

ISSUES INFLUENCING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The 2001 White Paper 6 on Special Education commits to ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to be educated and welcomed in all schools, irrespective of their abilities. Consequently, the inputs and contributions of educational leaders such as principals and school management teams (SMTs) are critical in leading and managing schools that accommodate and provide for learners with diverse educational needs. It is important to note that when managing the curriculum for inclusion, leadership is not confined to the principal but is also delegated to the SMTs and teachers tasked with the academic programme of the school. This study sought to examine the nature of curriculum management for inclusion in secondary schools. A qualitative research design was adopted for the study and a purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample of ten SMT members and 10 teachers from 10 secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The main research instrument for data collection was a focus group discussion with the study participants. Thematic analysis was subsequently applied to analyse the qualitative data gleaned from the transcribed focus group discussion. The findings revealed that barriers to implementing inclusive education included inadequate teacher preparation, curriculum inflexibility, unfavourable classroom learning environments and weak support structures. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, School Management Teams, Curriculum Monitoring, Curriculum Management, Accommodating Learners with Barriers to Learning in Mainstream Schools

Background

The need for equity and social justice within a just and egalitarian society has dominated intellectual discourses over the last two decades (Adigun, Nzima, Maphalala & Ndwandwe, 2022). Persons with disabilities have thus been included in the various discussions in recent times, especially those within academic discourses (Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016; Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2018). Accordingly, the concept of 'inclusion for all' has dominated various intellectual discourses that centre on persons with disabilities, particularly as regards school-going learners with disabilities. Learners with disabilities are a heterogeneous group of individuals, and include those with "long-term intellectual, mental, physical or sensory impairments which hinder their full and effective participation in societal activities on an equal basis with others" (United Nations, 2007). The aforementioned individuals, that is, learners with disabilities, require specialised instruction and pedagogical interventions to benefit actively from regular classroom activities despite their unique and individual needs.

According to Osisanya, Oyewumi and Adigun (2015), while some learners with disabilities may require the services of a sign language interpreter, others may need a Braille machine, pen and stylus or magnifying glass. In addition, other learners with a disability may require behavioural therapies to ensure their active and purposeful participation in teaching and learning activities and to facilitate socio-psychological adjustments (Oyewumi et al., 2015).

The term 'inclusive education' refers to an approach that seeks to address the learning needs of learners with disabilities. It seeks to provide these learners with a learning environment that provides the same conditions, privileges, and opportunities to learn as those learners who are without disabilities. It ensures that these learners are not marginalised because of their disability (Adigun, 2021). According to Adigun (2021), inclusion is a process based on a philosophy and practice that seeks to promote the full participation of individuals with disabilities in mainstream society. Like many other developing nations in sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa has shown concern for the education of learners with disabilities. This concern is evidenced by Education White Paper 6 that deals specifically with special needs education (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). This White Paper has facilitated a shift in the educational frameworks, ideologies, policies, philosophies, and research evidence that inform best teaching-learning practices for learners with disabilities (DoE, 2001). Lamentably, while a plethora of research evidence is available on the various dimensions of inclusion in South African secondary schools (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Adigun, 2021; Hay, 2003; Walton, 2018), research gaps still exist on issues relating to curriculum management for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in South African secondary schools. This study was thus conceptualised to bridge the observed research gaps in curriculum issues in inclusive education within the South African context. The objective of this study was to assess the issues that influence curriculum management to include the diversity of learners' needs in South African secondary schools. Based on the objective of this study, it therefore follows that the research question that guided this study was: What issues influence curriculum management for the inclusion of a diversity of learners' needs in South African secondary schools?

Literature Review

Quality educational programmes for all learners are based on organised educational approaches and processes, irrespective of any disabilities. According to Ozcan and Uzunboylu (2015), educational programmes are not static in structure or by nature. In other words, educational content, objectives, learning activities and assessment procedures differ across various educational strata and programmes. Ketsman (2014); and Yuksel (2014) hence posit that when constructing educational objectives and content, learner-centred activities and learners' diversities must be given consideration. This implies that instructional objectives relating to the expected knowledge and skills to be acquired by learners should be structured so that all learners, irrespective of their learning abilities, can learn and achieve such objectives. Ozcan and Uzunboylu (2015) aver that the implementers of educational programmes must ensure a balance between theory and practice while simultaneously considering learners' educational, economic and social needs.

The above description of approaches and processes that form part of educational programmes (Ketsman, 2014; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2015) fits the description of a curriculum, as captured by Su (2012) and Lawrence and Maphalala (2021). According to Lawrence and Maphalala (2021), a curriculum is an organised, detailed and well-planned learner interaction with pedagogical content and practices and materials, as well as processes for evaluating the attainment of proposed educational objectives. Curriculum theorists (e.g., Jansen, 2017; and Young, 2013) assert that a curriculum is deliberately centred on knowledge to which learners are entitled. In other words, learners' interactions with pedagogical content are carefully designed and managed by key players (teachers, school administrators and curriculum designers, among others) in the educational sector. The educational curricula in secondary schools must be inclusive and inform and enhance a change in behaviour among learners with disabilities. Unfortunately, management of the implementation of such curricula remains a challenging task for school management teams (SMT) and for teachers in particular.

Past studies have acknowledged the role of the SMT in implementing the curriculum at school level (Ahmad & May, 2018; Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009; Pak, Polikoff, Desimone & Saldívar García, 2020). The studies note that the concept of curriculum management in schools involves diligent planning, conscious implementation, evaluation and provision of feedback to curriculum designers for possible modification and development of positive teaching and inclusive learning engagement. Kim (2005) avers that SMTs should provide school units with autonomy and accountability through decentralised curriculum management in a manner that is beneficial to all, especially learners with disabilities. However, teachers' capacity to implement the school curricula has been queried (Ahmad & May, 2018; Allen & Penuel, 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009; Pak et al., 2020). As stated by Allen and Penuel (2015); and Heifetz et al. (2009), teachers' capacity to accommodate learners' diversity is impeded by certain barriers presented by inadequacies in their professional preparation and training for their task of teaching. Heifetz et al. (2009) allude to the fact that many teachers, especially novice teachers, lack a proper understanding of the curriculum and how to connect it with classroom/learner diversities in order to achieve the objectives of the curriculum.

Additionally, teachers sometimes fail to manage the implementation of the curriculum in an inclusive manner, especially in a learning environment involving learners with special educational needs (Franck & Joshi, 2017). Franck and Joshi (2017) opine that inadequate teacher training, coupled with shortages of instructional materials and resources, present significant curriculum challenges to inclusive education. Heifetz et al. (2009); and Pak et al. (2020) add that teachers' perceived failures to adapt and manage the curriculum for inclusive education arise from challenges presented by their inability to surmount the adaptive and technical challenges associated with curriculum implementation. Pak et al. (2020) are of the opinion that school leaders and SMTs should collaborate to assist teachers to overcome their difficulties in identifying the teaching and learning needs of learners with disabilities. Their collaboration should include the application of expert-driven procedures to try out new principles and techniques. This will help the teachers to overcome their difficulties as well as manage the curricula to benefit these learners better.

The school leaders and SMTs should also provide the appropriate support structures necessary for teachers to manage and implement the curriculum in schools to create inclusive classrooms for their students with disabilities.

Researchers have investigated issues related to curriculum adaptation and management in schools. Over the years, many such studies have examined the factors that contribute to the failures or successes observed, as recorded in schools' adaptations and management of their curricula. For instance, Derrington and Campbell (2015); and Pandey (2018) found that school administrators' attitudes to perspectives on curriculum adaptation for learners may influence how well teachers modify the curriculum content to suit the learners' learning needs. In their studies, both Derrington and Campbell (2015); and Lee and Dimmock (1998) reported that school management's concerns and perspectives inform the capabilities of teachers with regard to the implementation of the curriculum, content creation, and their ability to source learners-specific instructional material and assessment/evaluation procedures that respond to the educational needs of each learner. Hall (2015) further states that curriculum implementation depends on time. In other words, SMTs that fail to address challenges in curriculum implementation and/or adaptation at an early stage could potentially hinder the achievement of anticipated learning outcomes.

Jess, Carse and Keay (2016) opine that teachers need to be prepared and trained to meet the objectives of a curriculum that addresses learners' individualities. Jess et al. (2016) further reiterate that SMTs need to build teachers' capacity to design developmentally appropriate learning tasks that are aligned to the curricular expectations for all learners, irrespective of their learning characteristics or abilities. A recent study (McNeill, Katsh-Singer, Gonzalez-Howard & Loper, 2016), however, found that teachers generally lack the required capacities or skills to manage the curriculum for meaningful implementation in an inclusive classroom. Al-Shabatat (2014); and Rakes and Dunn (2015) point out that belief and confidence in institutional support from principals and other SMTs play a vital role in teachers' perceptions of curriculum management and the implementation process for active learning engagements. Unfortunately, McNeill et al. (2016) aver that teachers do not believe that they will receive meaningful support from their SMTs that will equip them to modify the curriculum appropriately. In other words, they do not believe that they will be adequately equipped to teach learners with diverse needs so that they can attain the proposed objectives of the curriculum.

The quality of instruction depends on the instruction content and explanations provided by the teacher (MacDonald et al., 2016). Lawrie, Marquis, Fuller, Newman, Qui, Nomikoudis, Roelofs and Van Dam (2017) provide support for a combination of informal and formal teaching approaches to improve the knowledge and skills of learners with diverse learning abilities and backgrounds. According to Lee et al. (2014), learning activities for learners with disabilities could be better designed if responsibility for learning opportunities were shared through interaction and reflective communication between/among designers/developers of the curriculum and the teachers who are saddled with the responsibilities of implementing the contents of the curriculum.

To buttress this, the findings of Pandey (2018) and Van Gastel, MacCabe, Vreeker, Tempelaar, Kahn, Boks (2014) showed that teachers in inclusive education settings are often perplexed when designing instructional content and suitable education plans and procedures to implement the curriculum in such a way that both disabled and non-disabled learners derive equal benefit from the learning intervention. This confusion arises from their inability to modify the curriculum for diverse learners in their classrooms, as well as the perceived negative attitudes of SMTs towards this practice (Ashworth et al., 2010). Groeneweg (2015) examined issues relating to the management of the curriculum in inclusive schools, and asserts that the quality of education is deteriorating for this special group of learners. This is partly because of exposure to a curriculum which does not speak to their learning challenges and behavioural characteristics.

Studies conducted by Ashworth, Bloxham and Pearce (2010); Hall (2015), Jess et al. (2016), Lee et al., (2014), MacDonald et al. (2016), Pak et al. (2020) and Pandey (2018) resonate strongly with the challenges experienced by teachers who struggle to capture and communicate elements of the curriculum to learners with disabilities. Disappointingly, teachers and school administrators in South Africa are still overwhelmed by the various challenges involved in managing the curriculum to ensure the full inclusion of learners with disabilities in the inclusive classroom, especially in South African secondary schools (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). Based on the foregoing, we acknowledge that leadership in the management of the curriculum for inclusion is not confined to the principal but is also delegated to the SMTs (deputy principals, Heads of Department [HODs]) and teachers tasked with the academic programme of the school.

Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by constructivist theory (Bruner, 1966), which assumes that learning is a personal and active process. This implies that knowledge is constructed from varied experiences. Learning must take place in a realistic environment and alongside suitable assessment techniques for knowledge to be constructed (Seyyedrezaie & Barani, 2017). Bruner (1986) posits that learning instruction must be structured to provide learners with ample opportunity to extrapolate and grasp instructional content and fill their knowledge gaps. The foregoing advances the need for curriculum management to provide active teaching and learning processes for all learners, irrespective of their learning and behavioural capabilities. In other words, learners with diverse educational needs require structured and carefully designed curricula that address their learning and behavioural needs. Hence, teachers and SMTs are at the centre of curriculum management for inclusion that caters for the learning needs of all learners, irrespective of their physical, cognitive and behavioural needs.

While curriculum adaptation, modification and/or management are necessary for ensuring equal learning opportunities for the achievement of inclusive education goals, implementers of the curriculum must be guided and equipped to manage the curriculum for learners with diverse educational needs.

Educational instructors should be concerned about which principles to adopt for the effective diffusion of curriculum content to all learners. Some past studies maintain that inclusion is influenced by several contextual and environmental factors (Anderson et al., 2014; Baguisa & Ang-Manaig, 2019; Osisanya et al., 2015). However, the implications of those factors for curriculum management for inclusion are yet to be considered in existing research evidence and this is especially true among secondary school learners. Therefore, anchored on constructivist theory (Bruner, 1966), the researchers assessed the issues influence curriculum management to provide for the inclusion of the diversity of learners' needs in selected South African secondary schools.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was chosen to examine the nature of the management of the curriculum for inclusion in secondary schools. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011), a research approach is the set of decisions taken in research that assist the researcher to make an informed selection of their study's design, methods, data collection instruments, data analysis and interpretation procedures, and how the results will be presented. A qualitative orientation focuses on exploring the experiences, meanings, beliefs, experiences and perspectives that participants assign to a social phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2020). A purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample of ten SMT members (4 HODs, 3 principals and 3 deputy principals) and 10 teachers from 10 high schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The main research instrument for data collection was a focus group discussion, which was used to collect qualitative data. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the focus group discussion, following the measures suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). They propose six phases for categorising research data according to themes. These phases, which were followed in this research, include familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and naming themes.

Findings

Five themes resulted from the analysis of the data obtained in answer to the research questions. The study findings are discussed here in detail in terms of these themes: teacher preparation for inclusive education; curriculum flexibility and inclusivity; classroom learning environment; and support structures.

Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education

The findings revealed that one of the biggest concerns in successfully implementing inclusive education in schools is that teachers are not adequately trained to teach in inclusive classrooms. Several teachers in the schooling system have not received formal training in working with special needs learners. Hence, they lack the required experience and knowledge for teaching in inclusive educational settings. As exemplified by the extract that follows, teachers lack the competence to deal with learning challenges among learners with disabilities. SMT member 1 said that:

“Some teachers have not been exposed to special needs classrooms, and this can be a disadvantage.”

In another example, Teacher 6 indicated that:

“There is a severe shortage of teachers who have specialised in teaching learners with disabilities.”

The failure of teacher education institutions to generate a sufficient number of inclusive education instructors has been criticised. SMT member 1 had this to say:

“Our teachers lack knowledge in special needs education. I don't blame them because teacher training has not produced enough teachers in this area.”

Continuous professional development programmes offered by the Department of Basic Education have not focused on closing the knowledge gap that in-service teachers have regarding inclusive education and the challenges faced when confronted with teaching in an inclusive education classroom. Teacher 8 confirmed this by saying:

“The Department does offer workshops on various aspects of teaching; however, the teaching of learners with disabilities has not received any prominence.”

SMT member 3 concurred by saying:

“Even though we are experiencing a skills gap in special needs education, this could be solved by organising intensive programmes to train teachers. The half-a-day workshops that are offered currently do not serve the purpose.”

The findings revealed that the processes for identifying and assessing learners who require additional support are inadequate and poorly structured. So too are the provisions available for learners with learning challenges. Teachers also do not have the knowledge and skills to determine the various categories of special needs learners. To attest to this, SMT member 1 confirmed:

“Teachers lack knowledge of types of learners. Not all teachers have been exposed to persons with special needs before, and this becomes a challenge for teachers.”

The participants noted that if they were capacitated to identify and assess learners requiring additional support, they would either support them or seek appropriate assistance for them. Teacher 10 had the following to say:

“Teachers sometimes don't even know where to start in identifying a learner that needs additional learning support. ... Most teachers are lost in making provision for educational intervention.”

Schools have a practice of turning away students whose needs are deemed to be too challenging to manage in the schools. SMT Member 4 attests to this by saying:

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“In the past, we have avoided admitting learners who would need the kind of support that the school was not equipped for. A case in point was a learner who was blind because her vision [had] deteriorated as she grew older.”

Curriculum Flexibility and Inclusivity

The findings revealed that curriculum delivery in school is not flexible or inclusive. The teaching and learning process does not accommodate learners' various needs. Instead, learners are expected to conform to the prescribed syllabus and the teaching and assessment strategies in place, which are common for all learners. To support this, Teacher 7 said:

“We do not have teaching strategies meant only for learners with disabilities [specifically]; we teach all the learners the same way, just vary the approach at some times. We have only been optimistic that those teaching approaches will appeal to the learners with disabilities. We also have revision sessions in areas where learners did not do well.”

Teacher 5 explained:

“Teachers are under severe pressure to go according to the syllabus. The syllabus coverage is non-negotiable.”

Teacher 1 added:

“I concede that our school plan for teaching and assessment activities does not necessarily accommodate learners with special needs. Even though the policy requires us to do [so], it's always one size fits all. The reason may be because we are not sure how else we can teach and assess these learners.”

Schools have not adopted alternative or adaptive assessment methods to accommodate the functional differences of some learners. The standard assessments administered to all the learners, irrespective of their abilities, prevent the teaching from meeting all learners' diverse needs. Alternative or adaptive assessment methods are meant to minimise the impact of a range of barriers on the learners' performance by modifying assessment formats and conditions to address the obstacles experienced by some learners during the assessment process. SMT Member 4 commented:

“I have heard teachers complaining about how the syllabus is slowed down by the workload of having to administer alternative tests for learners with special needs.”

Teacher 9 confirmed:

“It is not that teachers do not want to offer alternative forms of assessment for learners with different needs. The fact of the matter is teachers have not been capacitated on adaptive assessment methods. Sadly, this disadvantages our learners.”

Classroom Learning Environment

The findings revealed that schools have not successfully eliminated the barriers and challenges faced when teaching special-needs learners to ensure that they receive a good quality education similar to that of their peers who are not faced with these challenges. For example, the classroom learning environment, such as large class sizes and inadequate access to teaching materials, as well as the unsuitable physical facilities and equipment, have a direct impact on the quality of the education that learners with special educational needs receive. In addition, the unfavourable learning environment in the classroom results in instructional deficiency for learners with special needs, putting them at an even more significant disadvantage. Teacher 8 explained:

“The quality and adequacy of resources such as physical facilities, equipment, teaching and learning materials have a direct bearing on the quality of education.”

To support this, Teacher 2 said:

“Lack of resources and appropriate infrastructure for disabled learners is a source for concern in our schools.”

Overcrowding in the classrooms, resulting from a lack of classrooms and an adequate number of teachers, has an adverse impact on the quality of education. SMT member 4 explained:

“The expectation by the Department for teachers to handle large classes and accommodate learners with diverse needs [simultaneously] is not reasonable. We have a teacher shortage; therefore, we cannot split the class into manageable groups to give individual attention to the learners. This is injustice, in my book.”

This was confirmed by SMT member 7, who had the following to say:

“Overcrowding in class is not suitable for effective teaching and learning. As long as we have considerable numbers in class, it would be difficult to discuss inclusive education in our schools. So how do I demand that teachers attend to individual needs when they are so overwhelmed by overcrowding in their classes.”

Support Structures

The findings revealed that by law, schools are required to establish a school-based support team (SBST), previously known as the institutional level support team (ILST). The SBST is responsible for determining the support needs of the school, teachers, and learners and for coordinating support provision within the framework of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy. This team comprises teachers, volunteers, members of the SMT, members of the district-based support team (DBST), and other stakeholders from the community (such as health professionals, other government departments and non-governmental organisations).

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The SBST exists mainly on paper in some schools as it does not have the capacity to carry out its responsibilities for identifying learners with special needs and developing strategies to support teachers in dealing with such learners.

SMT member 5 stated that:

“The school does have the SBST in place... It does not assist us with any intervention strategies and resources to support learners experiencing barriers to learning.”

In instances where the school has identified learners that need support, the district office cannot provide support to the school. To explain this, SMT member 10 said:

“In our case, the SBST does its work albeit under constraints. We identify learners that require support and submit the list of learners to district support specialists to deal with individual cases. However, most of the time, we don't find any joy in terms of assistance; we are ignored and kept hanging through promises.”

Teacher 5 confirmed this by saying:

“In my school, learners with special needs are referred to the SBST, and the cases that cannot be handled with the school are referred to the district office for further support. I must say, we have so many outstanding that have not been resolved. In the meantime, learners are disadvantaged by the situation (Teacher 5).”

The participants note that the responsibilities of the DBST are not being carried out successfully. The DBST has a role to play in supporting, training and mentoring teachers to teach successfully in inclusive learning environments. SMT member 2 had this to say:

“We need specialised support from the DBST to enable our school to implement inclusive education, but help is not forthcoming. We are told the district office is short-staffed and cannot, therefore, provide adequate support to schools.”

To support this, Teacher 9 said:

“Teachers need ongoing training and support to accommodate learners with different abilities in their classrooms.”

Discussion

White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) addresses the special educational needs of learners in ordinary public schools. In congruence with the Bruner's (1966) assumption, as stated in the constructivist theory, White Paper 6 recognises the role of various actors in educational processes in the development of knowledge and knowledge sharing. White Paper 6 acknowledges that all learners – irrespective of their barriers to learning and development – have a right to be educated in an ordinary school by well-trained teachers and with other learners.

However, the findings reveal that the main issues hindering the successful implementation of inclusive education include inadequate teacher preparation, curriculum inflexibility, unfavourable classroom learning environments, and weak support structures.

Teacher unpreparedness remains a particularly significant barrier to quality learning for learners with special needs. The findings revealed that one of the biggest concerns hindering successful implementation of inclusive education in schools is that teachers are not adequately trained for inclusive classrooms. This finding supports earlier studies (Adigun, 2021; Jess et al., 2016; McNeill et al., 2016) that echo the need for effective teacher preparation for teaching learners with diverse educational needs in educational environments which have not been specifically designed to meet the needs of learners with diverse learning needs. Unlike Kuyini and Mangope (2011), whose concern was more about the attitude of teachers towards inclusive education, other studies (Hay et al., 2001; Jess et al., 2016; McNeill et al., 2016) emphasised the need for teachers to be grounded in the management of the curriculum for diverse learners. Unfortunately, McNeill et al. (2016) have recently asserted that teachers still lack the required capacities to manage the curriculum for an inclusive classroom. The report by McNeill et al. (2016) is regrettably confirmed in this current study.

In terms of curriculum flexibility for inclusion, the findings show that in the majority of cases, teachers have failed to adapt the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of all the students in their classroom. This is as a result of classroom overcrowding, work overload and a lack of training in inclusive education, as well as the fact that they have to adhere to the prescribed syllabus and schedule, which is inflexible. The inflexible nature of the curriculum prevents teachers from implementing it in such a way that it meets learners' diverse needs. In research by Zimba (2011) at a private inclusive primary school, it was discovered that the curriculum used at the school was not modified to accommodate learners with a wide array of educational needs. Teaching pupils with learning disabilities using mainstream techniques makes learning and teaching challenging for both the teacher and the learner in an inclusive class. The findings of McNeill et al. (2016) support those of Zimba (2011) and are now also confirmed by this study. Currently, teachers in inclusive schools lack the requisite skills needed to implement pedagogical practices for learners with disabilities. Learners' disabilities differ, and so do their learning needs (Osisanya et al., 2015). Al-Shabat (2014), as well as Rakes and Dunn (2015), believe that institutional support could assist in-service teachers in inclusive schools. Hence, there is a need for capacity building and technical support for teachers and learners alike (Rakes & Dunn, 2015).

Teachers are responsible for creating a positive learning environment for all learners, including those with special learning needs. However, according to the findings, the barriers preventing learners with special needs from receiving a good quality education have not successfully been eliminated. Classroom learning environments still constrain inclusion in schools.

Large class sizes and inadequate teaching materials, as well as unsuitable physical facilities and equipment, all have a direct impact on the quality of education that learners with special educational needs continue to receive. In addition, the unfavourable learning environment in the classroom results in instructional deficiency for learners with special needs, putting them at an even more significant disadvantage. According to Mokelle (2012), a huge concern is that few allocations are made for assistive devices for learners with special needs and there is a general shortage of teaching-learning materials in schools. According to Tremblay and Tivat (2007), a general lack of support and resources, as well as the prevailing negative attitudes towards disability, all contribute to the general bewilderment in South African schools regarding individualised educational programmes (IEP). Furthermore, if educators do not have the necessary skills and techniques to teach, this may promote or support negative attitudes.

According to the results, schools are required by law to form an SBST, formerly known as an ILST. The SBST is in charge of determining the school, teacher and student support requirements and organising help within the scope of the SIAS policy. Teachers, volunteers, members of the schools' administration teams, members of the DBST, and other community members make up the SBST (including health professionals, other government departments and non-governmental organisations). In some schools, the SBST team merely exists on paper because it lacks the resources needed to carry out its responsibilities of identifying learners with special needs and designing ways to assist teachers to deal with such learners. White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) stipulates that it will strengthen the education support service, and have at its centre new DBSTs. These DBSTs will strengthen and build the capacity of educators and schools to recognise and address severe learning difficulties and accommodate a range of learning needs. This support has not been forthcoming (Hallahan & Daniel, 2012).

According to Landsberg et al. (2016), many studies conclude that educators are key to the success of IEP implementation, yet educators are still left without educational support. This is a significant barrier in terms of the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to work with diverse learners. Another major barrier is the lack of human and material resources.

Conclusion and Recommendations

White Paper 6 of 2001 (DoE) addresses the special educational needs of learners in ordinary public schools. In terms of this White Paper, all learners – irrespective of barriers to learning and development – have a right to be educated in an ordinary school by well-trained teachers and with other learners who do not face barriers to learning. However, teachers have been overwhelmed by the nature of the general curriculum. They have struggled to ensure that learners with diverse educational needs benefit from the same curriculum content, in accordance with the tenets of inclusion philosophy. In other words, managing the general curriculum for inclusion in secondary schools has been a laborious task for teachers and SMTs alike.

Based on constructivist theory (Bruner, 1966), this study assessed those issues specifically influence the management of the curriculum for inclusion in selected secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Findings derived from this qualitative study revealed that teacher preparation for inclusive education, curriculum flexibility and inclusivity, the classroom learning environment, and support structures are the issues that influence curriculum management for the inclusion of learners with disabilities. Above all, our study concluded that teacher preparation is a major contributory factor to curriculum management.

Consequently, there is a need for teacher training institutions across South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, in general, to make conscious efforts to include issues of curriculum development, adaptation, modification and management in their teacher training models. This will provide aspirant teachers with the ability to implement curricula successfully in all learning environments for all learners, regardless of any challenges or barriers to learning that they might evidence. Prior to and during professional practice, pre-service teachers should be equipped to adapt and modify the existing general curriculum for the purpose of using the same for inclusive teaching and learning activities. The Department of Basic Education and all government supported education stakeholders need to organise in-service training for the teachers of learners with disabilities on the modalities and intricacies of curriculum management. Curriculum experts should be employed to provide retraining for teachers and SMTs in this regard. Such retraining will serve as a refresher course for the curriculum implementers on curriculum management, but also on the learning and behavioural needs of secondary school learners with disabilities. It is important that SMTs provide classroom teachers with the technical and professional support required to deliver curriculum contents efficiently to learners with diverse educational needs. Adequate provision for instructional resources should be made available in inclusive schools. Although the availability of adequate instructional materials may not make learning a real and permanent experience for learners with diverse educational needs, it will facilitate the seamless management of the curriculum as well as straightforward transmission of knowledge and skills to learners in the inclusive classroom.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Studies

This study assessed issues of curriculum management for inclusion in selected secondary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. A qualitative research approach was employed to identify possible issues that could impede the effective management of the general curriculum for learners with disabilities in various secondary schools at the study site. Owing to limited resources, our study was limited to just one of the nine provinces of South Africa. We acknowledge that there may be variations in the reporting of findings when our results are compared with similar studies in other provinces. We did not consider using a quantitative approach for data collection nor a cross-sectional study that compared curriculum management for inclusion between and among various provinces in South Africa.

Some contextual variables such as school location, gender, and years of work experience could affect the pedagogical practices, curriculum management and content delivery for learners with disabilities in various inclusive secondary schools in South Africa. As a qualitative research undertaking, the findings of this study cannot be generalised, but they can be useful to better understand different contexts of inclusive curriculum management.

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