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Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni

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Title of research:

Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

The University of Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work in the field of School Social Work

by

Phiwokuhle Jiyane

March 2025

Declaration

I, Phiwokuhle Jiyane, hereby declare the research titled '**Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS Policy in Primary Schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni'** is my work and that all the sources and quotes utilised have been acknowledged in adherence to referencing conventions.



Signature: Date: 21st March 2025

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Abstract

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has structured its education system to promote inclusive education. The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) sets out this vision, aiming to remove barriers to learning and ensure that every learner is included. To support this, the National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) developed by the Department of Education, enhances access to quality education, particularly for learners likely to be marginalized or excluded. The SIAS's main purpose is to identify, assess, and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school. Furthermore, the SIAS policy aimed to ensure that every learner has fair and equal access to mainstream education, regardless of their learning differences and challenges. This must be a requirement for teachers to ensure that the needs of all learners are met. This research aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers' perceptions of the SIAS policy using a qualitative research approach. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework underpinning the research. A non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select 10 primary school teachers at two primary schools. A single case study was employed because the case focused on the said phenomenon. Personal, semi-structured interviews were used as a method of data collection. The method of data analysis used was thematic analysis. The key findings of this study reflect that most teachers find it challenging to implement the SIAS policy. Some teachers question whether Inclusive Education is workable in some cases for poor cognitive development. It is recommended that teachers receive regular training in SIAS policy and managing challenges in this regard.

Keywords: Daveyton, Inclusive education, primary school, SIAS policy, teacher.

Contents

Chapter 1 ..... *10*

General Orientation and Introduction to the Study *10*

1.1 Introduction **10**

1.2 Background of the Study **10**

1.3 Statement of the Problem and the Rationale for the Study **13**

1.4 Relevance of Social Work **15**

1.5 Research Question **16**

1.5.1. Research sub-questions 16

1.5.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study 17

1.6 Definitions of Keywords and Concepts **17**

1.7 Overview of the Research Methodology **19**

1.8 Summary and Structure of Research Report **20**

Chapter Two *22*

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review *22*

2.1 Introduction **22**

2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning the study **22**

2.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory 22

2.3 Literature Review **25**

2.3.1 Historical Background of Special Education 26

2.3.2 Special Education before 1994 in South Africa 27

2.3.3 Inclusive education in South Africa 29

2.3.4. The SIAS Policy 31

2.3.5 School Social Work.....38

2.3.6. Legislation and Policy Guidelines to Inform and Influence the Delivery in Schools 42

2.3.7. Challenges that impede the implementation of SIAS as a policy for Inclusive Education 46

2.3.8 The SIAS Document 51

2.4 Summary.....53

Chapter Three 54

Research Methodology.....54

3.1 Introduction.....54

3.2 Research Paradigm.....54

3.3 Research Approach and Design.....54

3.4 Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure.....56

3.4.1 Population 56

3.4.2 Sample.....56

3.5 Research Tool 58

3.6. Method of Data Collection 59

3.7 Method of Data Analysis 59

3.8 Trustworthiness.....61

3.8.1. Credibility 61

3.8.2. Dependability.....62

3.8.3. Confirmability....63

3.8.4. Transferability....63

3.9 Ethical Considerations....64

3.9.1. Ethical approval....64

3.9.2. Permission from the authorities and participants....64

3.9.3. Voluntary participation....64

3.9.4 Informed consent....65

3.9.5. Confidentiality....65

3.9.6. Anonymity....65

3.9.7.Data Protection and Management....66

4. Summary....66

Chapter Four....67

Presentation and Discussion of Findings....67

4.1 Introduction....67

4.2 Demographic Profiles of Participants....67

4.3. Themes and the Sub-Themes that emerged based on the data analysis....68

Theme 1: A good knowledge of IE does not always lead to a positive attitude....71

Theme 2: The challenges experienced by teachers are overwhelming....73

Theme 3: Teachers do not have a clear understanding of the SIAS policy and how to provide the necessary support for learners facing barriers to learning....83

4.4. Summary....86

Chapter Five....87

Main Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations *87*

5.1 Introduction and study limitations **87**

5.2 Primary Aim and Objectives of the Research Study **87**

5.2.1. Primary Aim 87

5.2.2. Objectives of the Study 87

5.3. Summary of findings regarding Objective 1 ..... **87**

5.4. Summary of main findings regarding Objective 2 ..... **88**

5.5. Summary of main findings regarding Objective 3 ..... **89**

5.6 Conclusions **89**

5.7 Recommendations **90**

References *92*

List of Appendices *106*

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet **106**

Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation in the Study **108**

Appendix 3 Interview Guide **109**

Appendix 3 Interview Guide **110**

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DBE:	DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION
DBST:	DISTRICT BASED SUPPORT TEAM
CSTL:	CARE AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
EWP6:	EDUCATION WHITE PAPER 6
FSS:	FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS
IE:	INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
ISP:	INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT PLAN
SASA:	SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL ACT
SBST:	SCHOOL BASED SUPPORT TEAM
SGB:	SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY
SIAS:	SCREENING, IDENTIFICATION, ASSESSMENT, AND SUPPORT
SMT:	SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
SNA:	SUPPORT NEEDS ASSESSMENT
UNESCO:	UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Chapter 1

General Orientation and Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general orientation and introduction to the study. It discusses the current problems and rationale for the study. The main research question, main study aim, and objectives are briefly discussed. A brief overview of the study methodology is provided, including the research methods. The identified keywords are defined. The chapter concludes by providing a summary of the structure of the research chapters following Chapter 1.

1.2 Background of the Study

The global movement for inclusive education has developed over the past three decades to guarantee quality mainstream education for every learner (Nel et al., 2016). Its foundations can be traced back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948, which established education as a fundamental right for all individuals. The declaration's article states that everyone is entitled to education, and that primary and basic education should be free (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Kanyopa, 2023). Inclusive education aims to lessen marginalization in the classroom while addressing and meeting the needs of learners through participation in cultural practices, schooling, and community activities (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019).

Du Plessis (as cited in Hess, 2020) noted that inclusive education emerged as a central theme in several key United Nations declarations and conventions. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasized the importance of education free from discrimination. In the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, known as the Jomtien Declaration (UNESCO, 1990), inclusive education was established as a primary objective. Furthermore, the 1993 UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

reinforced the notion that education should be provided in integrated and mainstream school settings.

According to UNESCO, the 1994 Salamanca Conference aimed to promote equal access, participation, and inclusion of all learners (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024). The Salamanca statement and the Draft Framework for Action were drawn together for Special Needs Education (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Siddiqui, 2020; Maseko, 2024). The message from the Salamanca statement is that every learner has a Constitutional right, including access to quality education that seeks to accommodate all learners' unique and diverse learning needs regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or other conditions (UNESCO, 1994).

The roots of inclusive education in South Africa are intricate and closely linked to the historical injustices committed during apartheid (McKenzie, 2021; Makhalemele et al., 2021; Ntseto et al., 2021; Smit et al., 2020). However, when the new government took office in 1994, there was a restructuring in the education system in order to address the imbalances of the past, and thus schools were the key focus area in the protection of human rights, and inclusive education was the strategy used to achieve this end (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024; Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Smit et al., 2020).

This led to the introduction of Education White Paper 6 (EWP6): Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, a policy document laying a foundation for implementing inclusive education in South African schools (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Maree et al., 2023; Nel, 2016; Ntseto et al., 2021). At the time of the policy’s release, it was observed that 280, 000 children and young adults with disabilities or impairments were out of school (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024). Therefore, the main objective of the EWP6 was to address the diverse needs of all learners regardless of their disabilities or barriers experienced in making sure that everyone has equal access to education. The policy

also aimed to emphasize the importance of safeguarding the rights of all learners (DBE, 2001; Mncube & Lebopa, 2019).

To strengthen the EWP6, the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2001) introduced the National Strategy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support [national abbreviation is SIAS policy] (DBE, 2014) as an additional policy (DoE, 2001; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Maree et al., 2023). According to the DBE (2014), the SIAS policy is described as the policy that outlines the standard procedures aimed at ensuring that all learners can access quality education and perform to their fullest potential. According to Phasha and Majoko (2018), SIAS offers a policy framework for programmes for learners who require additional help. Early identification of learners and intervention strategies for barriers to learning is one of the SIAS policy's goals (DBE, 2014; Ntseto et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020).

It not only focuses on those who are physically disabled but also those learners who come from disadvantaged communities, specifically in informal settlements, townships, and rural areas, as they have not had the privilege of accessing services that support their learning (Mahlo, 2017). Primary and secondary schools in South Africa are required to efficiently implement the SIAS (2014) policy. Furthermore, all teachers are expected to have a crucial role in the process of screening, identifying, and assessing any barriers to learning that arise during their teaching practices. As a result, they must assist any learner who might be facing barriers to their learning.

Studies conducted on teachers' training by Matolo and Rambuda (2022), Adewumi and Mosito (2019), Maree et al. (2023), Msane et al. (2023), and Ntseto et al. (2021), argue that effective implementation of this policy is heavily reliant on the training and development of teachers for it to be effectively implemented at schools. This is important because it was discovered that teachers in both primary and secondary schools did not screen for barriers

experienced by learners. Since the screening process represents the first step in implementing the policy, any subsequent implementation may fail if the screening instructions are not followed (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022).

1.3 Statement of the Problem and the Rationale for the Study

Several researchers have discovered that implementing inclusive education (IE) in the SIAS policy, particularly in South Africa, has not been easy (Hess, 2020; Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). There is a notable discrepancy between policy and execution that must be acknowledged and fixed (Mavropoulou et al., 2021). The strategies introduced by the Department of Basic Education are still on paper (Engelbrecht, 2020). For the SIAS policy to materialize in our South African primary and secondary schools, teachers need to be properly trained and empowered so that the policy can be implemented (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021).

Many more challenges, according to Mncube et al. (2023), are caused by a lack of funding, facilities, human, financial, and material resources, as well as inadequate infrastructure to support the implementation of IE. Furthermore, gaps exist between policy formulation and the actuality of its implementation, which are at odds with one another and make implementation difficult to take place (Andrews & Done 2020; Mavropolou et al., 2021; Naicker, 2019).

Researchers such as Engelbrecht and Walton (2024), Msane et al. (2023), Matolo and Rambuda (2022), and Siddique (2020) emphasized the importance of training teachers as key since they are the main role players in making sure that the SIAS policy of inclusive education is implemented. Consequently, the experiences and perceptions of teachers cannot be overlooked since they are the implementers of the SIAS policy.

A rigorous literature indicated that no research to date has focused on primary school teachers' experiences and perceptions in Daveyton, on the implementation of IE in terms of the SIAS policy. The motivation for this research stems from my observations of the

persistent challenges faced by township schools, even in the post-apartheid era. Despite efforts by the government to address past injustices, many schools continue to struggle with systemic issues that hinder the implementation of inclusive education. Key challenges include inadequate resources, overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of trained teachers, and the absence of a multi-disciplinary support team, such as social workers. Additionally, bullying, violence, insufficient parental involvement, and socioeconomic barriers further exacerbate these difficulties.

The purpose of this study was to fill this knowledge gap. Personal, lived experiences of individuals shape their attitudes and beliefs (Guskey, 2020; Maree et al., 2023). In the study, I explored teachers' experiences of implementing IE in terms of the SIAS policy.

The findings of the study will be made available to primary schools in Daveyton township so that principals, teachers, School-based support teams, and parents can gain more insight into how to better implement the SIAS policy. The findings will also be made available to the Ekurhuleni Education District office because district offices have an essential role in ensuring that all learners have access to quality education, and they are linked with provincial education departments.

The study holds the potential to enhance existing literature by offering new perspectives on teachers' perceptions of the SIAS policy's implementation in Township schools. Additionally, it will provide the DBE in Gauteng with valuable insights into the challenges teachers face while implementing this policy, and teachers can offer recommendations and strategies for improvement.

Finally, my personal reason for conducting this research is that I am striving to become a school social worker, and thus, I am in the process of completing my Masters Degree in School Social Work. It is important that I research the topic because social workers in the school setting are responsible for providing support to both teachers and learners.

1.4 Relevance of Social Work

In 2014, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the SIAS policy to establish a unified system for early identification and intervention in schools (Makofane et al., 2024). This policy was designed to create a safe, inclusive environment, ensuring that all learners develop academically, socially, emotionally, and mentally while minimizing interruptions to their learning through targeted psychosocial support (DoE, 2014).

However, many learners continue to face learning barriers, ranging from socioeconomic challenges such as poverty to physical, cognitive, sensory, and developmental impairments (Motolo & Rambuda, 2022). In addition, learners experience mental health struggles, including anxiety, depression, diminished self-esteem, interpersonal difficulties, bullying, behavioural challenges, and substance abuse, all of which further their ability to thrive (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024).

The complex interplay between these challenges significantly impacts learners' academic performance, attendance, concentration, and overall well-being (Khumalo, 2024). Consequently, social workers play a critical role in addressing these psychosocial challenges within school environments (Pretorius, 2020). As trained professionals, social workers bring specialized knowledge and intervention strategies, working within multidisciplinary teams to improve learners' mental health, social stability, and academic success (Vergottini, 2019). Their primary objectives include emotional support, reducing barriers to academic performance, and improving learners' overall welfare (NASW, 2018). Acting as intermediaries, social workers bridge the gap between school, families, and communities, ensuring that learners receive holistic support across multiple settings.

Their work extends beyond individual interventions; they also facilitate programs for groups, learners, parents, and communities, reinforcing a collaborative approach to education. Within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, social workers function primarily at the mesosystem level, fostering connections between schools, families, and community

organizations. Because learners exist within a complex interactive network, their development relies on cohesive support structures involving educators, parents, social workers, and other stakeholders (Nembambula et al., 2023).

By facilitating cross-system collaboration, social workers strengthen the protective factors that support learners in navigating educational and personal challenges (Kim, 2012). However, despite their crucial role, social workers encounter significant challenges in effectively delivering support services. Khumalo and Pretorius (2024), and Nembambula et al. (2023) identify limited parental involvement as a major obstacle, as family participation is essential to reinforcing interventions. Many parents cite work commitments as barriers to engagement, while in some cases, parental involvement is entirely absent, leaving a gap in the learners' support system.

Additionally, social workers face resource shortages, including insufficient transport, which makes traveling between schools difficult (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024). Lack of resources limits support interventions by social workers, as their role is crucial in the school context for enhancing the psychosocial well-being of learners, advocating for their needs, collaborating with a multi-disciplinary team, families, and the community to create a healthy and supportive educational environment for all learners (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024).

1.5 Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

- What are the experiences and perceptions of teachers at primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni, regarding the implementation of inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy?

1.5.1. Research sub-questions

The following three research sub-questions were also identified:

1. What challenges do teachers face when implementing inclusive education in the classroom?
2. What are teachers' views on how to support learners who experience barriers to learning?
3. What support or resources are necessary for implementing inclusive education in township schools?

1.5.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni, regarding the implementation of inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate primary school teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards IE.
2. To explore the experiences of primary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.
3. To investigate how primary schools understand and implement the SIAS policy in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning.

1.6 Definitions of Keywords and Concepts

The following key concepts are relevant for the study:

Daveyton

Daveyton is a township in the Ekurhuleni district, managed by the Ekurhuleni Municipality in Gauteng. Established in 1952 during the apartheid era, it was intended as a township for Black South Africans. The area faces numerous challenges, including poverty and crime attributed to high unemployment rates, which have negatively impacted the economic and educational landscape. The implementation of inclusive education continues to pose a challenge due to these systemic barriers.

Implementation

Implementation is the act of turning a plan or idea into action. This includes converting elements of a project or a strategy into tangible, operational outcomes. The study defines implementation as a process of putting a decision or a plan into action and execution, particularly the SIAS policy. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is a broad term that describes a system of education where all learners are accepted and supported regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other limitations (DBE, 2014). Inclusive education aims to eliminate any barriers that may prevent individual learners from accessing education. The goal is to provide equal opportunities for all learners, especially in mainstream schools, ensuring that no learner is left behind.

Primary School

According to the DBE, a primary school is a school that offers the first phase of the General Education and Training (GET) band, which is the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase. Primary school offers grade R (reception year) plus Grades One to Seven. The reception year is optional, and children start formal schooling in Grade One. This study defines a primary school as a public or independent school that offers education from Grade R plus grades one to seven.

SIAS Policy

SIAS is an acronym for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support. The DBE states that this is a ‘’policy framework for the standardization of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programs for all who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school’’ (Department of Basic Education, 2014, p.10).

Teacher

The South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) defines a teacher as an educator. Therefore, an educator is any person who is appointed to teach, train, or educate other persons or who provides professional educational services, which include professional therapy and educational psychological services, at a school.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) defines a teacher as a school-based educator whose core responsibility is classroom teaching (DBE, 2010). This study adopts this definition of a teacher as a school-based educator employed in a primary school. A teacher in an inclusive context supports all learners in their classrooms to achieve their best, regardless of race, background, abilities, or challenges.

Township

A township is a term that refers to a racially segregated urban area that was reserved for non-whites under the apartheid regime. Philip (2014) stated that township is a term that identifies 'non-white' neighbourhoods alone created during the apartheid era. This study adopts the definition of a township as an area that is underdeveloped and racially segregated for mostly black people.

1.7 Overview of the Research Methodology

In my study, I adopted a qualitative research approach because I focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of the SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni.

I selected a single case study research design because it is a qualitative research design with which I could obtain in-depth data regarding a group of primary teachers. I purposively selected a sample consisting of ten primary school teachers. I gathered information from participants using a personal semi-structured. I also used an interview guide to help me cover relevant issues directly related to the aim and objectives of my study. I

analysed data gathered using thematic analyses and used my findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations to relevant stakeholders.

1.8 Summary and Structure of Research Report

This research report is divided into five chapters, following the sequence below: In Chapter 1, I introduced the reader to the study by providing an overview of Inclusive Education and SIAS policy. I briefly discussed the history of Inclusive Education and why it is being implemented in South Africa. I presented my rationale for conducting the study based on the existing problem circumstances. I defined important words and concepts for readers so they could specifically understand what they meant. The aim and objectives of the study were outlined, as well as my research methods.

Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical framework that underpinned my study, namely, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. It also provides a comprehensive literature review of information relevant to my research. For example, I contextualise learning barriers, the purpose and position of SIAS policy, and associated SIAS phases that guide SIAS implementers in addressing barriers to learning. Further, I provide an overview of school social workers from global and local perspectives. In addition, I focus on the roles of SIAS policy implementers at a grassroots level including social workers, teachers, and SBST members. Finally, the Children's Act (No. 35 of 2008, as amended), and the Care and Support of Teaching and Learning (CSTL) legislative framework from which SIAS policy is founded were discussed.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology in detail. Information I cover includes the research paradigm underpinning my study, the research approach and design I adopted. Chapter 3 also describes my sample of participants, as well as the method of data collection and analysis. The four paradigms of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are delineated. I also focus on ethical issues I took into

consideration when conducting this research. At the end of the chapter, I explain what ethical principles I put into practice when I conducted the study.

In Chapter 4 I summarise the profiles of each research participant and then present my findings based on a thematic analysis process. I also provide a critical discussion of each theme that emerged from the analysis process.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter of my research report. In this chapter, I summarise my research findings, the conclusions I reached, and the recommendations I made based on my research findings.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical framework that underpins my study and provides the reader with a review of the literature regarding implementing the SIAS Policy as an Inclusive Education (IE) Policy.

2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning the study

In this section of my report, I describe the theoretical framework underpinning the study and why it was selected. I then present a comprehensive literature review related to Inclusive Education and SIAS policy.

2.2.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

This study is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which provides a holistic lens through which to understand the complex, interacting systems that influence teachers' experiences and practices in implementing inclusive education, particularly within the framework of the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy. The theory was initially developed in 1979 and later refined in 2006 and 2009, offering a model for understanding human development as shaped by multiple layers of environmental influence (Ryan, 2001; Matolo &Rambuda, 2022).

Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes that individual development does not occur in isolation but rather in dynamic interaction with various environmental systems. These systems, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, provide a conceptual framework for analyzing how inclusive education is implemented in schools and how teachers experience the barriers and support involved in implementing the SIAS policy (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Donald et al., 2010).

Microsystem

Swart and Pettipher (2005) explained that the microsystem is the closest and most immediate system or social environment to the individual (teacher). The microsystem places a strong emphasis on interrelationships. This involves daily interactions between the teacher and learner, the teacher and school-based support team (SBST), the teacher and parents, etc. As SIAS 2014 policy implementers, teachers must thoroughly explore both the barriers and support factors within a learner's operational system before turning to other systems for assistance.

To help with this, before referring a learner for assistance from another system, teachers in a school must first screen and identify the barriers that impede their learning (Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2021; Ntseto et al., 2021). They must then evaluate the level and type of support structure available within the school. When all support options have been exhausted, only a support request can be made from a different system, which also has its own obstacles and support elements (DoE, 2014; Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). The theory promotes examining how classroom and school contexts contribute to learning barriers, rather than placing barriers solely on the learner (Maree et al., 2023).

Mesosystem

The mesosystem is comprised of various microsystems. The success of the implementation of inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy is dependent on fostering relationships between the microsystems. In the context of the SIAS policy implementation, this comprises a collaboration between teachers and parents, teachers and the school management team (SMT), and the SBST and DBST. According to Matolo and Rambuda (2021), effective communication and collaboration among these systems are crucial for the

success of inclusive education. Weak or inconsistent connections can hinder intervention efforts and diminish the effectiveness of support strategies.

Exosystem

The exosystem refers to an environment where the teachers are not directly involved; however, it still affects their development and the microsystems in which they operate. For instance, the district-based support team (DBST) provides training and support to teachers for policies such as the SIAS policy, monitors the implementation of the policy, and responds to referrals that significantly affect teachers' capacity on policy requirements (DoE, 2014). Limited support or lack of communication from these structures can contribute to frustration and policy resistance among teachers (Maree et al., 2023).

Macrosystem

According to Net et al (2012) and Smit et al. (2020), the macro system defines a nation's values, customs, policies, ideologies, and cultural and social influences that impact teachers. In this system, the National Department of Education formulates policies and legislation and issues implementation requirements for provinces based on their needs. Inclusion policies stem from this system, and for the policy to be integrated into the school environment, it should be adopted by all the microsystems.

However, the top-down mandates often face resistance when local realities, such as limited resources or entrenched deficit-based attitudes, conflict with policy ideals (Maree et al., 2023). Teachers may perceive the policy as overly prescriptive, contributing to negative attitudes or inconsistent implementation (Nel et al., Maree et al., 2023).

Chronosystem

The chronosystem refers to the concept of time, which is crucial in the ecological systems theory because interactive processes result in outcomes over various periods (Msane et al., 2023). This implies that long-term interactive processes result in major developmental

changes, whereas short-term processes may have only a small impact (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). This system highlights how teachers' beliefs, practices, and capacities evolve over time. The legacy of pre-1994 training, which was based on a medical-deficit model, continues to shape the perspectives of older teachers (Maree et al., 2023). Additionally, inadequate ongoing training has undermined teachers' confidence and readiness to implement the SIAS policy effectively (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Msane et al., 2023).

Relevance to this study

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is particularly suitable for this study as it offers a structured framework to analyze how various environmental layers influence teachers' ability to implement inclusive education in line with the SIAS policy. This theory highlights the importance of teachers' experiences within and across different systems, highlighting both immediate and distant factors such as classroom conditions, school support systems, district interventions, and national policy mandates.

By applying this theoretical perspective, the study acknowledges that the successful implementation of inclusive education in terms of SIAS policy relies not only on the individual efforts of teachers but also on the complex interactions of systemic factors. Understanding these interactions can lead to more supportive and practical policy approaches for inclusion in South African schools.

2.3 Literature Review

In terms of my literature review I cover relevant literature related to IE: i) the historical background of special education development of IE policies, ii) IE in South Africa, iii) the SIAS policy, vi) the role of parents and learners, v) and lastly, the challenges that impede the implementation of SIAS policy.

2.3.1 Historical Background of Special Education

The development of special education has evolved over centuries, shaped by societal perceptions, philosophical shifts, and policy interventions. Initially, individuals with disabilities were marginalized, often seen as incapable or cursed, leading to exclusion from formal education (Makhalemele et al., 2021). The Enlightenment era brought a shift in perspective, emphasizing human dignity and the need for structured education for learners with disabilities (Johnston, 1999, as cited in Makhalemele et al., 2021). This laid the foundation for specialized schooling and later legal mandates such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which reinforced the right to education in mainstream settings (Winzer, 1998).

In South Africa, the pre-1994 education system was deeply segregated, shaped by apartheid policies that disproportionately allocated resources to white learners while neglecting Black and Coloured learners with disabilities (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024; Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). The medical model of disability dominated, viewing barriers as intrinsic to the learner rather than considering societal and environmental influences (Dryer, 2015; Hughes et al., 2020).

The shift toward a social model post 1994 reframed disability as a product of systemic inequality rather than individual limitations, leading to policy developments such as Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) and the SIAS policy (DBE, 2014). The push for Inclusive Education (IE) aimed to dismantle historical exclusion, advocating for integrated learning environments while addressing implementation challenges in under-resourced schools (MsKenzie, 2021; Maree et al., 2023).

Despite progressive policies, structural barriers persist, requiring continued efforts in teacher training, curriculum adaptation, and stakeholder engagement to achieve equitable education for all learners.

2.3.2 Special Education before 1994 in South Africa

Before 1994, South Africa's education system was deeply segregated and unequal, shaped by apartheid policies that marginalized learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024; McKenzie, 2021). While the social model of disability was acknowledged, educational practices did not incorporate Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, resulting in limited recognition of individual and environmental factors in learning (Smit et al., 2020). Education was divided along racial lines, with 42% of the public special education budget allocated to White learners, while Black and Coloured learners were largely excluded from specialized support services (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2024).

Apartheid policies maintained dual education streams, separating mainstream schooling from special education, reinforcing exclusionary practices (Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). The medical model of disability dominated this era, viewing disability as a fixed individual limitation requiring curative interventions rather than systemic change (Dryer, 2015; Makhalemele et al., 2021; Maree et al., 2023). This narrow approach led to fragmented support systems, where disability was treated as a personal deficit rather than influenced by broader social, economic, and environmental barriers (Swart & Pettipher, 2016).

By the early 1990s, the transition toward a social model highlighted the role of societal structures in shaping educational inequalities, leading to policy shifts that would later influence Inclusive Education reforms post-1994 (Nel et al., 2013; Hay & Joubert, 2020).

When considering the historical influences that persisted until 1994, education was depicted as being of low quality for learners who encountered barriers, particularly for the underprivileged and disabled population. These historical events transformed, resulting in new laws, regulations, and organizational frameworks (Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Smit et al., 2020; Steyn et al., 2017).

The goal of the new South African government was to create a more democratic and inclusive educational system by restructuring and transforming the country's disparate and unfair system that would afford learning for students facing barriers to flourish (Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024; Donald et al., 2020; Drake, 2014; Smit et al., 2020).

Some recommendations were made for policy issues in areas of education related to support services at the micro level based on the results of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC, 1993), and the value framework of democracy. The switch to IE opened new possibilities for the education of learners facing obstacles and revealed a new inclusive value system, though implementation is still problematic (Engelbrecht, 2018; Maree et al., 2023; Ntseto et al., 2021).

A significant shift in perspective was that the educational system should consider each child's needs rather than the individual having to ''fit into'' it (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). Interventions now concentrate on the strengths and capabilities of learners, given the contextual influences. Furthermore, when inclusion became the norm and parents and learners had options, a large number of learners with special needs were transferred from education classrooms to regular classrooms. Additionally, the introduction of outcomes-based education in South African education greatly impacted how learners with special needs were supported (Adedoyin & Okere, 2017, as cited in Makhalemele et al., 2021).

The inclusion laws and policies passed between 1996 and 2001 compelled the education system to change to accommodate all learners (Makhalemele, 2011). According to Engelbrecht (2020), Swart and Pettipher (2009), these policies were consistent with the values that served as the foundation for the Constitution, including freedom, equity, respect, non-discrimination, and justice. These policies were: The South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996), specifically the Bill of Rights, White Paper on Education and Training (DoE,

1995), South African Schools Act (SASA) (84/1996), White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (DoE, 1997), NCESS reports (DoE, 1997), Higher Education Act (101/1997) (South Africa, 1997), Further Education and Education and Training Act (98/1998) (South Africa, 1998), Employment of Teachers Act (76/1998) (South Africa, 1998), Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (EWP6) (DoE, 2001) and the national strategy on screening, identification, assessment, and support (SIAS) (DBE, 2014), which details the EWP6 implementation (Smit et al, 2020).

2.3.3 Inclusive education in South Africa

Inclusive education (IE) in South Africa was introduced as part of broader educational reforms following the apartheid era exclusion, officially gaining momentum with Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) in 2001 (DBE, 2001). While IE has been in development for over 18 years, its implementation remains complex, influenced by historical inequalities, systemic resistance, and entrenched deficit-based thinking (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2015; McKenzie, 2021; Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022).

However, globally, inclusive education emerged as a response to marginalization in education, advocating for the full inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Dryer, 2017). In South Africa, this movement extended beyond disability to address race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and gender inequality (Ainscow, 2005; Skae et al., 2020). The foundation of inclusive education is the recognition that education is a fundamental human right, ensuring equal access and meaningful participation for all learners.

Despite progressive policy frameworks, the success of IE depends heavily on teacher attitudes and practices (Motolo & Rambuda, 2022; Maree et al., 2023). According to EWP6 (DoE, 2001) and Walton & Engelbrecht (2024), classroom teachers play a pivotal role in achieving inclusive learning by adapting teaching methods to accommodate learner diversity.

However, deep-seated medical deficit perspectives continue to shape teacher expectations, making some hesitant to fully integrate learners with disabilities (Maree et al., 2023).

To address these gaps, South African teacher education policies have evolved. The Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (SA, 2014) emphasized the need for graduates of Bachelor of Education and Postgraduate Certificate in Education programs to be proficient in inclusive education (McKenzie, 2021). Furthermore, specialized university courses now train educators to support learners with low vision, deafness, autism, and neurodevelopmental disorders, equipping them with targeted instructional strategies (McKenzie, 2021).

Recent curriculum developments provide hope for learners with severe intellectual disabilities. These include the introduction of South African Sign Language as an official subject and the implementation of a practical and functional curriculum (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024). However, despite these advancements, the implementation of the policy continues to fall short of its theoretical foundations. Many teachers still face challenges in effectively applying inclusive education principles in their classrooms (Florian & Walton, 2018; Makhalemele et al., 2021; Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Ntseto et al., 2020; Smit et al., 2020).

Research suggests that teacher attitudes play a crucial role in determining the success of inclusive education. Siddiqui et al. (2023) found a correlation between the type or severity of a disability and educator confidence, with teachers more comfortable accommodating physical and sensory disabilities than cognitive and learning impairments. The disparity is a fundamental challenge in IE implementation, while policy emphasizes inclusion, actual classroom practices often reflect deep-seated discomfort and hesitancy in supporting diverse learning needs (Mpu & Adu, 2021).

Nembambula et al. (2023), however, argue that the true difficulty of IE lies not in policy formation but in the complexities of implementation. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms, insufficient skill development, and resource shortages continue to undermine efforts to achieve meaningful inclusion, revealing a gap between policy intent and practical execution.

To address these implementation challenges, Engelbrecht and Walton (2024) emphasize that inclusive education in South Africa is a continuously evolving process, requiring contextual relevance and responsiveness to the social and economic realities within unique school contexts. A key component of this evolution is the targeted development of teacher training programs that integrate inclusive education models into classroom practice, ensuring equitable and effective support for all learners (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Maree et al., 2023; Msane et al., 2023; Nembambula et al., 2023).

2.3.4. The SIAS Policy

The DBE (2014) developed the SIAS document to fulfil the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education- Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (EWP6) directive of implementing an IE system (DBE, 2001). Both the EWP6 and the SIAS document serve as important frameworks for IE support (Maree et al, 2023; Ntseto et al., 2021; Green et al, 2018; Makhalemele et al., 2021).

In South Africa, primary and secondary schools are required to implement the 2014 SIAS policy proficiently. Additionally, all teachers are equally required to actively participate in the process of screening, identifying, and evaluating obstacles to learning during their everyday instruction (DBE, 2014; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Ntseto et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers must be familiar with barriers to learning to ensure that all learners can access quality education to achieve the Constitutional aims of SA.

The Teaching for All project is a partnership between the British Council, the University of South Africa, the Departments of Basic Education and Higher Education and Training, and MIET AFRICA, and it is co-funded by the European Union. The Teaching for ALL project aims to provide teachers in South Africa with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to teach inclusively in diverse classrooms in diverse communities.

In 2019, the Teaching for ALL project published a factsheet titled: Understanding the SIAS. The said factsheet provides a good introduction to the SIAS policy and describes different phases of the SIAS process. In 2014, the Department of Basic Education issued a policy document – SIAS - to provide a framework with which to standardise the procedures to identify, assess, and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school.

It is crucial to understand that the assessment mentioned above refers to an assessment done to identify learning obstacles, functioning levels, support needs, and resources available to the learner and their system to participate in the support program, rather than an assessment of learners' scholastic achievement (DBE, 2010).

The SIAS policy is aimed at improving access to quality education for vulnerable learners who experience barriers to learning, including learners in ordinary and special schools. Barriers may include family disruptions, language, the impact of poverty, learning difficulties, disability, large classes, and inflexible curriculum. Further, children who are of compulsory school-going age and youth who may be out of school or have never enrolled in a school due to their disability or other barriers to access.

Policy includes a protocol as well as a set of official forms to be used by teachers, School-Based Support Teams (SBST), and District-Based Support Teams (DBST). The School Based Support Team (SBST) includes teachers, representatives from the School Governing Body (SGB), volunteers, members of the School Management Team (SMT), other

stakeholders (e.g. health professionals, other governmental departments, and non-governmental organizations), learners, and administrators (DoE, 2001; Grosser & Nel, 2016; Makhalemele & Nel, 2014).

The District Based Support Team (DBST) is a team of experts situated in all the education districts in each province throughout South Africa (DBE, 2014).

The SIAS process consists of three stages:

STAGE 1: The Initial Screening is guided by the Learner's Profile

The Teacher screens all learners at admission and the beginning of each phase; records findings in the Learner Profile and captures them on the Learner Unit Record and Tracking System (LURITS).

STAGE 2: Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Learning and Development at the School Level

When a learner is identified as vulnerable, the teachers assume the role of case manager and, based on the information gathered, formulate a reviewable intervention plan in conjunction with the learner and the parent. If the learner needs further support, the teacher completes Support Needs Assessment Form 1 (SNA 1) and approaches the SBST, who will then develop an Individual Support Plan (ISP) for the learner. The SBST will use SNA Form 2 for this purpose. This plan must be reviewed regularly. If a higher level of support is required for the learner, the District Based Support Team (DBST) is approached.

STAGE 3: Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Learning at the District Level

The Support Needs Assessment 3 (SNA 3) form guides the District Based Support Team (DBST) in its intervention strategy, which is informed by the teacher and SBST's support plans for the learner. The DBST develops a Support Plan which includes:

- Planning and budgeting for additional support programmes determined in SNA 3.
- Resource and support service allocation to schools and learners.

- Training, counselling, and mentoring of teachers and parents/legal caregivers.
- Monitoring support provision.
- Using the various tools included in SIAS to help carry out their decisions.

All decisions made about the placement of a learner have to be made in consultation with the parents.

Levels of Support available

The Teaching for All project also provides information regarding the level of support available to implement the SIAS policy. A support package for a learner may consist of a range of additional support provisions depending on the level of intensity and frequency of support required; the support will be assessed to be a low, moderate, or high level. This will in turn, determine where and by whom support will be provided. SIAS identifies five specific support provision areas:

Specialist support staff

- Assistive devices, specialized equipment, and teaching and learning support materials.
- Curriculum differentiation to meet the individual needs of learners.
- Initial and on-going training, orientation, mentorship, and guidance.
- Environmental access (once-off and not necessarily on-going).

The nature and extent of the support needed to address the barrier are determined by evaluating:

- The existing resources and support available to the learner and the school.
- What is available within the province or district that could reasonably be made available at the school level through a range of means?
- Placement at a Special School is only considered once all other options for supporting a learner at his/her local school have been explored.

Effective implementation of the SIAS policy

Teachers are the primary agents when it comes to the implementation of IE, therefore, it is vital to improve their skills to be able to teach diverse groups of learners, including those

learners with learning disabilities (Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). It is important, therefore, that support is provided for teachers in the face of myriad systemic and contextual challenges (Dryer & Mfuthwana, 2019; Naicker, 2019).

The Teaching For All also provides information regarding the effective implementation of the SIAS policy:

Training:

For the SIAS policy to work effectively for the benefit of all children experiencing barriers to learning, teachers will need to be familiar with the policy and be able to implement the process. This will require regular training and support beyond the initial orientation.

District support

A good relationship between the SBST and DBST is vital to the successful implementation of SIAS. Endorsement and involvement from the district will ensure prompt and effective engagement by the SBST and well-supported teacher intervention.

Seamless coordination of all directorates and State departments

Successful implementation does not rest with one directorate but depends on the coordination of various directorates in education and other State entities to deliver services to learners to support effective teaching and learning. To cater to the various needs of learners, the DBE (2014) divided schools into Full-Service Schools (FSS) for learners with moderate support needs, and Special Schools for Resource Centres (SSRC) for learners with high support needs (Engelbrecht &Walton, 2024; Msane et al., 2023).

Parents/Caregivers' Involvement

Historically, South African schools operated in isolation from parents and the broader community, particularly during the apartheid era, when education governance was centralized and exclusionary (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024). However, extensive research supports the view that parental involvement significantly enhances academic success, contributing to

higher achievement, fewer disciplinary issues, lower dropout rates, and improved overall well-being (Afolabi, 2014; Bisschoff &Segoe, 2019; Skae et al., 2020; Nembambula et al., 2023).

Parental participation in education includes engagement at school, communication with teachers, home-based involvement, and supporting children's learning experiences (Hill, 2020). Within Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, the interaction between parents and educators is crucial; without consistent parental engagement, implementing inclusive policies like the SIAS policy becomes increasingly difficult, as learners require a stable support network that spans both home and school environments (DBE, 2014). The SIAS policy recognizes parents and caregivers as equal partners in identifying, assessing, and supporting learners with barriers to education (DBE, 2014; Le Roux, 2013).

Early identification of learning difficulties relies not only on teacher observations but also on parents' insights into their child's behaviour, developmental concerns, and learning patterns (DBE, 2014). For example, the Support Needs Assessment Form 1 (SNA 1) requires teacher-parent collaboration to accurately assess a learner's challenges. Additionally, all intervention strategies determined by the SBST must be communicated to parents to align home and school support mechanisms (DoE, 2014; Msane et al., 2023).

Despite these policy efforts, teachers often cite low parental involvement as a major challenge. This is attributed to three key factors: limited awareness of stakeholder responsibilities, and many parents lack understanding of their role in educational decision-making (Afolabi, 2014; Bisschoff & Segoe, 2019). Secondly, low educational backgrounds parents with limited schooling are less likely to engage actively, often due to self-perceived inadequacy in supporting their child's learning. Thirdly, there is denial and reluctance; some parents struggle to accept their child's condition, hindering cooperation and limiting efforts (Msane et al., 2023).

While studies indicate persistent disengagement in many South African schools (Makhalemele et al., 2021). Walton and Engelbrecht (2024) present a contrasting perspective, highlighting an increase in parental involvement. This suggests that socioeconomic conditions, school leadership strategies, and cultural perceptions play a role in shaping how engaged or disconnected parents are from their child's learning journey. Ultimately, the whole policy framework advocates for parental participation, and sustained engagement requires both systemic support and a cultural shift in attitudes toward education. Parents must commit time, financial resources, and emotional investment to actively contribute to their child's academic success (Afolabi, 2014; DoE, 2014; Bornman & Donohue, 2014; Skae et al., 2020).

For inclusive education to succeed, a collaborative approach between committed teachers and engaged parents is essential (Skae et al., 2020). The attitudes of teachers toward working with diverse learners influence parental participation, as teachers who actively foster positive communication with families strengthen parental involvement, improving learning outcomes for children experiencing learning barriers (Nambambula et al., 2023).

Role of learners

Throughout the SIAS decision-making process, parents/caregivers and learners (starting from the age of 12 when feasible) must be involved (DoE, 2014; Le Roux, 2013). The policy aims to improve understanding of the learner's needs as part of the preventative services. The policy also states that information sharing must never infringe upon the learner's rights and privacy. Consent must be obtained from either the parents or the learner before recording and sharing any information.

It is important to maintain confidentiality, and the learners should be included in evaluating their progress whenever possible. The policy also emphasizes the importance of considering learners' educational needs, social relationships, and emotional development (DoE, 2014).

2.3.5 School Social Work

Overview of School Social workers globally

School social work (SSW) is recognized internationally as a valuable approach for addressing learning barriers in schools, including issues of inequity, socio-economic factors, and physical and mental health challenges (Huxable, 2013). According to Kemp (2013), the practice of school social work began in New York in 1906 and was influenced by laws mandating compulsory school attendance and the recognition of children as individuals by educators and other service providers (Allen-Meares, 1996, as cited by Lesesa, 2022).

According to Costin (1969, as cited by Lesesa, 2022), social work services in schools were developed to enhance the relevance of education by connecting it to the lives of learners. Dupper (2003) highlighted that the mental health movement of the 1920s significantly impacted the establishment of school social work. During this period, social work was considered an essential therapeutic resource in schools, particularly in response to the challenges posed by the Great Depression. School social workers provided shelter and food for families in need (Lesesa, 2022).

Between 1940 and 1950, there was a significant shift in focus from social casework and advocacy to prioritizing the individual child. This change transformed the methods and goals of school social work, emphasizing collaboration with parents and support for at-risk learners. During this period, research was conducted on the roles of school social workers and an examination of school practices and policies that negatively impacted learners (Dupper, 2003; Allen-Meares, 1996, as cited by Lesesa, 2022).

Between 1970 and 1980, the United States began to engage in discussions about the quality of education. During this time, legislation was passed to support the role of social workers in schools, and the National Association of Social Workers established the first standards for these professionals (Lesesa, 2022). As the 21st century approached, the country

recognized the need to reform schools to address various issues, including the increasing number of underperforming learners, violence, substance abuse, the necessity for sex education and AIDS awareness, as well as discussions surrounding alternative schooling and parental choice (Allen-Meares, 1996, as cited by Lesesa, 2022). Currently, school social work is practiced in approximately 49 developed and developing countries around the world (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020).

Overview of School Social Work in South Africa

During the apartheid era, South Africa established a fragmented education system that was based on racial groups. Non-white learners were moved from the church special schools to educational departments specifically created for each race (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020). Like many countries, the political, philosophical, and cultural influences of the time significantly impacted the development of education in South Africa (Naicker, 2006, as cited by Lesesa, 2022). The need for social workers to provide services in schools was formally recognized in 1973, which led to a recommendation for the development of school social work, particularly focusing on children with special educational needs (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020).

The beginning of democracy in South Africa marked a significant transformation in the education system. The Bill of Rights in the new Constitution declared that all learners have the right to basic education and equal access to educational institutions (Constitution of South Africa, 1996). Since then, the DBE has been actively promoting inclusive education, ensuring that all learners, including previously disadvantaged groups, have access to quality education (DBE, 2001).

The Education White Paper 6 is a significant policy that acknowledges a diverse range of learning needs among learners. These needs can stem from various factors, including physical, mental, sensory, neurological, and developmental challenges, as well as socio-

economic deprivation (DBE, 2001). The document emphasized the necessity of educational support services to adequately address these needs within the education system. Such services include professional psychosocial support provided by academics, psychologists, and social workers (DBE, 2014).

Interest in social work has generally increased, correlating with the rise in new appointments in the Western Cape, Free State, Kwa-Zulu Natal, and Gauteng (Van Sittert, 2016, as cited in Vergottini & Weyers, 2020). In Gauteng Province, the appointment of school social workers is a collaborative effort between the Departments of Education and Social Development. Their specific mandate is to provide psychosocial services to learners in public schools (Lesesa, 2022).

Kemp (2014, as cited by Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024) highlighted the multifaceted roles of school social workers, which include identifying learners in need of support, assessing their unique needs and challenges, and communicating these needs to school personnel, learners, parents, and other relevant stakeholders. Additionally, they provide both direct and indirect service, engage in consultation and collaboration, promote parental involvement, advocate for community engagement, liaise with necessary resources, and facilitate cooperation among various stakeholders through inter-professional teams.

Integration of social workers in schools

Many people believe that schools reflect the society in which they exist and that the issues and challenges affecting these communities also appear within the school system. (Savage & Schanding, 2013, as cited by Vergottini & Weyers, 2020). This suggests that South African learners encounter the same difficulties and social problems commonly found in their communities. Furthermore, in low and middle-income countries like South Africa, learners face a range of socioeconomic, and psychosocial challenges, and structural inequalities, including poverty, racial discrimination, child-headed families, health disparities, abuse, rape,

cultural discrimination, disabilities, and the problem of identities. These factors significantly impact both learners and their families (Drane et al., 2021; Heard-Garris et al., 2021, Rollins, 2020).

Lesesa (2022) highlighted that bullying is also a significant issue, where learners bring weapons to school for self-protection. Pretorius (2016) found that in township schools there is an increased frequency of ill-discipline and other problematic behaviours. Due to these experiences of psychosocial challenges and the influence of socioeconomic factors, learners in these environments are more vulnerable to academic difficulties and mental health disorders (Khumalo, 2024; Pretorius, 2016).

Bezuidenhout (2010, as cited in Lesesa, 2022) noted that many schools, particularly those in townships, lack the essential resources needed to function effectively. Consequently, integrating social workers into a school-based support system is vital, especially in under-resourced areas like township schools. Social workers in schools play a key role in addressing the psychosocial challenges faced by learners (Pretorius, 2020). They also promote and support the educational process where they provide professional social and emotional services, participate in the development of learners, and know how to modify the school environment to better serve children's interests (Dash & Moha, 2015, as cited in Lesesa, 2022).

The importance of school social workers in educational institutions is supported by the assertions of Pretorius (2016) and Huxable (2022), who highlighted their specialized expertise in understanding family and community systems, as well as linking them to essential community services that promote learner success. Their presence is crucial in fostering a supportive learning environment. While they bring knowledge and skills to the school system, they also provide support to teachers, allowing them to focus on their diverse roles. By employing various strategies, teachers can effectively engage learners and help

them understand the curriculum content. Meanwhile, school social workers provide services that enhance the psychosocial well-being of learners (Pretorius, 2020; Vergottini, 2019).

Furthermore, the selection of interventions used by social workers in schools is continuously guided by their assessment of each learner's unique circumstances and needs. In relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which underpins my research, the theory contributes to the development of more effective interventions. This framework allows social workers to consider the entire environment in which the individual exists (Hepworth et al., 2013). It offers a framework for conducting reliable and valid assessments of learners and provides strategies for intervention aimed at removing barriers to learning (National Association for Social Workers, 2012). Change in an individual is not solely dependent on that person; it also involves the relevant systems around them.

According to Mann and Sun (2021), 31% of elementary learners and 34% of middle school learners in the U.S. have begun attending schools that are supported by social workers. In South Africa, special educational needs (SEN), equal educational treatment, and the emotional and social well-being of learners are fundamentally prioritized as services provided by social workers (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). The expertise and skills of school social workers make them invaluable professionals for addressing the unique needs of learners. They also play a crucial role in promoting social justice and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable populations, including foreign learners and those with learning disabilities. These groups may be susceptible to victimization, bullying, and ridicule by their peers (Altshuter & Webb, 2009, as cited in Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024).

2.3.6. Legislation and Policy Guidelines to Inform and Influence the Delivery in Schools

The following subsections are concise outlines of the main legislation and policies that regulate service delivery in schools and guide social workers operating within those schools:

The Children's Act, 2005 (Act 38 of 2005) as amended.

The Act serves as the legislative framework for the implementation of child safety and health programs in South Africa. This Act aims to include the appropriate care, protection, and support needed by children to reach their full potential (DSD, 2015). According to Section 150 of the Children's Act of 2005, child protection services provide resources for children who are at risk, such as those facing neglect or abandonment and are in need of care and protection (RSA, 2005).

Section 11 of the Children's Act of 2005 focuses on the rights of children with disabilities and chronic illness. It makes provision for access to services, protection from discrimination, and support for families.

Child Justice Act, 2008 (Act 75 of 2008)

The 2008 Child Justice Act (Act No. 75 of 2008) aims to establish a framework for handling cases involving minors in conflict with the law (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2017). This Act seeks to address juvenile justice issues in a rights-based manner and to support children accused of crimes, transforming their lives. It encourages them to become active citizens through restorative justice initiatives, rehabilitation, and alternative sentencing options (DSD, 2017).

Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998)

This act aims to provide victims of domestic violence with the highest level of legal protection against domestic abuse (DSD, 2017). Social workers play a crucial role by providing psychosocial support to these victims (Lesesa, 2022).

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)

This Act applies to educational settings in the Republic of South Africa. This Act establishes a standardized framework for the organization, governance, and financing of schools by creating a government school board (The South African Schools Act, 1996).

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

The Act establishes that children are entitled to a maximum measure of their rights and responsibilities. Children have the right to live in a safe environment, receive an education, and access social care, ensuring they are protected from violation and maltreatment (RSA, 1996).

Revised White Paper on Families (2021)

It aims to support and strengthen families by addressing issues that can harm them, such as poverty, unemployment, child abuse, gender-based violence, inequality, and domestic violence (DSD, 2021).

National Policy Framework and Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Management of Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation

This policy is designed to reduce incidents of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation in South Africa. It focuses on preventing further maltreatment of affected children (DSD, 2017).

Mental Health Care Act (Act 17 of 2002) as amended

This policy aims to provide for the care, treatment, and rehabilitation of individuals with mental illness. Social workers in schools play a crucial role in identifying and addressing mental health issues among learners and providing appropriate support (RSA, 2005).

The Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

The legislation aims to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, promoting their full participation in society on an equal basis. It ensures accessibility, non-

discrimination, and inclusion in all aspects of life. Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasizes the best interests of children with disabilities, while Article 24 focuses on their rights to education without exclusion from the general education system due to disability.

The Care and Support for Teaching and Learning (CSTL) Programme (2008)

The goal of the CSTL Programme is to realise the educational rights of children, including those who are vulnerable, through schools becoming incentive centres of learning, care, and support (DoE, 2001). The CSTL Programme intends to prevent and mitigate factors that have a negative impact on the enrolment, retention, performance, and progression of vulnerable learners in schools by addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

The Bela Bill

The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Bill was signed into law at the Union Building in Pretoria on September 13, 2024. To modernize and simplify the governance in the education sector, the Bill suggests several amendments to the Employment of Educators Act (76 of 1998) and the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996). According to the Basic Education Deputy Minister, Dr Reginah Mhaule: “At its core, the Bill reflects South Africa’s aspiration for a more inclusive, equitable, and efficient basic education system. It addresses key challenges that have hindered the progress of our education’’.

However, the BELA Bill has sparked numerous concerns regarding its possible conflict with inclusive education in South Africa and its likely adverse effects on teachers. Here are some important points:

- Centralization of Decision-Making: The Bill transfers substantial decision-making authority from School-Governing Bodies (SGBs) to provincial Heads of Departments. Critics argue that this centralization might weaken schools' capacity to cater to the needs of their local communities, potentially obstructing efforts to foster inclusive

environments. However, the DOE believes there is a prevalent misunderstanding that the Act seeks to diminish the autonomy of SGBs. In truth, it aims to align the powers of the SGB with the guidelines of the appropriate provincial Head of Department (HoD). Under the law, the HoD's intervention will occur solely when language and admission policies are discriminatory towards specific learners within the community, an action that the Constitution opposes.

- Language Policy Changes: The legislation grants provincial governments greater authority over language policies, raising concerns that it may erode mother-tongue education. Critics, including groups like AfriForum and Solidarity, contend that the Bill proposes the addition of more languages for instruction, despite the impracticality or lack of necessity. They view this as a compromise of the rights of Afrikaans-speaking communities to educate their children in their preferred language. The Daily Maverick mentions that the Democratic Alliance (DA) agrees that the Bill infringes on the right to mother tongue education, protected by the South African Constitution.
- Greater Administrative Load: The extra administrative demands introduced by the Bill may overload teachers and school administrators. This heightened workload could interfere with their capacity to prioritize developing and maintaining inclusive educational practices.

2.3.7. Challenges that impede the implementation of SIAS as a policy for Inclusive Education

Inadequate teacher training and negative attitude of teachers

According to Bowe and Ball (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022), policy implementation is adhering to legislatively mandated policy guidelines step by step. This implies that all SA education policies, including the SIAS 2014 policy, should be applied consistently by male and female teachers in primary and secondary schools. However, implementing the policy in

classrooms has proven to be challenging for teachers (Green & Soudien, 2018; Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). Nemambulu et al. (2023) suggest that this difficulty arises because teachers are expected to take on multiple roles, including those of parents, counsellors, and managers.

Teachers have expressed concerns about not receiving sufficient support and training to address the various challenges their students present in the classroom. This sentiment is supported by numerous studies (Dryer & Mfuthwana, 2019; Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Msane et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Nel, 2016). As a result, many educators feel ill-equipped to understand and implement policies related to their areas of expertise (Marais & Wessels, 2020). This inadequacy has led to negative attitudes towards inclusion, as teachers often feel incompetent (Adewumi, 2019).

Research by Lebopa and Mncube (2019) highlighted the key areas teachers believe are essential for effective implementation of inclusive education (IE) in their schools. They emphasized the importance of thorough, relevant training and professional development. They recommended that the following topics be covered in their training:

- Lesson planning
- Strategies for screening, identifying, and supporting (SIAS) learners with barriers to learning.

Ntseto et al (2021) found that the timing and duration of teacher training for SIAS policy implementation are insufficient. For example, the teachers cited that the training is mostly conducted during holidays, which could be inconvenient, as teachers may be covering some of their administrative responsibilities.

Another challenge noted by Maree et al. (2023) is that the IE team has been concentrating on training teachers on how to handle the administrative portion of this document instead of helping them use the SIAS document as a tool for early identification

and support for learning difficulties. Furthermore, it has been noted that teachers who have not received inclusion training exhibit negative attitudes toward the implementation of SIAS (Maree et al., 2023; Msane et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Ntseto et al., 2021).

Lebopa and Mncube (2019) and Skae et al. (2020) state that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion improve when they are ready to teach in inclusive classrooms; on the other hand, when they are not equipped for this instructional model, negative attitudes dominate because they lack confidence, skills, and knowledge on how to provide for the individual needs of their learners. This negative attitude may impact the learner's quality of life, sometimes for the rest of their lives (Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Majoko & Phasha, 2018; Skae et al., 2020).

Lack of support for teachers

Skae et al. (2020) argued that teacher's attitudes would be positive if, along with training, they received appropriate professional support for working with learners experiencing barriers to learning, such as support from professional personnel, special equipment, and educational resources, accommodations and teachers aids in the classroom to assist with learners with disabilities. The teachers brought up the issue of the district's failure to adequately support them in their capacity as DBE representatives (Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Msane et al., 2023).

Dryer and Mfuthwana (2019) stated that teachers are aware that they cannot do this by themselves, which adds more to their exasperation. In a study conducted by Nembambula et al. (2023), it was found that teachers need support from teacher assistants, parents, and the community, as well as collaboration among teachers. They believe that the lack of this support negatively impacts the implementation of IE. Doe (2014) and Melane (2022) reiterate this point that supporting diverse learners is not just the duty of teachers but also of all parties involved, including parents, guardians, experts from other fields, trainers, researchers, managers, policymakers, and national and local officials.

Teachers also face another challenge of a lack of parental involvement from some parents who do not accept their children's condition and refuse to cooperate (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Mahlo, 2017; Msane et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2021). Because of this, some teachers have had to include family members who are aware of the circumstances (Msane et al., 2023).

On the other hand, other teachers expressed satisfaction with the parental support they received. For example, they shared that when issues were recognized with the learner, parents were contacted and would react positively by visiting the school for updates and instructions on how to help the child at home with relevant skills. Furthermore, parents were brought on board by keeping them updated on events occurring at school, and they were cooperative throughout (Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Msane et al., 2023).

Dryer (2017) pointed out how important it is to support teachers in their difficult roles inside and outside the classroom. Swart et al. (2002, as cited in Melane, 2022) discovered that when it comes to teachers, policymakers often emphasize their knowledge, skills, and practical support while overlooking their emotional well-being. This oversight has led to significant distress among teachers, resulting in many of them taking extended leaves of absence. Prolonged teacher absences also negatively impact the quality of education and student learning.

Kruger and Yorke (2010, as cited in Melane, 2022) echo this sentiment, asserting that while the Department of Basic Education introduces initiatives to reform the education system, it fails to prioritize the development of the personnel responsible for implementing these changes. Therefore, teachers must be emotionally prepared to teach in inclusive classrooms (Msane et al., 2023).

Lack of resources

A study conducted by Adu & Mpu (2021) identified a primary challenge faced by schools at the meso-level as a lack of resources. These resources are essential for addressing the diverse needs of learners with learning disabilities in South African schools. This shortfall has been highlighted in numerous studies (Lebopha & Mncube, 2019; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Maree et al., 2023; Msane et al., 2023; Stofile et al., 2018).

As a result, teachers find it difficult to create inclusive classrooms due to a lack of human, administrative, and financial support from district offices as well as a shortage of teaching aids, equipment, and inadequate facilities at schools and are unable to meet the needs of the learners with barriers to learning (Engelbrecht, 2020; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Lebopa & Mncube, 2019; Skae et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it has been observed that there are too many overcrowded classrooms, which interfere with teaching and learning (Msane et al., 2023; Siddiqui, 2020; Govender & Nunan, 2023; Adu & Mpu, 2021). Research indicates that the current national learner-educator ratio (LER) stands at 33:1, with some classes reporting LER figures of 50:1 or higher (Dryer & Mfuthwana, 2018; Materechera, 2020). Alarmingly, Mpu & Adu (2021) found that government schools average about 80 to 100 learners per classroom, increasing instructional challenges. As a result, there is an increased number of learners with diverse learning needs, which creates challenges for teachers to provide inclusive education under constrained time and resources, making it difficult for learners to receive support.

In a recent report, Gwarube (2024), the Minister of Basic Education, noted that the total number of learners in the education system has risen by approximately 292, 820 over the past five years, which has made the learner/teacher ratio rise in most provinces.

Additionally, she emphasized that an increase in learners without a corresponding increase post post-basket could impact the quality of teaching, which may soon be evident in the system’s overall performance. It has also been noted that teachers have insufficient

knowledge and comprehension of curriculum differentiation. This is because teachers who have undergone training still do not have a strong grasp of curriculum differentiation (Ntseto et al., 2021; Skae et al., 2020). It could also be because of the teachers' skill levels, which may restrict the intervention offered to each child and result in less significant changes when addressing the child's issues (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Msane et al., 2023).

The recent challenges teachers face are the looming budget cuts that could affect the majority of teachers' posts. The Western Cape has announced that the department is dealing with a budget shortfall and will need to reduce expenses by letting go of 2000 teachers in 2025. Additionally, in the Western Cape, 2407 contract positions are in jeopardy of not being renewed in 2025, while in Kwa-Zulu Natal, 11,000 teaching positions are at risk of being cut. This situation could negatively impact the implementation of inclusive education, as decreased funding may hinder resources, support services, and teacher training, further increase the learner-teacher ratio, and classroom accommodations essential for inclusivity practices.

2.3.8 The SIAS Document

The SIAS document is significant in South Africa because it guides teachers in implementing inclusive pedagogical practices. The challenge is that not all teachers follow or adhere to what is stipulated in the document, and failure to do so could cause all implementation attempts to fail (Maree et al., 2023; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). However, Engelbrecht and Walton (2024) believe that teachers, both on their own and in groups, do change the policy and guidelines based on their personal beliefs. They do this to address challenges in their specific context to support the various needs of their children in their classrooms.

It has also been noted that teachers are hesitant to fill out the SIAS forms from the policy document because of the additional administrative burden and lack of understanding of

inclusive education (Maree et al., 2023; Ntseto et al., 2021). Maree et al., (2023) found that teachers were disengaged from the document and chose to keep the SIAS document in the safe, while others had never opened it.

Common Learning Problems Identified in Primary Schools

Identified behavioural issues commonly occur among young children in Primary Schools. A study by Msane et al. (2023) revealed that most children misbehave, leading to a lack of focus on their academic activities and academic challenges. Some children face learning obstacles such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Teachers also noted difficulties in reading and writing among these individuals.

According to Stofile and Naicker (2008), poverty is another major issue in South Africa and poses a barrier to implementing IE. Maarman (2009) and Wiseman (2012, as cited in Melane, 2022) argue that learners from underprivileged backgrounds tend to focus on survival needs (such as food and clothing) rather than on their education and academic achievements. This indicates that inadequate nutrition and poverty significantly impact learners' success. Consequently, it is essential to provide support to overcome learning obstacles caused by poor health and socio-economic challenges (Melane, 2022).

Socio-economic challenges

South African schools are grappling with significant challenges due to the high number of vulnerable learners from diverse social backgrounds. These learners face a myriad of socio-economic and psychosocial issues that hinder their educational progress (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024; Makofane et al., 2024). According to Drane et al. (2021), Makofane et al. (2024), and Rollins (2020), vulnerable learners are those who experience socio-economic and psychosocial challenges. These challenges include poverty, child-headed households, inadequate nutrition, bullying, abuse, sexual assault, discrimination, defiance, and cultural biases.

The DBE (2001) emphasized that socio-economic factors form part of the extrinsic barriers, which are conditions outside of the learner, and they hinder effective learning. This aligns with the ecological systems theory, which suggests that a learner's school performance is significantly influenced by their relationships within their microsystems (Hess, 2020). Due to socio-economic challenges and structural disparities, many learners face disadvantages at the start of their educational journeys, which increases the risk of falling behind in the education system (Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024). This is a significant issue in South Africa and poses a challenge to the implementation of IE (Stofile, 2008, as cited in High, 2022).

Ncosha and Shumba (2013, as cited in Khumalo & Pretorius, 2024) explained that these challenges lead to a range of negative outcomes, including reduced school attendance, higher dropout rates, lower academic performance, impaired concentration, a detrimental classroom atmosphere, and overall suboptimal educational experiences. Therefore, providing support to address barriers to learning caused by poor socioeconomic conditions is essential (Melane, 2022).

2.4 Summary

The SIAS policy is not being effectively implemented in primary schools. The screening process is the first step in implementing policy; neglecting to follow through on screening directives may fail in all implementation efforts (Matole & Rambuda, 2022). However, teachers still do not understand the policy framework for screening, identifying, and supporting learners with learning barriers. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, numerous challenges continue to confront teachers, which impede the effective implementation of the SIAS policy need to be addressed for effective implementation to take place (Maree et al., 2023; Msane et al., 2023; Matole & Rambuda, 2022; Ntseto et al., 2021).

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth description of the research methods utilized in the study. The first part of this chapter describes the paradigm in which the qualitative research approach is rooted, the qualitative approach applied, and an explanation of the single case study designs utilized in this research study. The third part identifies the study population, followed by the sample and sampling procedures, and the type of research tool used. The methods of data collection and analysis are highlighted. The study's trustworthiness, the ethical considerations I upheld, and the study's limitations and delimitations are explained.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) defined a research paradigm as a set of beliefs that influence and shape the researcher's approach to conducting research. An interpretive paradigm guided this study. Creswell (2009) stated that the interpretive paradigm recognizes that individuals' subjective experiences and actions are legitimate, varied, and constructed socially based on their unique interpretations of social interactions. Socially constructed implies that individuals derive meaning from their experiences through social engagement. This kind of research paradigm examines reports, words, and detailed views of a person in their natural environment to build a comprehensive picture. Additionally, its adaptability permits the exploration of unseen problems (Hess, 2020). This paradigm was relevant for this study as it helped me to understand teachers' perceptions of implementing the SIAS policy.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

In this study, a qualitative research approach was applied. Cresswell (2014) described qualitative research as an approach that involves investigating and understanding the meaning

individuals and groups attach to a social or human problem. This approach aims to understand individuals' subjective or emic viewpoints and perspectives (Greenstein et al., 2013).

The individuals involved in my study were teachers in the school context, and by adopting the qualitative approach, I aimed to understand their perceptions and experiences of implementing IE using the SIAS policy. In this sense, I focused on how they interpret and derive meaning from their personal experiences of the world around them (Greenstein et al., 2013). The approach was thus suitable for this study to enhance my insight into the teachers' perceptions of implementing the SIAS policy, allowing them to share their experiences and views. The research was both exploratory and descriptive.

Cresswell and Creswell (2017) explained that a research design is the researcher's overarching plan for approaching research clearly and logically. This plan involves developing research questions, deciding on methods for gathering, analysing data, and deciding how to report findings. Furthermore, the research design, as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), can guide the type of data analysis the researcher intends to perform, influenced by their epistemology, theoretical framework, and research objectives and questions.

According to Creswell (2014), a case study research design is a form of inquiry aimed at achieving a thorough understanding of a program, event, process, activity, individual, or group of individuals. It involves a detailed examination that provides a holistic perspective using various data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, audio-visual materials, documents, reports, or archival records (Creswell, 2014; Gustafsson, 2017). According to Yin (2018) case study refers to an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context.

This study used a single case study research design, in the sense that it focused on one phenomenon. The ‘case’ being studied was primary school teachers' experiences and perceptions of the implementation of IE in terms of SIAS policy. According to Yin (2018), case studies are ideal for researchers investigating complex social phenomena in real-world settings. In this study, the case study approach enables an in-depth analysis of teachers’ perspectives, offering rich and contextual insights into the practical implementation of the SIAS policy.

I obtained my sample from two different primary schools; I did not regard it as a multiple case study because I didn’t compare or contrast research findings in each of the two different schools. The ‘case’ boundary was primary school teachers' experiences and perceptions of IE in terms of SIAS policy.

3.4 Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedure

3.4.1 Population

Fraenkel and Warren (2002) defined the study population as a group of people with similar characteristics that the researcher is interested in. The study population comprised Grade 5 and 6 teachers teaching in two public primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni.

3.4.2 Sample

Sampling is the process of choosing a small number of people (a sample) who are representative of the larger group (population) from which they are drawn (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Fouche et al., 2021). There is purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling. In this approach, researchers use their judgment to choose the units, e.g., individuals, cases, events, or pieces of data that they intend to study. This form of non-probability sampling involves the researcher making decisions about which individuals will be part of the sample based on various criteria, which may include their specialized knowledge of the research topic or their ability and willingness to participate in the study

(Maree et al., 2023; Rai &Thapa, 2016). Moreover, non-probability sampling does not provide all individuals within the population an equal chance to be selected (Campbell et al., 2020; Rai & Thapa, 2016).

In my research, non-probability, purposive sampling was used to select participants. This sampling method helped in choosing participants who were easy to reach (Neuman, 2006). The sample for this study was 10 teachers selected from two primary schools (Siphethu Primary School and Melodi Primary School), five from each school.

Participants were selected in advance rather than being identified during the research process. According to Maree (2007), the criteria used for selection should help identify participants who are likely to have relevant experience or insights related to the research topic. A sample size of 10 participants was determined through purposive sampling, ensuring that individuals with the appropriate expertise and insights were chosen. Thapa and Rai (2015) state that purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on participants who are most likely to provide rich and meaningful data.

While larger sample sizes can facilitate broader generalizations, the chosen sample was sufficient to explore key themes and contribute valuable findings in line with the study's aims. Additionally, I monitored data saturation by identifying recurring themes in participants' responses. As the interviews progressed, it became clear that no new significant insights were emerging, indicating that saturation had been achieved.

Most families in Daveyton are black Africans, and as a result, the two selected schools have mostly black learners and teachers from different parts of the community. After obtaining permission from the principals, I received permission to advertise the study on the school notice board, and I provided them with the participant information sheet to ensure that they fully understood the study. I then contacted those who met the criteria and were willing to participate.

However, before data collection, I conducted a verbal briefing with the participants to explain the study's purpose, risks, and the voluntary nature of involvement. This allowed me to confirm their understanding and address any questions to provide clarity while ensuring that informed consent was obtained before proceeding with the data collection.

Participant inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Teachers of Grade 5 and 6 learners.
- Have been employed for at least five years at one of the two selected primary schools.
- Have heard about or implemented inclusive education in terms of SIAS policy.
- Adult males and female teachers.
- Personally feel that they are enjoying healthy functioning.

Teachers who did not meet the selection criteria were excluded from participation.

3.5 Research Tool

In this study, the research tool utilized was the in-depth interview guide, which included a list of questions I planned to address. According to Creswell (2014), an in-depth interview is a process for structuring an interview by making sure that critical questions are not missed or overlooked during the interview. The guide contained three questions, which were a set of open-ended questions, so that I had a structure during the interview sessions. Fouche et al (2021) also pointed out that open-ended questions enhance the likelihood that the researcher will be able to obtain rich, meaningful data on the topic.

Clarke and Braun (2013) stated that the interview guide is adaptable because it enables the researcher to elicit clarification on any related issues that came up during the interview but were not covered in the guide. The use of the interview guide was to inquire and gain the views and opinions of the teachers about the implementation of the SIAS policy.

3.6. Method of Data Collection

This study used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) asserted that semi-structured interviews offer researchers the opportunity to pose questions tailored to individual participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined semi-structured interviews as a method of the line of inquiry that allows the participants to voice their ideas, opinions, values, and knowledge on issues related to the investigation. Semi-structured interviews are, therefore, a useful means for getting in-depth knowledge of the subject at hand (Creswell, 2009; De Vos et al., 2005).

For this study, I conducted individual interviews with the participants at times that worked best for them. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews took place in a private, locked office at the school to ensure privacy. Rule and John (2011) described an interview as a discussion between a participant and the researcher. I used semi-structured interviews, following an interview guide that included a set of open-ended questions. This guide assisted me in keeping the conversation on track while allowing for follow-up questions so that flexibility was maintained (De Vos, 2011; Geyer, 2021). Additionally, the open-ended questions were used to thoroughly understand the participants' perspectives, opinions, and feelings regarding the implementation of IE in terms of the SIAS policy.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for the study were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognized method in qualitative research. This approach assists researchers in systematically organizing their data by transcribing information, followed by multiple readings of the transcripts to identify and code relevant elements. These codes help recognize patterns, which are then categorized as themes (Punch, 2016). Once the data is organized and themes are identified, the next steps involve synthesizing the information for presentation and

interpretation. The final outcome is a comprehensive written report (Greenstein et al., 2013; Punch, 2016).

The collected data was examined using six steps by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013) and Creswell (2014). These are as follows:

Stage 1: Familiarising yourself with the data

I recorded and transcribed the audio from individual interviews. This was achieved by listening to the audio recordings and transcribing the conversations. Thereafter, I read through the transcripts several times to become familiar with the data. I further examined the information closely and thought about possible analyses while looking for patterns in the transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2014).

Step 2. Generating initial codes

To understand the data better, this stage was accomplished by me carefully reading each transcript and then organizing it by grouping similar information together. Codes were developed to facilitate effective data analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013).

Step 3. Searching for themes

During this stage, I read the transcriptions multiple times to understand their deeper meanings. The information was revisited to get a general sense and overall understanding (Creswell, 2014). Next, I developed themes based on the codes and looked for response patterns across different data sets (Clarke & Braun, 2013). To identify these themes, I assigned colours to similar data sets, which helped me code effectively and create themes. During this process, I then combined the coded data into main themes that accurately represented the different data sets (Creswell, 2014).

Step 4. Reviewing themes

After completing the coding, I reviewed the themes to refine them and to ensure they accurately reflected the data. The themes identified from the transcripts matched and could be

integrated to create well-grounded themes. Sometimes, themes may not connect well because there isn't enough supporting data (Creswell, 2014). This stage also helped me to check if the data's intended meanings were accurate and allowed me to "consider the validity of individual themes concerning data sets" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 21).

Step 5. Defining and naming themes

This stage involved defining the meaning of each theme and refining the main themes identified from the data. It was important for me to determine which parts of the data should be included under each theme to ensure an accurate representation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The key themes identified will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Step 6. Producing the report

The final report I have tried to provide enough evidence to support the themes found in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I think the themes capture the essence of my research as described by Clark and Braun (2013).

3.8 Trustworthiness

According to Babbie (2015), verifying qualitative research's veracity is all about trustworthiness. To maintain rigour while keeping the study relevant, I followed the trustworthiness principles pertinent to qualitative research, as described by Schurink et al. (2011). Schurink et al (2011) explained that 1895, Guba and Lincoln proposed a model to obtain trustworthiness in qualitative research. The four components to enhance the trustworthiness of the study are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Below is the discussion on how I sought to improve the trustworthiness of my study.

3.8.1. Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the degree to which the research study findings reflect reality. Credibility is established when the researcher, participants, and readers perceive the research findings as accurate from their perspectives, indicating that the

results must be both truthful and believable (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this study, I tried to ensure credibility by collecting rich and thick data (Schurink et al., 2021).

Cope (2014) emphasized that the research findings should allow readers to recognize shared experiences with other individuals. Furthermore, Cope (2014) asserted that there should be coherence in the interpretation and presentation of participants' views. To enhance the credibility of the study, I employed member checking (Shenton, 2004). Some participants were contacted by phone to clarify questions and confirm that the transcript accurately reflected their responses during the interviews and the intended meanings expressed during the individual interviews.

3.8.2. Dependability

The primary concern regarding how the study should be conducted is the issue of consistency and the ability to accurately replicate the research over time. Dependability demands that the researcher clearly describe and meticulously adheres to a well-defined research strategy (Melane, 2022). Shenton (2004) noted that dependability implies a likelihood of obtaining similar results when conducting research in a different context using the same methodology as the original study. In this study, dependability was achieved by providing a detailed explanation of the methodology employed. This clarity can assist other researchers with similar interests in pursuing a comparable methodology to achieve similar findings.

Additionally, the same interview guide, containing an identical set of questions, was utilized across all individual interviews to ensure that participants were responding to the same propositions. The interview guide was semi-structured, allowing a balance between consistent questioning and flexibility in participants' responses. This approach ensured that important themes were addressed while enabling participants to elaborate on their experiences.

The guide was developed based on relevant studies concerning Inclusive Education (IE) and the School Improvement and Accountability System (SIAS) policy, which helped identify key themes and common concerns among primary school teachers. Additional feedback from my supervisor was sought to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the study's objectives.

The researcher pretested the interview guide with several primary school teachers, gathering feedback to refine the questions based on their responses. This process allowed for adjustments to ambiguous or leading questions, ultimately ensuring that the final set of questions was unbiased and encouraged open-ended responses.

3.8.3. Confirmability

According to Anney (2014), confirmability is achieved when research findings are based on data collected rather than the researcher's bias or imagination, allowing for validation by others. I employed a reflective journal to maintain objectivity and minimize bias, documenting honest personal reflections and all relevant events that occurred in the field (Anney, 2014). Additionally, I incorporated sufficient direct quotations to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the participants' insights and how I interpreted the information shared (Bless et al., 2013).

3.8.4. Transferability

Transferability refers to the ability to apply the findings of a study from one specific context to different cases or situations, involving new settings and diverse samples of individuals (Creswell, 2014). In this study, I facilitated the potential for other researchers to leverage the study to gain insight into various settings with other individuals through thorough descriptions (Anney, 2014). Thorough descriptions entail detailed explanations of the research processes presented in this report, starting with the contextualization of the study and the methods employed during its execution (Anney, 2014).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The following ethical principles were observed:

3.9.1. Ethical approval

According to Cresswell (2014), all researchers need to obtain ethical clearance to conduct research. I carried out the study after receiving ethics clearance approval from the University of the Witwatersrand, Departmental Human Research Ethics Committee [HREC] (Non-Medical). Initially, the HREC's approval was conditional. I first had to obtain permission from the DBE to conduct research. Once I had received permission, I received an ethics clearance. My ethics protocol number is SW24/04/01.

3.9.2. Permission from the authorities and participants

I conducted my study at two public schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni. After I obtained permission from the DBE, I received permission from the principals of Melodi Primary School and Siphethu Primary School. I obtained signed consent from the teachers who were participating in the study.

3.9.3. Voluntary participation

According to Rubin and Babbie (2010), voluntary participation means that research participants should not be coerced to participate in a study. Participants needed to be aware of their participation in this study, informed of the consequences of participating, and willing to give consent to participate. Participants were free to choose whether or not to partake in the individual interviews, ensuring that there was no pressure to participate under any circumstances; all involvement was strictly voluntary (Dunn, 2009).

Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, without facing any negative consequences. To ensure they fully understood the process, I encouraged them to feel free to ask questions and seek clarification on any concerns they had. I respected

the autonomy of the participants by allowing them ample time to decide whether to participate in the study without any pressure or coercion. Throughout the process, I practiced reflexivity by critically examining my role as a researcher to ensure that all engagements remained neutral and that no unintended influence affected the participants' decision-making.

3.9.4 Informed consent

Informed consent in research refers to the process whereby participants are informed about what their participation entails, including any potential risks or benefits (Dunn, 2009). I upheld this principle by providing participants with comprehensive information regarding the nature of the study and seeking their explicit permission to voluntarily make an informed decision to participate, as detailed in Appendix B.

3.9.5. Confidentiality

Christensen and Johnson (2008) stated that confidentiality refers to not divulging any personal information about participants without their consent. According to Dunn (2009), researchers must explicitly inform participants that their personal information will remain confidential. This is achieved by avoiding the use of their names or any other identifiable information; instead, alphabetical codes were utilized in the final research report.

I assured participants of their confidentiality by clarifying that only I and my supervisor would have access to the collected data. Their signed consent forms with their personal particulars were kept in a locked cabinet. I also interviewed the school participants in a private locked office at the school to ensure privacy.

3.9.6. Anonymity

Anonymity is more stringent than confidentiality since the research team must not know the identity of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The researcher assured the participants

that their names or any other identifying information would not be included in the research report, which would prevent any readers from identifying them.

3.9.7.Data Protection and Management

According to Wiles (2013), a researcher must process potential participants' data fairly and legally; this information should never be disclosed in any way that can link the participant to the information shared.

Creswell (2014) stated that data must be retained for a fair amount of time after it has been analysed. In addition, the American Psychological Association (APA) points out that data be retained for five to ten years (Creswell, 2014). After this period, the data should be discarded to prevent it from falling into the hands of other researchers who might misuse it. I informed all participants that the consent forms would remain in a locked cabinet for a period of five years, but if my research findings were published in accredited journals or I presented the findings at a conference, they would be destroyed after two years. Additionally, I assured all participants that the data would be stored on a password-protected computer.

4. Summary

The chapter provided an in-depth description of the research methods employed in the study. It explained the qualitative research approach and its relevance to the research objectives. The single case study design was defined, and the rationale for selecting this design was highlighted. The study population was identified, the selection criteria I used in selecting my participants, and the processes I implemented for the data collection were detailed, including the specific methods applied for analysing data.

Additionally, the chapter addressed issues of data trustworthiness and the ethical principles I adhered to when conducting my research. In the following chapter, I present and discuss my research findings.

Chapter Four

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Introduction

The study aimed to explore the teachers at Siphethu Primary School and Melodi Primary School perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of the SIAS policy regarding IE. This chapter presents and discusses the findings derived from the collected data after transcription and thematic analysis. The participants' demographic profiles are presented first. Following this, I outline the themes and sub-themes from the data analysis. The findings are presented and discussed in relation to the study's objectives. Each theme and sub-theme identified is described in detail, accompanied by verbatim quotes from participants, as well as references to the existing literature to either support or contrast the findings.

4.2 Demographic Profiles of Participants

In this section, the demographic profiles of the 10 participants are presented in Table 1 on the following page. I have combined data gathered from Siphethu Primary School and Melodi Primary School because I conducted a single case study, the case being the primary teachers at both of these schools. All participants were black South Africans and primarily spoke IsiZulu and Sotho. I also speak and understand both IsiZulu and Sotho languages. The interviews were conducted in these languages as participants felt comfortable speaking in their home language, although some incorporated a bit of English. The transcriptions had to be translated into English. The participants were between the ages of 30 and 60 years. Out of the 10 participants, five were from Siphethu Primary School (three females and two males) and the other five were from Melodi Primary School (five females) participating in the research study.

Table 1

Demographic profile of 10 participants (J=10)

Gender	Male	2
	Female	8
Ages	30-40 years	3
	41-50 years	3
	51-60 years	4
Teaching Grades	5	6
	6	4
No. of yrs teaching experience	6 – 10 years	3
	11-20 years	3
	21- 30 years	4

4.3. Themes and the Sub-Themes that emerged based on the data analysis

In this section, the identified themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study are discussed in relation to the objectives:

-To explore primary school teachers' understanding of, and attitudes towards, inclusive education.

-To explore the challenges experienced by primary school teachers when implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.

-To investigate what teachers, understand about SIAS policy and how they implement the SIAS policy in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Important Note: Codes J 1-5 are participants from one primary school, and codes J6–J10 are from the other primary school.

A summary of the themes and sub-themes derived are presented in Table 2 on the following page.

Table 2

Themes and sub-themes that emerged from data analysis

Themes	Sub-themes
1. A good understanding of IE does not always lead to a positive attitude towards IE	Teachers have a good understanding of IE 1.2 Some teachers have a negative attitude towards IE
2. The challenges experienced by teachers are overwhelming	2.1 Lack of teaching resources 2.2 Difficulty managing children with cognitive disabilities 2.3 Lack of support from the DBST and parents 2.4. Teachers need training on the SIAS policy 2.5 Completing forms and curriculum demands have a negative impact on teachers 2.6 Poor collaboration and partnership
3. Knowledge of the SIAS policy	3.1 Teachers do not fully understand the steps that must be taken when implementing the SIAS policy 3.2 Teachers can describe learning barriers, but don't know how they should be addressed

The following theme and two sub-themes are related to Objective 1: To investigate primary school teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards IE

Theme 1: A good knowledge of IE does not always lead to a positive attitude

Participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the general principles and goals of the policy. However, this understanding did not always lead to supportive or positive attitudes toward its implementation or sufficient support for learners facing barriers to learning. Two sub-themes emerged when exploring this objective during data analysis.

Sub-theme 1: Teachers have a good understanding of IE

Most participants from both primary schools had a relatively good understanding of IE, namely, it is an education policy highlighting that learners from all backgrounds must be allowed to access mainstream schools and to fully participate in all their activities, regardless of their backgrounds and abilities, characteristics, and learning needs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1994).

The following examples of participants' responses reflect this theme.

Some participants presented as having a good knowledge of IE.

Sub-theme 1 Teachers have a good understanding of IE

Participant (J6) explained that “I feel that its main focus is on children who were previously marginalized by the old government, and now the new government that took over is trying to fix those mistakes by making sure that they get an education.”

Participant (J9) pointed out that: “Inclusive education is important in today’s schools, and it is about making sure that learners feel they are all included, taught in one classroom.”

According to (J5): “I think the term inclusive education is all about accommodating learners at the same school and also in the same classroom by making sure they benefit from getting an education, especially both the disabled and those who are not disabled.”

Most participants understood the goals of Inclusive Education (IE) and its benefits for learners with disabilities and those facing learning barriers. This is supported by a recent study conducted in South Africa (Hooijer et al., 2021), which found that teachers' knowledge

of IE has improved over the years. However, the study also indicated that simply knowing about the policy does not make it easy to implement.

Sub-theme 2: Some teachers have a negative attitude towards inclusive education

The participants who held a negative attitude towards inclusive education primarily felt that the policy increased their workload, as they were already overwhelmed by the demands from the department. This is what some participants highlighted.

(J3) stated: ’I honestly believe that there are many policies that the department has introduced over the years, and IE has been tough and also a burden to apply. On top of that, we have to deal with learners who are not of the same abilities, which takes a toll on us as teachers.’

….I do not know how to teach learners who have serious learning difficulties because I believe they are the hardest to understand and teach. Keeping them here not only frustrates them, but us as well, and it is so frustrating to teach one thing repeatedly while you can see that the learner will never be able to grasp it. So, they should be in special schools.’’(J7)

Likewise (J9) stated: " so these learners can be better accommodated in special schools, but they [some teachers] are clueless and prefer not to deal with the problem, then sadly it catches up with learners later’’

The responses from participants indicated that many teachers' negative attitudes hindered support, particularly for learners facing barriers to learning. According to Adewumi et al. (2019), negative attitudes of teachers stem from feelings of incompetence. While Siddiqui et al. (2023) claim that there is a correlation between the type or severity of a disability and teachers’ attitudes. For example, compared to those with cognitive and learning disabilities, teachers are more likely to feel at ease accommodating learners with physical and sensory disabilities. Research conducted by Bines and Lei (2011) found that disability continues to be a significant factor in the exclusion of learners from education and schooling.

Additionally, a study by Khumalo and Hodgson (2017) provides substantial evidence indicating that over half a million children with disabilities remain out of school. Furthermore, Adewumi and Mosito (2019) emphasize that those children who are in school are not acquiring the skills needed to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Furthermore, research in inclusive education demonstrates that learners have various learning methods, such as careful observation or mimicking peers; specifically, learners with cognitive disorders show improved learning rates when placed in inclusive classrooms compared to similar learners who are not in such settings (Siddique et al., 2023).

To address this issue, researchers such as Siddique et al. (2023), Skae et al. (2020), Msane et al. (2023), and Engelbrecht and Walton (2024) suggested that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education can improve through professional development and training. Furthermore, Matolo and Rambuda (2023) emphasized that negative attitudes among teachers can serve as barriers that prevent learning from occurring.

Objective 2 was to explore the challenges experienced by primary school teachers implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy. The following theme and six sub-themes were constructed.

Theme 2: The challenges experienced by teachers are overwhelming

Most participants highlighted their frustration about the demands and challenges that came with inclusive education in teaching learners with diverse needs in a single classroom. This challenge was due to a lack of training, resources, and knowledge on how to effectively address the learning needs of learners, particularly those with barriers to learning. Six sub-themes emerged from this theme.

<u>Sub-theme 1 Lack of teaching resources</u>

The lack of teaching resources has significantly contributed to the frustration for teachers in implementing the policy by providing support to learners. It appeared that it demoralized their spirit, which impacted teaching and support of learners.

(J4) highlighted that schools face challenges, especially when there are not enough teaching resources: “I believe that as a school we do our best to accommodate all learners, though it is hard because of the resources we have a few but not enough. For example, we only have one interactive board in the entire school, so it is difficult to support all learners.’’

On a positive note, data showed that participants from one of the primary schools could collaborate and work with a resource centre, which had professionals available to assist with cases requiring their knowledge, skills, and expertise.

> ….Sometimes we are able to work with Usizo Lwethu Special School, which is a resource centre to assist learners with high-level needs because they also have an OT, speech therapists, and an educational psychologist who assists with the assessment of learners. But at times, the assistance takes a bit of time because it is the only resource centre in the entire Ekurhuleni North district (J3)

‘’Oh, support of learners is a challenge in our school because we do not have much of resources to help them, but we use action rhymes for those who struggle with reading. We are basically forced to be creative with our teaching methods.’’(J7)

Teachers from both schools reported significant challenges due to a lack of resources. Nonetheless, they have demonstrated resilience by finding creative methods to continue delivering lessons and supporting learners. Numerous recent case studies support these quotes that, despite challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and limited resources, teachers are developing alternative approaches to ensure inclusivity for all learners (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Andrews, 2020; Engelbrecht & Muthukishna, 2019; Themane & Thobejane, 2019).

Nembambula et al. (2023) argue that effective implementation of IE requires resources and tools to enhance teaching and learning. They also acknowledge that the context matters, as the challenges faced in classrooms are unique to each teacher and school environment, as are the resources available to them. Similarly, Mpu and Adu (2021) identified that the mesosystem is the level at which the lack of resources can impede support for learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Sub-theme 2 It is difficult to manage children with cognitive disabilities

Many participants have indicated that teaching learners with cognitive disabilities poses many challenges, requiring teachers to become familiar with specialized teaching methods, which they may not be knowledge with. Participants commented:

(J1) shared her exasperation when trying to manage learners with cognitive barriers to learning: I have about two or three learners who can't see properly, and a few who are hyperactive, and their behaviour is difficult to control, and I find it hard to make them sit still and concentrate for the whole period. So, what should I do with those learners? I leave them hoping that they will get bored or tired and continue to teach others because they are disruptive, not only in class, but also disturb other learners as well.

The participants' responses revealed that the challenges of inclusive education prevent teachers from creating fully functioning inclusive classrooms. Hence, they would prefer these learners to be educated in special classrooms, which contradicts the principles of inclusive education that aim to eliminate the segregation of learners with learning barriers.

This quote is substantiated by a study conducted by Matolo and Rambuda (2022), who found that some learners facing barriers to learning in schools did not receive adequate internal support. In terms of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which underpinned my research, the microsystem can become a risk factor if a child does not receive support from the immediate environment, such as the school or home.

Also, the move towards IE without proper training has put a strain on teachers. Before 1994, teachers in South Africa were only trained for either mainstream education or special education, making them products of the medical model. In addition, mainstream education was not intended to cater to diversity or address the needs and strengths of individual learners. This resulted in many teachers lacking the skills to instruct learners with disabilities (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024; Net et al., 2016; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022).

Sub-theme 3 Lack of support from the DBST and parents

The data indicated that participants were frustrated due to the insufficient support from the District Based Support Team (DBST) and parents, believing they were crucial to the successful implementation of the SIAS policy. Below are some of the responses:

‘’ We cannot do anything without the support of the Department, DBST, parents, and family members.’’

‘’Parental involvement is there, but parents are in denial about their children. This delays the intervention because they refuse to give consent.’’ (J8)

(J6) made a similar comment: “… the DBST only comes after 6 months, which is too late because we are already into the year. But it is the children who suffer because the same department does not want us teachers to fail them, so we have to promote them to the next grade, meanwhile they are struggling to read or write. Now, when they get to grade six or seven, they are stuck because they can’t read or write.’’

The findings revealed that the lack of support from parents stems from their lack of acceptance of their children’s condition. Additionally, the DBST’s limited involvement hinders the implementation process because their role is crucial in ensuring that support is provided to all learners. However, Mabaso (2019) posits that the district-based support teams (DBST) face significant challenges, including a serious shortage of essential human resources, which hinders their ability to perform their functions effectively. As far as parents

providing support, Msane et al. (2023) and Makofane et al. (2024) established that some parents find it difficult to accept their children's condition and fail to cooperate with the school. I made similar findings.

From a positive perspective, McKenzie et al. (2018) stated that schools should propose various potential parental involvement activities to align parents' strengths with the school's needs. Oades et al. (2016) defined the strength-based approach as a person's positive attributes to help them recognize and utilize their strengths in overcoming challenges. This approach emphasizes individuals' resources and abilities more than their flaws or deficiencies (Pattoni, 2012). It entails acknowledging individuals' strengths and leveraging them to assist in achieving goals and overcoming challenges.

However, Afolabi (2014), and Bisschoff and Segoe (2019), acknowledged that the majority of parents had limited educational backgrounds and that their educational attainment is influenced by their socio-economic status and the degree of education. This makes them disinterested in their children's education, ultimately hindering their learning progress and resulting in subpar academic performance. However, a study by Walton and Engelbrecht (2024) showed significant collaboration among schools, parents, and learners.

However, according to Rademeyer (2008, cited in Hartell & Steyn, 2019), many schools have become nothing more than ‘’education dumping grounds’’, where parents expect teachers to manage their children's educational needs. Hartell and Steyn (2019) provided a different perspective, noting that modern education faces new challenges, including the need to assume responsibilities traditionally held by institutions such as the church, parents, and families.

In terms of the SIAS policy (DBE, 2014), conveyed that participation from the parent/caregiver in the SIAS process is required, and they should always be considered equal partners in the identification and assessment processes involving their children.

Sub-theme 4 Frequent training is required on how to meet learners' learning needs

The participants expressed that ongoing training would enhance their confidence in supporting learners through the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies. They also noted that this training would be valuable for older generations of teachers who may not be well-versed in modern inclusive education practices.

The following verbatim quotes are examples of what was highlighted by participants in this regard: According to (J1): "I do feel that ongoing training is very important so that we can properly be able to identify and support learners who might be experiencing learning challenges, and we may be able to assist them, but right now I do not feel I have the skills to do so." Similarly, (J3) expressed:

> I am familiar with identifying challenges that are common to learners, such as reading and writing, but I do feel that we need to be trained more to develop professionally. Because there are many barriers faced by learners that I am not familiar with, and the different interventions that need to be applied.

J 6) pointed out: "It is demanding and requires a lot from us as teachers. We are from the old generation, and we do not know these new policies of IE."

This quote is substantiated by Maree et al. (2023) that teachers trained before 1994 received instruction based on the medical-deficit model (DBE, 2001). This model provided educators with limited inclusive teaching practices, leaving them feeling disempowered in their ability to support learners in their classrooms. As a result, they have few pedagogical strategies to effectively assist their learners (Nel et al., 2016, as cited in Maree et al., 2021).

Participants from both schools believe that ongoing training would greatly benefit them. They feel it would enhance their knowledge and equip them with the necessary skills to support learners facing barriers to learning effectively. Additionally, this training would help ensure that inclusive practices are implemented to close the gaps in learner support.

According to several researchers, teachers must receive training to meet the demands of inclusive education. Training can assist them in becoming more self-assured with improved skills, knowledge, and attitudes (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Engelbrecht & Walton, 2024; Kamran et al., 2023; Maree et al., 2023; Makofane et al., 2024; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Msane et al., 2023; Skae et al., 2020). A study conducted by Tarig et al. (2019) found that older teachers often resisted new teaching methods and the integration of technology in schools.

They perceived these 'tech-savvy' technological advancements as time-consuming and exhausting, sometimes yielding little or no results. The study also revealed that the teachers' beliefs and their age could impact their willingness to embrace change. As habits strengthen over time, it becomes more convenient for them to stick with familiar practices rather than develop new skills and teaching strategies.

Sub-theme 5 Completing forms and curriculum demands has a negative impact on teachers.

The participants highlighted that administrative tasks disrupt their daily teaching, adding stress and an unbearable workload. As a result, the majority of teachers find it difficult to maintain effectiveness in the classroom while attempting to balance these additional responsibilities. Three participants captured this point well:

(J2) highlighted:

> Our job has a lot of paperwork. Everything that is introduced by the department takes up all of our time, and I end up spending less time in class and doing more work on admin so that the work does not pile up. When we return to work the following day, we are not even productive because we are overwhelmed by the work.

(J7) emphasised:

> The individual support plan (ISP) form that needs to be filled out for each child is time-consuming. The SNA form also takes time on its own. There is also marking and

> other admin stuff that I have to attend to daily, no, it is a lot of work, I am barely coping and always taking sick leave because I do not have time to rest. We are working under pressure.

According to (J10):

> The work is demanding on our health, and by the time we retire, we are going to be sick from all kinds of sicknesses. Have you noticed how many teachers are taking sick leave? Every single month, there is always a teacher who is on sick leave. But what is worse is that many teachers have retired before their time, and many have also left the profession

Findings revealed that most participants were overwhelmed by the work that comes with the completion of SIAS forms, and also the administrative duties that they are expected to perform, which has a negative impact on their performance and quality of work. Additionally, many teachers' health has suffered due to the demands of the curriculum. The teachers noted feeling burnt out and physically and emotionally exhausted, stressed, resulting in hypertension, along with depression and anxiety stemming from the workload.

These quotes are supported by a study conducted by Msila (2017, cited in Hartell & Steyn, 2019), which found that approximately 4000 teachers leave the profession each year due to frustration stemming from curriculum changes, burnout, and an intolerable working environment. Furthermore, an opinion poll indicated that more than half of the 20, 000 former teachers surveyed left their positions due to low job satisfaction, which was attributed to heavy workloads, inadequate pay, and a lack of professional status and respect.

These findings are particularly concerning, especially considering that the training and retention of teachers have not kept pace with the growing school-age population (Hartell & Steyn, 2019). Research conducted by Makhalemele et al. (2021) noted low morale among teachers grappling with a range of significant challenges and work demands. Additionally,

Hartell and Steyn (2019) highlighted that township and rural schools [Daveyton is a township] face the greatest obstacles not only in terms of overcrowding, the lack of resources and infrastructure, but also in terms of unmotivated teachers. Furthermore, the health challenges experienced by teachers significantly impact learners.

Since teachers are part of the microsystem, the most influential level encompassing the child's immediate environment, these challenges result in less engagement in their teaching, which probably negatively affects the learners' academic development. This also leads to a less stimulating learning environment, and learners feel less supported.

Sub-theme 6 Poor collaboration and partnership

Participants from both schools emphasized the importance of collaborating with other stakeholders who can help support learners. This collaboration could also contribute to achieving inclusive education (IE) in township schools and alleviate the burden on teachers in fulfilling multiple roles.

"… the lack of collaboration with stakeholders makes IE frustrating and difficult. We need psychologists and social workers who can address psycho-social issues that many learners are facing."(J2)

"…unfortunately, we cannot be able to answer and solve every problem we encounter. We need other experts to help solve some of the problems." (J5)

(J3) pointed out: "… the challenges we are experiencing in township schools are too many and I believe they are different compared to those in white schools or the suburbs. We need help from outside, so the learners here can stand a better chance of being successful."

The findings from this theme highlight the significance of collaboration with stakeholders who possess expertise in various fields. This collaboration can significantly aid teachers in supporting learners, particularly by involving professionals such as social

workers. These professionals can address the diverse challenges faced by learners, their families, and even the teachers themselves.

Khumalo and Pretorius (2020) emphasized the vital role that social workers play in schools, as they help to tackle the psychosocial difficulties (stress, depression, anxiety, bullying, poor self-concept, and hyperactive behaviors) encountered by learners. This support has been shown to enhance both learners' well-being and academic success. Furthermore, social workers serve as essential intermediaries, connecting the school, home, and community.

Kemp (2014) outlines the key roles of social workers in schools, which include identifying and assessing students in need of support, communicating their needs to school personnel, parents, and stakeholders, and providing direct and indirect services. Encouraging parental involvement and community engagement, acting as a liaison with relevant resources, and facilitating teamwork among various stakeholders. These roles are crucial for fostering supportive educational environments.

Engelbrecht and Walton (2024) further emphasized that often teachers in individual schools lack the knowledge and skills necessary to address challenges, coordinate solutions, or promote inclusion, even in areas that may not directly relate to education. Therefore, these stakeholders contribute unique assets, invaluable expertise, and essential competencies to the team. Hoy and Gregg (2011, cited in Makhalemele et al., 2021) reinforce this perspective, stating that no single discipline knows how to address the complex issues that learners may face in school settings. Their findings confirm the need for collaboration and interdisciplinary partnerships in ensuring effective supportive structures within educational systems.

Objective 3 was to investigate how teachers understand and implement the SIAS policy in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning.

The following theme and two sub-themes were constructed related to this objective:

Theme 3: Teachers do not have a clear understanding of the SIAS policy and how to provide the necessary support for learners facing barriers to learning.

This theme highlighted how teachers lack comprehension of the SIAS policy, which would ensure that they provide the necessary support for learners facing barriers to learning. Two sub-themes emerged from this theme.

Sub-theme 1: Teachers do not fully understand the steps that must be taken when implementing the SIAS policy

Some participants expressed their frustration with not fully understanding the required steps to follow and acknowledged that training would greatly assist them in implementing the SIAS policy. This is evidenced by the following response:

(J10) admitted: “Well, I might not know all the steps to follow, which I think I still need a bit of training, but I know that I need to identify in a child if there are challenges that he or she might be experiencing, like reading or numeracy challenges.’’

(J1) pointed out: “The process is long, but it involves identifying and providing support to a learner, and the parents are also involved in the process because without them we can do nothing, especially if the child needs to be referred to a special school. It is a long process.’’

According to (J4) ‘’The SIAS process is all about making sure that learners’ needs are met, especially those who are identified to be struggling or if there is a barrier that hinders learning. Then the process is guided by an SNA 1 form.’’

The findings show that the participants understood that a barrier is anything that prevents effective learning from taking place (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). However, the data also showed that participants, particularly from School B, did not fully grasp the SIAS process. Further, data analysis revealed that participants did not follow or understand the SIAS process by first doing learner profiling, which plays a pivotal role in implementing the

policy, as it is the first step. According to the SIAS policy (2014), the learner profile takes place first to gain knowledge of the learner's strengths and needs before the identification process takes place (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022).

Makofane et al. (2024) noted that not doing a learner profile as the first step is the reason many schools are not aware of the challenges experienced by learners and the amount of assistance they require. A recent study by Makofane et al. (2024) found that profiling learners presents teachers with an opportunity to develop strategies aimed at engaging vulnerable learners in academic activities. This, in turn, will create a more interesting and supportive schooling environment for all learners.

Sub-theme 2 Teachers can describe learning barriers they observe but don't know how they should be addressed.

Most participants recognized the various learning barriers that arise daily in their classrooms and noted that socio-economic challenges affect some learners' learning. However, it was also noted that they found it difficult to identify the necessary steps to address these issues. The following participants highlighted that the prominent learning barriers in their classrooms are reading and writing. (J6) reported as follows:

> There are different learning barriers that I have seen during my years as a teacher, but the common ones are reading and writing. To make example, many children struggle with fluency when reading. Also, there are those with comprehension problems, and their vocab is limited.

Other participants highlighted that it is not just reading and writing that face learners with learning barriers. For example, participant (J10) pointed out: "I had a learner who was deaf and mute, and we did not have anyone in the school who could assist with sign language. Her parents ended up taking her out of the school.''

Participant (J4) ‘’We are faced with learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and experience hardships such as poverty, parents are unemployed, some of the learners are raised by single parents or grandparents, and there are child-headed homes where there is no food, and many other struggles you can think of that many black children are faced with, especially in townships.’’

The findings indicate that participants recognised various barriers to learning, which can be classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic barriers that hinder the learning process (Matolo & Rambuda, 2022). The microsystem within ecological systems theory significantly impacts these barriers. Historically, the support provided to learners was limited, but it has now been expanded to address a much wider range of learning needs (Makhalemele et al., 2021).

Intrinsic barriers such as depression, anxiety, chronic illness, disabilities, and cognitive difficulties can prevent learners from accessing education and development (DBE, 2014; Matolo & Rambuda, 2022; Nel et al., 2015). Additionally, extrinsic barriers outlined in the SIAS policy may arise from the home, school, community, and socioeconomic factors (DoE, 2014). Nel et al. (2015) highlighted that in the school environment, extrinsic barriers can also be caused by an inflexible curriculum and poorly trained teachers. Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) emphasized that children who face adverse home environments often struggle to meet academic demands. The lack of basic necessities such as water, electricity, and financial stability can lead to underperformance among learners.

These quotes are substantiated by Breetzke (2020), Ngidi (2022), and Rachel et al. (2022) that many children living in these areas face a range of psycho-social challenges due to various factors, including poverty, domestic abuse, crime, substance abuse, poor infrastructure, and violence. Bianchi et al. (2021) emphasized that these issues can create barriers to learning, which often results in underperformance and higher dropout rates among

learners. These contextual challenges expose vulnerable learners to emotional and psychological insecurities, reducing their participation in academic activities.

4 Summary

This chapter presented and discussed various themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. The participants shared their views and experiences regarding their understanding of inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy. It became evident that the participants did not fully grasp the SIAS policy process, were only familiar with common learning barriers, and lacked knowledge of different interventions that should be applied.

This suggests that adequate support was not provided to learners who experience barriers to learning. Participants further indicated that insufficient training and support from the DBST and parents were one of the barriers that prevented the policy from being fully implemented effectively.

Despite facing challenges such as a lack of resources and socioeconomic factors, some teachers have successfully implemented creative teaching methods to address the needs of their learners. They have recognized that collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders, particularly social workers, can help tackle the different issues that students encounter. This collaboration can alleviate some of the stress and burden teachers experience while trying to fulfill multifaceted roles for which they may not be adequately prepared. The final chapter will summarize the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter Five

Main Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction and study limitations

This chapter recaps the primary aim of the research and presents a summary of the research findings, the conclusions I reached, and recommendations emanating from my study.

5.2 Primary Aim and Objectives of the Research Study

5.2.1. Primary Aim

The study's primary aim was to explore the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni, regarding implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.

5.2.2. Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were set to realise the main aim of the study:

-To investigate primary school teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards IE.

-To explore the experiences of primary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.

-To investigate how primary school teachers understand and implement the SIAS policy in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning.

5.3. Summary of findings regarding Objective 1

The main theme that came to the fore related to this objective: *A good knowledge of IE does not mean implementation thereof is viewed positively.* Although the majority of teachers showed a solid conceptual understanding of IE and acknowledged the rationale behind the government' push for its adoption, several expressed reservations about its practical

feasibility. These concerns were justified for a number of reasons, including a lack of systemic support, insufficient training, and inadequate resources.

Viewed through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these challenges can be attributed to a variety of environmental levels, such as the microsystem (e.g., classroom dynamics), mesosystem (e.g., teacher collaboration and support structures), and exosystem (e.g. education policy and resources allocation)- all of which interact to affect teacher's capacity and willingness to implement IE effectively.

5.4. Summary of main findings regarding Objective 2

The main theme that captured this objective is: *The challenges experienced by teachers are overwhelming.* The participants emphasised the following key factors that contributed to this problem-situation: a lack of resources, curriculum demands are difficult to meet, there is a lack of support from DBST and from the learners' parents, and they find it particularly difficult to manage children with cognitive disabilities, and poor collaboration and partnership with stakeholders, especially social workers.

The Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner allows us to view these challenges as a component of a wider network of influence. For example, the mesosystem, where ties between the school and other nearby settings deteriorate, is connected to the absence of parental and DBST support. The absence of collaboration with social workers, who could assist in addressing learners' social and emotional needs, reflects a noticeable gap in the exosystem, where community services and policies indirectly impact what happens in the classroom. Teachers find it far more difficult to successfully implement IE when these links are missing.

5.5. Summary of main findings regarding Objective 3

The main theme related to this objective is: *Teachers do not have a clear understanding of SIAS policy and how to provide the necessary support for learners facing barriers to learning*

Teachers raised several concerns regarding the implementation of the SIAS policy and their ability to support learners facing barriers to learning. Firstly, they expressed that they do not fully understand the specific steps necessary for the effective implementation of the SIAS policy. Although they are familiar with various types of learning barriers, they often feel uncertain about how to respond appropriately to each situation.

Additionally, teachers noted that their ability to assist these learners would greatly improve if relevant resources were made available to them. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to analyze this situation highlights gaps at multiple levels of the system. For instance, the lack of clear guidance and training reflects issues within the exosystem, where decisions made by the education department indirectly affect the teachers' capacity to support their learners.

5.6 Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal that primary school teachers in Daveyton find it difficult to implement the SIAS policy (2014) because they face many challenges. These include inadequate teacher training, resource limitations, systemic barriers, socio-economic challenges, and insufficient support from the DBST and parents. Consequently, learners experiencing barriers to learning have not received the adequate internal support they require.

A critical issue identified is the lack of understanding among teachers regarding the policy's principles, rationale, and practical application, particularly in screening, identifying, and addressing diverse learning needs. While a few teachers demonstrated commendable creativity in supporting learners, these efforts remain isolated and insufficient. To address

these challenges, intensive and ongoing training and support are essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively implement the SIAS policy.

Greater stakeholder collaboration, particularly with social workers, along with improved resource allocation and strengthened systemic support, is also vital. Only through these measures can inclusive classrooms be realized, ensuring that all learners are supported in reaching their full potential.

5.7 Recommendations

The recommendations based on research findings are as follows:

- The GDE should ensure that teachers, SBST members, and DBST members receive comprehensive training regularly regarding how to implement the SIAS policy and support learners facing barriers to learning. This will help teachers assess the severity of these barriers and provide appropriate support through various interventions and strategies.
- This training should also provide guidelines on how teachers can develop collaboration and partnerships with various stakeholders, including parents, teachers from other schools, teachers rendering services at special schools, and professionals such as occupational therapists, child psychologists, social workers, and medical practitioners.
- Training should also be provided to social workers who can play a meaningful and impactful role by ensuring they receive training in child development, learning barriers, and inclusive practices. Additionally, it is recommended that they should be part of the SBST and have a clear role in supporting learning through Individual Support Plans (ISP). They also need access to resources to work collaboratively with teachers and families to be effective and make a meaningful impact.

- Policy recommendations should advocate context-specific solutions through tailored interventions that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by under-resourced and township schools.
- The Department should prioritise allocating necessary resources to primary schools in townships to assist teachers in addressing the needs of learners facing barriers to learning. This is especially important for Full-Service Schools (i.e., mainstream schools)
- Research should also focus on township schools that have successfully implemented the SIAS policy to find best practices and solutions that can be scaled up.
- Future research should compare the SIAS policy implementation in township schools versus well-resourced schools to highlight disparities, examine contributing factors, and propose equitable interventions for inclusive education.
- Explore innovative funding solutions for underfunded schools that lack resources to implement the SIAS policy.
- Examine the role of emerging social workers in school settings, emphasizing their potential to develop dynamic interventions that adapt to the constantly changing psychosocial challenges faced by learners.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Title of the project: Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni**.**

Dear Sir/ Madam,

My name is Phiwe Jiyane, and I am an MA research student in School Social Work at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I must undertake a research project, and I am keen to explore the experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in primary schools in Daveyton.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in a personal interview with me. We can have the interview at a private school office or anywhere else that would be convenient for you. This activity will involve me asking questions to you about your experiences and how you perceive incorporating inclusive education in primary schools. The interview will take around 30 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview session.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, nor will not you receive any direct benefits by participation in the project and there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be confidential, and your identifying particulars will not be revealed when I print the research findings as I will not use your actual names or any identifying information. Instead, I will use false names. Information you share with me will be loaded onto my password protected computer.

If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume it at another time.

If you have any questions during or afterward about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. Therefore, if you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to forward it to you.

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

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix B: Consent Form for Participation in the Study

Title of project: Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni**.**

I,……., agree to participate in this research project. The purpose and procedures regarding the research have been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain confidential.	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio-recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance obtained.	YES	NO

…… (Signature)

……... (Name of participant)

…… (Date)

…… (Signature)

Phiwokuhle Jiyane (Name of researcher)

…… (date)

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

Title of the project: Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni**.**

Participant 1:
School A:
Gender:
The number of years of teaching experience:

1. What is your understanding of 'inclusive education' in terms of the SIAS policy?
2. What kind of support and training have you received regarding the SIAS policy since the policy being introduced by the Department of Education?
3. Is your school facing any challenges regarding the implementation of inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy? If so, please explain.
4. How, in your opinion, do the teachers at this school assist learners who are facing learning challenges?
5. What do you think needs to be done to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education in terms the SIAS policy within township schools, such as Daveyton?
6. What kind of assistance for teachers do you believe would improve the SIAS policy's implementation?

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

Title of the project: Experiences and perceptions of primary school teachers regarding implementing Inclusive Education in terms of SIAS policy in primary schools in Daveyton, Ekurhuleni**.**

Participant 1:
School A:
Gender:
The number of years of teaching experience:

Objective 1: To investigate primary school teachers' knowledge and attitudes towards IE.

Questions:

1. What is your understanding of inclusive education?
2. How are IE principles implemented in your classroom?
3. What obstacles have you encountered when applying the IE policy, and how have you addressed them?
4. What advantages does IE offer learners with diverse learning styles?
5. What kind of assistance or training do you think would help teachers improve their approach to IE?

Objective 2: To explore the experiences of primary school teachers in implementing inclusive education in terms of the SIAS policy.

Questions:

1. How has the SIAS policy influenced your approach to identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning?

2. What difficulties did you encounter when applying the SIAS policy, and how did you overcome them?

3. Can you provide an example of a situation from your classroom where you implemented the policy? What was the outcome?

4. What additional resources or assistance, in your opinion, would increase the effectiveness of the SIAS policy, particularly in inclusive education?

Objective 3: To investigate how primary school teachers understand and implement the SIAS policy in identifying and supporting learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Questions:

1. What steps do you follow to accurately identify learning barriers and ensure appropriate support for affected learners?

2. What are the common learning barriers you have identified in learners? and how do you address them?

3. Does the school have adequate resources to address the barriers identified?

4. What strategies and interventions have been most effective in your experience when implementing the SIAS policy to ensure that all learners are supported in the classroom?

5. How do you collaborate with parents, stakeholders, and other educators to support learners experiencing barriers to learning?