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Johannesburg

School of Education

Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post-Covid

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Research Project Submitted for the Degree:
MEd by Dissertation in Inclusive Education
Johannesburg, 17 March 2025

Supervisor: Dr Tanya Bekker

Abstract

Self-efficacy is an essential aspect in moulding student teachers' confidence and success, especially as they handle the difficulties encountered in inclusive education. This study investigated the perceptions and experiences of fourteen final year Foundation Phase education student teachers from one higher education institution in Gauteng concerning their self-efficacy in diverse classroom contexts, particularly focusing on the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program's role in preparing them for inclusive teaching. Data was collected using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in this qualitative research methodology to investigate the interconnection between theory, practical teaching experiences, and challenges faced in real-world classrooms. Findings show that although student teachers acquire an intense theory in inclusive education most of them felt that they were ill-prepared for the practical execution. Difficulties such as classroom management, inadequate practical training, and limited resources were major areas of concern that were noted. Moreover, restricted practical experience, inadequate coaching, and restrained resources adversely impacted their self-efficacy and confidence in teaching. Regardless of these difficulties, participants emphasized that support from peers, personal reflection, and being exposed to diverse situations where they can teach learners with varied needs can help them build competence in their teaching. The study emphasizes the necessity to improve opportunities for practical training in ITE program, influential mentorship structures, and continued professional development to equip student teachers thoroughly for inclusive education contexts. Recommendations include improving programs for teacher education and offering real-life experiences in inclusive settings.

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- My husband, Shingi Jiri and my children Casey, Joshua, and Enelo, thank you for tolerating me when I could not give you my full attention.
- I sincerely appreciate your prayers, comfort, and support, family and friends.

Declaration

Research Title: Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post-Covid

I declare that this project is my independent and original research work. It is submitted to meet the project submission requirements for the degree of MEd by dissertation in Inclusive Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The work has not been submitted elsewhere for any educational qualification at any other University.

Name: Princess Jiri



Date: 17 March 2025

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List of Abbreviations:

Abbreviation	Meaning
BEd	Bachelor of Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBSTs	District-Based Support Teams
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EADSNE	European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualification
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
SASA	South Africa School Act
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support
UDHR	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Definition of Key Terms:

Term	Definition
Inclusive Education	Inclusive education refers to a system where all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, or differences, are taught together in mainstream schools with appropriate support to meet their individual needs (Ainscow, 2005).
Self-Efficacy	"People's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their own actions" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3).
Foundation Phase	The Foundation Phase is the early stage of formal education that focuses on the holistic development of children, typically from ages 3 to 9 years, emphasizing play-based learning, social, emotional, and cognitive growth (Department of Basic Education, 2011).
Inclusive Pedagogy	Inclusive pedagogy is an approach to teaching that seeks to address the diverse needs of all learners by removing barriers to learning and ensuring full participation, regardless of background, ability, or experience (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).
Inclusive Practice	Inclusive practice refers to teaching strategies and approaches that ensure all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or needs, have equal access to learning opportunities and are supported in reaching their full potential (Florian, 2014).
Initial teacher Education (ITE)	Initial Teacher Education (ITE) refers to the formal programs and training that prepare individuals for the teaching profession, equipping them with pedagogical knowledge, subject expertise, and practical teaching experience before they enter the classroom as qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of the Study

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, Inclusive Education has been on the global agenda, with countries around the world committing to ensuring that their education systems meet the needs of all learners, and that human rights and values of social justice are upheld. Inclusive Education has a key imperative to ensure that the diverse needs of all learners are supported and that all learners have access to and participation in education (Smith & Johnson, 2023). South Africa has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring an inclusive education system as demonstrated by national policy on inclusive education such as White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). Teachers are identified as being pivotal to the successful implementation of Inclusive Education. It is thus crucial to ensure that Initial Teacher Education (ITE) prepares aspiring teachers to provide inclusive learning settings since educational environments continue to change to meet the different requirements of learners. The purpose of this study was to find out how fourth-year education students at one higher education institution perceived their own self-efficacy for inclusive teaching. Although self-efficacy was stressed in a more general sense in Bandura's theory (1977) initial work, scholars have expanded the idea to specific domains, such as teaching, giving rise to the idea of teacher self-efficacy. Bandura's theory offers a theoretical framework for comprehending how people's perceptions of their own skills affect their behaviour and results (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, within the teaching setting, teacher self-efficacy pertains to the assurance that teachers have in their capacity to carry out duties linked to teaching, handle difficulties in the classroom, and have a positive influence on the learning of learners. Teacher self-efficacy, which is understood as a person’s confidence in their own ability (Bandura, 1977), has a significant impact on instructional strategies, student outcomes, and general classroom dynamics in the setting of education (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This study supported Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which prioritizes inclusive and equitable access to high-quality education for all (United Nations, 2015). Assessing future teachers' self-efficacy and readiness to adopt and successfully execute inclusive teaching practices is crucial to addressing this global goal. This study provided a background to the problem that the study investigated and presented the aim and research questions posed for the study. A rationale for the significance of the study is presented and

literature related to the topic is extensively investigated as well as the theoretical framework, research methodology, data collection, and data analysis are presented in that order.

1.2. Background to the study

Historically during the Apartheid era in South Africa, separate education provisions were made available based on race (Brown & Williams, 2023). These included the Department of Bantu Education for Black South Africans, the Department of Coloured Affairs for Coloured South Africans, and the Department of Indian Affairs for Indian South Africans. The fact that education was provided separately implied that resources were also provided separately. Resources were also unevenly distributed in the department of whites. Special schools were still experiencing inadequate provision of resources compared to the mainstream schools. Traditionally, the highest percentage of resources was allocated to schools that were intended for white learners while schools that were for black learners received far fewer resources (Garson, 2004). Additionally, the type of curriculum offered was a separate curriculum for each race and there were separate education departments meaning that each race had its own education department that is white learners had their own education department, Indian learners had their own education department, coloured learners had their own education department, and black learners had their own education department (Asmal, 2000). In addition to the unequal distribution of resources, each education department managed its own curriculum. The many curricula that were provided to various racial groups under that Apartheid ideology were intended to prepare learners who graduated through those systems for varied roles in society. For example, Ocampo (2004) asserted that white learners were prepared to go to university for academic work such as corporate roles, in contrast, black learners were prepared for service delivery roles such as gardening.

As South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994, one of the first significant pieces of legislation in the nation stated that a political choice had been made to establish a unified educational system (Sayed & Mayekiso, 2018). One education for all, one curriculum for all, and with an intention to address historical inequalities, the nation simultaneously enacted an inclusive education policy that is founded on social justice and human rights and reinforces the nation's commitment to providing high-quality education for all learners (Sayed & Mayekiso, 2018). New laws were implemented following democracy, such as the constitution, South Africa School Act (SASA), and White Paper 6, the White Paper on Education and Training, White paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy, NCSNET/ NCESS reports. Other Acts, such as the Higher Education Act (101/1997), the Further Education and Training Act

(98/1998) and the Employment of Teachers Act (76/1998) have further enhanced the establishment of learner support services, which intended to address historical inequalities. At the same time the Covid pandemic accentuated and exposed the continued existence of inequalities (Valodia & Francis, 2020). Moreover, the legacy of the past has persisted, meaning that South Africa is still experiencing uneven and unequal resource provisioning, and the quality of education varies substantially depending on the context of the type of school a child in South Africa attends (Patel & Naidoo, 2022). South African learners struggle to perform academically because of the complexity and diversity of its various socioeconomic contexts, as well as economic limitations, historical legacies, and the fact that its learners must learn while already being at a disadvantage due to the use of different languages, for instance Van der Berg and Louw (2006) claimed that the scores and results in international benchmarks like the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) was one method we could tell that South Africa was struggling in terms of the quality of education or academic performance. Therefore, while moving toward democracy and adopting an inclusive education system with the intention of creating a united educational system, South Africa continue to face inequalities and an unequal allocation of resources. Slee (2001), who asserted that inclusive education is not a reality for all, was proven correct in the South African context by the outcomes of international benchmarks.

ITE programs were also given attention in 2011 and this led South Africa to develop the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) document (Department of Basic Education, 2015). This document was intended to address the same issue where South Africa had different education departments for different races and different school provisions for different race groups under apartheid, there were also different teacher education colleges for various race groups. Originally a teacher education qualification was a diploma but after policy changes, ITE was reconceptualized as a Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree. The MRTEQ Act provided the guidelines for what should be included in the BEd program to prepare teachers to teach in various contexts. The MRTEQ Act included explicit reference to preparation and teaching inclusively. It specified that all ITE students should be able to differentiate in the classrooms and should be able to differentiate in terms of curriculum instruction and assessment. The idea of being responsive to learner needs and being able to teach inclusively was emphasized (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

The term "student self-efficacy" describes how students feel about their own capacity to complete particular activities or reach specified objectives within the framework of their education (Bandura, 1977). Student self-efficacy can have a significant impact on how they experience and succeed in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and as future teachers. Students' motivation, self-efficacy, and performance during their training and beyond their teaching careers can all be impacted by their self-efficacy in ITE programs (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). High levels of self-efficacy among ITE students increase their propensity to participate in class activities, persevere through difficulties, and use effective teaching techniques.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007), students who possess high self-efficacy may exhibit greater proactivity in pursuing professional development opportunities, cooperating with mentors and peers, and modifying their pedagogical approaches to cater to the requirements of a varied student body. Students who lack self-efficacy, on the other hand, could be more anxious, doubt their skills, and be less ready to attempt new things or take chances in the classroom. To prepare future teachers who are self-assured, capable, and dedicated to their work, ITE programs must cultivate and encourage students' self-efficacy. This could entail offering tools for professional development, opportunities for practical experience, constructive criticism, and mentorship (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). ITE programs can assist aspiring teachers thrive in their teaching responsibilities and have a beneficial impact on student learning outcomes by fostering student self-efficacy.

Attention to ITE is important because literature has shown that a comprehensive ITE program can improve the self-efficacy of graduating teachers (Bandura, 1977). However, ITE programs themselves did not escape the consequences of Covid such that many higher education institutions were forced to move to online learning, which according to Williams, Sayed, and Singh (2022) severely impacted ITE and the ability to complete teaching experience in schools. Teachers need to be prepared to deal with the challenges that would arise in the classrooms, such as the low academic performance in South Africa and the need to meet the needs of all learners in accordance with inclusive education, even though their own initial preparation for teaching may have been compromised.

1.3. Problem statement

For several reasons, South Africa generally struggles with the effectiveness of its educational system and according to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2015), poor academic

performance is a defining characteristic of many primary schools in South Africa. This may be because the South African context is very complex and dynamic as the country is faced with various socio-economic challenges, infrastructure challenges, and even service provision challenges. Ardington, Wills, and Kotze (2021) claimed that grade-four children in South Africa could not read which indicated that the state of education in South Africa is in dire straits. To worsen the situation the Covid pandemic put South African learners two to three years behind where they ought to be (Ardington, et al. 2021).

As a result, in as much as South Africa struggles with poor academic performance, the Covid pandemic made matters worse by giving prominence to the already existing imbalances in the South African educational system (Valodia & Francis, 2020). The lockdown, according to Valodia and Francis (2020), brought attention to the continuance of social, economic, and spatial injustices. This was because learners missed some days of school due to the lockdown and the pandemic's forced school closures thereby widening school performance gaps (Vorster, 2020a). According to Ardington, et al (2021), Covid caused the loss of 60% of early-grade school days in South Africa just in 2020. Due to the Covid pandemic's impacts, South African learners were reported to be two to three years behind where they should be in their development, and this meant that all teachers were dealing with challenges brought about by Covid (Valodia & Francis, 2020).

It was, therefore, critical to take into consideration pre-service teachers who would begin their teaching careers dealing with difficulties escalated by Covid and who had to be prepared for those challenges. If teachers were going to address the poor performance difficulties and backlog brought on by Covid, then there was a need to consider how initial teacher programs prepare teachers to address those issues because deficits had been identified where teacher preparation was subpar, according to Espino-Díaz, Fernandez-Caminero, Hernandez-Lloret, Gonzalez-Gonzalez & Alvarez-Castillo (2020). Teachers not only had to deal with improving the performance of learners in general but many of the learners themselves had individual challenges in addition to their generally poor performance. Considering the South African Inclusive Education mandate that established how Inclusive Education must be delivered, positioning the supply of support for learners in many ways according to the Department of Education (2001), teachers needed to not only be addressing poor performance levels, loss of education and backlog created by Covid but they were also expected according to the Inclusive Education mandate to be responsive to individual needs in the classroom (Department of Education, 2001). This entailed that they felt adequately prepared to cope in classrooms given

these kinds of obligations because while dealing with poor student performance, Covid backlog, and educational loss, teachers still needed to be sensitive to their learners. The Ministry of Education (2011) clearly stated that all potential teachers must be able to manage the diversity of all learners in their classrooms, according to the requirements for a bachelor's degree articulated in the MRTEQ document. This then called for teachers to participate in strong initial teacher education programs, and their training as teachers had to prepare them to manage these kinds of expectations.

However, in much the same way as Covid had a detrimental effect on learners' ability to learn, it had to be considered that initial teacher education programs were proceeding at the same time. Similar time loss and learning backlogs were experienced by teachers enrolled in teacher education programs, which may or may not have affected their preparation. Jacob, Abigeal & Lydia (2020) claimed that face-to-face contact is more interactive and beneficial to the learning process as it provides better opportunities for sharing knowledge and asking for clarifications as compared to remote learning. That being the case it had to be considered that teachers in ITE programs experienced a similar circumstance during Covid which could have had a negative effect on their preparedness. The final year pre-service teachers particularly might not have received enough preparation to adequately prepare them to deal with learners' poor performance exacerbated by Covid. The implication was that this specific cohort was in its fourth and final year having begun its first year in 2020, the year South Africa went under lockdown. They were scheduled to graduate at the end of 2023 after completing three of their four years under lockdown. Their perception of their efficacy could have been affected by this because newly graduated teachers are also affected by their preparedness or lack thereof (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is based on the social cognitive theory, which maintains that people have some control over their growth and situations in life even though many things are at least somewhat random (Bandura, 2006a). This is a critical issue because research has shown that low levels of self-efficacy beliefs strongly impair teachers' ability to deal with difficult situations such as learners needing support. This was a problem that I was interested in investigating to find out what was worrying final-year pre-service teachers, what was making them anxious, and what they perceived as their level of preparedness. I was interested to know about their perceptions of preparedness and how that was affecting the sentiments of their academic and emotional readiness to go into the classroom in 2024. It would have been a problem if final-year preservice teachers felt underprepared due to the heavy demands placed on them. Therefore, to improve learner performance and support learners who faced various

difficulties, teachers who had the necessary preparation and were capacitated to teach in an inclusive context to support the learning of all and teachers who could address the unique learning needs of each learner were needed. To handle the learning backlog in schools, South Africa needed teachers who were ready to take on those problems given all these different types of issues.

1.4. Purpose/ Aim

The issue that this study aimed to investigate was how prepared final-year pre-service teachers at one Higher Education Institution in South Africa perceived themselves to be to enter the classroom, and to establish the biggest challenges or concerns that they identified about going into the classroom. The justification for this was to better understand the concerns pre-service teachers experienced and identify where the preparation gaps may have been to suggest recommendations to better support their development. As final-year pre-service teachers would be expected to teach in an inclusive environment for the first time and to address the needs of all learners, it was relevant to explore how prepared they perceived themselves to be and identify concerns they had about going into the classroom.

1.5. Research Aim:

To investigate how prepared final-year Foundation Phase pre-service teachers felt they were to enter the classroom and explore what they believed to be their major problems or concerns about doing so.

1.6. Research Objectives:

- To investigate what perceptions are held by final-year pre-service teachers about the preparation they have received to teach in an inclusive context.
- To consider ways that final-year pre-service teachers may require support to improve learners' performance, address Covid gaps, and teach inclusively going into classrooms.

1.7. Research Question

How prepared do final-year pre-service teachers feel they are to enter the classroom and what do they believe to be their major problems or concerns about doing so?

1.7.1. Sub Questions

1. What perceptions do final-year preservice teachers have about the preparation they have received to teach in an inclusive context?

2. In what ways might final-year preservice teachers need support to improve learners' performance, address Covid gaps, and teach inclusively going into classrooms?

1.8. Rationale

In the post-2015 development agenda of the United Nations, there was an increasing call for the accomplishment of universal and sustainable access to primary education for everyone. However, gaining access to it has been difficult, especially in the areas of educational success, equity, and quality. Additionally, these advancements had led to disparities in learning results between those who had access and those who did not during Covid all over the world, (Durowoju & Onuka, 2015). This had led to a situation where many graduates perceived themselves as not sufficiently prepared for the workforce challenges, (UNESCO, 2014). Therefore, my study hoped to uncover the perceptions of the final-year education students on the preparation they had received to teach in inclusive contexts. The study also hoped to uncover ways these students may have needed to support learner performance and address Covid gaps as they entered the classrooms. Cheung (2008) contended that teaching experience had a major impact on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Contrarily, Hofman and Kilimo (2014) asserted that self-efficacy was positively connected with the number of years a person is employed, suggesting that factors other than teaching experience may also affect teacher efficacy. Dignath, Rimm-Kaufman, van Ewijk, and Kunter (2022), claimed that there was a lack of understanding of the variables influencing differences in teachers' self-efficacy regarding inclusive education and how their training experiences affected the development of their professional views because of the conflicting findings of this field of research. Hence, this study was pertinent given that the cohort in question had completed three years of online education and had only had face-to-face contact in 2023, their final year before graduation. Given these special conditions, it was interesting to learn how they viewed their self-efficacy as they got ready to enter inclusive classrooms.

1.9. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the study's history, problem statement, and justification for concentrating on the final-year Education students. Along with its four sub-questions, it also included a description of the main research question, goals, and purpose of the study. relevant literature will be reviewed in the upcoming chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This section presents a discussion of the conceptualization of inclusive education drawn from the Salamanca Statement and related United Nations definitions. Later sections of the literature review considered the conceptualization of inclusive education and its applicability in the context of South Africa. UNESCO notes that learners with special needs are not isolated from their peers but South Africa has developed arrangements for high support needs learners to receive separate education.

2.2. Inclusive Education

As they get ready to enter the teaching profession, pre-service teachers must comprehend the history and tenets of inclusive education. It gives them a fundamental grasp of the significance of establishing inclusive learning environments and attending to the various requirements of every learner. Pre-service teachers are better able to effectively help children with disabilities and other different needs when they have knowledge about inclusive education (Gallagher, 2017). Inclusive education is founded on the idea that every learner has a right to quality education in a welcoming and encouraging environment irrespective of their talents, impairments, backgrounds, or other attributes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1994). By establishing a sense of belonging and guaranteeing that all learners can participate and learn together, inclusive education seeks to build classrooms and schools that welcome and encourage diversity. It considers each learner's specific requirements and characteristics while also recognizing and valuing their distinct qualities, aptitudes, and potential. Learners with special needs or impairments are not separated from their peers or taught in a separate setting under an inclusive education system, they are fully integrated into normal classes and extracurricular activities (UNESCO, 1994). This entails offering the proper assistance, adaptations, and accommodations so that disabled learners can participate completely in the learning process alongside their typically developing peers.

Inclusive education encourages collaboration between parents, teachers as well as other stakeholders for the purpose of establishing a welcoming and inclusive learning environment (United Nations (UN), 2016). To meet the various requirements and learning styles of learners, it places an emphasis on the utilization of a variety of instructional methods, resources, and

assessments. Additionally, inclusive education promotes the elimination of structural, psychological, and physical barriers that could obstruct the participation and advancement of learners with disabilities. Schools that practice inclusive education work to advance social integration, fair opportunity, and tolerant perspectives on diversity. It acknowledges that inclusive education serves all learners by fostering empathy, and insight and encourages embracing each other irrespective of whether they are disabled or not (UN, 2016).

2.2.1. Inclusive Education Internationally

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), which also protected the rights of children with disabilities, provided the legal framework for the creation of inclusive education. Everyone has the right to education according to the UDHR, and education must be focused on enhancing human character. The parents would decide on the type of education they wanted for their child (UN General Assembly, 1948). Representatives from twenty-five international organizations and ninety-two governments adopted the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education in 1994, to ensure that learners with special educational needs may fully participate in society, it advocated for inclusive education as the most efficient strategy (UNESCO, 1994). For those with disabilities, access to an inclusive education was a crucial human right and the Salamanca Statement endorsed this principle and underlined the need to include all types of learners in a single educational environment to provide education for all. The Salamanca Statement went on to argue that inclusive normal schools would be effective tools in the battle against prejudice and would also help in creating welcoming environments. This implied the creation of inclusive communities and the realization of universal access to education (UNESCO, 1994).

2.2.2. Inclusive Education in South Africa

Significant progress has been made in South Africa in inclusive education, which aims to ensure that all learners, including those with special needs or disabilities, have equitable access to high-quality education. The South African Government policy was drastically changed from an apartheid setting when South Africa won independence in 1994 and put in place democracy so that it can accommodate every citizen, (Corder, 1994). Prior to 1994, South Africa had a bi-model system with separate education departments for each race as well as segregated education based on race and aptitude. One of the key provisions of the constitution that was recognized was the establishment of education for learners with disabilities, and the government was prohibited from discriminating against anyone on any basis, including disability (The Constitution Act No. 108 of 1996). There were regular schools as well as special

schools. Accordingly, schooling varies depending on a person's level of aptitude. Everyone in South Africa is guaranteed the right to an education, according to South Africa's constitution, which also mandates that schools provide inclusive education regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, or culture (Ngcobo & Dlamini, 2022).

All South African children, regardless of their skills or disabilities, have a legal right to an education under the South African Schools Act (1996). This act established the legal basis for inclusive education and underlined the significance of integrating learners with special needs into regular classrooms. The South African government's commitment to inclusive education was underlined in White Paper 6, which was published by the Department of Education (2001). Inclusion of all learners in age-appropriate normal classes where they are supported to learn, contribute, and participate in all aspects of school life is how inclusive education is defined in Education White Paper 6 (2001). Inclusion meant that learners with disabilities would receive the support they require to overcome whatever barriers they may be facing. The policy statement included recommendations and tactics for implementing inclusive education in classrooms, highlighting the significance of removing obstacles and helping guarantee that every learner participates fully.

When the Education White Paper 6 was implemented in response to the post-apartheid government's support for special education, it marked a crucial departure from the outdated paradigm of special education schools (Department of Education, 2001). The medical paradigm and its associated practices were what drove the previous paradigm, whereas the new paradigm would operate in a different paradigmatic environment. The policy's goal was to eliminate prejudice by classifying disabilities and ensuring that learners with disabilities received greater support in school rather than having their difficulties be the centre of attention (Department of Education, 2001).

The Department of Education's Education White Paper No. 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) lays out the general framework for an inclusive educational system. This strategy puts a greater emphasis on addressing the various needs of all children, especially those who struggle academically. The policy goes on to claim that for inclusive education to be a reality, there must be a theoretical change made in how help is provided to children who struggle academically (Department of Education, 2001). The policy was implemented to address issues like the maltreatment of disabled learners who

were subjected to racial discrimination, stigmatization, marginalization, and the failure of the educational system to provide facilities that were appropriate for learners' various needs.

After White Paper 6 various guidelines were published to address the concerns raised about lack of specificity and practical guidance in White Paper 6. The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy (2014) was developed to guide the practical implementation of support provisioning. The goal of the SIAS Policy (2014) was to recognize and assist learners who were experiencing difficulties in their academic and personal growth. The structure was established for early detection and intervention to ensure that learners would have the help and adjustments needed to succeed in the classroom.

2.2.3. Challenges to implementation of Inclusive Education in SA

South Africa is faced with several difficulties in implementing inclusive education that include resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, attitudinal barriers, limited collaboration coordination, accessibility and infrastructure, language barriers, and socioeconomic disparities. When it comes to resource constraints, notably in education, South Africa's resources are inadequate, claims Miles (2000). Providing inclusive education for all learners, taking into consideration disabled learners and those with special needs, is challenging due to a lack of funds, infrastructure, and specialized equipment. The difficulty is exacerbated further by the uneven distribution of the available resources (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). In South Africa, as asserted by Mpu and Adu (2021), a lot of teachers lack the necessary training to facilitate inclusive education. They might not have the knowledge and abilities needed to successfully teach learners with a range of learning difficulties. As a result, teachers feel that they are not capable of teaching all learners or that they are unable/cannot cope with teaching. According to Garcia and Lopez (2023), when teachers believe they cannot handle the demands of teaching, it can have a substantial negative impact on their self-efficacy. Reduced confidence and self-belief in their teaching talents might result from this feeling of inadequacy and incapacity to handle different facets of their work. Therefore, comprehensive, and continuous teacher training programs are required, emphasizing inclusive pedagogy and methods for assisting children with impairments (Mpu & Adu, 2021).

According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), there are still misunderstandings and negative attitudes toward learners who have special needs in South African society. Within schools and communities, this can result in prejudice, stigmatization, and exclusion. For that reason, awareness programs, neighbourhood involvement, and advocacy initiatives are necessary to

shift perceptions and promote an inclusive culture (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). As stated by Sharma, Armstrong, Merumeru, Simi, and Yared (2019), the successful implementation of inclusive education depends on cooperation between several stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, families, and civil society groups. However, Sharma, Armstrong, Merumeru, Simi, and Yared (2019) noted that efforts to coordinate and collaborate in South Africa are frequently dispersed, which results in a lack of consistent procedures, uneven policies, and inefficient service delivery.

Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, and Van Deventer (2016), argued that many South African schools lack the physical accessibility features required to serve learners with impairments, including ramps, accessible restrooms and assistive devices, learners' engagement and inclusion in normal classrooms are severely hampered by the lack of inclusive infrastructure. The inability of pre-service teachers to successfully serve diverse learners in their classrooms might be a major factor in their low self-efficacy when there is a lack of inclusive infrastructure. Pre-service teachers may feel underprepared and apprehensive about their capacity to address the needs of all students in the absence of sufficient resources and accommodations, which could lower their self-assurance and faith in their teaching abilities (Garcia & Lopez, 2023). To intensify challenges to implementing Inclusive Education, South Africa has several official languages and is a linguistically diverse nation. The availability of adequate instructional materials and support services in learners' native languages is one factor that can make language barriers more difficult for inclusive education. Learners' ability to attend education and their ability to study can both be hampered by inadequate linguistic support (Aarons & Akach, 2002). Student teachers' or pre-service teachers' self-efficacy can be severely impacted by inadequate linguistic support since it makes it more difficult for them to connect and interact with students from different linguistic backgrounds. Student teachers may feel overburdened, ineffectual, and doubtful of their capacity to promote learning for all children when they lack the support, they need to manage language challenges in the classroom (Smith & Johnson, 2023). South Africa has large socioeconomic inequalities, and these inequalities frequently interact with the difficulties of inclusive education. Poverty, restricted access to healthcare, and a lack of support networks may provide extra challenges for learners from underprivileged backgrounds. port networks may provide extra challenges for learners from underprivileged backgrounds. The self-efficacy of student teachers or pre-service teachers can be greatly impacted by poverty, limited access to healthcare, and a lack of support systems. People may have higher stress levels and worse general well-being when they are dealing with socioeconomic difficulties

including poverty and restricted access to healthcare, which can erode their confidence and belief in their capacity to perform as educators (Garcia & Lopez, 2023). Furthermore, in the absence of sufficient networks for emotional, professional, and social support, student teachers can experience feelings of isolation and overload due to the responsibilities of their position, which could further undermine their confidence in themselves (Martinez & Rodriguez, 2021). To promote inclusive and equitable education for all learners, it is imperative to address these gaps in culture (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Consequently, to overcome these obstacles, a multifaceted strategy that includes regulatory changes, greater educational spending, teacher training programs, public awareness campaigns, improved infrastructure, and stakeholder cooperation is necessary (Mitchell, 2015).

2.3. Principles for Inclusive Education

There are several guiding principles for the implementation of inclusive education and the dignity of people, their equality, and their rights are the values that underpin inclusive education. In the conversation, some prominent ideas are discussed. At the beginning of inclusive education's development internationally, Florian and Walton (2017) claim that it was heavily centred on disability. It was extensively assumed that children who were disabled could not learn, and governments were doing nothing to be accountable for the education of these disabled children. Florian and Walton (2017) assert that in 1955, families fought the American government regulations to ensure that their impaired children would be treated equally and accepted as regular learners and receive the same education as other children. Although it was not simple, eventually the American government came around to the notion, agreed to support the parent-run schools, and ultimately decided that disabled children should have access to public education. To advance inclusive education, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations (UNCRPD), (2006) acknowledged that individuals with disabilities have a right to an education and places a strong emphasis on inclusive education. Its principles have inspired the creation of inclusive education policies all around the world and have been ratified by several nations (UNCRPD, 2006). This has led many nations to create and put into place inclusive education policies to support equal educational opportunities for all learners. The goals of these regulations are to dismantle obstacles to education, offer suitable assistance as well as accommodations, and promote inclusive school settings.

When it comes to increasing access, for children with impairments or specific educational requirements, Ahmad (2015) claims that there have been efforts to enhance access to education. This entails actions like expanding assistive technology, making schools more physically

accessible, and creating inclusive curricula and instructional strategies (Ahmad, 2015). According to Forlin (2013), for that to happen there is a need to focus on offering teacher training and professional development opportunities which has emerged in response to the realization that inclusive education requires qualified teachers. Through these activities, teachers are to be given the knowledge and abilities to serve different learners in inclusive classrooms (Forlin, 2013).

Teachers' self-efficacy can be raised through collaboration and partnership, which offer chances for professional growth, knowledge and resource sharing, and support. Teachers can get insightful information, constructive criticism, and encouragement from working together with peers, parents, administrators, and community members. This can help teachers feel more confident in their ability to teach (Patel & Naidoo, 2023). According to research by Smith and Johnson (2022), teacher self-efficacy in implementing new teaching tactics was greatly increased by collaborative professional development programs. The research showed that teacher self-efficacy in meeting a variety of student needs rose as a result of partnerships between schools and community organizations (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Collaboration and Partnerships are important to advance inclusive education, governments and educational institutions have partnered with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and advocacy groups. These partnerships need to produce best practices, reference materials, and standards for promoting inclusive education (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011). This could be done by sharing best practices through conferences, forums, and global networks, nations have shared more of their insights and lessons learned in adopting inclusive education. Stone (2004) claims that the growth of inclusive educational policies and practices has been aided by this knowledge exchange on a global scale. It is significant to recognize that cultural, socioeconomic, and political issues influence inclusive education development differently in different nations. While some nations have made considerable strides, others are just beginning to put inclusive education policies into place. However, there has been a global movement toward appreciating the value of inclusive education and putting measures in place to make sure it is practiced (Stone, 2004).

2.4. Approaches to Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to guarantee that all children have equitable access to high-quality instruction (Mitchell, 2015). These strategies strongly emphasize fostering inclusive educational settings, reducing obstacles to learning, and offering the right kind of support to

cater to the various needs of learners. Therefore, regardless of their skills or limitations, every learner should be given the opportunity to attend ordinary mainstream classes, according to the full inclusion approach (Mitchell,2015). It encourages schools to make the necessary accommodations and support to ensure that all learners participate and succeed, and it promotes the idea that all children may benefit from working together.

2.4.1. The Medical Model Approach

The medical model approach to inclusive education commonly referred to as the medical model of disability is founded on the notion that children with disabilities need to be integrated into the mainstream culture or the norm of the classroom and that their impairments are the primary cause of their difficulties (Reindal, 2008). Traditionally, the medical model approach has seen disability as a particular calamity or shortcoming that needs to be identified, remedied, or eradicated. Instead of addressing the obstacles or opportunities in the environment that affect these children's learning and involvement, this strategy frequently results in practices that concentrate on mending or normalizing children with disabilities (Burchardt, 2004; Mitra, 2006). This strategy is criticized for failing to respect the diversity and capacities of children with disabilities and for failing to confront the attitudes and systems that currently exclude them, according to Slee and Allan (2001), who claim that this method is not genuinely inclusive. Some essential elements of the medical model approach include diagnosis and assessment, treatment and intervention, a specialist-driven approach, a focus on individual deficits, and segregated or separate settings.

According to Reindall (2008), the main goal of the medical model is to recognize and classify disabilities according to accepted medical standards where diagnosis and assessment place a strong emphasis on medical examinations, testing, and evaluations to establish the type and degree of the disability. Treatment and intervention are when the medical model approach prioritizes interventions, therapies, and medical treatments that are intended to address, manage, or cure the disability after it has been identified, claims Mitra (2006). The main objective is frequently to lessen or eliminate completely the disability's impact on the person's functioning therefore the medical model places a significant emphasis on healthcare professionals, including doctors, therapists, and specialists, in the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of disability (Reindall, 2008). These practitioners are regarded as specialists because they offer interventions and medical knowledge, hence why it is called a specialist-driven approach. Burchardt (2004) asserts that there is a focus on individual deficits where the medical model emphasizes the person's shortcomings or impairments as the main contributor to

incapacity. However, it frequently ignores the environmental and societal elements that could be a part of the restrictions and constraints that people with disabilities may experience. The medical model approach frequently places disabled people for care or support in segregated or specialized environments, such as institutions, hospitals, or clinics but the consequence of this segregation may be isolation and a lack of full integration into the community because of the segregated and separate settings (Reindall, 2008).

The medical paradigm is criticized for placing too much focus on "fixing" the individual instead of addressing the societal structures and barriers that support exclusion and prejudice. Slee and Allan (2001), promote a change to a social model or inclusive approach to disability, which acknowledges that disability results from interactions between people and their surroundings. To enable people with disabilities to lead more independent lives, the social model emphasizes reducing obstacles, advancing accessibility, and encouraging social inclusion.

2.4.2. The Social Model Approach

The social model approach in inclusive education is founded on the notion that society and the environment, which do not accommodate the different needs and potential of children with disabilities, are the primary causes of their impairment (Reindall,2008). According to the social model of inclusive education, all learners should be able to engage completely and actively in the educational process by removing obstacles and fostering inclusive environments (Reindall,2008). Instead of seeing disability as a personal shortcoming or medical disease, Terzi (2004) claims that the social model approach sees it as the product of how people interact with their physical and social environments. With this strategy, Burchardt (2004) claims that the standards and presumptions of the traditional educational system are questioned, and it is promoted that the laws, customs, and mentalities that prevent children with disabilities from learning and participating in society's activities be changed. Along with valuing their perspectives and experiences, this strategy supports the rights and self-determination of children with disabilities and their families in the educational system. It does this by placing the onus of conformity on individuals to fit into the current educational frameworks, the social model focuses on responsibility for accommodating and including people with disabilities in society (Burchardt, 2004).

The social model advocates for social justice and equality. It acknowledges that every learner, including those with disabilities, has a right to an equal opportunity to a high-quality education. It stresses the importance of human rights in inclusive education and calls for the removal of

obstacles that prevent disabled learners from participating (Terzi,2005). According to Dalkilic and Vadeboncoeur (2016), the goal of inclusive education based on the social model is to identify and remove obstacles that stand in the way of full participation and learning. These obstacles may be structural, for example, inaccessible structures, or psychological, such as discriminatory attitudes and ideas. The goal of inclusive education is to break down barriers so that all learners may access the curriculum to take part in all facets of school life and attempt to establish a supportive environment. The social model strongly emphasizes on cooperation between teachers, support personnel, learners, families, and the larger society. It acknowledges the significance of developing a strong network of allies that can offer the tools, know-how, and support required to make sure inclusive practices are successful. Collaboration supports the creation of a welcoming and supportive learning environment (Muñoz-Martínez, Monge-López & Torrego Seijo, 2020). Social model-based inclusive education encourages a welcoming and supportive school climate that values variety, respect, and inclusion. It entails actively tackling bullying and prejudice as well as establishing an inclusive culture within the school community (Muñoz-Martínez, Monge-López & Torrego Seijo, 2020).

The social model advocates for making educational settings, curricula, and instructional resources usable and helpful to all learners, including those with a variety of needs (Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Liston, 2005). This means that in alternative to adding adjustments or modifications as a last-minute solution, the approach seeks to prevent potential barriers by considering the needs of all learners from the beginning. Thus, instead of expecting learners to adhere to a single norm, the emphasis is on tailoring the learning environment and instructional strategies to match the various requirements of learners. This is done through the implementation of inclusive teaching methods that support the involvement and engagement of all learners. This covers adaptable grouping, individualized instruction, and the appropriate use of assistive technology or accommodations (Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Liston, 2005). That being the case, society's attitudes, structures, and practices frequently contribute to the obstacles and restrictions that people with disabilities must overcome. It strives to build an educational system that celebrates diversity, respects the rights of all learners, and offers worthwhile learning experiences for everyone by removing these barriers and supporting inclusive behaviours.

2.5. Goals of ITE in South Africa

For ITE programs, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET, 2015) in South Africa has specified important objectives and requirements. The DHET offers principles and

criteria that underline how critical it is to train qualified teachers who can make a positive contribution to the educational system and the readiness of pre-service teachers should be the major focus of ITE (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). In South Africa, MRTEQ identifies types of knowledge that teachers should be exposed to throughout their BEd. The importance of practical learning (Teaching Experience) is one of the important aspects that ITE is meant to be doing in South Africa to ensure that teachers are prepared to teach in particular ways (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Most BEd degrees regardless of which university one attends are guided to have modules that cover procedural knowledge, content knowledge, and professional knowledge. Pre-service teachers need to have educational theory language and methodology knowledge which is knowledge of the methodology of their subjects, and they also need to have a practical component. These are very important because the effects of Covid could be influencing the fact that they could not access learning and could not do their teaching practice.

In South Africa, ITE programs are supposed to give aspiring teachers a firm grounding in pertinent subject-matter knowledge and understanding, as well as pedagogical content expertise (du Plessis & Sunde, 2017). This entails having a deep knowledge of the curriculum, instructional techniques as well as assessment procedures. (Department of Basic Education, 2015). Future teachers' pedagogical proficiency ought to be improved by ITE programs. Giving them the knowledge and abilities to efficiently prepare, deliver, and evaluate lessons is a crucial part of this. The implementation of various teaching strategies, the use of educational technologies, classroom management, and the support of varied learners should all be skills that prospective teachers should be prepared to apply. (Department of Basic Education, 2015). ITE programs ought to place a strong emphasis on the values and concepts of inclusive education. The use of varied instruction and assessment techniques, as well as the creation of inclusive learning environments and awareness of and response to diverse learning requirements, should all be skills that teachers should be prepared to use. Teachers should also be knowledgeable about South African laws and regulations pertaining to inclusive education (Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel & Malinen, 2012). The growth of professional values, ethics, and attitudes among aspiring teachers should be encouraged by ITE programs. This involves fostering a dedication to social justice, equity, and human rights as well as fostering professionalism, honesty, and respect for learners, co-workers, and the community. Wilmot (2004) highlighted that ITE programs should foster reflective practices among prospective teachers that inform their teaching decisions and improve their effectiveness in the classroom

and ought to promote analytical thinking, self-reflection, and ongoing professional growth. However, McIntyre (2009) claims that regardless of what is accomplished in the university, the teaching methods, and perspectives that pre-service teachers typically learn to adopt are those that are now prevalent in schools. Therefore, it is challenging to implement innovations like inclusive pedagogy through traditional ITE programs. For novice teachers, Harber and Serf (2006) claim that in the same way there is a focus on ITE programs there are challenges for new teachers entering the workforce and they feel unprepared for what awaits them in their initial teaching roles. Therefore, the degree to which novice teachers are prepared for their employment demonstrates the connection between ITE and the experiences of beginning teachers entering the workforce (Harber & Serf, 2006). There is a need to give the best training in ITE programs so they can succeed from the first day in the classroom.

2.6. ITE During Covid

2.6.1. ITE During Covid Internationally

The Covid pandemic's effects on teacher preparation and professional development have been covered in several worldwide papers and publications. Allen, Rowan, and Singh (2020) conducted a study to investigate the transition of teachers as well as teacher educators into online teaching and learning. When it comes to online and remote learning transitions there was a swift transition during the pandemic, and its effects on teacher preparation have been heavily stressed. The delivery of training programs remotely using a variety of online platforms and resources has required swift adaptation on the part of educators and teacher training institutes (Smith & Brown, 2022). The fact that the adaptation was rushed so that the engagement of students was sustained meant that lectures had to bend over backward, and this resulted in too much work. This was because all material needed to continue teaching had to be moved online and this required specific software to make it a reality (Allen, Rowan & Singh, 2020). As lecturers and pre-service teachers strived to balance and prepare for the "new normal," the adaptation to online learning proved to be demanding for many universities. Flores and Swennen (2020) are also in agreement as they foresaw that more shaky and unbalanced conditions would unquestionably come with complications for lecturers and pre-service teachers because pedagogical approaches used in the contact learning mode are different from those used in remote learning. In their investigation Flores and Swennen (2020) found out that teachers and learners were expected to rework their modes of learning, this was also the same for the preparation of teachers. Since the pandemic was unexpected everything happened abruptly. In Israel it was the same thing, Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020) focus was

particularly on how the Covid pandemic has affected Israel's ITE. In the same manner programs for teacher education were impacted by this transformation and had to immediately modify their techniques and curriculum to support remote delivery.

Allen, Rowan, and Singh (2020) were intrigued to learn how online teaching would support lecturers and pre-service teacher goals so that the engagement would continue and found that to address the specific difficulties of remote and hybrid learning in teacher preparation, it has been necessary to adjust instructional methods during the pandemic. To improve student engagement and learning results, it is crucial to educate teachers on adaptable instructional approaches, assessment techniques, and the use of multimedia tools. The question of whether pre-service teachers would be pushed to embrace the stereotypical ways of teaching or forced to repel was raised by Allen, Rowan, and Singh (2020).

Regarding digital skills and pedagogy, the pandemic has brought a point home that to successfully engage learners in online and mixed-learning environments, it is crucial that teachers are equipped with digital skills and pedagogical expertise. Online teaching methodologies, digital literacy, and the efficient use of educational technology have all been highlighted in articles regarding the necessity for professional development programs. Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020) claimed there was a difficulty relating to access and technological infrastructure that was highlighted by the shift to online education. The availability of gadgets, internet connectivity, and digital tool competency were problems that teacher education programs and candidates had to deal with. The development of candidates' digital literacy abilities was supported by efforts to provide the tools they needed.

The pandemic's impact on teacher preparation has also brought attention to the significance of promoting teachers' physical and mental health. Self-care techniques, management of stress as well as the provision of support networks for teachers dealing with difficulties of teaching remotely and adjusting to new teaching methodologies have been stressed by Darling-Hammond and Hyler, (2020) who claim that attempts were needed to make sure that educational needs, social needs as well as emotional needs of pre-service teachers were fulfilled due to the aftermath of Covid. The loss of learning that happened needed to be un-evened up so that whatever form of learning could take place, (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020). Lecturers for pre-service teachers were required to come up with resilient measures in order to offer unwavering support to their students. Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) suggested that lecturers and the people in charge of making policies were required to tackle the academic

needs, social needs as well emotional needs of pre-service teachers. What was required was moving with the times and coming up with new and fresh ideas on how lecturers could help in meeting those needs.

2.6.2. ITE During Covid in Africa

When Covid hit Ghana, to continue teaching and learning learners and university students had to move to online platforms. However, when using online platforms for learning and teaching effectively, users must possess certain basic computer abilities and Kwaah, Adu-Yeboah, Amuah, Essilfie and Somuah (2022) investigated preservice teachers' digital proficiency, stress, and coping mechanisms during online lessons in the midst of the Covid pandemic and found that online teaching and learning can become stressful if teachers and students are not provided with the proper training and there are not enough resources. This led to stress being greatly exacerbated by pre-service teachers' insufficient access to resources and unmanaged stress can be detrimental to one's physical and mental health (Jung, Kudo & Choi (2012). The investigation recognized that young people who lack digital literacy, particularly those who are pre-service teachers, are left out of future digital societies, which are recognized to provide improved possibilities and well-being.

As countries were moving to remote learning, Kenya also availed itself of distant learning. Kereri, Kennedy, and Kereri (2022) conducted a study to investigate postsecondary teachers' perspectives on the transition to distance learning. Their findings were that online learning was not a new thing in Kenya's universities but the usage of electronic devices by the students and, in certain cases, the teachers, presented a barrier in terms of internet access. Educating learners remotely is difficult enough. When the shift to distance learning is rapid and sudden due to disruptions like Covid, it is considerably more difficult for students, teachers, and even parents. Teaching/research, production, and practical lessons have all been significantly impacted by the move to remote learning due to Covid (Kereri, Kennedy & Kereri, 2022). In addition to the difficulties associated with the shift to distance learning, teachers were impacted by external issues such as Covid lethargy which led to a drop in productivity, weariness, mental distress, fear, and isolation, among other things.

As the whole world was moving to online teaching and learning Morocco was not to be left behind but they took a different route. When creating and delivering online courses, Moroccan teachers used a variety of technological tools and platforms such as Zoom, Teams, and Skype. Mounjid, El Hilali, Amrani, and Moubtassime (2021) conducted a study to investigate the

challenges of online teaching and learning as perceived by teachers. The findings indicated that most of the teachers encountered several technological, educational, and socioeconomic difficulties that served as roadblocks to the processes of online education. The change was unexpected and abrupt. As a result, new schedules were developed, new classroom arrangements were made, and new tools were embraced. Yes, teachers could utilize a variety of free and clever online tools. However, while teaching and learning were happening at home both learners and teachers have encountered numerous difficulties (Mounjid, El Hilali, Amrani & Moubtassime,2021). The investigation found that the lack of any professional teacher preparation for online teaching is one of the major problems faced by Moroccan teachers as they receive more training in using ICT for face-to-face instruction than they do training in online education. Internet access, as well as leaner apathy, were some of the impacts of Covid in Morocco.

2.6.3. ITE During Covid in South Africa

Similarly, what was happening internationally, South Africa was facing the same problems as Covid changed methods of learning at teaching in ITE, and as a result, both teacher educators and pre-service teachers were more anxious due to new methods of teaching and learning. Williams, Sayed, and Singh (2022) conducted a study on the experiences of teacher educators managing teaching and learning during times of crises at one initial teacher education provider in South Africa. They found that most pre-service teachers had to go back to their homes and leave the campus and were faced with inadequate learning and teaching conditions at home, including little or no access to technology and the Internet (Williams, Sayed & Singh, 2022). This means that issues about equity and inequality during Covid for both school children and university students were evident. While some students lived in locations with low network coverage and used basic smartphones, others had unrestricted access to Wi-Fi and sophisticated equipment (Motala & Menon, 2020). When online learning was introduced universities and lecturers were faced with both practical and technological issues. This was something new and had never been done before, so it really was straining to the lecturers as well as the students. It came to light that huge imbalance for pre-service teachers from differing socio-economic backgrounds when it came to online learning and teaching the students from the rural areas of South Africa suffered a great deal. Inequalities in access to high-quality education have been brought to light by the pandemic. According to Williams, Sayed, and Singh (2022), it is essential for teacher preparation programs to address issues of equity and inclusion, with a

focus on strategies for helping impoverished learners, bridging achievement gaps, and establishing inclusive learning environments in both online and offline settings.

Moosa and Bekker (2022) looked at student well-being to get a sense of what first-year Bachelor of Education students were explaining about their experiences during Covid. What is interesting about this cohort is that it is the same cohort I am picking up now for my study as they are now in their final year. Moosa and Bekker (2022) found that the abrupt shift to remote learning hugely affected first-year students' general well-being which has made many students feel even more excluded and marginalized. This was because not every student had the same learning experience or outcomes because of the change, and Moosa and Bekker (2022) argue that concerns of inclusive policy, practice, and culture to support the learning of all may have received less attention in a perfectly valid attempt to provide online learning for students.

If this is the case, then marginalized and vulnerable students may have been most negatively impacted, as the online learning environment encourages a particular sort of interaction that may be advantageous to some but restrictive to others. Just like Williams, Sayed, and Singh (2022), Moosa and Bekker (2022) found that many students in South Africa look forward to having the opportunity to reside on campus in contrast to their existing living arrangements because they will have access to quality medical care and a sufficient diet. One could argue that the disadvantage of online learning has prevented these students from using these resources. To agree with Moosa and Bekker (2022), Jamieson and Van Blerk (2022) found that all facets of society were impacted by the Covid outbreak because people were instructed to self-quarantine in their houses to stop the spread of the virus. The lockdown had negative effects on mental health, leading to issues including despair, tension, and frustration. The effects of the Covid pandemic have been more detrimental for the students from less wealthy households and inequalities have been made worse.

From the findings, worldwide, in Africa and South Africa, it is evident that schools and ITE institutions were facing the same problems. The usual field experience and practicum components of teacher education programs were disrupted by the pandemic. The number of possibilities for in-person observation and practical teaching experience was constrained by school closures and constraints. Virtual communities of practice have been created using online platforms, enabling teachers and lecturers to share materials so that learners and students can gain insight from one another's experiences navigating distant teaching. Inequalities have been exacerbated worldwide between rich people and poor people.

2.7. Theoretical Framework

In this study I combined two theoretical frameworks. The two frameworks I combined were self-efficacy by Bandura (1977) and four key competencies to inclusion by Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, & Guzmán-Rosquete (2021). The reason I combined the two was because I was interested in evaluating pre-service teachers' own sense of efficacy in relation to the four key competencies for inclusion. I was interested in teacher efficacy specifically for inclusive teachers because teachers play a crucial role in their teaching practice because their perspectives, comprehension, ideas, and instincts regarding inclusion affect how they behave and treat each learner in the classroom.

2.7.1. Self-Efficacy

Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theoretical framework refers to an individual's conviction in their own ability to successfully complete activities and achieve goals in various domains. The self-efficacy framework originated in the 1970s as part of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory which highlights the role of cognitive processes, behaviour, and the social environment in human functioning (Bandura, 1977). Through a considerable study, Bandura (1977) identified the importance of people's beliefs in their own skills and established the word "self-efficacy" to capture this construct. The self-efficacy framework is a theory that describes how people's ideas about their own capabilities to be able to complete specific duties, impact on their habits, consequences as well as motivation. According to this idea, self-efficacy is the belief that one can effectively implement the action required to create the intended results. A person's self-efficacy influences how an individual approaches objectives, challenges, and tasks, and individuals with high or strong self-efficacy set higher objectives, stick with them longer, employ more successful tactics, and overcome difficulties more easily than people with low self-efficacy.

According to Bandura (1977), the four types of information that influence self-efficacy are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these components. Mastery experiences are the most effective source of self-efficacy because they provide immediate confirmation of one's potential. Vicarious experiences are observations of other people's achievements that can either boost or deflate one's self-efficacy based on the perceived likeness and effectiveness of the models. Verbal persuasion is feedback or encouragement from others that can increase or decrease one's self-efficacy determined by the reliability and particularity of the source. Physiological and emotional states are physical and perceptual responses to

situations that can have a good or negative impact on one's self-efficacy based on how they are understood (Bandura, 1977). Overall, the self-efficacy theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of individuals' beliefs in their own abilities and how such beliefs impact their behaviour, motivation, and performance in numerous aspects of life as shown in the figure below.

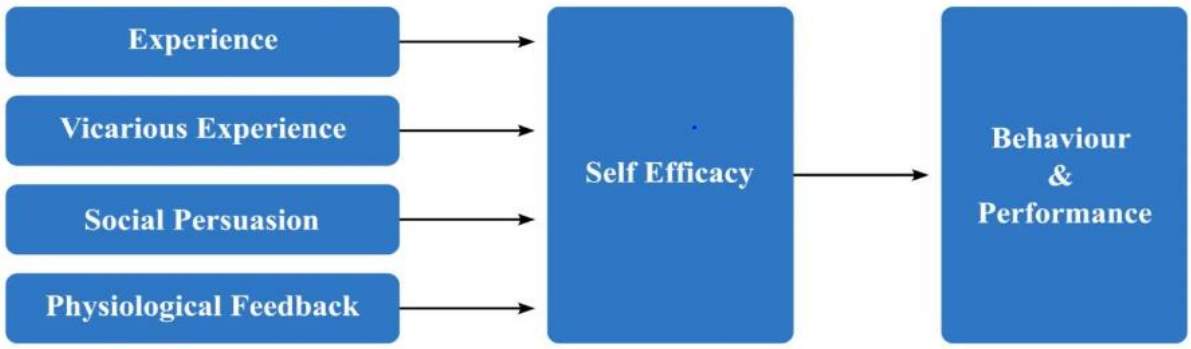


Figure 1: Teacher efficacy theoretical framework (Lopez-Garrido, 2023).

The framework of self-efficacy has been applied to several aspects of human functioning, including education, health, sports, jobs, and social relationships. It has also been used to develop interventions aimed at increasing people's self-efficacy and improving their outcomes. The self-efficacy framework is a behavioural change unifying theory that may explain and forecast how people cope with difficulties and achieve their goals (Lent & Hackett, 1987). In education, when it comes to a learner's academic achievement, incentives, and participation, self-efficacy beliefs are extremely important. For example, in South Africa, Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018) argued that the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) should be paying more attention to teachers' self-efficacy as it is speculated that that these teachers' sense of self-efficacy is being undermined by the DBST's present incapacity to assist full-service schoolteachers in instructing inside an inclusive education system. Teachers can help learners feel more capable of achieving their goals by giving them constructive criticism, modelling positive conduct, and providing mastery experiences. Teachers can boost academic accomplishment and goal setting in their learners by raising their self-efficacy (Van Dinther, Dochy, & Segers, 2011). In much the same way as, self-efficacy is important for learner performance, teachers themselves hold a sense of self-efficacy in relation to their own professional practice. A strong feeling of self-efficacy is extremely beneficial for teachers because it has a large positive impact on their ability to teach effectively, and their general well-

being at work. Therefore, it is important to consider teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in managing inclusive classrooms as having a strong sense of self-efficacy is crucial for teachers because it can enhance their professional development, and enhance their own personal wellbeing (Türkoglu, Cansoy & Parlar, 2017).

Self-efficacy is also important for comprehending and enhancing the results of mental wellness. With a view to foster resilience, coping mechanisms, and psychological well-being, therapists and counsellors frequently work with their patients to increase their self-efficacy beliefs. In fields including the treatment of addiction, phobias as well as anxiety disorders, self-efficacy is crucial (Maddux, 2016). In sports, the performance of sports is greatly influenced by self-efficacy. High self-efficacy athletes are more likely to establish difficult goals, stick with them through disappointments, and give their best effort. Sports psychologists help players improve their sense of self-worth by using strategies including goal setting, self-talk, and visualization (Feltz, Short & Sullivan, 2008). This is also true for teachers and maintaining their mental health and giving their all are equally important because that can have an impact on both their performance as teachers and their general well-being at work. Therefore, teachers must prioritize their mental health (Johnson 2020). Teachers who are struggling with mental health concerns may experience stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, or other psychological problems that might limit their ability to effectively plan, present, and evaluate educational lessons. Teachers will be able to do that if their own personal self-efficacy beliefs are supporting their own mental wellness and supporting their own mental wellness and supporting their own performance of that duty (Johnson, 2020).

Even though self-efficacy has received extensive research and substantial empirical evidence, some concerns have been voiced in the literature. Self-efficacy, according to Williams (2015), is a limited concept that mostly relies on people's perceptions of their own skills. Other crucial elements that can influence behaviour and performance, such as contextual influences, social support, and external restrictions, are not sufficiently considered. Williams (2015) stated that self-efficacy may not adequately account for emotional aspects like worry, fear, or stress, which can have a major impact on behaviour as well as execution. Williams (2015) agrees with Marzillier and Eastman (1984) that in addition to personal views, social customs, cultural elements, and systemic effects also have an impact on behaviour and performance. According to Marzillier and Eastman (1984), it might be difficult to appropriately quantify self-efficacy beliefs across domains or activities since self-efficacy tests are frequently short of specificity. Marzillier and Eastman (1984) contend that a broad measure of self-efficacy might not account

for the subtleties and variation of self-beliefs in various contexts as it places too much emphasis on personal beliefs and underestimates the role of societal and environmental circumstances. Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs and emotional states may interact and affect outcomes in nuanced ways that are difficult for the construct to fully account for.

Applying the teacher efficacy framework theory to my study of teacher readiness for inclusive teaching generated interesting results. The factors influencing teachers' confidence and proficiency when teaching diverse learners were revealed. For example, my inquiry was interested in looking at how elements such as teacher education programs, opportunities for professional growth, the prevalent school culture, and available support mechanisms impact teachers' self-efficacy views and, as a result, their inclusive teaching practices. This helped me in exploring the impact of pre-service teachers' self-efficacy on lesson planning, pedagogical choices, and execution of classroom methods which was one way of relating the evaluation of pre-service teachers' preparedness with the self-efficacy framework theory.

Furthermore, the study expanded to investigate the complex relationship between teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and their attitudes, techniques, and general professionalism in inclusive teaching situations. For example, I was interested in investigating how teachers with strong self-efficacy beliefs developed and implemented inclusive teaching techniques that appealed to a diverse range of learners. I was hoping that this study that incorporated the teacher efficacy framework theory could thoroughly explicate the subtle dynamics shaping inclusive teaching preparedness.

Another potential result of incorporating the teacher efficacy framework theory into my study which concentrates on teacher preparedness for inclusive teaching is the ability to provide important perspectives on increasing teachers' self-efficacy regarding inclusion. For example, my study could recommend techniques for designing teacher education programs and professional development opportunities that effectively challenge long-held beliefs that specific learners have inadequacies, are incapable of learning, or lack potential.

2.7.2. Four Key Competencies for Inclusion

The four key competencies for the inclusion framework had already been thoroughly addressed in the existing literature before being attempted by Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, and Guzmán-Rosquete (2021). The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) first established this framework in 2012, outlining a profile for the inclusive teacher. The four-competency theory by Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, & Guzmán-

Rosquete (2021), arose from a study initiative that sought to assess the level of establishment of competencies associated with inclusion as well as attentiveness to diversity among university students that hold a degree in primary education in Spain. The theory was built out of a project that was developed by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) initiative on the inclusive teacher profile which outlined four essential competencies for inclusive education. The framework's foundation was built on a study of existing literature, as well as an in-depth analysis of comments gathered from twenty-five European countries through a comprehensive questionnaire focusing on teacher education for inclusive practices. This framework was methodically constructed with the goal of creating a shared focal point that policymakers, teacher educators, school administrators, and teachers could all access. Its goal was to help these stakeholders advance inclusive education by providing advice and coherence (Rawlings, 2018).

The purpose of developing this theory was to give a framework for analyzing and evaluating teachers' competence in inclusive education, which according to Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) is a critical aspect in guaranteeing quality and equity in education for all learners. Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) were also hopeful that their theory would help enhance teacher education programs and policies that promote inclusion and diversity in educational environments because according to Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021), these four competencies are interconnected and complement each other, therefore, they should be advanced in every part of the teacher education program and continue thereafter. Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) argue that there is diversity that exists in many aspects of life, more so when it comes to education, thus suggesting the importance of creating an inclusive school that provides equal possibilities, learner engagement, teamwork, multicultural awareness, as well as one that provides quality education. As a result, Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) thought it was important that primary school teachers should be groomed for and develop essential competencies to be able to deal with diversity so that quality inclusive schools can be provided. The theory focuses on the important skills and abilities that primary school teachers should develop during their initial training, particularly in the areas of inclusion and addressing various learner needs.

The four key competencies for inclusion and attention to diversity identified by Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, & Guzmán-Rosquete (2021), are valuing student diversity, supporting all learners, working as part of a team, and developing one’s professional and personal qualities. To demonstrate valuing student diversity, teachers must be able to recognize and value the diversity among their learners' skills, needs, likes, customs, languages, etc. It also

entails refraining from stereotypes and prejudices and having positive expectations and attitudes for all learners. When it comes to supporting all learners, giving all learners proper support and direction is a requirement for this competency, more so learners at the risk of being excluded or having unique learning needs. It also entails modifying the environment, the methods, the evaluation, and the curriculum to better suit the various learning styles and demands of learners (Arvelo-Rosales et al., 2021).

The third competency, teamwork, requires collaboration as well as good communication with other professionals for example coworkers, experts, and school personnel, who are required for this ability. It also entails encouraging a culture of inclusion and involvement and incorporating communities and families in the process of education. Developing one's professional and personal dimension is the fourth competency, which calls for lifetime learning and constant professional growth to enhance one's knowledge, abilities, and attitudes about inclusion and diversity. It also entails taking stock of one's own behaviour, principles, and worldview while being adaptable to criticism (Arvelo-Rosales et al., 2021).

Below is the visual representation of the four key competencies of inclusion theoretical framework:

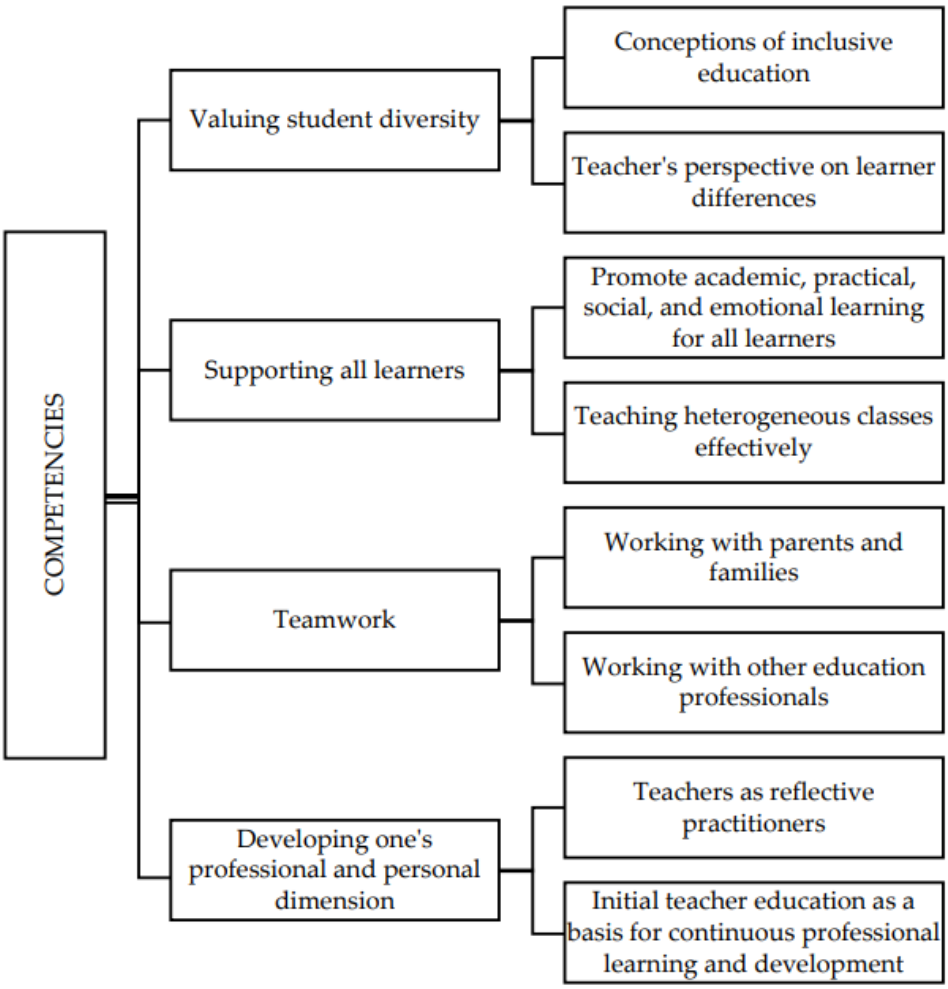


Figure 2: Teacher profile for inclusive education: (Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, and Guzmán-Rosquete, 2021).

Numerous researchers and practitioners have used the framework proposed by Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) to assess the extent of competency development and the influence of the four key competencies on inclusive education across diverse contexts and countries. A few examples of studies that reference or use this approach include Rawlings (2018) who investigated the framework as a crucial educational viewpoint regarding special educational needs and disabilities in the United Kingdom. Gavish and Shimoni (2018) also investigated the relationship between the four competencies and teachers' beliefs about inclusion in Israel's context. Another example that used the framework as a basic structure to develop a self-assessment tool that allows teachers in the United States to evaluate their inclusive teaching techniques introspectively is Kozleski, Yu, Satter, Francis, and Haines (2017).

However, the framework comes with its own criticisms that have been made in the literature. According to Florian (2010), Slee (2010), Meijer (2003), and Allan (2011), the framework's generality leads to a lack of specificity in terms of relevant content and successful teaching and learning practices for inclusive education. Florian (2010), Slee (2010), Meijer (2003), and Allan (2011) claim that the framework is vague, failing to define the relevant content or instructional practices required to facilitate inclusive education. Guidelines for differentiating instruction, utilizing assistive technology, and participating in collaborative efforts with colleagues to successfully support diverse learners are conspicuously absent. The approach, according to Chhabra, Srivastava, and Srivastava (2010), Lynch et al. (2015), and Mandina (2012), fails to consider contextual variables that influence the practical implementation of inclusive education such as school culture, curriculum design, assessment systems, accessible resources, and overarching policies. A consideration of how educators might handle issues and impediments that may develop within their school environments or classrooms when striving for diversity is conspicuously absent. According to Ballard (2012), Donnelly and Watkins (2011), and Majoko (2017) claim that the framework falls short of addressing the wide range of opinions and interactions that teachers have with inclusion and diversity as there is little mention of how teachers' views, attitudes, values, and emotions can influence their educational method and interactions with learners. Deluca, Tramonta, and Kett (2013), as well as Munjanganja and Machawira (2015), raised concerns about the framework's lack of specific instructions or benchmarks for assessing the advancement of competencies and their consequences on the achievements of learners as they assert that the framework lacks precise guidelines or standards for evaluating competency progression and its impact on learner achievements.

2.7.3. Self-efficacy in Relation to the Four Key Competencies for Inclusion

The relationship between Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy framework theory and the four key inclusion competencies identified by Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) can be established by investigating the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on the formulation and execution of these competencies. Take for example the competency of valuing student diversity, teachers with high self-efficacy are likely to value and honour differences among their learners, seeing them as sources of richness and opportunities for learning. Furthermore, they demonstrate greater confidence in their ability to adjust instructional strategies and resources to effectively serve the diverse needs and interests of their learners. Teachers with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, may see learner diversity as a barrier or complexity, maintaining gloomy prejudices or

biases toward specific student groups. Furthermore, they may be concerned about their abilities to handle classroom diversity, sometimes reverting to rigid or standardized practices that fail to accommodate individual differences.

When it comes to supporting all learners, teachers who have a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to provide competent and personalized assistance to all learners, with a special emphasis on those at risk of exclusion or academic underperformance. Their preference to work with colleagues and engage families ensures that all learners receive the necessary support and resources (Bandura, 1977). Teachers with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, may mistakenly neglect the needs of specific learners, particularly those who require more attention or assistance. Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2018) noted that teachers that are not supported to cater for all learners have been faced with, "a negative impact on these teachers' self-efficacy beliefs" (p. 2). They may also be hesitant to seek or accept other assistance, frequently attributing difficulties to outside circumstances or placing responsibility on the learners themselves.

Working as part of a team means that teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to participate actively and collaboratively in teams made up of fellow teachers, professionals, and stakeholders. Their willingness to learn from their peers complements their readiness to share ideas, experiences, and critiques (Bandura, 1977). Teachers who have poor self-efficacy, on the other hand, may isolate themselves and avoid team participation. Furthermore, they may assume a more defensive posture, demonstrating resistance to change and enhancements and a lower openness to external feedback or suggestions.

Teachers who have a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to actively pursue ongoing professional development and engage in lifetime learning activities, expanding their expertise, proficiencies, and inclusive education perspectives regarding developing their professional and personal qualities (Bandura, 1977). They have a great self-awareness of their skills and areas for development, and they actively seek opportunities for self-improvement. Teachers with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, may face a plateau or regression in their professional growth and participation in inclusive learning activities. Their self-awareness of strengths and flaws may be less prominent, prompting them to avoid challenges or situations that offer opportunities for growth.

2.7.4. How Teacher-Efficacy Framework and The Four Key Competencies for Inclusion Framework were combined in this study.

The figure below shows how the two frameworks were combined in this study.

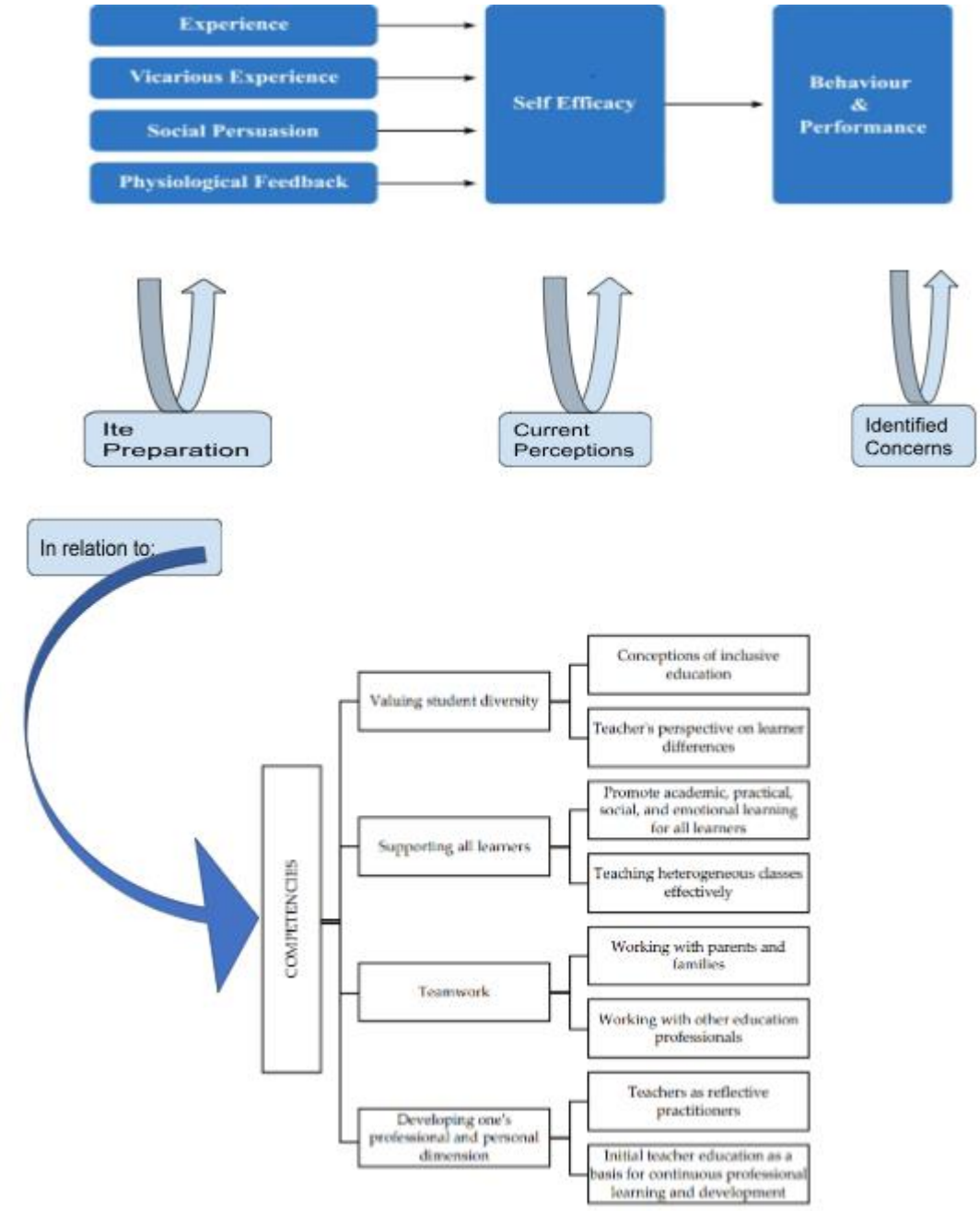


Figure 3: A combination of the Teacher-Efficacy Framework and The Four Key Competencies for Inclusion Framework.

In this study, the teacher efficacy framework and the four key competencies intersected as I explored the role of initial teacher education (ITE) preparation within the context of final-year

foundation phase students' experiences and social influences that contribute to the development of self-efficacy. This investigation also delved into what students have acquired during ITE preparation, determining whether it has fostered a strong sense of self-efficacy or not, particularly in the realm of inclusive education. The study sought to discern the specific elements of ITE preparation that either instil high levels of self-efficacy or result in lower self-efficacy perceptions among education students.

My study aimed to assess education students' self-efficacy perceptions and their readiness to teach in inclusive classrooms, focusing on the concerns and anxieties they identified regarding their performance in these settings. I was particularly interested in understanding the students' apprehensions related to appreciating student diversity within the context of the four competencies. In evaluating their self-efficacy levels, I also sought to gauge their confidence in effectively supporting all students.

In my study, I considered students' self-efficacy levels concerning their abilities in teamwork. Teachers often collaborate with other educators and members of the school community to achieve common goals (Pajares, 1996). I was particularly interested in evaluating whether students' motivation and their tendency to engage in collaborative cooperation were influenced by their sense of self-efficacy. According to Pajares (1996), teachers' motivation and readiness for cooperation may be influenced by their level of self-efficacy, with higher levels increasing teachers' proneness toward collaborative activities. On the contrary, individuals with low self-efficacy might tend to avoid teamwork, feel self-conscious about their contributions, and resist change.

According to Pajares (1996), teachers' willingness and readiness to engage in professional development activities, such as attending workshops, reading research literature, or joining online communities of practice, might be influenced by their level of self-efficacy. Therefore, I was interested in their perceptions of self-efficacy in relation to the four competencies when it comes to nurturing both their professional and personal dimensions, if initial teacher education (ITE) preparation for students increases their self-efficacy, which is demonstrated by positive attitudes toward professional development, a perception of its value and benefits, and a sincere appreciation for feedback and support from their peers and mentors. I also questioned whether the opposite was true, particularly, does ITE preparation occasionally result in lower self-efficacy, which shows up as unfavourable attitudes toward professional development, a

belief that it is fruitless or stressful, and a propensity to mistrust or reject criticism and assistance from others.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter examined relevant studies from a range of scholars, following the evolution of inclusive education from a global viewpoint to the national level. The study looked at the beginning and development of inclusive education in South Africa. The study's theoretical underpinnings, which include the Teacher-Efficacy Framework and the Four Key Competencies for Inclusion Framework, were also presented and defended in this chapter. The research technique and study design will be covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, beginning with a discussion of the chosen qualitative research paradigm, drawing on insights from key theorists. Qualitative research was regarded as appropriate for this study as it provided a detailed, in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was conducted at a higher education institution in Gauteng, participants consisted of fourth-year Foundation Phase education students. These participants were selected through purposive sampling to align with the study's focus (Patton, 2015). Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, enabling the capture of rich and refined insights. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, following a six-step inductive data analysis approach (Thomas, 2006). Additionally, the study incorporated measures to ensure the rigor and credibility of qualitative research, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings

3.2. Research Paradigm

Although Kuhn (1962) first used the term "paradigm" in a philosophical context, it has since evolved to signify the researcher's underlying worldview in modern educational research, as emphasized by Guba and Lincoln (1994). How research is interpreted and comprehended is influenced by this worldview. According to Kuhn, the choice of a paradigm is intimately related to the researcher's individuality and pertains to how they perceive knowledge and reality. More specifically, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) adopt the same viewpoint as Guba and Lincoln (1994), contending that a paradigm is a fundamental collection of assumptions and worldviews developed by academics conducting research. This emphasizes how the researcher's view of the world, impacted by their epistemological ideas, personal experiences, and other factors, is reflected in the paradigm they choose.

3.3. Epistemological Stance

Therefore, I am adopted a constructivist epistemological stance in my study because it placed emphasis on how human perception, interpretation, and context affect how we comprehend the world (Smith & Johnson, 2023). Constructivism is an epistemological position that contends knowledge is subjective and produced by individuals, (Andrews, 2012). It is also a perspective that sees knowledge as the outcome of social interactions and human perception. This viewpoint accepts that reality is not a constant or an immutable thing that can be found via

rational scientific methods. Instead, it is viewed as a subjective and dynamic construct that is impacted by the circumstances, interpretations, and meanings of both participants and researchers (Andrews, 2012). Adopting a constructivist perspective meant that I was acknowledging the existence of various and diverse ways to understand and interact with fourth-year education students on what they gained from initial teacher education and what they perceived to be their level of self-efficacy beliefs in relation to the four competencies.

3.4. Ontological Stance

The philosophical view or conviction that a researcher holds regarding the truth and existence of things is known as their ontological stance (Smith, 2022). There are fundamental concerns raised, including what is real, what types of things or events exist, and how the researcher and the subject of the investigation are connected (Doe, 2023). To influence their research strategies and worldviews, researchers adopt various ontological stances (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). Accordingly, I adopted the constructivist ontological perspective, as it maintained that reality was shaped by human perception, language, and interpretation rather than being a fixed entity. My participants comprised of a diverse group of students with different subjective perceptions of reality, which could change depending on the situation. I hoped to gain insight into how fourth-year education students interpreted their experiences and how they gave them meaning.

3.5. Methodological stance

My chosen methodological stance was qualitative research. The term "qualitative research" has been defined in a variety of ways by various writers, but most of these definitions all share the same feature, they all emphasize the fact that researchers use qualitative research with the aim of uncovering reality (Creswell, 2014). The goal of qualitative research, according to Patton (2002), is to understand specific circumstances within their specific environments, including the interactions that take place there. According to Scott (2002), the goal of qualitative research is to comprehend the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences and the world around them. Patton (2002) defined this process as an analytical search for a more complete understanding. Qualitative research methodology is extensive, as shown in the definition above. It strongly emphasizes finding meaning, according to Scott (2002). As a result, I had the chance to undertake in-depth research as part of my investigation, using methods such as open-ended questionnaires and interviews to collect data. This strategy allowed me to obtain a

variety of viewpoints from the participating students, helping me gain a deeper understanding of various important justifications and opposing perspectives.

3.6. Axiological Stance

Deciding what you value in your research is the goal of axiology according to Heron and Reason (1997). This is crucial since the researcher's values influence both how the study is conducted and what is found to be meaningful in the findings. It helps in the consideration of ethical concerns, integrity, and the effects of research on individuals and society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It has an impact on how researchers organize, carry out, and interpret their research, ensuring that it adheres to moral standards and the values and ideals of both the individual researcher and the community (Heron & Reason, 1997). My axiological stance in this study was influenced by values in qualitative study. This meant that I as a researcher was inseparably linked to the study and unable to be separated from the information gathered. My personal values influenced the interpretations of the research findings as claimed by Merton & Kendall (1946). Consequently, throughout the research process, I maintained the position of self-reflection and transparency regarding my own views and role. Furthermore, I acknowledged and respected the participants' values as well as their points of view, and the contextual elements influencing the research.

3.7. Research Design

For doing educational research, researchers have many alternatives. Although there are many ways to acquire knowledge, Jenkins (2000) contends that the early difficulties in research methods frequently revolve around worries about quality, study objectives, and the quest for empirical precision and accuracy. This suggests that the best empirical research methodologies for acquiring accurate insights into the topic, the nature of the inquiry, and the specific study emphasis all have a significant impact on the paradigm choice. As a result, the qualitative paradigm drawing on an interpretivist kind of design was used for this study, because I was trying to make sense of the fourth-year education students' experiences and their thoughts as well as their perceptions about inclusive teaching. Qualitative research is an investigative technique that emphasizes on comprehensive interpretations, situation, and individual meaning through subjective information. The investigation is done using interviews, observations, and analysing text to acquire thorough understanding of people's viewpoints and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretivism paradigm, according to Gage (1989), is a qualitative research design. It claims that people have a level of consciousness, demonstrating

that they are not merely puppets that passively respond to outside circumstances. According to interpretivism, humans are complex and have varied ways of perceiving and comprehending the same occurrences, which causes them to give different interpretations for their actions (Gage, 1989).

3.8. Research Methodology

A case study-style methodological approach was used in my study because it concentrated on an in-depth examination of a single case or a limited number of participants to gain insights and understanding into a particular phenomenon or setting (Yin, 2003). A case study is, according to Yin (2003), "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 13). This fit perfectly in my case as I was only looking at understanding this specific case's behaviour of fourth-year education students at one higher education institute in key settings by delving into its complexity. These fourth-year education students received the same first-year, second year, and, third-year program which meant they went through the same system and curriculum to get to their fourth year. Therefore, they had been exposed to the same kinds of situations, making this a bounded case study.

3.9. Research Site and Participants

The invitation was given to all fourth-year foundation phase education students at one higher education institution in Gauteng. I decided to invite only Foundation Phase education students to participate in my study because early childhood education is very important when it comes to moulding lifelong educational and socio-emotional results. The Foundation Phase stage is critical to develop the foundational skills that are needed in this age group which are from three to nine years. The skills include numeracy, literacy as well as problem-solving skills (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Research has also shown that initial educational exposure remarkably influences future learning specifically in situations that are impacted by socioeconomic difficulties (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, learners this young are exceptionally an easy target for being at a disadvantage more so when they are coming from impoverishment backgrounds, have restricted access to resources, and require educational and emotional support, all these affect their self-efficacy and learner participation (Florian, 2014). Hence, concentrating on Foundation Phase education students, my study aimed at investigating the degree to which teacher self-efficacy, inclusive pedagogical practices, and specialized

learning support influences learning competencies in this developmental phase. The selection was based on those who responded positively or agreed to participate. Rapley (2016) agrees with Merriam (2002) in asserting that qualitative research, which aims to understand the importance of a phenomenon via the perspectives of the participants, requires the careful selection of a sample from which the most insightful information can be gained. The sample was therefore chosen with the expectation that it had the capacity to provide significant and informative information for the study. This decision was made with the hope that the fourth-year foundation phase education students at one higher education institution in Gauteng who were chosen would be able to add their wealth of knowledge and experiences to the research findings. The research site is situated in an urban area and is relatively well-resourced, but it caters for all students from different areas including those in the vicinity as well as those that travel from rural areas.

3.10. Data Collection Methods

I used open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in that order. which enabled participants to articulate their ideas, viewpoints, and experiences in their own words. Open-ended questionnaires offered an organized structure with free-flowing questions for participants to answer, whereas semi-structured interviews gave greater freedom, which enabled me to delve deeper into answers and covered subjects in greater detail. My plan called for handing out online questionnaires, a type of research tool made up of questions intended to gather data. I planned to use this technique prior to interviewing a group of six students. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a smaller, more focused sample after the preliminary results from the questionnaires were examined to go further into specific themes or subjects that surfaced from the questionnaire replies. More in-depth investigation was possible with semi-structured interviews, this gave me the chance to elucidate participants' answers, identified underlying motives, and obtained a deeper comprehension of their experiences. Closed-ended questionnaires, according to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), are well-organized and simple to analyze. However, I firmly believed that open-ended questionnaires would be more appropriate for my qualitative research because they gave students the flexibility to offer unrestricted responses. Using questionnaires had several advantages. First off, the students had the freedom to fill them out whenever it was convenient for them because I did not have to be physically present. This approach was effective and guaranteed quick responses. Students were accustomed to the style of questionnaires, which often only caused mild anxiety. Importantly, the responses were entirely the students' own because I did not give

any verbal or visual clues that would sway their answers in a particular manner, thereby creating a space where students did not feel under pressure to react in a certain way. Nonetheless, there were certain disadvantages to consider. For instance, students could have given false information to feel better about themselves. The limited possible responses might also have resulted in answers that were incomplete or poorly understood, making it difficult to fix issues later. According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), some students might have been reluctant to respond to queries out of concern that it might not have been in their best interests. I intended to assure students that their responses would be anonymous. I also took great care in designing the open-ended questionnaire, phrasing the questions carefully so that they were clear and understandable. The open-ended questionnaire is available in Appendix A. It was sent to all fourth-year Foundation Phase students, and I hoped to receive between ten and twenty responses, but I only got eight responses.

I extend the invitation to all fourth-year foundation phase students and hoped to obtain a participant sample of between five to ten students for semi-structured interviews and I managed to get six participants. The study's goals were thoroughly explained to the participants before the interviews, and their consent to participate in the study was requested. Fylan (2005) described semi-structured interviews as deliberate dialogues where the researcher is aware of the questions they are trying to answer. This implies that semi-structured interviews are more than just casual discussions since the researcher will steer the discourse toward a certain goal. Adams (2015) and Schmidt (2004) both agree that semi-structured interviews, which provide follow-up questions with a lot more freedom, make greater use of the knowledge possibilities. This suggests that the researcher is free to simplify questions if necessary. As a result, according to Adams, (2015), the researcher can direct or focus the talk in semi-structured interviews on topics they see as being crucial for the study.

Any research project must carefully analyze the choice of data-gathering technologies because it is a critical component. Fylan (2005) stressed that the selection of data collection methods should be in line with the study question. To put it another way, these resources should not be chosen at random but rather should be uniquely suited to the nature of the study question. Fylan (2005) agrees with both Adams's (2015) and Schmidt's (2004) viewpoints, which support the use of semi-structured interviews since they allow for a more in-depth investigation of the research issue and a thorough examination of meanings. This emphasizes how effective semi-structured interviews are for examining the root reasons and obtaining an understanding of

people's viewpoints, visions, critiques of the present, and outlooks for the future. Semi-structured interviews seemed to be the ideal choice of data collection methods given that this study was concerned with examining the present experiences of fourth-year education students.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study as the primary data collection technique. Due to their highly interactive and open-ended nature, qualitative research methods are supported by Morse (1994). Additionally, because they encourage active engagement between participants and researchers, semi-structured interviews easily mesh with qualitative research. Morse (1994), stressed that the interactive methods chosen for qualitative research are necessarily interpretive and subjective, reflecting the researcher's views, experiences, and biases. Because their own influences invariably shape interpretations, experiences, and prejudices, researchers are unable to completely dissociate themselves from the study process. A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to ensure that key questions were posed whilst retaining the option to ask additional or probing questions. This schedule is available in Appendix A.

3.11. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used as the research's chosen analytical technique. Thematic analysis is a method for categorizing, exploring, and spotting patterns in acquired data, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). They contended that thematic analysis makes it easier to organize and present data in an understandable and basic manner, making it simple to analyze. With the extra benefits of adaptability and completeness, it provides a useful method for analyzing qualitative data.

Six steps make up the thematic analysis process, which I meticulously followed throughout this investigation. Braun and Clarke (2006) underlined the need to familiarize oneself with the data as the first step after data gathering. A thorough examination of the questionnaires and interview transcripts was done. To achieve a thorough grasp, I partook in numerous reading sessions and audio listening sessions. To make the audio recordings more accessible, I also transcribed them. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocated starting the coding process by emphasizing possibly pertinent concepts as the next step. The second step then entails the development of initial codes, which act as classifications for data themes. Prior to moving on to the third phase of discovering themes, it is crucial to understand that all data must first be

coded. At this point, I carefully examined my codes and investigated how different codes might combine to create broad, overarching themes.

The process of theme refinement was my focus in the fourth step. To provide a more convincing portrayal, this phase entailed a rigorous assessment of the themes that had been discovered. Some ideas were dropped, and others were added. The definition and naming of these themes were included in the fifth phase. To do this, they were categorized according to their content and arranged in a logical and trustworthy way. To further aid comprehension and clarity, I included thorough descriptions for each theme. The sixth and final phase involved compiling a thorough report that shows the fascinating findings from the investigation. All the discovered themes are included in this report, which provided a comprehensive overview of the results.

3.12. Rigour

Guba and Lincoln (2003) claimed that the accuracy of a qualitative study can be questionable because it is general, and accepts diverse realities, knowledge, and methods without evidence. However, Tracy (2010) claimed that qualitative research is of high quality and is demonstrated by a rich complexity of abundance, descriptions, and explanations. This suggests that qualitative research should provide thick descriptions and explanations that are a result of wide reading from the researcher’s side. In this study, various practices were employed to achieve rich rigor by going beyond what was convenient, opportunism, or taking an easy way out, (Tracy, 2010). Therefore, this study considered credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.12.1. Credibility

According to Tracy (2010), credibility includes the study's findings' dependability, persuasiveness, and plausibility. Basically, the research findings should be credible, judged acceptable, and have a degree of plausibility that justifies consideration for adoption. In accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) viewpoint, this study sought to provide results that are not only trustworthy but also persuasive to readers, incentivizing them to base judgments on the researcher's conclusions. By following Golafshani's (2003) advice that credibility must be acquired by consistency, precision, reliability, and repeatability rather than being a natural trait, this objective was achieved.

According to Guba and Lincoln (2003), the concept of credibility refers to the conviction that study findings are accurate. Certain measures were implemented in this study to ensure

trustworthiness. First, every participant had the option to decline to take part in the study without suffering any negative effects. As recommended by Shenton (2004), this voluntary participation technique assisted me in guaranteeing that only participants who were genuinely willing to contribute to the study were included.

3.12.2. Transferability

According to Guba and Lincoln (2003), transferability is the capacity of research findings to demonstrate their applicability in many contexts. They put forth a technique known as "thick description," which entails giving a thorough justification of experiences within a specific context while taking societal and cultural interaction patterns into account (Holloway, 1997). In this study, I sought to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions derived from my research could be applicable to other Higher education institutions by providing extensive descriptions of the research site.

3.12.3. Dependability

The ability of the researcher to show that their findings are accurate and repeatable is referred to as dependability, according to Guba and Lincoln (2003). Utilizing inquiry audits, where a lone researcher who is not involved in the study analyzes both the research process and its findings, is a reliable way to ensure dependability. According to Guba and Lincoln (2003), the purpose of this examination is to confirm the veracity of the findings and determine whether the explanations, deductions, and conclusions are consistent with the information gathered.

3.12.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is another important factor to consider because it indicates how much the study's conclusions are influenced by the participants rather than the investigator's bias, encouragement, or interest (Guba & Lincoln, 2003). As recommended by Guba and Lincoln (2003), I employed an audit trail in my study to provide a clear explanation of every step done from the start of the investigation until the completion of the findings report. A deeper understanding cannot be attained by relying solely on one type of data collection. Instead, I was able to cross-verify and guarantee consistency among the conclusions drawn from questionnaires and interviews.

3.13. Ethical Considerations

I followed the University's procedures to get approval from the ethics committee before starting my project. Pseudonyms were used to safeguard participant identity. All information gathered will be safely kept at the Wits School of Education (WSOE) and discarded in a discreet manner

after three to five years. Each participant received thorough letters outlining the study, which they voluntarily signed for consent.

3.14. Conclusion

A mixed-methods approach was used to comprehensively explore the research objectives. Quantitative data was collected through online questionnaires, allowing for efficient collection of information. To enhance these findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted, providing qualitative insights into participants' experiences and perspectives. This combination of methods assisted a vigorous analysis, enabling both the identification of general patterns and the exploration of in-depth personal narratives. Integrating these methodologies made the research to achieve a remarkable understanding of the studied phenomena.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the themes that emerged from my data collection, reflecting the experiences of fourteen fourth year Foundation Phase students at one selected university. My study made use of questionnaires and interviews as the two main data sources. This study's qualitative nature needed a thematic analysis with the purpose of fully understanding the participants' viewpoints. This chapter begins with presenting the questionnaire analysis and then discusses the findings from the semi-structured individual interviews.

4.2. Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, Section A: Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Education and Section B: Self-Efficacy in relation to the four competencies to inclusion. Section A aimed to elicit responses from participants that would provide insight into the ways in which they understand and define the concepts of self-efficacy and inclusive education. Section B aimed to explore their own personal feelings of self-efficacy in relation to perceived competency to teach inclusively. In this section experiences and perceptions were elicited regarding their preparation for, and feelings of readiness for teaching.

4.2.1. Section A: Self- Efficacy and Inclusive Education

4.2.2. Understanding of Self-Efficacy

In response to the prompt "*Please explain your own understanding of self-efficacy*," participants expressed a range of perspectives. The first two participants described self-efficacy as the capacity and confidence to handle challenges, offering a broader understanding that includes managing difficult tasks and exerting control over one's motivation, behavior, and social environment. An example is when Participant 1 stated, "*Self-efficacy is the belief that l have the ability and confidence to handle difficult task and be able to achieve them*." On the other hand, several participants defined self-efficacy more directly as simply believing in one's ability to achieve goals, presenting a more straightforward and goal-oriented view. For example, Participant 5 stated that, "Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to complete tasks or reach goals." One participant took a more practical approach by defining self-efficacy as "*being able to plan, deliver, and prepare for lessons to achieve good results in class*" (P4, Questionnaire). This task-specific perspective ties into the broader and goal-oriented definitions. Overall, while the participants varied in their interpretations, from focusing on

overcoming challenges to achieving specific goals or applying confidence in practical contexts. All agree that self-efficacy is rooted in belief in one's abilities. This shared understanding underscores the central role of confidence in managing tasks, achieving objectives, and excelling in real-world applications like teaching.

4.2.3. Understanding of Inclusive Education

Participants defined inclusive education in two main ways, either from a deficit perspective or a diversity perspective. One group focused on addressing the specific needs of learners, such as disabilities, special needs, or learning challenges, while the other emphasized ensuring that no one is excluded based on diversity characteristics, such as culture, language, or background. For example, Participant 1 described inclusive education as accommodating the needs of all learners, specifically highlighting disabilities, special needs, and learning challenges when they stated, "*Inclusive education is the ability to teach in a way that accommodate the needs of all learners. This includes the disability, learners with special needs and learners who have learning challenges*" (P1 Questionnaire). This reflects a deficit-based perspective, viewing inclusive education as a means to address gaps or provide extra help for those requiring additional support. By including learning challenges beyond disabilities, participant 1 demonstrated a broader understanding of diverse learner needs. On the other hand, Participant 2 defined inclusive education as ensuring that no one is excluded because of their culture or background, reflecting a diversity-based perspective by saying, "*Inclusive education means that no one is excluded because of their culture or backgrounds*" (P2 Questionnaire). This approach prioritizes respecting and valuing differences, emphasizing inclusion beyond specific needs. Participant 3 bridged the two perspectives by saying, "*Education that includes all children, real learning opportunities for everyone even those who have been traditionally excluded not only children with disabilities but speakers of minority languages too - inclusive education caters for all"* (P3 Questionnaire). Participant 3 described inclusive education as creating real learning opportunities for everyone, including traditionally excluded groups such as children with disabilities and speakers of minority languages. This aligns more closely with the diversity perspective, as it broadens inclusion across various dimensions like language and culture while still recognizing specific learner needs.

In summary, the responses collectively highlight a shared understanding of inclusive education as a framework that values and supports all learners, regardless of their differences. However, they reveal different levels of focus and depth. Some participants emphasize addressing specific learner needs (deficit perspective), while others highlight acknowledging diversity and

creating an equitable learning environment (diversity perspective). These varying definitions reflect the multifaceted nature of inclusive education, combining practical strategies for supporting individual needs with broader efforts to foster belonging, fairness, and systemic inclusivity. Together, the responses demonstrate both the practical and philosophical dimensions of inclusive education.

The participants collectively view the purpose of inclusive education as ensuring fair, equitable, and quality education for all learners, with their responses highlighting overlapping themes and distinct emphases. Some participants for example participants 1, 2 and 8 focus on equitable access to education, for example, "*It ensures that no students are left behind especially those with special needs*" (P8 Questionnaire), emphasizing that all learners, particularly those with challenges or special needs, should receive the same quality of education and opportunities to learn. Others for example participants 3, 4 and 7 highlight the importance of embracing diversity by accommodating and catering to differences in race, gender, disability, learning styles, or other characteristics, emphasizing the need to foster inclusivity in mainstream education. For example, Participant 3 stated, "*To embrace everyone regardless of race, gender, disability, medical or other needs - it gives everyone the opportunity*" (P3 Questionnaire). Some responses such as participants 5 and 6 delve into the personal and emotional dimensions of inclusive education, stressing its role in creating a sense of belonging and supporting individual growth by tailoring education to meet the unique needs of each learner. This is expressed by participant 5 who said, "*The purpose of inclusive education is to ensure that learners receive equal opportunities to learn and grow by keeping in mind the different learning styles and needs of learners*" (P5 Questionnaire). From their responses participants 1, 4, and 8 take a deficit-based view, for example Participant 8 who states that, "*It ensures that no students are left behind especially those with special needs*" (P8 Questionnaire), emphasizing the need to support learners with challenges, such as disabilities, special needs, or learning difficulties, to ensure they are not left behind. These responses focus on addressing gaps and providing tailored support to help learners overcome specific barriers. Most of the participants adopt a diversity-based perspective, emphasizing the importance of embracing and accommodating differences in race, gender, culture, learning styles, and other characteristics. They stress inclusivity as creating a sense of belonging and providing equitable opportunities for all, regardless of background. While participants vary in their emphasis, some prioritizing fairness and access, others focusing on diversity and inclusion, all agree that inclusive education is about recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of learners, ensuring no one is left behind,

and fostering a supportive and welcoming environment that promotes learning and growth for everyone.

4.2.4. Inclusive Teaching Methods and Strategies

Participants were asked to rate their knowledge of Inclusive teaching methods (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) and indicate why they gave themselves that rating as shown in figure 4 below.

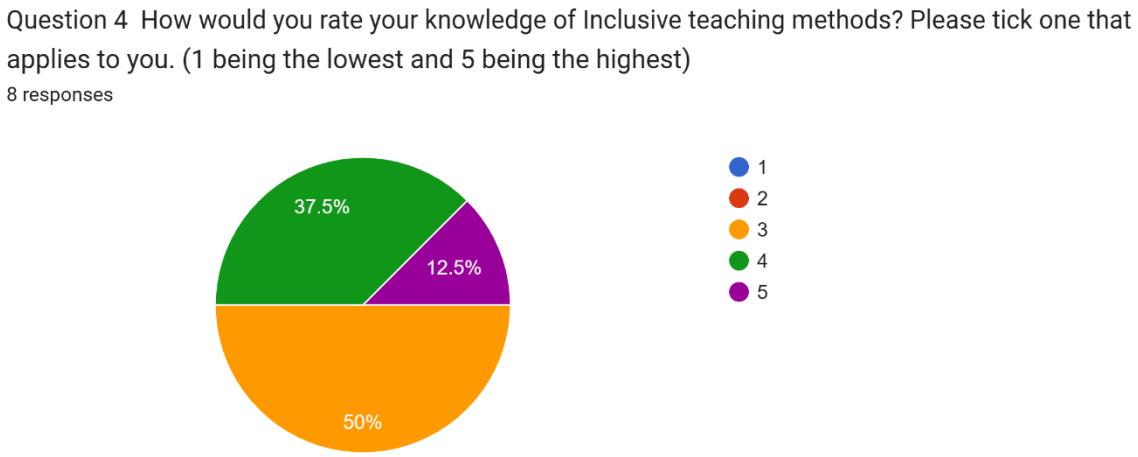


Figure 4: Knowledge of Inclusive Teaching Methods.

The participants' self-ratings on their knowledge of inclusive teaching methods reveal an interesting link to their earlier responses and perspectives on inclusive education. The majority rated themselves 3 or higher, with none indicating a complete lack of knowledge. Those who rated themselves in the middle of the scale, which is a 3, seem to focus more on inclusive education as meeting specific needs, such as disabilities or learning challenges. This group which is 50% on the graph may feel uncertain about their ability to apply inclusive methods effectively for diverse learners, recognizing that they may need more training or practical experience to address those specific challenges. In contrast, participants who rated themselves higher (4 or 5) tend to emphasize inclusivity from a diversity perspective, focusing on ensuring that no one is excluded due to differences in culture, language, or background. These participants are more confident in their ability to foster a welcoming and equitable learning environment, which might explain their higher ratings. This aligns with their openness to exploring and adapting to diversity in the classroom.

The ratings and responses suggest that those who focus on the needs of specific learners such as disabilities, might feel less confident because they recognize the need for tailored strategies and specialized training. They are more aware of gaps in their knowledge, particularly regarding individualized teaching methods, for example when asked why they gave themselves that rating they responded, "*It is always important to consider learners' different backgrounds, the way they process information, and their abilities in a classroom. However, I feel I am not equipped in creating a supportive learning environment for all learners*" (P5 Questionnaire). On the other hand, those who adopt a more diversity-focused perspective tend to rate themselves higher because they see inclusive education as an overarching goal of creating equitable opportunities for all learners, making them feel more prepared to implement inclusive practices in a broader sense as noted by Participant 7 who gave themselves a rating of 4, "*I have been participating in programmes that equip students with the challenges of inclusive education. I did an online course on inclusive education*" (P7 Questionnaire). This distinction highlights that participants who emphasize diversity may feel more confident in their ability to create inclusive environments because they view it as part of a broader, more generalized approach to education, rather than focusing on fixing deficits.

The self-ratings of participants reflect a combination of their theoretical knowledge and practical experience, with a common theme of recognizing the need for further development in applying inclusive methods effectively. Factors such as the Covid pandemic, limited in-person learning experiences during teaching experience, and a lack of exposure to real-world teaching scenarios are also noted as contributors to the lower ratings. Overall, the responses show that while participants may have a good theoretical understanding of inclusive education, they feel less confident when it comes to its practical application, with a need for more hands-on experience and specialized training as stated by Participant 4, "*Because different methods are available, and I am not sure as yet how to apply them*" (P 4 Questionnaire).

It becomes clear that participants who rated themselves lower which is a 3 focused on addressing specific learner needs, a deficit perspective, while those who rated themselves higher, 4 or 5 tend to focus on fostering a diverse and inclusive environment, a diversity perspective. These differing approaches explain the range of self-ratings, with those focused on specific needs feeling less confident due to gaps in knowledge or experience, and those focused on diversity feeling more equipped to handle the broader concept of inclusion in the classroom.

Participants were also asked to indicate pedagogical strategies that they would be comfortable using in their classroom next year and why. Their choices are indicated in the figure below.

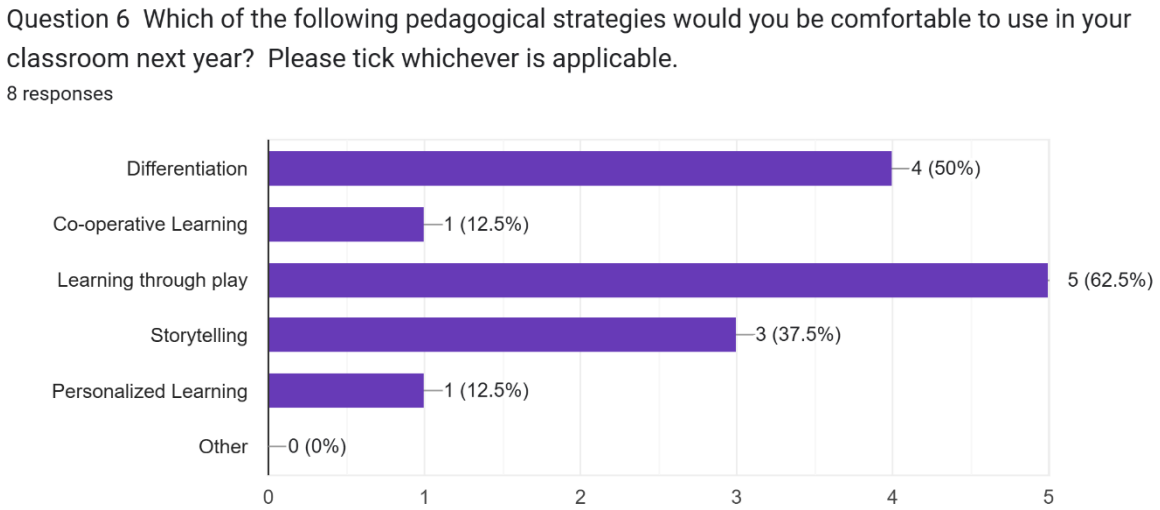


Figure 5: Pedagogical Practices.

The chosen pedagogical strategies, differentiation, cooperative learning, learning through play, storytelling, and personalized learning align with the participants' confidence levels and their understanding of effective teaching methods. Learning through play is a popular choice among participants chosen by five of the participants, and they emphasized how it helps learners engage their senses, promotes active learning, and improves knowledge retention. It is followed by differentiation chosen by four participants, and they say differentiation allows them to cater to diverse learning needs by adjusting activities, materials, and teaching approaches. Participant 1 stated that, "*I prefer to use differentiation because l am able to accommodate the needs of the strong and weak learners with different activities make sure that all learners are happy and ready to learn with confidence*" (P1 Questionnaire). Participants who chose differentiation emphasize flexibility in instruction, and the ability to support both strong and struggling learners showing a strong awareness of inclusive teaching practices. However, one participant mentions only having a rough idea of differentiation and said, "I have a rough idea about what differentiation is and it lets teachers use different methods and materials, which can help students understand better and make difficult ideas easier for everyone to learn" (P6 Questionnaire), indicating that while they recognize its importance, they may still need more guidance in its application.

Those that chose storytelling see it as an effective way to connect with learners, particularly those with different learning needs. Personalized learning chosen by one participant is also valued as a proven method for accommodating individual differences. Confidence in using these strategies is linked to prior exposure and preparation. Some participants mention having teaching aids that will help them implement differentiation effectively, while others express confidence because they have already observed the effectiveness of these strategies in practice. However, responses vary in depth, some provide detailed reasoning for their choices for example differentiation allows flexibility and meets learner needs, while others are more general for example "*They support learners' learning*" (P2 Questionnaire). Overall, the responses suggest that while participants are generally confident in their chosen strategies, some may still require further training and experience to fully implement them effectively in an inclusive classroom.

4.2.5. Participant Beliefs and Feelings

This section explores participants' self-efficacy beliefs in relation to inclusive education.

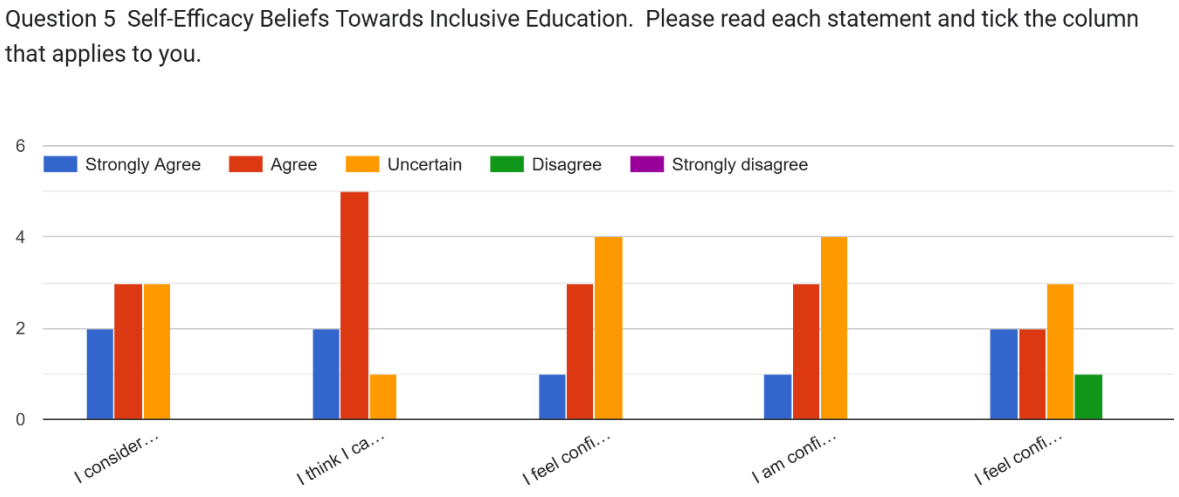


Figure 6: Self-Efficacy Beliefs towards Inclusive Education.

The analysis of self-efficacy beliefs towards inclusive education reveals varying levels of confidence among participants. The bar chart indicates a significant number of uncertain responses, suggesting that many fourth-year students feel they still need more training and experience in implementing inclusive teaching. This aligns with participant responses, where some express strong confidence, particularly in lesson planning for example using differentiated instruction like visuals and varying question difficulty, while others acknowledge

their need for improvement. On one hand, those who feel highly confident, participants1, 2, 3, and 8 fall into the agree or strongly agree categories on the graph, whereas those who feel somewhat confident, participant 6 correspond with the uncertain responses.

On the other hand, participants who lack confidence, participants 4, 5, and 7 highlight challenges such as limited practical experience, the impact of Covid on training, and difficulties in creating an inclusive classroom environment. These concerns align with the disagree and strongly disagree sections of the graph, further emphasizing the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. Many participants recognize the importance of inclusive teaching but feel unprepared to fully implement it in a real classroom setting.

When asked how they feel about including all learners the responses were as shown in the figure below.

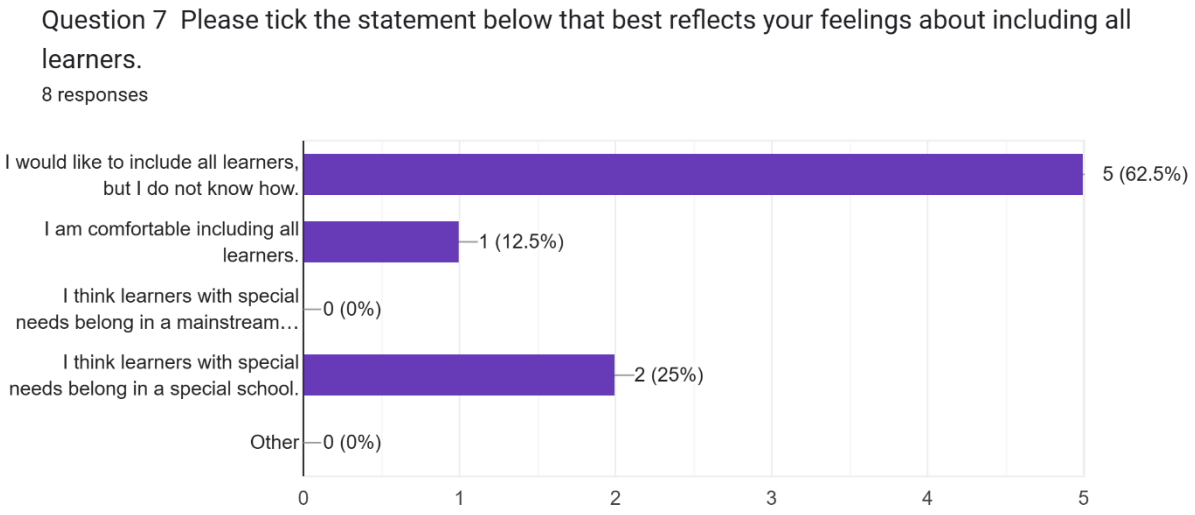


Figure 7: Feelings about Including all learners.

The responses reveal a mix of willingness, uncertainty, and exclusionary beliefs among participants regarding inclusive education. Most participants are willing to include all learners but feel unprepared and feel that they lack the necessary skills to do so effectively. This is shown by the most chosen statement which was, "*I would like to include all learners, but I do not know how*." The majority express a desire to be inclusive but admit they do not know how. Only one participant feels fully confident in their ability to include all learners, showing that some individuals have had more exposure or training in inclusive teaching than others.

However, two participants believe that learners with special needs belong in special schools, as they chose the statement that says, "*I think learners with special needs belong in a special school*." shows a lack of confidence in inclusive education or a traditional mindset about special needs support. These responses suggest that while there is an overall positive attitude towards inclusion, many participants feel they need more training, strategies, and hands-on experience to feel fully prepared. Additionally, some resistance to inclusion still exists.

Participants were asked to rate their overall confidence in their capacity to teach inclusively on a scale from 1 – 5 and their reasons for giving themselves that rating. (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest) and indicate why they gave themselves that rating. The results are shown in the figure below.

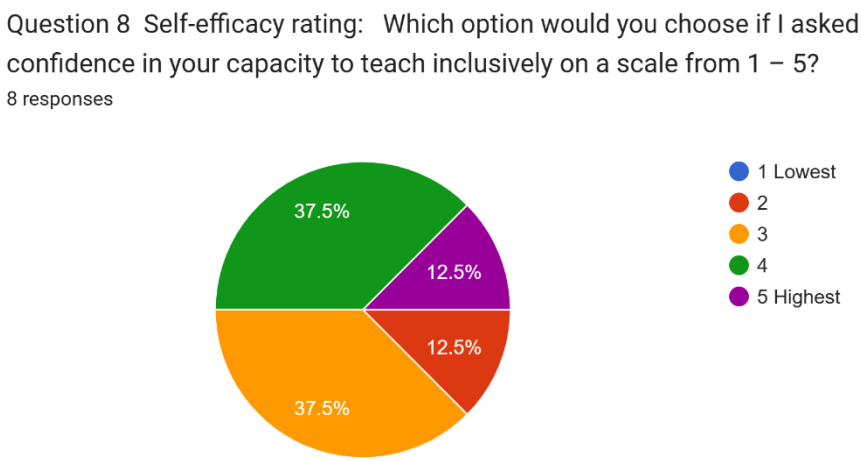


Figure 8: Self-Efficacy Rating.

The participants' ratings and explanations for their confidence in teaching inclusively reveal both shared perspectives and distinct differences. Across all ratings, there is a collective acknowledgment of the challenges in implementing inclusive education, particularly regarding gaps in training, experience, and the practical application of strategies. This shared understanding is coupled with a universal commitment to improving inclusive practices and adapting teaching methods to meet diverse learner needs. The impact of external factors, such as the Covid pandemic, is also noted, with many participants highlighting how it limited their practical exposure to inclusive teaching. However, differences emerge in how participants perceive their abilities. Those who rated themselves lower, participants 4 and 5 in particular tend to focus on specific challenges, such as addressing deficits in training or learner needs,

and express uncertainty about their preparedness, reflecting a more deficit-oriented perspective. For example, the reason given was that "*I have not been fully trained to consider the needs of all learners or to prepare for setbacks, such as adjusting lessons to meet different learners' needs*" (P5 Questionnaire). In contrast, participants with higher ratings, participants 2 and 3 draw confidence from their theoretical understanding, training, and openness to growth, often demonstrating a diversity-oriented perspective that emphasizes creating inclusive environments for all learners. This is shown by Participant 3 response, "*When planning my lesson plans, I plan in such a way that I include all my learners for example auditory, visual, kinaesthetic incorporating all styles in order to achieve better academic results*" (P3 Questionnaire). Despite these differences, all participants show a recognition of the need for continuous learning, displaying that confidence in inclusive teaching is closely tied to both self-perception and external opportunities for development.

4.2.6. Participant Experiences

This section explores participants' experiences over four years of study that have resulted in them feeling more confident or less confident in their teaching ability and why they think so.

The responses from the participants reveal both shared and unique experiences that have shaped their confidence in teaching. A shared theme among most participants is the value of hands-on teaching experiences, exposure to real classrooms, and opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge. For example, Participant 6 shared that, "*During my four years of studying, I had many experiences that helped me feel more confident in teaching. One important moment was my teaching experience, where I worked directly with students. This hands-on experience allowed me to use what I learned in my lectures and showed me that I could manage a classroom. This experience made me feel confident*" (P6 Questionnaire). These experiences are frequently cited as critical in building confidence by allowing participants to work directly with learners, solve challenges, and develop practical teaching skills. Additionally, the influence of academic modules, feedback from supervisors or peers, and learners' engagement and enthusiasm during lessons are common factors that boost confidence. However, differences emerge in the extent and type of exposure participants have had. Some participants highlight positive experiences, such as receiving feedback, observing the impact of their teaching, and leveraging advancements like online learning, as key factors in their confidence growth. Conversely, others point to gaps in their experiences, such as limited opportunities to observe experienced teachers, insufficient feedback, or challenges transitioning theory into practice, as reasons for lower confidence. These differences indicate that while most participants value

practical engagement, the level of access to such opportunities and the quality of support during their studies play a significant role in shaping their confidence.

The participants' responses show both similarities and differences in the experiences that have led to feelings of reduced confidence in their teaching abilities. A common theme is that all participants have encountered moments of uncertainty or challenge during their studies, which undermined their confidence. These include difficulties in addressing diverse learner needs for example auditory problems, managing classrooms effectively, or adapting teaching methods when learners struggle to grasp concepts. Additionally, external factors like the Covid pandemic and its shift to online learning are widely noted as having limited participants' preparation for in-person teaching. However, the differences lie in the specific nature of the challenges and their sources. Some participants attribute their reduced confidence to personal experiences, such as receiving discouraging feedback from lecturers as noted by Participant 3 who said, "*When I was third year, I prepared for my crit lesson but when my supervisor came, he crushed everything without even acknowledging what I had done and my teaching styles. this incident left me crushed because of the personal comments passed"* (P3 Questionnaire). Struggling with classroom management during teaching experience was also mentioned by Participant 6, "*During my four years of studying, I had some experiences that made me feel less confident in my teaching. One time, I had trouble managing a classroom during a lesson. I felt unprepared and didn't know how to keep the students interested. This made me doubt my ability to teach well. These challenges showed me that I still have a lot to learn, which affected my confidence in my teaching skills*" (P6 Questionnaire). Others cite systemic or structural issues, such as a lack of full-time classroom exposure or limited skills and training to address specific learner needs as. Additionally, some participants emphasize the impact of academic results or rigid teaching methods, while other participants focus on broader external disruptions, like the pandemic's restriction on in-person learning. These differences highlight the varying ways individuals perceive and respond to challenges, but the overarching theme is a shared recognition of the need for more support, feedback, and practical experience to build confidence.

4.3. Section B: Self-efficacy in relation to the four competencies for inclusion

In Section B, participants were asked to select statements that reflected their approach to teaching and explain why they chose them. They also picked a statement that resonated with their beliefs and explained its significance. Additionally, they identified a statement that best described their own opinions and how they perceived their self-efficacy in teamwork. Lastly,

they chose a statement that captured their feelings about their personal and professional development and described their level of self-efficacy in these areas.

4.3.1. Reflections on approaches to teaching

In this section participants selected statements that they felt were reflective of their approach to teaching and their reasons. Their responses are shown in the figure below.

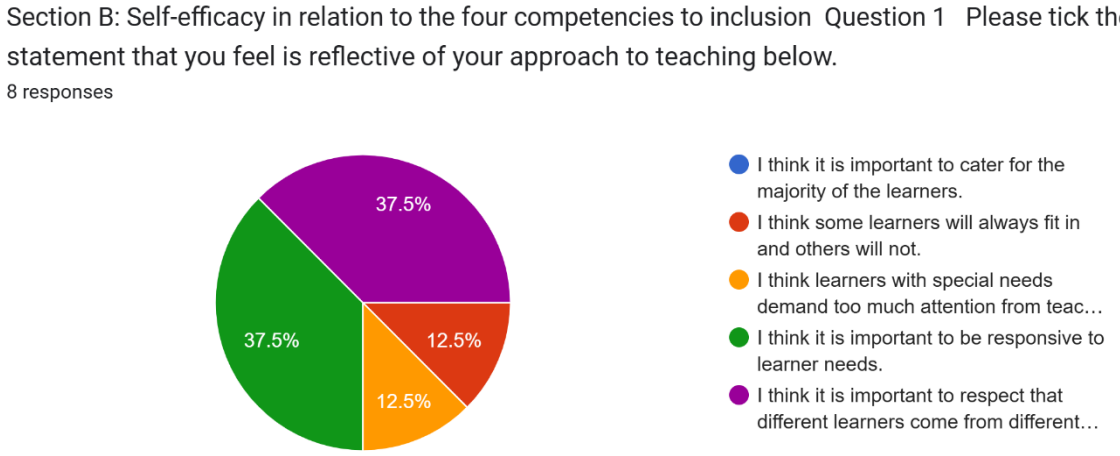


Figure 9: Reflections of Approaches to Teaching.

The most frequently chosen statements were "*I think it is important to respect that different learners come from different backgrounds*" and "*I think it is important to be responsive to learner needs*." The responses provided align well with the chosen statements, as participants who emphasized the importance of respecting diverse backgrounds discussed how inclusivity foster a positive learning environment where all learners feel valued. Similarly, those who focused on responsiveness to learner needs highlighted the necessity of adapting to different learning styles and providing individualized support to ensure learners success. It is also interesting because the most chosen statements align with their earlier definitions of inclusive education. This consistency indicate that participants see inclusion as an active process of adapting to learner diversity rather than merely acknowledging it. However, while they recognize the importance of meeting individual needs, their confidence in implementing inclusive strategies varies. Some participants feel prepared due to hands-on teaching experiences and lesson planning, while others express uncertainty, particularly in handling specific challenges like special educational needs or classroom management. Previous responses also highlight how factors such as training, exposure to real classrooms, and the

impact of Covid have influenced their self-efficacy. While their attitudes toward inclusion are strong, their practical skills and confidence in applying inclusive methods differ which may indicate a need for further support and development in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

However, one participant selected the statement "*I think some learners will always fit in and others will not*," reflecting a more cautious perspective on inclusion, recognizing that social and academic differences can still pose challenges. Another participant chose "*I think learners with special needs demand too much attention from teachers,*" showing concerns about balancing instructional time between learners with varying needs. The two participants who selected different statements expressed a more sceptical view of inclusion compared to the majority, who emphasized responsiveness to learner needs.

When compared to their definitions and explanations of inclusive education, these responses stand out as less idealistic. Most participants defined inclusive education in terms of responsiveness and ensuring all learners succeed, but these two responses introduce a more pragmatic, perhaps less confident, perspective. This demonstrates that while many participants conceptually support inclusion, some struggle with how to make it work in practice, particularly when they feel underprepared or lack the necessary resources and training. Their statements align with earlier responses where some participants expressed doubts about their own competence, particularly in managing diverse needs effectively. This indicates a critical gap between the aspiration for inclusive teaching and the perceived ability to implement it successfully in a real classroom.

4.3.2. Reflections on personal beliefs

In this section participants selected statements that best aligned with their beliefs. Their beliefs are represented in the figure below.

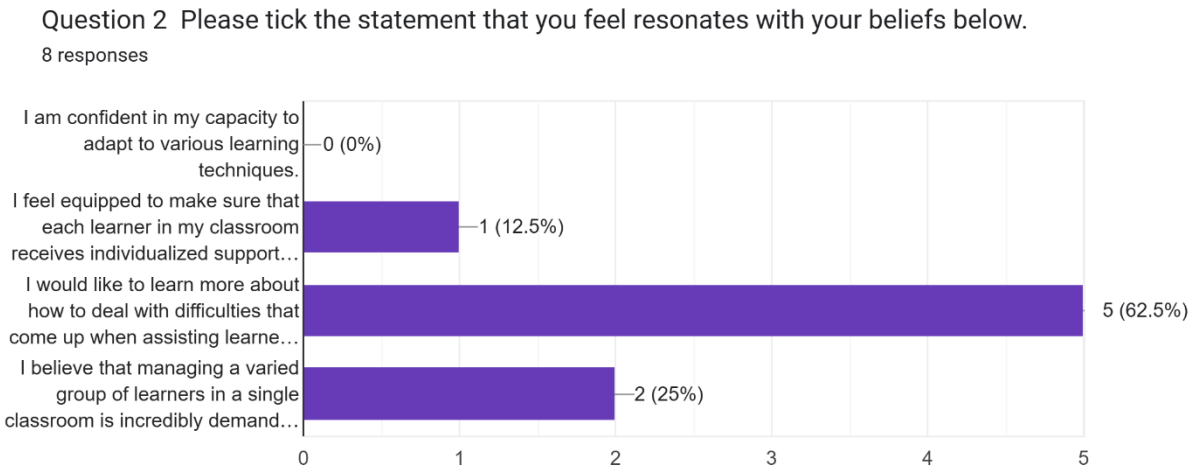


Figure 10: Reflections of Approaches to Teaching.

The responses suggest that while participants generally support inclusive education, many feel underprepared when it comes to effectively assisting learners with special needs. The majority selected the statement *"I would like to learn more about how to deal with difficulties that come up when assisting learners with special learning needs,"* participants are acknowledging a recognition of gaps in their training and a desire for further development in this area. Their explanations reinforce this, as several participants express that while they understand inclusive education conceptually, they lack practical strategies and experience in supporting diverse learners.

A few participants chose the statement *"I believe that managing a varied group of learners in a single classroom is incredibly demanding and challenging."* Their explanations show an overwhelmed perspective regarding concerns about the complexity of meeting individual needs in a diverse classroom. This aligns with earlier responses where some participants expressed doubts about their competence in implementing inclusive teaching, especially when faced with real-life classroom challenges. Only one participant felt equipped to provide individualized support, reinforcing the idea that most participants do not yet feel fully confident in their ability to implement inclusive practices. This connects to previous responses where participants defined inclusive education as responsiveness to learner needs but also acknowledged barriers such as lack of training, experience, and support. Their recognition of these challenges shows that while they are committed to inclusion, they see it as an ongoing learning process rather than something they feel fully prepared for. Overall, these responses demonstrate a gap between

the ideal of inclusive education and participants' perceived ability to implement it effectively. While they value inclusivity, many acknowledge that they need more training, exposure, and experience to develop the competence required to manage diverse classrooms successfully.

4.3.3. Self-efficacy in relation to teamwork

In this section, participants shared their opinions on their self-efficacy in relation to teamwork. When asked about their views on collaboration, responses varied in confidence, with some feeling well-equipped for teamwork, while others expressed uncertainty about their ability to collaborate effectively. These findings in the figure 11 below accentuate the role of teamwork in fostering inclusive education and the need for further development in building collaborative skills.

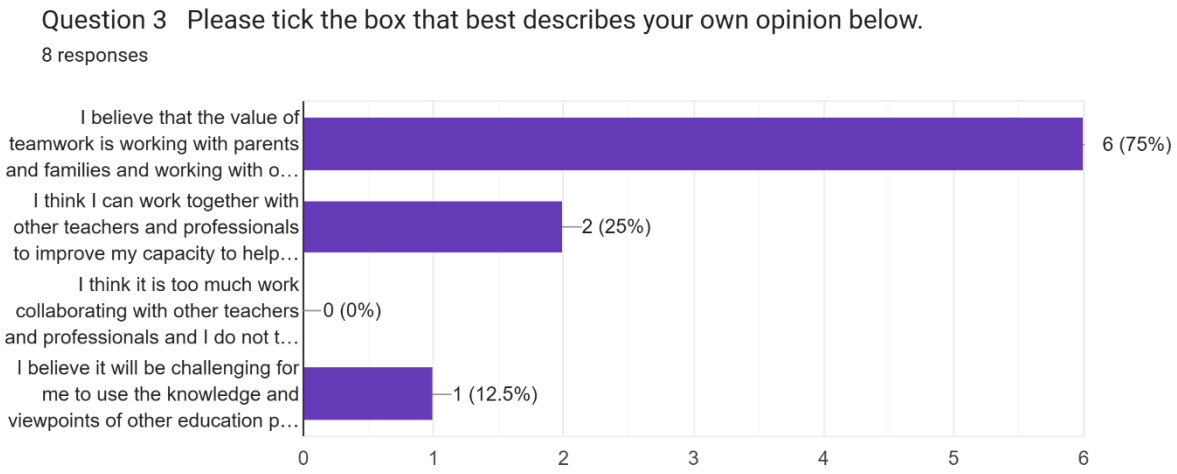


Figure 11: Self-efficacy in relation to teamwork.

The responses indicate that most participants recognize the importance of teamwork in inclusive education, particularly in collaborating with parents, families, and other professionals to support learners both at home and in school. Most participants expressed confidence in their ability to work with others and saw teamwork as beneficial for problem-solving and achieving shared educational goals. This aligns with their earlier definitions of inclusive education, where responsiveness to learner needs and collaboration were emphasized as key components. However, one participant expressed uncertainty about their ability to effectively engage in teamwork, stating that while they see its theoretical value, they struggle with applying it in practice. There could be a gap in their self-efficacy regarding collaboration, which could be

linked to a lack of experience or confidence in engaging with other professionals. It also mirrors earlier responses where some participants acknowledged feeling underprepared to implement inclusive teaching despite understanding its principles.

The responses further emphasize that participants generally see teamwork as essential for inclusive education, yet their personal confidence in collaborating varies. Those who feel more self-efficacious in teamwork view it as a collective effort where all stakeholders contribute to learner success, reinforcing their belief in inclusivity. The one that expressed doubts may require more support and experience in working collaboratively to feel more confident in their ability to engage in inclusive practices effectively. Overall, these responses suggest that while the participants value teamwork, their perceived competence in engaging with others in an inclusive setting is not uniform. This reflects a broader theme seen in previous answers, while they support inclusive education, many feel they still need more training, exposure, and practice to fully implement it.

4.3.4. Self-efficacy in terms of professional and personal development

In this section, participants shared their feelings about their self-efficacy in both personal and professional development. The figure below illustrates participants' self-efficacy beliefs regarding their personal and professional development. Responses reveal a mix of confidence and uncertainty, with some participants feeling prepared to grow in their teaching careers, while others express concerns about balancing work, ongoing learning, and the need for tailored training.

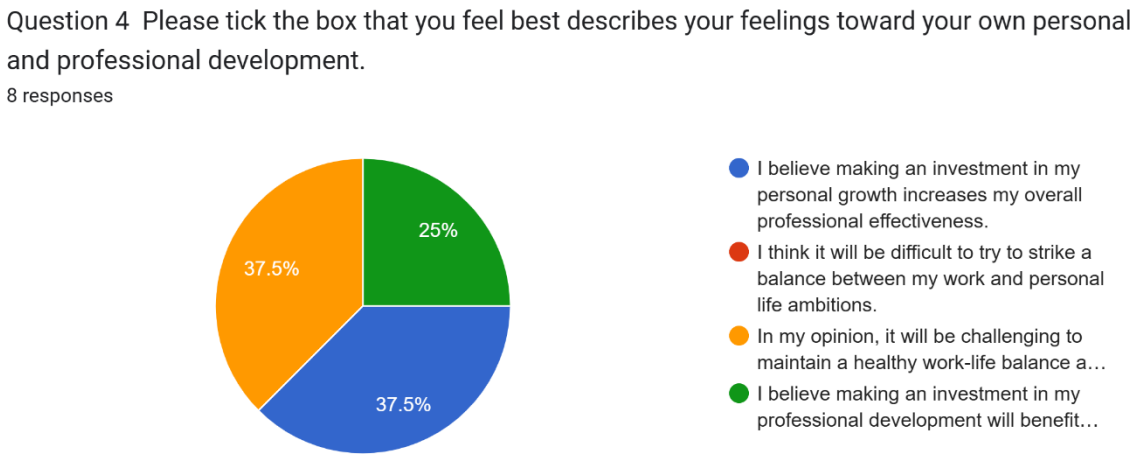


Figure 12: Self-efficacy in terms of professional and personal development.

The responses highlight a strong awareness of the connection between personal and professional development, with most participants acknowledging that growth in one area positively influences the other. This aligns with their broader understanding of inclusive education, where continuous learning and adaptability are necessary for effectively responding to diverse learner needs. Many participants express confidence in their ability to invest in their professional development, recognizing that it builds their skills, confidence, and effectiveness in the classroom. However, a significant number of participants also express concerns about balancing professional development with personal well-being. Those who believe maintaining a work-life balance will be challenging indicate lower self-efficacy in managing multiple responsibilities. They see professional growth as valuable but feel uncertain about their ability to sustain it alongside personal commitments. This mirrors earlier concerns about feeling underprepared for the practical aspects of inclusive education, such as classroom management and adapting to diverse learning needs. Those who express high self-efficacy in personal and professional development emphasize goal setting, continuous learning, and self-improvement. They see themselves as proactive in their growth, which aligns with their confidence in handling inclusive teaching. Conversely, those who feel uncertain about maintaining balance tend to view professional development as a challenge rather than an opportunity, which may impact their ability to fully engage with inclusive practices. Overall, the responses suggest that while most participants value growth and recognize its role in inclusive education, their confidence in managing it varies. Some feel well-equipped to integrate learning into their professional journey, while others worry about the pressures of balancing multiple demands. This reflects an important aspect of self-efficacy in inclusive teaching. Which is, while many future teachers understand the principles of inclusivity, their confidence in executing them effectively depends on how prepared and supported they feel.

4.4. Interview Analysis

From the analysis of the interview responses, four key themes emerged, namely, Perceptions of Inclusive Education, Inclusive Teaching Preparation, Teaching Confidence, and Influence of Teacher Training. These themes give an extensive framework for investigating participants' viewpoints on inclusive education and their preparedness for teaching diverse learners.

4.4.1. Perceptions of Inclusive Education

The first theme considers participant perceptions of Inclusive Education. The discussion is structured around two sub-themes, namely Knowledge of Inclusive Education, and Beliefs about Inclusive Education.

4.4.2. Knowledge of Inclusive Education

Participants' understanding of inclusive education is examined in this sub-theme, along with their knowledge of policies, teaching strategies, and practical application in diverse classrooms. Their training background and preparedness to apply inclusion are also considered. The responses from participants on their knowledge of inclusive education show differences in their understanding. Some participants are showing a shallow understanding whilst others are demonstrating a more in depth understanding of inclusive education and its policies. Most participants describe inclusive education as a system that provides equal learning opportunities for all learners. For example, Participant 2 defines inclusive education as "*the practice of providing equal learning opportunities and access to education for all students regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. It basically speaks on creating a learning environment that accommodates the diverse needs and styles for every learner*" (P2 Interview). This is also echoed by participant 5 by stating that, "*it means all children in the classroom or in the same school, they have equal learning opportunities. Without saying this one is black, this one is white, or whatever disability, all children are just the same with equal opportunities*" (P5 Interview). The way the two participants have responded align with a diversity perspective which acknowledges and appreciate learner differences, and which goal is to build a learning environment where all learners are include and supported.

However, some responses indicate a deficit perspective, especially when discussing the challenges of implementing inclusive education. This express concerns that indicate a deficit perspective, specifically regarding the challenges of implementation implying a lack of confidence in adapting to diverse learners' needs. One participant has revealed uncertainty about how to practically implement inclusive education, indicating that while they understand its goals, they may lack confidence or practical strategies to apply it effectively in diverse classroom settings. This is shown when they say, "*I do know what inclusive education is, I have practiced applying it in some classroom settings however there are contexts where I wouldn't know how to execute and prepare exclusive lessons*" (P1 Interview). Another participant mentions that overcrowded classrooms and inadequate support structures make effective inclusion difficult when they state that, "*The challenge for educational systems is to ensure*

that schools provide effective strategies to give all students this equal opportunity. Unfortunately, increasing inequalities in our schools makes this challenging. Effective inclusion cannot be achieved in schools that are overcrowded and have overloaded or inadequate support mechanisms" (P6 Interview). While these concerns are valid, they propose that inclusive education is seen as a burden rather than an opportunity to embrace diverse learning styles.

Responses from participants emphasize both advantages and disadvantages of inclusive education there is an indication of optimism as well as concern with regards to inclusive education. Most of the participants acknowledge the benefits of inclusive education in promoting embracement, diversity and better learning results. One participant points out the significance of comprehending and successfully implementing inclusive education, saying, "*I personally feel that knowing what an inclusive education is and knowing how to execute inclusive lessons will result in better learner achievements considering that we teach in a diverse country*" (P1 Interview". This viewpoint emphasizes the idea that, when effectively implemented, inclusive education can improve the educational process. Likewise, a different participant backs up this assertion by characterizing inclusive education as, "a progressive approach to education, more especially our education system" and further asserts that an environment which is inclusive can enhance *"a sense of belonging and acceptance among learners,"* (P 2 Interview) which eventually enhances learners' empathy and sense of social cohesiveness. Despite many participants having a positive viewpoint on inclusive education some point out its viability, especially the South African setting. One participant acknowledges the limitations of inclusive education in the South African context, stating, "*I personally think that it is possible. But in the South African context, I do not think it is possible in majority of the schools. So. in as much as we can say we can include everyone else. There is always going to be that marginalized group of learners. So, I went to a private school recently. In a private school, there is finance, there is resources, there is room for you to grow, even as a teacher. So, there is information, there is access to information, there is constant development. So, unlike where you do not have access to workshops, or you are not financed enough to get, like, say, short courses on these things, because, like, I say in we only did it in fourth year, and you do not know that much about it, and it will be nice for you in the long run, as you continue to, like, gather information*" (P4 Interview). This participant emphasizes the imbalance between public and private schools considering that private schools are in a better situation compared to public schools. Participant 5 adopts a historical and social justice viewpoint contending that the

promotion of inclusive education should prioritize historically underprivileged populations, especially Black South Africans saying, "*I feel it is a good thing because, there were groups that were previously disadvantaged, like black people. So, it is very important for them to include us in their education, because we are also part of the nation. We also want to hold the high performance in the workspace, not that we get the minority of what education is to offer. So, I feel it is a good thing to be included*" (P5 Interview). This response emphasizes a broader significance of inclusive education in redressing historical injustices and guarantee that all learners, irrespective of their race or socioeconomic status, have equal access to high-quality education.

4.4.3. Beliefs about Inclusive Education

This sub-theme investigates participants' perceptions of inclusive education, covering its advantages, disadvantages, and effects on all learners. It also examines how their beliefs affect their teaching and adaptability. According to the participants' responses, their individual experiences, whether as previous learners or future teachers have had a huge impact on how they view education, inclusion, and equality. Although a lot of them have the same experiences with educational inequality, resource imbalance, and exclusion, their individual backgrounds also emphasize specific challenges that have influenced their beliefs. A recurring issue among participants was how their educational experiences shaped their views on inclusivity and equitable learning opportunities. Many participants reminisce about how they were exposed to either advantages or disadvantages of inclusion in their years of schooling. According to one participant, their confidence in the efficacy of effective teaching was shaped by their time spent at a public school with few resources but extremely committed teachers, stating "*Going to a public school which lacked resources and had poor infrastructure and had the best teacher, shaped my belief system about school and teaching. My school would perform better than independent schools that were well-resourced*" (P1 interview). In the same way another participant talks about how teaching experience made them aware of the significance of inclusion mentioning that, "*My teaching experiences made me realize how important inclusion is in a schooling environment. Some teachers I have observed were either too focused on the fast learners or never made the effort of including the more slow learners at all. That made a lot of kids discouraged about learning and that should never be a thing learners experience because their right to education is not exercised when there is no epistemological access for everyone*" (P2 Interview). This shows a common understanding that inclusive teaching, whether there are resources or not, is very important when it comes to learner success.

Another issue that participants have in common is detrimental effects of labelling and exclusion of learners. Most participants mentioned how teachers tend to focus on high achievers whilst abandoning those that were facing different challenges. One participant remembered, "*I feel like our teachers, they did not promote inclusivity, and we often seem like to them, when children are struggling, they will be like, sometimes labelled by saying they are dumb, or they only say they do not belong to this kind of setup, they must go to a special school*" (P3 Interview). Similar experiences were shared by another participant in a school where learners had language obstacles because of their varied linguistic backgrounds, further complicating the issue of inclusion. They express, "*I went to a school that stresses me. I went to a school that majority of the kids were African kids, if I may put it that way, when you ask them, you are like, what language do you speak, they will tell you, we speak English. What language do you speak at home, so that I can try to, like, liaise between me and you, and you understand the context*" (P4 interview). These encounters support the notion that instructor attitudes, classroom procedures, and language diversity have a big influence on how learners interact with their learning.

4.5. Inclusive Teaching Preparation

With an emphasis on how well their training has prepared them to teach diverse learners, the second theme investigates participants' perceptions of Inclusive Teaching Preparation. The discussion is structured around three sub-themes, namely Gaps in teacher training Lack of Preparation, Ways to improve teacher preparation, and Readiness to Teach All Learners.

4.5.1. Gaps in teacher training/ Lack of Preparation

The flaws of teacher preparation programs are examined in this sub-theme, which includes a lack of practical experience, a lack of emphasis on inclusive teaching methods, and a lack of instruction on how to support learners with special educational needs. It draws attention to participants' areas of lack of preparation and the difficulties they anticipate in actual classroom settings. Responses from participants when it comes to their teacher training show that in as much as they gained theory and practical experience to inclusive teaching, preparation was different for individuals. Some participants indicated that they were well prepared while others felt that they could have done with more preparation to deal with elements of teaching in diverse classrooms. Many were taken aback by the overwhelming administrative work that is needed to be done by teachers. One participant noted, "*Oh, all the paperwork that comes with being a teacher, classroom management, all we were taught was vague*" (P1 interview). Similarly, another participant, expressed the same opinion stating, *"I was mostly not prepared*

for the amount of administrative work educators do on a daily basis. I had a preconceived notion that we taught more than doing the admin stuff but going into the classroom and observing the amount of work teachers put into ensuring their files, journals, and paperwork shocked me" (P2 interview). According to these responses it is clear that pre-service teachers think that their main responsibility will be teaching when they qualify to be teachers. Participants also mentioned classroom management as an area they struggled with, with many feeling that they were not fully prepared to bring order in the classroom. This was stated by one participant saying, *"I always assumed there were generic techniques that fit in any classroom, but going into practice proved otherwise"* (P2 Interview). Another participant admitted, *"I think I am still not prepared, even now, for how to deal with management"* (P4 Interview). These responses indicate what the majority of pre-service teachers go through when trying to achieve classroom management skills that are effective on different environments. Even though there may have been equipped in theory participants pointed out the need of practical application and flexible teaching methods that take into account different classroom situations. Many participants also felt unprepared in teaching disabled learners especially when they went for their teaching experience and were expecting to teach "normal" children. One participant described, "*I was not prepared for teaching like disabled. Is it not that inclusive education is for everyone?"* Another participant expressed how surprised they when meeting disabled learners, noting, *"I did not expect to find children with severe disabilities, and also, I did not expect that I will find children who have got ADHD problems."* This finding implies that although inclusive education was discussed in training, the actual strategies for helping learners with disabilities were not sufficiently addressed.

In connection to participants' confidence in teaching inclusively, their responses show that although they feel reasonably prepared, their confidence is not comprehensive, and there are still areas in which they feel they could improve. On a scale of 1 to 10, most participants rated their level of confidence between 6 and 8. This implies that they are conscious of the gaps that still exist even while they accept that their training has provided them with a foundation of knowledge. For example, "*On a scale of 1-10, I would say a 6. I wouldn't know how to teach, accommodate learners with different learning abilities or how to identify how they have certain learning disabilities"* (P1 Interview). Although theory was taught during the training, the lack of comprehensive guarantee implies that practical application is still challenging. Likewise, another participant who gave their confidence a score of 7 demonstrated that, *"some things will not shock me, and I know how to work around things"* (P 4 Interview). This implies that while

experience has contributed to an increase in confidence, more can be done. An important factor that also contributed to participants' confidence was the role of experience. Most participants emphasized that their capacity to adapt and learn was greatly aided by their exposure to differing school contexts. One participant stated, *"I feel like on a scale of 10, I am at a seven, 70% prepared as... all my different contexts showed me what I have, and if I do not have something, what I can do"* (P4 Interview). This shows that confidence is not only achieved in theory but also in experience. However, according to another participant, they experienced a challenge when they stepped into a diverse classroom, noting, *"Before I went, I was confident, but the minute I was in that classroom, I feel like I need to learn more."* This shows that many pre-service teachers may misjudge their preparedness until they are placed in practical teaching circumstances. Many participants were unsure about how to teach disabled learners, especially those with ADHD, despite their training. One participant admitted, *"I am pretty confident that I have acquired the foundational knowledge and skills to teach learners with diverse needs, although I am a bit anxious about dealing with learners that have disabilities"* (P6 Interview). Another participant shared their struggle in understanding how to cater to children with ADHD and severe disabilities, saying *"We have children with ADHD problems... there is more that I need to learn in order for me to be able to cater for all the learners"* (P3 Interview). These responses point to a training gap as many of them believe they were taught about inclusivity in general but were not provided with sufficient techniques to assist learners with particular disabilities. Their capacity to successfully accommodate every learner in their classrooms may be hampered by this lack of preparation. Overall, participants show that they are partially confident in practicing inclusive teaching. They feel that they have gained foundational knowledge but at the same time they admit there are gaps in their preparation especially when it comes to assisting disabled learners.

4.5.2. Ways to improve teacher preparation

The suggestions made by participants for improving teacher preparation to better prepare aspiring teachers for inclusive classrooms are examined in this sub-theme. Their suggestions included increased hands-on experience, exposure to diverse learning settings, specific training on disabilities and adapted instruction, and possible mentorship opportunities with more experienced inclusive teachers. Understanding diverse learning requirements of learners is a vital component of teacher preparation. One participant stated, *"I think we can be taught about different learning abilities and styles in detail and how to identify learners with learning disabilities. We can also be exposed to working with learners with diverse abilities"* (P1

Interview). It is therefore necessary to have a thorough teaching on learner diversity. Additionally, teacher preparation also equips teachers with inclusive techniques. One participant stated, *"Develop more awareness on the diverse learning needs students have and they would gain an understanding of the various learning styles in order to implement effective strategies, like differentiation in instruction or materials"* (P2 Interview). This emphasizes the significance of adaptive teaching methods for diverse learners. Some participants felt unprepared when encountering learners with different needs and it is important to ensure early exposure to diverse classrooms. One participant elaborated, *"When we went for practicals, we just went in that first day and we were asked to teach. I did not know that I am going to be dealing with children with different learning challenges"* (P3 Interview). What can help pre-service teachers to plan more efficiently is allocating structured field experiences for them. Practical teaching experience in different school settings can also build adaptability. A participant proposed, *"If we were subjected to such contexts where we had to practice, we would be diverse in the schools that we are willing to go to, so we would not see contexts like that as a challenge"* (P4 Interview). It is realistic that exposure to different school environments promotes flexibility and adeptness in handling inclusive education. Teacher preparation must also instil an appreciation for diversity. One participant stressed, *"They must instil in pre-service teachers a knowledge and appreciation for diversity… You have students here that are doing BEd, who just do not care about diversity"* (P6 Interview). Therefore, an inclusive mindset should be promoted.

4.5.3. Readiness to Teach All Learners

Participants' confidence in applying their training in practical teaching situations is assessed by this sub-theme. It considers their perceived capacity to successfully manage diverse classrooms, modify lessons for diverse learning needs, and implement inclusive strategies. Additionally, it identifies the areas in which they feel confident versus those in which they feel extra development is required. Participants responses show that they are confident in their knowledge and abilities, at the same time they also show that they have different opinions on how ready they are to teach all learners. Although a lot of participants think they have attained essential knowledge, some reveal some concerns about their actual classroom experiences and unanticipated difficulties. For example, this participant states, *"I have been taught about different ways to set assessments, different teaching strategies which I have used during teaching practicals"* (P1 Interview). This implies that the coursework for the Bed program and the teaching experience have provided them with necessary teaching techniques. Likewise,

another participant echoes the same sentiments, stating, *"I have developed my pedagogical reasoning skills, which enabled me to make choices... that will help learners understand knowledge"* (P6 Interview). This demonstrates an earnest understanding of the value of teaching flexibility and the application of topic knowledge in diverse classroom settings. Participants also understand that teaching can be unpredictable and requires teachers to think on their feet. A need for adaptability was noted by one participant claiming, *"I am knowledgeable enough about what goes on inside the classroom, and how much adaptability one needs to have on a daily basis"* (P2 Interview). Similarly, another participant stressed the importance of thinking on the spot to address unpredicted challenges stating, *"When you get inside the classroom, you need to be prepared... trying to think on the spot to say, oh, okay, this is the problem that I have encountered; what is it that I can do quickly to assist the child"* (P3 Interview). Concerns about the amount of practical experience were raised by another participant. Theory was not a problem but they *"did not acquire much... time to teach in the physical classroom"* (P5 Interview). According to this, some fourth-year students still lack practical experience with actual learners, even when their theoretical knowledge is solid. Another participant offered a different story, explaining how confidence-boosting mentorship essential stating was, *"The teacher... was open to new ideas and new ways of doing things that built my confidence so much"* (P4 Interview). This disparity demonstrates that whereas some participants believe they are ready because of encouraging teaching experiences, others believe they require additional time in actual classroom settings. Interestingly, while most participants feel ready to teach, they also acknowledge that learning is a continuous process. One participant openly stated, *"I still need to learn because at some point we get to encounter different problems, even though I feel like, oh, I am ready"* (P3 Interview). Similarly, another participant expresses confidence but admits to needing further development, saying, *"Yes, we will still have to work on ourselves and develop ourselves, but this is something we can work with" (*P4 Interview). These responses demonstrate a growth mindset, in which pre-service teachers understand that even though they are ready, they still need to keep learning and improving.

4.6. Teaching Confidence

The third theme investigates participants' confidence as teachers, drawing attention on their confidence in applying inclusive teaching methods. The main sub-theme of this conversation is Confidence in Inclusive Teaching.

4.6.1. Confidence in Inclusive Teaching

This sub-theme focuses on the participants' teaching confidence in their ability to effectively teach diverse learners, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. It investigates how their training, teaching experiences, and exposure to inclusive education have influenced their confidence levels. Furthermore, it considers the factors that reinforce or sets back their self-efficacy, for instance mentorship, hands-on experience, and ongoing professional development. The participants' responses show similarities and differences in their perceptions of self-efficacy when it comes to implementing inclusive education. Granted that some participants say they are confident in their capacity to handle diverse classrooms, others admit they are not fully prepared, especially when confronted with complicated problems or unexpected situations. The understanding that exposure and experience have an impact on self-efficacy in inclusive education is a major theme that comes up among participants. Most participants rate their level of confidence on a scale of 6 to 8 out of 10. One participant noting, "*I would say 6 on a scale of 1-10*," (P1 interview), demonstrating a moderate level of confidence but also proposing room for growth. A different participant also shares this opinion, saying, "*I would say a six or seven on a scale of 1-10*," (P3 Interview), recognizing the constraints in their abilities to completely apply inclusive techniques, but also observing their attempts to accommodate learners.

The idea that background affects self-efficacy is another prevalent viewpoint. This worry is expressed by one participant saying, "*I think I am still at the basic level...I have been in, not I do not have another word, in boujee situations, boujee contexts. If I was to be put in a deep rural area, I think I would still find a whole lot of challenges*" (P4 Interview). According to this reaction, a teacher's trust in inclusive education is greatly influenced by their surroundings. Rural teachers may face additional social and systemic challenges that hinder successful inclusive practices, whereas urban settings could offer greater resources and support. Some participants demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy despite these difficulties, which is frequently connected to their perceived emotional intelligence and problem-solving abilities as seen by the participant stating, *"I would say that I have high self-efficacy to implement inclusive education. You know, I positively believe in my capabilities to teach diverse classrooms. I feel like I am emotionally intelligent, and I am well equipped, and I am ready to offer learners equal opportunities in learning"* (P6 Interview). According to this viewpoint, self-efficacy is greatly influenced by personal qualities like emotional intelligence and faith in one's capacity as a teacher. Nevertheless, there is also recognition that confidence levels are influenced by real-

world experience. This is expressed by one participant noting, *"I did set up a meeting with their parents, and I communicated with them, and it went very well, and I was so happy that I was able to assist one of my learners who had challenges by speaking to their parent"* (P3 Interview). This experiential learning illustrates how practical application of inclusive education techniques can gradually increase self-efficacy. However, while giving themselves a high "eight out of ten," another participant demonstrates that confidence is still a work in progress. This supports the more general idea that self-efficacy is a dynamic concept that evolves with experience and exposure to diverse classroom situations. Overall, participants shared an awareness of the difficulties in implementing inclusive education and an awareness that confidence increases with practice. There are differences in the degree of self-efficacy, whilst some participants feel quite prepared, others are aware of their shortcomings, especially in situations where they are unfamiliar or have limited resources. Responses from participants display how essential mentorship, ongoing education, and practical experience are to building the self-efficacy required to successfully fulfil inclusive education.

4.7. Influence of Teacher Training.

The fourth theme explores the influence of teacher training on participants' viewpoints and preparedness for inclusive education. It looks at how their training experiences have shaped their understanding, perspectives, and confidence when it comes to teaching diverse learners.

4.7.1. Perceptions

This sub-theme explores how participants perceive their training's effectiveness in equipping them to teach inclusively. It investigates whether participants believe their coursework and practical experiences have competently prepared them to address diverse learning needs. It also considers their opinions of the advantages and disadvantages of their teacher education programs, such as the lack of exposure to real-world classroom difficulties, the practical application gaps, and the applicability of the content covered. The responses from participants show that their perceptions of inclusive education have advanced through their teacher preparation programs, even though each participant's experience is different. One crucial element is that participants gained new information and techniques to successfully implement inclusive education by means of teacher preparation. One participant emphasized how exposure to actual classroom situations influenced their perspective, revealing that inclusion encompasses not only learners with learning challenges but also those with ADHD and other disabilities. They state," *I learned that when it comes to inclusive education, I am not only accommodating learners with learning challenges. There is more—we get to accommodate*

learners with disabilities, ADHD, and ensure they receive quality education" (P3 Interview). This insight signifies a change from a narrow view to a more thorough knowledge of inclusion, demonstrating that real-world experience is important to changing preconceived notions. Another common opinion is that although teacher preparation gave participants a basic understanding, it only touched the surface, making them believe that more in-depth training and experience was needed. This concern was conveyed by another participant feeling that their teacher training was hurried and inadequate, stating, *"I feel like we just got basic information, basic knowledge, basic background. They were rushing through everything. I feel like there is still more room for me to learn about inclusive education and how it is implemented out there by people who actually have been on the job"* (P4 Interview). This claim emphasizes the necessity of longer and more practical training so that it can close the gap between classroom experience and theoretical knowledge. While stressing the importance of ongoing learning, some participants showed confidence in their comprehension of inclusive education. One stated, *"Perhaps reading more on inclusive education, engaging with other people in the teaching field, and discussing their experiences and how they implemented inclusiveness in their classroom will help me grow"* (P1 Interview). This emphasizes how collaboration and lifelong learning may support inclusive education. Initial presumptions on the ease of inclusion were also altered by teacher preparation. One participant admitted, *"I used to think that it would be easy to become inclusive as a teacher once I graduated. But teacher preparation made me aware that the task will not be easy. The problem is that one group at a time cannot achieve inclusion"* (P6 Interview). This response accentuates the difficulties and systemic obstacles that need constant work to conquer. In most, social justice is another important viewpoint. One respondent stressed*, "Whenever you treat people equally, they also do their best, as compared to favouring other children because of their race or something"* (P5 Interview). This demonstrates how knowledge of ethical obligations in inclusive education is fostered by teacher preparation. While some feel more prepared than others, all recognize inclusive education as a continuous learning process. Real-world experience, mentorship, and further professional development remain crucial in shaping their skills. Participants' reflections reveal evolving understandings, gaps in practical training, and the need for ongoing learning. Teacher training programs should balance theory with practice to ensure teachers feel fully prepared to teach inclusively.

4.7.2. Additional Insights

The participants' responses show various important problems in teacher training programs, particularly with regards to inclusive education. The way teaching experience is organized and timed, challenges in evaluating diverse learners, and the sufficiency of training pertaining to teaching learners with disabilities. One participant revealed that it was difficult to balance assessment procedures to accommodate all learners. When doing teaching experience, differentiated instruction was used by giving fewer questions to learners that were struggling. However, all learners sat for the same test during assessments, which caused problems for those who had previously received adapted training. The participant then questioned, *"How do we balance this, especially when it comes to assessment? How do we make our assessment to be able to accommodate all our learners, without them feeling overwhelmed on the exam day"* (P3 Interview). This issue emphasizes that it is important for teacher training programs to equip future teachers with useful differentiated assessment strategies that align with inclusive teaching methods. Another participant voiced concerns about the organization and timing of teaching experience within their training program. They recommended that exposure to diverse teaching settings should be carefully and thoughtfully planned throughout the years of study to provide a well-rounded perspective, stating, *"I feel like if they were to diversify that, or actually put us into categories... so that you have a well-rounded perspective."* (P4 Interview). Furthermore, they questioned the final year's excessive academic load, stating that crucial practical knowledge had to be introduced earlier, *"Now you are trying to give me proper information in fourth year. I am like, no, you should have given me this inclusive education information in third year or second year"* (P4 Interview). According to this participant, there is need for the curriculum to be restructured so that students are given a more thorough and gradual grasp of real-world teaching problems to ensure an ease in their final year pressure. One participant pointed out significant concerns about the perceived lack of training in teaching learners with disabilities. They claimed that their teacher training placed too much emphasis on inclusive education for "normal children" and criticized the teacher training for missing the mark in sufficiently preparing them to teach learners with disabilities. They expressed, "At Wits, they only teach us inclusive education for normal children. They do not cater for those who are disabled... We do not know how to even teach them" (P5 Interview). The perspective reveals a serious gap in the training especially when it comes to disabled learners.

The responses to the question about whether participants had something to share reveal important insights into their perspectives, experiences, and concerns about their teacher

training and preparedness. While most participants simply answered "No," two provided detailed responses that highlight significant themes regarding self-reflection, the value of the interview process, and concerns about inclusive education. As a researcher, these responses offer valuable data on gaps in training, emotional engagement with the teaching profession, and areas that may require further investigation.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter investigated the information gathered from questionnaires and interviews, giving emphasis to the experiences and perceptions of fourth-year students regarding inclusive education. Four major themes emerged from the thematic analysis of interviews namely influence of teacher preparation, teaching confidence, inclusive teaching preparation, and perceptions of inclusive education. These themes shed light on participants' knowledge of inclusive education, readiness to teach diverse learners, and their confidence in applying inclusive teaching strategies. Responses to the questionnaire investigated self-efficacy in connection to inclusive education and the ability to teach inclusively, while interview participants elaborated on practical experiences and obstacles. Collectively, these findings emphasize areas that may need additional development to improve future teachers' preparedness for inclusive classrooms, highlighting both the advantages and disadvantages of teacher preparation.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I delve deeper into the findings derived from both the interviews and questionnaires conducted with fourth-year foundation phase education students at one higher education institution in Gauteng. My objective is to present these findings in a structured and coherent manner, aligning them with the research objectives and questions outlined earlier in this study. I aim to provide a comprehensive and insightful discussion of my findings, contributing valuable perspectives to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education and teacher preparedness as a conclusion to this study. The contribution and limitations of the study are also discussed and recommendations forwarded.

5.2. Discussion of Findings

The results of my study were examined using Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory as well as the four essential inclusion competences proposed by Arvelo-Rosales, Alegre de la Rosa, and Guzmán-Rosquete (2021). I hoped to place my findings within the frames of inclusive education and recognized educational psychology by incorporating these theoretical frameworks.

5.2.1. Self-Efficacy in Inclusive Teaching

Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory proposes that individuals' beliefs in their abilities influence their actions and perseverance when they are going through difficulties. With regards to education, a teacher's self-efficacy influences their teaching strategies and ability to manage diverse classrooms. My findings indicated that many fourth-year education students felt underprepared to address the needs of learners with disabilities, which aligns with Bandura's claim that low self-efficacy can obstruct performance. One participant stated, "*The BEd degree has not equipped us with methods or skills to include learners with such disabilities,"* (P6 Interview), emphasizing a gap in their training that may have negatively impacted their teaching efficacy. This perceived lack of preparedness may result in a decline in self-efficacy's key elements of confidence and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, these fourth-year education students may be less likely to implement inclusive practices effectively after graduation, potentially perpetuating educational inequities. Self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1977), have reference to an individual's belief in their ability to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance achievements. In the context of inclusive education, pre-service teachers' self-efficacy is elaborately linked to their confidence in addressing diverse

learner needs. Participants often reported feelings of unpreparedness and anxiety when considering the practical application of inclusive teaching techniques. This lack of confidence could negatively affect their teaching efficacy, as self-doubt may interfere with the implementation of inclusive practices. Therefore, fostering a vigorous sense of self-efficacy through designated training and support is of vital importance for the effective endorsement of inclusive education. Participants identified a variety of challenges that disrupt their preparedness to implement inclusive education successfully. Regardless of theoretical coursework, there was a remarkable insufficiency that was noted in practical training opportunities that could allow pre-service teachers to apply inclusive strategies in real-life classroom contexts. This lack of hands-on learning contributed to feelings of unpreparedness. There were many participants who expressed concerns about scarce resources, including insufficient teaching materials and support services. Significant constraints to the successful application of inclusive approaches were presented by these limitations. Another major problem was how to manage diverse classrooms, especially when it came to accommodating learners with different needs. Concerns over their capacity to preserve an inclusive atmosphere that supports learning for all kids were voiced by the participants. These challenges resonated with the findings of Swart et al. (2002), who emphasized that practicing teachers required ongoing support and professional development to adapt to inclusive education effectively.

5.2.2. Development of Competencies for Inclusion

Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021) identified four essential competencies for inclusive education namely valuing student diversity, supporting all students, working collaboratively, and engaging in ongoing professional development. My study revealed varying levels of competency development among participants. With regards to valuing learner diversity, while participants recognized the importance of diversity, they expressed doubts about accommodating learners with disabilities. One participant mentioned, *"We do not know how to even teach them,"* (P 5 Interview), revealing a need for more extensive training in this area. It was also clear that there were no distinct techniques that were put in place for the purpose of supporting diverse learners. During their hands-on teaching experiences, participants admitted to depending on trial and error, which may suggest that their formal education did not adequately prepare them. One participant noted, *"I have learnt into practice, to go through trial and error, to find out what would work"* (P2 Interview). In the interest of making up for training gaps, participants recognized the importance of self-directed learning. As one participant put it, "It is for you to have networks, to reflect, to develop yourself," (P4 Interview),

drawing attention to the importance of ongoing professional development in inclusive education.

5.2.3. Relating Findings to the combined theoretical framework.

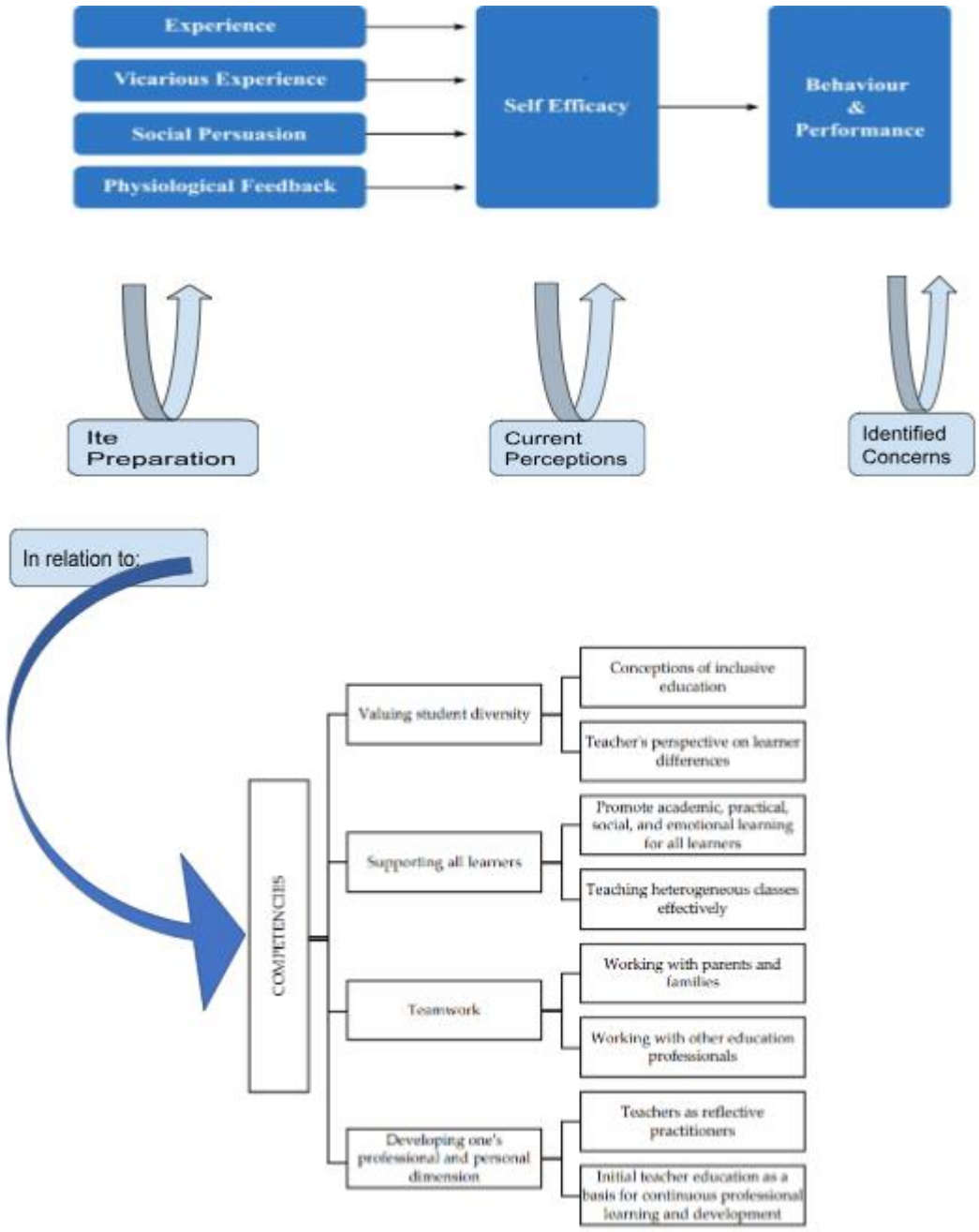


Figure 13: A combination of the Teacher-Efficacy Framework and The Four Key Competencies for Inclusion Framework.

From the findings of the questionnaires and interviews there is an indication that the fourth-year students' self-efficacy was moulded by experience, indirect experience, social persuasion,

and physiological feedback (Bandura, 1997). Many participants reported that practical teaching experiences during their ITE program played a vital role in building their confidence. However, the unavailability of adequate classroom exposure and hands-on experiences left some feeling unprepared to tackle diverse classroom contexts. Indirect experiences, for example observing experienced teachers, were seen as something that could be beneficial, but some participants noted that observation only was insufficient as they needed to be actively involved. Additionally, their sense of preparedness was positively impacted by social persuasion, or support from peers, and lecturers yet, many emphasized the necessity of more robust mentorship programs. The biggest worry was in the area of physiological feedback, where student teachers experienced high levels of stress and anxiety as a result of overpopulated classrooms, limited resources, and the need to meet the requirements of diverse learners without adequate assistance. An essential theme in the findings is the gap between ITE preparation and hands-on classroom challenges. Although many student teachers admitted that their training outlined theory that was related to inclusive education and inclusive teaching, they demonstrated that experiential application was lacking. The adaptation from preparation to practice revealed several challenges, such as difficulties in dealing with diverse learning abilities and successfully using restricted resources. Participant perceptions show that in as much as some felt a little prepared, others were overwhelmed as they found it hard to adapt to diverse learner needs. This impacted their self-efficacy and general performance.

The results further revealed varying levels of confidence from participants and difficulties in competencies for example embracing diversity, supporting learners, teamwork, and professional development. Although participants demonstrated that they were aware of inclusive education concepts, they had varying degrees in their ability to put these into practice. Some showed positive attitudes toward learner diversity, but others had trouble comprehending and adjusting to individual learning differences. Participants emphasized difficulties in promoting academic, social, and emotional learning for all learners, especially in overcrowded classrooms with limited resources. The struggle of teaching diverse learners was a persistent worry, this reinforced the need for ITE programs to give student teachers hands-on experience with a variety of teaching methods prior to graduation. Findings indicate that although some student teachers engaged in collaborative teaching and worked with parents and professionals, many lacked the confidence to initiate these partnerships. Some stated that they were unsure about interacting with parents and multidisciplinary teams because their ITE programs did not

place a strong emphasis on teamwork. Gaps in professional development were discovered during the shift from student teacher to practicing teacher. Ongoing support networks were perceived as lacking by some participants, while others saw reflective practice as helpful. Furthermore, the results show that even while ITE programs offer the concepts of professional growth, chances for ongoing training after graduation are necessary to improve teaching efficacy.

5.3. Answering research questions

5.3.1. Main Question

> How prepared do final-year pre-service teachers feel they are to enter the classroom, and what do they believe to be their major problems or concerns about doing so?

Fourth-year foundation phase students at one higher learning institute in Gauteng revealed a mixture of hopefulness and anxiety as they approached the shift from teacher training to enter professional practice. Even though a lot of them believed that they had a solid theoretical understanding, they usually expressed concerns about how it will be used in actual classroom situations. An important issue that was highlighted was the sufficiency of their preparation to grapple with diverse learner needs, especially in inclusive educational settings. For example, studies have shown that pre-service teachers feel that their training programs do not adequately prepare them to accommodate learners with disabilities, leading to feelings of unpreparedness and anxiety (Oswald & Swart, 2011). Furthermore, the struggles of managing large class sizes and limited resources further exacerbated these concerns, as pre-service teachers worried about their ability to provide individualized attention and support to all learners (Oswald & Swart, 2011).

5.3.2. Sub Question 1

> What perceptions do final-year pre-service teachers have about the preparation they have received to teach in an inclusive context?

The fourth-year foundation phase students' perceptions of their preparation for inclusive teaching were on numerous occasions characterized by a recognition of theoretical exposure but a lack of practical preparedness. While many acknowledged that their coursework introduced concepts of inclusive education, they felt that this knowledge was not sufficiently integrated into practical teaching strategies. For example, research indicates that pre-service teachers are aware of inclusive education principles but struggle to apply these in lesson planning and classroom management (Moosa & Bekker, 2021). Furthermore, the

compartmentalization of inclusive education into standalone modules, rather than being woven throughout the curriculum, contributed to a fragmented understanding and application of inclusive practices (Ngulube et al., 2021). This approach frequently left pre-service teachers feeling inadequate to address the diverse needs of learners in real-life situations.

5.3.3. Sub Question 2

> In what ways might final-year pre-service teachers need support to improve learners' performance, address Covid gaps, and teach inclusively going into classrooms?

Fourth-year foundation phase education students needed committed support in several crucial areas in order to help learners effectively, especially following the disruptions that were caused by the Covid pandemic in the schooling system. In the forefront, improving hands-on training via mentorship programs and simulated teaching experiences could close the knowledge gap between theory and practice, giving pre-service teachers the confidence to employ inclusive practices. (Moosa & Bekker, 2021). Secondly, integrating inclusive education principles across all modules within teacher education programs could promote a more holistic understanding and application of these practices (Ngulube et al., 2021). Lastly, providing resources and training on digital tools and remote teaching strategies would have been crucial in addressing learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, ensuring that pre-service teachers were equipped to support all learners effectively in various teaching contexts.

5.4. Contributions to the study

This study makes a contribution in highlighting that the progression from pre-service teacher training to professional practice is a significant phase, concerning the preparedness of final-year pre-service teachers to successfully navigate inclusive classroom contexts. This discussion harmonizes findings from questionnaires as well as interviews, contextualized within Bandura's (1977) Self-Efficacy Theory and the four key competencies for inclusion proposed by Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021), to clarify these fourth-year foundation phase students' perceived difficulties and level of preparedness. A recurring point of view among participants was an awareness on insufficiency in their training regarding inclusive education. Many pre-service teachers acknowledged exposure to theoretical aspects of inclusivity, however, they expressed a lack of hands-on techniques to put into practice these concepts successfully in diverse classroom situations. This theoretical-practical gap aligns with findings by Oswald and Swart (2011), who observed that while pre-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education improved post-intervention, their concerns regarding practical implementation, such

as resource availability and classroom management, escalated. The contribution that the study makes is to emphasize the need for teacher education programs to incorporate extensive, hands-on experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice. The problems that come with putting teaching into practice for example managing of classrooms and making resources available have worsened, especially in contexts that have varied learner needs and insufficient infrastructure. This gives prominence to the importance of teacher preparation programs to have extensive, hands-on experiences that close the gap between theory and practice. From a theoretical viewpoint, the study argues that teacher preparation should be enlightened by the four key competencies for inclusion proposed by Arvelo-Rosales et al. (2021), which put in the spotlight effective, experiential learning. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) significantly connects to this, indicating that teachers who participate in genuine teaching experiences are more likely to develop confidence in their teaching abilities. Consequently, immersing hands-on style into teacher training can strengthen pedagogical capability and flexibility.

The study also contributes to an identified literature gap, specifically in the context of South Africa. Existing literature tends to emphasize continued difficulties as far as teacher preparation is concerned because of socioeconomic imbalance, classrooms that are overpopulated, and demanding curriculum (Spaull, 2019). Even though research internationally has investigated the significance of hands-on experience in teacher training, there is minimal research that is locally investigating how South African ITE programs are preparing teachers for these real-world experiences. My study contributes to the discussion by putting into perspective how practical limitations influence the success and preparedness of teaching in South African schools. Practically, the findings emphasize the urgent need to improve practical teaching components in teacher education programs. This may include organized mentorship, improved school-based training, and approaches that are aimed at managing environments that are lacking in resources. The practical needs to be addressed means that my study could potentially further conversation about policy and curriculum design to equip the student teachers thoroughly so that they can improve their practical teaching elements.

5.5. Limitations of the study

5.5.1. Sampling Limitations

With only a certain subset of final-year pre-service teachers from one university included, the study's sample size was noticeably small. Pre-service teachers at other institutions or in different areas may have a variety of experiences and viewpoints that this small sample may not adequately represent. Therefore, the findings' capacity to be applied to a larger population

is limited. As noted by Mackey (2015) that research findings may not be as representative when sample numbers are limited.

5.5.2. Methodological Limitations

The use of self-reported information from questionnaires and interviews raises the possibility of biases like social desirability bias, in which participants give answers they think are positive rather than ones that really represent their opinions or experiences. Furthermore, the study's cross-sectional design records participants' opinions at a certain moment in time, making it difficult to evaluate changes over time or pinpoint causal links. Non-randomized designs and other methodological limitations can make it more difficult to prove causation in study results.

5.5.3. External Factors

The results may be impacted by outside variables, such as the specific educational setting of the university where the study was carried out. This university may have a different curriculum, resources, and support systems than other universities, which could impact how well the findings translate to other contexts. Research findings may not be as broadly applicable to larger groups due to contextual limitations.

5.6. Recommendations

A multimodal approach is necessary to improve final-year pre-service teachers' preparedness for inclusive teaching. This entails encouraging cooperation among educational stakeholders, to guarantee ongoing professional growth, and merging in-depth academic knowledge with real-world experiences.

5.6.1. Improving Programs for Teacher Education

Compulsory courses on inclusive education that emphasize both theoretical frameworks and real-life experiences should be included in teacher education programs. Pre-service teachers are guaranteed to gain a thorough understanding of inclusive practices and practical strategies for a variety of classroom environments thanks to this dual focus. These curricular improvements are in line with research findings emphasizing the need of thorough preparation in inclusive education.

5.6.2. Offering Real-Life Experience in Inclusive Contexts

Pre-service teachers could use their theoretical knowledge and build critical skills by incorporating real-life experiences, such as internships or placements in inclusive classrooms. A major weakness in conventional teacher training programs is filled by exposure to real-life situations, which cultivates skill and confidence in handling a variety of learner demands.

5.7. Conclusion

The intention of this study was to find out how fourth-year foundation phase education students at one university felt about their own self-efficacy for inclusive teaching. It also intended to investigate how prepared they are, how confident they are, and to find out potential difficulties in the implementation of inclusive techniques in diverse classroom contexts. To sum up, this study has shed important light on how prepared final-year pre-service teachers are for inclusive teaching. The results emphasized the need for thorough teacher preparation programs that successfully combine academic understanding with real-life application. Educational institutions can better prepare aspiring teachers to provide inclusive learning settings and advance fairness and excellence in education for all learners by addressing recognized issues and putting specific recommendations into practice.

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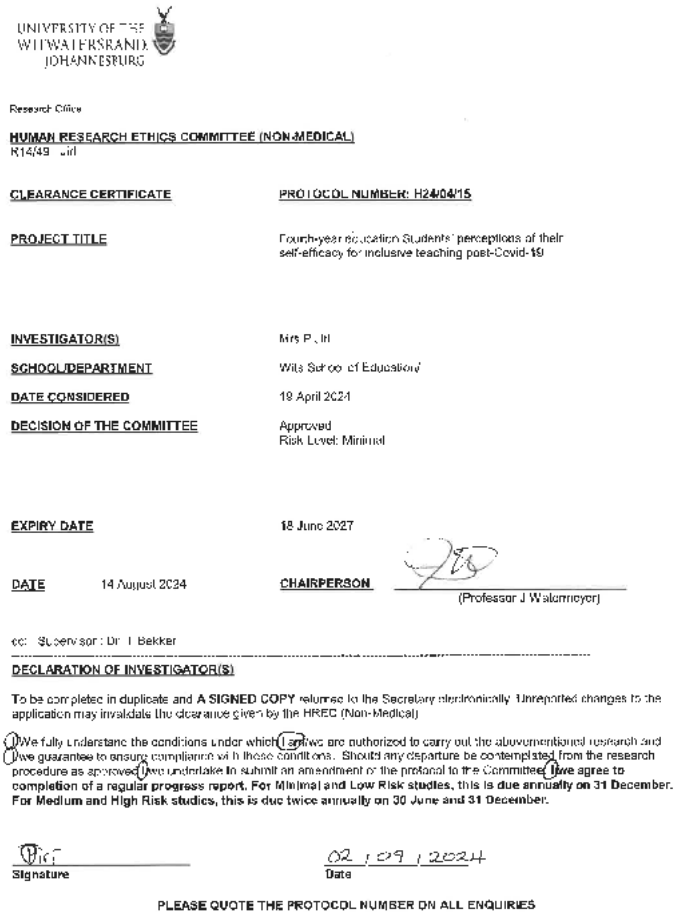
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Appendices

Appendix A1: Ethics Clearance



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H24/04/15**
PROJECT TITLE	Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post-Covid-19
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mrs P ... ln
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Wits School of Education
DATE CONSIDERED	19 April 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Minimal
EXPIRY DATE	18 June 2027
DATE 14 August 2024	**CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Wakermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr T Bekker

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

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

Signature

02 / 09 / 2024
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix A2: Permission Letter



05 August 2024

Ms Princess Jiri
0410898m@students.wits.ac.za

Re: Permision to conduct research at the Wits School of Education -
PROTOCOL NUMBER: H24/04/15

Dear Ms Jiri,

Permission is, hereby granted for you to conduct your study **'Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post-Covid-19'** at the Wits School of Education in accordance with **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H24/04/15** of your conditional ethical clearance approval.

Sincerely,

J.C. Perumal

Professor Juliet Perumal
Head of School
Wits School of Education
Tel: 011 717 3003
Email: Juliet.Perumal@wits.ac.za

Appendix A3: Individual Interview Information Sheet



Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Princess Jiri I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Tanya Bekker. I am conducting a research study about how the fourth year feel they are prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms and if they are ready to go into the classroom next year. The study title is: Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post Covid-19.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about thirty minutes to an hour. The interview/research activity will take place at Wits School of Education at a time that is convenient for you.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in computer protected with a password for three years and it will be destroyed after three years. Only the researcher which is me Princess Jiri will have access to the data.

The interview Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post Covid-19, will be confidential and anonymous only if I am interviewing you on your own. However if you agree to do a focus group interview with your peers I can only guarantee your confidentiality but you will not be anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

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

Appendix A4: Individual Interview Consent Form



Consent Form: Individual Interview

Title of project: Fourth-year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post Covid-19.

Name of researcher: Princess Jiri

I, ..., agree to participate in this research project.
I agree to the following:
(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.	YES	NO
I agree that the individual interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my individual interview may be used by the researcher in their research report: Fourth year education Students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post Covid-19.	YES	NO

Appendix B1: Fourth-year Education Students Questionnaire Schedule

Questionnaire Title: Fourth-year education students' perceptions of their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching post Covid-19.

Introduction:

I appreciate you taking the time to respond to this crucial questionnaire. This questionnaire will investigate the perspectives of fourth-year education students regarding their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching. This questionnaire is intended to help final-year education students reflect on their level of preparedness as they prepare to teach in the classroom and to pinpoint the key difficulties or worries, they foresee. It should take you around 30 minutes to complete the survey. Please know that your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Section A: Self-Efficacy and Inclusive Education

1. Please explain your own understanding of self-efficacy.

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……
……
……

2. What is your own definition of Inclusive education?

……
……
……
……..

3. What do you think the purpose of Inclusive Education is?

……
……
……
……

4. How would you rate your knowledge of Inclusive teaching methods? Please tick one that applies to you. (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest)

1	2	3	4	5

- Can you explain why you gave yourself that rating?

……
……
……
……

5. Self-Efficacy Beliefs Towards Inclusive Education.

Please read each statement and tick the column that applies to you.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I consider myself sufficiently ready to face any task in my role as an inclusive teacher.					
I think I can design and plan lessons that are inclusive of all learners.					

I feel confident to address situations that test my ability as a teacher.					
I am confident in my ability to motivate demanding learners.					
I feel confident in my skills to carry out teaching successfully.					

- Can you explain how confident you feel when it comes to practicing inclusivity in the classroom?

  ……
  ……
  ……
  ……

6. Which of the following pedagogical strategies would you be comfortable to use in your classroom next year?

   Please tick whichever is applicable.

Differentiation	
Co-operative Learning	
Learning through play	
Storytelling	

Personalized Learning	
Other	

- Please explain what makes you comfortable using the chosen strategies.

……
……
……
……

7. Please tick the statement below that best reflects your feelings about including all learners.

I would like to include all learners, but I do not know how.	
I am comfortable including all learners.	
I think learners with special needs belong in a mainstream classroom.	
I think learners with special needs belong in a special school.	
Other	

8. Self-efficacy rating: Which option would you choose if I asked you to rank your overall confidence in your capacity to teach inclusively on a scale from 1 – 5?

1 Lowest	2	3	4	5 Highest

- Can you explain the reason you selected that rating?

……
……
……
……

- What do you think has influenced your confidence? Why?

……
……
……
……

9. What experiences in your four years of studying have resulted in you feeling more confident in your teaching ability? Why?

……
……
……
……

10. What experiences in your four years of studying have resulted in you feeling less confident in your teaching ability? Why?

……
……
……
……

Section B: Self-efficacy in relation to the four competencies to inclusion

1. Please tick the statement that you feel is reflective of your approach to teaching below.

I think it is important to cater for the majority of the learners.	
I think some learners will always fit in and others will not.	
I think learners with special needs demand too much attention from teachers.	
I think it is important to be responsive to learner needs.	
I think it is important to respect that different learners come from different backgrounds.	

- Explain why you feel your choice is more important.

……
……
……
……

2. Please tick the statement that you feel resonates with your beliefs below.

I am confident in my capacity to adapt to various learning techniques.	
I feel equipped to make sure that each learner in my classroom receives individualized support and care.	

I would like to learn more about how to deal with difficulties that come up when assisting learners with special learning needs.	
I believe that managing a varied group of learners in a single classroom is incredibly demanding and challenging.	

- Explain why the statement you chose resonates with you.

……
……
……
……

3. Please tick the box that best describes your own opinion below.

I believe that the value of teamwork is working with parents and families and working with other education professionals because learners have assistance at both home and school.	
I think I can work together with other teachers and professionals to improve my capacity to help diverse learners.	
I think it is too much work collaborating with other teachers and professionals and I do not think it will significantly increase my ability to support diverse learners.	
I believe it will be challenging for me to use the knowledge and viewpoints of other education professionals to raise the standard of instruction and support given to learners.	

- How would you describe your own self-efficacy in relation to teamwork?

……
……
……
……

4. Please tick the box that you feel best describes your feelings toward your own personal and professional development.

I believe making an investment in my personal growth increases my overall professional effectiveness.	
I think it will be difficult to try to strike a balance between my work and personal life ambitions.	my
In my opinion, it will be challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance and pursue ongoing professional development.	
I believe making an investment in my professional development will benefit my personal development.	

- What would you say about your own level of self-efficacy in terms of professional and personal development?

……
……
……
……

Appendix B2: Fourth-year Education Students Interview Schedule

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to explore the perceptions of fourth-year education students regarding their self-efficacy for inclusive teaching. I am keen on understanding the level of preparedness that final-year education students perceive as they approach classroom teaching and identifying the primary challenges or concerns, they anticipate. My research report will be based on part of the information I learned from this interview. I want to reassure you that your responses will be kept completely confidential, and that no specific person will be mentioned in my study. I value your willingness to participate in this study and your invaluable input.

It should take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete the interview.

Are you happy to participate in the interview today?

If you change your mind during the interview, you are free to do so.

Do you have any queries before we begin?

Is it okay if I record our chat just to aid me with my notes?

1. How would you describe your level of knowledge in relation to Inclusive Education?

2. What do you personally think and feel about inclusive education?

- Which life experiences have shaped your belief systems?

3. What do you think your BEd programme has prepared you for in terms of teaching inclusively?

- What do you think your BEd programme has not prepared you for?

4. How confident are you in your ability to teach learners with diverse needs in an inclusive environment based on your training and experience?

- Why do you feel this way?

5. As a final-year education student is there anything that is making you worried or anxious about when you think of walking into the classroom as a teacher next year?

- Why do you feel that way?

6. What do you think is your level of self-efficacy when it comes to implementing inclusive education?

7. Please describe how you think the knowledge and the experience you have received have prepared you to teach all learners.

8. You have almost completed your BEd degree, what are your current perceptions about Inclusive Education?

Scenario: Imagine next year you go into a school that has a very different view of Inclusive Education to the one you have just told me.

Do you think you would still advocate for Inclusive Education, or you would feel obligated to conform to the school policy?

9. What do think initial teacher education programmes should do to improve teachers' skills?10. Is there anything I have not asked that you wish I had?