culture, according to the theory, are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and comprehend reality (Akpan et al., 2020). In educational psychology, the consensus among constructivists that knowledge is not mechanically acquired but actively constructed within the constraints and opportunities of the learning environment was regarded as a paradigm shift (Liu & Matthews, 2005). In addition, theorists who follow this view argue that knowledge is not a self-sufficient entity and that knowledge is not directly transmissible from one person to another but rather is constructed or discovered in an individual and idiosyncratic manner (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Additionally, popular belief holds that these theorists are proponents

of the central role of the social environment in learning, despite their diverse perspectives (Liu & Matthews, 2005).

According to Hein (1991), learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it. Therefore, there is no other kind of learning other than constructing meaning (Mogashoa, 2014). For McLeod (2019), knowledge is constructed rather than innate or passively absorbed. However, Phillips (1995) argues that prior knowledge influences what new or modified knowledge an individual will construct from new learning experiences. Moreover, Wnet (2004) in Akpan et al. (2020) asserts that when we encounter something new, we reconcile it with our previous ideas and experiences, possibly by modifying our beliefs or discarding it as irrelevant. In any event, we actively generate our own knowledge.

Constructivists believe that learning is a social activity (Hein, 1991). Hence, Kapur (2018) and Akpan et al. (2020) observed that the social construction of knowledge takes place in various ways and at different locations. In accordance with social constructivism, engaging in conversation, interacting with others, and applying knowledge are all crucial components of learning and ways to meet learning goals (Akpan et al., 2020). In the present study, the researcher embarked on a journey to illuminate the experiences of participants during the implementation of Inclusive Education (IE). This approach echoes the very essence of social constructivism, wherein meaning surfaces through meaningful dialogues and interactions with LSTs (Creswell, 2003). The research endeavor gained resonance from Akpan et al. (2020) assertion that knowledge is not an isolated possession but an outcome of shared social interactions. For this study, this included any interactions during LST cluster meetings or conversations during semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, daily dialogue and shared viewpoints between LSTs and teachers in a school setting provided insight into their true identities and beliefs. Hence, Akpan et al. (2020) contend that language is used to transmit concepts, which are then interpreted and understood through experience and interactions within a cultural context.

Al-Shammari et al. (2019) substantiate that constructivism implies that a person must understand the importance of the social dimension during the learning process through observation, treatment, interpretation, and adaptation of information on building a

cognitive structure. For Akpan et al. (2020), knowledge could be accomplished through group discussions, teamwork, or any instructional interaction in a facility for learning or training, on social media, in places of worship, or in markets; hence, social constructivism is also known as collaborative learning because it is based on student interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. Thus, the researcher constructed meaning by observing the behaviors and actions of LSTs and by actively engaging with them through interviews in order to learn about their experiences. The LSTs in this case are the main drivers of inclusion through the effective implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy. As a result, constructivism is regarded as an appropriate theory for the teaching and learning of learners with barriers because it will assist researchers in investigating the deep meanings of learning and support teachers' experiences when implementing inclusive education.

In essence of the above, the researcher framed the examination of participants' experiences as an adventure into shared knowledge construction, guided by the principles of social constructivism. A better understanding of the complexities of applying IE was poised to emerge as the researcher moved through the lanes of dialogue and interaction, guided by the rich cultural background and interpersonal dynamics. The other theory is the ecological systems theory, which is discussed further below.

3.3 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

The Ecological Systems Theory was proposed by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. This theory provides an understanding of the effective roles of learning support teachers at different levels, which will lead to an understanding of their challenges too. According to Bronfenbrenner’s theory, individuals exist within the following four social relationships: the micro-system (teacher), the meso-system (the classroom environment), the exo-system (parents and colleagues), and finally the macro-system (culture and society).

The use of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory in this study provided a thorough lens to examine the influences on the implementation of inclusive education. However, due to its complexity, it was difficult to analyse and interpret the data, potentially missing factors like individual agency, cultural idiosyncrasies, and micro-level dynamics. While the theory's macro-level focus provided valuable insights into systemic influences, it demanded significant time, resources, and careful data collection methods. However, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of teacher attitudes toward inclusive education and to bridge the gap between theory and practical recommendations effectively, the researcher had to strike a balance between the theory's strengths and its limitations.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory is depicted in the diagram below with its various systems.

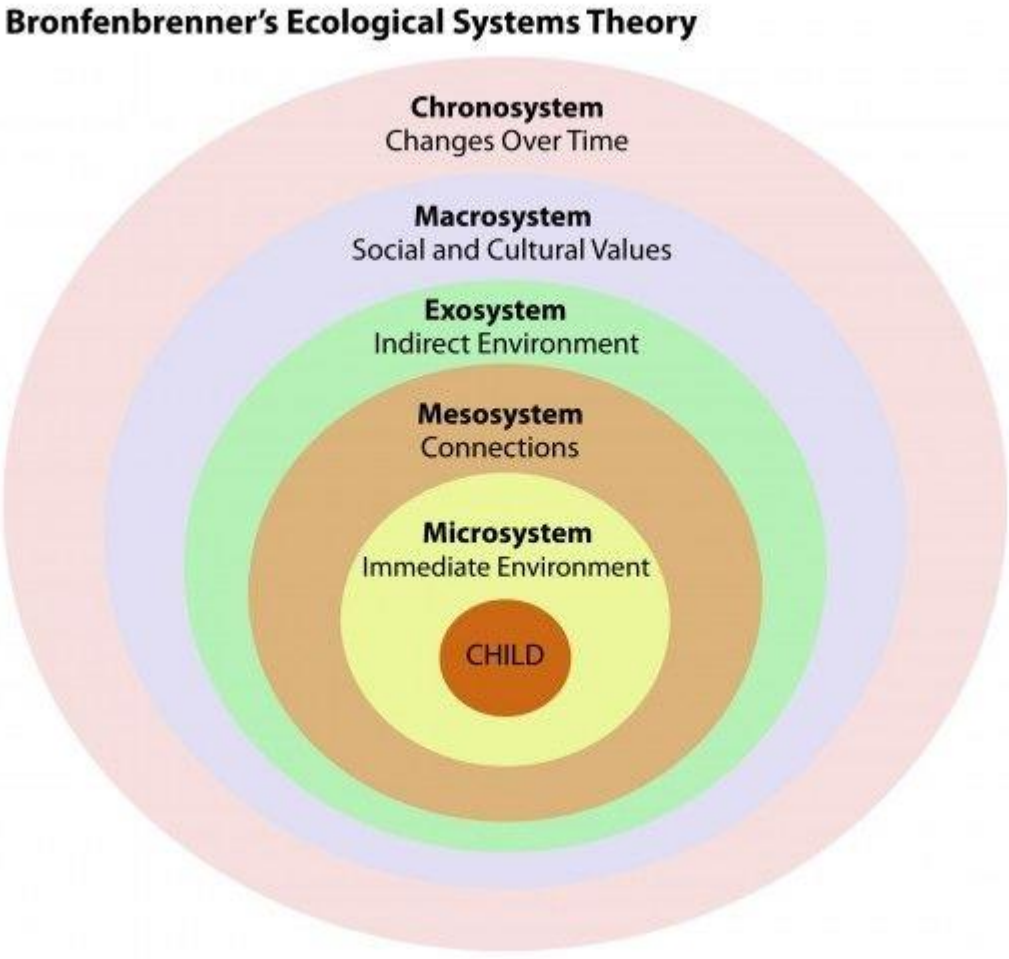

Figure 1: *Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory with its varied systems*,

Adapted from https://www.psychologynoteshq.com/bronfenbrenner-ecological-theory/

Micro-system

A micro-system is a blueprint of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships that a developing person encounters in a particular context or place with specific physical and material qualities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this model of human development, individuals do not only interact with people but also with objects and symbols. Culture and other external factors can have an impact on the development of emotions. According to the microsystem, the first domain of emotions is those found within the family, and they are crucial to the development of a child. This level also describes a setting where students live their daily lives developing through face-to-face interactions with people such as parents, friends and teachers. According to SIAS (2014) policy, both school and home should help learners reach their full potential (Ngubane, 2018).

The present study was anchored on the microsystem which is the overarching ideology and organization of social institutions that are found in different cultures. Teacher knowledge, training, and classroom experiences may have an impact on the central teacher in the micro-system.

Meso-System

The meso-system is the system of two or more microsystems which comprises the relationships existing between two or more settings in which a person is part of (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this system, the teacher forms interaction or bond with all the children they teach, including the learners with barriers. The learners and their teacher engage into a relationship in a classroom environment. Even though, the teacher still manages the class effectively but in situations where the class is big, classroom management can be a problem, especially where learners with barriers are involved.

Exo-System

In the exo-system, the person is indirectly affected by what happens within the setting of two or more things that interact. Here, the principal, opportunities for professional development by the DBST, principal, colleagues, learners and parents can influence the micro and meso-systems. Studies also show that those learners whose parents are involved earn higher marks at school, spend time on their homework, and have some positive attitudes towards their academic work and are more competent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Macro-System

The macro-system is an outer structure that informs the micro-, meso-, and exo-structures. It is a culture's overarching ideology and organization of social institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It consists of cultural values, customs, laws, and national policies, such as the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). The overarching ideology and organization of social institutions found in cultures are found in this system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Our culture shapes our beliefs about religion, school, family, and community life. These structures transmit cultural values from generation to generation, and the developing child receives them in turn. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), children are influenced by their culture through the communication of beliefs and customs received by their parents from other structures in the mesosystem and exosystem. In the present study, the community, the DBST, health care experts, and the department of education are all members of the macro-system. Changes on one level have the potential to have an impact on the entire system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory's relevance to this investigation is based on its success in earlier studies. As a useful lens through which to view the intricacies of learner support, the Bronfenbrenner ecological model inspired researchers like Joorst (2010), who investigated the implementation of learning support strategies by teachers in the intermediate phase of a school in the Western Cape.

3.4 Justification of the theoretical framework

While investigating LSTs' experiences in inclusive education, it is important to keep in mind the interactions and impacts that occur as a result of some shared impacts during the implementation of IE in schools (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Rather than acquiring knowledge, constructivism views learning as an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge. It is distinguished by active participation, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others (Mogashoa, 2014). This suggests that numerous realities can be found, as each person has a unique perspective on a certain issue, and each perspective is relevant and genuine. Therefore, by employing interpretive understanding, constructivist theory was of assistance to the researcher in making sense of the constructs held by LSTs and some role players (SBST coordinators) in the specific setting of schools in Khayelistha. Non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews with LSTs and SBST members enabled the researcher to understand the participants' lived experiences based on the theory.

While investigating LSTs' experiences in inclusive education, it is important to keep in mind the interactions and impacts that occur as a result of some shared impacts during the implementation of IE in schools (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). Rather than acquiring knowledge, constructivism views learning as an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge. It is distinguished by active participation, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others (Mogashoa, 2014). This suggests that numerous realities can be found, as each person has a unique perspective on a certain issue, and each perspective is relevant and genuine. Therefore, by employing interpretive understanding, constructivist theory will be of assistance to the researcher in making sense of the constructs held by LSTs and some role players (SBST coordinators) in the specific setting of schools in Khayelistha. Non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews with LSTs and SBST members enabled the researcher to understand the participants' lived experiences based on the theory. With educational barriers, psychological, social, and academic experiences, the ecological system can provide a holistic understanding of the learners. The benefit of utilizing this theory for the study is that, Bronfenbrenner completed his theory by developing his thinking on "proximal processes" that are reciprocal in the development of an individual and other

relevant processes (Rosa & Tuge, 2013). The microsystem, as per the bio-ecological framework, reveals how the house is straightforwardly connected with different subsystems, for example, the mesosystem, which alludes to the associations between different microsystems (Donald et al., 2010). One of the limitations identified is that Bronfenbrenner's model overlooks the critical role of resilience in overcoming adversities that may exist in the system (Engler, 2007).

Since the Department of Education is at the micro level, it has specified that school and home ought to help the students boost their true potential. Support at the school level connects with the environment, where individual development is viewed as the proximal process. The impact happens day to day, and as per White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), all schools ought to start up their own support structures, known as the school-based support team (SBST). The main role of the SBST is to make sure that educators' and learners' support services are well coordinated within the school. After the identification of barriers according to the screening, identification, assessment, and support (SIAS) policy document (DOE, 2014) process, referral to the SBST and intervention follow with the aim of assisting learners to achieve their maximum potential. The SBST then develops individual support programs (ISP), which are then implemented by mainstream educators. If the problem continues and cannot be solved at the school level, a referral will be made to the DBST for further intervention or placement in a school of skills or a special school.

This study consists of the Department-Based Support Team (DBST), SBST, and the community. At the micro level, it is important for the learning support teachers to interact and form close relationships with learners while also managing classes effectively. The interaction with learners would help create for them a very conducive environment for learning. In order to fulfill all these, the LSTs do require support from the district, parents, and principals. Furthermore, in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, a child's development is positively impacted by harmony and shared values if their parents are actively involved in their friendships. It makes sense that a similar situation could apply to schools if parents are actively interested and supportive.

For the purposes of this study, it is deemed that the ecological model is the most suitable for the efficient application of IE as it incorporates all aspects—biological, physical, and psychological—that affect a learner's growth and ability to learn. This well-thought-out decision emphasizes the interconnection of many aspects, transcending the traditional silos that frequently separate diverse influences on learning. The researcher claims, however, that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is not just a suitable theoretical framework for a thorough understanding of the nature of this study. It appears to be of great assistance in the development of constructive relationships between teachers and learners, as well as meaningful collaboration between schools and families, ensuring that the support network for learners remains cohesive and aligned.

The figure below shows the support pathway at the WCED.

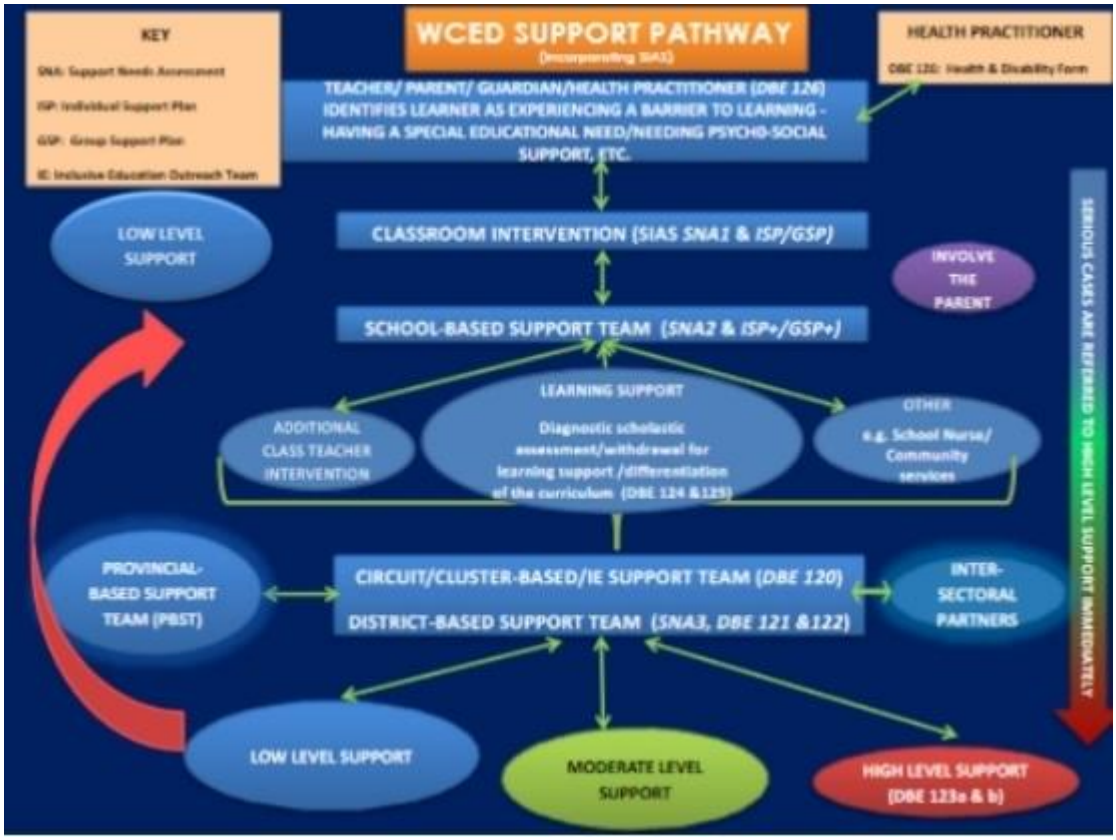

Figure 2: *WCED Support Pathway*. source: WCED Inclusive and Specialised Education Support (ISLES)

The Department of Education's White Paper 6 (2001) states unequivocally that the DBST will strengthen and drive education support services. The model given above provides a summary of the WCED Support pathway to screen, identify, assess and provide intervention for learners who experience barriers to learning. The pathway indicates the roles of the educator, the SBST, the circuit or district-based support teams, special school resource centres, outreach teams and special schools according to the SIAS policy document (DoE, 2014) process.

3.5 Conclusion of the chapter

This chapter focused on two theories that help in comprehending an individual's growth and behaviours: constructivism theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. The research methodology and design that were employed in this study are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research design and methodology of the study are discussed. The chapter begins by a presentation the research paradigm, design and methods adopted in the study. This is then followed by a discussion of research site, sampling, data collection methods, trustworthiness in qualitative research, data analysis and finally, ethical considerations.

4.2 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a set of beliefs and practices, sometimes known as "world views," that influence researchers (Sefotho, 2015). Worldviews such as attitudes, values, stories, and expectations inform people's thoughts and actions about the world around them (Gray, 2011). This study was guided by an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive research is based on naturalistic inquiry, which forms the basis of interpretive research because it uses non-interfering strategies of data collection to determine the natural movement of events and processes and how they are interpreted by the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). According to Rosenthal (2018), humans do not just encounter the world and react to it; they rather create social reality by interacting with other humans. This means that people sequentially create meanings that are constantly changing through interactive processes. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm implies that our social engagement within the environment is a consequence of our own experiences. Meaning, we can know how people think of their actions or activities by observing their social lives. As Ngubane (2018) explained, interpretivists believe that facts are not fixed but rather are influenced by the environment in which they are presented and people's perceptions of knowledge. This further suggests that, in this study, the researcher had to observe, study, or interpret an individual's behaviour and understand it in its natural setting.

The researcher observed and listened to the participants in an attempt to make sense of their experiences (Udjombala, 2002). The interpretive paradigm was relevant for the present study because it helped the researcher get the LSTs' perceptions on the implementation of IE, their challenges, and how they deal with them. A research paradigm consists of the following four components: axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology.

Working within the interpretive paradigm has been a transformative experience marked by a dynamic engagement with the complexities of human experiences and perspectives. This paradigm emphasizes the subjective nature of reality by shifting the researcher's role from one of an observer to one of a co-creator of meaning. The researcher learned things from participants' narratives that quantitative methods might not have. This approach demanded reflexivity, requiring the researcher to continuously examine biases and assumptions. The interpretive paradigm offers a deep, empathic understanding of participants' realities, but it requires patience as themes emerge gradually. Despite difficulties with ambiguity and complexity, this journey has helped me re-evaluate her research role and highlighted the importance of context and stories in qualitative research. Ultimately, this paradigm fostered a deep connection with participants and contributed to a more complex understanding of the human experience.

4.2.1 Axiology

Axiology refers to the ethical issues that need to be taken into account when planning a research proposal, such as what values shall be attributed to the different aspects of the research, the participants, the data and the audience to which the results shall be reported (Kivunja et al., 2017). Axiology is centred around what a researcher values in a study. According to Killam (2013), the researcher's purpose of the inquiry needs to be balanced with what they value as well as other ethical considerations when conducting a research. If basic beliefs about what is ethical are embedded in research, that will guide the researcher in decision making. As an interpretivist approach guided this study, it is considered not to be value-free research. In the interpretivist paradigm,

the researcher plays a role in their study and cannot be separated from it, thus makes them to be subjective in that research (Saunders et al., 2009).

4.2.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology

Ontology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of existence, or reality. It is concerned with things that people assume in order to believe what is real or makes sense (Kivunja et al., 2017). Because ontology studies various conceptions of being, reality, or phenomena, it has so many challenges that Sefotho (2015) suggests researchers take an ontological stance, which they need to declare as they perceive how things really are and how things really work (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, the researcher selected the data methods that allowed him to take a stance in order to avoid bias. Enoch (2017) argues that there cannot be a vocabulary for representing knowledge without an ontology. The researcher has thus stated the reality, or being to be studied, as a problem statement.

Epistemology

According to Kivunja et al. (2017), epistemology is a branch of philosophy that studies knowledge or reality and is concerned with the nature of knowledge, its forms, and how it can be acquired and communicated to other human beings. In research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to explicitly state the epistemological stance, claim, or assumption (Sefotho, 2015). Within the natural settings being investigated, the researcher constructed knowledge socially as a result of her personal experiences as the learning support teacher (Punch, 2005). It is presumed that the researcher and their subjects are fully occupied in interactive processes in which they intermingle, dialogue, question, listen, read, write, and record research data. This approach also gives a reasonable connection between the research and the research subject, as it assumes that people cannot be divided from what they know (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

However, this approach could have introduced the risk of bias and subjectivity due to the researcher's personal experiences, potentially impacting the objectivity and generalizability of findings. The interpretation of findings could have also become complex, blurring the line between participants' perspectives and the researcher's experiences. In order to prevent that, the researcher enquired as to what kind of things do people do, how they do them, the purpose of their activities, and the meaning they attach to them. Thus, the researcher became interested in knowing more about the participants and making sure that their knowledge was adequate and legitimate. The subjective epistemology was appropriate for this study because it assisted the researcher in having an interactive process in investigating the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among LSTs in MEED.

4.2.3 Methodology

The study followed a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by any means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). This means that qualitative research studies are not statistically representative and cannot make statements about how often a certain phenomenon occurs in a particular population (Rosenthal, 2018). One advantage of qualitative research is that, when used effectively, it can identify patterns or tendencies in relation to a specific phenomenon (Walford, 2005). The researcher did this by quoting directly from participants. However, qualitative research can limit the researcher due to the fact that it can consume time and is demanding because the data gathered through it is voluminous (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993).

4.3 Research Design: Multiple Case Study

The study adopted a multiple-case research design. A case study is “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary case, set within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). This means the researcher has to seek close contact with a "case" (some

authors refer to it as a person) in order to study it, know about it, and have a clear understanding of how it behaves in the real world. According to Mills et al. (2010), a "multiple case study" is a study that uses several instrumentally bound cases that are selected to create a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon than a single case can provide. When dealing with multiple case studies, the researcher has to explore variances within the cases. So, multiple case studies enabled the researcher to investigate within each setting and across settings (Maree, 2016). Five learning support teachers and five SBST coordinators from ordinary public primary schools in Khayelitsha participated in the study. This means there were a total of ten people involved in the study. Because they are all in the same cluster, the researcher had easy access to all of the participants. After doing twelve interviews, Marshall et al. (2013) came to the conclusion that the majority of the data was saturated. Despite the researcher's inability to interview the desired twelve participants, the data gathered from the ten participants who were available was sufficient and produced the expected outcomes. It is also reasonable to anticipate that the quality of this study was at its best around the time when it reached exactly these ten interviews.

4.4 Research site

This study was conducted in Khayelitsha, a township in the Metro East Education District of the Western Cape. Khayelitsha is south-east of Cape Town. The name Khayelitsha is of Xhosa origin and means “new home." It is situated 19 km east of Wynberg and 25 km south-east of Cape Town in the Western Cape. It is a sub-economic area that was wholly neglected during the apartheid era. As the largest township in Cape Town, it is known for a high rate of poverty, crime, and unemployment. Hence, there are many social problems in this township. There are about 36 primary schools, two special schools, and a school of skills that serve the community of Khayelitsha. Most schools in Khayelitsha are clustered with informal settlements (shacks), and so there is a high crime rate (Manaliyo, 2014). The researcher had a special interest in the participants who work in this high-crime area because she wanted to understand more about their experiences.

4.5 Research Sampling

The population elements considered for inclusion in the study are referred to as "sampling." The sample participants were selected from Khayelitsha in the Metro East Education District. Five LSTs and five School-Based Support Team (SBST) coordinators from the LSTs' base schools were drawn for the study. According to the researcher, in order for LSTs to work well in schools, SBST coordinators must be aware of their responsibilities and provide them with support. Generally, all these participants are considered significant informants and expert sources of knowledge. Mason (2010) suggests that a minimum of fifteen participants constitutes an acceptable sample size for qualitative research studies. This is because the study's quality tends to enhance as participants are included until data saturation is achieved. However, subsequent to reaching data saturation, a decline in the study's quality might occur (Marshall et al., 2013). In this study, however, the researcher anticipated that by the tenth interviewee, as practically all of the participants are experienced and have certain qualifications, the material acquired would have reached saturation. A sample size of ten people was therefore appropriate for this study.

The data gathered from this sample was sufficient to reveal sound expertise, extensive experience, and detailed knowledge (Maree, 2016). Merriam (2009) proposed the phrase "criterion-based selection" as an alternative word for "purposive sampling" and suggested that the researcher construct criteria in order to pick participants. Creating the criteria entails identifying the specific characteristics that the researcher requires for the study. As a result of this, by drawing a sample from the LSTs and SBSTs working at schools in the Metro East District, the researcher selected the participants' characteristics necessary to answer the research questions for the study. Additionally, the participants in the present study were selected based on their understanding of the inclusive education system and their experiences teaching and providing support in ordinary public primary schools. In order to meet the knowledge requirement, a non-probability sampling technique was implemented using purposive and cluster sampling. In this study, the researcher sought the perspectives or information of experts in the field of education, i.e., primary school learning support teachers and SBST coordinators who work exclusively inside the school setting. Therefore, the

participants met the criteria mentioned in accordance with the nature of learning support provision in South Africa (DOE, 2005). The participants of this study were chosen by cluster sampling in the Metro East Education District.

4.6 Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods for this study comprised of semi-structured interviews and it is discussed as follows:

4.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview is the most important tool for collecting data. In interviews, the researcher asks participants some open-ended questions in order to learn about the participants' ideas, beliefs, views, and opinions (Maree, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were used by the researcher to get a better understanding of the participants' experiences. The interviews assisted in understanding the respondents' perspectives rather than making broad assumptions about their experiences. The researcher first built a rapport with participants in order to facilitate face-to-face interviews with them. Because semi-structured interviews use a more conversational form of interviewing, they were a good fit for this type of study (O'Leary, 2004). Each of the interviews with participants lasted about 30 minutes, after which the participants were allowed an opportunity to ask questions. With the participants' consent, the researcher recorded the interviews. Then, in order to prepare the data for analysis, the researcher meticulously transcribed every interview.

4.7 Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Utilizing this, patterns of meaning in informant narratives of experience were uncovered. (McLeod, 2011). The words "uncover" and "pattern" lead to the purpose of thematic analysis, which is a method used to reveal and deduce meaning, specifically patterns. The researcher

identified meaning patterns across a data set on the same topic, which provided answers to the research questions being investigated. Even though an inductive analysis was a method appropriate to the aim of this research, in the course of this study, the researcher did not just use Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines; she modified procedures to perfectly fit the topic and integrated her own resources in any way her mind worked because this method is flexible. Therefore, the researcher's thematic analysis was not the author's intended meaning alone; the research analysis went beyond the analytical reading and interpretation of unbidden visualizations that the researcher tried to convey. As Joffe (2012) argues, thematic analysis is most effective in revealing the unique characteristics of a particular group's conceptualization of the topic under consideration. Its strength is to capture latent meaning (Joffe, 2012).

The data for the current study was analysed in accordance with the steps stated by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading and re-reading texts and noting down initial ideas. The literature on the topic under study was consulted, and the research questions were precisely defined. Secondly, the researcher transcribed data manually by listening to the recordings and typed them out the spoken words or texts. Then, the researcher attended to some interesting features of the data by identifying text divisions relevant to the research question, identifying meanings in these text segments, and recording them as coders. Thirdly, the coded data was categorised under different themes, then the themes were searched, reviewed, defined, and named. This entailed checking and rechecking themes at every level against the initial codes and, at some point, also against the original text sections. Lastly, the researcher produced the report on the basis of identified themes. This is perceived as a further step in the analysis because the themes were defined and prominent data extracts were used to explain each theme.

4.8 Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

The principle of trustworthiness is of the utmost importance in research. In simple terms, "trustworthiness" is the method used to ensure firmness in qualitative research. In this study, the principles of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), were adhered

to. In addition, these techniques “guide the field activities and impose checks to be certain that the proposed procedures are in fact followed” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 330). In the following part, the five criteria for ensuring trustworthiness and how to apply them are discussed.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility mainly answers the questions, “How congruent are the findings with reality? How do I ensure that the reader will believe the researcher’s findings?” (Maree, 2016). Various works of literature discuss a number of strategies that researchers can use to ensure credibility. One of them is the adoption of well-established research methods and study designs that are pertinent to the research problem (Guba, 1985). Guba (1985) also suggests that researchers should familiarize themselves with the participants, the participating organization, well-defined purposive sampling, detailed data collection methods, and triangulation. To ensure the credibility of the data in this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with some LSTs and SBST coordinators who were or are still in similar posts before the data got saturated. In addition, the researcher used prolonged engagement with and persistent observations of research subjects to ensure the credibility of interview data. Moreover, credibility was ensured by the triangulation of data sources from three sources and semi-structured interviews.

4.8.2 Transferability

This is the degree to which the results or findings of the research can be applied to other research in the same settings and contexts. (Guba, 1994). Transferability aims to accomplish quality testing and quality assurance. In the qualitative research paradigm, research findings are generalizable to other settings (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). A precise description of events and significant responses from participants are presented so that transferability to other identical contexts is conceivable. The researchers ensured transferability by providing sufficient details to allow the reader to make this assessment by providing a comprehensive account of the time, context, place, and participants’ culture (Mertens, 1998). The researcher hoped that the

information from some of the participants whom she interviewed could be transferable to a wider population of learning support teachers in Khayelitsha schools.

4.8.3 Confirmability

According to Maree (2016, p. 125), confirmability is “the degree of neutrality or extent to which the findings of the study are shaped by the participants and not by the researcher’s bias, motivation, or interest.” In the present study, the researcher ensured confirmability in that, during data collection, he kept a field journal throughout the whole process to record all issues, including personal emotions and attitudes of both the researcher and participants.

4.8.4 Dependability

If the findings of the study could be repeated with the same research question, similar respondents, and under the same conditions, then the study would be regarded as reliable (Creswell, 2007). The researcher checked this by using the triangulation method, which encompasses overlapping methods like interviews, to understand the challenges of LSTs in Khayelitsha schools.

4.8.5 Authenticity

Authenticity refers to an honest description of events, people, and places. In qualitative studies, it is a way of indicating whether the explanations interconnect and whether the researcher is able to report a situation as seen by the participants (Cohen et al., 2002, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) add to this by regarding authenticity as the extent to which the researcher can fairly and adequately present the different points of view of the participants. In order to develop authenticity, the researcher asked respondents to validate the identified themes for authenticity to ensure that their perceptions were properly and precisely understood, correctly captured, and reported.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As human beings are usually objects in the study, the researchers have to strictly adhere to ethical principles throughout the study. The reason is that ethical issues may

stem from the methods used to obtain valid and reliable data or from “the nature of research itself” (Cohen et al., 2002, p. 49). Before conducting interviews, the researcher sought the participants' permission to ensure a cooperative relationship with those who contributed information to represent the primary schools of Khayelitsha. Moreover, the researcher sought permission to conduct this research from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities, Witwatersrand University, and the research directorate of the Western Cape Education Department. After being granted access to the participants, the researcher held a meeting to outline the aim of this study and arrange the dates for the interviews. The ethical issues in this research were addressed as discussed below:

4.9.1 Informed Consent

The principals of the schools and the teachers who were interviewed were given informed consent letters, which had details about their rights, before they were interviewed. The learners were also informed that the researcher would be at their school, even though they were not participating in this study. The people who signed the consent forms were the only ones who participated in the research, and that ensured voluntary participation.

4.9.2 Confidentiality

The principle of confidentiality is a critical part of a research study. Since some people may have the feeling that the information they provide is too sensitive to be disclosed to anyone, the researcher guarantees that the information will be known only between the researcher and them. To stress this kind of confidentiality, the names of the interviewees were not necessary. Researchers have to faithfully “ensure participants that anything discussed between them will be in strict confidence,” but the participants should bear in mind that the data gathered will be publicly reported (Berg, 1998, p. 48). The names of the schools were also excluded from this study. Moreover, confidentiality was ensured by keeping the data on a computer with a unique password only known to the researcher, and the stored data will be destroyed after a period of three years from the date when the last interview was carried out.

4.9.3 Anonymity

In research, anonymity means that the identity of the participants is concealed. In this study, the identities of the participants are only known to the researcher and protected from the public. To ensure this, the researcher used numbers and letters to name participants and some locations in order to protect their anonymity by concealing their names and any other identifying information. Before beginning interviews, participants were issued consent letters. They were assured that their identities would remain confidential during data processing, interpretation, and reporting. All the original documents that have the potential to compromise the participants' identities were immediately destroyed after being used.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research paradigm, research design, research methodology, research site, research sampling, data collection methods, trustworthiness of qualitative data, data analysis, and ethical considerations of this study. The findings of this study will be discussed in detail, and recommendations for further study will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which centered on the research question, "What are the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers?" The findings are divided into three parts, as follows: (a) psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education; (b) social challenges of implementing inclusive education; and (c) the kind of support that learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education. Moreover, under each of the above sub-headings, themes are identified, discussed, and supported by interview excerpts from the study participants.

5.2 Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers

As stated by Aygyapong et al. (2011), both educators and the general public recognize stress and burnout as significant issues in the teaching profession. For this study, the question that provided the data was, “What are the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education in schools?” The themes that emerged on psychological challenges include teacher stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, low self-efficacy, and negative teacher attitudes. The themes are presented and discussed as indicated below:

Theme1: *Teacher Stress*

Teacher stress is the experience of unpleasant, negative emotions caused by certain aspects of a teacher's job (Harmsen et al., 2018). According to Haydon et al. (2018), stress manifests in teachers and has significant effects on their perception of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout, attrition, student engagement, and physical health. The findings of the present study indicated that one of the psychological challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education is teacher stress. With regard to how psychologically challenging their careers have been as LSTs and SBSTs, most

respondents showed how overwhelming and stressful it is to implement inclusive education in their schools. The participants reiterated that they experienced stress because of the additional responsibilities of managing learners with barriers in mainstream schools. For example, one respondent reported, *"It's too much for me neh? But at the same time I'm coping because it's been long time doing this. So, I've got other tactics to deal with."* (SBST 1). Another respondent agreed that,

> "You get involved…You also have your psychological problems. Whatever you feel, you feel overwhelmed sometimes because you're the coordinator and you are also SMT member because you are the HOD." (SBST 3)

On the basis of the qualitative findings above, teachers experience stress due to the multiple responsibilities that they are assigned in addition to their teaching roles when implementing inclusive education. Thus, teachers get overwhelmed by additional roles, resulting in a stressful experience. Despite having to support learners who have various learning barriers, teachers must also manage their own psychological issues, which cause them stress. In addition, another respondent also indicated that, *"Everyone was…was not okay because you feel embarrassed when you've tried your best, but nothing has changed."* (SBST 4). Other respondents also reported that they experienced stressful challenges when implementing inclusive education because of the increased demands on them, added responsibilities and work overload. The following interview are the excerpts from five other participants regarding experiences of stress in implementing inclusive education:

> "It's too much right now. Maybe it's because of my personality. I'm just going forward, you know. As time goes on, as we are growing up, we have life challenges we are facing. It's mixed up, with work on the other side and on the other side it's your personal life." (LST 1)

> "It's really frustrating and sometimes I say haa! I want to go back to (subject X) because I just want… if I do something neh, I just want something that I can see, I can see that yeah now yah… With this one, I can't!" (LST 2)

> “I feel overwhelmed when I am supposed to go and fetch the learners neh? You see we are working according to time, so they’re taking so long to come in. I also take so long to go and fetch them, that is the challenge.” (LST 4)

> “It’s too much right now. Maybe it’s because of my personality. I’m just going forward. You know, as time goes on, as we are growing up, we have life challenges we are facing. It’s mixed up, with work on the other side and on the other side it’s your personal life. And then at work you suppose to work with parents, hand in hand and they don’t cooperate.” (LST 5)

> “It's too much. I'm the HOD, departmental head. I'm dealing with the classes, all the classes that are under my supervision. And then this, no, it’s too much. It's too much overload. I'm just doing it for just, I just agreed to do it because, um, district says it must be an SMT member.” (SBST 3)

From the interview excerpts presented above, it is evident that most teachers experience enormous stress when implementing inclusive education. Thus, it can be argued that teachers’ stress emanates from the changing roles and responsibilities that they have to undertake in classrooms with diverse learners. This means that teachers must handle changing and evolving expectations and responsibilities while also managing the classroom environment. For instance, performing HOD duties and teaching learners that require more support in the classroom. Moreover, the results also indicate that teachers are stressed due to the multiple roles that are expected of them when supporting learners with barriers in the classroom. According to what LST4 has stated, learning support teachers also have their own timetable that they must adhere to; therefore, it is extremely stressful for them when learners are not released on time to the learning support class and the LST has to go get them.

Finally, stress among teachers is also brought about by high expectations placed on them, which make them put in extra effort but yield very little results. For instance, LST 2 no longer has an easy experience with learning support. The respondent believes that the only remaining option is to return to teaching mainstream subjects. The research further concludes that, in comparison to the subject they used to teach in the mainstream, learning support teachers observe no progress in learning support. The

next theme discussed on psychological challenges experienced by teachers is burnout.

Theme 2: *Teacher Burn-out*

According to Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021), "burnout" is a psychological syndrome characterized by a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal pressures in the workplace. The findings of the present study indicated that teachers experience burnout when implementing inclusive education in schools. The teachers reported that they experienced burnout, which was a result of a perceived lack of trust by the school principal in handling assigned responsibilities for implementing inclusive education. The learning support teacher 1 reported the following regarding experiences of burnout: "*Yah, I can just go. That's what I'm good at."* (LST, 1). From the quoted response, the respondent demonstrated that if given the opportunity, they would not hesitate to return to a mainstream class. This implies that teachers cannot cope anymore being in the learning support role considering the psychological challenges that they experienced. In addition to this, the SBST coordinator also reported having experienced burnout, as suggested by the desire to leave a position of responsibility given the opportunity. The excerpt follows:

> "I would give it to someone else if I had a chance but my principal doesn't want me to because he feels that since I'm there SBST is functioning very well and even the department of education is saying that at X Primary school, SBST is functioning very well." (SBST 1)

From the interview results above, it can be argued that teachers experience burnout because of the low recognition of their efforts in performing their roles by the principals, who are their immediate supervisors at school. According to the participant, the department appears to be unaware that SBST is only holding the position for the sake of it. The research argues that there is a lack of recognition of teachers' efforts and roles in the implementation of inclusive education in schools. The next theme discussed on the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education is low self-efficacy.

Theme 3: *Teachers' Low Self-efficacy*

According to Cherry (2023), "self-efficacy is the confidence a person has in their abilities to perform a task or accomplish a goal." Low self-efficacy refers to situations in which teachers have very low beliefs in their ability to perform school tasks. The findings of this study indicated that most participants reported low self-efficacy in their efforts to implement inclusive education in schools. According to Lee et al. (2016), better school performance is a result of motivated teachers and other staff. Nonetheless, a lack of motivation could result in poor performance and even lead to burnout. When asked about how they feel about being LST so far, the respondents showed low self-efficacy in implementing inclusive education in schools. The interview excerpt in support of this was reported as follows:

> "Mmm… yhoo! You know it's not as easy to be a learning support teacher, more especially when you are experienced teacher. But I don't have…what do you call? … yes qualifications for learning support. Umm…and then you find out that there are so many learners that have problems and even those that are coming here, you know… and it's not just easy, problem is that they can't even write or read. And you, you do as much but hey, to see that yeah there is no… it's just a drop in the ocean, it's…When I sit and I do… what do you call it? Lesson plan. You know I can't sit down and make lesson plan and finish it in one day. You see? But haa! It's frustrating, you know when I was a teacher, a straight one you know, maybe we were 4 neh? Then let's say grade 3 or grade 1 teachers because I taught grade 1 and 2, then we will say, okay you are doing umm… Maths, you are doing ehhh English, you are doing isiXhosa and…. And we will do this lesson plan together" (LST 1)

From the interview excerpt above, it is evident that the participant seems to have reached a point of low self-efficacy by not being able to work as a team. This has led to frustration because of their inability to complete tasks on time. Another participant also reported that:

> "It is because first of all, educators don't want to refer learners whereas as an inclusive school, we're supposed to refer. So, what we did, we made a roster so that each and every educator just come and present the learners that are having barriers in learning, you know? So, it's hard. It is because most of the educators don't want to refer" (SBST1)

On the basis of the findings above, it can be argued that the coordinator of the SBST, despite having a roster, finds that teachers are reluctant to refer learners with learning barriers for professional support. Therefore, this makes it difficult for learning support teachers to make interventions with struggling learners.

In addition, another SBST coordinator also reported low-self efficacy in implementing inclusive education due to perceived lack of meaningful change despite numerous efforts. The interview excerpt in support of this is reported as follows: *"Everyone was…was not okay because you feel embarrassed when you've tried your best, but nothing has changed...*" (SBST 4). This implies that when there is an effort and to do the task but with no results teachers may feel like there is no value in what they are doing. Another learning support teacher appeared to have the same opinion and reported the following:

> "I don't have the problem. I like kids a lot and I like…you know, working with those needing support but it's those things… and you see there is also this thing, and I've got also another school. Two schools and there is no impact because I come here and it's my first day here, I've got 3 days here and 2 days at that school at (Location X), you know, and when I come back from that school I forgot what I have to do here" (LST 3)

The interview results above reveal that as LSTs work on an itinerant basis, it can be argued that being an itinerant teacher has a negative impact on them, as they tend to forget what they were doing when they were at another school for two or three days. As a result, they notice no change in their efforts to implement inclusive education in schools. Challenges such as fragmented time management, a lack of continuity, limited resource accessibility, adaptation difficulties, and increased stress levels could impede their efforts. Furthermore, establishing strong relationships with learners and

colleagues, ongoing professional development, and a consistent support network might be compromised due to their transient presence.

Theme 4: *Emotional exhaustion among teachers*

Emotional exhaustion is described as lacking the emotional energy to adequately address the situation (Glicken and Robinson, 2013). When someone feels emotionally spent and emotionally drained, they are said to be experiencing emotional exhaustion (Aldrup, et al., 2020). The findings of the study reported that teachers experience emotional exhaustion as a result of the varied learner issues that they handle in an effort to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools. Regarding their feelings of emotional exhaustion from learning support, the participants reported that: *"Mm..yah, when there is a specific problem about a child, maybe the child was raped then it became evident maybe, so I…I feel overwhelmed because even myself I became so emotional out of that"* (LST 2). In addition, another learning support teacher also reported that:

> "Yhooo! It's a lot. You know we are not only dealing with the leaners with learning barriers alone. There are so many challenges that they face like emotional, the social problems that they have. Sometimes they make you feel sad." (LST 3)

From the interview excerpts above, it is evident that the roles of learning support teachers vary according to the cases they deal with in schools. Therefore, the researcher argues that learners face not only learning barriers but also social and emotional challenges that in some way affect the learning support teachers' emotional well-being. The next theme discussed on psychological challenges is the negative attitudes of teachers.

Theme 5: *Negative teacher attitudes*

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993, p. 1), in Desombre et al. (2021), attitudes are defined as a psychological predisposition that is exhibited by judging a specific entity favourably or negatively. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education specifically

refers to their beliefs, feelings, and intentions toward an inclusive policy (Desombre et al., 2021). Another study conducted by Singh et al. (2020) reported that teachers have a moderate to favourable attitude towards inclusive education and that pre-service teachers have a more positive view of inclusive education than in-service teachers. The present study revealed that teachers do not embrace inclusive education since the majority of respondents reported that mainstream teachers are hesitant to refer learners and participate in school-based support teams. One participant reported as follows:

> "I would like to say, first of all, we are experiencing even challenges here in the schools. Because honestly, educators do not really like this committee. It's just that…I don't really know why, but it's a fact they don't like it." (SBST 2)

From the interview excerpt above, it is evident that there appears to be no special reason why teachers dislike or do not support inclusive education. However, it is apparent that teachers have negative attitudes towards the aspects that are meant to enhance the implementation of inclusion education. This implies that teachers' negative attitudes toward measures meant to support inclusive education are consistent with broader societal norms and structural limitations. This resonance emphasizes the importance of the study's theory in investigating the underlying power dynamics, institutional barriers, and societal influences that shape these attitudes. Not only do teachers lack support for inclusive education, but so do SBST members. Another participant weighed in and reported that:

> "And even us sometimes, other members, SBST members, even some of us who don't like the meetings, I mean the SBST members, let alone the teachers in the classes. Sometimes we don't even really meet the curriculum. We struggle to meet the curriculum, and to start the meetings. So maybe you are right. We can just try to conduct the research and find out from them what their reasons could be. Maybe that's why the department, as I said that all the… ehh, the school management, I mean all the SMT members, that means the school management members must be into this committee. Because the department is also aware that educators

don’t like the committee. So at least if the pressure comes from the school management to the educators, Yeah.” (SBST 2)

As the department of education is also aware of teacher attitudes towards inclusive education, the participant believes that limiting the membership of the SBST to members of the school management would assist teachers in becoming more interested in inclusive education or learning support. It appears that some SBST members are merely there for the purpose of being there. Regarding active membership, they are ineligible. The LST explained:

“We meet but you know sometimes they put someone in this position, you know…. They are at this SBST team but the mind is not there, they don’t like it, they don’t value it. Maybe you can find out that it’s only 2 to 3 people that are serious, the others will say, you know, “yhoo! haa, that thing of yours” when you are telling them about the meeting.” (LST 1)

On the basis of the finding above, it appears that just a few members of the SBST are committed to the committee, while the remainder do not even attend its meetings. They view the committee as something reserved for a select few, therefore isolating themselves from it. Another participant who shares the same sentiments as the previous excerpt reported as follows:

“The teachers refer the learners to the SBST. But the challenge we have, not every teacher wants to do ISP (Individual Support Plan) or GSP (Group Support Plan) because they think… um... they waste their time…they don't have time. They isolate, which is, they don't differentiate within their lessons. Because we normally preach that every day. The story that you are doing in your grade seven class is the same as that you are doing for even this level- grade one child. But the difference is that you lower the questioning, the how to do it, to each level, to their level.” (SBST 4)

From the interview excerpt above, it is expected that learners with learning barriers will be presented to the SBST along with an individual support plan or group support plan document so that both the teacher and the LST can implement them. However,

based on the findings, the majority of teachers do not aspire to complete those documents since they view them as a waste of their time. As a result, failing to develop, implement, and accomplish the whole process of referral results in a lack of differentiation in the classroom.

5.3 Social Challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers.

According to Mooney et al., (2022), social challenges are social situations that a sector of a society perceives as damaging to members of society and require remediation. The participants of the study were asked to indicate their social challenges with regard to implementing inclusive education in their schools. The major themes and sub-themes on social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers are: *teachers' related challenges* (sub-themes: uncooperative teachers, large work load of teachers, lack of trained teachers on inclusive education); *school-related challenges* (sub-themes: learners aggressive behaviour, dissonance between policy and practice, lack of resources to support inclusive education, learners non-disclosure of their problems, low self-esteem of learners, high learner drop out of school); and finally, *community related challenges* (sub-themes: low parental participation, insecure community environment, negative parental attitude, poverty in families, parental alcoholism).

The themes and sub-themes on barriers to implementing inclusive education in classrooms are presented in figure 3 below.

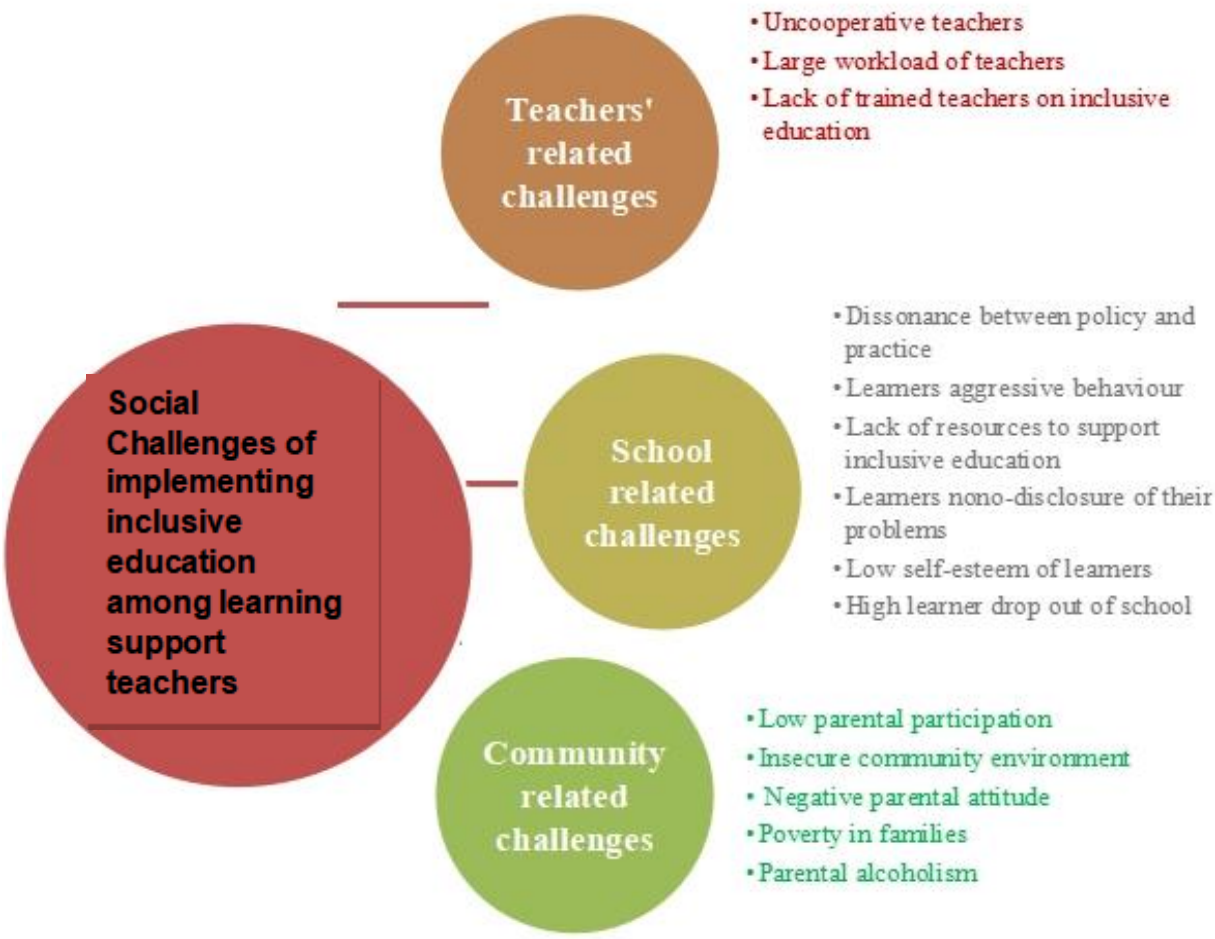

Figure 3: *Themes and sub-themes on social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers* (Source: Analysed Primary data (2023))

As presented in the figure above, the main themes and sub-themes are presented and discussed as follows:

Theme 1: Teacher related challenges

Unbeknownst to many, teaching is a phenomenal profession that comes with challenges. Teachers'-related challenges are difficulties that teachers face in the classroom or around the school. In this study, the following sub-themes emerged as

teacher-related challenges and are presented below: uncooperative teachers, a large workload of teachers, and a lack of trained teachers in inclusive education.

Sub-theme 1: *Uncooperative teachers*

Cooperation among teachers is an important attribute for success in schools. Following Heron et al. (1997) definition of cooperation, school cooperation can be described as a process whereby teachers or their representatives participate with the school management team through consultation and discussions in resolving issues or common concerns. The researcher argues that without cooperation, synergy cannot be achieved in educational institutions. However, in this study, the findings reported that there is a lack of cooperation between the learning support teachers and other mainstream teachers in the schools, and this has negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education. Two participants reported the following on the lack of cooperation among teachers:

> “They’re not complying because they don’t want the paperwork, you know. They don’t want to fill in the forms, they are always having problems and even when there was, this time of referring the kids to special schools, and there are lots of kids that they didn’t refer, you see… so it’s just tiring.” (LST1)

> “That's the challenge. And then one of the challenges is that when it comes to referrals as I indicated before, that thing it's one aspect that I don't think the teachers are taking seriously. Or the teachers, they feel that it's their overwork with it. You know, that is where I think the challenge is...” (SBST 5)

From the interview excerpts above, it is evident that when it comes to supporting inclusive education in schools, it appears that teachers' unwillingness to fulfil their responsibilities is a significant problem, as they are reluctant to refer learners for assistance. Moreover, another learning support teacher reported lack of access to learners for support as a result of reluctance by teachers to refer them for professional support. One learning support teacher reported that: “*Yeah, sometimes. More*

especially in grade 3s, the teachers there would say yhooo! we are busy, we are busy. They don't want to write the SNAs, you know…. SNAs are not enough, maybe they are 20" (LST 2). From the interview results above, it can be argued that teachers impede the proper implementation of the policy on inclusive education by refusing to refer learners and by not completing the necessary paperwork.

Another learning support teacher also reported a lack of cooperation from teachers as one of the social challenges in relation to the school environment, community, and parental involvement in the implementation of inclusive education. The interview excerpt from learning support teacher is reported as follows:

> "School environment hey! In terms of referrals, teachers are not cooperating. I think it's a social challenge neh? Because when you speak about referral and then they…it seems as if they understand and then they are willing to do referrals but when it comes to the main thing they don't do it." (LST 3)

From the interview excerpt above, it appears that the LST was referring primarily to all the paperwork required for learners to be successfully referred for support. Their heavy workload is caused by mainstream teachers not cooperating by doing the necessary paperwork that learners need for the referral process. Therefore, this is an impediment to the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

Sub-theme 2: *Large work load of teachers*

Teaching has become a more difficult job over the years, with increased paperwork and challenging learners' behaviour. According to Perlito et al. (2021), the teaching profession entails being subjected to a variety of professional responsibilities, which can give the impression of a heavy workload. The interview excerpt in support of this was:

> "I enjoy it, but there's too much work because SBST is an umbrella for everything at school. But you find out you are an SBST coordinator, you end up coordinating the committees that are within the school, within the

SBST. So it's a lot of work. Otherwise I enjoy, I do everything thoroughly." (SBST 4)

From the interview excerpt above, it is evident that even though the SBST coordinator has teaching responsibilities and coordinates the committee, other committees within the school depend solely on the SBST coordinator for their efficient operation. Consequently, this results in an increased workload when responsibilities are not shared. Regarding workload, another LST had to say:

> "Not very few I don't have less than 60, I always have more than 60 but I'm supposed not have 60 learners in this school. But I always have those huge numbers, 99 and eighty-something up to 100. That number is affecting my paperwork, I can't even group them. She even said, how do you group this learners, 99 learners? Serious, if I can stick to that 60, it can work. But it does not work with me now because I always have this large numbers." (LST 5)

Even though the LST is required to support a certain number of learners in one school, it is clear from the interview excerpt above that the large number of learners they end up supporting affects their workload. This results in increased workload and the inability to group learners. Failure to group learners also results in the absence of group support plans.

Sub-theme 3: *Lack of trained teachers on inclusive education*

Making sure that all teachers are equipped to teach all children is a critical component of inclusive education. According to UNESCO (2020), inclusion cannot be accomplished unless teachers are empowered change agents, possessing values, knowledge, and attitudes that allow every learner to succeed. Regarding training teachers on inclusive education, the results of a study conducted by Mokaleng and Mowes (2020) revealed that seventy-four of the ninety teachers in the study believed that teachers lacked knowledge about working with learners with special needs, while

seventy teachers believed that a lack of proper teacher training contributed to a reluctance to work with learners with special needs. The findings of this study revealed that some learning support teachers lack adequate qualifications and training in inclusive education. One learning support teacher reported this regarding the lack of training on inclusive education:

> "You know what….me, I don't believe in inclusive education because … you know, there is this child who can't even pronounce words right, you know. He is in grade R and when I ask what the problem is, he had ummm… accident and then that child, I also find out that there is a problem with him and then now, how is that child going to learn? Because he is affected in hearing and then the speech again, you know… and when the child is learning, he must speak you know and pronounce the words and hear it before they can write and I don't have the skills for that." (LST 1)

Based on the above interview excerpt above, the researcher contends that learning support teachers do not receive sufficient continuous training or programs in inclusive education. Due to a lack of training in certain inclusive education areas, some learning support teachers ended up no longer believing in inclusive education.

Theme 2: School Related challenges

As a result of the increasing demands and pressures in schools, there are numerous challenges to overcome. School-related challenges refer to the obstacles that prevent students and teachers from actively participating in teaching and learning in schools. In this study, the following school-related challenges emerged and are presented below: Learners' aggressive behaviour, dissonance between policy and practice, lack of resources to support inclusive education, Learners' non-disclosure of their problems, low self-esteem of learners, and high dropout rates of learners.

Sub-theme 1: *Learners' aggressive behaviour*

Aggressive behaviour is the outward manifestation of hostility and is frequently connected with developmental changes and a variety of medical and psychiatric illnesses across the lifespan (Liu et al., 2013). Behaviours such as teasing, irritability, bullying, fighting, and even cruelty may be seen in learners who are aggressive in class. According to Guetzloe (2006, p. 20), learners who display aggressive and violent behaviours are a cause for worry and concern for classroom teachers in both regular and special education settings. Three participants out of ten in the study reported that learner aggressive behaviours were prevalent in schools, and this also negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education. When voicing their worries, one LST stated:

> "Yah, there are those children that are…you know mos, little ones, they do copycat. So, others neh… they go with that trend of (skollies) you know. So, even here at school, they practice that. Maybe they just do like this on other people (shooting gesture) on other children neh, so by show of this, it's "I'm gonna shoot you," you know. So we try to make it…because that is not allowed at school. Some of them, maybe they've got their role model at home, so they transfer this to school." (LST 2)

From the results above, it appears that learners mimic what gangsters do and bring it to school. This means that the people they look up to as role models are those who rob others in their neighbourhood. When another participant remarked that the SBST committee is ineffective, they were asked if they hold frequent meetings to discuss critical cases at school, and the response was:

> "Yes. It also requires the paperwork. It requires that still, that profile as well. You must also follow that protocol, that profile staff. You must fill in that SNA form and all the staff that need to go to the social worker. It depends… we had the learners that were smoking, you know. So they had to be tested in all the staff. So you must still follow that protocol. The same protocol." (SBST 2)

From the interview excerpt above, it is evident that dealing with learners who take drugs is one of the learning support teachers' most significant social cases. It is also

clear that the learners' home environments have a substantial impact on their growth and development. This has reached the point where it has significantly affected who they are or what they will become. Similarly, one SBST coordinator had to say, "*They're unruly. Yhoo, it's because of, I think it's because of their background you know"* (SBST 3). From this quoted response, it is evident that certain situations in the classroom may cause learners to act aggressively. Such behaviours may put teachers and other learners at risk, as aggressive learners often interrupt the lessons. Therefore, the study concludes that aggressive behaviour in students is a hindrance to the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

Sub-theme 2: *Dissonance between inclusive education policy and practice*

Dissonance between inclusive education policy and practice occurs when there is a disparity or lack of congruence between what the inclusive education policy states and what is being implemented. Hudson et al. (2019) state that there is a rising awareness that policies do not succeed or fail based on their inherent merits; rather, their success is contingent on the implementation process. This issue of policy and implementation was raised when participants were asked about their experiences as LST and SBST coordinators. In this study, some participants discussed the challenges that they have faced so far in the implementation of inclusive education, but one individual highlighted how socially challenging her experience has been. One learning support teacher reported the following:

> "Mmm…How can I explain it? Mm…I don't know how I feel like, the reason why I'm saying that is because, uhh…you gain sometimes new things from the workshop and then you come and implement. Sometimes the experience that I'm gaining at the workshop, when I come and implement it doesn't work the way they say so in those workshops. So, that's my experience aah…" (LST 3)

According to the LST, there appears to be a discrepancy between the training teachers receive and what they must implement in their classrooms. From the trainings and

workshops they have, LSTs do gain valuable information, but it is not easy to put into practice what they have learned. This means that some workshops do not need to be only informational; they should be practical so that LSTs can practice what they have learned in their classrooms. In that way, there would be some progress in the implementation of the inclusive education policy.

Sub-theme 3: *Lack of resources to support inclusive education*

According to Paseka and Schwab (2020), a major barrier to successful inclusion appears to be a lack of resources or the inability of resources to address learners' specific needs. In this study, the lack of resources became a significant issue for three participants. When asked whether their schools have resources to facilitate inclusive education, one respondent reported as follows:

> "Resources are the challenge, as you can see that I don't have desk and chairs, you see? It's a challenge... For instance, I don't like to use this white board neh? because I am dealing with learners with learning barriers. So, I need that black board so that I can even draw lines because what I noticed is that my children are unable to write on lines. So, if I have a blackboard where I can draw lines so that I can say to them "start from this line, pass the line, end to the other one…:" so that they can understand when I show them that because I noticed that some cannot write on lines." (LST 3)

From the interview excerpt above, it appears that even though some resources are available at school, the schools do not supply those that could expressly cater to or accommodate learners with barriers. Some schools lack enough chairs and tables for their learning support classrooms. Not only do schools lack resources to facilitate inclusion, but district specialists also lack the required tools to assess learners with barriers. One SBST coordinator explained:

> "Everyone was…was not okay because you feel embarrassed when you've tried your best, but nothing has changed. But the learner moved to grade

> four. The learner…when you see her, she communicates well, but unable to write. Until we refer to grade three, we started referring because we only refer to the psychologist when the learner is nine years old, according to our psychologist that there are no tools for Isixhosa. And then, but the response came when they assess her while in grade four. So now we are waiting for transfer to the special school." (SBST 4)

According to the preceding finding above, it could take up to a year for the psychologist to assess a learner due to a lack of tools. Therefore, learners are simply promoted to the next grade, despite the fact that it is evident that they require professional support. This hinders the successful implementation of inclusive education, as it is apparent that these learners require more support than their teachers can give.

Sub-theme 4: *Learners' non-disclosure of their problems*

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines non-disclosure as "failure or refusal to make something known." According to a recent study, many students at an Australian university opt not to disclose their disability and, as a result, do not access support (Grimes et al., 2019). Similarly, this study found that some learners with barriers are reluctant to disclose their social problems, posing a challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in schools. Two respondents reported:

> "It's not easy. It's not easy because before a teacher can take the child to SBST, the teachers are supposed to meet the parent and get the information and know what can I do before using the information from the parent. But that is a gap, because you don't know the child, meaning that, because sometimes the children are so feeling ashamed about their parents they don't disclose some of the problems that happen at home. And then if you don't see the parent, that child will stay with that thing. Whatever intervention you do to that child won't do anything because that block is not broken." (SBST 4)

> "Few years back neh…. There was higher rate of ahh…. child abuse. They used to disclose to me, you know there was one incident I remember this

> child was in my class, I was in school X, she was in grade 2. I could see that she was more reserved than before, she was a quiet child. But you can see there's something, there's something wrong with the child as you know them individually. I saw this child, there's something happening with this child. I just said to the child "baby girl, even if you don't tell me what happened to you, maybe tell someone else what happened to you. So that you must be relieved with what is haunting you." The following day that child disclosed to her neighbour that her uncle that she was staying with used to rape her every day." (LST 5)

On the basis of the interview excerpts above, it is evident that some learners may not have access to school-based support because parents do not provide the necessary information for the referral processes. It appears that their non-disclosure is the result of personal issues and a variety of home issues, including a lack of confidence in their dependent. In addition, they do not disclose to their teachers because they are embarrassed, so they choose to disclose to other people, such as neighbours. As a result, it is possible that those learners will not receive the appropriate support, as the school-based support programs will not meet their needs as a result of a lack of sufficient information. Therefore, the implementation of inclusive education is hampered since the learner receives no intervention at the school level.

Sub-theme 5: *Low self-esteem of learners*

According to Rouault (2022), low self-esteem is the negative perspective of the self and is related to a number of psychiatric disorders, especially those of an anxious and depressive nature. At school, learners who have a personal tutor and attend supplemental classes are negatively connected with the risk of having low self-esteem (Nguyen, 2019). In this study, the findings revealed that learners who attend learning support classes have low self-esteem. One SBST coordinator reported that:

> "…But at the end of the day, maybe they will pick up that they may not be belonging in the mainstream. At the same time, they lose their self-esteem

> because they could see that they are not coping, even if they're in high school, because they have been promoting, promoting, promoting. And then they could start in high school. And so they realize that it's like…I'm not performing like others or I'm not doing what is expected. They lose their self-esteem and it's like we are killing them. I don't know how to put it, but you know, it's like you are killing them." (SBST 2)

On the basis of the findings above, learners suffer from a lack of self-esteem as a result of their segregation from the mainstream, as well as a lower standard of performance as compared to other learners. It can be further concluded that when learners lack confidence in their abilities to succeed, they may be reluctant to participate in learning or take acceptable risks for academic growth. As a result of all these factors, learners with low self-esteem may have poor mental health, which can lead to depression.

Sub-theme 6: *High learner drop out of school*

According to Bonneau (2015), a "dropout" is defined as any learner who withdraws from school without transferring to another primary or secondary school before graduating or completing a program of studies. School dropout is not an isolated occurrence; rather, it is the culmination of a long process of disengagement in which learners are drawn away from school by various circumstances. Gausel and Bourguignon (2020) contend that even though most educational programs are designed to help learners integrate into the social and professional worlds, some learners choose to drop out. Likewise, this study revealed that learners who attend learning support classes drop out of school for a variety of reasons. The interview excerpt in support of this was reported as follows:

> "And then sometimes you find out that maybe these learners… maybe that's why we end up having learners that are dropping out. Because sometimes we don't present. They don't come out and present these learners. But, uh… maybe they are just passing then, maybe they promote

> them, you know? It’s as if we are failing the learners because the learners get stuck in grade seven, of which there's nothing that can be done. At least if maybe the learner was identified at the early stage, something would have been done. That learner needs to be referred to the special school and all the stuff. Sometimes, somehow it's a problem.” (SBST 2)

The finding above indicates that, as a result of the failure of referrals, schools face a high dropout rate among learners who require support. It appears that teachers merely let learners who need support pass instead of identifying them early for support. As a result, those learners miss out on the opportunity to be sent to suitable schools, such as special schools or schools of skills. This causes learners to drop out in the end.

Theme 3: Community related challenges

Communities have challenges, just like people. Community challenges are local issues that can only be resolved with the participation of the people in that area. In this study, the following sub-themes emerged as community challenges to inclusive education implementation in schools: low parental participation, an insecure community environment, negative parental attitudes, poverty in families, and parental alcoholism.

Sub-theme 1: *Low parental participation*

Parental participation refers to the involvement of parents in a variety of school- and home-based activities to enhance their children's education (Maluleke, 2014). Low parental participation occurs when parents demonstrate a lack of interest or reluctance in their children's education. In the present study, low parental participation in the education of their children with learning barriers became a common trend among all the participants. Thus, from the findings of the study, it is evident that low parental participation acts as a hindrance to the practice of inclusive education in schools, and that becomes a challenge to the learning support teachers.

According to the respondents of this study, parents do not support their children to the point that they do not sign referral forms for additional support. Three participants reported the following:

> “I end up withdrawing learners without referrals. Then the parents don’t come and sign up the SNA part… yah, the signatures neh…but sometimes when you phone them they say, no you can take the child but when you call the parent to come and sign, the parent will never come.” (LST 3)

> “Those parents of the learners who are struggling, they are the one who are not cooperating. Those who are cooperating are the ones of learners who don’t need support. That is what I experience all these years. But… maybe few of them they care more than others but most of them they don’t even pitch out.” (LST 5)

> “First of all, as we are the inclusive school if we do…identify learners that are having challenges, and we want to refer them to school of skills, other parents they don’t want their learners to go to school of skills. You know? Those are the challenges that we are having.” (SBST 1)

From the two interview excerpt above, it is evident that a lack of parental involvement and collaboration in their children's education might result in learners not receiving necessary support. In addition, some parents' unwillingness to assist their children who have been referred to the district for more support may be related to ignorance and stigma associated with learners who have been sent to the school of skills. Therefore, this impedes the successful implementation of inclusive education in school. Likewise, another LST said, *“Haa.. nope! Sometime the other parent didn’t even come to sign for the kid for the School of Skills”* (LST 1). It appears that, despite the necessity for parents to go to school and assist with their children's referral process, they are reluctant to do so. Regarding this, one SBST coordinator said,

> “Yhoo! Some of them honestly. Some of them. But others don't. Even if you have to refer, they don't. Well, because I remember once we thought of maybe sending a social worker to the particular home.” (SBST 2)

> “Most of the parents are not supportive. They won’t even be coming to the meetings. Others you give them those letters stating that your child need support, they only sign it, even if you ask them to come to school, they don’t come. They don’t bother.” (LST 5)

When LSTs refer learners with barriers to the district for additional support, the process requires them to communicate with the learners’ parents so that the parents can provide additional information and sign the applications. In addition, when LSTs take learners for support, they require permission from the parents; however, the results above indicate that parents do not wish to learn more about their children and the support they require and therefore do not attend meetings. Some parents seem reluctant to acknowledge that their children have learning barriers. This is demonstrated by examples such as parents not being involved with their children during referral processes. One learning support teacher reported that:

> “No. They even don’t come to their classes. It is very difficult for them to come to my class. And the parents are in denial, they don’t understand that their learners are having challenges. Even in terms of when you call them for referrals, outside. You see?” (LST 3)

According to the respondent’s explanation above, some parents are in denial that their children do need support, and as a result, they make the external referral processes difficult as they do not attend meetings where they would have an opportunity to get more information about their children’s challenges. Some learners end up not being supported at the school level due to a lack of parents’ approval. There are some parents who do not cooperate. One SBST coordinator stated:

> “It's not easy. It's not easy because before a teacher can take the child to SBST, the teachers are supposed to meet the parent and get the information and know what can I do before using the information from the parent.” (SBST 4)

The SBST coordinatosr shared the same sentiments as the LSTs. According to their response, external referral process does not run smoothly because of lack of sufficient

information from the parents. In addition, some participants explained that when the school invites parents to meetings, only the parents of learners without barriers attend, whereas the parents who would be expected to attend in greater numbers, namely those of learners without barriers, do not. One participant explained, *"The parents…few, they respond, but those who respond are those parents who have no problems. Those we actually need, they don't or they will come drunk."* (LST 1). Likewise, the SBST coordinator expressed the same sentiments, *"No, no… if we do have parents' day, you know, as we need those parents…but they don't. The ones that we need don't come"* (SBST 1). According to the responses of participants, many parents appear to have no interest in their children's education. One SBST coordinator reported, *"Some are involved. Others…they don't, you know. They don't care. They are not. Majority are not involved."* (SBST 3)

From the interview findings above, it is evident that a lack of parental support for their children with learning barriers was reported as a major concern. As the implementers of inclusive education in schools, learning support teachers explained that the absence of parental support was their major challenge in successfully implementing inclusive education in their schools.

Sub-theme 2: *Insecure community environment*

The findings of this study indicated that an insecure community environment featured prominently as one of the social challenges that negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education in schools in the area. Previous studies have reported that the communities in townships continue to be insecure due to murder, robbery, assault, muggings, and domestic violence (Evans, 2022, para 7). In this study, when asked about their social challenges in relation to the environment, participants expressed concern about their safety when implementing inclusive education in their schools. For example, one learning support teacher reported that:

> "Yah, the community. We're not safe, looking at the community neh, we see that things are happening and then we feel that…us we feel not safe

because we work here, everyday we're here, in the morning we experience hijackings and everything." (LST 2)

From the interview results above, it is evident that teachers are not safe in their schools because crime occurs right in front of them, and it appears that they have no control or choice since they are in the workplace and daily attendance is expected. Another learning support teacher voiced concern about their safety, particularly while sharing resources with the community. The participants reported that:

"No, no…we're not safe, we're not safe. Like now, we're sharing electricity with the neighbours, our neighbours, you see? …and we understand that. They say, borrow us and then after an hour we will give you back. You see? They take it for 2 hours and they give us a chance of 30 minutes after 30 minutes, electricity is gone. I just thank God that I'm safe, but at the gate you must look around, you see? Because we are not safe here. I think, last of last year…there were gangs who came in our school, in a meeting and they gun point us and they collected all the phones and the laptops. (LST 3)

"Social challenges, it's the robbery that we facing when we're going to work. The school environment is bad because of the robberies, sometimes it comes in the school. Serious. It came inside but the school decided to lock the gates and there were securities. They requested the security to close the gate for people who enter the yard. But when you go outside it's not safe. There is car hijacking, are you driving? They can take your phones and everything. Most of the teachers, everyday one teacher doesn't have a phone because they robbed the phone outside school around here…and at gun point. Some of us have been gun pointed many times. Aaa…after this gun pointing thing now, I'm like… I don't know how I feel. I feel like I'm not safe. I'm not safe myself feeling that I'm coming to help to this school in (location X), I feel like I could not go there especially on weekends." (LST 5)

The interview excerpts above demonstrate that teachers in the area of the study work in fear, not knowing if they will be the next victims. It appears that teachers can be robbed at any time, whether they are inside or outside the school yard, indicating that school security is insufficient to protect them. Teachers can also experience trauma as a result of the shocking incidents that occur to them. Moreover, out of fear of the community, the school ends up depleting their resources intended to aid in the implementation of inclusive education.

Due to the crime that happens in the schoolyard during working hours, participants reported feeling unsafe. The findings further indicate that the majority of teachers working in the area of study suffer these incidents nearly every day, to the point that they fear going to work. In response to a question regarding her social challenges, the SBST coordinator noted that few parents prioritize their children's education. The participant reported the following: *"Few of them care. So. also, there's a…it's a high crime rate zone…Yeah, they just come during the day…Anything can happen. Anything. They…they come and take the laptops. 'Give me the phones. What, what'...."* (SBST 3).

On the basis of the interview fiding above, it is evident that teachers' safety at their workplace is jeopardized since they are robbed during the day. Working in fear of one's life has never resulted in increased productivity at work. Therefore, the researcher argues that the crime issues that teachers encounter impede the implementation of inclusive education in the study area.

Sub-theme 3: *Negative parental attitudes*

In Paseka and Schwab (2020), attitudes are defined as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related." Regarding parental attitudes, Breiner et al. (2016) reiterate that parents' parenting attitudes result from their knowledge of parenting and the values and goals (or expectations) they have for their children's development, which are shaped by cultural,

social, and societal images, as well as parents' experiences and their overall values and goals. When asked about the social challenges of implementing inclusive education, one participant brought up the issue of parental attitudes that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive education. The SBST coordinator reported the following regarding experiences of negative parental attitudes:

> “First of all, as we are the inclusive school if we do…identify learners that are having challenges, and we want to refer them to school of skills, other parents they don’t want their learners to go to school of skills. You know? Those are the challenges that we are having.” (SBST 1)

From the interview results above, it is possible to conclude that parents are hesitant to enroll their children in a school of skills due to a lack of awareness about the school or a fear of discrimination against their children Those learners may drop out if they are required to attend mainstream schools rather than special needs schools. Therefore, this presents ongoing challenges for both teachers and those learners who require further support.

Sub-theme 4: *Poverty in families*

The World Bank (2007) defines poverty as hunger. Poverty among learners from low-income families has been identified as a driving force for learning difficulties (Centre for Learning Disabilities, 2014; Omoniyi et al., 2022). Regarding the social challenges, one SBST coordinator reported poverty as the one that hinders the success of inclusive education in schools. The participant reported as follows:

> “The poverty. The poverty. Because sometimes learners, although we do have a feeding scheme…but sometimes you look at a kid, you see that this kid is struggling, he is suffering at home or their mother is unemployed and...” (SBST 3)

From the interview excerpt above, it has become evident that poverty has a multiplicative effect on the educational achievement of all children, including those with

learning barriers. As a result, schools struggle to attain success in inclusive education implementation and productivity.

Sub-theme 5: *Parental alcoholism*

Numerous historical examples of alcoholism exist, including accounts of parental alcoholism in the Old Testament of the Bible, such as Noah being drunk and lying unclothed in his tent (Genesis 9:21). Alcoholism is defined by Koob (2013) as the need to seek and take drugs, the loss of control over intake, and the creation of a negative emotional state when access to the substance is denied. The findings of this study indicated that parental alcoholism was prominently featured as one of the social challenges of implementing inclusive education in schools in the area. For example, the SBST coordinator reported:

> "We have a problem with the learners and the parents. Our children come from homes that both parents are drinking too much. Some, they go to the "nice thing" and leave the kids alone. And then go to their boyfriends, stay there, the kids have keys, they open and close the door. So, we have so many challenges. Of late, we have the challenges of the dagga muffins and the dagga. So yes, there's a lot." (SBST 4)

The interview excerpt above clearly indicates that, compared to their peers who were not raised by alcoholic parents, children of alcoholics are at a high risk for a number of cognitive, emotional, safety, and behavioral issues. Due to that, the children could have problems with drugs and alcohol in the future, probably because of both their genes and their environment. Another SBST coordinator added that:

> "…you see that this kid is struggling, he is suffering at home or their mother is unemployed and… they are drinking alcohol, although they are… they are getting the grant but they are not looking after the kids. Few of them care..." (SBST 3)

On the basis of the above interview excerpt, it can be concluded that living with an alcoholic parent influences how children and children-turned-adults view themselves. As a result, children may end up raising themselves and exhibiting behaviours that negatively affect their academic performance, which in turn hinders the successful implementation of inclusive education.

5.4 The kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education

This study also examined the kinds of learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education. Teachers require support since they normally feel lonely once they enter the classroom. With reference to Kidger et al. (2021), failure to support teachers may result in long-term mental health issues, presentism (going to work despite being psychologically or physically ill), illness, absence, or leaving the profession. Therefore, this section presents participants' responses about the kind of support they require in order to successfully implement inclusive education in their schools. The themes that emerged under the research question of this section were: the need for speech therapists and psychologists; implementation demonstration; feedback and reports from the district; trainings on inclusion; and early identification of learning barriers.

Theme 1: *The need for speech therapists and psychologists*

Educational psychology is defined by Skinner (1958) as the application of psychology to the field of education with the goal of enhancing teaching methods and learning outcomes. According to Berger (2013), educational psychologists can assist in the development of inclusive policies and practices by working with schools and district offices of provincial education departments. They can advise parents and teachers on the advantages of placing learners in inclusive environments, and they can support teachers by offering guidance on the different kinds of support that can be given, how to develop learning programs for learners as individuals, and how the curriculum can be modified to accommodate all learners. When asked what type of support they

require, three of the interviewees identified the need for psychologists and therapists in their schools. One participant stated:

> "If here at school, we can have our psychologist, neh? Based here. Secondly, our speech therapist, we need those people because we do refer, it takes time since we're having only one psychologist who is responsible many schools, you know? I think those are the main things we want." (SBST 1)

From what the participant reported above, the school psychologist is there, but he or she should be stationed in the schoolyard to eliminate delays in referring learners for additional support. LSTs work with learners who have a variety of learning barriers that require more than just psychological support. Another participant explained her challenge:

> "Yes, therapist…and it's a big challenge because a child is here and you don't have the skills to help the child but you are expected to help the child here. And the other one is umm…has got so many things… during birth, he has the things …and also he got a big scar and something went like this…but I think it's the biceps when they, you know… and that child doesn't comply, if he wants to go out he goes out and pee wherever, you know… and he can beat anyone." (LST 1)

Despite the fact that LSTs are expected to support learners with their various learning needs, they lack knowledge of medical barriers to learning, necessitating the need for therapists. Even though there are some gaps when it comes to teacher support, other participants showed that they indeed get valuable support from the education district. One of the participants reported as follows:

> "Yeah. But she is helpful. And the social workers as well as the psychologist. So whenever we are having a problem, or maybe we need to…maybe we have some learners to be assessed, psychologist come to assess the learners." (SBST 2)

It is evident from the response above that some education district professionals have a significant role in the services they provide to schools. Some schools do benefit from the support they get from their learning support advisors, psychologists, and social workers.

Theme 2: *Demonstrations and workshops on inclusive education*

Change is a constant component of human existence. Hence, some people resist or dread change. With this in mind, demonstrations are occasionally required to alleviate the fear of change. Even though there are workshops for LSTs, one participant in this study emphasized the need for a demonstration of how exactly they are expected to implement what they learn there. The response went as follows:

> "Yes, but the district sometimes… I think they must show us, they are supposed to come and teach us, you know, they must come and show what they really want. And you know even in those workshops, they can show us how to do the lesson plans and all these things because you will do it and they will say "ohh no," you know… so they must show us." (LST 1)

It appears as if there are some contestant changes in what the LSTs are trained on because when they try to implement, the district says something else, and the LSTs end up not being sure of what to do. That is why the participant further suggested that they need demonstrations on lesson plans. Some people learn by repeatedly doing things. This means that LSAs must take the time to do lesson plans with LSTs one-on-one, even if it means doing one lesson plan together and having the LST do the rest.

Theme 3: *The need for feedback/ reports from the district*

In any workplace, feedback, whether positive or negative, typically results in progress. When LSTs refer learners who need a high level of support to the district, they need feedback on how to help those learners in the classroom. Regarding what kind of

support they want from the district and what their support wishes are, one participant reported as follows:

> "You know what, I also umm… we need the support from district you know… because there are so many times that we as the schools refer the kids, more especially to the psychologist, the psychologist does need the… doesn't do the work. I can say because if I can start from (year X) when I got here, there was a guy psychologist, he was here when he was still young, coming from school. When you've got referrals to him, he will tell you to call the parents, we would call the parents, talk to the parents and then he will assess the kids and then he will write the report and would give the school the report and you will find it but this one, you won't know what is happening. Even if we referred the kids from grade 1, they are now in grade 4 and 5, they are still here and there is no report. It would be nice if psychology came and highlight and write down the findings, you know. So, now I really don't know what to say when teachers ask and I will say "I don't know" and there is still a learner who is in grade 7, I met him when he was in grade 4 and that learner can't write, he writes like a grade 2 learner. He can speak English if you teach because I was teaching them English that time and I would read the story and ask questions and he will just answer. I thought he is clever and always wondering why he is here but when it comes to writing, hayi! No." (LST 1)

The interview excerpt above demonstrates that learners are assessed, but without feedback on the next steps for teachers. Those learners end up progressing despite their inability to write. Some of these students drop out of school, as other participants also mentioned, which prevents LSTs from seeing the impact of their support in efforts to implement inclusive education.

Theme 4: *Trainings on inclusion*

A well-implemented inclusive education implementation system is designed with many things in mind, for example, training for unqualified teachers and ongoing professional development for all teachers. According to D'Addio and April (2020, para 5), it is rare for the aim of inclusive teachers' trainings to be realized. Inclusion is commonly taught to teachers as an afterthought rather than as a basic tenet of all training. LSTs in this study stated that they require more training because others are not qualified as LSTs, and they require it more for administrative work and learners' behaviour. Most participants developed a common trend of needing training. One participant explained:

> "So, honestly I feel bad. So I wish maybe, maybe let's say…I wish educators can maybe get maybe more trainings. Maybe they don't really understand this. Then I try to get in their own shoes. Maybe they don't understand it. Maybe if they can get more trainings… training maybe that look at the importance of this. And making workshop, like …with the importance of this, you know? And the consequences. Let me say the consequences of this. Imagine if it's your child, you know, then your child feels like maybe he's not doing or maybe he's not fitting into whatever…into the society. Maybe your child's not doing what is expected from him. How would you feel? Your child doesn't want to go to school because others like teasing him or her because maybe he's getting zero. You know, those things, you know." (SBST 2)

Since they are unable to address some of their learners' barriers, teachers feel that they are not doing enough to support their learners. Another participant also feels unequipped to deal with range of learning barriers. She expressed it thus: *"If we can get more workshops and trainings on how to deal with such cases because… more especially in the…in the cases of the learners' behaviour." SBST* 3. LST also drew on the similar interest of support and identified specific types learning barriers they encounter and for which they would like training;

> "Yes, the high ones. So, I think if teachers can get proper training I think so, maybe in the future for those children…because even us neh…for instance, let's take autism. There are children here who show those signs but we can't say they are because we are not doctors." (LST 2)

Learners who are high achievers are the ones that need a high level of support. The LST presented an example of a learner who has signs of autism that would require proper training from a teacher to deal with. Some schools are fortunate to receive support from both the district and the university. Their desire, though, is to have social workers stationed in the schoolyard. The responded reported:

> "What I can tell you… yes we've got a support from UCT (University of Cape Town). They gave us a social worker. But we've got one, but she comes once a week. Looking at things this year, if we could have that social worker on daily basis, because on that one day she works very hard because I was telling her that we need to establish support group for the teachers. We need to train the learners because they change the stages. So that if you train the certain group, then you know, you will monitor it and then train the other group. Then the learners can do things on their own. If they hear, they will remember even during the adult time, it's better to teach them, to let them be involved. And then she does the counselling and she does not finish every day. (SBST 4)

The interview excerpt above demonstrates that there is a great deal of support work to be done in schools. For example, there should be a support group for teachers so that they may in turn support learners. If they are stationed at school on a daily basis, social workers may be able to support both learners and teachers and therefore see some impact from their support.

Theme 5: *Early identification of learning barriers*

Identifying learners with learning barriers is a crucial step in the effective implementation of inclusive education (Mulovhedzi & Mudzielwana, 2021). The SIAS (2014) inclusive education policy states that learners should be identified for learning difficulties as early as grade R. Early identification of children at risk for learning difficulties may offset the detrimental impacts of delayed intervention by referring such learners to preventive interventions at a younger age. The findings of this study

revealed that teachers' failure to identify learners early for support impedes the successful implementation of inclusive education. Two SBST coordinators reported the following:

> "I would like these learners to be identified as early as possible. Because…I would say, I don't know how to put it, but I feel bad. You know? When maybe I see these like learners, how they are like…just like drop outs. They don't belong anywhere. But at the end of the day, maybe they will pick up that they may not be belonging in the mainstream. At the same time, they lose their self-esteem because they could see that they are not coping, even if they're in high school. Because they have been promoting, promoting, promoting. And then they could start in high school. And so they realize that it's like…I'm not like performing like others or I'm not doing what is expected. They lose their self-esteem and it's like we are killing them. I don't know how to put it, but you know, it's like you are killing them." (SBST 2)

> "…Also, because at times we had many situations where you discovered that learners are only discovered in grade 4. And then you asked yourself what was happening in grade 1, 2 and three, what was happening because the learner was here. So, yeah, hence I feel that I'm not happy. I'm not happy. Cause if we, we can identify them as the foundation phase and then it'll be easy. Cause already they will be in the system. We'll know that okay, they have been prepared, there is the assistant that they're getting and then that is the next teacher is going to win. You know? So, um, uh, I'm, I don't feel okay and I, yes I do blame teachers. Cause you feel that at some stage, how can you be a teacher and you don't even have one learner in class to be referred! Then this tells something. All of a sudden in grade four there many of them!" (SBST 5)

According to the excerpts presented above, it is evident that not identifying learners for support early on does not sit well with some teachers, and they feel guilty about that. This is due to the fact that if learners are not identified early, their learning barriers will be buried, they will not receive support as quickly as possible for any potential support opportunities, and they will cause problems for the next teacher. Without

support, they would just move on to the next grade, which could result in their dropping out of school when they reach higher grades and realize they are not performing well like other children.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presents the research findings. Different themes that contribute to the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education as well as the kind of support the learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education were identified and discussed. The summary of findings will be discussed in detail, and the concluding comments and recommendations for further study will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the summary of the findings of the research, conclusions, and recommendations. The findings are discussed in terms of the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers, the social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers, and the kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education. In addition, the chapter presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

6.2 Summary of Results

6.2.1 Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers

The study examined the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers. The findings of this study revealed that the main psychological challenges facing learning support teachers when implementing inclusive education are stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, low self-efficacy, and negative teacher attitudes. The findings suggest that effective intervention strategies for teachers' mental health are required to lessen the burden of stress that learning support teachers are experiencing. Teachers also need to participate in mental wellness programs so that they can be emotionally and psychologically prepared to meet the challenges they will inevitably face in the classroom, which would allow them to successfully implement inclusive education.

6.2.2 Social Challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers

The study explored the social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers. According to the findings, the social challenges of learning support teachers are related to schools, the community, and other teachers. The findings indicated that the teacher-related challenges that learning support teachers face are uncooperative teachers, a large workload of teachers, and a lack of trained teachers in inclusive education. The school-related challenges that learning support teachers face include learners' aggressive behavior, dissonance between policy and practice, a lack of resources to support inclusive education, learners' non-disclosure of their problems, low self-esteem, and high learner dropout rates. Finally, issues relating to community are low parental participation, an insecure community environment, a negative parental attitude, poverty in families, and parental alcoholism. Learning support teachers are hindered in successfully implementing inclusive education because mainstream teachers are not cooperative in so many ways. Moreover, the LSTs are overloaded with work, and inadequately trained teachers who are learning support teachers also impede schools' inclusive education implementation success.

6.2.3 The kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education

The study finally explored the kind of learning support teachers require in order to successfully implement inclusion in their schools. The findings indicated that the support that learning support teachers need includes the need for speech therapists and psychologists, demonstrations and workshops on inclusive education, feedback and reports from district trainings on inclusion, and early identification of learning barriers. If teachers are not supported, they may develop mental health problems they did not previously have. Therefore, urgent support for teachers is required to avoid severe implementation difficulties in inclusive education. Specialists, such as school psychologists and therapists, must be located in schools or in the area of study so that both teachers and learners have easy access to them. According to the findings, learning support teachers do receive training, but they do not feel adequately prepared

for the implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, the information from the trainings does not really materialize, so they require demonstrations and workshops that are tailored to inclusive education. In addition, the findings indicated that, despite the fact that learners with learning barriers are identified in school, early identification is necessary to avoid the negative effects of delayed intervention. The study's findings suggested that delays in identifying learning barriers are the reason why teachers become stressed and why some learners drop out of school.

6.3 Discussion of Findings

6.3.1 Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among teachers

The study explored the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers.

According to the findings of the present study, teacher stress is one of the psychological challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education. LSTs experience stress due to their increased responsibilities and roles in supporting learners with learning barriers as well as managing their own psychological issues. Finally, the study found that the stress experienced by learning support teachers is also a result of their being held to high expectations, which forces them to work harder but accomplish little in terms of results. These results are consistent with those of Warnes et al. (2022), who found that the behavioral issues that some respondents associated with inclusive education and perceived as an additional source of stress for teachers demonstrate the need for teachers' support. Similarly, Warnes et al. (2022) revealed that the behavioral issues that some respondents associated with inclusive education and perceived as an additional source of stress for teachers demonstrate the need for a higher level of paraprofessional and external support. Moreover, Kidger et al. (2021) reiterate that the causes of school-related stress and pressure to meet a growing number of externally determined goals

According to the findings, teachers burn out due to the school principal's perceived lack of trust in them to implement inclusive education. The findings also indicated that some schools' SBSTs are inoperable due to teacher burnout, but the department of education is unaware of that. This finding is consistent with the findings of Thakur (2018), who discovered that special education teachers have a higher risk of burnout compared to teachers in mainstream classrooms. The research findings also suggested that there is a lack of recognition of teachers' efforts and roles in the implementation of inclusive education in schools. This finding agrees with Hassan (2017), who asserts that in times of crisis, many teachers as well as students may suffer from the psychological effects of trauma, loss of separation from family members, and any other circumstances that may bring severe stress to them. Similarly, Johnson and Naidoo (2016) reported that burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization, and it can be caused by prolonged exposure to stress. In addition, Thakur (2018) reiterates that special education teachers have a higher risk of burnout compared to teachers who work in mainstream classrooms. Moreover, Mojsa-Kaja, Golonka, and Marek (2015) argue that teachers face psychological issues such as burnout symptoms of exhaustion as a result of a misfit between teacher expectations and their actual situation in the areas of workload, control, and fairness.

This study found low teacher self-efficacy in inclusive education. Teachers' low self-efficacy is a result of poor teamwork and teachers performing poorly despite their hard work, which has led to frustration because of their inability to complete tasks on time. The inability of teachers to finish tasks on time is consistent with the findings of Kazanopoulos et al. (2022), who found that teachers who have high self-efficacy beliefs can plan and organize effective teaching. Teachers' low self-efficacy is also due to LSTs working on an itinerant basis, as they tend to forget what they were doing when they were at another school for two or three days, and as a result, they notice no change in their efforts to implement inclusive education in schools. That could lead to teachers having attitudes, which is in line with Saloviita's (2020) claim that attitudes toward inclusion only have weak associations with factors other than the teacher category and that attitudes toward inclusion have weak associations with self-efficacy.

The study found that teachers dealing with diverse learner issues in mainstream schools to implement inclusive education are emotionally exhausted. Learning support teachers are emotionally exhausted because their roles vary depending on the cases they handle in schools. This finding is in line with that of Sibai (2018), who discovered that teachers may experience feelings of overwhelm and disorientation due to the shifting roles and demands placed on them. Rabrig et al. (2022) contend that teachers, as a group, are generally content with their jobs but also report feeling worried or exhausted. Stang-Robinson et al. (2023) also assert that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, which has a detrimental impact on school climates, high levels of burnout, and turnover.

The findings showed that teachers dislike inclusive education for no reason. Due to a lack of support for inclusive education, some teachers and SBST members have negative attitudes toward its implementation. The findings suggested that the department of education should limit the membership of the SBST to members of the school management, as that would encourage teachers to become more interested in inclusive education or learning support. These findings are consistent with those of Nel et al. (2011), who assert that there is a connection between the positive attitudes of teachers toward the mainstreaming of learners with special needs and the managerial support that these teachers receive. Furthermore, Nishan (2018) contends that despite having received specialized training in inclusive education, teachers do not embrace inclusion; however, taking a course on inclusion may improve teachers' attitudes toward inclusion as well as their general attitudes toward learners with special needs.

According to the research, teachers isolate themselves from the SBST committee because they believe it is reserved for certain people. As a result, only a small number of SBST members are dedicated to the committee, while the majority don't even show up to meetings. This finding supports the findings of Adewumi et al. (2019), who claim that such teachers do not take their jobs seriously and do not value the opportunities for professional development that are provided to them. Again, teachers are reluctant to complete the SNAs and ISP documents because they consider them a waste of time. As a result, failing to develop, implement, and complete the entire referral

process results in a lack of differentiation in the classroom. Similar findings were found by Duncan et al. (2021), who revealed that principals thought teachers' unwillingness to take personal responsibility for their own professional development was to blame for their knowledge gap and lack of cooperation. As a result, Zwane and Malale (2018) proposed that in order to achieve the shared objectives of inclusive education, mainstream and learning support teachers must collaborate closely and share their knowledge and experience.

6.3.2 Social Challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers

The findings revealed that teachers experience the social challenges of implementing inclusive education in three categories: teacher-related, school-related, and community-related challenges.

6.3.2.1: Teachers' Related Challenges

The findings of this study reported that there are teacher-related challenges that affect the implementation of inclusive education. For example, the findings indicated a lack of cooperation between learning support teachers and other mainstream teachers in schools, which has hampered the implementation of inclusive education. Mainstream teachers are hesitant to refer learners for learning support; as a result, they impede the proper implementation of the inclusive education policy by their reluctance to refer learners and their failure to complete the necessary paperwork. This finding is in accord with that of Fodo (2020), who found that some teachers' understanding of collaboration lacks the most essential components, such as the voluntary exchange of knowledge and experience, the agreement to view each other as equals with diverse and necessary expertise, the mutual agreement on goals, and shared responsibility, resources, and accountability, as stated by the other authors. According to Shleifer et al. (2017), schools with greater collaboration yield higher academic outcomes for their learners than schools with less collaboration. Similar to this, Warnes et al. (2022) contend that increasing the number of teachers in the profession may be

a more sensible answer to the issues raised about planning time, heavy workloads, more duties, and peer collaboration.

The findings also indicated that mainstream teachers have a heavy workload of referral documents that learners need for the referral process. It also became clear that, while the SBST coordinators have teaching responsibilities and coordinate the committee, other school committees rely solely on the SBST coordinators for efficient operation. As a result, increased workload occurs when responsibilities are not shared. This finding is consistent with other researchers who identified the teachers' heavy and unjustifiably large workload (Thakur, 2018) and responsibilities as a further unique challenge to the implementation of inclusive education (Sari et al., 2022; Jury et al., 2023).

The findings of this study indicate that a number of learning support teachers lack the necessary qualifications and inclusive education training. This finding is similar to that of Khaled and Othman (2022), who also claimed that teachers lacked the education and qualifications required to address the needs of learners who needed support. Adewumi et al. (2019) made a similar observation, citing a district official who claimed that teachers do not want to undertake inclusive education because they feel they lack the necessary special needs qualifications. In addition, insufficient ongoing training and programs in inclusive education are provided to learning support teachers, and as a result, some learning support teachers eventually lost faith in inclusive education due to a lack of training in particular inclusive education areas.

In their study in India, Niti and Singh (2021) also found that most school teachers don't have the training they need to create and run educational programs for learners with disabilities in regular schools. Similarly, Mpu and Adu (2021) found that teachers require initial teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning and that those who receive the initial preparation are more likely to pursue opportunities to advance their teaching practice and engage in professional development throughout their careers. These findings are also consistent with the constructivism theory, which argues that the mind is neither passive nor discovered but actively knows (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

6.3.2.2: School-Related Challenges

The findings also reported that there are school-related challenges that affect the implementation of inclusive education. Participants have brought up a policy and implementation concern. According to the research, there appears to be a disparity between the training teachers receive and what they must apply in their classrooms. LSTs learn a lot from their trainings and workshops, but it is hard to apply what they have learned. The findings imply that training should be practical so LSTs may apply what they learn in their classrooms. This finding is consistent with that of Sari et al. (2022), who argue that there are no appropriate guidelines or rules that teachers can use to guide them through the education and learning steps for learners with barriers in inclusive classrooms.

This study's participants struggled with a lack of resources. This result is consistent with several studies that found that a significant challenge to the successful inclusion of all learners appears to be a lack of resources (Mitiku et al., 2014; Pappas, 2018; Ralejoe, 2019; Mprah et al., 2020; Jury et al., 2023). The findings of the above studies all revealed that schools lack the resources necessary to accommodate learners with learning barriers. Some teachers even mentioned a lack of chairs and tables in their classrooms for learning support. Moreover, district specialists like psychologists may take a year to assess a learner due to a lack of resources. This finding is consistent with Mprah et al. (2020), who assert that only human resources, including parents, teachers, and resource teachers, are available; all other resources are grossly inadequate.

According to the findings of the study, some learners with barriers are hesitant to disclose their social problems, posing a challenge for the implementation of inclusive education in schools. As a result, the implementation of inclusive education is hampered because it is difficult for such learners to receive intervention at the school level. In this study, the findings also indicated that learners receiving learning support experience low self-esteem due to their isolation and lower performance. Consistent with this finding, age, taunting by smarter classmates, and branding due to withdrawal can impair learners' self-esteem, which Kriel and Livingston (2019) say is as important as intelligence to academic success. Nguyen et al. (2019) also observed that self-

esteem was substantially connected with educational factors such as school atmosphere, academic performance, and high educational stress. However, the study of Roman et al. (2022) established that learners in low socioeconomic schools are more motivated than learners in high socioeconomic schools, possibly contributing to low self-esteem.

This study found that referral failure is one of the reasons learners drop out of learning support classes. Dropouts also occur when teachers fail to identify learners who need support. Thus, those learners miss out on special education and school of skills opportunities. This result is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's theoretical assertion that culture and other external factors can influence the development of emotions in a child.

6.3.2.3: Community related challenges

The findings of the study also indicated that there are community-related challenges that affect the implementation of inclusive education. This study found that due to some parents' reluctance to acknowledge learning barriers, low parental involvement hinders inclusive education and presents difficulties for learning support teachers, preventing learners from receiving the necessary support. In line with this finding, Petre et al. (2022) discovered that some parents, for example, refuse to engage in assessments of their children and refuse to admit that their children may have difficulties. In addition, Ludago (2020) discovered that the majority of schools are unable to accommodate learners from diverse backgrounds due to the negative attitudes of teachers and the low expectations of school communities regarding learners with special needs, which results in low self-esteem among the learners. However, Adewumi et al. (2019) believed that many parents' rejection was a result of their lack of knowledge about inclusive education.

This study found that an insecure community environment negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education in schools in the area, with participants expressing concern about safety. These findings are consistent with those of Obiechina et al. (2018), who contend that the absence of a perimeter fence makes schools vulnerable to attack, which was deemed to have the greatest effect on teachers' productivity. In addition, Johnson (2015) concurs that traumatologists in

South Africa face difficulties due to ongoing trauma caused by a variety of ongoing factors, such as violence on the Cape Flats.

This study found that learners idolize gangsters and imitate them at school. Drug use is a major social issue that hinders inclusive education. The findings also showed that learners' home environments have a big impact on their development and who they become. This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theoretical perspective, which states that in the exo-system, a person is indirectly affected by the interactions between two or more things. In this case, learners are influenced by their home environments. Moreover, the study indicated that learners are very aggressive in class, and such behaviours put teachers and other learners at risk as aggressive learners often interrupt the lessons. According to Perumal (2021), who supports this finding, a further explanation for the prevalence of aggressive behavior in primary schools is that the diverse backgrounds of these learners have an impact on their emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. Additionally, Genovesi et al. (2022) concur that disruptive or aggressive behaviour in the classroom is a contributing factor to personal barriers to inclusion like negative teacher attitudes, low self-confidence, and poorer teacher-learner relationships.

The findings indicated that poverty has a negative impact on the educational achievement of learners, making it difficult to achieve inclusive education. This finding is consistent with those of Omkarappa and Rental (2019), who discovered that in nearly two out of every three published studies, parental alcoholism was statistically significantly associated with a child harm outcome measure and that 10 percent of US children are exposed to alcoholism or alcohol dependence in the home. In addition, Vural et al. (2021) assert that poor families in Turkey, particularly those with children with special needs, find it difficult to accept their children's circumstances and, as a result, do not respond favourably to cooperative efforts.

6.3.3 The kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education.

The study reviewed the kind of learning support teachers need in order to successfully implement inclusive education. The findings indicated that psychologists and social workers should be in the schoolyard to reduce referral delays. This result supports Ludago's (2020) assertion that teachers and the learning environment in schools require a coordinated support system. Desombre et al. (2021) also found that studies conducted in various contexts (professional, health, and social networks) have demonstrated that social support reduces depression and physical pain and promotes psychological health. Moreover, Hind et al. (2019) and Desombre et al. (2021) have also demonstrated that teachers do not always feel supported in their efforts to implement the inclusive education policy and that this perceived lack of support is associated with negative attitudes.

Additionally, school therapists are needed since LSTs lack some knowledge about medical impediments to learning. The learning support teachers indicated that they required demonstrations to overcome some anxieties they have about inclusive education implementation. This finding is consistent with the findings of a study by Hassanein (2021), who contends that while inclusive education policies do exist, they neither ensure that learners with learning disabilities have positive experiences nor guarantee that teachers, who are primarily responsible for the policy's successful implementation, will support them. In addition, Jonas (2014) discovered that one problem with educational policies is that they are inconsistent in their implementation. Hence, the study of Khalid and Othman (2022) suggested that policymakers can establish educational policies with inclusive learners in mind and that extra policies can be developed for the inclusive education system.

This study found that learners are assessed without input on next steps for teachers, and some progress despite their inability to write while others drop out. In this study, LSTs said they need more training because others are not trained and for administrative work and learners' behaviour. Although the DOE is seen as helpful, it appears that more support for teachers is still required, which is in line with this finding (Matebese, 2021). Additionally, teachers in a study by Bemiller (2019) stated that they

need more specialized support staff in order to be effective teachers. Nevertheless, Kazanopoulos et al. (2022) assert that teachers who have received special education training, or at least some training, or who have participated in conferences have shown higher levels of efficacy when using inclusive teaching strategies, cooperating with colleagues, and handling disruptive behaviours.

The findings of this study revealed that teachers' failure to identify learners early for support impedes the successful implementation of inclusive education. In light of this finding, the SIAS (2014) policy urged that learners be identified as soon as they are admitted to schools. Teachers may feel guilty if learners are not identified for support early on, as this could lead to them dropping out of school. This finding is consistent with Jimenez and Estevez (2017), who found that the perception of inadequate support that causes learners to drop out leads some to seek a social reputation based on non-conformism, rebellion, and aggression to compensate for the perceived lack of support.

6.4 Conclusion

In the research findings presented, the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers and the kind of support they require were discussed. The study found that LSTs experience stress due to their increased responsibilities and roles in supporting learners with learning barriers as well as managing their own psychological issues. Additionally, they are held to high expectations, leading to some LSTs contemplating leaving their current positions and returning to the mainstream. The study also showed that, for various reasons, teachers burn out. Teachers burn out due to the school principal's lack of trust, dysfunctional SBST, and a lack of recognition of teachers' roles in inclusive education. In addition to that, teachers have low self-efficacy due to poor teamwork, an inability to complete tasks on time, and itinerant work. This study found that mainstream teachers do not support inclusive education due to their reluctance to refer learners or participate in the school-based support team (SBST). The findings suggested that the department of education should limit the membership of the SBST to members of the school management to encourage teachers to become more interested in inclusive education.

This study also revealed a lack of cooperation between learning support teachers and other mainstream teachers, a reluctance to refer learners, and a heavy workload of referral documents as the major social challenges of implementing inclusive education. The study revealed that SBST coordinators have teaching responsibilities and coordinate the committee, but other school committees rely solely on them for efficient operation. In addition, learning support teachers lack the necessary qualifications and inclusive education training, leading to a lack of faith in inclusive education.

This study found that drug use is another major social issue that hinders inclusive education. It also found that learners' home environments have a big impact on their development and who they become. Additionally, there appears to be a disparity between the training teachers receive and what they must apply in their classrooms. Furthermore, learners with barriers are hesitant to disclose their social problems, posing a challenge for the implementation of inclusive education. Referral failure is one of the reasons learning support class learners drop out, and dropouts also miss out on special schools and school of skills opportunities.

The study also indicated that low parental involvement hinders inclusive education and presents difficulties for learning support teachers, leading to a fear of harassment and discrimination. According to the study, the poverty of learners who need support has a negative impact on their educational achievements, and their parental alcoholism can lead to cognitive, emotional, safety, and behavioural disorders and drug and alcohol abuse. This study also found that learners are assessed without input on next steps for teachers, and some learners progress despite their inability to write. Therefore, teachers should identify learners early for support to prevent them from dropping out.

To conclude, this study provided an overview of the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers and the kind of support they require to do so successfully.

6.5 Recommendations

From the study findings, discussion and conclusions, the following specific recommendations are suggested:

- The district officials should acknowledge the valuable work done by learning support teachers in the schools. This would re-energize them to provide more support to teachers in schools. This is because the learning support teachers who took part in this study felt that the schools' principals did not give them enough credit for their work. If they get recognized with awards such as "the best learning support teacher" or "the most improved learning support teacher," this will help reduce their stress and enable them to succeed in their challenging roles.

- Learning support advisors should select one group of learners who require support, create a group support plan, lesson plan, and deliver a lesson to those learners. This is because the study reported that, even though there are trainings for LSTs, the implementation of inclusive education strategies that they learn in workshops are inapplicable to their actual classrooms and learners.

- The school of skills and special schools in the area of the study should actively host open days for the parents and learners that the schools have identified as potential candidates for those schools. According to the study, the reluctance of some parents to support their children who have been referred to the district for additional support may be a result of ignorance and stigma associated with learners who have been referred to the school of skills or special school. This indicates that parents and learners are uninformed and are unaware of the specifics of what is happening in a special or skills school. Consequently, the research urges the district to ensure that the aforementioned schools in the area of study create and improve access to informational sessions.

- Social workers, psychologists, and therapists should be stationed in schools, or alternatively, ordinary mainstream schools should be transformed into full-service schools. This is because the study found that participating teachers indicated that they needed comprehensive services such as those listed to be stationed in their schools. Having inclusive or full-service schools will eliminate the stigma attached to students who are referred outside of their local schools for additional support. In addition, these students will not experience discrimination because they will be supported in their local schools as opposed to being segregated. Teachers would also benefit because they would be better equipped with skills to manage their stress and learners' aggressive behaviour.

6.6 Limitations of the study

This study is limited to learning support teachers in Khayelitsha township schools only. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Metropole East Education District, Western Cape. A researcher is a learning support teacher who works in the field of research. As a human instrument, a researcher has the inherent limitation of being human, meaning that personal biases may get in the way of their work (Merriam, 1998). The intention of the study was to provide the Metro East Education District with new information regarding the experiences and challenges the learning support teachers face in township schools in order to address those gaps and ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education in the district.

6.7 Suggestion for future research

Based on the research obtained, future researchers must engage with more schools in other districts, such as additional township schools and private schools. Future research could benefit from examining the challenges faced by teachers at other schools in order to gain a different perspective on inclusive education, the difference in the teachers' psychosocial challenges, and the support they have or require.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Information sheet for LST

30- 05-2022

Dear Learning Support Teacher

Investigating the psychosocial challenges of implementing Inclusive Education among learning support teachers at Metropole East District, Western Cape.

My name is Nkepeng E Khoboko and I am a registered Masters student in the school of education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the Psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers, under the supervision of Dr Peter Aloka. The aim of this research project is to identify psychological and social challenges of learning support teachers with regard to implementing inclusive education, and what kind of support they require to successfully implement inclusive education.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you for an interview either in person or using zoom or WhatsApp whichever is available and convenient for you. This interview will take around 30 to 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using an audio recording device.

There will be no personal costs for you to participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation and there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from this study. You may withdraw

at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. The interview will be after school and it will be conducted in English to assist with the data collection process. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point during this process, I will stop the interview and resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisors on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). The data collected from this research project will be stored in a password protected computer and will be kept for 5 years.

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

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Nkepeng Khoboko

1225833@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Peter Aloka and Dr. Erasmos Charamba

peter.aloka@wits.ac.za, and erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Participant Information sheet for SBST Coordinator

30- 05-2022

Dear SBST Coordinator

Investigating the psychosocial challenges of implementing Inclusive Education among learning support teachers at Metropole East District, Western Cape.

My name is Nkepeng E Khoboko and I am a registered Masters student in the school of education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating the Psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers, under the supervision of Dr Peter Aloka. The aim of this research project is to identify psychological and social challenges of learning support teachers with regard to implementing inclusive education, and what kind of support they require to successfully implement inclusive education.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you for an interview either in person or using zoom or WhatsApp whichever is available and convenient for you. This interview will take around 30 to 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using an audio recording device.

There will be no personal costs for you to participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation and there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from this study. You may withdraw

at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. The interview will be after school and it will be conducted in English to assist with the data collection process. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point during this process, I will stop the interview and resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisors on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). The data collected from this research project will be stored in a password protected computer and will be kept for 5 years.

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

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Nkepeng Khoboko

1225833@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Peter Aloka and Dr. Erasmos Charamba

peter.aloka@wits.ac.za, and erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

Appendix C: Consent form for LST

INVESTIGATING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AMONG SUPPORT TEACHERS AT METRO EAST EDUCATION DISTRICT, WESTERN CAPE.

Nkepeng E Khoboko

(Please circle the relevant options below).

Permission to be interviewed

I agree that I may be interviewed YES/NO

I agree that I may be audiotaped during the interview YES/NO

I may be interviewed in person or via WhatsApp call. YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only. YES/NO

I know that I can withdraw from the interview at any time. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of the school will not be revealed. YES/NO
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped. YES/NO
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 5 years after completion of the project. YES/NO
- I agree that the researcher may use my direct quotes that are anomymised in the research report/publications. YES/NO
- I agree to be observed. YES/NO

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

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of person seeking consent)

…… (Date)

Appendix D: Consent form for SBST coordinator

INVESTIGATING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AMONG SUPPORT TEACHERS AT METRO EAST EDUCATION DISTRICT, WESTERN CAPE.

Nkepeng E Khoboko

(Please circle the relevant options below).

Permission to be interviewed

I agree that I may be interviewed YES/NO

I agree that I may be audiotaped during the interview YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only. YES/NO

I know that I can withdraw from the interview at any time. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe and that my name and the name of the school will not be revealed. YES/NO
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audiotaped. YES/NO
- all the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 5 years after completion of the project. YES/NO
- I agree that the researcher may use my direct quotes that are anonymized in the research report/publications. YES/NO
- I agree to be observed. YES/NO

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

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

…… (Signature)

…… (Name of person seeking consent)

…… (Date)

APPENDIX E: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS

SECTION A

Age…… (years)

Years of teaching experience:…….(years)

Gender……

SECTION B

1. Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education

Think of the time you felt overwhelmed in your career and in a classroom as a learning support teacher, with respect to implementing inclusive education. Describe a typical week.

- What made you to feel that way? Describe your learning support teaching experience. How does this affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school?
- How do you feel about being the LST? How does this affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school?
- By reflecting on your self-beliefs and how you view inner self, how does this affect the implementation of inclusive education in school?
- How does your conceptualisation of inclusive education affect the implementation of inclusive education in school?

2. Social challenges of implementing inclusive education

By looking at the social environment on aspects such as; school environment, parental involvement, access for learners, which challenges affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school? Explain…

Which any other social challenges affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school?

3. Kind of support do learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education

Reflect on the support systems you have as the LST, what kind of support do they give you?

- Do have cluster meetings and are they helpful? What do you think about the support you get from your learning support advisor? Are there things you wish could change?
- Do you have all necessary learning and teaching materials? How accessible are the tools you need to use when you do your planning, e.g. schedules, access to internet or computer, printing machines, etc?
- How do the parents provide support for you and the kids? Do they pay unscheduled visits to check how their kids are progressing? Do they attend parents' meetings? How do you communicate with them, via letters? And do they come if they are needed at school?
- How is your relationship with the SBST? How does the SBST support you? Where do you address your issues if you have them? Are the mainstream teachers cooperative when it comes to referrals and anything you request from them?
- To effectively implement inclusive education, which support do you require to be able to effectively do this in school?

APPENDIX F: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE SCHOOL BASED SUPPORT TEAM COORDINATORS

SECTION A

Age…… (years)

Years of teaching experience: ….(years)

Gender……

SECTION B

1. Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education

Think of the time you felt overwhelmed in your career as the SBST coordinator, with respect to implementing inclusive education. Describe a typical week.

- What made you feel that way? Describe your SBST coordinating experience. How does this affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school?
- How do you feel about being the SBST coordinator? How does this affect you in the implementation of inclusive education in school?

- By reflecting on your self-beliefs and how you view your inner self, how does this affect the implementation of inclusive education in school?

- How does the way you think about inclusive education affect how it is used in the classroom?

2. Social challenges of implementing inclusive education

Which challenges affect the implementation of inclusive education in school when looking at the social environment on aspects such as school environment, parental involvement, and access for learners? Explain…

Which other social challenges affect the implementation of inclusive education in this school?

3. Kind of support do learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education

Reflect on the support systems you have as the SBST coordinator, what kind of support you receive?

- Do you have SBST meetings and are they helpful? What do you think about the support you get from the school or the district? Are there things you wish you could change?
- How is the school treating the LSTs? Do they have all the necessary learning and teaching materials? How accessible are the tools when they need to be use for planning, e.g. schedules, access to internet or computer, printing machines, etc?
- How do the parents provide support for the learners? Do they make unscheduled visits to check how their kids are progressing? Do they attend parents' meetings? How do you communicate with them, via letters? And do they come if they are needed at school?
- What is your relationship with the LST? How does the SBST support the LST? Where does he/she address issues if you have them? Are the mainstream teachers cooperative when it comes to referrals and anything he/she requests from them?
- To effectively implement inclusive education at the school, what kind of assistance do you need in order to be able to do so?

Appendix G: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/07/13**
PROJECT TITLE	Investigating the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers at Metropole East Education District, Western Cape
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms N Khoboko
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Education/
DATE CONSIDERED	22 July 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	08 September 2025

DATE 09 September 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr P Aloka and Dr E Charamba

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

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

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

Signature **Date** 13/09/2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix H: Coding table

Research question	themes	codes
Psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers	Low self-efficacy	Teacher stress
	Burn out	
	Emotional exhaustion	
		Negative teacher/SBST attitudes
Social challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers	Low parental participation	Poverty in families
	Negative parental attitude	Lack of resources to support inclusion
	Insecure community environment	High learner drop out of school
	Limited access to disabled learners	Negative attitudes of SBST members
	Learners non-disclosure of their problems-	Low self-esteem of learners
	Learner aggressive behaviours	Limited knowledge on diagnosis of disability
	Dissonance between policy and practice	Large work load
	Uncooperative teachers	Lack of trained teachers on inclusive education
The kind of support learning support teachers require to successfully implement inclusive education	Need for fulltime psychologist/speech therapist	Need for early screening and identification of learners with disability
	Demonstrations	Need for feedback from district
	Training of teachers on inclusion	Need for training of learners