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2024

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Zikalala, Lucia. (2024). The parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision of a child's Learning Difficulty: Case studies [Masters dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg]. WIReDSpace. https://hdl.handle.net/10539/44799

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The parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision of a child's Learning Difficulty: Case studies

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education (Educational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Abstract

The democratically elected government of South Africa undertook reforms in the education sector to provide everyone with access to high-quality education and to align the system with global norms. The Department of Education (2001) has legislated policies, such as Education White Paper 6 (EWP6), which unequivocally states that all learners must have access to support and that learning barriers must be removed to reach their full potential. EWP6 states that bolstering the educational support system for students, instructors, schools, and the education system is one of the most important ways to lower learning difficulties. To implement EWP6, the Department of Basic Education has adopted the National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) (Department of Education, 2001). Additionally, the SIAS policy offers tactics to educators so they can work cooperatively with parents and students to build inclusive systems. Although teachers are the driving force for inclusive education, they involve the parents as soon as they notice any learning difficulty. Furthermore, support structures like the School Based Support Team (SBST) and the District Based Support Teams (DBST) were formed to accomplish inclusive education.

The study focused on the parents' lived experiences of the pathway to identification and support provision of a child's learning difficulty through case studies. The study adopted a qualitative research design with data collected through semi-structured telephonic interviews with eight high school parents from Soweto. Data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The ethical principles adhered to were informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and non-maleficence. Cultural-historical Activity Theory was employed as a theoretical framework to understand the parents' lived experiences of the pathway to identifying and supporting a child's learning difficulty through case studies. The study findings suggest that even though it has been several years since the SIAS policy was developed, the South African education system still faces challenges with the implementation of the policy. The findings further indicated the need for educating the parents about inclusive education and the identification process. The parents had no clear understanding of the identification process and the support that should be provided to their children after they have been identified as having a learning difficulty. The parents experienced the identification process in primary and secondary schools differently.

Declaration

I herewith declare that “The Parents’ Lived Experiences of the Pathway to Identification and Support Provision of a Child’s Learning Difficulty: Case Studies” is my work, and all references to sources utilized are included for your reference.

Student signature: 

Date: 24 June 2024

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude for being allowed the opportunity to complete this research project. It was stressful, but it was a wonderful experience. I express my gratitude to my supervisor for your assignment.

To my supervisor, thank you for your unwavering support, help, and dedication throughout the project. I am grateful for all the time you took to check on me, especially when I was not well. May God continue to bless your caring heart.

My family, thank you for your support, especially Mom and Dad. You carried me and my little family emotionally and financially. Even when times were hard financially, you pulled through without expecting anything. We have been through a lot this past year. Losing my aunt, grandparents, and uncles due to cancer was extremely overwhelming emotionally, but having you guys as my support system made everything doable.

My supportive husband, thank you for being my number-one cheerleader. You helped make my life easier. To my beautiful babies, Buhle and Sakhiwo, thank you for the heartwarming hugs and kisses I get daily from you. They were always a reminder of why I chose to take this path. Doing it with you became even more purposeful. Mommy loves you so much.

To the principal and parent participants at the full-service school that welcomed me with warm hands, thank you. I understand it was difficult to open up, but you did. This would not have been possible without you.

Table of Contents

Abstract .....
Declaration ii
Acknowledgments iii
1.1 Background of the Study 1
1.2 Purpose of the Study 2
1.3 Problem statement 3
1.4 Research Aims and Objectives 4
1.5 Research Questions 4
Primary Question 5
Secondary Questions 5
1.6 Clarification of terms 5
1.6.1 Learning difficulties 5
1.6.2 Learning disabilities 5
1.6.3 Inclusive Education 5
1.6.4 Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) 5
1.6.5 Barriers to learning and development 6
1.6.6 District-based support team (DBST) 6
1.6.7 School-based support team (SBST) 6
1.6.8 Full-service school (FSS) 6
1.7 Overview of the Study 6
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework 8
2.1 Introduction 8
2.2 Learning Difficulty 8
2.3 Learning Difficulties in the South African Context 9
2.4 Learning Disability 10
2.5 Inclusive Education 12
2.5.1 Inclusive Education in the South African Context 14

2.6 The Identification Process in South Africa through Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) 16
2.6.1 Screening 16
2.6.2 Identification 17
2.6.3 Assessment 18
2.6.4 Support 18
2.6.5 The SIAS Process 19
2.8 Theoretical Framework: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) 23
2.9 Conclusion 27
Research Methodology 29
3.1 Introduction 29
3.2 Research Design 30
3.3 Sampling and Description of Participants 31
3.4 Data Collection Methods 32
3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews 32
3.4.2 Document Analysis 33
3.4.3 Procedure 34
3.5 Data Analysis 35
3.5.1 Subject 35
3.5.2 Object 36
3.5.3 Tools 36
3.5.4 Rules 36
3.5.5 Community 36
3.5.6 Division of Labour 36
3.6. Ethical Consideration 36
3.6.1 Informed Consent and Confidentiality 37
3.6.2 Integrity and Respect 37
3.7 Conclusion 37
Data Analysis and Findings 38
4.1 Subject 38
4.3 Object 45

4.4 Tools 47
(i) Scholastic history 47
(ii) The identification process 49
(iii) Emotions 51
4.5 Rules 53
4.6 Community 55
4.7 Division of Labour 56
Summary and Conclusion 59
5.1 Introduction 59
5.2 Summary of the Findings 60
5.3 Challenges with Identification 60
5.5 Strengths of the Study 62
5.6 Limitations of the Study 62
5.7 Recommendations 62
5.8 Conclusion 63
APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule 74
APPENDIX B: Participant Information Sheet 77
APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet for the Principal 79
APPENDIX D: Consent Form 81

Chapter 1

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is one of the essential needs of life. All countries throughout the world prioritize it. Each country develops policies that guide how it plans to make education accessible to all. Additionally, the development process of the policy is determined by the state of education in the country. The common goal in developing countries is to make education inclusive (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994).

According to Prinsloo (2001), the paramount purpose of an education system is to provide quality education for all learners, with the goal being for them to reach their full potential, allowing them to contribute to the economic development of their countries and give value to society. Over the past twenty years, the development of global policies has centered on providing high-quality education to all students in mainstream education, eliminating the stigma and stereotyping of students through literacy (Prinsloo, 2001).

South Africa has accepted educational approaches towards inclusive education. Ferocious attempts are made to identify the obstacles that give all children and youth equal access to quality education (Matolo & Rambunda, 2022). The problem that has to be overcome in this process is the need for training to identify and effectively support learners who experience barriers to learning.

Like in other countries, in 2014 the South African Department of Education developed the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) to help teachers in primary and secondary schools identify obstacles to learning (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). Through this policy, teachers are expected to play an essential role in recognizing and evaluating obstacles to learning in their teaching daily and providing support to the learners experiencing learning barriers.

The identification of learning barriers is very long and can be daunting for students and parents. This study embarks on getting insights into the parent's experiences with the identification process of their children's learning barriers. The education system in South Africa continues to experience challenges concerning the identification and support of students who experience learning problems.

The identification of students begins in the classroom, which is commonly where problems are identified students who are eligible for additional support, the provision of educational services, and the selection and application of appropriate interventions for students who have trouble. According to Knight and Scott (2004), teachers often use inappropriate labels for some students. The most forgotten area of this subject is how the process of identification can be daunting and emotionally strenuous for parents. The key focus of this research project is to understand the parent's lived experiences concerning the pathway to identification and support provision of their child's learning difficulties.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

It has been over 29 years post-apartheid; however, the South African education system still faces tremendous illuminated. Additionally, the common problems with the identification process include the failure to improve challenges regarding making education accessible for all. Though steps have been taken to make education inclusive for all, there are still trials with the application of the policies that guide the process. More focus has been on teachers and how they can help students in the classroom; however, few resources focus on parents with children with learning difficulties and their experiences in their day-to-day lives.

Thwala et al. (2015) suggest that parents of students with learning difficulties struggle to comprehend what is happening with their children, even after having several meetings with their teachers. The parents become overly frustrated and distressed when they learn that their child is not performing according to the expected level with other children of the same age. Furthermore, Heiman (2002) adds that such parents may encounter feelings of misery, irritation, tremors, blame, and sometimes shame. When parents do not have a thorough understanding of their children's academic challenges, they cannot provide them with appropriate support. Therefore, the goal of this study is to comprehend parents' experiences and their perception of the processes that led to the identification of learning impediments and the corresponding interventions.

The inclusive education policy, known as Education White Paper 6, was adopted by South Africa in 2001 to address these historical and contemporary issues by the Department of Education, (DoE), in 2014. An extensive background of the policy is further reviewed in the second chapter. Various initiatives have been launched since then to help with the successful implementation of an inclusive education system (Mpu and Adu, 2021). This policy describes

methods for offering educational help to students who encounter obstacles to their growth and learning. Establishing an inclusive education and training system is one of the primary solutions, according to this strategy, for enhancing education assistance for students facing learning and development difficulties (DoE, 2014). Additional guidelines to reinforce EWP6 are found in the Department of Basic Education's (DoE) 2014 National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) (DoE, 2001). SIAS approach is crucial in assisting in the direction of inclusive education in South Africa. It focuses on the needs of all South African students, especially those who are likely to be marginalized or excluded, and aims to increase everyone's access to high-quality instruction and support (DoE, 2014). The method focuses on early learning barrier detection and appropriate evaluation techniques for potential learning barriers.

The challenges in the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa have been one of the most discussed topics in literature, (Dreyer, 2017; Du Plessis, 2013; Donohue and Bornman, 2014; Mpu and Adu, 2021). Researchers discovered that teachers did not receive enough assistance in implementing the policy (Dreyer, 2017; Du Plessis, 2013). According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), there is uncertainty over the best ways to accomplish inclusive education, which has led to an apparent restriction in its implementation. According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), policy ambiguity is purposeful and related to a lack of financing. Mpu and Adu, (2021) suggest that these policies are symbolic since they are developed to comply with international standards rather than directly result from local initiatives. Such initiatives are not well funded, which suggests that they have little local substance.

1.3 Problem statement

The inclusive education and training system was created so that students who encounter learning challenges could be identified early and offered support, according to the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). The procedure for determining students who encounter obstacles to learning is a crucial first step in offering the required assistance. Therefore, in order to support students in the system, it is imperative that teachers in mainstream schools be able to recognize the various hurdles that may exist, both extrinsic and intrinsic.

All schools have been required to adopt the National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) since 2017. The national strategy on SIAS as a policy was implemented in 2015 to standardize early identification across the nation and to give educators the knowledge of the support required for every learner (DoE, 2014). However, there were a lot of problems with the 2008 piloted draft policy (Geldenhuys and Wevers, 2013). These problems were due to a lack of relevant in-service training, educators were not completely aware of their tasks and responsibilities. Although there have been modifications to the inclusion policies over the past years, there are still challenges experienced with the identification process and support provided to a child with learning difficulty. The parents of the learners play a crucial role in assisting teachers in facilitating inclusive education. Teachers are required to engage parents in all processes of inclusive education (DoE, 2013). The SIAS policy clearly states the role of parents during the identification process. This paper provides insights into the lived experiences of parents on the pathway to identification and support provision of a child's learning difficulty.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

The study aims to understand the lived experiences of parents with children with learning difficulties on their pathway to identification and support provision in the first 12 schooling years through a case study.

The objectives of this study are;

- To get insights into the parents' lived experiences on the pathway to the identification of a learning difficulty of their children.
- To understand the support provided for a child's learning difficulty.

1.5 Research Questions

The focus of the research is to unearth the understanding and gain more insights into the parents' lived experiences of the pathway to identification and support for a child with a learning difficulty, which is central to the SIAS policy in South Africa. The following questions assisted the researcher in having a deeper understanding of the aim of the study:

Primary Question

- What are the parents' lived experiences of the process towards the identification and support provision for their child with LD?

Secondary Questions

- If any, what were the barriers to identification and support provision for the child?
- How were the inclusive education and SIAS policies applied in this case?

1.6 Clarification of terms

1.6.1 Learning difficulties

Learning difficulty is an umbrella term for academic difficulties of different origins. It comprises general learning deficits and low academic performance (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2013). Students with learning difficulties may experience challenges in specific forms like reading, spelling, and arithmetic.

1.6.2 Learning disabilities

The term learning disability usually highlights general and long-lasting learning difficulties, often linked to the field of special education (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2013). Additionally, they were previously closely linked to educational policies and it is commonly assumed that they emerge in the context of general low cognitive abilities.

1.6.3 Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education is a broad term that describes an education system in which all learners are recognized and accommodated regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions (SIAS, 2014).

1.6.4 Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS)

SIAS is a policy aimed at improving access to quality education for vulnerable learners and those who experience barriers to learning, including learners in mainstream and special schools who are failing due to barriers, or children who may be out of school due to their disability or other barriers (DoE, 2014).

1.6.5 Barriers to learning and development

A barrier to learning is anything that hinders learning. Barriers to learning are the result of a broad range of experiences in the classroom, at school, at home, or in the community as a result of health conditions or disability (DoE, 2014).

In the South African context, the term barriers to learning is referred to when describing learning difficulties. Please note that for the purpose and context of this study, the research will use learning difficulties when referring to barriers to learning.

1.6.6 District-based support team (DBST)

The responsibility of this management structure encompasses assisting with the coordination and promotion of inclusive education through the identification, assessment, and addressing of barriers to learning and teaching through training, the distribution of resources, curriculum delivery, and support and infrastructure development (DoE, 2014).

1.6.7 School-based support team (SBST)

The SBST is established by a school about general and further education. It serves as a system through which support is based at the school level, and its primary function is to put coordinated support in place for schools, teachers, and learners. The core function of this team is to support and facilitate the learning and teaching process at the school level (DoE, 2014).

1.6.8 Full-service school (FSS)

Full-service schools are mainstream educational institutions that offer quality education to every student by fairly meeting their learning needs across the board (DoE, 2014). They have a vision and mission to meet the needs of all their learners.

1.7 Overview of the Study

Chapter 1, provides an overview of the research, including its background and the problem that the study is intended to address, along with the questions, aims, and objectives of the study, problem statement, and clarification of terms. Chapter 2, looks into the literature, and the pertinent research on learning disabilities and difficulties in South Africa and around the world is presented in this chapter. The chapter further discusses learning difficulties and disabilities. The chapter also introduces commonly used terminology in the South African context. The background of inclusive education is described, including how it came to be and how it is used in South Africa. The policy that directs the identification process is reviewed in this chapter.

The literature review section of this chapter concludes by discussing parental involvement concerning their children's learning difficulties and identifying the gap in the literature. Finally, this chapter discusses the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) by Vygotsky, (1929), as this is the theoretical framework adopted in the study. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the research methodology adopted for this study. The chapter discusses study methodology as well as design, data collection strategies, and data analysis methodologies. Additionally, ethical considerations are discussed. In Chapter 4, data presentation and the findings of this study are presented, while the conclusion of this study in the form of the summary, challenges, implications, strengths, limitations, and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Learning difficulty is one of the most researched topics and highly spoken about in education systems across the world. Based on the literature, this chapter provides insights into learning difficulties and learning disabilities and how there is a thin line between the two in some contexts. This chapter also provides a detailed review of the South African education policies that guide the identification process of a learning difficulty, and it reviews the international literature on various identification procedures. The chapter further provides insight into the challenges of education systems regarding the identification process. The Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework is adopted in this study and will also be reviewed in this chapter.

2.2 Learning Difficulty

Learning difficulties are one of the most challenging concepts to define, as there is no single definition that is suitable for all contexts (Knight & Scott, 2004). This is a result of the evolving times we live in and the advancement of technologies in the education system. Considering education worldwide, some countries are more advanced than others. Such advancements entail revisiting formerly recognized meanings to ensure that they address the current difficulties learners face.

Several studies attempted to define the concept of learning difficulties to distinguish it from being a disability. Knight & Scott (2004) suggest that learning difficulty is a broad term that includes students with a low prevalence of disabilities such as cognitive impairment, language disorder, hearing and vision difficulties, and a range of difficulties, including students with specific learning disabilities. Additionally, the grouping of learning difficulties may also comprise those scholars who are most likely to experience difficulties with schooling due to the absence of adequate learning opportunities, psychological problems, or inadequate environmental experience.

Academic issues arising from various sources are grouped together as learning difficulties (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2013). It includes specialized types including reading, spelling, and math impairments in addition to general learning deficits and poor academic performance, such as when combined with disabilities. As a result, there are numerous denotations that attempt to distinguish between general and particular forms or highlight the learning problem's stability. Gaining a deeper comprehension of learning difficulties enables one to acquire specific knowledge about the mechanisms underlying learning problems in terms of their individual, instructional, and interactional causation, in addition to general knowledge about normal development (Lenhard and Lenhard, 2013). It may seem insignificant to mention that educational attainment and, conversely, learning difficulties are correlated with socioeconomic status and standard of education.

Norwich and Kelly (2004) suggest that learning difficulties refer to the difficulty in obtaining basic educational skills. Additionally, the words learning difficulty indicate the scholars' learning problems when their performance in the classroom is significantly below what is expected of their ability to learn (Pastor and Reuben, 2002). Scholars with learning difficulties may experience problems with reading, writing, spelling, speaking, and listening. While others have reported problems with maintaining the information over some time and the ability to access the information when needed (Norwich & Kelly, 2004).

2.3 Learning Difficulties in the South African Context

In the South African school system, learning challenges are sometimes referred to as obstacles to learning and development. Some students encounter these obstacles as a result of difficulties they have at home, in the community, or the classroom. Sometimes the obstacles are the result of health issues or impairments (Department of Education [DoE], 2014). According to the DoE (2014), the barriers include socio-economic factors that are risk factors for students, such as political violence, HIV/AIDS, other chronic illnesses, and physical, emotional, and sexual assault. The barriers also include attitudes, rigid implementation of the curriculum in schools, language, and communication, dangerous and inaccessible built environments, and inappropriate and insufficient support service offerings. Lastly, barriers to learning may be a result of a lack of human resource development strategies, a lack of parental identification and involvement, and a lack of accessible learning and teaching support materials and assistive technologies. It is essential to note that learning barriers are not limited to learning problems experienced in the classroom.

Furthermore, another term that is commonly used to describe learning difficulties in Southern Africa is learners at risk. Mabhoyi and Seroto (2019) suggest that students at risk refer to students who are at risk for undesirable scholastic outcomes, such as low educational performance, poor attendance, grade retention, and dropout, owing to a variety of personal and social reasons. Learners who are perceived to be at risk are more likely to be school dropouts as a result of their observed learning challenges and predisposition for failure, as well as their seeming inability to deal with unusual circumstances that are educationally discouraging (Fairbrother, 2008). Additionally, for learners who are at risk based on their widely acknowledged socioeconomic characteristics, such as coming from a low-income home, specialized learning support is required to prevent them from leaving school prematurely.

2.4 Learning Disability

It is crucial to present the background of the South African education system to fully comprehend the identification, assessment, and support of learners with learning challenges. The White Paper Six policy was created as an inclusive education and training system, and to provide guidance for the use of inclusive education approaches, such as special needs education (DoE, 2014). Inclusive education is acknowledged as the primary mode of teaching in South Africa. This had a big impact on how learners with learning difficulties and other barriers to learning and development are identified and supported.

Before the White Paper Six policy, a medical model was put into place, according to which a diagnosis and therapy were necessary because it was thought that a child's deficit was within the child (Nel, 2013). According to Swart and Pettipher (2011), professionals in the medical model operate autonomously, diagnosing and recommending interventions or treatments without having any prior knowledge of the client's system, resources, or assets. Swart and Pettipher (2011) argue that the social model necessitates cooperation and promotes a multidisciplinary viewpoint on assistance and the efficient use of resources. To get past this barrier to learning and growth, the learner was the main focus. Many students were consequently classified as having special needs and put in a special education setting. Although the White Paper Six called for a new strategy, the socio-ecological model, to identify, classify, and support students who face learning obstacles, schools, and districts are still using the medical model (Swart and Pettipher, 2011). The socio-ecological model acknowledges the connections between people and interactions within social systems. In addition, the interactions that occur in these systems; families, classrooms, and schools; have a big impact on both the

results of diagnostic procedures and how people are supported (Landsberg, 2011). This paradigm encourages that all students should receive equal education and that teaching methods must take individual characteristics into account (UNESCO, 1994).

In South Africa, defining a learning disability might be challenging. When discussing learners who face learning obstacles, phrases like learning disability, learning impairment, and learning difficulties are frequently used interchangeably. Furthermore, to make this clearer, (Dednam 2011) explains that learning difficulties can be understood as mostly extrinsic in origin and that they can be remedied. Only particular topics or elements of subjects are affected by learning difficulties, and when students receive more effective support from teachers, their academic performance improves rather rapidly. The majority of learners with learning difficulties have inherent causes, and even with good instruction and extra support, they still struggle with learning (Dunbar-Krige & Van der Merwe, 2010). While the term "learning disability" is frequently used in literature, the term learning difficulty is utilized for the purposes of this study.

The definition that emerges most frequently in contemporary American studies is probably the one from the Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). According to the IDEA, a specific learning disability is defined as a disorder in one or more of the core psychological functions involved in understanding or using language, whether spoken or written. An individual with a specific learning disability may exhibit deficits in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or performing mathematical calculations (Scott & Knight, 2004). The phrase covers a variety of problems, including dyslexia, brain injury, little brain dysfunction, and emerging aphasia. This definition excludes learning difficulties that are primarily caused by mental retardation, emotional instability, sensory impairment, or economic, cultural, or environmental disadvantage.

The most common definition of learning disabilities in Queensland, Australia, postulates that pupils who have learning impairments belong to a tiny subset of students who struggle with learning and have significant support needs in reading, numeracy, and learning how to learn (Knight & Scott, 2004). These children have persistent long-term issues due to the neurological basis of their difficulties. These students exhibit unique learning styles that are shaped by their particular diseases and impede their academic progress, rather than having universal intellectual deficits.

The argument over definitions in Australia has focused less on categories. A significant smaller number of students who do not seem to retort to their classroom curricula have been referred to as having learning difficulties; on the other hand, those who have or are expected to have long-term difficulties with learning are referred to as having learning disabilities (Elkins, 2002). Once more, the emphasis is on assisting children who are not meeting expectations for their response to the classroom program. Both the student's responsiveness to the program and the classroom program or intervention are taken into consideration (Elkins, 2002).

The majority of the definitional discussion has taken place in North America, where funding for services that meet students' educational requirements and support research is inextricably related to the processes of classifying children based on certain needs and traits (Elkins, 2002). Precise measurement and labeling necessary for financing purposes have proven troublesome. Particularly in terms of advocating for a deficit construction of learning problems, in which the idea of learning difficulties as a representation of a gap in each student's capacity (Knight & Scott, 2004).

There seems to be a clear indication of what learning difficulties and disabilities are in educational systems and how to deal with them. Though there are challenges with the identification procedures of learners, the policies that support the facilitation of these procedures are solid and grounded. However, none of the policies considers the parent's experiences with having a child or children with learning difficulties or how to best support them. This current study aims to fill the gap by exploring the parents' experiences with the identification and support provided for their children.

2.5 Inclusive Education

According to the White Paper 6, inclusive education entails recognizing that all children and youth are capable of learning and that they all require assistance. Inclusive education is acknowledging and appreciating the reality that every learner is unique in some manner and has various demands for learning, all of which are equally valued and a normal aspect of the human experience. The goal of inclusivity is to enable educational institutions, processes, and teaching strategies to accommodate the requirements of all students while recognizing and appreciating individual diversity among students (DoE, 2010).

According to inclusive education, all students should have access to high-quality education and have a constitutional right to learn (Adewumi and Mosito, 2019). As a result, instruction should

take into account the variety of children's characteristics and demands. Ensuring that each student has a strong sense of belonging and feels appreciated and respected is the goal of inclusion in education (UNESCO, 2020). There are numerous obstacles in the path of that goal. Many people are excluded by discrimination, preconceptions, and estrangement. These segregation processes are the same regardless of an individual's gender, geography, poverty, color, language, relocation, movement, sexual orientation, confinement, faith, or other views and attitudes (UNESCO, 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda aims to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for everyone, is part of the UN's commitment to leave no one behind (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, the agenda states that it strives to create a fair, unbiased, accepting, open, and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most disadvantaged communities are met.

Achieving equity and inclusion in education systems may be aided or hindered by social, economic, and cultural issues (UNESCO, 2020). If education views learner variety as a challenge rather than a problem—that is, a means of identifying unique brilliance in all of its manifestations and establishing the circumstances required for it to thrive—then it offers a crucial starting point for an inclusive society. Regrettably, underprivileged populations are compelled to leave or are kept out of educational systems through mostly covert means such as curriculum exclusion, irrelevant learning objectives, textbook stereotyping, discrimination in the distribution of resources and evaluations, acceptance of violence, and needless neglect (UNESCO, 2020).

Circumstantial elements like politics, resources, and culture might give the impression that the inclusion challenge differs between nations or social groups. In actuality, the difficulty remains constant regardless of the situation. It is essential that all students are treated with dignity; this will ensure that there is an obstacle breakthrough for education systems; therefore, an increase in scholastic achievement and enhanced learning will be attainable (UNESCO, 2020). Systems must abandon the practice of tagging students, which was implemented under the guise of making the preparation and delivery of educational answers easier. One group cannot accomplish inclusion on its own. Students are multi-identity individuals who intersect. Furthermore, there is no specific trait linked to a predefined capacity for learning.

2.5.1 Inclusive Education in the South African Context

South Africans have experienced a problematic education system that was severely prejudiced by oppression and segregation of individuals based on the color of their skin before 1994. This meant that people of color attended certain schools with limited resources. In the year 1999, the education system was categorized into eighteen sectors by the National Education Policy Act of 1967, with a separate sector based on the racial group and place of origin (Asmal & James, 2001). Furthermore, the Bantu Education System was developed for black people, as stated by the Bantu Education Act of 1953, and it provided limited instruction within the curriculum.

Post-apartheid, the newly elected government made drastic changes to the education system, among other things. South Africa had one national education system that catered to all people, irrespective of their ethnicity and geographical area. Furthermore, education became essential and mandatory for all children in South Africa (Donohue and Bornman, 2014). A new constitution was developed in 1996, and inclusive education has become a relatively new phenomenon in the South African educational system. Section 29 of 1 of the Constitution (1996) stipulates that everyone has a right to a basic education. Consequently, the first official paper to promote inclusive education as a discourse and policy in South Africa was the White Paper (WP) Six: Special Needs Education (DoE, 2001). The WP was presented as an inclusive policy; however, it was criticized for being unclear, which made it difficult to put into practice. To support the inclusion policy paper, many projects and documents were then started in response to this criticism.

The White Paper 6's main objectives are to mobilize disabled children who are not in school, to strengthen special education programs, to establish full-service schools, to create district- and school-based support teams, to increase awareness of inclusive education, to improve training on inclusive education, and to make special provisions for funding the establishment of an inclusive education system. A revised Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) was recently released by the Ministry of Basic Education (DoE, 2013).

This policy adds a great deal of content to White Paper 6, which lays out specific, workable procedures for the admission and referral of students with disabilities between the three tiers of education (Hodgson, 2018). Most importantly, its fundamental tenet is that every child ought to be entitled to high-quality basic education as well as community support in their local area

(DoE, 2001). The definition of disability provided by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is specifically referenced in SIAS, which solidifies the right to reasonable accommodation as an organizing principle (Hodgson, 2018). A number of recommendations have been developed by the DBE to support the implementation of its inclusive education policies, in addition to White Paper 6 and SIAS.

Among them are the Guidelines for Full Service Schools (DoE, 2009), the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (DoE, 2008), and the Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DoE, 2010). Despite these determinations, there remains a gap between the policy's stated intent and the actual implementation of inclusion. Makoelle (2012) highlights the significant execution gap between government policy and the actual practices implemented by teachers and schools in South Africa, impeding the country's transition to inclusive education. The gap results from a lack of clarity and the difficulty of implementing the policy's recommendations, given the socio-economic difficulties present in South Africa.

Giangreco and Doyle (2010) suggest that inclusive education exists when each of the following elements occurs on an ongoing, daily basis: (a) All pupils are embraced in universal and non-specific education. General education is usually considered first for all pupils, irrespective of disability. (b) Disability is acknowledged as a type of individual variety. Students with disabilities are therefore recognized as unique individuals and are not refused entry because of their condition. (c) Regardless of the kind or severity of a disability, appropriate support is provided. (d) The classroom setting should be inclusive and have students within the same age group with and without disabilities. Together with the required support, students with and without impairments engage in common educational experiences as they work toward individually suitable learning outcomes.

South Africa is a diverse country, with different cultural groups and an extensive history of inequality. It is postulated that inclusive education is perceived differently by societies. This often results in divergent views on how inclusive education should be implemented. A study by Donohue and Bornman (2014) contends that the paramount issue with inclusive learning, which results in the education system yielding minimal success in the South African context, is the policy’s lack of clarity and poor execution. It is essential to note that several nations have experienced difficulties implementing inclusive education programs. For inclusive education

to be a success worldwide, teachers need to have the right tools—sufficient support, positive attitudes, and appropriate training (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Furthermore, positive attitudes among caregivers are also crucial because they influence the amount of time, money, and sacrifices they are prepared to make, as well as the level of support they are prepared to provide on behalf of their children to guarantee that they receive the education to which they are legally entitled.

2.6 The Identification Process in South Africa through Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS)

The South African education system approved Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, where the National Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support will be used to implement inclusive education (DoE, 2008). The aim of SIAS, according to Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA, 2019), is to offer a framework for standardizing processes to recognize, evaluate, and offer programs for all students who need extra help to improve their engagement and inclusion in the classroom. The SIAS strategy focuses on a holistic picture and guides decisions around the required level and nature of support. The primary goal of the SIAS strategy is to provide the learners with help, instead of transporting them to a place where support is available, such a special school (Nel and Grosser, 2016). It also directs the involved role player's actions.

Below is a discussion of the components of the policy that teachers are expected to utilize in their daily teaching.

2.6.1 Screening

Testing for the existence or absence of a learning barrier is known as screening. To ascertain which scholars are in danger of having a learning challenge and who require extra assistance, the entire class or school must be organizationally screened (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). Acquiring knowledge about a learner is another aspect of screening. Additionally, for educators to adjust to and respond to individual variances, they must have an understanding of the learners' learning development, which necessitates an understanding of patterns of growth and development. According to the SIAS 2014 policy, a class educator provides a learner profile, which is used for screening for obstacles.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model suggests that educators should concentrate the screening process on the barriers within the learners and their interactions with their

surroundings. The SIAS policy assumes Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem view, which calls for education to move from seeing barriers as existing within learners to identifying them as existing throughout all the systems that make up learners' environments and serve as learning obstacles.

2.6.2 Identification

Identification and addressing refers to the processes that teachers and schools use to identify and classify an obstacle that prevents effective learning (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). Teachers start by identifying and interpreting the types of barriers that exist within or around students that obstruct their ability to learn. For this study, the identification of a child refers to formal and informal identification. Formal identification is when a teacher completes all necessary forms for the identification of a learning difficulty and provides support. An informal identification of a child is when a teacher notices or identifies that the child has a learning difficulty and provide some form of support, but does not complete any related forms.

According to Gargiulo and Metcalf (2013), a learner's strengths and requirements are often profiled by the available data from many sources, which educators must evaluate to identify hurdles. When implementing the SIAS 2014 policy, teachers look over completed student profiles, the evaluation for the school, and conversations with parents and caregivers to gather information that will help them identify the types of barriers that prevent students from learning effectively.

The screening will assist the teacher in identifying whether or not the student is at risk of experiencing a learning barrier. The teacher then assumes the role of case manager, ensuring that the learner receives the appropriate support. Knight & Scott (2004) suggest that the willingness of the school is essential because once identification has been made, there is an expectation that an educational intervention will be delivered.

According to the DoE (2014), the SIAS 2014 policy guides teachers with the SIAS forms, which help evaluate the learner’s needs and will be discussed with the parents or caregivers, as well as the child who is 12 years old and older. The outcome of the discussions provides clarity on whether there have been interventions before and guides the teachers on what interventions the student will benefit from through an individualized support plan. The support team from the school is involved when more support is required. Progress is closely monitored and recorded. Once a term is up, the support plan is reviewed to discuss the level of support required

further. When there is a need for higher-level support, the support team from the school reaches out to the support team from the district for assistance.

2.6.3 Assessment

Under the inclusive education approach, the assessment process entails investigating the obstacles that students face to learning rather than being limited to measuring the amount of curriculum content that they have mastered. To grade the degree or intensity of obstacles inside or around learners, an educator, school, or the entire education system will examine the barriers. According to Bouwer (2016), the assessment process focuses on how students handle learning a new or complicated skill so that appropriate modifications can be made.

Glazzard et al. (2015) provide evidence to support this point of view by attesting that the needs assessment process encompasses a review of all relevant material, including details regarding a learner's personal, social, and emotional development. Determining the type of intervention provided for the learners regarding any requirements they might have is another aspect of this. The assessment of barriers to learning, not academic success or learners who face learning hurdles, is what the policy refers to when determining the assistance requirements of learners.

The outcomes of the evaluation must be promptly, precisely recorded, and shared with the individuals who will be impacted (DoE, 2014). To effectively implement the policy, teachers will periodically evaluate the support requirements of students to ensure that all students, that is, those who encounter learning hurdles as well as those who do not, have access to high-quality education. As a result, assessments must give students the chance to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities. This will make it possible for teachers to offer sufficient learning assistance in a system of inclusive education. Teachers will use methods for learning support that take into account the diversity of their students.

2.6.4 Support

According to Landsberg and Matthews (2016), providing support to learners entails a solution-focused process that identifies and attends to each student's unique requirements when they call for an extra teaching tactic or approach. Several strategies are used to support students who encounter learning obstacles. All of these are predicated on producing an opposite impact on obstacles. Teachers must investigate as many methods and techniques as there are variations in their students. Gargiulo & Metcalf (2013) also stress that teachers must comprehend that the first step in helping students who encounter learning barriers is creating an individualized

support plan. In this plan, teachers can identify a barrier to be changed and track, observe, and measure how often it occurs before implementing counter-barrier teaching and reinforcement strategies.

The provision of support in the screening, identification, and assessment process with reference to learners who have learning difficulties is mandated by the SIAS policy, procedures, and official documents. Three steps make up this process: the initial screening, school-level identification and resolution of learning barriers, and district-level implementation (Department of Education, 2014). It is crucial to understand that the term "assessment" in the SIAS policy refers to evaluations conducted to identify learning obstacles, functioning levels, support needs, and resources available to the learner and their system to participate in the support program (Department of Education, 2010). An outline of the SIAS process's areas of purpose is provided below:

2.6.5 The SIAS Process

Three stages explain the SIAS process implemented in schools. Each stage is characterized by the forms and processes done. The stages are discussed in detail below:

(i) The first stage

At the beginning of a new school phase (foundation, intermediate, or senior phase), or upon enrollment, all students undergo screening by their teacher as part of the first stage in the process, known as SNA 1. After that, the information is entered into the learner profile (LP), which takes the place of any previous profile forms that schools may have used. To gather pertinent data for the learner profile, all documents and reports—including the admission form, the Road to Health booklet, year-end school reports, and reports from parents, teachers, experts, and relevant stakeholders—are used. Finally, the instructor needs to start filling out Support Needs Assessment Form 1 (SNA 1). To complete SNA 1, the teacher and parents work together under the guidance of the SIAS form. The SNA 1 is designed in a way that helps the instructor build a comprehensive image of the student by having them work through the necessary summaries and questions. This gives an excellent indicator of possible learning impediments and areas that the teacher may address right away. The teacher's perspective is shaped by the SNA 1. To ensure that students with learning disabilities receive the best possible support, Nel and Grosser (2016) agree with the idea of guiding teachers' thinking and state that the focus

should be on empowering regular school teachers to become inclusive in their school cultures and practices.

(ii) The second stage

In stage 2 (SNA 2), the parent/guardian's consent is obtained before the teacher seeks advice from the SBST after using a number of classroom intervention tactics and seeing little to no success. Together, the teacher and the SBST finish the SNA 2 and create the Individual Support Plan (ISP), which includes both current and future intervention techniques and plans. These interventions and methods could involve asking the learning support instructor for advice on in-class procedures, academic help, or a referral to a psychologist for more research into potential learning obstacles and useful support techniques. After the SBST has given suggestions, the parent or caregiver is consulted and required to be included in the decision-making process. All involved parties, including the parents, sign the ISP, which includes an assessment of the obstacles identified, the interventions implemented, and the action plan developed to improve the assistance. The support plan is implemented and tracked through a termly review process. Should development be insufficient, help from the DBST is needed. The LST and EP's contributions are quite important at this point. To decide on the best course of action, they cooperate and exchange information. Important collaborative skills include listening to each other, sharing knowledge, and respecting each other's opinions equally.

(iii) The third stage

When the DBST is contacted for support, the third step of the procedure is activated. Form DBE 120 is used to explain why the DBST is needed and what kind of help is needed. With the help of the support guidelines, the support level rating table, and the checklist that specifies how the support is to be given, the SBST and the DBST examine the ISP and finish SNA 3. The DBST creates a support package for the student and/or the school. This support package includes planning and budgeting for additional support programs, distribution of resources and services to support the student and school, training, counseling, parent and teacher mentorship, and any additional referrals or actions to be taken, such as referral to special schools (DoE, 2014). Depending on the frequency and intensity of support needed, this package will be determined as either low, moderate, or high-level support. This will therefore dictate who will give the support and where. After every alternative for assisting a student at their home school

has been investigated, placement at a special school is only taken into consideration (DoE, 2014).

The SIAS document directs the processes for delivering the required learning support and describes how to identify a learner's needs and potential learning obstacles. It becomes clear throughout the process how important it is for all of the system's role players to work together. According to DoE (2014), one of the assessment criteria outlined in the SIAS paper is that close collaboration across the various system levels' structures particularly the SBST and DBST is necessary to guarantee the seamless execution of the process and provide information for the support package.

2.7 Parental Involvement/Engagement

Parental involvement is one of the well-researched topics worldwide. These studies have indicated that parental involvement increases the student's academic performance (Pakter and Chen, 2013; Rogers et al., 2009; Lightfoot, 2004). Although the SIAS policy states that parents are engaged in the early stages of identification and throughout the decision process. There is, however, limited literature on parental involvement in the SIAS process. This paper attempts to find out how much parents are involved in early identification.

In trying to understand the parents' perceived educational needs for parenting a child with learning difficulties, Chein (2021) reported that parents were physically and emotionally exhausted as a result of the demands placed on their time by their involvement in their child's education and that they were also dealing with negative attitudes from the school staff, who were perceived to be uncooperative and to be misinterpreting their children's learning difficulties.

For most parents, having a child with special educational needs can be a daunting experience (Forlin, 2011). Okeke and Mazibuko (2014) conducted a study in South Africa and Swaziland that revealed that parents of children with special education needs were experiencing a range of emotions, such as anger, fear, guilt, and anxiety when they tried to understand their children's experience with special education. Furthermore, because of cultural diversity and background differences, parents in Swaziland expressed dissatisfaction with the way educators and other students treated children with special education needs.

Researchers suggest that the benefits of parental involvement include improved and higher academic outcomes and encouraging optimistic behavior at school (Rogers et al., 2009). These authors further suggest that parental involvement occurs in two ways, firstly, parental involvement occurs through putting effort in as a parent to assist with homework, assignments, and projects. Lastly, parents also become involved by engaging in parent meetings and participating in school committees. Both of these engagements are in the best interest of the child. Being an active parent also makes it easier for parents to communicate with the educator whenever the need arises. For instance, the parent will have an idea of the scholastic challenges their children may have before the educator confirms it and calls or schedules a meeting. This makes it easier to understand what is going on with the child. Unlike uninvolved parents, they usually struggle to understand the scholastic challenges their children have, as it is usually the first time they learn about or hear about them. As a result, some parents tend to be in denial or find it hard to accept what the educator tells them.

Taderera and Hall (2017) suggests that a high degree of expertise as well as access to resources, information, and assistance are necessary while parenting children with learning difficulties. However, these services and resources are not always accessible in developing nations. As a result, parents in Namibia, a developing nation, confront difficulties in treating their children's cognitive problems as well as other developmental issues. These difficulties include difficulties relaying to supportive and preventative interventions. The results of their study indicated that several parents had only an unclear understanding of difficulties with learning since they could not obtain basic information about this occurrence (Taderera & Hall, 2017). Additionally, they lacked awareness of the policies, programs, and resources available to help their kids with learning difficulties. Participants acknowledged that there are misconceptions and prejudices about learning impairments held by them, their children with learning disabilities, and others in the community.

Resch et al. (2010) also found that access, or more pointedly lack of access, to important information and needed services was the most salient and overarching area of concern for the participants in their study. Parents indicated that they often encountered many challenges related to access to resources. Resch et al., (2010) further explained that when parents discovered their children had a learning difficulty, they immediately began to assume the role of caregivers, which included making efforts to obtain information and services. Additionally,

parents perceived the initial attempt to learn about their child's learning difficulty as time-consuming and challenging. According to Resch et al. (2010), success in obtaining needed information and resources brought considerable relief to parents. The parents expressed that learning where to search for information and services and then being able to access them was a process full of challenges and roadblocks. The difficulties associated with the process of acquiring information and services seemed to be a product of having to navigate complex human service organizations (Resch et al., 2010).

The family structure of the children is an area of concern. Munje and Mncube (2018), indicate that parents play an essential role in their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. The teachers in their study contended that specific family dynamics hurt students' academic achievement. It was shown that a large number of students lived with grandparents or other relatives who, for a variety of reasons, did not support their education, which had detrimental effects. Parents in underprivileged neighborhoods typically work at jobs that prevent them from being involved in their children's education (Jensen, 2009). As a result, parents are unable to oversee their children's homework or keep an eye on their academic development. It seems that when students return from school, a lot of parents in underprivileged communities are not home, which causes the kids to misbehave (Abrahams, 2013; Manilal, 2014).

Few studies focus on parents' perceived experiences on having a child with a learning difficulty in Southern Africa, the researcher hopes that this paper will add value in the literature. This makes the purpose of this paper even more relevant because the entire education system needs to understand what parents need and want, as well as to what extent they would like to be involved. This should also allow the education system to assure the parents that there needs to be strong and constant collaboration among all stakeholders, which includes parents, teachers, students, and school management. Parents should not want to be involved only when there is something to complain about or when their child has failed the academic year.

2.8 Theoretical Framework: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

CHAT is an interdisciplinary and philosophical framework that highlights the many intricate ways human actions take on different shapes as societal and individual evolution processes (O'Donoghuea and Harford, 2022). There are several explanations for the historical context that gave rise to the corresponding CHAT model. It is known that it commenced with

Vygotsky's activity theory (Vygotsky, 1929) and progressed through several generations, from Leont'ev (1978) to Engeström's (1987, 2015), who also made significant contributions.

Nussbaumer (2012) suggests that by analyzing the dialectical relationships between individuals, resources, and objectives as they are regulated and framed by culture, social structures, and history within a society. CHAT serves as a model that offers lenses through which to view human cognition. According to this theory, the main analytical unit is an activity system, which is made up of networks of socio-cultural components and intricate mediational structures that influence the coordinated behaviors of people who are driven to accomplish a particular objective (O'Donoghuea & Harford, 2022). Every society also has a set of socio-cultural conventions, which are rules that have been agreed upon by all. These are standards for acting, behaving, and engaging in the community that are either clearly expressed or inferred.

Education researchers now understand how important social components of learning are. As a result of the growing interest in utilizing this theory and its extensive descriptive features, practitioners are also able to compare the reviewed papers to a recognized professional educational scenario like teaching and learning (Nussbaumer, 2012).

Based on Vygotsky's model of mediated action, CHAT was expanded to include all aspects of an activity system by Engeström (1987, 2015). Engeström (1987) is credited with developing this theory's second generation. He integrated the first generation of CHAT into his concepts by taking into account the following elements that form the activity system: Object, Subject, Instruments, Rules, Community, and Division of Labor. These six elements work together toward the attainment of the Outcome. Vygotsky and his associates (1987, 2001, 2015) named this theoretical approach socio-historical/cultural-historical psychology, or CHAT, as Figure 1 below illustrates:

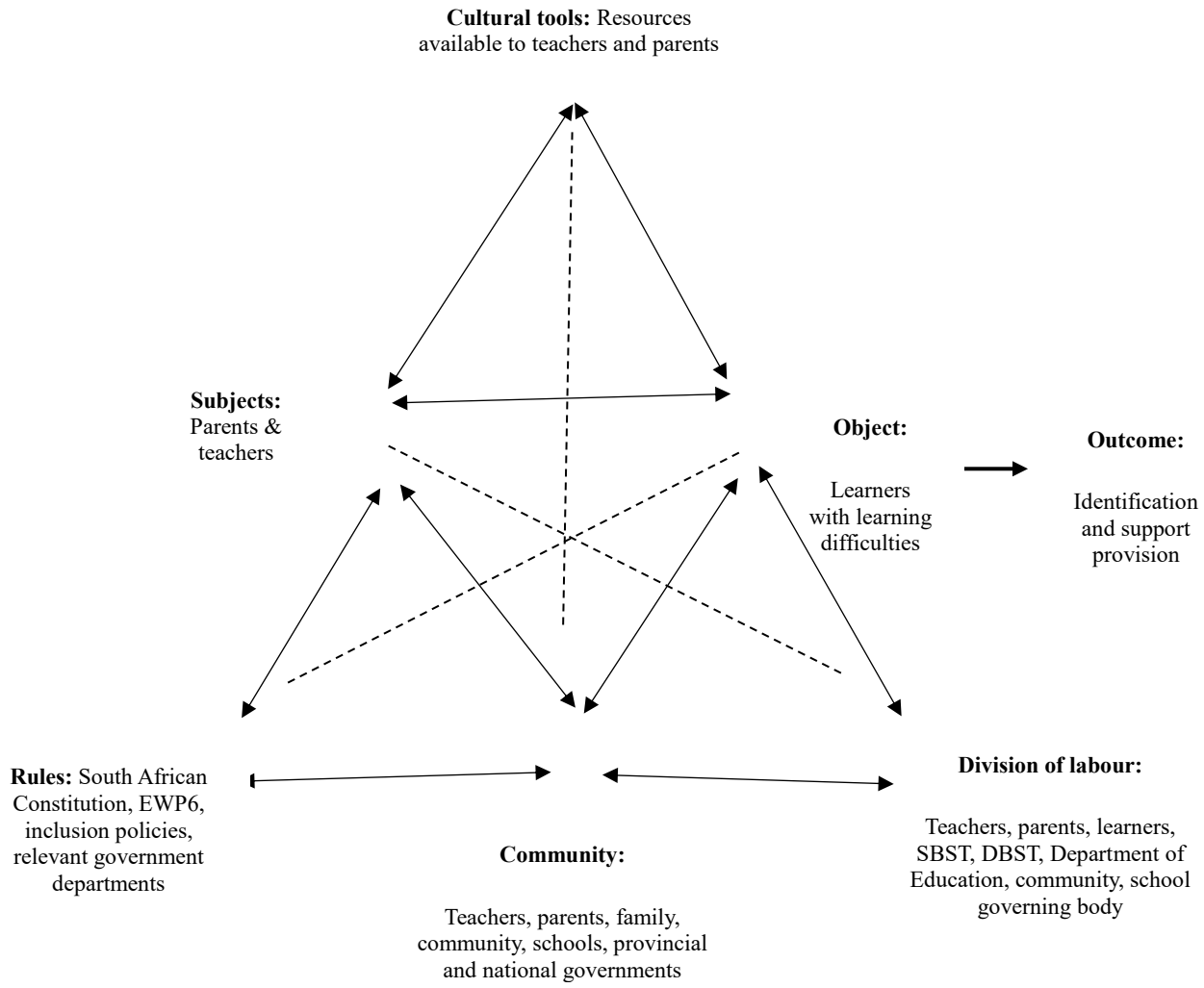


Figure 1: Vygotsky's second generation, CHAT model adapted from Grimalt-Álvaro and Ametller (2021)

Subject

A person or group working toward a goal that will result in an outcome is the subject. For this paper, the subjects are the parents and teachers who are both working towards an outcome that will result in having the students with learning difficulties properly identified and supported in the South African education system.

Tools

Tools are both material and conceptual and facilitate the achievement of the object (Engeström, 1999). According to Vygotsky (1978), tools facilitate all human acts and involvement. The subject frequently molds and improves the tool for it to be operational and suitable, which then

modifies the approach with which the subject concludes a task. The tools in this study will include the department's resources available to teachers and parents, such as the learner profiles, forms used for identification in the SIAS policy, and all relevant feedback reports.

Rules

In this context, the rules include the South African Constitution, the Education White Paper Six, inclusion policies, and the relevant government departments, i.e., Social Services.

Community

The community is a cluster of people with a common object within an activity system, and it includes all relevant stakeholders, for instance, teachers, parents, schools, and provincial and national governments.

Division of labor

Division of labor occurs among the teachers, parents, students, school, and district support teams. These elements all influence mediating and ensuring that the goal is achieved and results are observed. The crucial point of the study is the connection between the parent's experience and the entire pathway it took for the child to be identified as they associate in an appropriate natural setting. CHAT is thus a system that assists us in understanding human activity in its natural setting (Gretschel et al., 2015).

Object

Engeström (2015) refers to the object as the intended activity in the system. In this study, the learner with learning difficulties is the object. The activity theory suggests that it is the duty of teachers serving on SBST committees to recognize and address the unique requirements of each student. When creating support interventions for learners with learning difficulties, who find it difficult to manage the different physical and psychological demands of their educational experiences, they must apply their knowledge of inclusive education.

Outcome

The outcomes of a CHAT system illustrate the kind of constructive change that the group envisions. The sociocultural, historical, and systemic values influence the outcomes

(Engeström, 2001). The participants engage in active collaborative work within the division of labor and directly interact with the objects as they facilitate the realization of the outcomes. The learners with learning difficulties being identified and support provided are the most desired outcomes in this study.

According to Engeström (2015), the activity is distributed among the members of the community in the following way; the relationship between the subject (parents and teachers) and the object (learners with learning difficulties) is mediated by the resources available to facilitate the identification and support required. Transforming the object into an outcome (identification and support provision) requires tools such as the learner profile, and all relevant forms and resources in the SIAS policy. The relationship between the subject and the community is mediated by the rules. The relationship between the object and the community is mediated by the division of labor

By assisting in the understanding of each element in context and pointing out contradictions that result in tensions both within and between elements, the CHAT framework can be used to enhance practice within the activity system (Engeström, 2015). These tensions exert pressure on the participants' work and serve as the basis for innovation or change (Ireland, 2023). Additionally, the word tension in CHAT should not be taken negatively, but rather as something that could force changes to the activity system.

2.9 Conclusion

Over a decade has passed since the introduction and implementation of the policy, but research has indicated that the reason for the implementation's ineffectiveness is the lack of sufficient skills and knowledge among teachers to address barriers and implement inclusive pedagogies in the classroom (Schoeman, 2012).

The study done by Motitswe (2014) suggests that there is evidence in schools that teachers attempt to implement intervention programs and individualized education plans; however, it can take between 4 and 6 months for the district to intervene and provide the necessary support for students. Unfortunately, in some cases, no feedback is provided from the district, thus making it difficult for teachers to provide support, and no one can account for what happens to the student during that time. Additionally, it was noted through document analysis that some teachers in primary schools do not keep records of minor to moderate cases; it is only the severe cases that receive attention and support, and also get referred to the district for further

support. This study will provide insights into the parents' experiences with the implementation of inclusive education policies.

The CHAT model has proven useful in the analysis of change in a variety of societal domains because of its emphasis on how the nature of actions is created socially, culturally, historically, and educationally. Regarding this, Yamagata-Lynch (2007) has made the case for its application in defining the parameters of socio-political and educational change throughout national educational systems.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study is a qualitative design as it explores the experiences of parents with children who have learning difficulties. The qualitative research approach is more suitable than quantitative research in this study since the researcher wants to gather more insights into the phenomena being studied through interviews, school reports, and other relevant documentation such as the SIAS policy and referral letters if available.

Rather than using experimentally measurable data that is evaluated according to quantity, intensity, frequency, and amount, qualitative research focuses primarily on the qualities of things as well as processes and meanings (De Vaus, 2001). It explores how reality is socially created and emphasizes the link between the researcher and the subject of study. Its focus, according to Macmillan and Schumer (2010), is on describing and investigating interesting phenomena as well as how individuals view and comprehend the world. Because the goal of the study is to characterize, comprehend, and interpret how various parents in a social situation construct learning difficulty and the identification process in the school setting, the research is grounded in a qualitative research approach. Increasing awareness and insight into the human condition is one of the goals of the qualitative research approach, which places a strong emphasis on better understanding human experience and behavior. According to Creswell's (2003) theory, the qualitative research approach is founded on hypotheses that arise from facts rather than predefined or preconceived concepts. As a result, the research is based on qualitative research since it uses an inductive strategy.

Caution should be exercised in noting that the main focus of this research is on the opinions and viewpoints of the participants, in this case, the parents. The knowledge from this study will be developed based on their subjective experience of the journey for their children. By no means does this mean that all parents have the same experience as the parents who took part in the research. It is also crucial to remember that the meaning that is drawn from the information acquired during the interviews is heavily influenced by the researcher's opinions. Such information creation will influence the study's design. Bean (2006) further suggests that investigators plan their investigations according to their conception of knowledge. As such, the

path taken in the pursuit of objective truth differs from that taken in the pursuit of personal meaning or agreement over intersubjective meaning.

3.2 Research Design

This is a qualitative study and it adopts the case study research (CSR) design. The CSR design is beneficial in this current study, as it aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of the parent's experiences of the pathways to identification and support provision for a child with a learning difficulty. CSR is an extensive technique progressively applied in humanities and health studies to explore the how or why subjective exploration questions (Morgan et al, 2017). According to Yin (2014), CSR can also be applied when the researcher has limited control over the proceedings and when the attention is on a modern-day phenomenon within some realistic context. Thus, CSR differs from other exploration strategies, like trials, which deliberately separate a phenomenon from its unique context. In the CSR setting, it is inseparably connected to the marvels being scrutinized and, in this way, is pivotal to seeing true cases (Ramchander, 2017).

The advantages of case studies are that they examine and document the intricate, dynamic, and developing interconnections of events, human relationships, and other factors in a singular instance because the settings are distinct and dynamic (Yin, 2014). Among the restrictions connected with case studies is the requirement for contextual binding, which restricts the findings' range. This indicates that the results are only true within a very specific context and cannot be taken to be generalizable. Consequently, they are unable to be broadened. The vulnerability of a case study to the prejudices and views of the researcher is another issue. Exploratory conversation and regular engagement between the researcher and participants are used in case studies. The researcher can have an impact on the interpretation and discourse (Yin, 2014).

With this method, the researcher comprehends how people construct, alter, and interpret the worlds in which they live (Creswell, 2003). The purpose of this study is to find out the lived experiences of parents on the pathway to identification and support for their child’s learning difficulties. This study benefits more from the qualitative research since it sheds light on the parents' perspectives of what identification and support look like. Consequently, it emphasizes a deeper comprehension of human behavior and experience while fostering a better awareness of oneself and the human predicament.

A qualitative study, according to Creswell (2003), is situated within a constructive paradigm, which suggests that the researcher accepts the existence of multiple realities, which are various interpretations of personal and societal experiences that have been socially and historically constructed to produce a theory. Finding out the opinions and viewpoints of the participants on their actions, words, and comprehension of their practices is what is expected. Creswell (2003) further claims that socially constructed realities and traits, which are intricate and inseparable from discrete factors, are the focus of qualitative research. As a result, these researchers make an effort to characterize, comprehend, and analyze their surroundings. Because of this, the current study uses an inductive approach that is founded on viewpoints that come to light as a result of the data itself rather than on preconceived notions.

In this context, the goal of qualitative research is to expand on teachers' perspectives and understanding of inclusive education, as well as their pedagogical expertise and techniques for working with students who have a range of problems and abilities. According to Creswell (2003), while using a qualitative approach, the researcher frequently bases knowledge claims primarily on constructive views, which accept the various social and historical interpretations of individual experiences to create a theory or pattern.

3.3 Sampling and Description of Participants

Purposive sampling, also known as selective sampling or intentional sampling, is the method used to choose the sample. The qualitative researcher sets strict requirements that each participant must fulfill to be taken into account for the research study, making it extremely selective (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). In addition, the participants must be able to offer comprehensive information regarding the topic under investigation. The participants may include, but are not limited to, the biological parents, legal guardians, and caregivers of the children. The participants have a child who is in a public full-service secondary school, has been formally or informally diagnosed or identified by the teacher as having learning difficulties in their schooling years, and lives with their parents. The rationale for deliberately selecting the parents of public full-service secondary school learners lies in the consideration that the child has experienced at least 7 years of school in their life. The parents of children in secondary schools are in a better position to share their experience since they may have had to make several adjustments in their lives for the 7 years that the child has been in school, and are thus considered experts in understanding their experiences. Secondary school life could be difficult, and such parents may have more profound information on the effects of understanding

troubles (Dreyer, 2015). The secondary school was selected from Johannesburg, the Soweto region, to be precise. The researcher found it convenient to select the Soweto secondary school because it was located nearby. The researcher had no funds to visit schools outside of Soweto. The researcher approached the school principal about conducting research with the parents of the learners, and permission was granted. The principal indicated that the participant information sheet with be given to the grade 10 and 11 learners only. The grade 9 and 12 learners were said to be preparing for the exams, while the grade 8 were considered to be new to the school and would not be fit for the intended purpose. The researcher had hoped to have at least 15 participants who would be interested in participating in the study; however, due to challenges that will be discussed in detail in the chapters below, data was collected from 8 parents.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The study used two data collection methods and they are discussed below.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for this study as they permit the participants some amount of freedom to discuss their thoughts and highlight areas of particular interest and expertise that they felt they had. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe questions when necessary to bring out and resolve apparent contradictions (Flick et al., 2004).

Interviews are described by Macmillan and Schumacher (2006) as open-ended questions intended to extract meanings and perspectives from participants regarding significant life experiences. The goal of a research interview is to investigate people's opinions, experiences, convictions, and driving forces behind particular issues.

Through the process of exchanging opinions among people of interest, an interview is a strategy that aims to develop information concerning a topic of interest and locate data in their social settings. Interviews are thought to offer a comprehensive picture of social phenomena and are particularly useful in situations where little is known about the topic being studied or if specific information from individual participants is needed.

Semi-structured interviews comprise multiple pivotal inquiries that serve to both clarify the domains to be investigated and permit the investigator or subjects to stray further into an ideal

response. Respondents can answer in semi-structured interviews. This particular interview format was used because it seemed more relevant and allowed me, the researcher, to delve deeper into the teachers' comments and follow up on ideas. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions are designed to help participants connect theoretical ideas with practical situations by allowing them to consider and share how they perceive interview theory.

The questionnaire has four sections, which aim at first understanding the parents and child's context and scholastic history; the second section focuses on the identification of the child and includes questions such as what led to the identification of the child. The third section attempts to understand the interactions the parents had with the teachers, school-based support team, etc. The last section explores the challenges the parents faced in the identification and support provision of the child with learning difficulties. The researcher had anticipated conducting the in-person in the comfort of the participants' homes, however, considerations were made for parents who were uncomfortable with having the interviews at their homes. The interviews were then conducted telephonically and online through platforms like WhatsApp video calls, Zoom, MS Teams, and Google Hangouts. The researcher contacted the parents to schedule meetings with the parents using the contact details that the parents wrote on the consent forms. The interviews took 3 weeks to complete since the researcher had to accommodate working parents and find the most suitable time to have a conversation that concerned them and their children. Each interview took a duration of 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

With the participants' complete consent and cooperation, the interviews were audio recorded with a cell phone so that I could have a reference and prevent forgetting any crucial information when transcribing. The significance of recording an interview lies in its ability to verify the language of remarks and points of interest that the researcher may want to mention in the analysis.

3.4.2 Document Analysis

The researcher had hoped to collect data through document analysis, such as school reports, books, and other relevant communication, which include formal letters from the school or a professional assisting the child. The participants indicated that documents such as referral letters were given to them but were requested by the schools during the application process as a result they no longer have them in their possession. The process of applying for concessions was done directly by the school, therefore, the parents had no documents as evidence of the

applications. It was unfortunate that the researcher experienced these limitations. Nonetheless, the researcher had access to analyze several government policy documents such as the inclusive education policy guidelines and the SIAS. The SIAS policy addresses procedural guidelines that aims at supporting teachers in assessing and designing support plans for learners of diverse needs.

Document analysis is one technique that can be used to augment previously acquired amounts of data. It is akin to other analytical techniques in qualitative research and necessitates scrutinizing and interpreting data to extract significance, comprehend, and generate empirical knowledge. Hermeneutics is the term used by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) to describe this critical analysis of texts. They define it as the study of text interpretation. The researcher must seek convergence and corroboration using a variety of data sources and methodologies to be considered trustworthy.

3.4.3 Procedure

A research proposal that examined the literature on learning disabilities, inclusive education, and the SIAS policy served as the basis for this investigation. After going through this procedure, I applied for clearance to the School of Human and Community Development Ethics Committee, and I was given full approval. Next, the researcher requested authorization to interview parents of students enrolled in the full-service school for research purposes. After obtaining permission, the researcher went to the school to inform the principle about the purpose of the study and the areas in which I required help. I informed the principal that I required the parents of pupils who had been classified or identified as having a learning difficulty, whether formally or informally. I explained to the principal that I needed 15 parents to participate in the study. The researcher was well-received at the school, such that the principal accepted the participation information sheet for the principal, the consent form, and the participation information sheet for the participants.

The researcher collected nine signed consent forms before starting data collection. To honor the COVID-19 regulations, data collection was done virtually and telephonically. The researcher contacted the parents individually to schedule an appointment and explained the aims, objectives, and procedure of this study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Three parents scheduled virtual interviews through Google Hangouts, and each interview lasted an hour. Five parents were scheduled for telephonic interviews, and they also

took an hour. One parent canceled and told the researcher that she no longer wanted to participate in the study. The researcher held this in the highest regard. The interviews were recorded to be later transcribed.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's stages of thematic analysis (2006). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns within qualitative data commonly known as themes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The six stages are: (1) become familiar with the data; (2) generate initial codes; (3) search for themes; (4) Review themes; and (5) Define themes. Using the 6 stages in thematic analysis, I looked through and underlined some of the raw data to become familiar with it. The simplest section of the raw data that can be utilized to pinpoint an interesting feature is where the initial codes are generated. After that, themes are identified by classifying codes into potential themes and compiling all of the data extracts that fit into those themes. The researcher then creates a thematic map that illustrates the connections between themes and sub-themes, as well as reviewing and improving the themes. The researcher identifies and characterizes themes, ensuring that they provide the reader with an instant understanding of the subject matter. The researcher writes a report that uses data extracts woven into an analytical narrative to argue a point regarding the research question and persuade the reader of the value and validity of the analysis.

The study is guided by the theory, CHAT, therefore making it a deductive analysis. This means that the researcher applies the theory to the data to test the theory. The researcher discussed the themes that were unpacked by applying the theoretical framework, Vygotsky's (1978) activity system of the CHAT, for finding meaning in the data. This concept allows us to comprehend human interrelationships between the person and the context, history, community, and relation of the situation and activity. The CHAT concepts include the subject, object, tools, rules, community, and division of labor, all of which have been explained in detail in the framework section. The researcher also used the literature to understand the insights that the data provided.

3.5.1 Subject

A person or group working toward a goal that will result in an outcome is the subject (Vygotsky, 1978). For this research, the subjects are the parents and teachers involved in the system and trying to work towards a common goal of understanding and making sense of learning difficulties.

3.5.2 Object

The object is an area of concern that the person or community is focused on (Vygotsky, 1978). Working on the object results in achieving outcomes.

3.5.3 Tools

The tools are both material and conceptual, which facilitate the achievement of the object (Engeström, 1999). According to Vygotsky (1978), tools facilitate all human acts and involvement. The subject frequently molds and improves the tool for it to be operational and suitable, which then modifies the approach with which the subject concludes a task. The tools in this study will include the department's resources available to teachers and parents, such as the learner profiles, forms used for the process of identification in the SIAS policy, and all relevant feedback reports.

3.5.4 Rules

In this context, the rules include the South African Constitution, the Education White Paper Six, inclusion policies, and the relevant government departments, i.e., social welfare services.

3.5.5 Community

The community also forms parts of the activity system, and it includes all relevant stakeholders, for instance, teachers, parents, schools, and provincial and national governments.

3.5.6 Division of Labour

This occurs among the teachers, parents, students, school, and district support teams. These elements all influence mediating and ensuring that the goal is achieved and results are observed.

3.6. Ethical Consideration

It is important to consider the fundamentals of research ethics involving human participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). Approval from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee was received to continue with the study and was issued a clearance certificate with the protocol number MEDPSYC/21/08. A request for permission to conduct the research was made to the concerned district, school, and GDE, and it was well received. The researcher provided the school with informed consent letters to the parents to request that parents who are interested in taking part in the study forward their details so that an appointment can be arranged. The participants received a participant information sheet that informed them of what was expected from them, how the data would be used, and what (if any) consequences there could be. The participants will be referred for further emotional support at

Lifeline for telephonic counselling on 0861 322 322. The Government's regulations and restrictions regarding COVID-19 did not affect the proposed data collection method. However, some parents were more comfortable with online and telephonic interviews.

3.6.1 Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Informed consent and confidentiality were assured and maintained throughout the research. These entailed a thorough explanation of the rationale and objectives of the study. Participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that they were welcome to withdraw at any time from the study. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection, the real names of the participants were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used. The data was stored on a computer that is protected by a password. The researcher transcribed in a private room and used headphones to hear the audio. The participants. Participant’s rights to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were respected and assured.

3.6.2 Integrity and Respect

Integrity and respect for all participants were maintained. Participants were treated with respect and no discrimination, regardless of their gender, race, marital status, age, or educational background.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter elaborates on the research methodologies chosen and applied in this paper. These included the research design, sampling and description of the participants, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter provides a detailed description of the researcher's presentation of data and findings. This is unpacked using the activity system of the CHAT model with the collected data. The researcher revisits the research questions, aims, and objectives of the current study. The study aims to understand the lived experiences of the parents of the pathway to identification and support provision in the first 12 schooling years of a child with learning difficulty.

The activity system of CHAT is applicable in analyzing data in this study as it emphasizes that learning is a social phenomenon (Engeström 2000; Douglas 2011). In other words, the parent's experience and pathway towards identification and support occurs within social systems that have developed historically and culturally, and provide participants with specific tools to work on a shared object. The CHAT concepts pertinent to this study include the subjects, who are the participants (parents) in the study; and the object, which is the identification and support of the learning difficulty. The subjects have different views and experiences about the object. Tools are the resources that have been used to mediate the parent's experience towards the object. The rules are the policies that guide the identification and support process of children with learning difficulties. The findings explore the extent to which the parents interact with the rules. The community involves all the people in the activity system and how they interact together. The study discusses how the parents interact with the students, teachers, and school and district support teams.

4.1 Subject

The subject is part of the activity system, and in this study, the parents are the subject that is being studied.

The participants biographical information below on table 1.

Participants	Age (years)	Marital status	Family structure	Education	Employment status
A	Mom: 39 Dad: 45	Married	Staying together with 4 children	Both have tertiary qualifications	Both are employed
B	Mom: 40 Dad: 49	Married	Staying together with 2 children	Only mom has a tertiary qualification	Own a business together
C	Mom: 40	Not married but still together with the dad	Stay together with their child	No tertiary qualification	Both are employed
D	Dad: 50	Not married but still together with the dad	Staying together with their 4 children	No tertiary qualification	Only mom is employed
E	Mom: 44 Dad: 48	Separated and not married	Staying together with 4 children	No tertiary qualification	Both are employed
F	Mom: 41	Separated and not married	Dad not involved and no siblings	Mom has a tertiary qualification	Mom is employed
G	Mom: 39	Separated and not married	Stays with her 2 children	No tertiary qualification	Self-employed
H	Mom: 45 Dad: 47	Separated and co-parenting	Mom stays with her 2 children	No tertiary qualification	Both are employed

Table 1: Participants biographical information

The study had eight parents who participated, and their biographical information will be discussed below:

Parent A

The parents were both present during the interview. Mom is 39, and Dad is 45 years old. They are married and are staying together with their three children. Their student (A) is 17 years old, is currently in Grade 11, and is the eldest child among his siblings. Both parents are employed and have tertiary education. Student A had experienced challenges with writing at school when he was in Grade 2. The teacher did inform the parents, and they implemented the teacher's recommendations. He has not repeated a grade, but he still struggles with most of his subjects at school.

Parent B

Only mom was present in the interview and is also married to the father of student B. Mom is 40, and Dad is 49 years old. They are staying together with their two children, and student B is the oldest. The parents are self-employed and are running their business together. Only Mom has a tertiary qualification. Student B is 17 years old, currently in Grade 10, and is struggling with mathematics, however, she has not repeated a grade.

Parent C

Only Mom was present in the interview, and she is 40 years old. She is not married, but she is still together with the father of her child. The parents are both employed and do not have any tertiary qualifications. Student C is the only child; he has been struggling at school but has never repeated the grade. He is 17 years old and is currently in Grade 10.

Parent D

The Dad was the only one present during the interview, and he is 50 years old. The parents are not married but stay together with their four children. Student D is the second child with an older sibling at the university. Both parents do not have any tertiary education. Mom is the only one who is employed as a receptionist at a medical center. Student D is 18 years old and is currently in Grade 11. He has been struggling at school since he was in Grade 4 but has not repeated a grade.

Parent E

Both mom and dad were present for the interview. The mom is 44, and the dad is 48 years old. Student E is the oldest child among 4 siblings. He used to stay with his maternal grandmother when he was in primary school and only came to stay with his parents when he started high school. Mom said that his school marks were not great, but he was passing. He has been struggling so much in high school that his teacher suggested that they put him into extra classes. He is 17 years old, is currently in Grade 11, and has never repeated a grade.

Parent F

The mom was the only one present for the interview, and she is 41 years old. Student E is the only child and was staying with his maternal grandmother in Lesotho until he was in Grade 4. He was struggling at school and was always behind with his schoolwork. His teachers had meetings with the grandmother to discuss his progress. Mom took him to stay with her in South Africa, and because of his challenges, he was taken back to Grade 3 at his new school. He was given support at the school, and his progress was closely monitored. He is 18 years old, currently in Grade 10, and he attends extra classes at school for additional support. Mom has a degree in business administration and works for one of the biggest banks. The father is from Lesotho and is not involved in the scholar's life.

Parents G

The mom was the only one present for the interview, and she is 39 years old. Mom has two other children whom she stays with, and student G is the oldest child. Mom is not married, and all her children have different fathers. The children do have a relationship with their fathers. She does not have any tertiary education. She owns a hair salon business that operates in a backroom at her house. She mentioned that when student G started school, she asked her teacher in Grade 1 to keep an eye on her because she saw that she was a bit slow. The teacher would sometimes report that the scholar did not want to write at school. She is 16 years old and is currently in Grade 10 and experiences challenges in most of her subjects.

Parent H

Both parents were present for the interview. They stated that they are not married and have actually separated, but are co-parenting together. Mom is 45, and Dad is 47 years old. Student H is their oldest child, and they each have younger children outside their relationship. Student

H repeated Grade 3 as he struggled to meet the minimum requirements of the Grade. He is 17 years old and is currently in Grade 10, and he is struggling with mathematics.

4.2 Presentation of themes and sub-themes

The main themes and sub-themes identified from data gathered through individual interviews are presented in Table 2. below.

Themes	Subthemes	Research question	Participants
Tools used	Scholastic history	-Info from school -grades were challenges were experienced -feedback from the school -interventions	Parents A, F, and G were made aware of their children's learning difficulties when they were in primary school. Parent A, child had writing problems in grades 1 and 2, and the teacher told them to be patient with him. The parent reported that the teacher helped the child in class without giving feedback. Parent F, child struggles to read in grades 3 and 4, no interventions or feedback were given. Parent G, child struggled with writing in grade 1 and the teacher gave mom worksheets for support. Parent B, C, D, E, and H indicated that they were not made aware that their children had learning difficulties in primary school.
	Identification process experienced	-what led to the identification of your child's learning difficulty? -how was your child identified?	Parent A indicated that the child is still struggling with all his subjects in grade 11. The parents were not surprised that he was still struggling but were glad that he attended extra classes. Concessions have been applied for. Parent D's child is also in grade 11 and concessions have been applied for her because she was identified to be at risk of academic failure. Parent D indicated that she was not

		-what grade was the child in and what is the current grade? -what was the parents' experience with the initial identification of your child? -description of emotions parents experienced -family's reaction towards the identification How are you currently managing?	aware of the challenges her child had, which made her annoyed because she was told when fetched the end-of-term school report. Parent E's child is also in grade 11 and concessions have been applied for him. Parents were hopeful that their boy would pass grade 12. Parent H was confused when the teacher told her to keep an eye on her child in grade 3. She did not know if there was anything she could do to help. Parent B indicated that their child was a below-average performer in maths from grade 8 and now she is struggling even more in grade 10. Parents were not surprised when told that the child needs to attend extra classes. Parent C was told in a parent meeting that the child is struggling, and has to attend extra classes. The mom was worried if her child would get the help he needed in grade 10. Parent F indicated that the teacher called the grandmother, who was then staying with her child to a meeting to discuss the progress of the child before assessments. The child was in grade 3 and had challenges with his school and was falling behind in most of his work.
Object	Parents' experience with the learning difficulty (identification and support)	-the experience parents had with interacting with teachers -support received from teachers, school and district -challenges parents have or had with the identification and support for their child	-The initial interaction that all parents had was when they were called to the school to be informed about their children's learning difficulties. Parent F believes that the support her child received while in Lesotho was not sufficient. Although the teacher had explained to the grandmother during the meeting, Mom went to take him and enroll him in a school in Johannesburg. Parents indicated different ways in which teachers supported them. Parents G and A were

			given worksheets to use at home and monitor the children's progress. Parents D, E, and A teachers have applied for concessions for them since they are doing grade 11. The teacher informed them that there would be better chances for them to pass when they apply for concessions. Parent C is concerned about the support that is given to her child. Her child attends extra classes. Parent B's child attends extra classes for maths and this had been the only form of support that she receives.
Rules	parent's experiences with the policies (inclusive education and SIAS) that were used or implemented to support their children	-Duration of the identification process -measures the school took for inclusive education -parents' experience with the measures of inclusive education	The duration differed, however, parent A, B, C, E, G and H appreciated being called to meetings to discuss the progress of the learners. Parent G was given worksheets to assist at home when child was grade 1, but was not clear on the measures given in class. Parent G was not aware that there are policies that had to be followed when the learner is struggling. Parent D was disappointed that the teacher waited till it was time to fetch school reports. The measures the school took was to make extra lessons compulsory for all struggling learners. The parent did not know of any policies that had to be implemented Parent F gladly expressed that the teacher informed her as soon as she saw that her child was experiencing challenges. The child was assisted by the teacher in school. The teacher gave supporting worksheets to be done at home.
Community	Support provision	Interactions that occurred, with teachers, SBST, and DBST	Parent C was invited to a parent meeting where the teacher discussed with her that her child was experiencing learning difficulties and because of this he needs further support. She was also told

			that external people would be coming in to teach the students on Saturdays and during the week the teachers will see them for extra lessons. Parent D invited her to the end of term parent meeting, and collection of reports. The parent was very upset to learn that her child was struggling and the teacher only told her at the end of the term. The parent would have liked to be called before the end of term to discuss her child's progress.
Division of labor	Collaboration between parents and teachers	Division of labor among the parents who had children with learning difficulties	Parent G indicated that her child had challenges with writing. The teacher invited her to the school and gave her worksheets to use at home. Parent B was confused that the teachers waited till the term ended for them to tell her that her child was struggling at school and needed more support. Her experience in primary school was that the teacher did not wait till the end of the term to tell her that her child was struggling with numbers because she checked their work every day. So she does not understand why there was a delay for teachers in high school to give feedback.

Table 2: Emerging Themes and subthemes relating to the Parents' lived experiences

4.3 Object

The area of concern in this study is the identification and support provision for children with learning difficulties. The aim here is to understand what parents have experienced regarding the identification of their children's need for support. The parents indicated that they have been informed by their children's teachers that their children are not performing as well as their peers, which means that they require additional support.

Parent D reported,

> *"I was invited to the school to collect her term 4 school report and the teacher asked me to remain behind after issuing the reports. I stayed for a few minutes before he spoke to me. He told me that my daughter was one of the students who were identified to be*

at risk of academic failure. He explained that my daughter was condoned to Grade 12 because she had not repeated the phase. He also mentioned that an application for concessions will be made for her in Grade 12."

For some parents, after the teacher had indicated that the child required additional support, the teacher gave them educational resources such as worksheets, names of books that parents could buy, and mobile apps that could be downloaded.

Parent G indicated,

"When the teacher of my child in Grade 1 informed me that my daughter did not want to write at school at times, she shared worksheets and the name of some interactive workbooks that I could buy for her to encourage her to write at home. Unfortunately, the books were expensive so I only used the worksheets she gave me and threatened her at times."

In some schools, support was in the form of extra classes that the student had to attend.

Parent E reflected,

"When I attended a school meeting at my son's school, the teachers informed us that all students would be attending extra classes on Saturdays, and depending on the teacher some would also attend morning classes. I had been already told by the teacher that my son is struggling at school, but I liked how they said all students will attend extra classes not label it as if it's for struggling students."

Parents indicated that they did not understand what was expected of them when they were told that their children had a learning problem.

Parent H lamented,

"I was confused when the teacher told me to keep an eye on my child in grade 3. I didn't know if there was anything I could do."

The object was not clearly understood in such a way parents did not know how to support their children. While in some schools, parents seem satisfied that their children were not labeled as having a learning difficulty and therefore, being compulsory for them to attend extra classes.

Haley et al (2013) suggest that parents should be involved in the initial stages of their children's diagnosis of a learning difficulty as this will result in the successful implementation of the individualized educational plan. Therefore, this will allow the parents to comprehend the object more clearly.

4.4 Tools

Tools are all the instruments that have been used to facilitate human activity and engagement. In this section, I will discuss the data I gathered about the scholastic history of the child because that is an indication of what tools have been used. I will also discuss the process that led to the identification of a learning difficulty, as well as the emotions the parents experienced during the identification as it forms part of the instruments used.

(i) Scholastic history

When the parents reflected on the scholastic history of their children, three parents (A, F, and G) said that they were aware that their children have struggled to do certain tasks at school.

Parent A articulated that,

"Our boy took time to learn things like the sound of the letters and handwriting. But honestly, we thought he would outgrow it. Grades 1 and 2 were hard for him because he took time to learn how to write. No intervention was done; we were just told that we needed to be patient with him. Things looked better when he was in Grade 3 than when he was in Grade 9. We noticed that he was struggling in most subjects, and we took him to extra classes. Now he is in Grade 11, and it's compulsory for him to attend extra classes at school."

Parent F responded happily,

> *"My boy used to stay with my mom back at home in Lesotho till grade 4. I took him because his teacher indicated that he was struggling to read, and my mom could not help him with any of the things the teachers suggested. I felt that the schools here had better resources than the ones in the rural areas of Lesotho, and I will be there to help him. After explaining his story to the principal, he advised me that it would be better for my son to be taken back to grade 3 so that he could get a foundation they were sure about and see where the problem was. I took the advice and spoke to him. He did not*

understand, but I told him that it was for the best. Today he is in grade 10, and he still reads a bit slowly, but he can read."

Parent G reported:

"I did see something that was not okay, but I thought maybe because she is new to a school environment, she will adjust eventually. She went to a daycare in the township and went to a primary school for grade one at the age of seven. The first six months were hard, as the teacher would inform me that she sometimes didn't want to write."

The parent was asked a follow-up question that probed for more details on the matter. The researcher asked how the matter was resolved.

Parent G responded shamefully,

"I didn't know what to do with the situation. I thought that threatening to hit her would help, but it did not. The teacher did give me some worksheets to use and a list of interactive books to buy. The books were expensive so I only used the worksheets from the teacher. She passed but still struggled with completing certain tasks at school. That went on till now, and though she's a bit older, it is hard for her to complete tasks that she finds no interest in. So when looking at her school report, there is no balance in her school subjects."

The rest of the parents explained that they were not too involved in the education of the children, so they never noticed that a problem was a problem. No intervention from the schools was provided for them. The feedback that came with the term report will indicate the overall progress and areas of learning the child needs support with.

From the interviews, it seemed like parents who stayed permanently with their children had an idea about the scholastic challenges that the children had. Parental involvement was easier for them since they stayed with the child and they knew the tasks they were given at school. Also, when teachers requested parent meetings, the parents were easily accessible by the teachers. Some parents indicated that the children stayed with their grandparents back home in the rural areas. This meant that the grandparents were the ones who had direct communication with the teachers.

Parent E lamented,

> *"My son used to stay with my parents back home because I worked in Joburg. I went home during my leave days. My mom would tell me the feedback she got from the teachers and how my son was improving in certain subjects. He came to live permanently with me when my mom passed away, and he was in Grade 7 and going to Grade 8 at the time."*

The findings of the study indicate that the parents are working parents and hardly get the time to attend all school meetings, and this has a negative impact on their children's performance at school. According to Rispoli et al. (2018), parental participation is influenced by the parents' socioeconomic level. In addition, low-income parents are more likely to work two or more jobs to support their families. As a result, they hardly ever have time to help their kids with their schoolwork or even take part in school events. However, parents who earn more money and have greater levels of education tend to be more involved in their children's academic lives. According to Rispoli et al. (2018), parental involvement in high-income parents did not correlate with parental involvement at home.

(ii) The identification process

The parents reflected on the process of identification they have experienced since their children started school till now. Please note that some reflections were from when the students were in primary school, and some in high school. The parents were asked a set of questions that gave insights into what led to the identification of learning difficulties for their children and their subjective experiences.

Parent A indicated that their boy struggled with learning how to write when he was younger. His teacher provided him with additional support, which helped him a lot. The parent also mentioned that their boy struggled through high school and was recently identified by his teacher in Grade 11 as having a learning difficulty. According to the parents, the teacher advised that the school will be applying for concessions for him since he is going to matriculate. The teacher and school believe that he will benefit from having additional time during the exams.

Parent A reflected,

> *"My son had been struggling at school and I'm surprised that he had not failed. The teachers informed us during a meeting that they will try by all means to support students who are not doing well. They made extra classes compulsory and informed us that they would apply for concessions for students who would benefit from them. My son writes slowly and his teacher believes that he will benefit from additional time."*

It is important to note that the researcher also had the same experience as the other parents of Grade 11 learners. They had been informed that the school would be applying for concessions for them as well. According to the parents, their children had never had any form of identification done before being told about the application of the concession.

Parent D reported that,

> *"My child is in grade 11 and concessions have been applied for her because she was identified to be at risk of academic failure."*

Parent E reported that,

> *"We are hopeful that our boy would pass grade 12 because concessions have been applied for him."*

With regards to the parents of learners in Grade 10, the only identification that was done for their children was in primary school, and it was done by the teachers. Even though no assessments or screenings were done for the children, the teachers in primary school seemed to be able to identify the learning challenges these children had at that time and provide additional support.

Parent F has indicated, in the previous sections that her son was identified in Grade 3 by his teacher in Lesotho to have a learning problem. Parents A and G also indicated in the previous sections that their children had writing challenges in primary school, and the problem was identified by the teachers. Currently, the school has organized extra classes for learners who are struggling academically from external providers. Unfortunately, the services are not free for the Grade 10s and 11s, they are required to pay a monthly fee of one hundred rand.

(iii) Emotions

In this section, parents reflected on the emotions they experienced during the identification process.

Parent A reflected,

> *"The primary school teacher did not mention a lot on the call, but she indicated that she would like to discuss my child's progress before the term ends. I was not sure what to expect, as they had not received school reports at that time. I liked how she took me through their daily work and what they still had to do first, then showed me my child's books. I saw a problem even before she mentioned it. I understood what she said the problem was and made a promise to myself that I would support my child like his teacher had advised me."*

Another parent reported being annoyed when she was told about her child's academic challenges when she fetched his school report.

Parent D responded with annoyance,

> *"It annoyed me that they waited till I fetched his school report for them to tell me that he is struggling. I thought this was something teachers monitored from day one of school. The teacher did explain why she was only letting me know at the end of the term, but I believed that there was something she could have done even before."*

There seems to be an inconsistency in how teachers in primary and high school identify and, communicate with the parents. In primary school, according to the data gathered from parents, teachers do not wait for the term to end to discuss the challenges that students experience. They use parent meetings to show the parents the student books and discuss their progress and how they should be assisted. While in high school, teachers can take the entire term to observe and monitor the student's progress and only discuss it when reports are issued. It is important to note that these parents have been informed about their children's learning challenges in primary school; however, they still expressed their dissatisfaction with the amount of time that teachers in high school take to inform them that their children are still struggling. Heiman (2002) suggests that parents' reactions are usually negative when they are first informed about their children's learning difficulties, and they may express feelings similar to grief. In most cases,

parents' initial reactions are likely to be negative and similar to those related to bereavement (Heiman, 2002). Furthermore, the frustration experienced may lead to some parents fighting or denying the diagnosis. While others adjust flexibly and mobilize into successful action or freeze in varying degrees of inflexible, ineffective behaviors.

The family's reaction to the child's identification was also analyzed in the study. The aim here was to understand how the family was impacted by the identification of the student. According to the parents, the older siblings would be told and asked for support.

Parents E expressed that,

> *"We have kept the child's learning challenges private in our immediate family respectively, and are not discussed with other family members."*

Heiman (2002) suggests that parents with children with a disability make lifestyle changes to cope with the child's disability. The parents are mostly stressed about their children, such that they restrict what the child does, eats, and where the child visits. The parents in this study shared the same concerns about the restriction that only close family members are informed about the learning difficulties. Some parents had indicated the difficulty of talking about it with family and friends about something they were not clear about as well. This has been addressed in the paper as a verbatim from parent H.

When parents reflected on how they were currently managing the identification of their children, they mentioned that it has become easier now that they know which learning areas are challenging for their children.

Parent H reported,

> *"The teacher told me to keep an eye on my child and I did not share this with anyone because it was unclear to me what I need to keep an eye on. I had no idea how to support my child."*

Parent E says;

"It helped knowing that my child experienced challenges with mathematics and sciences because now we knew where he needed help the most. He attends extra classes, and there seems to be an improvement."

Parent mentioned that they used resources that were accessible to them to provide their child with the support he required. Parents G reflected that she used worksheets given by the teacher as her only resources to assist her daughter who struggled with writing in Grade 1.

Parent A said,

"When my child's teacher said he struggles to write, I went to get him activity books that would teach him because that's what I could afford and get easily."

From the above responses from parents, they indicated different ways to manage a child with learning difficulties. Their methods were based on what resources they had access to. It is essential to note that as the child progressed to high school, the parents had to find new management strategies that would be age and grade-appropriate. This indicates that managing a child's learning difficulty is an ongoing process that requires constant monitoring so that the appropriate support is provided for the child.

Thwala et al (2015) suggest that parents with children with special frequently need to make major changes in their lives and this affects everyone in the family. The changes usually have a financial impact which is a cause of stress, shock, and anger.

4.5 Rules

The set of questions that were asked here was to explore the parent's experiences with the policies (inclusive education and SIAS) that were used or implemented to support their children during the identification process.

Reflecting on how long the process took, the parents with students in Grade 11 indicated that they were in the initial stages of applying for concessions and were not clear on when they would receive feedback or what the way forward was after. Parents A, D, and E have children in grade 11 and the teacher had applied for concessions for them.

Parent D expressed that,

"The teacher informed me that he had applied for concessions for my child and this would help her pass grade 12. It is not clear how the process is but I was told you can before the learner goes to grade 12."

The parent (parent F) whose child started school in Lesotho said it took a few months for her child to be identified, and the grandmother was included during that process. She mentioned that it would have taken a few months for her child to be assessed by a specialist in Lesotho, which is why she fetched him and brought him to Johannesburg.

Parent F shared that,

"My child was getting support but I felt that it was not sufficient. That is why I took him with me to JHB, South Africa to look for a school that would be able to assist him"

The rest of the parents, parents A, B, C, E, G and H, expressed that they have had no experience with any policies or formal identification. Their experience was only limited to a parent meeting that was called by a teacher to discuss the progress of their children. Teachers in primary schools did have parent meetings where they specifically focused on showing the parents their children's progress through school exercises and activity books. The purpose of such meetings would also be to suggest ways that parents could support their children at home. Parent G, B and E have been called to teacher meetings to discuss he progress of their children.

Parent B explained that,

My child's teacher invited me to a meeting and discussed the progressed while we went through the exercise books and files for my child.

A lot is different in high school; the progress of the students was discussed during a parent meeting when end-of-term school reports were being issued. It was through these meetings that the parents became formally aware of their children's academic challenges. Some parents indicated that they missed the initial meeting when they were invited to come to the school.

According to the SIAS policy, support programs have to be created so that learners have complete access to all available learning opportunities. It also emphasized the importance of cooperation between all stakeholders and is thought to be essential to the support program's effective execution (DoE, 2014; Nel & Grosser, 2016).

4.6 Community

The community is all the people in the system who interact together (Vygotsky, 1978). In a school setting, the community would include students, teachers, parents, the school support team, and the district support team. The purpose of this paper is to understand the interactions that have occurred and are still occurring between parents and teachers concerning the identification and support provision for their children with learning difficulties. The parents have indicated that they have had interactions with the teachers, and this occurred when teachers noticed their children were not performing as they were expected.

Parent C reported that,

> *"I was invited to a parent meeting where the teacher discussed with me that my child was experiencing learning difficulties and because of this he needs further support. I was told that external people would be coming in to teach our kids on Saturday and during the week the teachers will see them for extra lessons."*

Parent D reported,

> *"The teacher invited me to the end of term parent meeting, and collection of reports. I was very upset to learn that my child was struggling and the teacher only told me end of term. I would have like to be called before the end of term to discuss my child's marks."*

These interactions occur as a means of finding ways to support the students. The interactions occurred in the form of parent meetings as discussed in the sections above. Furthermore, these interactions allow teachers and parents to find the meaning of the object, that is, the learning difficulty, which will result in an outcome that is in the best interest of the student. Based on the findings, parents seem to have positive interactions with the teachers. Despite the interactions the parents mentioned during the interviews, parents are reliant on the teachers to inform them of the progress of their students. None of the parents indicated that they requested a meeting with the teachers to discuss their students' progress. The parents do not clearly understand their role in their children's education. Parents are an essential part of the community in the activity system; thus, they must understand their role.

The findings are supported by Rispoli et al. (2018) as they suggest that parents' opinions toward their involvement and their impression of the teacher and school have an impact on their level of parental involvement in elementary, middle, and high school. Furthermore, it is suggested by Elkins et al. (2003) and Rispoli et al. (2018) that parents who are aware of their children's disabilities are more likely to be involved in their education because they may frequently seek advice and clarifications from the teachers (Rispoli et al. 2018).

4.7 Division of Labour

The current study explored how labor was divided among the subjects in the system. The subjects included teachers, parents, students, and the school and district support teams. For the purpose of his study, the researcher observed how labor was divided among the parents who had children with learning difficulties.

According to the parents, some teachers were able to state clearly how parents could continue supporting their children at home.

Parent G reported that,

> *"My child had challenges with writing. The teacher invited me to the school and gave me worksheets to use at home"*

Activities and mobile apps that assisted children with mathematics and writing were shared with parents, as parent G has expressed in the previous sections. These helped parents know how they can help their children and also understand what they need help with. This also provided collaboration between the teachers and parents, as teachers would provide feedback in the meetings, they have every term. The school also intervened by organizing extra classes on weekends to support students who were struggling. Although the parents seemed unhappy with the identification process at high school as they felt that they could do better, there seemed to be a working collaboration between the parents, teachers, students, and the school. Parent B, C, and H were unimpressed with how the high school took time to inform them that their children were struggling.

Parents B argued,

> *"I don't understand why the teachers have to wait till the term ends for them to tell me that my child is struggling at school and needs more support. Could they not tell us*

sooner so that we see what we do with our children? My experience in primary school was that the teacher did not wait till the end of the term to tell me that my child was struggling with numbers because she checked their work every day. So I honestly don't understand we must wait till the end of the term to get feedback."

The parents who participated in this study have had no interaction with the district support teams; therefore, the researcher cannot conclude that there is no division of labor within the district support teams.

A study by Lightfoot (2004) suggests that some parents do not care about being involved in their children's education and programs organized by the school. Some of the reasons why they do not care include a lack of understanding of the language being used during the programs intended to train parents on how to engage with their scholars. Some parents indicated that they would love to attend the sessions; however, they work long hours and are unable to attend. Lightfoot (2004) continues to make a distinction between low- and middle-class working parents. It is only middle-class parents who do school visits and sometimes motivate students by telling them what career fields they are in and how they made it there. This disadvantages parents' who are not proud of the work that they do.

4.8 Parental awareness on Inclusive Education and the SIAS policy

Parental awareness of inclusive education and the SIAS policy are the focal points of this study. The parents are not informed and educated on inclusive education and related policies.

Parent D reported that,

"I did not know of any policies that had to be implemented to support learners. I thought that introducing extra lessons was the only way that could help."

Parent G also mentioned that,

"I was not aware that there are policies that had to be followed when a learner is struggling. I was given worksheets to assist my child at home and was not made aware of the measures the teacher would do in class."

Parents D and G's children were identified to be struggling by their respective teachers, however, parent D was informed that extra lessons would with the problem. While parent G was given worksheets to do with the learner at home. It seems like there are efforts from the

teachers to identify learners who are having difficulties, however, the support needed by the learner and the support provided are not made clear to the parents.

Unlike parents D and G who were unclear about the support given to their children in class, parent F was made aware by the teacher that her learner was experiencing challenges and would be supported in class so that he could catch up.

Parent F explained,

> *"I removed my son from the school in Lesotho and brought him to Johannesburg were I was adviced by the principal that my son would benefit from repeating the grade. The principal said they don't know the foundation he had in grade 3 so he might struggle in grade 4. I agreed for him to repeat grade 3 and was informed on how and what the teacher would assist him with in the class. I was also given supporting worksheets to do at home. But now in grade 10, I was told that he needs extra lessons."*

The difference the parents have indicated above, is evidence that teachers in primary schools identify and implement inclusive policies differently from high school teachers.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the lived experiences of parents on the pathway to identification and support for children with learning difficulties. The objectives of this study were to get insights into the parent's lived experiences on the pathway to the identification of a learning difficulty of their children and to understand the support provided for a child's learning difficulty.

The focus of the research is to unearth the understanding and gain more insights into the parents' lived experiences of the pathway to identification and support for a child with a learning difficulty, which is central to the SIAS policy in South Africa. The following questions assisted the researcher in having a deeper understanding of the aim of the study:

Primary Question

• What are the parents' lived experiences of the process towards the identification and support provision for their child with LD?

Secondary Questions

• If any, what were the barriers to identification and support provision for the child?

• How were the inclusive education and SIAS policies applied in this case?

The study focused on parents with children who are in high school and have been informally or formally diagnosed with learning difficulties. The findings of the study were discussed in the previous chapter. This current chapter will provide a summary of the findings, challenges with identification from the perspective of the parents, and the strengths, limitations and the implications of the study, Lastly, there would be a discussion on the recommendations and conclusion of the study.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

According to the data collected, it is evident that some form of identification does occur in schools, especially primary schools. Although a lot of cases did not end up with a psycho-educational assessment being conducted for students with learning difficulties, it is evident from the data collected through interviews that teachers did notice children who were struggling more than others. All parents who participated indicated that their children were first identified at primary schools, and the teachers involved the parents in showing them how best they could support their children at home. This indicates that the teachers understood the importance of early identification and support. It was also interesting to learn the difference in how teachers in primary and high schools identified students with learning difficulties. According to the parents, teachers in primary school invited parents to discuss the student's progress throughout the term, while in high school, the progress discussions were done at the end of the term when parents collected the school reports. Some parents were given worksheets and name of books that could assist their students. While in high school, support seemed to be general, in that all students attended extra classes.

The interviews also revealed that none of the students were formally assessed by a professional. It was only the students who were in Grade 11 who had applied for concessions for Grade 12 and were awaiting feedback. The parents also indicated that at times they would not go to the meetings when they were called to the school; unfortunately, this affected their children negatively, as the teacher wanted to work together with the parents and explain what the problem was.

The findings of the study were affected by the limitation of the inaccessibility of the documentation such referral letters, school reports, forms, or feedback forms. The documents would have added value to this study. It was also interesting to see that the parents did not mention experiencing major adjustments to their daily lives to accommodate their children with learning difficulties. The parents continued providing the support they could afford. If books were expensive, they did not buy them regardless of how helpful they were.

5.3 Challenges with Identification

Identification seemed to take longer in high school than in primary school. Teachers seemed to require more time to get to know their students. As a result, student's progress would be discussed at the end of the term, usually when reports are collected. The parents seem not to

understand that in high school, students are taught all subjects by different teachers. Unlike, primary school, where one teacher would teach students up to four subjects alone. This is what makes primary school teachers seem more proactive in terms of identifying students. High school teachers need more time to observe the students and consolidate their experiences with the students, and unfortunately, this occurs at the end of term in public schools.

Another challenge that the parents indicated was that they sometimes do not go to parent meetings or when they are called to a meeting. They indicated that sometimes they are at work and are unable to attend. However, they do not make other arrangements with the teachers. This makes the identification process longer because the teacher needs to discuss important information with a parent who does not want to make time to meet.

Some parents indicated that their children used to live with their grandparents. All communications would be done with the teacher and the grandparents. The parents of the child would be informed by their grandparents.

5.4 Implications of the study

The current study has made effort to get insights on the parents' lived experience on the pathway to identification and support provision of a learning difficulty. The findings indicated that teachers are able to identify learners who are struggling in both primary and secondary schools. However, parents were unclear about the nature of support that was being provided especially in high school. According to the experiences of the parents, teachers in primary school specified the challenges the learner had, and were precise in what support the learner needed. While in high school, parents were informed that the learners struggled with mathematics, and specifications were not made in terms of which topic or sections the learner struggled with. The support provided was extra classes for all learners with no clear indication of what would be done in the extra lessons. The findings also indicate that parents are not knowledgeable about inclusive policies and this shows that parents should be educated on the policies and how they are implemented. This motivates further research in this field as parents play an essential role in inclusive education.

Numerous studies have been done on the best ways to implement SIAS policy as a tool to advance South Africa's adoption of inclusive education (Stofile, Green & Soudien, 2018; Nel & Grosser, 2016). On the other hand, little research has been done on how parents particularly in high school, experience the identification process and the application of SIAS policy. This

study revealed that parents are facing difficulties with understanding the support provided for learners with learning difficulties because very few teachers could explain it clearly to the parents.

5.5 Strengths of the Study

The study was able to fulfil its purpose, in that, parents were able to share their lived experiences on the process of identification and support provision for their child with learning difficulty. Each experience was unique and was treated like that by the researcher.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

The study had intended to have at least 15 participants, but only 8 came forward. It is important to also note that all the parents came from the same full-service school. The researcher would need a larger sample size from different schools to be able to make generalizations about the study.

Talking about a child's learning challenges is a sensitive matter for some parents. Some parents were not comfortable sharing their own experiences. When the researcher called a parent, the parent indicated that they no longer wanted to take part in the study because they knew what went wrong with their child. The researcher had to respect the parent's wishes about not wanting to continue with the interview. It seemed that some parents were not too comfortable talking about their children's progress at school. More awareness needs to be made of the academic challenges faced by school children so that it becomes easier for parents to talk and seek help when necessary.

The study focused on the parent's lived experiences with the identification and support provision for their children with learning difficulties. Though teachers were mentioned in the study, the researcher does not generalize that all teachers in primary or high school do that.

5.7 Recommendations

The schools should normalize having workshops or training sessions where they educate parents on what learning difficulties are and how to deal with children who experience them. In the research findings, it seems common that after identification has been made, whether formal or informal, parents become unclear on what to do next. For instance, in the study, parents of students in Grade 11 were told that the school had applied for concessions, however,

parents did not know precisely what that meant. The meaning of identifying a learning difficulty should be explained in detail to the parents.

The parent's availability seems to be a problem in this study, as some parents did not avail themselves when the teachers invited them to meetings. When parents do not show up for meetings, they delay teachers and students in various ways. Teachers are unable to discuss the progress of the student with the parents. The teacher may have suggestions on how the students should be supported but would not be able to communicate that with the parents if they do not avail themselves. Parents should avail themselves when teachers invite them to meetings. Parents will benefit from programs that aim to provide clarity on the identification process of students with learning difficulties and address all their questions.

Parental involvement seems to be a challenge in this study; parents need to understand the importance of being fully involved in the education of their children. Perhaps this should be one of the topics for the parent meetings that the schools have. Parents need to understand their role in inclusive education.

The research topic should be explored further with a larger sample size from more than one full-service school. The validity of the study will be achieved when more parents from different contexts (schools) are included in the study.

5.8 Conclusion

The study has achieved its intended purpose, which was to understand the parent's lived experiences of the pathway to identification and support for a child's learning difficulties. The parents have shared their subjective experiences on the matter, and I believe they have also created not only opportunities for further research but also indirectly informed us on how the South African education system can do better. The findings of this paper indicate that there is a form of identification that is done in schools, even though not all students are taken for psycho-educational assessment. It is important to note that parents do not have a clear understanding of the SIAS and inclusive education policies, but they have had their children identified as having a learning difficulty.

Additionally, teachers do attempt to work in collaboration with parents by inviting them to parent meetings to discuss the progress of the learners; however, the timing at which this is done creates frustration and anger among the parents. The parents have mentioned that the

meetings are usually end of the term or report collection meetings. There may be challenges with the implementation of inclusive education policies, and the major one that has been addressed in this paper is parental awareness of the policies and their involvement. The South African education system should continue to encourage this complex phenomenon and create more awareness and support with the parents. Therefore, there is a continuous need for psychoeducation in schools.

The study has managed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of parents of the pathway to identification and support for their children with learning difficulties, as per the aim of the study. The parents were in a better position to share their experiences as their children had at least seven years of schooling life, as was proposed in the research proposal. The parents were pleased with the identification process they experienced with primary school teachers, and they also expressed their dissatisfaction with the identification process in high school. They felt that the high school teachers delay a lot as they wait for end-of-term meetings to discuss the progress of the students. Based on the findings, the support that the teachers in primary school provided was more personalized, while it is more general in high school, however, the parents seemed to be satisfied with it. This is perhaps a topic to be explored with further research.

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Appendix: A, B, C, D

APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule: Semi-Structured Individual Interview in English

The parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a learning disability: a case study.

The interview guide will be based on the three research questions that will guide the study.

What is the parents' experience of the process of identification and supporting provision for their child with LD?

If any, what were the barriers to identification and support provision for the child?

How were inclusive education and the SIAS policies applied in this case?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section A: biographical information

Parent 1 age (mother or other):

Parent 2 age (father or other):

Family structure:

Parent's education:

Parent's employment: Child's date of birth:

Child's age:

Child's gender:

Child's current school:

Child's scholastic history:

Year	Age	School	Grade	Feedback from school	Intervention

Section B: The first section will have questions based on the identification

What lead to the identification of your child's learning difficulty?

How was your child identified as having learning difficulties?

What grade was the child doing when identified to have learning difficulties and what grade is the child currently in?

What was your experience with the initial identification of your child's learning difficulties?

Briefly explain the emotions you experienced during this process?

What was the family's reaction towards the identification of your child? How was it received?

How are you currently managing

Section C: The second section will have questions based on inclusive education and the SIAS policy

Do you remember how long the process took?

What was the experience you had with interacting with the teachers?

Tell me about the kind of support you received from the teachers, school and district

What measures did the school take to ensure that your child is included in the classroom?

How was your experience with the measures taken?

Section D: The third section will have questions based on the barriers to identification and support for the child if there are any

What are the challenges you experienced or are still experiencing for the identification support for the child?

APPENDIX B: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Lucia Zikalala and I am a Masters student in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am exploring the parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a learning difficulty under the supervision of Dr Simangele Mayisela. This research project aims to understand the parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a learning difficulty.

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview to get your personal experience on the phenomenon being studied and will take around 30-45 minutes. The only expectation from you is that be free and honest when you share your personal experience. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. The recording will be deleted, however, the transcript will be kept on a password-protected computer. I would also request to view your child's school reports, books, and other related communication from school.

You won't incur any expenses personally if you take part in this project. Although there are no immediate benefits to participating in the study, there are no drawbacks or penalties if you decide not to, or if you leave the study early. If you would like, you may opt-out at any moment or choose not to respond to any questions. Pseudonyms will be used, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection as the agreements will be made before the interview day.

If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time if you still wish to continue. A debriefing session will be organized for the participants where they will reflect on how the interview session went for them and how are they feeling about it. The participants will be referred for further emotional support at Lifeline for telephonically counseling on 0861 322 322.

Please feel free to contact me using the information below if you have any questions regarding this research, either during or after it is conducted. This research will be published as a research report, which can be accessed online via the university library website. It might also be published in a journal and given as a conference presentation. I would be pleased to email you

a summary of this study if it would be of interest to you. I will retain the data gathered from this study project for five years, keeping it on my Google Drive. The information gathered for this study project may be anonymized and utilized by other researchers with your consent.

You are invited to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) by phone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, or email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za if you have any questions or complaints about the ethical processes of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Lucia Zikalala

Researcher:

Lucia Zikalala, 459802@students.wits.ac.za, 0715134834

Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisela, simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za, 011 717 4529

APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet for the Principal

LETTER TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Principal

My name is Lucia Zikalala and I am a Masters student in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am exploring the parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a learning difficulty under the supervision of Dr Simangele Mayisela. This research project aims to understand the parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a learning difficulty.

I would like to invite 15 parents at your school to participate in a research project. The participants should have a child who is in a public full-service secondary school; has been diagnosed formally or identified by the teacher to have a learning difficulty in their schooling years and live with the parents. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews which will be 45 minutes long and may be either face-to-face, telephonically, or online through mediums such as WhatsApp video call, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Zoom, and other mediums that the participants feel comfortable using. The interviews will be audio-recorded using a digital device. The recording will be deleted, however, the transcript will be kept on a password-protected computer. I would also request to view your child's school reports, books, and other related communication from the school

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct gain from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research. No harm will be done to the participants. Participation is exclusively voluntary. The participants are welcome to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the data collection, however pseudonyms will be used.

Please feel free to contact me using the information below if you have any questions regarding this research, either during or after it is conducted. This research will be published as a research report, which can be accessed online via the university library website. It might also be

published in a journal and given as a conference presentation. I would be pleased to email you a summary of this study if it would be of interest to you. I will retain the data gathered from this study project for five years, keeping it on my Google Drive. The information gathered for this study project may be anonymized and utilized by other researchers with your consent. If you're worried about anything or concerns, The University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) can be reached by phone at +27(0) 11 717 1408, by email at hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za if you have any questions or complaints about the study's ethical processes.

Yours sincerely,

Lucia Zikalala

Researcher:

Lucia Zikalala, 459802@students.wits.ac.za, 0715134834

Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisela, simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za, 011 717 4529

APPENDIX D: Consent Form

The parents' lived experience of the pathway to identification and support provision for a child with a Learning Difficulty.

Lucia Zikalala

I _____ consent to taking part in this study. I've received an explanation about the research, and I know what my involvement entails. I consent to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I acknowledge and accept that my involvement will remain anonymous. YES NO I understand and consent to the researcher using quotes from unidentified sources in the research report. YES NO I understand and consent to having the interview recorded on audio. YES NO I understand and acknowledge that the data I supply may be used, in an anonymous manner, for academic reasons by other researchers once this project is completed, provided that they first receive their own ethics clearance.

Signature of participant_____

Name of participant_____

Cellphone number of participant_____

Email address of participant_____

Date_____