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Exploring the Efficacy of Workshops as a Professional Teacher Development Strategy for Inclusive Education in South African Schools: Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

For inclusive education to be a success, in-service teachers need to be thoroughly trained. learning and professional development programmes have been initiated across the globe including South Africa to prepare teachers. Workshops are well-known training methods in inclusive education. Surprisingly, despite their existence, literature points out that there's still an inadequacy of teacher training. This complaint makes one question the efficacy of the workshops. To this end, this study explored the efficacy of workshops on Inclusive Education (IE) for Foundation Phase (FP) teachers in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province. To achieve this, the case-study design in qualitative research was used. A purposive sampling strategy was used to sample 11 FP teachers from three ordinary schools. Data was collected through document reviews, in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview. The data was analysed through the thematic analysis method. The analysis revealed that according to teachers the workshops are not effective, for the following reasons: (i) the workshops only provide a theory that does not match the reality of the schools; (ii) the workshops are too short and not sufficiently informative; (iii) through teacher agency, teachers improvise to achieve IE. These findings suggest that IE workshops do get implemented in South African schools, however, their efficacy is questionable. Therefore, a proper model for the workshops that will be considerate of the schools' context should be devised. This study may inform policy makers workshop facilitators, and researchers about what is working and what is not working regarding inclusion workshops.

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa and other developing countries are battling a plethora of inhibitors, and that inspires doubt about the practicality of inclusive education in ordinary schools. According to Florian, IE pronounces that all learners must be able to learn in one classroom atmosphere regardless of their abilities.[1] Florian,

[1] Lani Florian, "What Counts as Evidence of Inclusive Education?," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 29, no. 3 (2014): 286–94.

further states that IE represents an education system that is able and willing to adapt to the needs of every learner and not learners adapting to its demands.[2] It is, therefore, the mandate of the schools to ensure that every learner enjoys inclusive education.

However, the mandate of these schools is constantly undermined because teachers as the custodians of implementing inclusive education are not thoroughly trained.[3] This quagmire results in the exclusion of most learners in the learning process as some teachers lack the skills to implement inclusive education in their classrooms.[4] This exclusion is even more intense in the Foundation Phase (FP) classrooms where learners are unable to express themselves due to their young age, hence, their severe vulnerability to exclusions.

In response to the cry of teachers emanating from poor training for inclusive education, the Department of Basic Education devised professional teacher development strategies to capacitate teachers.[5] The teacher development strategies came in the form of workshops, Short Learning Programmes (SLPs), seminars, peer building, etc.[6] Of all the mentioned strategies, inclusive education workshops are the most common and well-relatable to teachers, hence it was selected by the researchers as the focus area. In South Africa inclusive education workshops are considered the primary source of knowledge relating to inclusive education for in-service teachers (teachers who are already working). The workshops are advocated for by key inclusive education policies such Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support **(**SIAS) policy; and the White Paper 6 (WP6) on inclusive education.[7] According to Jama and Buka, workshops on inclusive education have been in existence for almost 16 years; however, it is surprising that the literature strongly suggests that teachers are still complaining about not being trained adequately.[8] The same view is maintained by Narayan and Patnaik stating that although rural teachers are at ease with IE, they are, however, confronted with serious deterrents mostly not being properly trained.[9] This assertion raises the question of the efficacy of teachers' training programmes in place, specifically the workshops. The concern raised by the researchers was also confirmed by Jama and Buka positing that the "viability of such workshops is questionable as negative attitudes and lack of skills still prevail in inclusive classes."[10] This is despite the efforts by the Department of Basic Education through its District-Based Support Teams (DBST) through the allocation of resources to make the workshops a success.[11] The researchers have realised that in the discussions of the nature and challenges of the workshops, the voice of teachers regarding the efficacy of inclusive education workshops is faint.

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[2] Florian, "What Counts as Evidence of Inclusive Education?"

[3] Emine Ozel et al., "Critical Issue Teacher Training into Inclusive Education," *Advanced Science Letters* 24, no. 7 (2018): 5139–42; Chris Forlin and Dianne Chambers, "Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education: Increasing Knowledge but Raising Concerns," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 39, no. 1 (2011): 17–32; Simon Mfula Ndlovu, "Enablers and Inhibitors of the Implementation of Inclusive Education in the Foundation Phase Classrooms of Capricorn District, Limpopo Province: Implication for Inclusion" (PhD diss., 2022); David Kollosche et al., "Inclusive Mathematics Education: An Introduction," *Inclusive Mathematics Education: State-of-the-Art Research from Brazil and Germany*, 2019, 3–6..

[4] Rachel B Mabasa-Manganyi and Mohammed Xolile Ntshangase, "The Path to Decoloniality: A Proposal for Educational System Transformation," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research* 3, no. 1 (2021): 56–65.

[5] Mabasa-Manganyi and Ntshangase, "The Path to Decoloniality: A Proposal for Educational System Transformation."

[6] UNISA, " Inclusive Education ," March 12, 2021, https://www.unisa.ac.za/sites/corporate/default/Register-to-study-through-Unisa/Subjects-&-modules/All-subjects/INCLUSIVE-EDUCATION; UNICEF, "Inclusive Education," May 18, 2015, https://www.unicef.org/education/imclusive-education; Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support* (Pretoria: DBE, 2014).

[7] Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*; Department of Basic Education, *Education White Paper* (Pretoria: DBE, 2001).

[8] Mahlapahlapana Themane and Hlabathi Rebecca Thobejane, "Teachers as Change Agents in Making Teaching Inclusive in Some Selected Rural Schools of Limpopo Province, South Africa: Implications for Teacher Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 23, no. 4 (2019): 369–83; Pateka Pamella Jama and Andrea Mqondiso Buka, "Viable Workshops for Inclusive Classes: The Intake of South African Teachers," *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* 8, no. 1 (2020): 114–21.

[9] Jayanthi Narayan and Nibedita Patnaik, "Inclusive and Special Education Services in Rural Settings," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, 2020.

[10] Jama and Buka, "Viable Workshops for Inclusive Classes: The Intake of South African Teachers," 115.

[11] Dikeledi Mahlo, "Teaching Learners with Diverse Needs in the Foundation Phase in Gauteng Province, South Africa," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 1 (2017): 2158244017697162.

To this end, this study seeks to explore the efficacy of workshops on inclusive education as a professional teacher development strategy for the foundation phase teachers *(these are teachers based in the first phase of formal schooling in South Africa, the phase includes grades R -3)* through teachers' views. Capturing teachers' views is critical as they can inform the workshop designers and developers of the teachers' needs and expectations. Further, it is through teachers' views that designers and developers of workshops can get the essence of the key content necessary for training as per the context of the schools involved. The following research questions, and objectives guided this study:
The following Research questions underlie the study:

- What are the teachers' views on the efficacy of workshops conducted on inclusive education?
- What are the challenges experienced by teachers during IE workshops?
- What strategies can be employed to address the challenges encountered by teachers during IE workshops?

The objectives of this study are thus to:

- To solicit teachers' views on the efficacy of workshops on inclusive education in South African schools.
- To explore the challenges experienced by teachers during IE workshops.
- To ascertain the strategies that can be employed to address the challenges encountered by teachers during workshops.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Significance of training for in-service teachers

According to Waitoller and Artiles, it is critical that if teachers are to succeed in implementing inclusive education, they should be trained to do so.[12] To develop inclusive school systems to capacitate, nurture, and teachers to have the understanding, skills, critical sensibilities, and contextual awareness to provide quality educational access, participation, and outcomes for all students, the training must be effective. This view is also echoed by UNESCO that it would be an impossible task to achieve inclusive education if teachers are not empowered agents of change with the values, knowledge, and correct attitudes for inclusive education. [13] Thus, the education system should design teacher education and learning opportunities that will displace the views that some learners are deficient and unable to learn UNESCO.[14] The structure and nature of teacher training programmes for inclusive education ought to depend on the needs level (lower, medium, and higher needs) of their target pupils (Department of Basic Education.[15] However, Shani and Hebel argue that although this assertion is true, teacher training for IE should include the key IE skills required by teachers.[16] Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson describe the four basic skills that are essential for inclusive teachers: [17]

> "a) familiarity with the attributes of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEND) and understanding their areas of responsibility as teachers in implementing laws dictating inclusive education in the school;
> b) expertise in teaching methods adapted to a broad range of pupils;
> c) excellent classroom management skills for creating the optimal classroom climate and a sense of security among the pupils;

[12] Federico R Waitoller and Alfredo J Artiles, "A Decade of Professional Development Research for Inclusive Education: A Critical Review and Notes for a Research Program," *Review of Educational Research* 83, no. 3 (2013): 319–56.
[13] UNESCO, "Inclusive Teaching: Preparing All Teachers to Teach All Students," *Global Education Monitoring Report Policy Paper 43*, 2020.
[14] UNESCO, "Inclusive Teaching: Preparing All Teachers to Teach All Students."
[15] Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*.
[16] Michal Shani and Orly Hebel, "Educating towards Inclusive Education: Assessing a Teacher-Training Program for Working with Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Enrolled in General Education Schools.," *International Journal of Special Education* 31, no. 3 (2016): n3.
[17] R Allan Allday, Shelley Neilsen-Gatti, and Tina M Hudson, "Preparation for Inclusion in Teacher Education Pre-Service Curricula," *Teacher Education and Special Education* 36, no. 4 (2013): 298–311.

d) the ability to work as part of a team and cooperate with other teachers and professionals in developing intervention programs"

The assertions of Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson emphasise the critical areas that an inclusive teacher must develop to be inclusive, and we concur with them because any training should be targeted at specific skills.[18] This is the case because if these areas are not well-developed teachers may experience difficulties in dealing with learners experiencing barriers to learning. In Support of these utterances Di Paola and Hoy argue that after teachers have received the training, they should not be left hanging as this may have detrimental effects.[19] Instead, training should be continuous, thoroughly planned, and subjected to evaluations through supportive feedback either from the trainers or trainees or peer coaching. Further, Jez and Luneta indicate that for any training to be effective, it should be based on teachers' needs and interests, as the one-size-fits-all does not work.[20]

The importance of teacher training for inclusive education is undisputed — it is maintained in the literature that the failure of inclusive education is due to poor teacher training.[21] As a result, teachers may hesitate to accept responsibility for learners facing barriers to learning because they do not have the proficiency.[22] This is one of the major challenges impeding the implementation of IE, which proper training of teachers may address. These include but are not limited to the following: inadequate funding, teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion, lack of resources, language barriers, etc.[23] Of all the inhibitors mentioned above except "lack of resources", poor teacher training for inclusive education seems influential. It is saddening because a discussion on the efficacy of IE workshops appears to have received less attention in the literature than it deserves.[24] We are singling out workshops, although there are a lot of methods to prepare in-service teachers for inclusive education, because, as indicated in the introduction workshops are the most common and preferred method of training in-service teachers for IE, especially in South Africa. The structure and nature of inclusive education workshops in South Africa are discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

IE Workshops in South Africa

A workshop refers to a class or series of courses in which a small group of people learn the methods and skills used in doing something. This definition complements the context of this study, where the group refers to teachers who learn inclusion methods. Researchers and inclusivists in South Africa acknowledge that relevant training programmes that will be context-based are needed to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills, and subsequently boost learners' performance.[25] Beyond the borders of South Africa, researchers hold the view that proper training for in-service teachers should conform to the following standards: (i) be engraved in the nature and context of the schools to avoid a mismatch of training and context; (ii) offers teachers platforms to express their know-how through interaction with peers; (iii) consider how learners and how they are assessed; (iv) emphasise, encourage, and

[18] Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson, "Preparation for Inclusion in Teacher Education Pre-Service Curricula."
[19] Michael DiPaola and Charles A Wagner, *Improving Instruction through Supervision, Evaluation, and Professional Development* (IAP, 2018).
[20] Rebekka J Jez and Kakoma Luneta, "Effective Teacher Training on Inclusive Practices: Using Needs and Interests to Design Professional Development and Follow-up Support in South Africa," *Asian Journal of Inclusive Education* 6, no. 1 (2018): 22–47.
[21] Lauren Tristani and Rebecca Bassett-Gunter, "Making the Grade: Teacher Training for Inclusive Education: A Systematic Review," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 20, no. 3 (2020): 246–64.
[22] Sip Jan Pijl, "Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Education: Some Reflections from the Netherlands," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 10 (2010): 197–201.
[23] Kollosche et al., "Inclusive Mathematics Education: An Introduction."
[24] Sifiso L Zwane and Matome M Malale, "Investigating Barriers Teachers Face in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in High Schools in Gege Branch, Swaziland," *African Journal of Disability* 7, no. 1 (2018): 1–12; Shani and Hebel, "Educating towards Inclusive Education: Assessing a Teacher-Training Program for Working with Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Enrolled in General Education Schools."
[25] Kevin Patton, Melissa Parker, and Deborah Tannehill, "Helping Teachers Help Themselves: Professional Development That Makes a Difference," *NASSP Bulletin* 99, no. 1 (2015): 26–42; Laura M Desimone, "Improving Impact Studies of Teachers' Professional Development: Toward Better Conceptualizations and Measures," *Educational Researcher* 38, no. 3 (2009): 181–99.

support the formulation and maintenance of the school-based supports structures; (v) provide follow up services and support; (vi) incorporate constructivist approaches to teaching and learning.[26]

The training of teachers in the required IE skills through workshops in South Africa is deeply engrained in the SIAS policy. In South Africa, these workshops are arranged by the district office (*this office is the link between schools and the provincial Department of Basic Education*) and facilitated by an IE specialist, which is a district-based official responsible for the implementation of IE in schools. The White Paper 6 (WP6) instructs the SIAS policy to have teachers properly trained for inclusion.[27] These training programmes target in-service teachers in public schools. The official IE workshops in South Africa are based on the needs of the learners. The needs are divided into low-level, moderate, and high-level needs. Table 1 below shows the conditions for training teachers guided by the levels of learners' needs as per the SIAS policy:

Table 1: Learners' needs levels and teacher training

Low-level needs	Moderate level needs	High-level needs
"Once-off or short-term programme (fewer than 10 sessions) for management and staff on issues of support (nature and strategies), awareness programmes, and policy implementation. These training/orientation sessions can be provided either by other teachers/specialists within the school or surrounding schools, SBST (the *school-based team responsible for inclusive education matters*) or DBST, or by the school's network of stakeholders." (DBE, 2014:15)	"Short-term (fewer than 10 sessions) to long-term (more than 10 sessions) training and outreach programmes for management and teachers on issues of support (nature and strategies), awareness programmes, and policy implementation provided by the school's network of stakeholders or specialists outside the Department can be accommodated within the school but require resourcing in the inclusive allocation." (DBE, 2014:16)	"Intensive induction programmes for staff to master competencies that are required in the support programme. On-going specialist mentoring, supervision and training of staff needed. Training programmes are sourced within departmental structures or externally." (DBE, 2014:17)

The table above outlines the sessions required per the learners' needs in schools and how the sessions should be structured according to the SIAS policy. The plan seems perfect; however, the challenge arises when a school has a mixture of learners' needs (*this refers to situations where a teacher trained for low-level needs learners is expected to teach moderate and high-needs learners*), as indicated by UNICEF.[28] This misplacement translates to a situation of the wrong teachers for the wrong learners' needs, for example, a learner having "high-level needs" stuck at a school offering services to "low-level needs" learners. In rural areas, this is normally caused by the resistance of parents to participation and low budgets for the placement process (*this is the process of transferring a learner from an ordinary school to a special school, as it can be costly*).[29] Further, this results from teachers not being able to screen and identify the learner's needs, and this could result from poor training. Although teachers constantly complained about not being trained for IE, they, nevertheless, have made great strides as maintained by Themane and Thobejane.[30] These strides translate to greater teacher agency in the implementation of inclusive education.

[26] DiPaola and Wagner, *Improving Instruction through Supervision, Evaluation, and Professional Development*.
[27] Department of Basic Education, *Education White Paper*.
[28] UNICEF, "Inclusive Education."
[29] Olusegun Emmanuel Afolabi, "Parents' Involvement in Inclusive Education: An Empirical Test for the Psycho-Educational Development of Learners with Special Education Needs (SENs).," *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies* 6, no. 10 (2014): 196–208.
[30] Themane and Thobejane, "Teachers as Change Agents in Making Teaching Inclusive in Some Selected Rural Schools of Limpopo Province, South Africa: Implications for Teacher Education."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand how teachers learn and interact with IE workshops, the researchers employed the adult learning theory commonly referred to as andragogy, which was developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1968.[31] According to Merriam and Brockett, "Adult learning, distinct from child education, is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values."[32] Another view by Darkenwald and Merriam describes adult learning as "the process whereby persons whose major social roles are characterised by adult status undertake systemic and sustained learning activities to bring about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills."[33] This theory emphasises that adults cannot be taught like children where needs and expectations are remotely determined; instead, adult learning prioritises supporting the unique characteristics and needs of adult learners.[34] Adults know what knowledge and skills they want and how it must be delivered. This theory aligns with the current study, considering that the researchers can safely refer to the sampled teachers as adults and the workshops as education. Teachers participate in workshops to develop their knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills toward inclusive education. Most of them do so because they have never received the knowledge in their junior teaching qualifications.

According to scholars, there are five principles of the adult learning theory: (i) adults need to know; (ii) Adults are self-motivated; (ii) Adults always build their learning on their lived experiences; (iv) Adults are ready to learn; (v) An adult's orientation to learning is life centred.[35] These principles helped researchers understand teachers' expectations and zeal for inclusive education workshops.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research study using the case research design. These research approaches helped the researchers to explore the efficacy of workshops as a professional teacher development strategy for inclusive education in South African schools through teachers' perspectives.

Sampling

The purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed to select the participants for this study. The dual sampling methods were utilised because of the COVID-19 restrictions in the country, which limited school visits. Therefore, a few teachers who fulfilled the sampling criteria and those more accessible to the researchers were initially selected. Then, their referrals were used to get to other participants. Through these methods, 11 (3 from school, 3 from school B, and 5 from school C) FP teachers from three ordinary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province were sampled. All the sampled teachers were females in their late 40s and some in their early 50s. The following criteria were used to select participants: (a) It must be teachers who have once attended an inclusion workshop; (b) Teachers must have experience in teaching diverse classrooms in the foundation phase (grades R-3), which is the initial formal schooling phase in the South African education system; (c) Teach at a rural primary school in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province.

Data Collection

Data was constructed through in-depth interviews, a focus group interview, and document reviews. The usage of multiple data construction methods was meant for triangulation purposes. The methods delivered three data sets. Data set 1 - In-depth interviews: this data was collected through in-depth

[31] Malcolm S. Knowles, "Andragogy, Not Pedagogy," 1968.
[32] Sharan B Merriam and Ralph G Brockett, *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 34.
[33] Gordon G Darkenwald and Sharan B Merriam, "Adult Education: Foundations of Practice," 1982, 9.
[34] Michael Feder, "Adult Learning Theory: The Principles of Andragogy," University of Phoenix, August 24, 2021, https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/adult-learning-theory-the-principles-of-andragogy.html.
[35] Feder, "Adult Learning Theory: The Principles of Andragogy"; William J Rothwell, *Adult Learning Basics* (Association for Talent Development, 2020); Szufang Chuang, "The Applications of Constructivist Learning Theory and Social Learning Theory on Adult Continuous Development," *Performance Improvement* 60, no. 3 (2021): 6–14; Oluwasola Babatunde Sasere and Sekitla Daniel Makhasane, "Adult Learning Theory Tenets: A Panacea to ICT Skills Gaps among Educators in South Africa," *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 92 (2023): 58–75.

interviews with the six teachers from schools A and B. Data set 2 – Focus Group interview: this set was established through a focus group discussion at school C with five foundation phase teachers. Data set 3 – Document reviews: this set was established by reviewing critical IE documents and other supporting documents acquired from the schools. The reviewed documents included the following: The White Paper 6 (WP6) of 2001, the SIAS policy of 2014, and the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996.

Data Analysis

This study followed the Thematic data analysis method to synchronise and make sense of the above-discussed data sets. The researchers followed all the six phases of the method as detailed by Maguire and Delahunt.[36] Phase 1: Becoming familiar with the data: all the recorded interviews were transcribed into written texts to be easily read. Phase 2: Generate initial codes: specific codes were used to highlight key information from both the audio transcripts and documents (WP6, SIAS, SASA) the codes were used to develop themes. Phase 3: Search for themes emanating from the above phase; the codes were used to generate themes. After the formulation of themes, all superfluous data was removed. Phase 4: Review themes: in this phase, all the themes were thoroughly studied to establish whether they can achieve the purpose of this study. Phase 5: Define themes: in this phase, the themes identified in Phase 3 were allocated relevant and informative names.[37] Phase 6: the write-up – this was the final stage of the analysis process. In this phase, the themes were used to write up the findings and discussions of this study.

Ethical Considerations

All the necessary permissions were garnered before the data collection sessions for this study. After the study was approved by the University of Limpopo ethics committee (TREC), an ethical clearance certificate was issued. This certificate was used to request permission to collect data from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education. Permission from the Limpopo Department of Education was used to request permissions from the three sampled schools. All the participants signed the consent forms after explaining everything about the study.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore the efficacy of IE workshops as a strategy for professional teacher development in inclusive education in South African schools, through teachers' perceptions. The following objectives guided it: To solicit teachers' views on the efficacy of workshops on inclusive education in South African schools; to explore the challenges experienced by teachers during IE workshops; and to ascertain the strategies that can be employed to address the challenges encountered by teachers during workshops.

Through teachers' responses, the researchers were able to make sense of their experiences of IE workshops and why they were heavily supported by policies. Although the inclusion workshops are filled with positive aims as indicated in the SIAS policy, they were met with a plethora of criticism from teachers. These criticisms unveiled the discrepancies between the policies and the actual training. Teachers complained about the workshops being less effective/helpful in their journey to becoming inclusive teachers as they only come once in many years.[38] Some of the reasons for the complaints included less exposure to workshops. For example, teachers complained that they were not afforded enough opportunities to attend the workshops. Of the 11 teachers who were sampled, none have attended more than two of the workshops despite being in practice for a long time, with a number having over 30 years of practice.

[36] Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt, "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars.," *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2017).
[37] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.
[38] Maite Elias Maebana, "The Effect of Workshops on School Management Team's Competence in Inclusive Education in the Capricorn District of Limpopo" (2016).

The other complaint was that the workshops were not relevant to their needs and expectations. For example, the workshops only focused on structural matters such as the composition of the school-based Support Team (SBST) (*this is the team each school has, it is responsible for school-based IE matters*) and neglected pertinent matters such as how to identify and assess learners experiencing barriers to learning. The workshops did not cover the key inclusion skills as advised by Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson quoted in the introduction. [39]This is true because none of the policies specifies the content to be covered. The selection of the content is left to the workshop facilitators to decide. Apparently, their choice of content usually does not match the expectations of teachers. Thirdly, the teachers complained that the workshops were not intensive enough as some of the workshops lasted only a few hours. On average, the teachers attended fewer than three times in their teaching careers. However, they were expected to cater to the needs of all learners. This is the case despite the explicit indication of the number of workshops by the SIAS policy. Lastly, they complained that the facilitators of the workshops from the districts were not good enough, as they were teaching irrelevant content and could not answer most of the questions asked by the teachers. The complaints can be bundled into two themes: 1) the workshops only provide theory; there are no practicals and when the workshops are done, there are no follow-ups made by the DBE, and 2) the workshops are too short and not sufficiently informative. This is worrisome because this workshop structure applies to ordinary and full-service schools. However, through teacher agency, teachers improvise to achieve IE.

Unproductive workshops

This theme was the product of the following key questions posed to both individual teachers and the focus group interviews: What is your experience of the IE workshop(s) you have attended? How can you describe the structure of the workshops you have attended?

- The workshops only provide theory

Teachers voiced their discontent with Inclusive Education (IE) workshops, claiming that such sessions are only giving them theoretical knowledge and not enough practical training. This lack of hands-on experience impacts their perceptions of the feasibility of IE. One teacher even drew a comparison between the IE workshops and other subject-based workshops they have attended, highlighting that the former lacked practicality. The teacher went on to compare inclusion workshops with university training programmes, which typically incorporate a practical component. Additionally, teachers have noted that there is no follow-up after the workshops to ensure that they are effectively implementing the knowledge gained.:

> *"The department does provide us with the information we need to implement IE but the information they are giving us is only theory. They never give us an opportunity to do that thing practically. They simply think that we are going to do it. For me, workshops for IE are not the same as the workshops where we are being equipped for teaching content in a classroom."*

T1A concurred with this argument by stating that the workshops are only theory and no one from the specialists dares to come to schools and show the practicality of the theory. T1A added that:

> *"They just give us workshops that are theoretical, not practically so, they don't come and do it so that we know how it's done. They only end with the workshops, so this thing is not properly implemented in our school."*

These utterances are true because even in policy documents, practicals are never mentioned as part of the workshops (see the Workshops training structure in the SIAS policy as in Table 1 above).[40]

- The workshops are too short and insufficiently informative.

Teachers have expressed concern that the workshops are too short, which can result in important information being lost. This is particularly problematic for schools like School C, where only one

[39] Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson, "Preparation for Inclusion in Teacher Education Pre-Service Curricula,"2.
[40] Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*, 17.

teacher may attend the workshop. Workshops typically last a few hours, with some being as short as two hours. Afterwards, attendees are expected to share the information with their colleagues, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. While the SIAS policy does require peer training in some cases, the current workshop setup may not be ideal. T2C from the focus group has provided insights into how an inclusive IE unfolds:

> *"Let us say we consider the selection of one teacher for training per school as a training, it is also a problem because the training is only for one day because you find that… say … it is for one day, you are going to attend it at around 13h00. They would register you and you would be shown rooms. Then, the experts do introductions, then, you are going to come the following day to be trained until mid-day, that is it; we are done. The problem starts when we are expected to come and share the information with the teachers in our respective schools about what happened at our training. You found that the information has been distorted."*

This view was further supported by T2A giving her experience of the one IE workshop she attended in her 12 years' service as a grade 3 teacher that lasted for only two hours.

> *"I have been teaching grade 3 for 12 years, but I have only attended 1 workshop, just 1 imagine!. This is painful you know! because we are expected to perform miracles with this little knowledge. I can't say I have learnt much from that workshop that was organised by the Capricorn District, and we were taught by a guy from the district. The workshop lasted for only 2 hours because he had to go to other circuits. The workshop focused on the formation of the SBST and its functions. That was not enough for me because I needed to know how to deal with learners experiencing barriers to learning. a lot of teachers showed confusion and the presenter showed a lack of understanding as he was unable to answer most of the questions.*

Based on these views, the IE workshops are not doing enough to be considered the only form of training meant to enlighten teachers about IE. Teachers need proper workshops that address how they can deal with learners experiencing barriers through differentiation of the curriculum, interacting with parents, identifying learners' needs et cetera, and be followed by thorough follow-ups to ensure practicality as advised by Allday et al.[41] Teachers further complained that the workshops were not relevant to their needs and expectations. For example, the workshops only focused on structural matters such as the composition of the school-based Support Team (SBST) and neglected pertinent matters such as how to identify and assess learners experiencing barriers to learning, and interpretation of the key policies and procedures. Teachers were able to pick up this mismatch because some of them had done IE as a module in their junior degrees and others were able to get the information elsewhere. Hence, the expectations of comprehensive knowledge of IE and how it must be implemented. Another significant finding established although it was never intended for, was that as much as teachers constantly complained about not being trained, and the workshops not meeting their expectations they, however, made great strides to make education inclusive as maintained by Themane and Thobejane.[42] These strides translate to teacher agency, as discussed below.

Teacher Agency

Through teacher agency, teachers are trying to ensure that all learners in their classrooms receive education. This is despite the lack of training they complained about, and other challenges discussed in literature. Most of the teachers interviewed rely on curriculum differentiation, and motherly instincts to make a difference. Teachers promote IE by shaping lessons and assessment methods to meet the needs of all learners. This is key, especially for rural schools where a shortage of skills and resources

[41] Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson, "Preparation for Inclusion in Teacher Education Pre-Service Curricula"; Inneth Baby Makofane, "An Investigation into the Teachers' Experiences of Workshops on Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Professional Development in Lebopo Circuit in the Lebowakgomo District, Limpopo Province" (2019).

[42] Themane and Thobejane, "Teachers as Change Agents in Making Teaching Inclusive in Some Selected Rural Schools of Limpopo Province, South Africa: Implications for Teacher Education."

is the order of the day. Curriculum differentiation is vital because it allows for interesting educational experiences and replaces standard curriculum experiences.[43]

Teachers indicated that when they prepared lessons for a classroom that has learners experiencing barriers to learning, they sometimes prepared different lesson plans depending on the types of needs. Teachers, also rely on their motherly instincts to identify some of the troubled learners in their classes and then offer help so that the learner can focus in class. The help offered includes adoption, assisting with basic needs (food, clothes, and spectacles for those who are visually impaired), and buying learning resources (giant pencils) from their own pockets. In addition, teachers stated that they arrange afternoon classes for all the learners who are lagging, and through these, they can give enough attention to all the learners. For some teachers, this is an intrinsic skill but for others, it is a skill learned through workshops and other forms of training and readings.[44] These responses were captured from TC2:

> *"When you prepare, those who have barriers to learning must have the lesson plan that is specifically meant for them, and also even in the afternoon, teachers must be able to assist them"*

TC2 (focus group team) outlined the process followed when differently assessing a learner with special needs:

> *"Their assessment is different from that of their normal counterparts because others are being "verbal" like how we are doing it now. So, in that case, the school must apply so that it gets a person who is going to monitor the verbal assessment. Normally, when the assessment is verbal, the person writes down what the learner says".*

T3A indicated how they sometimes rely on their motherly instincts to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning:

> *"We are mothers, sometimes by just looking I can see that a certain learner is troubled then I intervene. Sometimes we assist by covering the basic needs of the learners such as food, clothes, and uniforms. And if the situation is too bad at home, we even adopt these kids so that they can live in a comfortable home and focus on their school work. We buy all these things from our own pockets, including learning resources such as learners spectacles and giant pencils for those who are visually impaired"*

T2B indicated how they differentiate lessons and assessments by involving the parents of the learners affected. The teacher also maintained that involving parents to assist their child at home is the policy they have in their school (although it was not available during the time of writing), and it was agreed upon by all the relevant stakeholders. The teacher had this to say:

> *"The learner would be given their special work depending on the needs and sometimes we give them extra work, which they are expected to do when they get home being assisted by the people at home".*

DISCUSSION

The importance of inclusion workshops for teachers' training cannot be stressed enough, as vouched for by key inclusion policy documents (SIAS, and WP6).[45] However, it becomes a conundrum when teachers are still complaining about not being trained yet the workshops have been in full swing for over 16 years as per the findings by Kollosche *et al.,* and Buka.[46] This ignited the researchers' interest

[43] Dikeledi Mahlo and Hlabathi Maapola-Thobejane, "Early Identification and Curriculum Differentiation for Learners with Autism," in *Autism* (Routledge, 2023), 25–39.
[44] Rafel Argemí-Baldich, Paulo Padilla-Petry, and María Inés Massot-Lafón, "What Is Inclusive Education? Voices and Views from a Carpentry Classroom Workshop," *Social Inclusion* 10, no. 2 (2022): 75–84.
[45] Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*.
[46] Kollosche et al., "Inclusive Mathematics Education: An Introduction"; Jama and Buka, "Viable Workshops for Inclusive Classes: The Intake of South African Teachers."

in exploring the efficacy of workshops as a professional teacher development strategy for inclusive education in South African schools. This was done largely to capture the alignment and discrepancy between policy, expectations, and the actual experiences of teachers. The study employed the adult learning theory to understand teachers' expectations and zeal for inclusive education workshops.

Firstly, the study found that according to the teachers, the workshops are not productive enough, and most teachers rely on their agency to implement IE in their classrooms. The workshops were not productive in the sense that *firstly* they only offered theory with no tangible practice and no thorough follow-ups made. This finding is not an isolated one as was once mentioned by Makofane that the workshops make IE exist on paper than in real life. [47]This assertion is also confirmed by the SIAS policy and recommended by WP6, that indeed for low and medium-need learners, no practical training is recommended or prescribed. This finding speaks to the principles of (i) adults' need to know; and (ii) Adults are self-motivated, according to the adult learning theory. Teachers can rebuke the workshops because they need to know, and they are motivated to learn, therefore if the education is not giving them that then it is not good for them. [48]

The dissatisfaction of teachers about the IE workshops is further backed by Shani and Hebel attesting that this is a huge problem because some of the training content is isolated from actual school reality.[49] The researchers concur with Shani and Hebel, considering that the current approach to training teachers is the same for all schools regardless of their specific needs and demographics.[50] The education approach used in delivering the workshops' content is what cautioned against when dealing with adult learners.[51] This is the case because according to the fifth principle of the adult learning theory, adults centre their learning on their life experiences. Hence, they become frustrated when the content of the workshops covers trivial aspects of inclusive education and does not cover the content addressing the challenges they experience in the classrooms when dealing with learners experiencing barriers to learning.

Sensitive cases are those of a mixture of learners' needs and hosting schools. Although none of the IE policies describes how the nature of the workshops should be, yet based on how teachers described the workshops, one would agree that they may not be able to thoroughly prepare teachers. Therefore, it would be better if the training could take into consideration the specifics (place, physical structure, age of teachers, number of learners etc) of schools before the training takes place. This could be of assistance because some of the information shared during the training seems to be less useful due to the nature of the schools.[52]

Secondly, teachers complained of the workshops being too short, hence, less informative. This claim could be true as it is guided by the SIAS policy on pages 6-7 see Table 1 for reference.[53] This sentiment is also maintained by Palma and Villafuerte-Holguín stating that most directors/principals of institutions in the middle and lower countries of South America spend far less time on inclusion-related training for teachers.[54] Another study by Legodi-rakgalakane and Mokhampanyane revealed that the

[47] Makofane, "An Investigation into the Teachers' Experiences of Workshops on Inclusive Education as a Strategy for Professional Development in Lebopo Circuit in the Lebowakgomo District, Limpopo Province."
[48] New England Institute of Technology, "Everything You Needed to Know About Adult Learning Theory," 2001, https://www.neit.edu/blog/what-is-adult-learning-.
[49] Shani and Hebel, "Educating towards Inclusive Education: Assessing a Teacher-Training Program for Working with Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Enrolled in General Education Schools."
[50] Shani and Hebel, "Educating towards Inclusive Education: Assessing a Teacher-Training Program for Working with Pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Enrolled in General Education Schools."; Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*.
[51] New England Institute of Technology, "Everything You Needed to Know About Adult Learning Theory."
[52] Maebana, "The Effect of Workshops on School Management Team's Competence in Inclusive Education in the Capricorn District of Limpopo."
[53] Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support*.
[54] Elian Santillan Palma and Jhonny Saulo Villafuerte-Holguín, "Access, Techinal Support, and Reading Practice of Students with Hearing Impairment at Three Ecuadorian Universities," *MODULEMA. Revista Científica Sobre Diversidad Cultural* 7 (June 22, 2023): 63–81, https://doi.org/10.30827/modulema.v7i.26984.

workshops were not effective for classroom reality and time is a factor.[55] Therefore, this together with the other challenges renders teachers unfit for implementing IE. This complaint justifies the assertions of Binder on adult learning theory that adults are ready to learn when they perceive a need for new knowledge or skills.[56]

Thirdly, as much as teachers are complaining, one cannot ignore the fact that despite these challenges, teachers on their own are forging ahead to make IE a reality in their schools. This, according to Themane and Thobejane, demonstrates teacher agency.[57] To achieve this, teachers set up afternoon lessons for learners facing challenges, and give extra work to learners trailing. Although some of their efforts (curriculum differentiation et cetera) are captured in IE key policies such as the WP6 and SIAS, it shows that teachers vouch for IE. With these findings and supporting literature, it is safe to conclude that the "One shoe fits all" approach in training teachers for inclusion is not effective. Further, teachers through their urgency go to the extent of spending their own money to assist learners so that learning can take place. This finding is in line with the report by Sellgren maintaining that *"One in five teachers is using their own money to buy classroom resources once a week."*[58] This is the reality of South African teachers, and it compromises the quality of education. However, it shows the importance of teacher urgency in the success of schools.[59] The efforts made by teachers justify the Merriam and Brockett "readiness to learn" principle of adult learning theory indicating that teachers need the IE workshops because they are ready to learn more and do more to learn.[60]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings discussed above, the study makes the following recommendations. Teachers are expecting pieces of training that would start by discovering what they need to know and then move through to key classroom issues necessary to teach diverse learners, and clearly, the current model is not working. These expectations are also backed by the adult learning theory. This study, therefore, suggests that the IE workshops should adopt the "content subjects workshop model" currently used by the DBE, for the following reasons. *(i)* This model is productive because the workshop facilitators start by establishing areas where teachers need help. This is done to prepare the workshop content based on the needs of the teachers. *(ii*) This model requires teachers to attend the workshop every quarter (four times per year), this is done to ensure that teachers can reflect, and share problems regularly. *(iii)* The model further, requires the facilitators (subject advisors) to visit schools to confirm if teachers can implement plans made at the workshop. This helps teachers not to feel isolated because the subject advisors get to see the school context and advise on how teachers make things work. Following this model would eradicate most of the problems raised by the teachers.

CONCLUSION

This study discussed the efficacy of IE workshops as a professional teacher development strategy for IE implementation in South African schools through the views of Teachers. The study found that the IE workshops are implemented as per the recommendations of the WP6 and the SIAS policy, except that some schools house learners with needs they cannot cater to. However, teachers are lamenting the poor quality of the workshops. Teachers complain that the workshops are very short, less informative, and seldom hosted. Hence, teachers consider these workshops less effective. On the positive side, the

[55] Kentse Legodi-rakgalakane and Matsolo Mokhampanyane, "Evaluation of Educators' Experiences and Practices of Inclusive Education in Primary Schools: A South African Perspective," *International E-Journal of Educational Studies* 6, no. 12 (2022): 255–63.
[56] Marting Binder, " The Ultimate Guide to Adult Learning Theory: Knowles' Principles & More ," 2023, https://www.thinkific.com/blog/adult-learning-theory/.
[57] Tsoaledi D. Thobejane, Lobelo D. Mogorosi, and Ntshengedzeni V. Luthanda, "Gender-Based Violence against Men: A Muted Reality," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 28, no. 1 (September 10, 2018), https://doi.org/10.25159/1016-8427/4304.
[58] Katherina Sellgren, "Teachers Paying for Resources out of Own Money," BBC News, April 18, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/education-47964154.
[59] Kohar Pradesa et al., "Urgency of Teacher Personality Competency in Building Student Character," *Proceeding ICEHOS* 1, no. 1 (2021): 111–19.
[60] Merriam and Brockett, *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education: An Introduction*.

study found that although teachers are complaining about the workshops, they make strides to ensure that learners experiencing barriers to learning are not neglected. The study used the adult learning theory to understand the zeal of teachers to attend the IE workshops. Based on this theory teachers are motivated to attend the workshops by the following principles (i) adults need to know; (ii) Adults are self-motivated; (ii) Adults always build their learning on their lived experiences; (iv) Adults are ready to learn; (v) An adult's orientation to learning is life centred. Therefore, for any training focusing on adult in-service teachers to be successful, it should resonate with the needs of teachers as suggested by the adult learning theory.

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