

**ENHANCING INCLUSION IN GRADE 10 ENGLISH LANGUAGE
CLASSES THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION
INTERVENTIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree

Master in Education

in

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
in the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
(WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

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JUNE 2025

DECLARATION

As a candidate for the Master of Education degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, I, Nomonde Sithembile Mdinwa, hereby attest that this dissertation has never before been submitted for credit toward a degree at this or any other university. Any assistance has been acknowledged, but this dissertation is entirely my own. I have made sure to properly cite any other sources I have used.

	<u>15 JUNE 2025</u>
Signature	Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the following people:

- My daughter, who is my inspiration and source of strength. My motivation to keep going and finish my Masters research has come from your presence and my love for you.
- To my cherished parents, whose constant encouragement and support have served as my main source of inspiration. Their selflessness and faith in my abilities have motivated me to pursue greatness. This work is also dedicated to my supervisor, whose advice has been crucial during this process.
- I want to express my gratitude to my friends and colleagues for their support and shared experiences, which have added significance to this process.
- Finally, this research is dedicated to the cherished memories of my late uncle Mavuso Mtshali, who placed a high importance on education and constantly urged his children to seize every chance for education and development. I continue to be inspired by his unshakable faith in the power of knowledge, and I honour his legacy with this accomplishment. May he rest in peace forever.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful to God for giving me the courage, discernment, and fortitude to finish this research; his direction and favour have been my pillars of support throughout this process, particularly in the trying times when I felt extremely overwhelmed.
- I want to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini, whose constant encouragement, support, and dedication have greatly influenced the direction of this study. Particularly during my pregnancy, your understanding, encouraging, and patient advice were a real strength. I will always be thankful to you because your confidence in my ability kept me going when I wanted to give up.
- I would want to convey my gratitude to all of the participants in this study as well as the educators who not only shared their knowledge but also remained supportive and concerned long after the data gathering process was completed. This research was made possible by your willingness to share your viewpoints and experiences. Additionally, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the two chosen colleges for their collaboration and assistance during this research.
- I want to express my gratitude to my amazing parents, Herman and Smangele Mdinwa, as well as my brother, Loyiso Mdinwa, for their everlasting love, support, and encouragement along this journey. Your confidence in me kept me inspired and grounded. To my darling daughter, my ray of hope and perseverance, you served as a continual reminder of the reasons I had to keep going. This achievement is equally yours and mine.
- I want to express my sincere gratitude to my cousin, Lerato Mokoena, whose inspiration, assurance, and support were crucial in helping me stay focused and driven. Thank you for your friendship, spiritual support, and shared scholastic problems, dear friends Thandile Dova, Prudence Zimba, and Melisah Mjokovana. This adventure was more fulfilling and manageable because of you.
- Lastly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped make this research a success in one way or another. I am incredibly grateful to have had all of you by my side; your generosity and encouragement have been priceless.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of special education practices in a mainstream secondary school, focusing on enhancing inclusive education in Grade 10 English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms in a South African township school. The study employs an interpretivist research paradigm with a qualitative, phenomenological design to capture participants' lived experiences. The sampling method used was purposeful where it involved intentionally selecting participants who were most likely to provide relevant, rich, and in-depth information about the study. Two male and female learners were selected from the mainstream school, resulting to a total of four learners. Five educators from both institutions were included who solely taught Grade 10 English FAL. Data was collected through participant observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, research diaries and reflective journaling. Thematic analysis was used to identify emerging patterns and insights, while ethical considerations ensured informed consent, confidentiality and participant wellbeing. Findings reveal the key challenges and opportunities in integrating special education interventions into mainstream English language classrooms. The study contributes to existing literature by offering evidence-based recommendations for policy and teaching practices that promote inclusion. Ultimately, this research advocates for targeted interventions that address learning barriers and support diverse educational needs in South African township schools.

Key terms: Special education, inclusive education, special educational programmes, individualised education plan, zone of proximal development

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LISTS OF ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADHD	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
ANC	African National Congress
AT	Assistive Technology
CAT	Computer applications technology
CRPD	Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBSTs	District-based support Teams
EAHCA	The Education for All Handicapped Children Act
EFA	Education for all
FAL	First additional language
FAPE	Free appropriate public education
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualised education plan
LRC	Learning in a Regular Classroom
LRE	Least Restrictive learning environment
LSEN	Learners with special educational needs
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
MDGs	The Millennium Development Goals
MKOs	More Knowledgeable Others
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NSC	National Senior Certificate
RTI	Response to Intervention
SBSTs	School-Based Support Teams
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEL	Socioemotional learning
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy
SMTs	School Management Teams
UDHR	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UDL	Universal Design for Learning

UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The term special education describes specialized teaching methods, materials, and interventions created to address the particular learning requirements of learners who have learning barriers or have disabilities. “Special education is-both by American law (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, dating from 1975) and traditional concern for the education and well-being of students with disabilities-focused on the individual, not the general population of students. It is because educators must say of certain students with characteristics that are not shared by all, “This one, not that one.” (Kauffman & Hornby, p.7, 2020). Whereas an educational strategy known as inclusive education makes sure that all learners, irrespective of their abilities, backgrounds, or challenges, have an equal chance to engage, learn, and succeed in mainstream classrooms. “In 1994, inclusion was presented as a promising new pedagogical approach at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca (UNESCO Citation1994). Building on the Salamanca declaration, the global movement of ‘Education for All’ (UNESCO Citation2000), states that the inclusion of all children in regular schools is the most effective way to counteract discriminatory attitudes and achieve the goal of inclusive education” (Kauffman & Hornby, p. 7, 2020). Therefore, special education in this study refers to the intentional use of targeted interventions, teaching strategies and support networks created to meet the particular learning requirements of learners who experience learning barriers. When it comes to teaching English learners in grade 10, inclusive education places a strong emphasis on developing a classroom environment where all learners actively participate, have equal learning opportunities, and feel like they belong. Therefore, special education interventions are seen as necessary support that enable inclusion in mainstream English classes rather than as an independent measure. This chapter begins with the background of the study, followed by the problem and purpose statements and the research questions guiding the study. The rationale explains the significance of the study, while the discussion of inclusive education explores its international and South African policy contexts, as well as the challenges in implementation. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework of social constructivism and considers different approaches to inclusive education. The research methodology is briefly introduced, alongside ethical considerations that ensure the integrity of the study. To guide the reader, the structure of the report is outlined, and operational definitions of key terms are provided. The

chapter concludes by summarizing these elements and setting the foundation for the rest of the dissertation.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Special education is a set of services, programmes and strategies designed to fulfil the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. The purpose of special education is to give learners with disabilities an equal opportunity for education by addressing their specific learning challenges and ensuring they have access to a suitable and effective educational environment. Special education is a field that attempts to help individuals with impairments flourish academically and socially (Kauffman, 2018). Laws and regulations governing special education differ from country to country, but common examples are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States of America (USA) and the Education Act in the United Kingdom. These rules define the rights of learners to obtain an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. The USA supports efforts that aim to ensure learners with special needs or learning barriers receive adequate support and have access to a high-quality education, as well as inclusive education for learners who experience a variety of learning challenges (Bjorn et al., 2016, p. 7). The IDEA, which was re-authorised in 1997, was the first law to fundamentally, conceptually, and practically alter the concept of special education (Lipkin et al., 2015, p. 4). The Act calls for institutions to provide qualifying learners with special education services and supports in the environment with the fewest restrictions possible. In the USA, learners with disabilities receive educational services in regular classes, resource rooms or special schools, depending on their specific educational needs. Furthermore, Lipkin et al. (2015) suggest that a learner with a disability may obtain adequate education in regular classrooms, regular classes with supplemental services, or special education and related services. Special education is an essential part of inclusive education, which aims to provide equal opportunity for all learners, including those experiencing learning barriers and impairments.

Special education has grown and developed significantly in China during the past few years. As a remedy to redress the conundrum faced by learners with special educational needs, both those living with disabilities and those without, the Chinese government introduced the Learning in a Regular Classroom (LRC) policy (Fei, 2007). The LRC essentially aimed at three

aspects, which included: educator preparation, instructional adaptations and eligibility requirements. This necessitated the provision of special education programmes for school-aged learners; professional development and resource centres; and an intensive diagnostic and training centre for 3- and 4-year-olds with autism. Although such a school is thought to be quite intellectual, learners also participate in physical activities and spend a lot of one-on-one time with their educators. Deng and Zhu (2016) state that fundamentally, the LRC was the primary strategy for ensuring that all learners with impairments were required to attend school.

On the African continent, caused by inadequate infrastructure and resources, Zimbabwe confronts major difficulties in providing special education programmes. Chireshe (2013) reported that lack of a specific policy on inclusive education was among the challenges that were perceived to be present in the country. Other major factors were a lack of resources, such as specially trained educators and assistive technology, negative attitudes among some stakeholders, and a lack of understanding of what inclusive education means. Although the Zimbabwean government has worked to create inclusive education policies, implementation is still difficult, especially in rural areas. The challenges faced by the Zimbabwean education fraternity includes but is not limited to a lack of qualified educators, a lack of adequate funding, and a lack of specialised facilities. Chitiyo et al. (2017) state that the special education programmes are primarily geared towards the urban areas. However, international projects and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have contributed to the growth of special education services in Zimbabwe.

In the South African context, special education classes are created especially for learners with severe learning difficulties, or other complex requirements. According to the DoE (2005), the White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System envisioned that special schools be enhanced to serve as resource centres, offering system-wide help to learners who require a high degree of care. This was done in recognition of the resources and expertise that are present in special schools. Special education programmes are crucial for supporting inclusive education, as they offer individualised support, encourage social development, ensure equitable opportunities, and they have a positive effect on people with disabilities, as well as the broader society.

In addition to the guidelines for special schools, special school resource centres should have expert knowledge and skills that are not available in other schools in the planning and delivery of the curriculum programmes that are offered in their school. This

includes but is not limited to aligning their programme to the national curriculum, differentiating and adapting the curriculum, so that learners enrolled in their schools are able to learn and develop (DOE, 2005, p. 20).

1.3 Problem Statement

In most South African township secondary schools, there is a recognised, severe challenge in the English FAL classroom in properly meeting the learners' diverse learning needs, including those with various learning difficulties and special education requirements. Conventional teaching methods and resources often fall short in addressing the unique cognitive, emotional and behavioural demands of learners with learning disabilities, hindering them from fully engaging and progressing in the English FAL curriculum. To establish a welcoming and encouraging learning environment that meets the different needs of all learners and promotes fair educational outcomes in the English FAL classroom, it is important that specialised techniques and strategies from the field of special education be studied and incorporated. The goal of inclusive education goes beyond merely integrating learners with learning barriers into regular classes. It encompasses the broader objective of developing inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater for the needs of all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, identities or abilities. Terzi (2014) reported that inclusive education offers an integrated value framework that clarifies the relationship between education and the goals of a just society. It suggests an emphasis on equity needs, as well as educational provision quality. At the same time, it places all learners' wellbeing and agency at the heart of the educational process, including those with disabilities and learning barriers.

It was against this background of conundrum and speculation that the researcher decided to explore inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes by using special education interventions. While Grade 8 marks the beginning of high school in the South African context, Grade 10 to 12 are referred to as FET (further education and training), or as senior high school by learners, making Grade 10 a significant milestone for learners. This is when learners are expected to choose the subjects they would study for their National Senior Certificate (NSC hereafter). This certificate is commonly known as the matriculation (matric) certificate, as Grade 12 is the matriculation grade.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate how inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes can be enhanced through special education interventions. The major focus is on learners in Grade 10 who have special educational needs and are experiencing learning barriers. The objective is to analyse the practices and strategies previously used by schools to assist the inclusion of these learners, and to identify any barriers or challenges, and highlight successful approaches through the research. The aim is to establish a more responsive and supportive learning environment in the English FAL classroom by leveraging proven strategies and methodologies from special education. This integration aims to provide educators with tools that will allow them to successfully cater for learners of diverse abilities, enabling equal access to the curriculum and encouraging improved language learning and communication skills for every learner. The study seeks to offer helpful insights and recommendations to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of these learners in normal school settings by examining the implementation of inclusive education for Grade 10 learners with learning barriers.

1.5 Research Questions

Very few studies have explored the use of special educational programmes to facilitate teaching and learning in Grade 10 English Language classes. Therefore, the use of special education strategies to improve learning through English as a second language has far-reaching limitations.

Therefore, the main research question for this study was:

- How can special educational programmes be used in Grade 10 English language mainstream classes in secondary schools for learners with special educational needs to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions were used in the study:

- a) How do educators conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion?
- b) What strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education teachers in the implementation of special education practices in Grade 10 English FAL classrooms?
- c) What are the potential difficulties educators might face while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom?

1.6 Research Objectives

The research objectives for this study were:

- a) To examine how educators, conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion;
- b) To explore what strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education teachers in the implementation of special education practices in the Grade 10 English FAL classroom; and
- c) To investigate the potential difficulties educators, face while employing special educational practices in the Grade 10 English FAL classroom.

1.7 Rationale of the Study

Many learners in conventional township schools experience learning barriers, although they do not qualify for special education. These learners are subjected to silent exclusion in classes because teachers are unable to meet their educational demands. This results in them not being able to achieve specific educational requirements and norms. Consequently, these learners are typically advanced to the next grade without meeting the academic requirements and they end up as citizens who do not contribute meaningfully to society. Although studies on special education and inclusive education have been conducted, little research had been conducted on the use of special educational programmes, such as individualised learning support, to increase inclusion for learners with learning barriers in mainstream English classrooms. Thus, this study was conducted to help determine which programmes are most appropriate and effective for the use in the mainstream classrooms. It also aimed to provide guidelines and recommendations for teachers on how to implement and improve inclusion for learners with learning difficulties in Grade 10 English classrooms.

1.8 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an educational approach that attempts to offer equal opportunity and assistance for every learner in mainstream educational environments, regardless of their skills or disabilities (Moria, 2016). It involves creating inclusive learning environments that cater for learners' different needs, while it also encourages active participation and engagement in the learning process (Ainscow & Messiou, 2017). The purpose of inclusive education is to create an equal opportunity for all learners to study and participate in the educational environment, regardless of their ability, background or traits (Dalgaard et al., 2021).

1.8.1 International background on inclusive education

People with disabilities have often been excluded from mainstream education and in the past been placed in separate, special education settings or institutions. The origins of inclusive education can be traced back to various historical, social and philosophical influences, starting with the early roots of ancient civilisation where concepts of inclusivity and valuing diverse abilities can be found in educational practices of ancient Greece, China and India, where education catered for individual needs and talents. However, education was often exclusive and limited to selected groups of society in ancient times (Foreman, 2020). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the rise of special education movements in Europe and North America led to the establishment of segregated schools for learners with disabilities.

1.8.2 International inclusive education policies

Several international policies and agreements have been developed to govern and control the global implementation of inclusive education. These policies emphasise the need for providing equitable educational opportunities for all learners, especially those with disabilities and those who might be marginalised or excluded from the standard educational systems. The 1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994), the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are some of the key international policies and agreements related to inclusive education.

1.8.3 South African inclusive education policies

South Africa has made noteworthy efforts to adopt inclusive education by establishing several policies and laws to promote the inclusion of learners experiencing barriers to learning and other unique learning requirements in mainstream educational settings. The following are the key South African legal frameworks governing the implementation of inclusive education:

- a) The right to education is ensured by the South African Constitution of 1996 (Section 29, which guarantees the right to basic education).
- b) The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 as amended, Section 6A (1), states that the curriculum must be designed to ensure that all learners, regardless of their background or abilities, can achieve their full potential.

- c) The (2001) White Paper 6: Special Needs Education is the national policy framework for the provision of education and training to disabled learners.
- d) The 2013 National Inclusive Education Framework outlines the concepts and procedures for special needs education, including inclusive education principles. It provides a framework for meeting a variety of learning demands inside the educational system.
- e) Finally, the SIAS policy was initially introduced in 2014, which aims to improve the screening, identification, assessment and support systems for learners who have learning barriers.

1.8.4 Addressing challenges of inclusive education

Despite the best intentions, the implementation of inclusive education has been fraught with difficulties in numerous countries. Meeting individual needs within general education settings is a common challenge (Maeda et al., 2021). The learners' broad variety of skills and learning styles necessitates individualised help and adjustments (Maeda et al., 2021). Furthermore, the lack of educational psychologist support systems in mainstream schools also hinders the implementation of inclusive education (Maeda et al., 2021). Despite the challenges, there has been some progress in the implementation of inclusive education, such as broadening the concept of inclusion and ensuring that every learner is considered equally important and has the right to receive effective educational opportunities (Ainscow, 2020). The expectation is that the optimal model in inclusive education will be one that promotes the full participation and equal opportunities for all learners, regardless of their abilities, disabilities or other diverse characteristics. Inclusive education is based on the principles of equity, diversity and social justice. Therefore, the optimal model for inclusive education will have to be flexible, responsive, and focused on ensuring that every learner has an equitable opportunity to learn and thrive (Johnson, 2023).

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. It is a well-known developmental psychology theory that emphasises the importance of social interactions in cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learners' cognitive development is inextricably linked to their social and cultural surroundings. Kim (2001) stated that the relevance of culture and context in comprehending what happens in society and building knowledge based on this understanding is emphasised by social constructivism. It underlines

the importance of social and cultural impacts on human cognition and development, where it has a critical influence on moulding an individual's mental processes and higher-order thinking. Kim (2001) also reported that knowledge is a human product that is socially and culturally formed. Individuals generate meaning through their relationships with one another and with their surroundings.

Social constructivism lists three concepts, such as the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding and language (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). "The zone of proximal development is the distance between what learners can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance" (Van Der Stuyf, 2002, p. 2). It represents the difference between learners' current level of development and their potential development with the help of others. The ZPD refers to a more knowledgeable other (MKO), such as an educator or a more proficient peer. Rodina (2006) stated that according to Vygotsky's theory, "a positive resource-oriented approach means a favourable societal view of disabled learners, emphasising the strengthening and empowerment of individual skills above the conventional emphasis on weaknesses or deviations" (p. 3-4). Scaffolding is the assistance provided by a knowledgeable individual to assist a learner in completing tasks within their ZPD (Wass, Harland, & Mercer, 2011). As the learners gain competence, the support is gradually removed, allowing them to perform the task alone. Van Der Stuyf (2002) reported that in scaffolding instruction, an MKO provides scaffolds or supports to help the learner progress. The scaffolds help learners build on prior knowledge and internalise new information. Anggadewi (2017) cited in Rahmiadji, Hendardi, Meiland, and Fajriah (2023) further states that scaffolding is a learning strategy based on Vygotsky's philosophy. It employs a tiered learning strategy, which makes this method more adaptable to the learners' ability. Scaffolding can be used by educators in the remedial teaching process. This method allows learners to learn in stages, making mastering of learning materials easier.

Petrová (2013) reported that cultural tools are valuable means of deploying problem-solving techniques that are culturally more appropriate and outperform the effectiveness of the strategies currently available to individuals as part of their repertoire of independent action.

"Every function in a child's cultural development emerges twice: once on the social level and once on the individual level; once between individuals (inter-psychological) and once within the kid (intra-psychological). This holds true for voluntary attention,

logical memory and concept generation. All higher functions emerge from actual interpersonal relationships” (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Petrová, 2013, p. 241).

Vygotsky (1978) stressed the importance of language as a major cultural tool. Language is a tool for thinking and problem-solving, as well as a medium of communication. Individuals internalise knowledge and connect with others through language to jointly develop meaning and understanding. Children internalise cultural knowledge as they interact with others and use language, which shapes their thinking and understanding of the world. According to McLeod (2014), Vygotsky posited that language emerges through social interactions for the sake of communication. Vygotsky considered language to be person’s most powerful tool, a means of communicating with the outside world. Educators can improve the learning and development of learners with various abilities by recognising and using the power of cultural tools, and thereby ensuring that education meets the needs of all learners.

1.10 Different Approaches to Inclusive Education Research

1.10.1 Disability approach

A disability approach entails recognising, understanding and addressing the needs, rights and potential of people with disabilities in a variety of situations. These can include society, education, work and public services. Valle & Connor (2019) state that the approach promotes an understanding of disability as a social construct influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional factors. This approach encourages educators to recognize and dismantle the barriers both physical and attitudinal that hinder the full participation of learners with disabilities in general education settings. That strategy aims to provide an inclusive and accessible environment that fosters equality, dignity and full participation for individuals with disabilities.

1.10.2 School reform approach

A school reform approach entails systematically and intentionally changing many components of the education system to improve its effectiveness, responsiveness and overall outcomes. Bueno et al. (2010) contended that a high-quality education system should provide equitable chances for all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic level or background. They highlighted the need for the system to address inequalities in resources, teacher quality, and access to educational opportunities.

1.10.3 Critical theory approach

The critical theory approach is a social and humanities perspective that aims to investigate and criticise societal institutions, norms, power relations, and inequities. Multhukrishna & Engelbrecht (2022) mention that critical theory is used to question how Eurocentric values shape inclusive education. It focuses on transforming belief systems, policy, and leadership so that values like Ubuntu and social justice reshape inclusion. The goal of critical theory is to reveal hidden assumptions, challenge prevailing ideologies, and promote social change and fairness.

1.10.4 Emancipatory/ transformative approach

According to Feola (2015), the transformational research approach can be used to both understand and assist social change. The transformative approach is defined by three sets of assumptions that shape one's worldview. A transformative approach to inclusive education entails moving away from traditional educational approaches that merely accommodate learners with various needs and moving toward a more complete and holistic strategy that aspires to provide an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all learners.

1.11 Background of the Research Methodology

Research methodology is critical in guiding the research process and assuring the validity and dependability of the findings. According to Nieuwenhuis (2020), a research methodology refers to the procedures and strategies used by researchers to acquire data, analyse it, describe it and explain it. It serves as a framework that guides researchers in their quest to explore, investigate, and answer research questions or hypotheses (Peffer et al., 2007).

1.11.1 Research methodology

1.11.1.1 Research paradigm (interpretivism)

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs, assumptions, and concepts that guide researchers' approaches to their research and how they interpret their findings. Understanding paradigm-specific assumptions can assist to reveal the quality of findings that support scientific studies and uncover gaps in evidence generation (Park et al., 2020). This study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism, according to Briggs (2011), holds that reality is multi-perspectival and focuses on people's subjective experiences, how people form the social environment by sharing meaning, and how they interact with one another.

1.11.1.2 Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach is a research methodology that seeks to comprehend the breadth and complexities of human experiences, actions and occurrences (Rahman, 2016). It seeks to unearth the underlying meanings, patterns and social dynamics that affect people's viewpoints and relationships. According to Petterson (2019), qualitative research involves investigating how people assign meaning to the environment around them. Qualitative research provides context and depth to one's understanding of the human experience's complexities. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore how special educational programmes could be implemented in Grade 10 English classes in mainstream secondary schools to achieve inclusive teaching and learning.

1.11.1.3 Research design: Phenomenology

This study employed the phenomenological research design, a philosophical approach that focuses on understanding and explaining the essence of human experiences from the perspectives of those who have those experiences (Olekanma et al., 2022). Qutoshi (2018) states that phenomenology is primarily concerned with understanding, describing, and interpreting participants' lived experiences. As a result, phenomenology enabled the researcher to investigate learners' complex experiences in depth, specifically in terms of accommodating learners with specific needs in mainstream English classes. This necessitated the research going beyond surface-level observations.

1.11.2 Sampling and selection of participants

Halim, Ahmad, and Ramayah (2017) report that determining the optimal sample size is frequently a crucial step and decision that educational and organisational researchers face. Purposive sampling was used to select two male learners and two female learners from the mainstream school, resulting in a total of four learners. Five educators from both institutions were also included, who solely taught Grade 10 English language learners. The reason for this sampling was educators' thorough understanding of the specific challenges learners in that grade experience. The researcher also selected both principals from these institutions.

1.11.3 Qualitative data-generation instruments

Given (2015) stated that qualitative research is used to obtain insights into people's feelings and thoughts, which can serve as the foundation for a future stand-alone qualitative study or

aid researchers in developing survey instruments for use in a quantitative study. Therefore, I used the following tools to generate the data:

1.11.3.1 Participant observations

According to Aagaard and Matthiesen (2015), participant observation is a qualitative research approach, in which the researcher actively engages in and observes a social environment, or group of individuals, to acquire a thorough understanding of their behaviours, interactions and experiences. In this study, participant observations were utilised because of their strength of allowing the researcher to establish rapport and build a connection with participants (Archibald et al., 2019).

1.11.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Makafane (2022) describes interviews as a two-way communication, in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data and learn about the participants' ideas, beliefs, opinions and behaviour. According to Nieuwenhuis (2020), organised, semi-structured and unstructured interviews might take place in a study, depending on the researcher's aims. This study utilised semi-structured interviews, which are commonly used to corroborate data from various data sources (Nieuwenhuis, 2020).

1.11.3.3 Focus groups interviews

This study used focus group interviews, which were defined by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010) as a means of gathering data from more than one participant at the same time and in a secure atmosphere. Focus groups interviews gather a group of people to discuss a specific topic or issue. Focus groups allowed the researcher to collect data from several participants in single sessions, making it a time-efficient data collection method. The goal of the focus group interview is to collect data in addition to the actual remarks given by the participants (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010).

1.11.3.4 Research diaries

According to Sheble and Wildemuth (2009), a diary is a record of an ever-changing present, in which the perspective of one or more individuals is recorded over time, capturing both outward events and incidents, as well as internal thoughts and feelings. A contemporaneous insight into

the lived experience of the individual filling up the diary can be obtained through the use of diaries for qualitative research (Morrell-Scott, 2018).

“This is particularly pertinent when attempting to gain intimate details of the phenomenon’s experiences. This is in line with the phenomenological approach advocated with diaries as a data collection method, in order to gain a rich picture of the phenomenon of interest” (Morrell-Scott, 2018, p. 27).

In this study, I utilised a research diary to collect data as participants were requested to record their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their own terms and at their own pace, resulting in rich and detailed data that would not have been available through other approaches.

1.11.3.5 Research journal

This study also utilised research journals, which are a good instrument to communicate discoveries, add to the existing body of knowledge, and engage in intellectual conversations with other experts in their field (Valtakoski, 2019). Research journals are a platform for researchers to discuss their findings, theories and approaches, which other researchers can subsequently build on (Valtakoski, 2019). A research journal is a structured and organised space, where a researcher can keep track of all aspects of the research process.

1.11.4 Data analysis

According to Maree (2011), while analysing qualitative data, the goal is to synthesise what the researcher has observed, or heard, in terms of phrases, common words, themes and patterns that will help one understand and deduce what is unfolding. After gathering data, I conducted qualitative data analysis, which included classifying, categorising and interpreting the information. This implied that I analysed the interview data by using thematic analysis and supported it with relevant literature. I transcribed all the interviews, which required listening to and typing out each one. I then read the transcripts several times to become deeply acquainted with the content; I took notes and assessed the similarities and contrasts revealed by the data. I also wrote notes in the margins of the transcripts to assist with the initial study and analysis of the content.

1.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are vital to protect the rights and wellbeing of human participants. This is especially important when conducting research with minor participants, who are more vulnerable to exploitation and harm.

1.12.1 Gatekeepers' permission

Ethics clearance from a university is crucial for all research, as it ensures that research conducted among learners is conducted in a transparent, fair, respectful and ethical manner. I applied for ethics clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand's Research and Ethics Committee (non-medical) to conduct the study (Appendix A). To protect the rights and wellbeing of learners and educators, the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) has a responsibility to ensure that they are shielded from any potential harm that could arise from research activities. I applied to the GDE (Appendix C) for access and permission to conduct this study in the two schools. By following the GDE's procedures for applying for permission to conduct research in these schools, I ensured that this study was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner.

1.12.2 Informed consent

According to Manti and Licari (2018), informed consent is documented by a written, signed and dated informed consent form. Prior to the researcher commencing with the data collection process in the selected schools, she obtained informed consent from the parents or legal guardians of minor participants before enrolling them in the study (see Appendix F). Additionally, I obtained informed consent from the participating educators and principals. She provided them with all of the relevant information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, risks and benefits (Appendix E), explaining that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. According to Bell (2014), voluntary involvement is essential in ethical research, where individuals choose to participate without coercion. I also protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the minor participants' data and personal information (Jamal et al., 2014), ensuring that their data was secure and only shared with authorised individuals, including this study's supervisor.

1.13 Structure of the Report

Chapter 1: This chapter provided a thorough overview of the numerous aspects of special education in the US, China, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The comparison highlighted the different approaches and challenges that each nation has encountered during the process of implementing special education into practice, especially when it comes to promoting inclusive education. The problem statement established the importance of satisfying the various learning needs of learners in South African township secondary schools, especially those learning in the English FAL. This need formed the basis for the study, which aims to enhance inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through the integration of special education interventions.

The study's purpose, research questions and objectives were all clearly stated, highlighting the importance of determining the most effective ways to apply special education practices to serve learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms. The study's rationale emphasised the gaps in literature that currently exist and the critical importance of developing inclusive practices that cater to the needs of all learners, including those who encounter learning barriers but do not meet the requirements for special education.

Chapter 2: The literature review explores the landscape of special educational programmes and inclusive education. It examines international and African perspectives with a focus on legislative frameworks and theoretical underpinnings. The review provides a detailed analysis of the intersection between special education and inclusive education and identifies research approaches guiding this field. The literature review highlights the complexity of implementing and researching special educational programmes and inclusive education.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, which was guided by an interpretivist paradigm and followed a qualitative approach. The phenomenological research design is explained. The purposive sampling strategy is discussed, and qualitative data-generation instruments, including participant observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, research diaries, and a research journal, are described in detail. The chapter explains the data collection process and the process of thematic analysis used to identify patterns and meanings. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to institutional guidelines, are highlighted.

Chapter 4: This chapter provides an overview of the methods used to analyse the data included in the interview transcripts, the findings that were reached from the analysis, and the interpretation of the results.

Chapter 5: This study's findings are discussed in this chapter in relation to the themes that were employed and the data analysis in Chapter 4, which the researcher compares to the background of the literature review in Chapter 2 to draw conclusions about the study's contribution to the body of knowledge already in existence in this field. The research questions and their sub-questions are used to present the study's findings. Recommendations for policy and teaching are made considering the findings. The chapter ends with a summary of the study's limitations and potential research topics.

1.14 Operational Definition of Key Terms

1.14.1 Special education

In the context of this study, special education is a set of services, programmes, and strategies designed to fulfil the specific needs of individuals with disabilities. According to Billingsley and Bettini (2019), special education is the system used to help learners with physical, cognitive, emotional or developmental problems reach their full potential in educational settings. These programmes offer tailored support, accommodations and services.

1.14.2 Inclusive education

Inclusive education in this study is an educational approach that aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds or needs, have equal access to learning opportunities and can participate fully in the educational environment. Haug (2017) states that schools that implement inclusive education systems modify their curricula, instructional strategies and physical classroom layouts to accommodate the various requirements of every learner.

1.14.3 Special educational programmes

Special educational programmes in the context of this study are tailored instructional approaches and services designed to meet the unique needs of learners with disabilities or other learning challenges (Morin, 2020). These programmes aim to provide individualised support to help learners achieve their full potential and succeed academically, socially and personally.

1.14.4 Individualised education plan

For the purpose of this research, Individualised education plans (IEPs) are developed collaboratively by educators, parents and specialists, and are legally mandated in many jurisdictions for learners receiving special education services. According to Hallahan et al. (2020), the IEP is a legally binding document that outlines a customised educational plan made to meet the special requirements of a learner with a disability.

1.14.5 Zone of proximal development

As part of this research, Silalahi (2019) states that the ZPD refers to the set of tasks that learners cannot complete on their own, but one they can do with the assistance of a more competent individual, such as an educator, or a more proficient peer. It represents the difference between learners' current level of development and their potential development with the help of others.

1.15 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the background information to the study and explored the enhancement of inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions to facilitate inclusive learning and teaching. The chapter outlined the problem statement, the primary and secondary research questions, the study's aims and objectives, as well as the rationale of the study. Furthermore, the chapter explained inclusive education both from international and local perspectives, the social constructivism theory as the theoretical framework of the study, the different approaches to inclusive education research and the background of the research methodology. Finally, the chapter explained the ethical considerations that were adhered to throughout the study. The following chapter focuses on the available literature on the spectrum of inclusive education and special education programmes from both international and African perspectives.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review explores key concepts, frameworks and approaches that shape the field of inclusive and special education globally and in South Africa. It begins by defining special educational programmes as structured services designed to meet the needs of learners with disabilities, learning barriers and other special requirements, providing targeted resources and instructional strategies (Ainscow, 2020). The review then shifts to international perspectives on special education, where countries have adopted various approaches that were influenced by cultural, political and socioeconomic factors. Further, the intersection of special and inclusive education is considered in this review. The study then investigates the international legislative and policy frameworks regulating inclusive education, comprising foundational policies that encourage countries to implement inclusive education systems (UNESCO, 2015).

These frameworks have catalysed inclusive education practices worldwide, creating a shared standard for accommodating diverse learners. Shifting to a South African perspective, the roots of inclusive education are intertwined with post-apartheid policies focused on equity and social justice. The review further discusses the South African legislative and policy framework for inclusive education in South Africa. Thereafter, different approaches to inclusive education, such as the disability approach, school reform approach, critical theory approach, and emancipatory/transformational approach, offer distinct lenses, through which inclusive education can be understood. Each approach contributes valuable insights into how inclusive education can be enhanced in diverse educational contexts. This review provides a comprehensive overview of the global and South African perspectives, theories and approaches that underpin the evolution and ongoing development of inclusive and special education.

2.2 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

2.2.1 Defining special educational programmes

Programmes for special education are tailored teaching strategies, services, and resources designed to address the unique needs of learners who have disabilities or other learning difficulties (Hallahan et al., 2019). These programmes include a broad range of approaches meant to promote inclusivity and ensure equal access to education (Friend & Bursuck, 2019). Special education programmes in the English classroom are structured approaches and teaching methods created to support learners with a variety of learning needs, such as those who are

disabled, or have learning challenges. These programmes fall under the umbrella of inclusive education (Stein, 2011). By addressing learners' diverse capacities and ensuring that every learner may engage in the mainstream classroom, while receiving the necessary support to succeed, these programmes seek to promote equal access to quality education (Zigmond & Kloo, 2017). With a focus on the value of individualised support, inclusive education promotes the inclusion of learners with a diverse ability into general education settings. Special education programmes are devised to remove barriers and create equal learning environments, so that all learners, regardless of their specific needs, may engage with peers, access the curriculum, and improve their literacy skills in an inclusive English classroom (Kauffman, Hallahan, Pullen, Badar, 2018).

2.2.2 Types of special educational programmes

Musyoka and Clark (2017) report that a written plan, known as an individualised education plan (IEP), is created for learners with disabilities to ensure that they receive specialised education and support in the classroom. Specific educational objectives, the services the learner will receive, and any accommodations or changes required to support their success are all outlined in an IEP. A team of educators, specialists, the learners' parents, and occasionally the learners themselves work together to develop this individualised plan. IEPs are a common feature of special education programmes in inclusive education (Yell et al., 2021), and they are personalised learning plans created for learners with disabilities. The IEP includes the learners' specific educational goals, services and accommodations.

A multi-tiered strategy for early detection and support for learners with learning and behaviour challenges is called the response to intervention (RTI). According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2017), RTI

“focuses on providing high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to the learners' needs, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying data-driven strategies to determine whether learners require further support” (p. 56).

Increased levels of assistance are given in response to a learner's reactions to interventions. For example, learners experiencing difficulty with reading might become focused through small-group training; if they do not improve, they might receive more intensive one-on-one interventions (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2020).

Assistive Technology in Special Education is another programme utilised in the USA that exemplifies the use of assistive technologies in special education. According to Edyburn (2019), “special education supports learners in overcoming specific learning barriers, providing individualised solutions that allow them to participate more fully in both academic and social aspects of school” (p. 121). Common examples of these technologies include modified keyboards and speech-to-text software. Learners with cognitive or physical limitations can access the general education curriculum with the use of these aids.

The educational framework known as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) encourages flexible teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of learners with the goal of giving all learners an equal chance at success. UDL is based on the idea that teachers can accommodate the wide diversity of skills and learning preferences found in a classroom by implementing various forms of engagement, representation, and expression (Meyer et al., 2014). Offering a variety of presentation modes (such as written text, videos, or visual aids) and assessment methods (such as written essays, oral presentations, or multimedia projects) in an English classroom can be a part of UDL. Research highlights that UDL not only benefits the learners with specific learning challenges, but it also enhances learning for all learners by fostering a more adaptable and supportive educational environment (Hall et al., 2012).

Differentiation in learning is an instructional strategy that aims to address the unique needs, interests, and learning styles of individual learners by adapting the content, process and products of instruction. This approach is rooted in the understanding that learners have diverse abilities, motivations and prior knowledge, and therefore benefit from personalised educational experiences (Tomlinson, 2014, cited in Kubicek, 2024). To improve learners’ engagement and provide them with a more welcoming classroom environment, educators often change their lesson plans, methods of instruction delivery, assessment of learners, and classroom management when differentiated instruction is used. Depending on the readiness, interest, and learning profiles of the learners, these adjustments may involve modifications to the method, content, final product, and occasionally the learning environment (Blondie, Dahnke & Zusho, 2019). A common inclusive education approach is co-teaching, in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher collaborate in the same classroom. This is another special education programme and strategy. According to Friend (2016), this method supports learners with disabilities and enables differentiated instruction without separating these learners from their peers.

As part of the larger objective of inclusive education, special education programmes in South Africa are created to cater for the learners' various learning needs, especially for learners who have disabilities or learning challenges. The South African Schools Act (1996a) and the White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (2001) are two legislative foundations, which highlight every learner's right to a quality education, regardless of the learner's ability.

2.3 Special Educational Programmes – Internationally

The USA and UK

Laws and regulations governing special education differ from country to country, but common examples are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975 in the USA and the Education Act of 1996 in the United Kingdom (UK). These Acts define the learners' rights and require that all learners must be able to obtain an appropriate public education in the least restricted environment possible.

“The United States of America supports efforts that aim to ensure learners with special needs or impairments receive adequate support and have access to a high quality education, as well as inclusive education for learners who experience a variety of learning issues” (Bjorn et al., 2016, p. 7).

The IDEA of 1975, which was re-authorised in 1997, was the first law to fundamentally, conceptually and practically alter special education (Lipkin et al., 2015). It called for providing qualifying learners with special education services and support in the environment with the fewest restrictions possible.

Lipkin et al. (2015) suggested that a learner with a disability should obtain adequate education in regular classrooms, regular classes with supplemental services, or special education and related services. Special education is an essential part of inclusive education, which aims to provide equal opportunity for all learners, including those experiencing learning barriers and impairments. To ensure that learners with disabilities can access the general education curriculum alongside their peers without disabilities, the USA has long been at the forefront of developing inclusive education policies. Special education programmes have changed over time in response to the growing emphasis on inclusion, providing the support and accommodations that learners with disabilities require.

China

Over the past few decades, China has made substantial modifications to special education, especially considering the movement toward inclusive education. China's efforts are in line with international programmes, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which highlights everyone's right to inclusive education (Deng & Guo, 2017). China's special education programmes are developed to accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities, assuring them of a good education in mainstream schools. In the early years of special education in China, learners with disabilities were placed in separate facilities under a segregated system. However, China started moving toward more inclusive methods in the 1980s, after the Compulsory Education Law (1986) was put into effect (Hauwadhanasuk et al., 2018). This law established the foundation for the creation of inclusive education programmes by ensuring the right to education for children with disabilities. One significant step toward mainstreaming disabled learners was the 1988 release of the Outline of Education for Disabled Persons. This move was further cemented by the Chinese government's actions in the early 2000s. To emphasise the value of inclusive education for every learner, regardless of disability, the Chinese government created the education for all (EFA) initiative and the Law on the Protection of Disabled Persons (Winzer & Mazurek, 2017).

To promote inclusive education, China developed several special education programmes. The objective of these programmes is to ensure that learners with disabilities receive the support they need in mainstream classrooms (Yang, 2019). As a remedy to redress the challenge faced by learners with special educational needs (LSEN), both those living with disabilities and those without, the Chinese government introduced the learning in a regular classroom (LRC) policy. The LRC programme was started in the 1980s and aims to encourage learners with mild to moderate disabilities to attend regular schools (Zhang & Arya, 2023). One of the most popular inclusive education models in China is the LRC programme, in which a learner with a hearing impairment may be enrolled in a regular classroom with the help of a travelling special education teacher, who helps with curriculum adaptation and the use of AT, such as hearing aids (Zhou & Yang, 2016).

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's Education Act of 1987 is a testament to the country's commitment to inclusive education. The Act ensures that all children have access to education, including those with disabilities (Chitiyo, Hughes, Changara, Chitiyo, & Montgomery, 2017). However, caused by inadequate infrastructure and resources, Zimbabwe confronts major difficulties in providing

special education programmes. Chireshe (2013) mentions that the lack of a specific policy on inclusive education, a lack of resources, such as specially trained educators and assistive technology (AT), negative attitudes among some stakeholders, and a lack of understanding of what inclusive education means are among the challenges that are still perceived to be present currently. Although the Zimbabwean government has worked to create inclusive education policies, implementation is still difficult, especially in rural areas (Chimhenga, 2016). The challenges faced by the Zimbabwean education fraternity include but are not limited to a lack of qualified educators, of adequate money, and of specialised facilities. According to Chitiyo et al. (2017), special education programmes are primarily concentrated in urban areas. At the same time, international projects and NGOs have contributed to the growth of special education services in Zimbabwe. Special education is offered in an inclusive environment. Mutepfa cited in Chitiyo et al. (2017) claims that the four options used by Zimbabwean schools to support the education of learners with disabilities are locational inclusion, partial withdrawal from regular classroom settings, clinical remedial instruction, and unplanned or de facto inclusion.

Mpofu, Mutepfa, and Chataika (2020) report that Zimbabwe has started experimental programmes in recent years, aimed at integrating disabled learners into mainstream schools. The goal of these programmes, which are frequently supported by international organisations, such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), is to develop inclusive education models that can be expanded across the country (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in collaboration with UNICEF, launched the inclusive education pilot programme, a notable initiative. This initiative has been implemented in a few chosen schools around the nation to train teachers, create support networks for children with disabilities, and determine whether inclusive education practices are feasible (Mpofu & Shumba, 2020).

2.4 Inclusive Education

2.4.1 The origins of inclusive education – an international perspective

Inclusive education has its roots in more than merely considering disability rights groups. It also draws on larger social justice movements that advocate for the rights of marginalised groups, such as girls and women, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and refugees (Shyman, 2015). Understanding the need for and the implementation of inclusive education varied substantially between countries and regions, reflecting a variety of cultural, historical, and political contexts (Slee, 2001). Despite advances, there are still significant challenges to

delivering truly inclusive education for all. Lack of resources, insufficient teacher preparation, and continuing discriminatory attitudes are among these barriers (Garcia-Barrera, 2022). The origins of inclusive education can be traced back to various historical, social and philosophical influences, starting with the early roots of ancient civilisation, when concepts of inclusivity and valuing diverse abilities can be found in educational practices of ancient Greece, China and India, where education catered to individual needs and talents; however, education was often exclusive and limited to selected groups of society in ancient times (Foreman, 2020). Commencing with the mid-20th century, significant progress had been made in the drive toward inclusive education, key milestones in the mid-20th century included improved professional training for those who worked with people with disabilities, more structured adapted physical education programs, and shifting public perceptions of what sports and physical activity were appropriate for people with disabilities (Depauw, 2020). The aftermath of World War II drew attention to the rights and dignity of all individuals, including those with disabilities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) emphasised the right to education for all people, regardless of their capacities (Struthers, 2016).

2.4.2 International legislative and policy framework regulating inclusive education

The idea of inclusive education, which promotes the inclusion of all learners in regular classrooms, regardless of their ability, has gained international recognition (Ainscow, 2020). The motivation for such recognition can be found in the more prominent human rights movement, which prioritises equality and non-discrimination. The UDHR, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, laid the groundwork for inclusive education by recognising education as a fundamental human right (Foreman, 2020). Article 26 of the declaration states that “everyone has the right to education”, setting the stage for the inclusion of marginalised groups, including learners with disabilities, within the mainstream education systems (UN, 1948).

A significant turning point in the history of inclusive education was reached in 1975, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was approved by the US Congress (Gerber, 2017). To ensure that children with disabilities might learn alongside their peers without disabilities in the least restrictive setting feasible, this law mandated that public schools offer them with a free and suitable education. After being re-authorised in 1990, the IDEA established the groundwork for inclusive education and this influenced comparable laws around the world (Lambe, 2015).

Another important international framework that supports inclusive education is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was adopted by the UN in 1989. Every child's right to free, compulsory primary education is acknowledged by Article 28 of the CRC, which also promotes the creation of various secondary education programmes that are open to all learners (United Nations, 1989).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) is one of the most significant international declarations promoting inclusive education. This declaration, which was adopted during the 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain, urged governments everywhere to prioritise inclusive education as a policy objective. It stated that schools should accommodate all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994).

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA), which took place in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, proved to be another important event in the global advancement of inclusive education. The conference, which focused on the universal right to education, brought together delegates from 155 nations and many organisations (King & King, 2019). This conference laid the foundational principles for inclusive education policies worldwide and influenced subsequent global initiatives, such as the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (Kantavong, 2018).

Adopted in 2000 during the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, the Dakar Framework for Action restated the goal of attaining EFA by the year 2015. One of the main objectives of the Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000) was to ensure that all children, especially those with special needs and those living in difficult circumstances, have access to inclusive, quality education. To achieve universal primary education and reduce educational inequities among marginalised groups, such as girls, children with disabilities and children from low socioeconomic situations, the Dakar Framework placed a strong emphasis on the value of inclusive education.

The United Nations created the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, which set global goals for increasing education, enhancing health, and decreasing poverty by the year 2015. Goal 2 of the MDGs concentrated on attaining universal primary education “to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have access to free and quality primary education” (United Nations, 2000). The MDGs' focus on universal access to education was in line with the objectives of the inclusive education movement, even though they included no

explicit reference to inclusive education. The MDGs provided a global platform for advocating for the inclusion of marginalised groups in education systems. According to Melamed (2011), “while the MDGs did not explicitly address inclusive education, their focus on universal primary education helped to raise awareness about the need for policies that ensure the inclusion of all children, particularly those with disabilities” (p. 24).

The SDGs, which were endorsed by the UN in 2015, provide global goals for addressing important social, economic and environmental concerns by 2030. “Inclusive and equitable quality education and promot[ing] lifelong learning opportunities for all” is the main objective of Goal 4 of the SDGs (UNESCO, 2015). This objective explicitly emphasises the urgent need for the eradication of inequalities in educational access. This is especially vital for individuals with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and other disadvantaged group. It clearly highlights the significance of inclusive education. In addition to offering an accurate set of targets and indicators for measuring progress, the SDGs have strengthened the international commitment to inclusive education. According to Ainscow (2016), “the SDGs offer an unprecedented opportunity for countries to align their national education policies with global goals that prioritise inclusion, equity, and quality for all learners” (p. 46). Therefore, the SDGs have provided countries with the outline of a path to monitor their progress in attaining inclusion in educational systems by establishing explicit standards for inclusive education.

2.4.3 Origins of inclusive education – South African perspective

South Africa’s history, which includes both colonial and apartheid periods, had deep roots in inclusive education, according to Walton & Engelbrecht (2024), leaving behind significant path dependencies. These are historical patterns and structures that still influence the way education is structured, especially when it comes to inequality, segregation, and classification. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, the country sought to build a more just and equitable society, and therefore, inclusive education became an integral part of the country’s broader transformation agenda. Extreme segregation and inequality were characteristics of the previous South African educational system during the apartheid era. Under the Bantu Education Act of 1953, Indian, Black and Coloured children received inferior education, while white children received well-funded, high quality education (Dierdorp, 2015). This system marginalized children with minorities, who were often denied access to any kind of education, in addition to denying racial minorities access to high-quality education (Mbatha, 2024). Only a small portion of disabled children had access to formal education, and special schools for these children were severely

underfunded. However, the South African educational system underwent a complete overhaul following the end of apartheid in 1994 and the establishment of a democratic government. The African National Congress (ANC), which led the new government, was dedicated to redressing historical injustices and establishing a society that was inclusive and free from discrimination. Inclusive education was not just a matter of access, but as a way to challenge and dismantle power, oppression, marginalisation all of which are legacies of colonialism and apartheid (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018).

South Africa's implementation of inclusive education began with the country's participation in the international EFA drive, which began in 1990 (Nel, Bekker, Beyers, Pylamn, Alexander, & Matoti, 2023). The impetus to remove the historical inequities of apartheid, which had allocated resources in a discriminatory manner based on race, encouraged the shift toward inclusive education (McKenzie, 2020). However, in South Africa, the implementation of inclusive education has been affected and slowed down by the need to include principles such as UDL into policy, research, and teaching practice (McKenzie & Dalton, 2020). Despite the various hurdles in implementation, teachers have played an important part in establishing inclusive education, and their perspectives have been investigated (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019).

Participation in international organisations, such as the United Nations and UNESCO, also had an impact on South Africa's transition toward inclusive education. South Africa's post-apartheid educational objectives aligned with the UNESCO-launched EFA initiative's principles. The nation's efforts to promote inclusive education were further encouraged by its commitment to EFA and other international frameworks, including the SDGs, especially Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2015). Sayed and Kanjee (2013) noted that "inclusive education became a means to address the exclusionary practices that were entrenched in the apartheid education system" (p. 72). The new democratic government in South Africa tried to bring its policies into alignment with international human rights standards, especially those pertaining to the rights of people with disabilities.

To understand the role of inclusive education in South Africa, one needs to take into consideration the different types of schools; that is, mainstream, full-service and special schools. These will now be briefly discussed.

2.4.3.1 Mainstream schools

Mainstream schools are standard educational institutions that cater to most learners who do not have significant barriers to learning. These schools are designed to offer general education in a traditional classroom environment and adhere to the national curriculum (Engelbrecht, 2020). Although mainstream schools are encouraged to adopt inclusive practices, they often lack the resources and trained staff needed to successfully serve learners who have disabilities or other learning barriers (Engelbrecht, 2020).

2.4.3.2 Full-service schools

Full-service schools serve as a bridge between special schools and mainstream schools. According to Walton (2018), these schools are designed to meet the needs of learners with mild to moderate barriers to learning. To foster an inclusive environment, full-service schools provide additional resources, such as specialised staff, AT, and accessible facilities. According to the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), full-service schools act as models of inclusivity by demonstrating how teaching and learning can be adapted to accommodate diversity. These schools work with district-based support teams (DBSTs) to offer learners targeted interventions, and their teachers are trained in inclusive education practices. South Africa's vision of developing a support network throughout the educational system depends on the success of full-service schools (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit, & Van Deventer, 2016).

2.4.3.3 Special schools

Learners with severe or profound disabilities, or complex learning barriers that cannot be adequately addressed in mainstream or full-service schools are the focus of special schools. Furthermore, according to Donohue and Bornman (2018), these schools offer resources, teaching strategies and customised curricula that are geared toward the learners' individual requirements. Schools for learners with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or visual or hearing impairments are a few examples. The Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) highlights the dual role of special schools: They serve learners with high support needs and act as resource centres for mainstream and full-service schools by providing expertise and guidance. While special schools offer individualised education programmes and therapeutic support, their exclusivity means they are less focused than full-service schools on integration (McKinney & Swartz, 2016).

According to the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), full-service schools that are regular schools but have the resources and assistance to offer an inclusive learning environment for learners with special needs are examples of these special education programmes in South Africa. They are designed to accommodate and address a variety of learning obstacles, such as socioeconomic challenges and disabilities. In contrast, special schools are intended only for learners with more severe disabilities. Special schools also serve as resource centres, offering ordinary schools specialised assistance. They support the creation of IEPs, and aid in providing teachers with training on inclusive teaching methods. For instance, in addition to creating customised curricula with an emphasis on life skills and functional literacy, special schools that serve learners with disabilities can also act as a training ground for mainstream teachers (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

2.4.4 South African legislative and policy framework regulating inclusive education

2.4.4.1 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

South Africa's inclusive education strategy is rooted in the principles outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, specifically the stated commitment to human dignity, equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms. Section 9 of the Constitution guarantees equality and prohibits unfair discrimination. Section 29 (1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees the right to basic education, which includes the right to education for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). This constitutional foundation has led to policy initiatives aimed at transforming the South African educational landscape to be more inclusive.

2.4.4.2 South African Schools Act, 1996

The South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) provides the legal framework for basic education in South Africa and mandates the provision of inclusive education for all learners. Every child has the right to attend a public school, according to Section 12 of the Act, and it is the duty of each school's governing body to ensure that admission policies do not discriminate against any child (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). The Act plays a critical role in shaping inclusive education by ensuring that schools accommodate learners with diverse needs, and thus supporting equal access to education for all (Badat & Sayed, 2014).

2.4.4.3 National Education Policy Act (27 of 1996)

The National Education Policy Act (27 of 1996) (NEPA) aligns with the South African Constitution by ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background or disability, have the right to a basic education in an inclusive environment. The Constitution's principles of equality, non-discrimination and inclusion must be reflected in educational policies, according to NEPA, especially when so regarding learners' educational opportunities (Republic of South Africa, 1996c). This alignment promotes a more accessible and equitable learning environment for all South African learners by strengthening the legislative basis for inclusive education reforms and upholding the constitutional ideals.

2.4.4.4 White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001)

White Paper 6 highlights the importance of inclusivity and acknowledges that all children, including those with disabilities, should have access to quality education in all three categories of schools. As stated in White Paper 6,

“This White Paper 6 was designed to transform the South African educational system by building an integrated system for all learners (i.e., no special and ordinary schools); using a curriculum that is more support teams to provide systemic support for any and all teachers who need it; and strengthening the skills of teachers to cope with more diverse classes” (Muthukrishna & Schoeman, 2000, cited in Donohue & Bornman, 2014, p. 2).

The White Paper 6 offers a structure for creating inclusive educational practices and policies and highlights how crucial it is – as soon as possible – to identify, evaluate, and support learners who have special education needs (DoE, 2001).

2.4.4.5 Screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS)

The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy of 2014 (hereafter SIAS) is a policy framework implemented by the South African Department of Basic Education (DoBE) to ensure that all learners, especially those with barriers to learning, receive appropriate support to participate fully in education (DoBE, 2014). While SIAS has advanced the operationalisation of inclusive education, its success has been uneven because of the disparities in schools' resources and capacity.

While South Africa's legislative and policy framework for inclusive education is well-established, significant gaps remain between policy, theory, and practice. Addressing these challenges requires enhanced resources, improved teacher training and better language support to fully realise the vision of inclusive education.

2.5 Intersection of Special Education and Inclusive Education

Two crucial approaches are inclusive education and special education programmes for ensuring that all learners, including those with special needs or disabilities, have fair access to education (Ainscow & Sandill, 2018). Although ensuring that all learners have access to suitable educational opportunities is the aim of both approaches, their processes and implications are different. Usually conducted in separate locations or specialised classrooms, special education programmes concentrate on offering learners with disabilities unique interventions, resources, and support (Zigmond & Kloo, 2017). On the other hand, inclusive education promotes all learners' full participation in mainstream classes, irrespective of their abilities. Inclusive education is rooted in the belief that all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, should be educated in the same environment (Mitchell, 2015).

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) defined inclusive education as a process aimed at enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs (UNESCO, 1994). It emphasised that mainstream schools and curricula had to be adapted to meet the diverse needs of learners, rather than segregating learners into special schools or programmes based on their perceived deficits. Special educational programmes, on the other hand, are often designed to meet the individual needs of learners with disabilities, or other learning challenges (Robinson, 2017). These programmes could include specialised instruction, therapy services, and the use of assistive technologies. Special education services can be provided in separate settings, such as special schools or units, or within mainstream schools through specialised support services. Gargiulo and Bouck (2019) describe special education as "a range of services that provide individualised instruction, based on the unique needs of learners with disabilities" (p. 43).

Many scholars argued that inclusive education is best viewed as a continuum, with special educational programmes playing a vital role on that continuum. Loreman et al. (2010) stated that "inclusive education is not about completely eliminating all forms of special education but about ensuring that special education services are integrated within mainstream settings to the

greatest extent possible” (p. 85). This view supports the idea that special educational programmes can provide the necessary individualised support within inclusive classrooms, rather than in separate environments. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) stated that inclusive pedagogy, which integrates special education services into general education classes, is crucial for fostering an atmosphere, in which every learner, including those with disabilities, can engage in meaningful participation. This enables learners to take advantage of the social and academic benefits of learning with their classmates, as well as benefiting from the specific interventions they require. Special education programmes can offer the support systems required for a successful inclusive education implementation. Lindsay (2017) states that “for inclusion to work effectively, specialised services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and individualised instruction, must be available to learners within mainstream schools” (p. 15). By meeting each learner’s specific needs without separating them from the regular classroom setting, special education can improve inclusion.

One of the primary critiques of special educational programmes is that they can lead to segregation rather than inclusion. Kirby (2017) states that learners with disabilities have historically had limited opportunities to connect with classmates in normal settings, since they were frequently placed in special schools or separate classrooms. Slee (2011) argued that “special educational programmes can perpetuate the idea that learners with disabilities are fundamentally different and need to be educated separately from their non-disabled peers” (p. 98). However, the principles of inclusive education might become compromised because of social exclusion and decreased expectations of learners with disabilities. Additionally, an over-reliance on special education programmes might lead to a dual system of education, in which learners with disabilities are taught in parallel but separate from their peers, according to research by Kauffman and Hallahan (2020). The authors claim that this dual system “perpetuates the marginalisation of these learners and hampers the full integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream education” (p. 123).

While inclusive education seeks to accommodate all learners within mainstream classrooms, some learners might require more specialised instruction than what can realistically be provided in a general education setting. Mitchell (2014) pointed out that “one of the challenges of inclusive education is balancing the need for specialised instruction with the goal of creating an inclusive environment for all learners” (p. 56). Concerns over the quality of education for learners with severe disabilities can arise because mainstream teachers might lack the resources or expertise necessary to help these learners successfully. According to Norwich (2013), a

dilemma perspective recognises the conflict between specialisation and inclusion as a normal and essential aspect of the educational process. While striving for more involvement in social and extracurricular activities, he says that in some circumstances, separate special education services would be required to address the unique learning needs of some individuals.

Special education programmes and inclusive education have a complicated and multifaceted relationship. Special education programmes give learners who have disabilities the specialised help they require, while inclusive education promotes the involvement of every learner in mainstream settings. Hornby and Hornby (2014) claimed that these two approaches can be used to build a more effective and equitable educational system, rather than these approaches being mutually exclusive. To address the different needs of all learners, educators can strike a balance between the objectives of inclusion and specialisation by using models such as collaborative teaching, IEPs, and resource rooms (Hill, 2021).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Vygotsky's social constructivism theory. In the social cultural theory, the social constructivism theory is a well-known developmental psychology theory that emphasises the importance of social interactions in cognitive development (Pfadenhaueris & Knoblauch, 2019). According to Vygotsky, cited in Miller (2021), learners' cognitive development is inextricably linked to their social and cultural surroundings. Miller (2021) states that the relevance of culture and context in comprehending what happens in society and building knowledge based on this understanding is emphasised by social constructivism. It underlines the importance of social and cultural impacts on human cognition and development, where it has a critical influence on moulding an individual's mental processes and higher-order thinking. Amineh and Asl (2015) state that social constructivism is a theory of learning that places an emphasis on how social interactions and cultural context shape knowledge. Rather than merely absorbing information in isolation, it contends that learners develop their understanding through dialogue, collaboration, and experiences in social contexts. In inclusive and special education, where diverse learners need individualised support and active participation, this framework has significant implications. This theory proposes three concepts, such as the ZPD, scaffolding and language.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to the set of tasks that learners cannot complete on their own, but which they can do with the assistance of a more competent individual, such as an educator, or a more proficient peer. It represents the gap between a child's

existing developmental stage and their potential progress with outside assistance. “The zone of proximal development is the distance between what learners can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance” (Margolis, 2020, p. 65). Teachers can determine what kind of support each learner needs to achieve and where they stand developmentally by using the ZPD. ZPD also supports differentiated instruction by enabling teachers to assign work that challenges classmates who are developing in the usual manner, as well as learners with disabilities (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Regardless of their ability, every learner can participate in and gain from the learning process because of such an inclusive approach.

Scaffolding is the assistance provided by a knowledgeable individual to assist a learner in completing tasks within their zone of proximal development. As the learners gain competence, the support is gradually removed, allowing them to perform the task alone. Anggadewi (2017) explains that

“scaffolding is a learning strategy based on Vygotsky’s philosophy because it employs a tiered learning strategy, where this method is more adaptable to the child’s ability. Scaffolding is a way that educators can employ in the remedial teaching process. This method allows pupils to learn in stages, making mastering learning materials easier” (p. 215).

Petrová (2013) stated that “cultural tools are valuable means of deploying culturally more appropriate problem-solving techniques that outperform the effectiveness of the strategies currently available to individuals as part of their repertoire of independent action” (p. 240).

“Every function in a child’s cultural development emerges twice: once on the social level and once on the individual level; once between individuals (inter-psychological) and once within the kid (intra-psychological). This holds true for voluntary attention, logical memory and concept generation. All higher functions emerge from actual interpersonal relationships” (Vygotsky, p. 57, 1978) cited in Petrová (2013, p. 241).

Teachers can provide customised support to each learner, based on their unique requirements by means of scaffolding. Scaffolding for learners with disabilities might entail breaking down the tasks into more manageable steps, Anggadewi (2017) mentions that this assistance may take many forms such as guidance, warning/cues, encouragement, breaking complex tasks into simpler steps, modelling problem-solving stages, support that gradually withdraws as learner

ability increases. Scaffolding also encourages learners' collaboration in an inclusive classroom. According to Killen (2019), the ZPD places a strong emphasis on the value of social interaction by helping learners to advance from their current understanding to a higher one through collaboration and guidance. This guidance, referred to as scaffolding, is essential for learning in the ZPD, since it offers the support required to increase the learners' understanding. Peers encourage one another when working together on tasks, which builds a sense of community and shared accountability for learning.

Vygotsky emphasised the importance of language as a major cultural tool. Language is a tool for thinking and problem-solving, as well as a medium of communication. Individuals internalise knowledge and connect with others through language to jointly develop meaning and understanding. Children internalise cultural knowledge as they interact with others and use language, which shapes their thinking and understanding of the world. According to McLeod (2014, p. 9), Vygotsky felt that language emerges through social interactions for the sake of communication. Vygotsky considered language to be human's most powerful tool, a means of communicating with the outside world. Teachers might improve the learning and development of learners with various abilities by recognising and using the power of cultural tools, ensuring that education meets the needs of all learners.

Interaction between teachers, learners, and peers is facilitated by language, and this is crucial for co-constructing knowledge in an inclusive environment. It can be difficult for learners with special needs, especially those who struggle with language, to express themselves and participate in class activities. To close these gaps and allow learners to fully engage in the learning process, speech therapy and visual assistance are essential resources (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Miller (2021) also states that "Vygotsky believed that through engaging in verbal interactions, children begin to use language to organise their thoughts and actions, eventually leading to independent self-regulation" (p. 105). According to Vygotsky, this change from external, socially mediated language to internalised cognitive processes is crucial, because it signifies the passage from learning from others to autonomous problem-solving and self-guidance. Teachers can help learners use language as a tool to direct their learning by modelling the use of self-talk and other metacognitive strategies. By facilitating interaction between learners with disabilities and their peers, language also promotes social inclusion.

Odom et al. (2011) state that children with disabilities can interact with their classmates more meaningfully and foster social integration in the classroom when they are given the right

communication assistance. The practice of inclusive and special education depends on the concepts of language, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding can provide learners who have disabilities the support they need to realise their full potential, while the ZPD enables teachers to customise their lessons to each learner's unique needs. All children can engage in the learning process, since language serves as a mediation tool that promotes communication and cognitive growth. In addition to improving academic results for learners with special needs, these social constructivist approaches promote an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

2.7 Different Approaches to Inclusive Education Research

2.7.1 Disability approach

A disability approach entails recognising, understanding and addressing the needs, rights and potential of people with disabilities in a variety of situations, such as society, education, work and public services. In essence, Valle & Connor (2019) state that the approach promotes an understanding of disability as a social construct influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional factors. This approach encourages educators to recognize and dismantle the barriers both physical and attitudinal that hinder the full participation of learners with disabilities in general education settings. That strategy aims to provide an inclusive and accessible environment for individuals with disabilities and fosters equality, dignity, and full participation. According to Retief and Letosa (2018), disability-inclusive development means including persons with disabilities at all stages of the development process. It mandates, among other aspects, that all individuals must have equal access to education, healthcare, work and employment, and social protection.

2.7.2 School reform approach

A school reform approach entails systematically and intentionally changing many components of the education system to improve its effectiveness, responsiveness and overall outcomes. Bueno, Darling-Hammond, and Gonzales (2010) contended that a high quality education system should provide equitable chances for all learners, regardless of their socioeconomic level or background. They highlighted the need for addressing inequalities in resources, teacher quality and access to educational opportunities. Curriculum, teaching methods, assessment practices, school structure and educational policies are all examples of areas, where school reform projects might be implemented. The purpose is to improve learners' learning

experiences, promote equal educational access and equip learners for success in a fast-changing world. Hubbard, Mehan, and Datnow (2023) reveal that efforts to improve education and better prepare learners have resulted in the development, adoption and implementation of a wide range of reform initiatives.

2.7.3 Critical theory approach

The critical theory approach is a social and humanities perspective that tries to investigate and criticise societal institutions, norms, power relations and inequities. Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht (2022) mention that critical theory is used to question how Eurocentric values shape inclusive education. It focuses on transforming belief systems, policy, and leadership so that values like Ubuntu and social justice reshape inclusion. Critical theory is normative, because it actively pursues social justice and facilitates social change. The goal of critical theory is to reveal hidden assumptions, challenge prevailing ideologies, and promote social change and fairness. Critical theory is frequently used to investigate how power, privilege and oppression affect different areas of society. Nickerson (2023) states that critical theory is a social theory that seeks to criticise and transform society to uncover the underlying assumptions in social life.

2.7.4 Emancipatory/ transformative approach

The emancipatory/ transformative approach is a methodology or point of view that seeks to effect large and fundamental changes in different parts of a system, organisation, individual or society. Dullaart, Coetsee, Farmer, Feldman, Joost, Loots & Ntwasa (2023) stated that the transformative approach centers marginalized communities, seeking deep systemic change that drives equity, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Feola (2015) reports that the transformational research approach can be used to both understand and assist social change. The transformative approach is defined by three sets of assumptions that shape people's worldview (p. 245). A transformative approach to inclusive education entails moving away from traditional educational approaches that only accommodate learners with various needs and it moves toward a more complete and holistic strategy that aspires to provide an inclusive and equitable learning environment for all learners.

The emancipatory/transformative approach seeks to empower individuals who are traditionally marginalised or oppressed by giving them a voice and advocating for systemic change (Mertens, 2020). In the context of this study, the emancipatory/transformative approach

emphasises the empowerment of learners with learning barriers. It focuses on identifying and addressing the inequalities they face in accessing education, especially in an English language classroom. This research involved the learners and educators in the process of understanding how these special educational programmes assist the learners. This aligns with the idea that learners with barriers should have an active role in shaping the interventions meant to help them. This study explored how special educational programmes can be integrated into mainstream English classrooms to ensure inclusivity. The goal was not to segregate learners, but instead to transform the classroom environment, so it will accommodate diverse learning needs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Traditional education often marginalises learners with learning barriers by placing them in special classes, or labelling them as ‘different’. The emancipatory approach challenges these norms by promoting inclusive education, where all learners, regardless of their challenges, are educated together in mainstream classrooms. This is especially relevant in English language learning, as it ensures that learners with barriers are not segregated, but instead, they are part of the collective classroom experience (Wang & Torrisi-Steele, 2021).

2.8 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this literature review has demonstrated the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of inclusive and special education, showing how policies, theories and research approaches collectively shape the field. Furthermore, both international and local perspectives on inclusive education were discussed and key initiatives were highlighted. These global frameworks have provided a foundation for inclusive policies and practices across various countries, including South Africa. The application of social constructivism theory further reinforces the importance of a collaborative and context-driven approach to learning, underscoring the role of social interaction in cognitive development and inclusive education. Additionally, this review has identified diverse research approaches: disability, school reform, critical theory, and the emancipatory/transformational approach, which provide varied lenses to address the barriers and potential solutions in implementing inclusive education more effectively. The following chapter will delve into the research design and methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the literature review, which demonstrated the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of inclusive and special education, showing how policies, theories and research approaches collectively shape the field. In this chapter, the researcher comprehensively outlines the research methodology used in this study. The methodology chapter serves as the blueprint of the research process, detailing the philosophical foundations, design, data collection and analysis methods that guided the study. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the research paradigm that underpinned the study, with a focus on the interpretivist paradigm. The researcher outlines the qualitative approach adopted for this study. This section justifies the use of qualitative methods to capture in-depth insights and rich data. The study employed a phenomenological research design, which is explained in detail in this section.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Research paradigm (interpretivism)

This study was guided by the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism, according to Briggs (2011), holds that reality is multi-perspectival and focuses on people's subjective experiences, how people form the social environment by sharing meaning, and how they interact with one another. An interpretivist paradigm assumes that knowledge and meaning are generated by both participants and observers, with scholars such as Moschkovich (2019), cited in Williams (2020), defining naturalism as tolerating various realities. Individuals construct their own realities based on their own experiences, ideas and perceptions, according to interpretivism. The researcher recognised the significance of understanding these subjective realities, recognising that they affect how people interpret and make sense of the world.

3.2.1.1 Limitations of interpretivism

Interpretivism's inherent reliance on subjectivity is one of its biggest limitations. According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), researchers might unintentionally let their own prejudices, assumptions or cultural background affect how they perceive participants' responses, which could skew the findings and conclusions drawn. It is challenging to ensure the neutrality and consistency that are necessary in thorough research because of this potential subjectivity. Small, context-specific samples are usually the focus of interpretivist research, which restricts

the findings' applicability to wider populations. Conclusions from one study might not apply to other people, settings, or time periods to the focus on individual experiences and specific contexts (Pham, 2018). This limitation is especially problematic for studies that are meant to inform practice or policy more broadly. Although interpretivism produces rich, detailed data, its usefulness in addressing larger societal concerns might be diminished by concerns about its generalisability to larger populations (Yin, 2016). Interpretivist research often requires extensive time and resources to conduct in-depth interviews, observations or focus groups. It can be time-consuming and labour-intensive for researchers to develop trust with participants, immerse themselves in the research situation, and analyse data iteratively (Yin, 2016). Additionally, the need for detailed engagement with participants and context means that interpretivist studies are less suitable for large-scale research projects, limiting their scope and feasibility in certain fields.

3.2.2 Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach is a research methodology that seeks to comprehend the breadth and complexities of human experiences, actions, and occurrences (Rahman, 2016). It seeks to unearth the underlying meanings, patterns, and social dynamics that have an impact on people's viewpoints and relationships. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011),

“... qualitative research study is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (2011, p. 3).

Qualitative research provides context and depth to one's understanding of the complexities of the human experience. The aim of this study was to explore how special educational programmes could be implemented in Grade 10 English classes in mainstream secondary schools to achieve inclusive teaching and learning.

Although qualitative research provides essential insights into complex phenomena, it also has some disadvantages and limitations. Qualitative data collection and processing can be time-consuming. Researchers usually spend a significant amount of time conducting interviews, transcribing recordings and analysing qualitative data. The perceived lack of objectivity in

qualitative research has led to criticism raised by many scholars. The researchers' neutrality might be compromised if they become intimately involved with the subjects and their experiences, or they develop strong emotional attachments to the data (Golafshani, 2015). While qualitative research can provide useful insights into the subjective elements of human experiences and behaviours, it has distinct limitations, as mentioned above.

3.3 Research Design: Phenomenology

This study employed the phenomenology research design, a philosophical approach that focuses on understanding and explaining the essence of human experiences from the perspectives of those who have those experiences (Olekanma, Dörfler, & Shafti, 2022). According to Qutoshi (2018), phenomenology is primarily concerned with understanding, describing and interpreting participants' lived experiences. Therefore, phenomenology enabled the researcher to investigate learners' complex experiences in depth, particularly in terms of accommodating learners with specific needs in mainstream English classes. This necessitated going beyond surface-level observations. Although the phenomenological research design is useful for investigating lived experiences, it has several disadvantages that might affect the research process. The possibility of subjectivity and researcher bias is a major drawback of this type of research. Given that phenomenology is concerned with comprehending the participants' subjective experiences, the researcher's own perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions might have an impact on how the data is interpreted (Alase, 2017). This dependence on the researcher's interpretation could compromise the study's credibility and objectivity, making it more difficult to produce conclusions that are unbiased. Using methods such as in-depth interviews, which can be time and resource intensive, phenomenological research requires a close interaction with participants (Chan & Walker, 2018). Large amounts of qualitative data can be difficult to effectively identify and interpret through transcription, coding and analysis, which can take a lot of time.

3.3.1 Phenomenon of interest

In this study, the phenomenon of interest was to explore how special educational interventions can be used to enhance inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes, assisting learners with learning barriers.

3.3.2 Approaches to phenomenology

3.3.2.1 Descriptive phenomenology

The focus of descriptive phenomenology is on providing a thorough account of things as they are perceived. Husserl (1977) emphasised that rather than trying to explain or interpret things, it is crucial to describe the structures of consciousness and the ways, in which they are presented. According to Spiegelberg (1975), this method necessitates paying close attention to the “what” and “how” of events to capture their essence, without imposing theories or interpretations from other sources. This type of phenomenology is essential to qualitative research, since it is especially useful for comprehending people’s lived experiences. The researcher gathered data through in-depth interviews, and asked learners and educators to describe their experiences. The focus was on documenting the raw, direct experiences, such as how a specific learning technique affected a learner’s confidence or understanding.

3.3.2.2 Essential phenomenology

Finding the universal structures or essences that characterise an event is the main goal of essential phenomenology, sometimes referred to as eidetic phenomenology. To determine the invariant aspects of an experience, Spiegelberg (1975) pointed out that this entails creative variation, in which researchers consider a variety of situations and viewpoints. According to Husserl (1970), a phenomenon’s essence is its fundamental meaning that holds true in a variety of situations. By capturing the essential truths that underlie lived experiences, this technique goes beyond simple description and advances one’s knowledge of human consciousness. The researcher analysed the data to find commonalities in the experiences of different learners, such as feelings of empowerment, reduced anxiety, or improved social interactions.

3.3.2.3 Phenomenology of appearances

With a focus on the connection between the object and its perception, phenomenology of appearances studies how phenomena appear to consciousness. This aspect of phenomenology, according to Spiegelberg (1975), is to investigate how experiences or objects are presented to the observer, including their multiple meanings and nuances. Husserl (1970) reported that appearances are essential to comprehending the experience in its entirety and are not merely illusions. This method highlights how experiences of phenomena are dynamic and complex. The researcher explored how learners perceived and interpreted their progress within the

programme. For example, the questions were asked as to how they felt about their own academic growth compared to traditional programmes.

3.3.2.4 Constitutive phenomenology

The study of constitutive phenomenology looks at how awareness actively creates or shapes the meaning of things. Spiegelberg (1975) asserted that this entails examining how intentionality shapes experiences and examining the interaction between subjective perception and the outside world. Husserl (1977) maintained that consciousness actively contributes meaning to phenomena, rather than passively receiving it. This method highlights how the subject and the object co-create reality by exploring the mechanisms, through which occurrences are perceived as meaningful. The researcher focused on how learners actively made sense of their experiences within the programme, for example, how the programme's structure, teacher support and peer interaction shaped their learning.

3.3.2.5 Reductive phenomenology

Epoché, also known as bracketing, is a technique used in reductive phenomenology, in which the researcher suspends assumptions, opinions, and views about the outside world to concentrate solely on the phenomenon as experienced (Spiegelberg, 1975). This reduction, according to Husserl (1970), enables researchers to study phenomena as they manifest themselves in awareness free from biases or preconceptions. By removing layers of subjective and objective presumptions, researchers seek to uncover the substance of experiences and their intentional structures through phenomenological reduction. Because it establishes a neutral framework for phenomenological investigation, this stage is fundamental to Husserlian phenomenology. The researcher critically evaluated the data to isolate the essence of learners' experiences without allowing any distractions from unrelated influences.

3.3.2.6 Hermeneutic phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology expands on Husserl's concepts by integrating interpretation into the analysis of actual experiences, even though it was not initially a part of his framework. This is a dialogical method that aims to comprehend and interpret the deeper meanings of occurrences within their settings, according to Spiegelberg (1975). Supported by thinkers such as Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutic phenomenology places a strong emphasis on how language, culture and history shape experience. It goes beyond description to examine the importance and implications of events, which makes it especially relevant for practical research

in the social sciences, education and health. The researcher interpreted not only what learners were saying, but also what these experiences meant in their broader lives. For example, a learner might describe feeling ‘safe’, and the researcher would explore how this perceived safety translated itself into the learner’s academic and personal growth.

This study adopts a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which is most suitable for exploring the lived experiences of teachers and learners in Grade 10 English language classes where special education interventions are applied to promote inclusion. While phenomenology in general seeks to understand and describe human experiences, hermeneutic phenomenology extends this aim by interpreting the meanings individuals assign to those experiences (Ramsook, 2018).

3.3.3 Unique approaches involved in phenomenological research

3.3.3.1 *Intuition*

According to Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio (2019), intuition in phenomenological research is the process of directly interacting with a phenomenon’s essence through reflective awareness. To understand the phenomenon as experienced by the individual, researchers leave aside preconceived assumptions and rely on their intuitive understanding of participants’ experiences. Therefore, the researcher aimed to understand the phenomenon holistically, rather than through preconceived theoretical frameworks by developing an empathetic relationship with it through intuition. By keeping an open mind, the researcher was able to let the phenomenon unfold in a genuine and authentic way. The researcher interviewed learners and teachers involved, through open-ended conversations, and focused on understanding how learners perceive the programmes and how they addressed their challenges.

3.3.3.2 *Bracketing*

The deliberate suspension of the researcher’s biases, assumptions, and preconceived ideas regarding the topic being studied is known as bracketing (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). By doing this, the researcher planned to ensure that the data was not influenced by expectations, or judgements from outside sources and instead, concentrated only on the participants’ lived experiences. Throughout the research process, bracketing is an ongoing activity that calls for critical self-awareness and reflexivity. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), this approach makes the research findings more credible by letting phenomena arise naturally, free from the influence of the researcher’s viewpoints. Before data collection started, the researcher

reflected on own beliefs about special educational programmes, such as any prior assumptions about their effectiveness. This reflective process ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' experiences, rather than influenced by any expectations.

3.3.3.3 Analysing

In phenomenological research, analysis entails identifying and interpreting the core structures of the participants' shared lived experiences. Thematic analysis is frequently used in this process, in which researchers find recurring themes, patterns, and essences in the data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). The distinctive characteristic of phenomenological analysis is its emphasis on revealing the meaning structures that underlie lived experiences, as opposed to merely describing surface-level occurrences. Giorgi (2012) stated that phenomenological analysis aims to preserve the subjective narratives of the participants while determining the universal essence of the phenomenon. After collecting data, the researcher analysed the transcripts of all interviews, the focus groups, as well as of all observations and research diaries to uncover recurring themes. The focus was on what the learners experienced and how they interpreted these experiences.

3.3.3.4 Describing

Describing is the final step in which a researcher presents the essence of the phenomenon in rich, in-depth language that accurately reflects the participants' lived experiences. By portraying the phenomena as it manifests in the participants' mind, descriptive phenomenology seeks to explain the "what" and "how" of the experience (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The participants' narratives served as the foundation for this process, and the researcher faithfully and vividly depicted the phenomenon, so that others will be able to understand its core. A trustful and unaltered account of the participants' lived experiences should be the major focus of the description, free from interpretation or explanation (van Manen, 2016). The researcher produced a detailed narrative, describing how learners with learning barriers experienced special educational programmes. The goal was to create a compelling account that resonated with the lived reality of the participants.

3.4 Sampling and Selection of Participants

Determining the optimal sample size is a crucial step and decision that educational and organisational researchers face (Oribhabor & Anyanwu, 2019). Purposive sampling was used to select two male learners and two female learners from each school, one being a mainstream

school and one a special education school (LSEN), resulting in a total of eight learner participants. The reason I engaged with different genders was to capture their diverse perspectives, experiences and insights. Males and females do not experience the same situations at the same level, and this approach helped the researcher understand how these dynamics played out in society. I also met with five educators from each respective school, where the factors of gender, age, experience and race were not considered.

The educators had varied years of experience, including experience in teaching at these schools for between two and 15 + years. The selected educators had to have a thorough understanding of the specific challenges that learners in Grade 10 experienced. Engaging with them provided vital insights into how special educational programmes could be properly integrated into the English language classroom. This also allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the practical aspects of programme implementation and its influence on learners. Finally, I selected the principals from each of the two institutions, where both principals were male and had more than 10 years of experience; one principal was white and the other African. I believed these two principals could offer real-time feedback on the programme's efficacy and contribute to its improvement. This also allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the background and challenges faced by each school.

3.4.1 The research sites

3.4.1.1 School 1

I conducted research at this school, which served learners who had mild intellectual disabilities, to gather special education programmes that helped learners with learning barriers in the English FAL classroom, specifically in Grade 10. The school, a vocational school situated in the suburbs, offers courses in farming, hospitality, tourism, hairdressing, welding, forklifting, sewing, automobile services, computer applications technology (CAT), English home language and FAL, and Maths Literacy, as well as Life Skills. There were between 25 and 30 learners in each classroom, which teachers thought was 'a lot', given that it is a special needs school.

3.4.1.2 School 2

This is a mainstream school situated in a township, where the implementation of the special educational programmes takes place for learners with learning barriers. The school offers subjects, such as English FAL, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Xitsonga and seTswana as home languages, Mathematics and Mathematics Literacy, Life Orientation, History, Geography, Life Sciences,

Consumer Studies, Tourism, Accounting, Economics, Business Studies, and Physical Science. There were 60 to 70 learners in a classroom.

3.5 Qualitative Data-Generation Instruments

According to Given (2015), qualitative research is used to obtain insights into people's feelings and thoughts, which might serve as the foundation for a future stand-alone qualitative study, or aid researchers in developing survey instruments for use in a quantitative study. The tools the researcher used to generate data were as follows:

3.5.1 Participant observations

Aagaard and Matthiesen (2015) stated that participant observation is a qualitative research approach, in which the researcher actively engages in and observes a social environment, or a group of individuals to acquire a thorough understanding of their behaviours, interactions and experiences. Participant observation is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research for several reasons. Among other factors, participant observation allows researchers to establish rapport and build a connection with the participants (Archibald et al., 2019). Thus, participant observation is useful in phenomenology because it enables the researcher to fully immerse themselves in the participants' living context. This validates participants' perceptions and provides insights into behaviours, interactions and experiences that may not be fully expressed in interviews (Wilson, 2015).

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

In research initiatives, semi-structured interviews are used to corroborate data from various data sources (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). A semi-structured interview is a data collection method that relies on asking questions within a predetermined thematic framework (Karatsareas, 2022). Semi-structured interviews are central to phenomenological research because they provide participants with the opportunity to share their lived experiences in their own words. It also enables the researcher to probe deeper into personal interpretations, which is consistent with the hermeneutic phenomenological aim of finding meaning (Lauterbach, 2018).

3.5.3 Focus group interviews

Focus group research, as defined by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2010), is a means of gathering data from more than one participant at the same time and in a secure atmosphere. The goal of the focus group interview is to collect data in addition to the actual remarks made by the

participants and the manner in which they are expressed (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Morgan (1996) defined focus groups as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (p. 129), cited in Albanesi (2024). Focus groups allowed the researcher to collect data from several participants in a single session, making it a time-efficient data collection method. Focus groups align with phenomenology by enabling participants to reflect collectively on shared experiences, while also highlighting diverse perspectives. Group interactions often bring out memories, meanings, and interpretations that might not surface in individual interviews (Zeleeva, 2019).

3.5.4 Research diaries

In qualitative research, research diaries can be a useful instrument for collecting participants’ subjective experiences and perspectives (Hydén, 2014). Participants can record their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their own terms and at their own pace, resulting in rich and detailed data that might not be available through other approaches. In qualitative research, research diaries have various advantages. They give participants agency and control over their narratives, and they allow them to reflect on their experiences in a personal and meaningful way (Hydén, 2014). Research diaries are important for phenomenology because they offer first-hand, reflective narratives that can capture nuances of experience that are difficult to convey in formal interviews (Morrell-Scott, 2018).

3.5.5 Research journal

A research journal is a structured and organised space, where one can keep track of all aspects of the research process (Borg, 2001). Researchers can use research journals to communicate their discoveries, add to the existing body of knowledge, and engage in intellectual conversations with other experts in their field (Valtakoski, 2019). Research journals are also important for increasing knowledge and supporting innovation. They provide a platform for researchers to discuss their discoveries, theories and approaches, which other researchers can subsequently build on (Valtakoski, 2019). The researcher’s interpretation actively contributes to meaning-making in hermeneutic phenomenology, both by recording new information that comes to light throughout the research process and by assisting the researcher in avoiding personal prejudices.

3.6 Data Collection Process

Observations are conducted in both natural and controlled settings, where a researcher observes and records events, behaviours, and interactions in the research journal. I found these observations challenging to perform because of her work commitments during school hours. However, the researcher conducted one observation every Friday for the two schools. This posed an additional challenge, as the researcher was an outsider, and the presence of a new observer could well have influenced the behaviour of those being observed.

Learners

Consequently, the learner participants might have behaved differently than they would normally behave, despite the observation having taken place in their natural environment. Unlike insiders, whose perspectives were influenced by their culture and experiences, the researcher, as an outsider, examined the learners' behaviours and practices from an analytical, external posture (CohenMiller & Boivin, 2021). Understanding the context and history of the learners' experiences was critical for accurate interpretation, and the researcher lacked this contextual expertise, making it challenging to fully interpret the observed behaviours. I conducted semi-structured and focus group interviews with participants to explore their opinions, experiences and insights. Participants were reminded repeatedly by the researcher that participation in the study was completely optional and that they were free to leave at any time, if they opted to do so.

Four learners from the selected mainstream school participated in one-on-one semi-structured interviews, but no learners were interviewed individually from the LSEN school. Each participant had a 20-minute interview session. The interviews were conducted over loudspeakers and recorded by using a mobile phone as the recording device.

Principals

I interviewed the deputy principal from the LSEN school and the acting principal from the mainstream school. The intention had been to interview the principals from both institutions; however, that was not the case for both schools. In School 1 (LSEN), I interviewed the deputy principal for academics, which was a recommendation made by the principal. In School 2 (mainstream), I also interviewed the acting principal, who oversaw the school as the principal was away on sick leave. The deputy principals of both schools were interviewed for 15-20

minutes each. The interview questions were based on the research questions and this served as a guide for the interviews.

Educators

The educators participated in focus group interviews, which took place in the staff room after school and lasted approximately 30 minutes, with five educators from each school taking part. The researcher recorded their responses and took field notes to assist with the data analysis process.

Research diaries

Furthermore, research diaries were used, allowing the learner participants to describe their experiences in their own words, capturing a level of detail that interviews or surveys would not have been able to capture. These diaries were valuable as they provided insight into the participants' subjective experiences and emotions, which were crucial to the research. If any participant felt uncomfortable or threatened during questioning, they were instructed to express their desire to withdraw from the study. Beyond these diaries, the researcher's journal was used to document the researcher's observations, thoughts, reflections and insights of the research process.

3.7 Data Analysis

Cassell and Bishop (2019) stated that the objective of qualitative data analysis is to synthesise what a researcher has observed, heard or seen and recorded, into phrases, common words, themes, and patterns that will enable the researcher to comprehend and draw conclusions about what is happening. After gathering data, the qualitative data analysis included classifying, categorising and interpreting the information. I analysed the interview data by using thematic analysis and supported it with the relevant literature. The recordings were transcribed into transcripts, which were scrutinised for themes and comparable responses to the participants' questions. I then transcribed all the interviews, which required listening to and typing out each one, and she then read the transcripts several times to become acquainted with the content, took notes and assessed the similarities and contrasts revealed by the data. There were also handwritten notes that I the researcher had written in the margins of the transcripts to assist with the initial study and analysis of the content.

Analysis of the diaries entailed the researcher reading through the diaries multiple times to immerse herself in the participants' narratives and identify recurring themes, patterns or unique experiences. The thematic analysis to categorise data into themes or patterns involved coding the content line-by-line to extract meaning from participants' words. Behaviours, non-verbal messages, encounters and situations that were not expressed in the interviews or diaries were also captured by observational data.

The researcher's journal was used as a reflective tool that captured personal insights, challenges and methodological decisions made during the study. Analysing this data involved reviewing the journal entries to understand how personal biases, assumptions and emotions could have influenced the data collection and interpretation. The journal was used as a tool for bracketing to ensure that personal beliefs and preconceptions did not unduly influence the interpretation of the participants' data (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

3.8 My Role as a Researcher

As a researcher conducting a study in both these very different schools, my role encompassed multiple dimensions: an outsider, a neutral observer, and an agent of research. As an outsider, I entered the school environment with fresh perspectives, uninfluenced by internal dynamics, which allowed me to identify patterns, behaviours and phenomena without preconceived biases (Mohajan, 2018). This position required sensitivity to the culture, norms, and values of the school, ensuring respect for the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). In maintaining neutrality, I focused on objectively collecting and analysing the data, ensuring that personal beliefs or preferences did not influence the research process or outcomes. This neutrality was critical in fostering trust between myself and the participants, encouraging them to share their authentic experiences (Haq, Rasheed, Rashid, & Akhter, 2023). Lastly, as an agent of research, I acted as a facilitator of inquiry, systematically gathering data through observations, interviews and other qualitative methods while adhering to ethical guidelines. I also served as a bridge between theory and practice, aiming to produce findings that could inform educational practices, while I maintained the integrity of the research process (Muthanna & Alduais, 2021).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are important to protect the rights and wellbeing of human participants (Ketefian, 2015). This is especially important when conducting research with minors, who are more vulnerable to exploitation and potential harm. Prior to commencing the

data collection process in either of the two schools, I had already obtained informed consent from the parents or legal guardians of the minor participants before enrolling them in the study (see Appendix 7). I then provided them with all the relevant information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, risks and benefits. I further explained that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. According to Bell (2014), voluntary involvement is essential in ethical research, where individuals choose to participate without coercion. I protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the minor participants' data and personal information (Jamal et al., 2014), ensuring that their data was secure and only shared with authorised individuals, including the study's supervisor. Additionally, I obtained informed consent from the participating educators and principals (see Appendix 7). According to Manti and Licari (2018), informed consent is documented by a written, signed and dated informed consent form. To agree to their participation in the study, the participants signed a consent form. I The researcher provided them with all the relevant information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, risks and benefits. I also explained that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Ethics clearance from a university is crucial for all research, as it aims to ensure that research among learners is conducted in a truthful, fair, respectful and ethical manner. I applied for ethics clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand's Research and Ethics Committee (non-medical) to conduct the study. To protect the rights and wellbeing of learners and educators, the Gauteng Department of Education has a responsibility to ensure that they are shielded from any potential harm that could arise from research activities. I applied to the GDE (see Appendix 10) for access and permission to conduct this study in the two schools. By following the GDE's procedures for applying for permission to conduct research in these schools, the researcher ensured that the research was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. Appendix 5 presents the letters to the principals requesting permission to conduct the study, and the schools received letters requesting authorisation to carry out the research on their schools' property.

3.10 Chapter Summary

The research methodology of this study was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which aligns with the objective of understanding the subjective experiences and perspectives of participants. By adopting a qualitative approach, this research sought to explore the depth and

complexity of human experiences, making it well-suited to the study's goals. Specifically, a phenomenological research design was employed and the hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences, ensuring a rich, in-depth understanding of enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions. To generate qualitative data, a range of data collection instruments was used, including participant observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, research diaries and a research journal. This combination of methods enabled the collection of diverse and detailed insights, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of participants' views and experiences. The sampling process involved a purposive selection of participants, ensuring that only individuals with the relevant experiences were included, thus enriching the study's findings.

The data collection process was systematically conducted to ensure consistency and reliability, with careful attention given to ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality. The data analysis was continuous and thematic, allowing for the identification of patterns, themes and meanings within the data to emerge. By using an interpretive framework, the analysis provided a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives, revealing insights that might not have been captured through a more structured or quantitative approach. Overall, the chosen research paradigm, qualitative approach and phenomenological design, coupled with diverse data-generation techniques, sampling strategies and robust data analysis, contributed to the credibility, reliability and richness of the study's findings. This methodology not only aligned with the research objectives, but it also provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomena, offering valuable contributions to this field of study.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE EMPIRICAL DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from the empirical data collected during the research process. The analysis focuses on addressing the research questions and offers insights into the perspectives, experiences and challenges faced by participants. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with educators, principals and learners, as well as through participant observations, research journals and diaries. This choice of methods aimed to ensure that a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation would be garnered. Extracts from the interview transcripts were used to support the conclusions and interpretations.

4.2. Themes Derived from Answers to Question 1

Question 1 was: How do educators conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion?

4.2.1 Conceptualisations of inclusion

This theme probed the extent educators understood the conceptualisations of inclusion, which describe how individuals define, understand and interpret the concept of inclusion in relation to education. Integrating learners who have a diversity of needs, such as those from marginalised communities, those with disabilities, or those facing learning barriers into mainstream classroom settings, is often associated with inclusion. Therefore, according to data extracted from the focus group interviews, educators at the mainstream school indicated that many of them were unaware of the actual meaning of inclusion and mistakenly associated inclusive education with special education. This is what one of the educators who participated in the study had to say:

Educator A: *“You know neh ... the last time I actually heard about inclusion was ... I was doing my undergrad degree and nakhona (in translation even so), it was not in depth, so nje ... I really don’t know much about inclusion besides it talking about learners with disabilities. Mina ngizwa ngawe ukuthi (I am only hearing from you now that) it’s more than just learners with disabilities. So, every time when I think of inclusion, I immediately think of special education. It’s about creating space for learners with disabilities. So, already because I have bracketed inclusion to special*

education, I have already failed my learners ... if only in 'varsity we were told more about what inclusion is.'

Participating educators from the LSEN secondary school demonstrated contrasting views from those of the mainstream school. The focus group interviews revealed that they had some knowledge of what special educational programmes and inclusive practices entails. The participants made it known that through the basic workshops offered by their school managers, they were able to learn the fundamental principles of both interventions. This is what one of the educators had to say:

Educator G: *“When I started working here, we were initiated on what it entailed working at an LSEN school. We were given a course about inclusivity and special education, the type of learners we were going to be exposed to and how to work with them and teach them.”*

4.2.2 Increased learner participation

This theme explored increased learner participation in the context of inclusion, which means that all learners should actively participate in academic, social, and extracurricular activities, irrespective of their needs, backgrounds, or skills. It represents the idea that every learner should be able to participate actively in class and gain an equal share of benefits from all aspects of school life. The data garnered from the observations inserted in the research journal indicates that at the mainstream school, learner participation was hindered, as the classroom environment did not create an inclusive environment that addressed the diverse needs of all learners, especially those with learning barriers. The classroom lacked the opportunity to incorporate collaborative and interactive teaching methods, such as group work and multisensory activities, which should foster active involvement. In support of this claim, this is what one of the learners had to say:

Learner C: *“uyabona neh eclassini sibaningi so kunzima” (in translation: you see in class we are many and so it’s hard) to ... uhmmm ... do group work. The educator does try to make us work in peers and sometimes in groups, kodwa kubazima (but it becomes hard), because it ends up becoming very noisy. Then our ... ehh ... ma’am would make us break away from the groups, but still ... even when she continues to teach, it is hard to hear or concentrate because of the loudness. It’s challenging to follow the educator when so many people are chatting at once or moving around.”*

The LSEN classroom demonstrated a different learning environment, as learners were able to engage with the content that appeared to be more accessible, engaging and supportive. Through classroom observations, the researcher noticed that learner participation was at a higher level compared to the mainstream class and learners engaged meaningfully with the content offered by their educators. The usage of digital devices, such as power point presentation and YouTube videos, made the lessons more interesting; hence, there was increased learner participation. In support of this view, this is what one educator participant said:

Educator F: *“Although English FAL is not a subject the learners normally look forward to when it comes to attendance ... me as a teacher ... I try to make it interesting and always align the lessons to their course work and because I know my learners’ strong points and weak points, I always make sure to teach according to that to ensure that they engage and find the lesson interesting ... it’s difficult ... ehh ... but we try ... we use laptops ... we use the internet.”*

In support of the above-mentioned theme the researcher’s journal entry stated: “It was observed that big class sizes made group work challenging, with learners finding it difficult to focus due to noise and excessive movement in the classroom. Educators tried group and peer projects, but they frequently stopped due to difficulties with classroom management. Learners would complain that things like “it’s hard being in a group; ma’am we can’t hear you” were frustrating. In contrast, the LSEN class had a more regulated and encouraging atmosphere due to the smaller class sizes. There was an increase in learner participation. Learners were more involved, particularly when using digital resources like YouTube and PowerPoint. Educators would tailor their teaching to each learner’s strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing personalized and scaffolded learning. Although English FAL was thought to be less popular, educators worked to make it relevant by tying it into their courses, which increased the participation of learners.”

4.2.3 Attitudes toward special education programmes

This theme probed the views, opinions, and feelings that participants, including educators and learners have on the value, purpose and effectiveness of special education programmes. These attitudes have a major impact on how these programmes are implemented, received and succeed in educational systems. Classroom observation data analysis from the research journal indicated that the mainstream classroom was congested, with between 60 and 70 learners in each classroom. Learners appeared restless and frustrated, and the educator was very obviously

overwhelmed by the large number of learners. The educator felt it was impossible to use special educational programmes, as she was required to implement an individualised learning approach. Classroom observations gave the researcher an indication that the educator had a negative perspective about special educational programmes, and technically, the educator wanted to follow the annual teaching plan offered by the subject advisor from the district. In support of this view, this is what one of the participants said:

Educator B: *Hmmm ... yah neh ... eish ... special educational programmes ... (goes silent for a moment) heyi angazi ngizothini (I don't know what to say) heyi ... already inclusion I was so limited about knowing ngayo (about it), imagine khe special educational programmes, ngicela ungichazela wona kancane (please give me an explanation of them a bit) ... ooohhh hai ... it's the first time I have heard of such ... well, let me speak for myself, because it's not only maybe three or five learners who are failing, you will find that it's almost the whole class."*

Learner participants revealed during the semi-structured interviews that learners were frustrated and confused when taught the English language. This was evident during the classroom observations from the mainstream school, when learners responded in their mother tongue when asked a question in English. Most of the participating learners avoided questions posed to them by the participating educators, which led to the researcher concluding that the participating learners held negative attitudes toward special educational programmes. An upset and nervous participating learner said the following, when asked about attending an English language class:

Learner A: *"You see, ma'am ... maybe you will understand ... ehh ... you come from district ... our ma'am here at school ... ehh ... speak English that we don't understand give us work we do not understand ... we ask her why is this ... ma'am is angry ... we scared to do work, you see."*

The participating LSEN classroom displayed a different teaching and learning environment from the mainstream school's class. Classroom observation data analysis from the research journal indicated that the LSEN classroom had a welcoming and structured environment, with clearly defined areas for different activities (reading corner, group discussion area). Visual aids, such as posters with vocabulary words and phonics charts, were prominently displayed. This is what a participating educator said:

Educator H: *“I am familiar with some special educational programmes and although they seem good, the implementation becomes hard. With our ... you see ... our school, given that it is a vocational LSEN, we ... ehh ... do consider the different courses learners take as differentiation learning, but when we have to bring it home to English that is not used in English, we depend on collaborative learning, peer learning.”*

4.2.4 Educators’ beliefs and practices

This theme probed educators’ beliefs and practices in the context of inclusive education and special educational programmes, which refer to educators’ perceptions, attitudes and understandings about inclusion and how these shape their teaching methods, strategies and interactions with diverse learners. These beliefs and practices significantly influence the effectiveness of inclusive and special educational initiatives. Attributable to their limited understanding of the concept, educators at the mainstream school struggled to adapt their beliefs around inclusion, and they often associated it with the inclusion of learners with disabilities. Their limited understanding led to the misconception that inclusion was only about physical access, rather than comprehensive educational equity. Educators often resorted to one-size-fits-all approaches because of such limited understanding of inclusion and special educational programmes. This is what a participating educator had to say:

Educator E: *“When it comes ... ehh ... sorry about that ... educator beliefs and practices, we have that as educators ... neh, I mean we were told to establish that in university. I for one believe that I will always try to make a learner-centred environment, where learners will always have a voice and be heard when teaching and learning. Kodwa (however) Yoh! I never imagined I would be teaching such a large number, you know. Manje (now), when it comes to inclusion, to be honest, this is a new concept to me. I was not taught this in university and when I came into the work space, we were not introduced to this, so how am I expected to have beliefs and practices about a concept I don’t know?”*

The LSEN participants demonstrated different beliefs and practices as the focus group interviews revealed that inclusion was viewed as a strategy for integrating learners with disabilities and learning barriers into a supportive educational environment. The participants mentioned in the focus group interviews that they often worked together toward a common goal, sharing strategies and resources, and creating informal support networks in the school. This is what a participating educator had to say:

Educator J: *“We learn a lot ... ehh a lot from each other ... Because ... you know ... everyone has unique insights into how to support these learners. One practice we rely on as LSEN educators, because of limited or lack of training, is that we figure things out as we go, because formal training doesn’t cover the realities of our classrooms.”*

4.3 Themes Derived from Answers to Question 2

Question 2 asked: What strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education educators in implementation of special education practices in the Grade 10 English FAL classroom?

4.3.1 Joint planning and programming

This theme probed the extent to which joint planning and programming were utilised to promote inclusivity and cater to diverse learner needs, which refers to a collaborative approach where educators and stakeholders from both the LSEN school and mainstream schools work together to design, implement and evaluate educational practices and programmes. Focus group interviews revealed that educators from the mainstream school seldom collaborated with the LSEN school participants, basically because of the perceived differences in their curricula and the allocated resources. The disparity in resources between the LSEN school and the mainstream schools, according to the participants, further limited collaboration, as they believed that the mainstream schools were unable to implement the proposed strategies effectively because of their limited resources. A participant said the following:

Educator C: *“How can we apply what LSEN schools do when we have 50 learners in one room? You see ... ehh ... It’s impossible to focus on individuals. Thina (we) they expect us to perform miracles with what little we have, while LSEN schools are equipped with tools we can only dream of ... If the department doesn’t step in to guide us, how can we collaborate? We’re left to fend for ourselves.”*

Focus group interviews of LSEN participants indicated difficulties to collaborate with the mainstream educators who were faced with overcrowded classrooms, which made it impossible to implement the special educational programmes meant for smaller numbers of learners. Furthermore, LSEN participants felt that most of the programmes used in their institution were expensive and irrelevant to any of the programmes used in mainstream schools; therefore,

mainstream personnel would face challenges in meeting the costs of such programmes. In support of this claim, this is what a participant said:

Educator F: *“I believe ... if properly implemented by the department, it would really be beneficial to work hand-in-hand with mainstream schools, especially for those learners who are still waiting to be referred to special schools. Working with them can really help those learners ... ehh ... and this would avoid LSEN school becoming overcrowded. Sharing our resources and expertise can bring real change to schools struggling with limited budgets as well and ehh ... training together would help us understand each other’s challenges and find practical solutions we can all apply.”*

4.3.2 Professional development and training

This theme probed professional development and training of educators, which refers to the structured opportunities for educators to gain new skills, knowledge and strategies to enhance their teaching practices. Focus group interviews held with the mainstream school participants revealed that they were not well trained to address the needs of learners with disabilities or special needs. They made it known that the Department of Basic Education expected them “to work beyond their expertise”, despite the fact that they did not receive the necessary professional development and training. A participant said the following:

Educator A: *“Most educator training ... you see ... programmes don’t focus enough on inclusion or special education. We’re not taught ... ehh ... how to modify lessons or assessments for learners with special needs, while still meeting curriculum requirements. We don’t have enough access ... what you call ... ehhh ... to special education experts, who could guide us in implementing programmes, or addressing specific learner needs.”*

The focus group interviews held with the LSEN school participants highlighted the same sentiments as the mainstream school participants, as they also revealed that little or no professional development and training was offered by the Department of Education. Instead, they had to be self-taught on how to work with learners in their respective institution. One frustrated and angry participant said:

Educator J: *“Handling complex needs without adequate training is mentally and emotionally exhausting ... the department don’t care about us ... you see ... we often feel inadequate or unsure about whether what we are doing is the right thing for our*

learners ... without consistent training, each educator implements strategies differently, leading to inconsistencies in support.”

4.3.3 Collaborative teaching models

This theme explored the extent to which mainstream school and LSEN school participants used collaborative teaching models, which refers to the structured approaches, in which two or more educators work together to plan, teach and assess a group of learners. These models are meant to leverage the strengths and expertise of each educator to provide a richer, more inclusive learning experience, and especially so in classrooms with diverse learners. Focus group interviews held with mainstream school participants revealed that collaborative teaching models were seen to be an idealistic concept, especially for public township schools. They stated that without sufficient resources, training and support, implementing collaborative models was unattainable. A disillusioned educator said the following:

Educator E: *Hai kodwa yonke lento (no but all of this) is really idealistic, uyasibona lesi sikole (do you see this school?), do you see such being implemented? We’d really love to implement all of this with the right things put in place for us to make this work, but we can’t do it on our own. Where will we find the time to do collaborative teaching, when we don’t even have the time or ... or the resources to finish our own curriculum?”*

The focus group interviews held with the LSEN school participants shared similar sentiments with those from the mainstream school participants, as they indicated that collaboration was impossible, because little or no support was received from the district to enhance consistency. A participant said:

Educator G: *“It would be nice to work hand-in-hand with mainstream schools ... you know ... this would decrease the pressure on us. But the reality is ... some of you don’t understand ... that there’s no communication between our schools, there’s no clear policy encouraging partnerships between LSEN and mainstream schools ... so how would we go about implementing such? It sounds like a lot of work that needs a lot of money.”*

4.3.4 Inclusive classroom environments

This theme probed the extent to which participants were able to create inclusive classroom environments, referring to educational settings designed to ensure that all learners, regardless

of their abilities, backgrounds or identities, would feel valued, respected and supported in their learning journey. These environments should be aimed at eliminating barriers to least participation and achievement, fostering a sense of belonging for every learner. Research journal data analysis revealed that mainstream school participants had difficulties in establishing inclusive learning and teaching environments, or any effort aimed at collaborating with LSEN personnel. A participating educator said the following:

Educator B: *“We try to help our learners, especially those with learning barriers and siyabona ukuthi ngemphele lona uyayidinga (we can also see that this learner needs) intervention ... but these learners never want to meet us halfway, in as much as we are supposed to create an inclusive class ... the learners must be willing to be included.”*

Learner E: *“Ma’am ... our educators bayadina (sucks) ... ehh ... they want us to do their work ... they don’t help us ... they want homework ... this is school ... we must do work here ... at school ... why at home ... me, I don’t get this ...”*

The LSEN school’s focus group interviews indicated that the educators believed that they were partially able to create inclusive teaching and learning environments to accommodate all learners. This is what a participant said:

Educator H: *“Our learners ... ehh ... are happy and they feel valued, you can see for yourself. We do not even shout at them, we do gentle teaching and discipline, we do not want to trigger them ... we do not even force them to do their work. We just encourage. We ensure that there’s a feeding scheme for learners from disadvantaged homes, there’s buses for all learners in terms of transportation. So, we really do try to practice inclusion as best as we can.”*

In support of being able to create an inclusive environment for all learners, the results from the semi-structured interview data revealed that the LSEN school’s mission and vision were rooted in inclusivity. This is what the participating deputy principal said:

Deputy Principal B: *“Our school policy, code of conduct and curriculum are built on inclusion, and it’s a pity we do not get the chance to work hand-in-hand with mainstream schools, as this [would] be an opportunity for us to foster inclusion across all schools.”*

In relation to Inclusive classroom environments the Researcher Journal stated the following: *“In the mainstream school it was observed that educators expressed frustrations about implementing inclusivity. One teacher commented that although they recognize when a learner needs intervention, the learners themselves are “not willing to be included”. This revealed a potential misunderstanding of inclusivity, rather than placing responsibility on the learner, the classroom environment itself should adapt to the learner’s needs. In the LSEN school, the environment was strikingly different. Educators described their approach as gentle and encouraging. The atmosphere seemed more nurturing. There is a sharp contrast between mainstream and LSEN approaches; mainstream schools struggle to reconcile inclusion with large class sizes and traditional expectations, while LSEN schools embed inclusivity in both policy and daily practice.”*

4.4 Themes Derived from Answers to Question 3

Question 3 asked: What are the potential difficulties educators face while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom?

4.4.1 Impact of overcrowded classrooms

This theme explored the impact of overcrowded classrooms, which appears to be a core challenge toward educators being able to effectively implement special educational practices and instead, overcrowding is a barrier to inclusivity. Overcrowded classrooms hinder an educator’s ability to provide individualised support, create an inclusive environment, or address the diverse needs of learners, especially those requiring additional assistance because of their learning barriers. During the researcher’s observation of a Grade 10 English FAL classroom at a mainstream school, it became evident that overcrowding significantly affected both the teaching and learning processes. The sheer number of learners in the classroom created multiple barriers to effective instruction and learner engagement. The classroom was overcrowded, with desks crammed closely together, leaving little room for the educator to move around and interact with individual learners. Many learners appeared physically uncomfortable by the lack of personal space, which affected their focus and ability to engage with the lesson. A participating educator said the following during the focus group interviews:

Educator A: *“With so many learners, I simply don’t have enough time to address the unique needs of every learner ... you see ... special programmes require extra planning and attention, which is nearly impossible in a classroom this size ... it’s difficult.”*

The semi-structured interviews’ data analysis garnered from the mainstream school’s learners revealed that learners were not receiving adequate attention because of overcrowded classrooms. The classroom became very noisy and they missed out on important information, as some educators failed to manage the classroom and the learners effectively. A participating learner stated:

Learner B: *“Ehh ... I enjoy going to attend English, neh, but it becomes so loud during our lessons that I can’t even hear the educator properly ... ehh ... I ... sometimes feel like I miss important information, and ma’am does not have a loud voice. We have to raise our hands ... we have questions and address them in front of the whole class because ma’am can’t always come to each learner’s desk to help them or answer their questions there.”*

To emphasise further on this point a learner made a diary which stated:

Learner E: *“I know when I want to sit in front with a chair and table I must run to class and not to be late. If I am late I have to sit with my two friends we share a table. Our class is always full sometimes its fun but when I want to learn its not nice to learn with so much noise”*

The participants in the LSEN school focus group interviews shared similar sentiments regarding overcrowding. The research journal data analysis revealed that educators were faced with 30 learners in an LSEN classroom. The educators felt that overcrowding hindered their teaching and learning, as they faced difficulties in offering individualised instruction for learners who required extra attention. A participating educator said the following:

Educator I: *“Uyobona (You see), with us, we can’t really have more than 30 learners in a classroom ... that is a lot you see ... it becomes draining, given that we considered our learners as ‘not normal’ for lack of a better term. We are not only dealing with just teaching and learning ... but we also have to deal with their learning barriers, disabilities, behavioural challenges, mental challenges, those who can’t read and those who can’t write.”*

In support of these comments, the participating deputy principal from the LSEN school said the following:

Deputy Principal B: *“At first, we didn’t have the problem of overcrowding at our school, because a lot of parents didn’t want to bring their children here. They considered our school as a school for crazy learners, but now I think because parents are hearing more about special kids and what our school offers, we’re getting an influx of learners. And I also think educators at mainstream schools are referring a lot of learners here.”*

4.4.2 The impact of time constraints

This theme probed the impact of time constraints on educators, which referred to the challenges that arose when educators lacked sufficient time to plan, implement and evaluate special educational practices effectively. Time limitations can hinder the ability to differentiate instruction, provide individualised support and address the diverse needs of learners, especially in inclusive classrooms. The focus group interviews’ data analysis of the mainstream school participants revealed that special educational practices often required additional time to modify the lesson plans, create differentiated materials, or provide one-on-one guidance. Participants further stated that with overcrowded classrooms, managing time became even more difficult. The research journal data analysis indicated that the pressure to balance curriculum demands, administrative tasks, and learners’ diverse needs often left the participating educators feeling overwhelmed and unable to provide the level of support that learners with special needs required. In support of this claim, this is what one participating educator said:

Educator E: *“You know what ... time is our biggest enemy here ... the curriculum is so packed that we’re constantly rushing to cover everything. It leaves very little room for creativity or addressing individual learners’ needs. The pressure to complete the syllabus means that we often can’t spend extra time with learners who are struggling. This makes it hard to ensure that everyone is on the same page, especially learners with learning barriers.”*

The semi-structured interviews conducted with learners revealed that learners experienced difficulties in coping with the teaching and learning pace. In a bid to complete the curriculum, educators had to move at a faster level, which created even more challenges for the LSEN learners. A learner, who was feeling overwhelmed, said the following:

Learner C: *We have to move so fast in class ... sometimes I don't understand a topic futhi kakhulu kwi poetry (especially in poetry), but nawe uybona uma'am iskhathi sokuthi ma'am agcizelela asikho (you also can see that ma'am does not have the time to put emphasis), so we just move. Okusizayo ke ukuthi uma'am uyasichazela nge'siZulu (The only thing that helps is that our educator does explain to us in isiZulu). We can't go back and revisit topics that we struggled with, because we have to move on to new content. Some learners can keep up, but abanigi (most) fall behind and struggle to catch up."*

Contrary to the mainstream school scenario, the research journal data analysis reflected that the participating educators from the LSEN school were able to manage their time well, regardless of the overcrowded classes. The educators used effective teaching methods, such as group work and cooperative teaching and learning, to meet the learners' academic needs. Furthermore, the focus group interview data analysis revealed that the educators at this school believed that they had ample time to complete the curriculum. They even used time reserved for extracurricular activities, should a need arise to cater for specific academic needs. A participating educator said the following:

Educator H: *"The one thing I am really thankful for when working at an LSEN school is that we are not under pressure or have time constraints ... our heads and SMT not only provide us with unwavering support you see ... but they also assist us in our classrooms whenever necessary. Our periods enable us to fully interact with our learners, assign classwork, give them homework and yet, have time to go over it with them. Should we ever feel that we are falling behind with curriculum coverage, we are allowed, upon request, to keep our learners from going to the sports period, and they come attend classes to catch up or do deep intervention."*

Through observations researcher's journal revealed that: *"During classroom observations, it was evident that time constraints in the mainstream school limited educators' ability to support learners effectively. Lessons were rushed to meet curriculum demands, with little opportunity for individual attention or revisiting difficult concepts, leaving some learners disengaged and struggling to keep up. In contrast, the LSEN school allowed for a slower pace and flexible use of time, with educators incorporating group work and extending lessons when necessary. This created an environment where learners' diverse needs were met more effectively,*

highlighting how school structures and time management practices can directly influence the inclusivity of teaching and learning.”

4.4.3 Parental involvement

This theme probed parental or family involvement in their children’s academic endeavours, which appears to be a challenge. Inclusion requires a partnership between the school and the learners’ home. When parents are not actively involved with the school, or the learner, it creates a disconnect that affects the learners’ progress and their ability to meet their individual needs. Such lack of involvement makes it much far more difficult for the schools to implement any form of intervention to help the learners. The data analysis from the mainstream focus group indicated that many parents either do not understand the roles they are expected to play toward their children’s academic endeavours, or they do not have the resources or time to support their children. The educators also believed that the learners’ socioeconomic background played a major role, as parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often faced additional challenges, such as language barriers, lack of education, or financial struggles, which prevented them from actively participating in their children’s education. A participating educator said the following:

Educator D: *“Ehh ... shame, parental involvement my dear ... that is a sad joke here ... we normally ... at the end of the term ... host a parents evening to give learners their reports and also get the chance to communicate with the parents about ... about their children’s behaviour and anything else we want to address. And every term, parents don’t show up, only the parents of the excelling, least problematic learners show up. It’s so discouraging.”*

In support of this claim, the data analysis of the mainstream school’s interview with the participating deputy principal shared the same sentiments. This is what the deputy principal said:

Deputy principal A: *“Ehh ... you know, this ... this parental involvement is surely the most pressing challenge we face. Ehh ... this issue has an effect on teaching, learning and the overall progress of learners. We understand that many parents are either unable and others are just unwilling to participate actively in their children’s schooling, and this creates a gap that educators cannot bridge alone. When parents are not involved, educators find it very hard to enforce discipline and maintain consistent academic expectations.”*

The analysis of the focus group data garnered from the LSEN school indicated that parental involvement was a great challenge, even at this school. The participants revealed that most parents were in denial about having their children in an LSEN school, which they associated with “madness”, a stigma that discourages them from being actively involved. A participant said the following:

Educator F: *“It’s disheartening when parents see our school as a last resort, or think of special education as a label of failure. This mind set prevents them from being active partners in their child’s education. Whenever we host parents’ meeting at the school, the parents do not show up at all. And this affects us greatly, because learners struggle to make consistent progress without the necessary support and reinforcement at home, which puts a lot of pressure on us as educators. In most cases, we find that the parents truly do not understand what LSEN schools are and what role they have to play in their child’s education; hence, the lack of involvement. We end up compensating for the lack of parental support by spending extra time addressing issues that could be managed at home.”*

The data garnered from the deputy principal’s semi-structured interview from the LSEN school concurred with the views provided by the other participant. The participating deputy principal mentioned that lack of parental involvement was detrimental to the entire school’s achievements. This is what the deputy principal said:

Deputy Principal B: *“Parental involvement is such a crucial part when it comes to learners with special needs ... you see ... but it’s so unfortunate for us, because we have so many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds ... and ... and their parents are not involved in their children’s education. With us, we need parents to come to the school and be spoken to about the children’s behaviour, mental issues and how to manage that at home.”*

4.4.4 Language barrier

This theme explored the language barriers that occur when the language of instruction differs from the learners’ home language. This barrier presents a significant challenge for educators attempting to implement special educational practices, as clear and effective communication is essential for meeting the learners’ diverse needs. Focus group interview data analysis at the mainstream school revealed that language barriers were a significant obstacle in these

educators' classrooms, especially when they were trying to cater to learners with special educational needs. English is not the home language for most of the learners, and this creates challenges both for teaching and learning. For learners with special needs and learning barriers, the challenge is even more pronounced, as they require tailored support that often relies heavily on clear and precise communication. Educators admitted that they found themselves having to teach English in the learners' home language, as many of their learners struggled to understand even basic instructions in English. When it came to explaining abstract concepts, or steps in a learning strategy, the challenge became even greater. This is what a participating educator had to say:

Educator B: *"Ehh ... many of my learners come from homes, where English is not spoken at all. So, nje (now) I have two problems, (1) they're not only trying to learn the content, but (2) they are also trying to understand the language. I usually ... ehh ... notice that learners struggle to understand basic instructions ... you see ... this becomes a problem when they have to participate in activities, understand grammar rules, or engage with literature. Manje (now) what I do is teach English in isiZulu, so they can participate and at least understand, yona (that) it really helps."*

The semi-structured interview data analysis revealed that learners were experiencing academic challenges when using a language that was not native to them. This caused them to experience anxiety and frustration, as they struggled to comprehend the content delivered in a foreign language. A learner said the following:

Learner B: *"Me ... I ... enjoy learning English even at home ... ehh ... I try to read books and watch English movies. In class ... ehh ... I'm part of the learners who are always raising their hands and I pass well too ... but most of the learners in class ... you can see that they struggle ... they know the answer ... you see ma'am ... but it is hard for them to answer in English, but ma'am allows them to answer in Zulu. When ma'am allows us to use Zulu, you can see there's a lot of participation in class."*

The LSEN school's focus group data analysis indicated that educators believed that learners with special needs often required clear and simple instructions, but because English was not their home language, even the most basic instructions can become a challenge. This was especially problematic for learners with conditions such as dyslexia or ADHD, who already struggled with processing information. The educators stated that many of the resources and materials they used were in English, and learners with limited language proficiency struggled

to engage with them. The participants further stated that language barriers often were the result of cultural differences that affected how the learners interpreted or responded to instructions. This created misunderstandings and affected their ability to participate fully in class. A participating educator said the following:

Educator J: *“I try to simplify my language as much as possible and use visual aids to support understanding. But this isn’t always enough, especially for complex concepts. I often pair learners with stronger English ability with those who struggle, so they can translate or explain in their home language. While this helps, it’s not a long-term solution. It becomes very difficult for us to try and translate content into their home language, because we have Afrikaans speakers and many different Nguni languages, where will I begin to code switch ... which language will I use ... and which one will I not use? So, it’s better to stick to teaching English in English. It’s heart-breaking to see a learner’s potential get hindered by something as fundamental as language. I often feel like I’m not doing enough, even though I’m trying my best.”*

4.5 Chapter Summary

The analysis of the data collected through semi-structured interviews with learners and deputy principals, focus group interviews with educators, coupled with the observations recorded in the research diaries and documented in the research journals, provided a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Key themes emerged, highlighting the complexities, challenges and opportunities within the studied context. Overall, the data analysis revealed interlinked challenges, such as resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, lacking parental involvement, limited educator training and insufficient collaboration, while also uncovering areas of resilience and innovation. These findings serve as a foundation for the following chapter, which will discuss the implications of these results and propose actionable recommendations for addressing the identified gaps.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study, key recommendations and the overall conclusion derived from the research findings. The study explored the challenges and barriers affecting the implementation of inclusive education. This chapter begins by restating the research question and sub-questions, summarises the key findings of the research, and highlights the primary challenges identified in the study. It then provides a series of recommendations. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the overall implications of the research and also listing the limitations of the study and areas for further research.

5.2. Restating the Research Aim of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was motivated by the researcher having identified the gap in schools teaching Grade 10 English FAL to include learners with learning barriers and special educational needs. The findings revealed that special educational programs are relevant to assisting learners with learning barriers and implementing inclusive education principles. Therefore, the following research questions were stated.

5.2.1 Research questions

In Chapter 1, the research questions of the study were stated as follows: How can special educational programmes be used in Grade 10 English language mainstream classes in secondary schools for learners with special educational needs to facilitate inclusive teaching and learning?

To answer the question, the researcher had to consider the following sub-questions:

- a) How do educators conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion?
- b) What strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education educators in the implementation of special education practices in Grade 10 English FAL classrooms?
- c) What are the potential difficulties educators might face while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom?

5.2.2 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- a) To examine how educators, conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion.
- b) To explore what strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education educators in the implementation of special education practices in the Grade 10 English FAL classroom.
- c) To investigate the potential difficulties educators faced while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom.

5.3 Summary of the Study

Chapter 1 highlighted the study's background, motivation and justifications. The research's problem statement, research questions and ethical considerations were described.

Chapter 2 presented a review of the relevant literature. Reference was made to previous studies, the literature review highlighted the complexity of implementing and researching special educational programmes and inclusive education by bridging gaps between special education and inclusive practices.

Chapter 3 of this study covered the research design and methodological position. It also explained the interview and data gathering techniques the researcher employed, along with the rationale behind the qualitative study selection.

Chapter 4 reported the data analysis, which also described the data analysis measures based on the researcher's use of research journals and diaries, semi-structured interviews with principals and learners, and focus groups with educators.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the shortcomings and limitations experienced in this study, along with suggestions for how the researcher addressed them. The chapter concludes with review of the findings and a discussion of some possible explanations and implications of the findings of this investigation and provides a summary of the results.

5.4 Discussion of the Findings

5.4.1 Research Question 1

Question 1 asked: How do educators conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion? To answer this research question, the following themes were identified in Chapter 4:

5.4.1.1 Conceptualisations of inclusion

The findings showed that the participating educators from the mainstream secondary school mostly associated inclusion with special education and learners experiencing difficulties. This highlighted that undergraduate educator inclusion training was lacking in effectively communicating the two separate concepts. This also reflected a misperception that inclusion only addressed disability, rather than cultural, language and socioeconomic concerns. Inclusion should be taught as a universal basis for classroom diversity, not simply be focused on impairments. In contrast, LSEN educators had a deeper grasp of inclusivity. School-led induction programmes and workshops taught these educators diversity and special education practices. Even without pre-service training, LSEN educators benefited from focused in-house workshops and induction programmes. Social constructivism asserts that learning transpires through social interactions and scaffolded support (Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings demonstrated that undergraduate education was inadequate; however, school-led induction programmes and workshops assisted educators in cultivating inclusive behaviours. This corresponds with research indicating that educators gain advantages from professional learning communities, mentorship, and practical experience in real-world environments (Rouse, 2022). Social interactions within these programmes can provide the scaffolding necessary to construct a more inclusive perspective (Sharma & Sokal, 2015). The findings emphasised that inclusion was sometimes misunderstood as pertaining exclusively to disability, rather than incorporating cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity. Social constructivism suggests that these assumptions are influenced by society's norms, institutional practices, and educator training (Palmer, 2020). The absence of adequate pre-service training hinders the comprehensive knowledge of inclusion, underscoring the necessity for collaborative discourse and reflection to transform educators' perceptions (Florian & Spratt, 2013). This was noticeable especially in the mainstream schools.

5.4.1.2 Increased learner participation

The findings indicated that mainstream classrooms struggled to be inclusive. Caused by huge class sizes and a lack of collaborative and interactive teaching approaches, learner participation suffered. Learner testimonials showed that noise, distractions and concentration issues weakened their participation in mainstream schools, whereas LSEN schools' educators achieved better learner participation. Digital gadgets, multimedia presentations and individualised training were used by these educators, which made the content more accessible and interesting. LSEN school educators emphasised having to identify learners' needs and using technology to engage them. YouTube videos and PowerPoint presentations kept their learners engaged during coursework-aligned lessons.

Inclusion requires schools to adapt to various needs and make all learners feel valued and participated (De Klerk, 2020). According to Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, interaction and collaboration deepen learners' understanding and cognitive growth. The present study highlighted that the two contexts require different teaching methods to meet learners' demands. The LSEN school's educators were aware of their learners' strengths and shortcomings, which influenced their method of instruction. This personalisation was lacking in standard, mainstream classrooms. Laptops and internet resources in LSEN classrooms enhanced learner participation and the use of multimedia made lessons more engaging and personalised. Compared to such effective teaching approaches. The mainstream classrooms were seriously overcrowded, and the educators lacked the resources and tactics to be able to create engaging, inclusive environments.

5.4.1.3 Attitudes toward special education programmes

The study identified that educators teaching at the mainstream school lacked the relevant knowledge about special education programmes, and this resulted in their negative attitudes toward such interventions. Integration of such programmes can be complicated if there is a lack of training and assistance for the educators. This sentiment matched the educators' reliance on district-provided annual teaching plans, which limit individualised or innovative teaching practices. Emphasis on the poor communication between educators and learners, in most cases caused by the overcrowded, noisy and physically under-resourced classrooms, highlighted the unfavourable environment and learners' negative attitudes toward learning in a foreign (English) language and special education. Learners' dread, irritation and uncertainty indicated how they felt about the classroom and how they handled instruction.

In comparison, the LSEN classroom was pleasant, organised and visually appealing. These factors seemed to facilitate differentiated learning and a more inclusive learning environment. While educators from the LSEN school acknowledged the benefits of special education programmes, they noted the limitations of their implementation, especially in meeting vocational learners' demands. Peer and collaborative learning seemed to be more realistic ways to overcome language teaching restrictions.

Vygotsky (1978), cited in Marginson and Dang (2017), contended that learning is a socially mediated process, in which knowledge is constructed through interactions within a cultural and social context. This perspective highlights the significance of collaboration, effective communication, and the use of cultural tools in the process of cognitive development. The findings garnered from this study indicated that educators exhibited a deficiency in knowledge regarding special education programmes, which led to unfavourable judgements. From the perspective of social constructivism, this deficiency in being aware of, and understanding what special education programmes are and can offer tends to impede the collaborative processes that are essential for fostering effective learning environments. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the significance of the 'more knowledgeable other' in facilitating learners' learning through scaffolding. However, if educators do not possess the adequate knowledge, they are unable to offer the essential support required for learners with special needs (Smagorinsky, 2018). This situation highlights the necessity for extensive professional development aimed at improving educators' proficiency in special education. The findings reinforced the existence of ineffective communication and understanding between educators and learners, which led to negative attitudes toward learning and special education. Effective communication is fundamental to Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD, wherein learners attain elevated levels of comprehension through social interaction. Obstacles in communication can consequently impede the collaborative construction of knowledge and adversely affect learners' attitudes toward the learning process. In turn, this will have a lasting negative effect on these learners' future achievements and success in the world of work.

5.4.1.4 Educators' beliefs and practices

The study's findings revealed that mainstream educators generally understand inclusion only as referring to learners who have disabilities, indicating a poor knowledge of the concepts full meaning. The idea that inclusion equals physical access for all learners, irrespective of the abilities or skills, rather than educational equality, hinders inclusive activities. Limited exposure to inclusive education concepts throughout these educators' training and professional

development limits their effective practices when they are confronted by having to include learners with a wide range of capabilities and backgrounds. The LSEN school's educators understood inclusion better and knew that it incorporated learners with disabilities and learning difficulties into supportive environments. Common collaborative activities, such as sharing resources, tactics and informal peer support improved learners' results. Although the mainstream school's educators struggled to apply inclusive tactics, mostly attributed to the larger class numbers and overcrowding, they also lacked exposure to inclusive principles, while the LSEN school educators adapted their teaching through informal peer networks and practical learning. The mainstream school's educators generally used one-size-fits-all techniques, while the LSEN school's educators were more learner-centred and flexible in their approaches, despite their challenges. Overall, large class numbers, insufficient resources and inadequate training made inclusive education more difficult to achieve. Smaller class sizes and a specific emphasis on individualised teaching and the use of visual aids helped the LSEN school's educators implement inclusive policies. However, negative attitudes toward inclusion, or special education programmes among educators (or principals) can inhibit the effective implementation in the classroom.

A social constructivist approach promotes the redefinition of inclusion through shared dialogues and collaborative initiatives, thereby ensuring that everyone feels valued and supported. Reflective practice training can help educators evaluate and connect their values with inclusive ideals (De Klerk, 2020). There is a pronounced emphasis on the significance of continuous learning and social interaction in the cultivation of understanding new concepts these educators will be faced with. Therefore, schools ought to establish continuous, interactive training initiatives that promote educators' engagement with a variety of perspectives and facilitate the collaborative development of inclusive practices (Teater, 2014). Social constructivism emphasises the significance of social interactions in the formation of beliefs and attitudes. As a result, encouraging open dialogues and reflective practices among the school's teams and across other schools can facilitate the transformation of perceptions and cultivate a more inclusive culture.

5.4.2 Research Question 2

Question 2 asked: What strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education educators in implementation of special education practices in

Grade 10 English FAL classroom? To answer this research question, the following themes were derived from the findings reported in Chapter 4:

5.4.2.1 Joint planning and programming

The study found a recurring challenge regarding the opportunity of joint planning and programming. It highlighted the unbalanced resource distribution across LSEN and mainstream schools. The existing LSEN-school strategies and resources were challenging to implement in mainstream schools because of a lack of funding and the relevant teaching resources. Beyond their dominant limitations caused by overcrowded classrooms, the mainstream school's educators were frustrated by the lacking access to enabling resources. They reported that the LSEN-school's practices are impossible to implement in overcrowded and underfunded classrooms. In theory, joint planning and programming could improve inclusivity, but resource imbalances, overcrowding, a lack of available time, and a lack of departmental support and guidance all hindered collaboration, although participants saw the benefits of collaboration. Joint planning and resource-sharing could support learners awaiting placement in LSEN schools and alleviate overcrowding in LSEN facilities. Educators emphasised the benefits of shared expertise and collaborative training to provide them with a deeper understanding of what was required of them regarding special needs education and problem-solving. The LSEN school and the mainstream educators believed that the lack of support from the DoE hindered collaboration, as without proper training and guidelines, they could only collaborate on an individual basis.

Other studies found that when educators participate in collaborative planning, they combine a range of perspectives and areas of expertise, resulting in the co-creation of inclusive curricula that accurately represent the diverse cultural and educational backgrounds of their learners (Kuuluvainen, 2022). Matthew (2023) reports that this process reflects Vygotsky's assertion that social interaction is essential to cognitive development. Collaborative planning enables educators to devise scaffolding strategies that are specifically designed to address the unique learning requirements of each learner. Through collaborative efforts, educators can develop interventions that offer suitable levels of support, thereby facilitating learners' attainment of enhanced comprehension and skills development. This continuous learning method is consistent with the social constructivist perspective, which highlights the dynamic nature of learning and the continual adaptation of teaching methods to accommodate the learners' changing requirements.

5.4.2.2 Professional development and training

Professional ongoing development and specific training for educators in mainstream and LSEN schools seemed to be lacking, and inclusive practices were hindered by common challenges (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The findings showed that professional development programmes failed to address inclusion or special education, leaving educators unprepared to alter lessons and assessments for learners with special needs. This gap forced educators to self-teach or apply their inadequate knowledge regarding the two concepts of inclusion and special needs education, resulting in inclusive education inconsistencies. The mainstream school's educators said their training did not prepare them to teach learners with learning barriers. Given their lack of inclusive teaching experience or knowledge, they believed that the expectations by the Department of Basic Education were unrealistic, expecting them to manage inclusive classrooms. They struggled to address the learners' academic and emotional demands who were experiencing difficulties, which in turn, frustrated the educators and the learners. The LSEN school's educators also noted similar concerns, emphasising that they are often left to develop their skills independently. The lack of ongoing training from the Department of Education aggravated their feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, anxiety and even burnout. Educators also noted that this inconsistency in professional development resulted in varied approaches to teaching, leading to disparities in the learners' support. The findings further revealed that educators felt handling learners with complex needs without proper training led to emotional exhaustion and professional dissatisfaction. The educators' frustration highlighted the mental and emotional toll caused by the lack of structured training, guidance and ongoing professional development. However, even the best training and guidance would not overcome the challenge of overcrowded classrooms and underfunding of resources.

Polly, Allman, Casto, and Norwood (2017) state that in professional development, trainers provide support (scaffolding) to help individuals master new skills that they might struggle with on their own. Trainers or mentors are 'more knowledgeable others' who temporarily help individuals until they can work on their own (Nardo, 2021). Workshops, coaching and hands-on training reflect scaffolding's gradual release of responsibility. Vygotsky believed that knowledge is produced through experience in relevant settings; therefore, educators learn best when training is contextualised inside real work scenarios (Polly et al., 2017).

5.4.2.3 Collaborative teaching models

The findings from the focus group interviews highlighted significant barriers to the implementation of collaborative teaching models in both the mainstream and the LSEN

schools' contexts. Focus group interviews held with the mainstream school educators showed that collaborative teaching strategies are believed to be unrealistic, especially in resource-constrained public township schools. Poor LTSM, overcrowded classrooms and the lack of the necessary technology were major challenges for these educators. These limitations hindered the educators from collaborating and working on co-teaching approaches. Participants from the LSEN school echoed the sentiments of their mainstream school's counterparts, noting that collaboration remained unattainable without district-level support and clear policies. Educators both from the LSEN school and the mainstream school expressed frustration over the absence of clear and relevant policies and frameworks to encourage partnerships between mainstream and LSEN schools. This lack of direction led to inconsistent practices and missed opportunities for collaboration. Both the LSEN school and the mainstream school participants highlighted the district's lack of proactive involvement in fostering partnerships or providing the resources needed to facilitate collaborative teaching.

The findings also revealed that despite the challenges, educators recognised the potential benefits of collaborative teaching models. The LSEN educators noted that partnerships with mainstream schools could help distribute the burden of catering to learners with diverse needs. This would reduce pressure on the LSEN school. Enhanced learning opportunities through collaboration would allow for the pooling of expertise, enabling educators to deliver richer, more inclusive educational experiences. Collaborative teaching involves knowing every learner's ZPD, so that the educators can tailor their teaching approaches to help move the learners from assisted to independent performance (Margolis, 2020). Scaffolding appeared in collaborative teaching through modelling, showing learners tasks or strategies to imitate, prompting cues to help them solve problems, and questioning to promote critical thinking and involvement. These methods let learners learn independently in their ZPD. Vygotsky's principles are used in collaborative teaching by co-teaching, when several educators share the responsibility for education, and provide different perspectives and scaffolding to suit learners' varying needs (McGlothin, 2023).

5.4.2.4 Inclusive classroom environments

The findings of the study highlighted both the successes and challenges faced by mainstream and LSEN schools in achieving the goal of inclusive classroom environments. The mainstream school participants expressed difficulties in establishing truly inclusive classrooms because of the various barriers, which also included limited learner engagement. Educators noted challenges in motivating the learners with diverse needs to participate actively. Educators at

the mainstream school felt that inclusion required a reciprocal effort, but learners' unwillingness to engage often hindered any progress. At the same time, learners from the mainstream school expressed frustration with the educators' teaching practices, especially their expectation to complete homework without having received adequate in-school support. The inability to effectively collaborate with LSEN personnel exacerbated the difficulty of addressing diverse learning needs within the mainstream school's classrooms. The LSEN school educators reported more positive outcomes in fostering inclusivity, despite resource and systemic constraints. The educators emphasised their use of gentle teaching methods and of avoiding practices that could trigger learners' distress. The LSEN school also provided practical support, such as feeding schemes for disadvantaged learners, similar to the mainstream school, and transportation, ensuring that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds felt included and valued. The LSEN school's mission, vision, and policies explicitly promoted inclusive practices, creating a foundational commitment to inclusion.

Donohue and Bornman (2021) state that inclusive environments improve academic outcomes for all learners by fostering diverse perspectives and encouraging collaboration. Social constructivism sees learning as an active process, where learners gain knowledge through experience and interaction. Inclusive classrooms build confidence and progress by creating engaging, learner-centred environments, where every learner can contribute (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Vygotsky believed social and emotional growth was crucial to learning. Inclusive classrooms promote a sense of belonging, making learners feel appreciated and encouraged, which enhances their motivation and academic success (Taber, 2020).

5.4.3 Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: What are the potential difficulties educators may face while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom? To answer this research question, the following themes were derived from Chapter 4:

5.4.3.1 Impact of overcrowded classrooms

The study's findings revealed that overcrowding in mainstream schools negatively affected the teaching and learning processes. Educators struggled to provide individualised support because of the densely populated classrooms and the sheer number of learners. This hindered their ability to effectively implement special programmes tailored to the needs of learners with learning barriers. These findings reflected broader systemic issues, such as insufficient infrastructure and a lack of resource allocation to accommodate growing learner populations

in mainstream schools. Also, with smaller classrooms, more teachers would be needed at these schools. While the LSEN schools are traditionally designed to cater to smaller groups of learners requiring specialised attention, they too face overcrowding challenges. Educators and the deputy principal at the LSEN school indicated that increasing enrolment, caused in part by the growing awareness of the facilities and referrals from mainstream schools, has led to overcrowded classrooms.

In overcrowded classrooms, educators struggle to provide individualised support and scaffold learners within their zone of proximal development. This makes it difficult for learners to receive the help they need to move from what they can do with help to what they can do on their own (Marais, 2016). Social constructivism relies on peer interaction and cooperative learning; yet, overcrowding hinders group work, discussions, and hands-on activities because of space and noise constraints (Shabanza, 2019). Vygotsky highlighted the need for individualised training and teaching; yet, overcrowding makes it difficult for the educators to give tailored feedback or scaffolded support to every learner (Singh, 2024).

5.4.3.2 The impact of time constraints

The findings indicated that time constraints hindered the mainstream school's educators' ability to modify lesson plans or integrate innovative teaching strategies. In contrast, educators in the LSEN school tended to experience fewer time-related pressures because of the structured support and flexibility in their schedules. The ability to use extracurricular periods for academic intervention provided the LSEN school's educators with opportunities to ensure curriculum coverage and individualised support. This approach enabled them to maintain an inclusive learning environment, even with overcrowded classrooms. These educators expressed gratitude for their supportive leadership and the SMT, which facilitated a more manageable teaching environment. Assistance from school heads allowed these educators to focus on curriculum delivery and learner engagement.

Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which emphasises dialogue, interaction and scaffolding as being essential elements to enhance learners' opportunity for learning, is hindered by time constraints in the mainstream school (Naidoo & Mabaso, 2023). When instruction and learning time is limited, then educators cannot have meaningful discussions, scaffold, or guide individual learners through difficult subjects (Davis, 2017). This limits the learners' ability to express their understanding, ask questions, or challenge ideas, which are crucial aspects of learning. Time constraints often result in a fast-paced teaching approach, which can lead to disengagement among learners who require additional time to grasp

concepts. For instance, Mitchell (2020) highlights that learners with barriers and challenges are disproportionately affected by the lack of sufficient time for reinforcement and skill-building, further widening the achievement gap.

5.4.3.3 Parental involvement

The study found that parents from underprivileged backgrounds typically encounter challenges including low levels of education, financial struggles, or language challenges that prohibit them from engaging actively with the schools. Parents do not seem able or willing to become involved in their children's education, and this was confirmed in these two schools' settings. Parents often do not realise that their involvement can help their children's development. LSEN school educators noted the stigma connected with special education, where parents regarded LSEN schools as a label of failure. This mind set kept parents from attending meetings or interventions, separating school and home as they did not want to be seen to have a child at a special needs school. Many of the parents from a disadvantaged background also had limited resources, and they could not attend school meetings or help with schoolwork because of their own poverty and lack of childcare, transport or technology. The results showed low attendance at parent-teacher meetings, especially from parents of learners with academic or behavioural problems. Educators were frustrated by this lack of parental participation, as it limited their chances to communicate and collaborate on ways to help these learners. Without parental support, educators struggled to maintain discipline and academic standards, and this affected the learners' advancement. The LSEN school's educators said they often had to deal with the learners' behavioural and emotional matters that the parents should have handled. These changes increased the educators' workload and hindered their ability to concentrate on teaching.

Vygotsky's social constructivism theory emphasises social interaction's function in cognitive growth; therefore, the lack of parental participation hinders the learners' opportunity for optimal learning and development. For their development, children need more than their teachers, they also need additional knowledgeable others, such as a parent (Neba, 2019). Parents help children internalise knowledge and develop critical thinking abilities by helping them with their homework, reinforcing classroom concepts, and establishing a supportive home atmosphere (Epstein, 2018). Conversely, a lack of parental involvement means children do not receive adequate support to bridge their ZPD, potentially leading to lower academic achievement and limited cognitive development (Mermelshtine, 2017). Therefore, parental involvement is essential in Vygotsky's framework, as it ensures that children receive consistent

guidance and reinforcement both at school and at home, promoting holistic cognitive and social growth (Hassoun, 2022).

5.4.3.4 Language barrier

The findings revealed that educators must often teach both the curriculum content and basic language skills simultaneously, and this was time-consuming and reduced the focus on either aspect. Many learners felt disengaged and excluded, especially when they knew the answers but could not express themselves in the language of instruction. This limited class participation and academic success. Educators in the mainstream school then changed to the learners' home languages, for example isiZulu, to explain difficult concepts and clarify instructions. This approach improved participation and understanding, but it presented challenges in multilingual classrooms with diverse language needs. Thus, the educators tended to simplify their language and employed visual aids to support comprehension. However, these strategies were insufficient for complex or abstract concepts. In both contexts, the mainstream school and the LSEN school's educators would pair learners with stronger language skills with those who were struggling. While this approach was helpful in the short term, this was not a sustainable or scalable solution. Language barriers undermined inclusivity by disproportionately disadvantaging non-native speakers and learners with special needs. The principle of equitable education was undermined when language hindered the learners' ability to access or engage with the curriculum.

Vygotsky (1978) claimed that language is fundamental to the internalisation of culture and cognitive processes (Pathan, Memon, Memon, Khoso, and Bux, 2018). People utilise language in social interactions to create meaning, negotiate comprehension, and develop higher-order thinking. Learners can reduce language barriers by means of talking, bridging linguistic gaps, and co-constructing knowledge (Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman, 2015). Daneshfar and Moharami (2018) report that scaffolding is providing learners with personalised language support, while they gain new abilities or information in the ZPD framework. Educators can use language to help learners with difficult activities, gradually diminishing their assistance as the learners improve. This technique helps learners learn and empowers them to overcome linguistic problems by internalising language patterns and structures. Makalela (2021) emphasises that language barriers not only disrupt learning, but they also place additional pressure on educators who have to modify their instructional methods to accommodate diverse linguistic needs. At the same time, multilingual education can reduce linguistic barriers. Educators have to respect learners' cultural identities and foster deeper understanding by using

their native languages with the target language. This method promotes a welcoming atmosphere that values linguistic diversity. However, it assumes that the educators are fluent in several languages that are represented in their classrooms.

5.5 Implications of the Study

The following research sub-questions describe the study's implications in relation to the themes discussed in Chapter 4.

5.5.1 Themes derived from answers to Question 1

Question 1 was: How do educators conceptualise the use of special educational programmes within a context of inclusion?

5.5.1.1 Conceptualisations of inclusion

There was a critical gap in understanding of how educators in the mainstream schools conceptualised inclusion, often confusing it with special education. This limited understanding restricted their ability to create inclusive environments that accommodate the diversity of learners' needs, including those from marginalised communities, or learners facing other barriers, such as socioeconomic challenges, and language or cultural differences. Without a broader understanding of inclusion, educators might inadvertently marginalise learners who fall outside the narrowly defined concept of "special education". This pointed to the need for comprehensive educator education programmes that go beyond surface-level coverage of inclusion. Training should include practical strategies to integrate learners with diverse needs while also addressing systemic barriers, such as language, culture and social inequality. Pre-service educator training programmes must ensure that future educators will be exposed to a holistic understanding of inclusive education, emphasising its broader goal of equality for all learners. There is a disconnect between policy-level emphasis on inclusive education and its practical implementation. Many educators, particularly in the mainstream school, lack clarity on what inclusive education entails, which hinders their ability to implement it effectively.

This gap might stem from inadequate dissemination of policies or insufficient emphasis on inclusion during educator training. To address this, policy frameworks should include clear guidelines and practical tools for implementing inclusivity in diverse educational settings. Moreover, policymakers must collaborate with school managers to ensure that inclusive education is prioritised as part of the school's vision and mission. School leaders play a pivotal role in organising training sessions and fostering an inclusive culture that aligns with policy

goals. The lack of understanding of inclusion among the mainstream school's educators has significant implications for learners. Learners with learning barriers, or those from marginalised groups might remain underserved if educators are not equipped to meet their needs. Furthermore, the absence of a holistic inclusive approach might limit opportunities for peer interaction and mutual learning, perpetuating segregation within classrooms. To counter this, schools must actively promote inclusive cultures, where all learners feel valued and supported. This involves creating classroom environments that celebrate diversity and adopting teaching strategies that encourage participation from all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

5.5.1.2 Increased learner participation

The lack of a truly inclusive classroom environment in the mainstream school hinders learner participation. The inability to incorporate collaborative and interactive teaching methods, such as group work and multisensory activities, limits the active involvement of learners, especially those with learning barriers. The implication is that educators in a mainstream school must prioritise the creation of inclusive classrooms by adopting diverse teaching strategies that cater to a variety of learning styles and needs. The contrast between the mainstream school and the LSEN school's classrooms reveals that the integration of technology, such as PowerPoint presentations and YouTube videos, can significantly enhance learners' participation. Educators' use of digital tools tailored to learners' strengths and weaknesses demonstrates the potential of technology to create engaging and inclusive learning experiences. This highlights the importance of equipping educators with the necessary digital literacy skills and providing these schools with access to technological resources. The DoE will have to ensure that schools are able to invest in technology and training programmes that help educators integrate technology effectively into their lessons, ensuring that all learners benefit from interactive and engaging content.

The success of the LSEN school's classrooms in fostering higher levels of participation was tied to the educators' understanding of their learners' individual strengths and weaknesses. This highlighted the importance of personalised teaching approaches in promoting inclusion. Educators in both the mainstream school and the LSEN school's settings should be trained to be able to identify and address the learners' diverse needs, using differentiated instruction methods to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities. There are unequal experiences of learners in the mainstream school compared to the LSEN school's classrooms. Learners in inclusive environments that prioritise participation are more likely to engage with content,

build confidence and develop critical skills. Conversely, learners in less inclusive settings risk disengagement, reduced academic performance and feelings of exclusion. To address this, schools must adopt a more holistic approach to inclusion that involves all stakeholders, educators, learners and parents in creating environments where every learner feels valued and supported.

5.5.1.3 Attitudes toward special education programmes

There is a need for comprehensive professional development and training for educators. These programmes should focus on special education practices, individualised learning strategies and the effective implementation of inclusive education policies. Building educators' confidence and competence can lead to better programme outcomes. Policymakers and school administrators must address structural matters, such as class size and resource allocation. It will need the support of the DoE for schools to be able to create additional classrooms, hire additional educators, reduce class sizes and provide classroom resources, as these are critical steps toward creating an environment that is conducive to special education practices. Education policies must provide flexibility for educators to tailor their teaching methods and curricula to meet the needs of all learners. Inclusive education frameworks should be embedded within national and district-level policies to ensure alignment between special education programmes and broader curricular goals. Schools and policymakers should promote awareness of special education programmes through workshops, community engagement and public campaigns. Building a shared understanding of the purpose and benefits of these programmes can foster a culture of inclusion and collaboration.

5.5.1.4 Educator beliefs and practices

Professional development programmes need to redefine inclusion for educators, emphasising its holistic nature. Training should move beyond access and focus on strategies that promote participation, equality and meaningful learning for all learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or challenges. Educator education curricula at universities and educator induction programmes should include comprehensive modules on inclusive education. This would help educators develop a better understanding of how to design and implement inclusive teaching strategies tailored to diverse classrooms. Shifting educator beliefs requires targeted interventions, such as awareness campaigns, success stories from inclusive classrooms, and exposure to evidence-based practices.

Training programmes should emphasise the positive impact of inclusion on learners and educators to achieve buy-in and shifted mind-sets. Education systems should bridge the gap

between theory and practice by incorporating experiential learning opportunities into educator training programmes. Workshops, internships, and case studies on inclusive education could provide educators with hands-on experience and prepare them for diverse classroom environments. Schools should invest in the wellbeing of educators by providing mental health support, professional development opportunities and, through the DoE and an appropriate curriculum development, more manageable workloads. Recognising and addressing educator burnout is crucial for sustaining the long-term success of inclusive education programmes.

5.5.2 Themes derived from answers to Question 2

Question 2 asked: What strategies can be used to promote collaboration between mainstream education and special education educators in implementation of special education practices in Grade 10 English FAL classrooms?

5.5.2.1 Joint planning and programming

The DoE should address resource inequalities by providing both the mainstream schools and the LSEN schools with adequate infrastructure, materials, tools and financial support. Without an equal footing, collaborative efforts will remain one-sided and ineffective. Policymakers could establish systems, through which the LSEN schools could share specialised tools, teaching aids, or expertise with the mainstream schools, and thereby create a mutually beneficial relationship. Joint planning initiatives should focus on modifying the LSEN school's strategies to suit larger classrooms, such as peer-assisted learning models. The DoE should try to align aspects of the LSEN school and the mainstream school's curricula to facilitate collaborative practices and ensure that both schools can benefit from shared strategies. Joint programmes must focus on affordable and universally applicable strategies, such as training on inclusive practices, rather than relying on costly LSEN-specific interventions. Joint training sessions for the LSEN school and the mainstream school's educators can foster mutual understanding, allowing each group to learn from the other's expertise.

These programmes could focus on accessible inclusive practices, collaborative teaching strategies and resource maximisation. Schools could develop transitional support programmes for learners with special needs who are awaiting placement in LSEN schools. This would include temporary access to LSEN resources, shared expertise and tailored interventions. Collaboration can help mainstream schools retain and effectively support some learners with special needs, alleviating the demand for their placement in LSEN schools.

5.5.2.2 Professional development and training

Educator training programmes at universities must integrate inclusive education as a core component. This would have to include strategies for lesson differentiation, assessment modification and classroom management for diverse learners. The Department of Basic Education should prioritise continuous training workshops and certifications for in-service educators, focusing on inclusive teaching strategies and special education principles. Schools and education departments must establish support systems, such as counselling services, peer mentorship programmes, and communities of practice, where educators can share their experiences and strategies. The DoE should also develop a structured and standardised training framework for all educators, ensuring consistency in how inclusion is implemented across the various schools. Schools should have access to special education experts or inclusion specialists who can provide guidance, mentorship and ongoing support to educators.

Furthermore, the DBE should implement mandatory, recurring professional development programmes that focus on inclusion, ensuring that educators continually refine their skills and adapt to changing classroom dynamics. Educators need training that is not only theoretical but also practical, equipping them with tools and strategies that they can apply immediately in their classrooms. Training programmes must address the unique challenges faced by educators in the LSEN and mainstream schools, with content tailored to their specific contexts and resource constraints. Training should include hands-on workshops, where educators practise modifying lessons, assessments and classroom activities for the learners' diverse needs.

5.5.2.3 Collaborative teaching models

Both the mainstream and the LSEN schools' educators highlighted the lack of resources as a primary barrier to implementing collaborative teaching models. Schools, especially those in under-resourced areas, require physical spaces and tools that support collaboration, such as co-teaching classrooms and shared digital platforms. Governments and education departments must prioritise funding for collaborative teaching initiatives, including hiring additional staff, providing teaching aids and ensuring access to technology. Educators from both contexts emphasised the lack of training on how to effectively implement collaborative teaching models. Therefore, partnering educators with mentors experienced in collaborative teaching can provide practical guidance and ongoing support. Creating regional networks of educators from both the mainstream and the LSEN schools can encourage the exchange of ideas, strategies and resources. This can also make room for collaborative teaching models being introduced gradually, starting with small pilot projects to test feasibility and effectiveness before scaling

up as collaborative teaching allows educators to pool their strengths, creating richer learning experiences for learners in inclusive settings.

5.5.2.4 *Inclusive classroom environments*

Mainstream schools' educators require training on inclusive education practices to better understand how to meet learners' diverse needs and foster a sense of belonging for all learners. Educators should create environments where learners feel supported and motivated to engage actively in their education. The LSEN schools can serve as a model for mainstream schools by sharing their inclusive strategies, such as encouragement and finding solutions for socioeconomic barriers. However, these initiatives must be supported with adequate funding and resources to ensure they remain effective and sustainable. Mainstream schools must align their mission, vision and policies with inclusive values to create an institutional culture that prioritises inclusion. The LSEN school's mission and vision are rooted in inclusivity, demonstrating the importance of leadership and policy in fostering inclusive environments.

Inclusive education must account for the socioeconomic barriers that influence the effective participation by all learners. Mainstream schools should aim to adopt similar programmes, with support from the DoE, to ensure that all learners are provided with equal opportunities to succeed. Addressing socioeconomic challenges requires collaboration between schools, government agencies and community organisations to provide holistic support for learners, whether it is in the form of feeding schemes, transport, or the provision of textbooks and school materials. Schools must view inclusion as a dynamic process that evolves through ongoing reflection, feedback and adaptation.

5.5.3 Themes derived from answers to Question 3

Question 3 asked: What are the potential difficulties educators might face while employing special educational practices in the general Grade 10 English FAL classroom?

5.5.3.1 *Impact of overcrowded classrooms*

In both the mainstream and the LSEN schools, the high learner-to-educator ratio limited the educators' capacity to address individual learners' needs, and diminished the effectiveness of special education strategies. Educators faced burnout and stress as they struggled to address the diverse needs of a large number of learners, especially when dealing with learners' behavioural and academic challenges. This further affected learners requiring additional support and they felt neglected, which could lead to disengagement, poor academic performance and frustration. Learners who required more one-on-one support were often left

behind, because educators could not reach every individual. The LSEN school, while designed to cater to learners with special needs, was also experiencing overcrowding, reducing their ability to provide the specialised support they were intended to deliver. The growing number of referrals of learners with learning barriers to LSEN schools reflected both a positive shift in societal perceptions and a strain on the LSEN school's resources. Without adequate infrastructure and support, these schools will struggle to maintain quality. Overcrowding in mainstream schools will lead to more learners with barriers being referred to LSEN schools, exacerbating the strain on both systems. Mainstream and LSEN schools face challenges in collaborating to support learners when both schools are overburdened by overcrowding and resource shortages.

5.5.3.2 The impact of time constraints

Educators in mainstream schools face substantial challenges in dedicating time to tailor their teaching methods to accommodate learners' diverse needs because of a packed curriculum and other competing demands. The educators' inability to allocate enough time for differentiated materials and lesson plans compromised the inclusivity of the classroom. Learners with learning barriers felt unsupported and disengaged, as they were unable to keep up with the pace of instruction. Educators were forced to move through topics quickly, resulting in learners developing only a surface-level understanding of the material. Educators sacrificed innovative teaching methods, such as project-based learning, or exploratory activities, to stay on schedule. The combination of overcrowded classrooms and time pressure contributed to stress, anxiety and exhaustion among these educators, reducing their overall effectiveness.

For learners relying on additional language support, such as explanations in their home language, the rapid pace of instruction hindered their ability to process and retain information. Unlike their mainstream school's counterparts, the LSEN schools appear to have systems in place to alleviate time-related pressures, allowing educators to focus on effective teaching methods. LSEN educators can allocate sufficient time to cover the curriculum comprehensively and revisit challenging concepts. Techniques such as group work and cooperative learning help educators to manage learners with diverse needs and ensure active participation. Strong support from leadership and the flexibility to adjust schedules enable the LSEN school's educators to prioritise learners' success, without feeling overwhelmed. Unlike the LSEN school, the mainstream schools often lack the flexibility to adjust schedules or use extracurricular time for academic interventions.

5.5.3.3 Parental involvement

A core challenge in implementing inclusive education is the disconnect that arises when parents are not actively involved in their children's education. Schools alone cannot fully address the multifaceted needs of learners without complementary support from home. Educators struggle to enforce discipline, reinforce learning and address learners' behavioural problems without parental collaboration. Any intervention implemented at school is less effective if it is not reinforced at home, slowing down learners' progress and widening gaps in academic achievement. A lack of partnership between parents and schools undermines inclusive practices, which rely on consistent support systems across the home and school environments. Children from disadvantaged families might struggle more academically and behaviourally caused by the lack of reinforcement and guidance at home, perpetuating cycles of poverty and low educational attainment. Language barriers and parents' limited education hinder effective communication between schools and families, reducing the parents' ability to engage with educators and understand their roles in supporting their children. It is unfortunate that disadvantaged families often cannot provide the same level of support to their children as more privileged ones, exacerbating existing inequalities in educational outcomes.

For learners in the LSEN school, the stigma associated with special education further compounds the problem of lacking parental involvement. Many parents viewed LSEN schools as a "last resort" or they associate them with failure, preventing their own active engagement. Without parental support, educators are forced to compensate by addressing problems that should be managed at the learners' home, leading to increased workloads and stress for the educators. Schools must invest in educating parents about their roles and responsibilities, as well as the benefits of active involvement in their children's academic journeys. Providing parents with the tools, resources and knowledge to support their children at home can bridge the gap between school and home environments.

5.5.3.5 Language barrier

The most immediate implication of language barriers is that learners, especially those with special needs, face difficulty in understanding both the content being taught and the language of instruction. This creates a dual challenge, where these learners not only have to process academic concepts, but they also have to navigate a language they are not fluent in. While pairing learners with stronger language abilities with those who struggle, or translating content into learners' home languages, can offer short-term relief, but these solutions are not

sustainable in the long run. This temporary support might not be effective for all learners, especially when multiple languages are involved in a classroom, complicating the translation process.

The combination of language barriers and cultural differences means that learners might interpret or respond to instructions in ways that educators do not anticipate, leading to misunderstandings. Educators must be conscious of how different cultural backgrounds shape learners' understanding of language and content; yet, there is often little support or training to help teachers manage this complexity effectively. Educators might feel that their instruction is compromised because they are balancing the teaching of content with language acquisition. This dual responsibility means that learners might not be receiving the full depth of content knowledge or the language support they need.

5.6. Recommendations

5.6.1 Recommendations for teaching and learning

5.6.1.1 Conceptualisations of inclusion

Clear frameworks and explanations on what inclusion is and how it should be applied in practice should be provided by the Department of Education and school management teams. The DoE needs to develop and distribute resource materials that describe best practices for inclusion in varied classroom situations, such as assistive technology, policy documents, and teaching manuals. Pre-service teacher education programmes should include comprehensive modules on inclusion and special education that concentrate on integrating learners with diverse needs, including those from marginalised groups, learners who have impairments, and learners with learning barriers. Schools should work together with inclusive education specialists to exchange strategies and resources for effectively integrating learners with diverse needs into mainstream schools' classrooms. Facilitation of collaboration between mainstream and LSEN schools will be necessary to foster capacity-building and knowledge-sharing through collaborative workshops, or teacher exchange programmes that allow mainstream educators to gain knowledge from LSEN schools' educators, who often have specialised training in working with diverse learners. This should promote collaborative projects that allow mainstream and LSEN schools to work together to create inclusive teaching resources and practices.

5.6.1.2 Increased learner participation

Schools need to create seating arrangements in the classroom that encourage interaction, such as circular seating, which promotes teamwork without requiring too much movement from the learners. To accommodate a variety of learners, educators could also offer a variety of teaching methods, including written instructions, spoken explanations, and visual examples. During long classes, they should use short movement breaks or mindfulness exercises to assist learners in refocusing. Other solutions would be making use of peer-assisted learning techniques, such as pairing learners who have different ability levels to encourage collaboration and mutual learning. Creating small-group learning areas to reduce noise and distractions in large classes should assist learners to be able to concentrate and communicate more effectively.

5.6.1.3 Attitudes toward special education programmes

Workshops for professional development that concentrate on the fundamentals of special education programmes should be offered throughout the year, including their objectives, benefits and strategies for real-world application. It is also necessary for the DoE to find ways to fund extra infrastructure for more classrooms, which will achieve lower learner-to-educator ratios; it will also require funding for more educators or support staff, such as teaching assistants. Perceptions have a major impact on educators' desire to use special education approaches; therefore, it is important to provide educators with continuous professional and emotional support to help them feel less stressed or unprepared. Making use of reflecting sessions or focus groups (educator team building) should be apposite manner to allow educators to discuss problems and jointly come up with ideas to enhance programme implementation.

5.6.1.4 Educators' beliefs and practices

To promote peer observation and feedback sessions, where educators reflect on their teaching practices within an inclusive framework, reflection helps educators to connect their beliefs and practices with the principles of inclusion. This necessitates that they develop professional learning groups with their peers, so that they can freely share difficulties and work together to improve educational practices. There is also a need to build mentorship programmes, where seasoned LSEN school educators can coach educators from the mainstream schools in inclusive teaching methods. This should encourage the establishment of informal support systems in schools and collaboration, so that educators can exchange ideas and resources.

5.6.1.5 Joint planning and programming

Finding affordable ways for schools to share resources and expertise can improve collaboration, including resource-sharing agreements, where LSEN schools rotate lending specialised tools or materials to mainstream schools. Educators from mainstream and LSEN schools could work together, exchange knowledge, and create inclusive practices by establishing professional learning communities. This is where educators from mainstream and LSEN schools would together on a regular basis to talk about inclusive education approaches, problems, and solutions. They could also use online resources to help with collaboration, particularly when scheduling constraints or geographic distance occur. Finally, the DoE should create district or cluster-level, centralised resource hubs to enable schools to share teaching materials, digital tools, and materials that are available to both mainstream and LSEN schools.

5.6.1.6 Professional development and training

To give educators the tools they need to meet the diverse needs of learners, structured training programmes are crucial that prioritise inclusive education and special needs pedagogy. As previously mentioned, pre-service and in-service training modules must be designed with inclusion, differentiation, universal design for learning, and classroom accommodations for learners with special needs in mind. Universities or the DoE should offer a certification programme in special education for educators who want to focus on inclusive education. In order to keep educators informed of new legislation, teaching techniques, and technological advancements in special education, it would be necessary to implement frequent workshops and refresher courses. This would ensure that educators remain up-to-date on inclusive education best practices and emerging strategies. This should include internships in LSEN schools in educator preparation programmes to give educators practical experience with a range of learners' needs. Additionally, interdisciplinary courses that integrate psychology, pedagogy, and special education should be offered to give educators a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by learners with diverse needs and from diverse backgrounds.

5.6.1.7 Collaborative teaching models

Setting up a framework for collaboration between mainstream and LSEN schools requires, first and foremost, clear policies. To do this, the DoE needs to create a collaborative teaching policy at the national or district level that specifies expectations, roles, and guidelines for partnerships between mainstream and LSEN schools. In addition, the allocation of resources, teacher preparation, and shared accountability for inclusive teaching practices will have to be

prioritised in these policies. There should be a provision of training courses and modules on team teaching, co-teaching models, and cooperative lesson design and assessment techniques. To promote regular communication and planning, inter-school communities should be formed with educators from both mainstream and LSEN schools.

5.6.1.8 Inclusive classroom environment

To encourage practices such as ‘gentle teaching and restorative discipline’ to establish a safe, supportive learning environment will be necessary for all inclusive schools that include learners with learning barriers or barriers to learning, where activities are planned to be interesting, interactive, and relevant to the interests and experiences of learners. Educators could create opportunities for learners to have agency and voice, such as allowing learners to participate in learning how to make decisions. Inclusive schools should offer extracurricular activities that foster social and emotional growth, especially for learners who find interaction difficult. Educators will have to ensure that all learners feel they ‘belong’ by emphasising respect, equality, and inclusion in the school’s codes of conduct. This necessitates that principals and educators regularly evaluate policies to ensure they are in line with the required inclusive principles and address any gaps in practice.

5.6.1.9 Impact of overcrowded classrooms

In addition to sourcing funding to build more classrooms and hire additional educators to handle the ever-increasing number of new enrolments, the DoE should try to set maximum learner-to-educator ratios for both mainstream and LSEN schools, and especially for classrooms with learners who need extra support. This should reduce class sizes as a top priority in language-rich and basic disciplines, such as English, where one-on-one assistance is crucial. Additionally, LSEN schools will require more funds to upgrade their facilities and supply sufficient infrastructure to accommodate their expanding number of learners. There should also be specialised training programmes to assist LSEN educators in meeting their learners’ complex demands, especially where educators are faced with larger classrooms. To ensure a seamless transition for learners, feeder programmes should be established in which mainstream schools collaborate closely with LSEN schools.

5.6.1.10 The impact of time constraints

Curriculum trimming is necessary to enable schools to remove unnecessary material and make more space for in-depth interaction and assistance for learners who are having difficulty in staying in line with the learning schedules. Educators can create differentiated lessons and resources that meet the requirements of a variety of learners by setting out specific time for planning, but this means they have to reduce the amount of administrative work that educators must do by hiring assistant educators. In order to effectively teach within time constraints, the DoE must support a flexible and adaptable curriculum that prioritises mastery of fundamental concepts over ‘rushing through material’. Blended learning models, which combine in-class teaching with independent, technology-mediated learning, are one way to achieve this. This could incorporate cooperative learning techniques, such as group projects or peer tutoring, to increase learners’ engagement and cover more content in less time. By using micro-teaching strategies, which divide lessons into short, targeted sections to increase remembering and decrease time spent on re-explanations, educators can optimise lesson delivery to save time and improve learners’ level of understanding.

5.6.1.11 Parental involvement

All parents would have access to important information if multilingual resources were made available to parents from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. Orientation programmes and ‘image campaigns’ for LSEN schools need to be developed to help parents gain a more favourable view of special education by eradicating prejudices, stigmas and misunderstandings. Furthermore, to keep parents informed about their child’s growth and school activities, home to school communication methods need to be put in place, including newsletters and emails. To assist parents to still be able to become more involved with the school and thus, their children’s progress, despite the parents’ challenges or difficult work schedules, the schools should offer flexible meeting times, such as on weekends or after hours. To draw in parents with smaller children to attend school meetings, schools could provide a supervised childcare option. Schools should also work together with local organisations to offer resources, financial aid, or transportation to underprivileged families. Schools can also choose to use school bus services to accommodate parents on the evenings when parents’ meetings are required as many parents are unable to participate in school meetings, or their children’s sport functions because of logistical, time, or financial constraints.

5.6.1.12 Language barrier

Educators would need to use multilingual strategies to close the gap between the learners' home languages and the language of teaching. Understanding will be aided by the deliberate use of code-switching, which alternates between the learners' native tongue and the language of teaching, which could include 'trans-language' techniques, in which learners process and communicate ideas in both their native tongue and in English. To help learners understand, educators should also consider using diagrams and visual aids, rather than only relying on the spoken language. Educators can also set out specific times for focused language support sessions that concentrate on reading, vocabulary, grammar, and language comprehension. While the code-switching is useful for some learners, it assumes that the educator is able to master all home languages represented in the class, which is impossible in a country that has 12 official languages. Even for most educators in rural areas, English is a secondary language.

5.6.2 Recommendations for policy

The Department of Education should embrace a national inclusive education framework that defines inclusion and provides practical strategies for implementing it into practice. In order to change attitudes about inclusion, the DoE should create awareness programmes aimed at parents, educators, learners, and the community. Through special education awareness training in teacher preparation programmes and professional development, the department and schools should combat prejudice and stigma against any special needs schools or schools including learners with special needs, and encourage positive attitudes toward special education.

Policies are required to match the educators' values with inclusive teaching practices. This necessitates that support guidelines are provided that cover the responsibilities of administrators, specialists, and teaching assistants in inclusive classrooms. The district should provide the current resource centres with the appropriate resources, tools and expertise that address special education and inclusivity and offer specialised training courses on differentiated instruction, cultural competency, and inclusive education. Where needed, the DoE should provide financial assistance to educators pursuing further certifications or degrees in special education. Schools should organise on-site coaching sessions where experts provide helpful guidance to educators. Implementing these measures will empower educators, solve systemic challenges, and provide all learners with better opportunities to succeed.

5.7. Limitations of the Study

Despite the insightful information this study provided, a number of limitations have to be acknowledged. The findings' generalisability was one important limitation. One township school and one LSEN school served as the study's specific geographic and educational context, and as such, the experiences of educators, learners, and principals might not be representative of all schools, especially those in different regions with differing resources and support levels. It would be challenging to generalise the findings, since challenges with parental involvement, district support, and language barriers might be different in schools with varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Another limitation was the use of qualitative data, which was acquired through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Despite providing in-depth and rich insights into these participants' experiences and perspectives, this approach was inherently subjective. The participants' responses might have been influenced by social desirability, personal prejudices, or the presence of other participants in the group discussions. Additionally, the study lacked quantitative data, such as learners' performance indicators or statistical comparisons that would have provided a more thorough understanding of how the highlighted problems affected the educational results. Additionally, the study had limitations with regard to participant diversity and sample size. Not enough educators and learners were interviewed to fully represent experiences in inclusive and special education settings. Additionally, the study's capacity to provide a comprehensive picture of the systemic challenges and possible policy remedies was limited by the lack of in-depth exploration of the perspectives of parents, district officials, and policymakers. It was also not possible to observe long-term patterns, or evaluate the efficiency of suggested interventions over time. Lastly, the lack of implementation of special education programmes in the mainstream school was another challenge for the researcher. Educators were too busy and overburdened with assignments and tests to have the time or interest to try out new strategies that would help learners perform better despite their learning barriers.

5.8 Suggestions for Further Research

This study aimed at examining inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions. Given the significance of the findings, the following aspects should be researched in the future:

- a) Research should be conducted among LSEN and mainstream schools to assess in how far they have already implemented methods of collaborative teaching and cooperative planning to foster inclusivity, and thus, to establish the most effective ways of collaboration.
- b) A study should be conducted to assess the best content for professional development and training programmes aimed at training educators about special education, as well as suitable venues, times and who these programmes should be offered by.
- c) More research needs to be conducted on which special educational programmes are most appropriate for South African schools that can be implemented in both LSEN and mainstream schools.
- d) A study should investigate whether and how social media, apps and technology can be used to increase the community's and parental involvement with the schools and bridge the gap between parents and schools.

5.9 Chapter Summary

The research findings, recommendations, and overall conclusions gathered from the study were summarised in this chapter. Language barriers, time constraints, lacking parental involvement, lacking district support, overcrowded classrooms, and the use of inclusive teaching and learning practices were highlighted as some of the critical challenges that the study explored and that have an impact on inclusive education. The findings highlighted how societal and structural limitations make it difficult for educators to address the diverse needs of learners, especially among learners with special educational needs. Despite these difficulties, some schools were able to adopt successful teaching methods; nonetheless, the absence of adequate enabling infrastructure (more classrooms), resources (more teachers, technological equipment and funding), administrative support, and professional training provided for the educators, proved to be major barriers to successful inclusive education. The study concluded that although inclusive education is a fundamental right, putting it into practice successfully calls for an integrated approach that includes parents, legislators, school leadership and educators. The challenges raised by this study will continue to be barriers to the progress of inclusive education in the absence of adequate support structures and strategic interventions. Further studies must thus investigate more long-term solutions to these problems to ensure that all learners, irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds, receive inclusive, quality education.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PLAN

ACTIVITIES	TIME FRAMES
1. Apply for Ethics at Wits	4 Weeks
2. Application for permission to collect data at schools at Gauteng Department of Education (111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg)	2 Weeks
3. Apply for permission from both school Principals	1-2 Weeks
4. Giving and receiving back of consent forms from participants	1-2 Weeks
5. Data collection	4 Weeks
6. Data analysis	2-3 Weeks
7. Finalising results and discussion	4- 6 Weeks
8. Review and submit	1-3 Weeks

APPENDIX B: GDE REQUEST FORM



GAUTENG PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

For admin. Use only:

Ref. no.:

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN INSTITUTIONS AND/OR OFFICES OF THE
GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

1. PARTICULARS OF THE RESEARCHER

1.1	Details of the Researcher	
a) Surname and Initials:	MDINWA NS	
b) First Name/s:	NOMONDE SITHEMBILE	
c) Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms):	MS	
d) Student Number:	1441456	
e) SA ID Number:	970929 0258 083	
f) Work permit no. (If not SA citizen)		

1.2	Private Contact Details	
a. Home Address	c. Postal Address (if different)	
6 BUXTON AVENUE		
NOYCEDALE		
NIGEL		

<i>b. Postal Code:</i> 1491	<i>d. Postal Code:</i>
<i>e. Tel:</i>	<i>f. Cell:</i> 079 217 1336
<i>g. Fax:</i>	<i>h. Email:</i> 1441456@students.wits.ac.za

2. PURPOSE & DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

2.1	Purpose of the Research (Place a cross where appropriate)	
	<i>Undergraduate Study – Self</i>	
	<i>Postgraduate Study – Self</i>	×
	<i>Private Company/Agency – Commissioned by Provincial Government or Department</i>	
	<i>Private Research by Independent Researcher</i>	
	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>	
	<i>National Department of Education</i>	
	<i>Commissions and Committees</i>	
	<i>Independent Research Agencies</i>	
	<i>Statutory Research Agencies</i>	
	<i>Higher Education Institutions only</i>	
2.2	Full title of Thesis / Dissertation / Research Project	
	ENHANCING INCLUSION IN GRADE 10 ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY	

2.3	Value of the Research to Education (Attach Research Proposal)
THE STUDY LOOKS TO EMPLOY SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES FROM SPECIAL SCHOOLS TO EMPLOY AT MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS, SPECIFICALLY IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS TO ASSIST LEARNERS WITH LEARNING BARRIERS	
2.4	Date
a. <u>Estimated</u> date of completion of research in GDE Institutions	14 JUNE 2024
b. <u>Estimated</u> date of submission of Research Report /Thesis/Dissertation and Research Summary to GDE:	30 DECEMBER 2024
2.5	Student and Postgraduate Enrolment Particulars
a. Name of institution where enrolled:	UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
b. Degree / Qualification:	MASTERS IN EDUCATION
c. Faculty and Discipline / Area of Study:	HUMANITIES- EDUCATION/ INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
d. Name of Supervisor / Promoter:	DR SP DLAMINI

2.6	Employer (or state Unemployed / or a Full Time Student) : DHET
a. Name of Organisation:	EKURHULENI WEST COLLEGE
b. Position in Organisation:	LECTURER-PL1
c. Head of Organisation:	AMANDA EHLERS- CAMPUS MANAGER
d. Street Address:	25 LAKE ARTHUR STREET
	BRACKENDOWNS ALBERTON

<i>e. Postal Code:</i>	1454
<i>f. Telephone Number (Code + Ext):</i>	011 900 1202
<i>g. Fax Number:</i>	
<i>h. Email address:</i>	nomondemd@gmail.com

2.7	PERSAL Number (GDE employees only)
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2	9	6	4	8	0	3	3
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3. PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD/S

(Please indicate by placing a cross in the appropriate block whether the following modes would be adopted)

3.1 Questionnaire/s (If Yes, supply copies of each to be used)

YES		NO	×
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3.2 Interview/s (If Yes, provide copies of each schedule)

YES	×	NO	
-----	---	----	--

3.3 Use of official documents

YES		NO	×
<i>If Yes, please specify the document/s:</i>			

3.4 Workshop/s / Group Discussions (If Yes, Supply details)

YES		NO	×

3.5 *Standardised Tests (e.g. Psychometric Tests)*

YES		NO	×
<i>If Yes, please specify the test/s to be used and provide a copy/ies</i>			

4. INSTITUTIONS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH

4.1 *TYPE and NUMBER of Institutions (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside all types of institutions to be researched)*

INSTITUTIONS	Write NUMBER here
Primary Schools	
<i>Secondary Schools</i>	×
<i>ABET Centres</i>	
<i>ECD Sites</i>	
<i>LSEN Schools</i>	×
<i>Further Education & Training Institutions</i>	
<i>Districts and / or Head Office</i>	

4.2 *Name/s of institutions to be approached for research (Please complete on a separate sheet if space is found to be insufficient).*

Name/s of Institution/s
OLYMPIA PARK SCHOOL
NKHUMBULO SECONDARY SCHOOL

4.3 District/s where the study is to be conducted. (Please indicate by placing a cross alongside the relevant district/s)

District/s			
Ekurhuleni North		Ekurhuleni South	
Gauteng East	×	Gauteng North	
Gauteng West		Johannesburg Central	
Johannesburg East		Johannesburg North	
Johannesburg South		Johannesburg West	
Sedibeng East		Sedibeng West	
Tshwane North		Tshwane South	
Tshwane West			

IF HEAD OFFICE/S (PLEASE INDICATE DIRECTORATE/S)

4.4 Approximate number of learners to be involved per school (Please indicate the number by gender: M- Male and F- Female)

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Number												

<i>Grade</i>	<i>7</i>		<i>8</i>		<i>9</i>		<i>10</i>		<i>11</i>		<i>12</i>	
Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Number							2	2				

4.5 *Approximate number of educators/officials involved in the study (Please indicate the number in the relevant column)*

Type of staff	Educators	HoDs	Deputy Principals	Principal	Lecturers	Office Based Officials
Number	6	2		2		

4.6 Letters of Consent (Attach copies of Consent letters to be used for Principal, SGB and all participants. For learners also include parental consent letter)

4.7 Are the participants to be involved in groups or individually?

Groups	×	<i>Individually</i>	×
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4.8 Average period of time each participant will be involved in the test or other research activities (Please indicate time in minutes for ALL participants)

Participant/s	ACTIVITY	TIME
PRINCIPALS	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	15- 20 MINUTES
EDUCATORS	FOCUS GROUPS	30- 45 MINUTES
LEARNERS	INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS	20- 30 MINUTES
LEARNERS	CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS	30- 45 MINUTES

4.9 Time of day that you propose to conduct your research.

<u>Before</u> school hours		During school hours (for <u>limited</u> observation only)	X	<u>After</u> school hours	
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SEE Condition 5.4 on Page 7

4.10 School term/s during which the research would be undertaken

First Term		Second Term	X	Third Term	
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5. CONDITIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN GDE

Permission may be granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and permission may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted: The district/head office senior manager/s concerned, the principal/s and the chairperson/s of the school governing body (SGB.) must be presented with a copy of this letter.

The researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and cooperation of the GDE District officials, principals, SGBs, teachers, parents and learners involved. Participation is voluntary and additional remuneration will not be paid;

Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded by the end of the THIRD quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.

Because of COVID 19 pandemic researchers can ONLY collect data online, telephonically or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate. The approval letter will then indicate the type of arrangements that have been made with the school.

The researchers are advised to make arrangements with the schools via fax, email or telephonically with the principal.

Research may only be conducted BEFORE or AFTER school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The principal and/or director must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.

Items 3 and 6 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.

It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written consent from the SGB/s; principal/s, educator/s, parents and learners, as applicable, before commencing with research.

The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institution/s, staff and/or the office/s visited for supplying such resources.

All research conducted in GDE Institutions is anonymous. The names and personal details of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may neither be asked nor appear in the research title, report / thesis/ dissertation or GDE Research Summary.

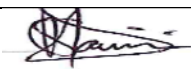
On successful completion of the study, the researcher must supply the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management, with electronic copies of the research report, thesis, dissertation as well as a research summary (on the GDE Summary template). Failure to submit these documents may result in future permission being withheld, or a fine imposed for both the researcher and the supervisor.

Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director/s and school/s concerned must also be supplied with a GDE Summary.

The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned;

<i>6. DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER</i>
6.1 I declare that all statements made by myself in this application are true and accurate.
6.2 I have read, understand and accept ALL the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and I undertake to abide by them. I understand that failure to comply may result in permission being withdrawn, further permission being withheld, a fine imposed and legal action may be taken against me. This agreement is binding.
6.3 I promise once I have successfully completed my studies, (before graduation) or on successful project completion, to submit electronic copies of my Research Report /

Thesis / Dissertation as well a GDE Summary on the GDE template sent to me with my approval letter or found on www.education.gpg.gov.za	
Signature:	
Date:	08 MARCH 2024
7. DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR / LECTURER / PROMOTER	
7.1 I declare that: (Name of <u>Researcher</u>) Dr Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini	
7.2 is enrolled at the institution / employed by the organisation to which the undersigned is attached.	
7.3 The questionnaires / structured interviews / tests meet the criteria of: • Educational Accountability; • Proper Research Design; • Sensitivity toward Participants; • Correct Content and Terminology; • Acceptable Grammar; • Absence of Non-essential / Superfluous items; • Ethical clearance	
7.4 The student / researcher has agreed to ALL the conditions of conducting research in GDE Institutions and will abide by them.	
7.5 I will ensure that after success completion of the research degree / project / study an electronic copy of the research report / thesis / dissertation and a research summary (on the GDE template) will be sent to the GDE. Failure to submit the research report, thesis, dissertation and research summary may result in: permission being withheld from both the learner and the supervisor in future and a fine may be imposed.	
7.6 Surname of the Supervisor :	Dlamini
7.7 First Name/s of the Supervisor :	Siboniso Phathumuzi

7.8 Title:	Dr
7.9 Institution / Organisation:	University of the Witwatersrand
7.10 Faculty / Department:	Wits School of Education
7.11 Telephone:	069 550 052
7.12 Email address:	<u>sibonisodlamini.dlamini11@gmail.com</u> siboniso.dlamini@wits.ac.za
7.13 Signature:	
7.14 Date:	12 March 2024

ANNEXURE A: GROUP RESEARCH

This information must be completed by every researcher/ student / field worker who will be visiting GDE Institutions for research purposes, besides the main researcher who applied and the supervisor/ lecturer / promoter of the research.

By signing this declaration, the researcher / students / fieldworker accepts the conditions associated with the granting of approval to conduct research in GDE Institutions and undertakes to abide by them.

Supervisor/ Promoter / Lecturer's Surname and Name NOMONDE S MDINWA

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHERS / STUDENTS:

Surname & Initials	Name	Tel	Cell	Email address	Signature

N.B. This form (and all other relevant documentation where available) may be completed and forwarded electronically to Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, please copy (cc) ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za. The last two pages of this document must however have the original signatures of both the researcher and his/her supervisor or promoter. It should be scanned and emailed, posted or hand delivered (in a sealed envelope) to Mr Gumani Mukatuni, 7th Floor Marshal Street, Johannesburg. All enquiries pertaining to the status of research requests can be directed to Mr Gumani Mukatuni and/or Ms Busi Mchunu on tel. no. 011 355 0775/1379.

Other Information:

- i) On receipt of all emails, confirmation of receipt will be sent to the researcher. The researcher will be contacted via email if any documents are missing or if any additional information is needed.
- ii) If the GDE Research request submitted is approved, a GDE research approval letter will be sent by email to the researcher as well as the supervisor / lecturer / promoter. Please ensure that your email address is correct.
- iii) After successful completion of your research, please send your Research Reports / Thesis / Dissertations and GDE Research Summaries (on the template provided to both the Researcher and the Supervisor with the GDE Research Approval letter) to the same addresses as the GDE Research Request documents were sent to, namely: Gumani.Mukatuni@gauteng.gov.za, Busi.Mchunu@gauteng.gov.za and copy Faieth.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za and ResearchInfo@gauteng.gov.za.

APPENDIX C: LETTERS TO PRINCIPALS REQUESTING PERMISSION

UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG



School of Education, Humanities

Inclusive Education

079 217 1336

Dear Sir/Madam,

Permission to conduct research at Nkhumbulo Secondary School.

My name is Nomonde Mdinwa.

I am studying toward a Master's degree in Inclusive Education at the school of Education with the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting research on enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions: A Phenomenological study. The aim of the study is to explore how special educational programmes can be implemented in Grade 10 English classes in mainstream secondary schools in order to achieve inclusive teaching and learning. The study will look at how Special schools (LSEN) employ their educational programmes in their English classes, which mainstream schools can use in order to assist with learning barriers in the English FAL classes. The research will entail collecting data from learner observations and learner semi-structured interviews, Educator focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews with the principal.

The study will take 2 ½ weeks where I would like to come for observations twice a week, where I will sit through the English lessons and interview English teachers for not more than 30-45 minutes once each week and interview the principal for 15-20 minutes at the beginning of the research that will be conducted and on the last week. I will also interview four learners once a week for 20-30, to get their perspectives on the lessons. Learners will be given research diaries to write their experiences down as well. Educator participants' responses as well as learners will be recorded for data collection purposes. Participants will be asked to give their written consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the school) will be anonymous. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The participants (teachers and principal) will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project

without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study.

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

Yours sincerely,

Nomonde Mdinwa

1441456@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor's name:

Dr SP Dlamini

Siboniso.Dlamini@wits.ac.za



School of Education, Humanities

Inclusive Education

079 217 1336

Dear Sir/Madam,

Permission to conduct research at Olympia Park School.

My name is Nomonde Mdinwa.

I am studying toward a Master's degree in Inclusive Education at the school of Education with the University of the Witwatersrand. I am conducting research on enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions: A Phenomenological study. The aim of the study is to explore how special educational programmes can be implemented in Grade 10 English classes in mainstream secondary schools in order to achieve inclusive teaching and learning. The study will look at how Special schools (LSEN) employ their educational programmes in their English classes, which mainstream schools can use in order to assist with learning barriers in the English FAL classes. The research will entail collecting data from learner observations, Educator focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews with the principal.

The study will take 2 ½ weeks where I would like to come for observations twice a week, where I will only sit through the English lessons and interview English teachers for not more than 30-45 minutes once each week and interview the principal for 15- 20 minutes at the beginning of the research that will be conducted and on the last week. Educator participants' responses will be recorded for data collection purposes. Participants will be asked to give their written consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the school) will be anonymous. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Nomonde Mdinwa

1441456@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor's name:

Dr SP Dlamini

Siboniso.Dlamini@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for Educators

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Nomonde Sithembile Mdinwa I am a Masters student in Humanities education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr. Siboniso P Dlamini. I am conducting a research study about the use of Special Educational programmes to help learners with learning barriers in mainstream schools. The study title is enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special Education interventions: A phenomenological study.

I am inviting you to take part in a lesson observation followed by a focus group interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 2 ½ weeks. The interview activity will take place at your workplace after school, however the lesson observation will take place during school hours.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the lesson observation as well as the focus group interview. This data will be stored in my laptop which is protected with a password so no one can access it. Only the researcher will have access to the data, the data will also be kept for a maximum of two years and will be destroyed.

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

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

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life or some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the focus group interview and continue another time. This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

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

Yours sincerely

Nomonde S Mdinwa

1441456@students.wits.ac.za

Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for Learners

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Nomonde Sithembile Mdinwa I am a Masters student in Humanities education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Siboniso P Dlamini. I am conducting a research study about the use of Special Educational programmes to help learners with learning barriers in mainstream schools. The study title is enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special Education interventions: A phenomenological study.

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 2 ½ weeks. The interview activity will take place at your school, during school hours.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in my laptop which is protected with a password so no one can access it. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

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

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

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report and will be kept in an encrypted folder in a secured password locked laptop for 2 years and will be destroyed. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

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

Yours sincerely

Nomonde S Mdinwa

1441456@students.wits.ac.za

Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for Principals & HoDs

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Nomonde Sithembile Mdinwa I am a Masters student in Humanities education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr. Siboniso P Dlamini. I am conducting a research study about the use of Special Educational programmes to help learners with learning barriers in mainstream schools. The study title is enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special Education interventions: A phenomenological study.

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 2 ½ weeks. The interview activity will take place at your workplace, afterschool.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in my laptop which is protected with a password so no one can access it. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

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

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

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time.

This research study will be written up as a research report and will be kept in an encrypted folder in a secured password locked laptop for 2 years and will be destroyed. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

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

Yours sincerely

Nomonde S Mdinwa

1441456@students.wits.ac.za

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORMS

Consent Form for a child's parent/legal guardian

Title of project: Enhancing Inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special educational interventions: A Phenomenological study.

Consent to take part in research

I..... agree that my child
..... can 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 my child can volunteer to take part in the study YES NO

I agree that the interview activity with my child may be audio-recorded YES NO
YES NO

I agree that my child will be observed through lesson observations in class by the researcher.

I agree that direct quotations from the interview activity with my child may be used by the researcher in their research report YES NO

I agree that my child's participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information provided by my child in their interview activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but that their name and any personal information will not be used or passed on YES NO

..... (signature)

..... (name of parent/guardian)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

LEARNER ASSENT FORM

I am Nomonde Mdinwa a Masters student from the Witwatersrand University I am conducting a study on enhancing inclusion in Grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions: A Phenomenological study. The aim of the study is to explore how special educational programmes can be used in Grade 10 English classes' mainstream secondary schools in order to achieve inclusive teaching and learning. I am trying to figure out whether the special learning programmes used at LSEN schools to help learners with learning barriers in English can be borrowed and used at mainstream schools to also assist learners who are facing learning barriers in the English FAL classroom. I am asking you to take part in the research study.

For this research, I will ask you some questions in a form of an interview about how are your learning experiences in the English classroom, I will be there to observe you while teaching and learning is taking place, lastly I will ask you to keep a journal to write down your experiences during the research period. I will keep all your answers private, and will not show them to (your teacher or parent(s)/guardian), I will not use your real name for the research. Only people from Witwatersrand University working on the study will see them.

I do not think that any big problems will happen to you as part of this study, but you might feel sad when we ask about some of your learning experiences in the English class. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can choose whether to take part or not. If there is a question you do not want to answer, just leave it blank. Your parent(s)/guardian(s) were asked if it is OK for you to be in this study. Even if they say it is OK, it is still your choice whether or not to take part.

Please read the information and tick in the box if you agree with them.

I have understood what you will be doing for this study	
I understood that I can stop at any time and I do not have to give a reason	
I am okay with being audio-recorded	
I agree that the information I give, to be shared in the research so that my real name is not used	
I agree to take part in the session(s)	

..... (signature)
..... (name of Learner)
..... (signature)
..... (name of parent/guardian)
..... (date)
..... (signature)
..... (name of researcher)
..... (date)

Consent Form for Teachers

Title of project: Enhancing Inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special educational interventions: A Phenomenological study.

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 YES NO

I agree that the interview/focus group may be audio-recorded YES NO

I agree that the researcher will be observing my lessons during teaching time to collect data YES NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group activity may be used by the researcher in their research report YES NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on YES NO

..... (signature)

..... (Name of participant)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

Consent Form for HoDs

Title of project: Enhancing Inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special educational interventions: A Phenomenological study.

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 YES NO

I agree that the interview/focus group may be audio-recorded YES NO

I agree that the researcher will be observing my lessons during teaching time to collect data YES NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group activity may be used by the researcher in their research report YES NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on YES NO

..... (signature)

..... (Name of participant)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

Consent Form for Principal

Title of project: Enhancing Inclusion in Grade 10 English Language classes through special educational interventions: A Phenomenological study.

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 YES NO

I agree that the interview/focus group may be audio-recorded YES NO

I agree that the researcher will be observing my lessons during teaching time to collect data YES NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview/focus group activity may be used by the researcher in their research report YES NO

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report) YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview/focus group/other activity (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on YES NO

..... (signature)

..... (Name of participant)

..... (date)

..... (signature)

..... (name of researcher/person seeking consent)

..... (date)

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUPS- EDUCATORS

1. Can you describe any learning barriers faced by your Grade 10 learners in your English classroom which are mainly formed by non-English speakers?
2. Have you heard about special educational programmes which are aimed at assisting learners who are faced with learning difficulties in schools?
3. What special educational programmes or interventions have been implemented in Grade 10 English classrooms to address these learning barriers?
4. If there are special educational programmes and interventions in place, what criteria is used to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes in addressing these learning barriers?
5. Are you aware of the policies White Paper 6 and SIAS, do you understand the policies and are they effectively used in your classroom?
6. The White Paper emphasises the importance of addressing barriers to learning. How do you identify and address such barriers in your classroom?
7. What challenges do you face/ have faced in implementing the use of White Paper 6 and SIAS in your classes?
8. How are educators trained or supported in implementing these programmes effectively, do you have a school-based support team (SBST) put in place at your school, and is it efficient?
9. Does your SBST work hand-in-hand with the district-based support team (DBST)? Does the DBST provide teacher support where necessary?
10. Do you involve learners, parents, and other stakeholders in the selection and implementation of special educational programmes to combat learning barriers in Grade 10 English classrooms, and if so how?
11. How do you sustain the implementation of these programmes over time to ensure continued support for Grade 10 learners facing learning barriers in English classrooms?
12. Should there be partnerships with Special schools in order to support the use and implementation of special educational programmes in mainstream schools?
13. What are the key factors contributing to the success of borrowing special educational programmes to combat learning barriers in Grade 10 English classrooms?

APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEARNERS

1. Can you describe any challenges or difficulties you face in your English classroom as a non-English speaker?
2. How do these challenges impact your learning experience and academic performance?
3. Have you heard about special educational programmes which are meant to help learners who are faced with learning difficulties in schools?
4. How do you think special educational programmes could help learners who are faced with learning barriers in English?
5. What specific aspects of English learning do you find most challenging, and how do you think special programmes could address these challenges?
6. In your opinion, what types of support resources would be most beneficial for learners with learning barriers in English classes?
7. Do you feel that your educator includes everyone when presenting a lesson, is there inclusivity?
8. Do you feel that you or any other learner would feel excluded in any way during some lessons?
9. Does your educator pay more attention on learners who are struggling or those who do well in class?
10. Do you have any suggestions or ideas on how educators could make special educational programmes more engaging and effective for learners in your class?
11. How do you think the use of special educational programmes could impact your confidence and motivation in learning English?
12. Have you ever discussed your learning needs or challenges with your educator/s? If so, how did they respond?
13. Do you think special educational programmes and interventions will be able to address your learning needs more effectively?

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

1. Can you provide an overview of the inclusive education policies and practices currently implemented in your school?
2. Can you explain the main objectives outlined in the South African White Paper 6 and how they align with your school policy?
3. How do you ensure that learners with diverse learning needs are fully included in the school community?
4. In what ways do you collaborate with teachers, School-Based Support Team (SBST) parents, and District-Based Support Team (DBST) to provide comprehensive support for learners with learning barriers/needs?
5. How do you monitor the effectiveness and implementation of White Paper 6 and SIAS policies in your school's inclusive education initiatives and make adjustments as needed?
6. What challenges have you encountered in implementing the effective use of White Paper 6 and SIAS policy, and how have you addressed them?
7. How do you ensure that all staff members receive adequate training and support to effectively meet the needs of learners with diverse learning requirements?
8. The White Paper emphasises the importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments. How do you foster a sense of belonging and inclusion in your school?
9. Do you have the necessary resources and materials to meet the needs of learners with learning barriers?
10. Looking ahead, what are your plans for further enhancing inclusive education and expanding special educational programmes at your school?

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

1. Can you outline the current challenges or learning barriers faced by English Grade 10 learners in your school?
2. Are educators assisted and supported in implementing the White Paper 6, SIAS policies in their classroom?
3. How do you envision these special educational programmes complementing or enhancing the existing English curriculum for Grade 10 learners?
4. Should there be any potential challenges or barriers in implementing these programmes, how do you plan to address them?
5. What strategies will be put in place to monitor progress, provide feedback, and make adjustments as needed throughout the implementation of these programmes?
6. How will the success of these programmes be communicated to stakeholders, including teachers, learners, parents, and the wider school community?
7. In what ways do you foresee these special educational programmes contributing to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all English Grade 10 learners?
8. Do you have any recommendations or thoughts on how educators could improve the effectiveness and engagement of special education programmes for learners in your class?
9. The White Paper 6 emphasises the importance of addressing barriers to learning. How do you as the departmental head of English identify and address such barriers?
10. Do you have an effective school-based support team (SBST) in place at your school, and how are educators educated or supported to administer these programmes?

APPENDIX J: CORRECTIONS COVER PAGE

COVER LETTER

- Corrections of 3.6 summary or abstract of the research have been made, trimmed down to an appropriate number.
- Corrections of only word documents to be submitted have been made.
- Usage of electronic signature were done.
- I have attached all necessary items such as participant information sheets and consent forms.
- Proposal was attached with all the necessary research instruments going to be used.
- My supervisor has seen and approved the changes made with my ethics.
- 1.5 has been corrected accordingly.
- Grade 10 Assent forms had been included.
- Lesson observations have been mentioned on participants' consent forms.
- Each group of participants has consent forms- HoDs, Educators and Principals.
- Interview questions for HoDs has been included.
- 8.2. Anonymity has been ensured in the form of pseudonyms.
- 9.2. It has been indicated how long the data will be kept before being destroyed and has been mentioned in the Information sheet.

Supervisor Signature: 

APPENDIX K: CONFIRMATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDITING

Barbara Wood
Tel: +27 44 873 5145
cell: 082 9022 571
E-mail: woodlandsmedia@gmail.com
8 Suikerbossie Street
Bergsig, George 6529
Western Cape, South Africa

To whom it may concern

Editing Certificate

I, Barbara Wood, hereby confirm that I am a registered professional researcher and editor and have edited the following academic document:

**ENHANCING INCLUSION IN GRADE 10 ENGLISH LANGUAGE
CLASSES THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

Nomonde Sithembile Mdinwa

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree

Master in Education

in

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

in the

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

(WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND

Supervisor: Dr Siboniso Phathumuzi Dlamini

June 2025

Signed:

Barbara Wood



APPENDIX L: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2024ECE005M

PROJECT TITLE

Enhancing inclusion in grade 10 English language classes through special education interventions: a phenomenological study

INVESTIGATOR

Nomonde Mdinwa

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

WSoE

DATE CONSIDERED

08 April 2024

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved unconditionally

RISK LEVEL

Minimal Risk

EXPIRY DATE

Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

29 May 2024

CHAIRPERSON


Dr. Lawan Abdulhamid

cc: Dr Siboniso Dlamini

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

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

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


Signature

Date 03 / 06 / 2024