



# Exploring challenges experienced by teachers in addressing learning barriers in the classroom: A case study for two selected schools in Chris Hani, South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the difficulties public school teachers encounter in dealing with learning barriers in the classroom in Chris Hani-West, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The main goal was to understand the support given to teachers in dealing with learning barriers in the classroom. The study used a qualitative approach involving interviews and observations, and the data collected were presented using a thematic method. The study used the case study method. Eight teachers were purposefully chosen in two selected schools. The study findings showed that distractions, reading/writing problems, and disruptive behaviours in the classroom all pose challenges to successful instruction. The findings showed that teachers use differentiated instruction and collaborative techniques, as well as inclusive teaching practices and curriculum adaptation to meet multiple learning requirements. The findings also showed that teachers experience a lack of support from education departments, emphasizing the requirement for more school and department-based extensive in-service training. The study also recommends improved teacher training, professional development, smaller class sizes, inclusive teaching practices, community involvement, and collaborative support systems.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, learning barriers, support and teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

South African school teachers are responsible for upholding fundamental educational rights by conducting classes in which learners with special needs participate in mainstream education. Mitchell and Sutherland allude to the fact that regular classroom teachers do not have the skills they need to deal with learners with learning barriers.<sup>1</sup> Mishra, Hota, and Khamari maintain that teachers are projected to meet academic standards and achieve positive learning outcomes regardless of ability or learning impediments for all learners.<sup>2</sup> When dealing with learners with learning disabilities or special

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<sup>1</sup> David, Mitchell and Dean Sutherland, *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education: Using Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> P. A. Mishra, S. Hota, and P.R. Khamari, "Curriculum Adaptation in Inclusive Education," *International Journal of Applied Research* 5, no. 8 (2019): 70–74.

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educational needs, this can be especially challenging. Harlow and Cowell say that teachers are facing various challenges in addressing learning barriers in the classroom.<sup>3</sup> Without legitimate help, teachers might struggle to provide sufficient facilities and accommodations to deal with learning barriers.

This study sheds light on the support teachers receive to deal with learning barriers in the classroom. The difficulties and challenges that teachers face in inclusive classrooms will be part of this study. The findings of this study allow the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to consider creating support structures, workshops, and training to provide teachers with the necessary skills to overcome learning barriers in the classroom. Teachers are really important in promoting learning and academic achievement. However, many teachers face various obstacles in the classroom, such as effectively teaching learners with learning barriers that prevent them from fully engaging and understanding the curriculum. To overcome these challenges, teachers need support and resources to improve their ability to detect and overcome the identified learning barriers. This study explores the different types of support teachers receive to deal with learning barriers in the classroom. The sub-research questions are as follows: What are the different types of learning barriers that can occur in a classroom setting? What challenges are teachers experiencing in addressing learning barriers in the classroom? What strategies are used to support learners experiencing learning barriers in the classroom? Using these questions, the study sought to fill the gap between the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers to address learning barriers in the classroom and their readiness to address the challenges using their pedagogical Content Knowledge.

Ajjawi and Fairbanks identified the management of the needs of diverse learners as one of the primary challenges for teachers in inclusive classroom settings in the United States.<sup>4</sup> This necessitates the consideration of varying levels of academic aptitude, linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as behavioural and emotional requirements. Furthermore, teachers face difficulties when trying to implement differentiated instruction to accommodate the individual needs of each learner.<sup>5</sup> Mnyamana, Matope and Ndebele revealed that teachers have a limited understanding of how to differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners. In addition, according to Shields et al., teachers may find it challenging to make effective accommodations and changes for learners with barriers in mainstream education.<sup>6</sup> In summary, inclusive classrooms rely heavily on teacher support and training to overcome these barriers.<sup>7</sup>

Within the context of Zimbabwe, inclusive education is the process of identifying and reducing or eliminating obstacles that prevent learners from participating in traditional settings (school, home, community, and workplace) and maximising resources to promote learning and participation.<sup>8</sup> Ensuring that inclusive education legislation is binding for all stakeholders is essential to successfully implement inclusive education systems in Zimbabwe. Teachers, who are the key to the successful implementation of the inclusive education system, must be equipped with the facts, skills, and approaches to effectively manage inclusive classrooms.<sup>9</sup> Teachers should be able to recognise learners with learning barriers and provide them with the support they need to overcome these obstacles. Inadequate support and intervention can focus on the learner's issues, rather than the system where barriers may exist, and

<sup>3</sup> A., Harlow and K., Cowell, "Building Teacher Capacity to Address Barriers to Learning," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 68 (2017): 297–307.

<sup>4</sup> R. Ajjawi and W. Fairbanks, "Inclusive Education in the USA: Teacher Perceptions and Preparations," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 23, no. 7–8 (2019): 735–53.

<sup>5</sup> Nondumiso Mnyamana, Samson Matope, and Clever Ndebele, "Examining Grade 6 Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Differentiated Instruction in O.R. Tambo Inland District in South Africa," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences*, May 3, 2024, 593–610, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024553>.

<sup>6</sup> T. Shields, J. Coleman, and G. R. Simonson, "Teacher Perceptions of the Challenges of Inclusive Teaching in General Education Classrooms," *Journal of Disability Policy Studies* 31, no. 1 (2020): 8–16.

<sup>7</sup> Ajjawi and Fairbanks, "Inclusive Education in the USA: Teacher Perceptions and Preparations."

<sup>8</sup> L. Marongedza, P.M. Hlungwani, and P. Hove, "Institutional Constraints Affecting Secondary School Student Performance: A Case Study of Rural Communities in Zimbabwe," *Cogent Education* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2163552.

<sup>9</sup> Mnyamana, Matope, and Ndebele, "Examining Grade 6 Teachers' Knowledge and Understanding of Differentiated Instruction in O.R. Tambo Inland District in South Africa."

intervention may exacerbate learning failure. Poor skills and knowledge among teachers and support staff can lead to a lack of ability and fear to address a wide range of learners' needs.<sup>10</sup>

South Africa has a lot of experience to draw on from around the world. However, it must not lose sight of the context in which it operates if it is to implement inclusive education effectively. Teachers fear that schools and other educational institutions in South Africa are ill-prepared to cope with inclusive education.<sup>11</sup> DeMatthews et al. and Sharma maintain that the majority of teachers supported inclusion, but only if it was accompanied by enough money, the right laws, and the help of administrators, parents, teachers, and the community.<sup>12</sup> According to White Paper 6, inclusive practices must be accessible to everyone, everywhere, and at all times.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the role of the teacher must evolve very quickly as the demands of the profession increase.

Before IE, it was up to specially qualified people, either from school psychological services or special schools, to help learners with learning barriers. This meant that teachers and schools did not think that it was their job to help learners who were having trouble learning, but just to point them in the right direction.<sup>14</sup> The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) document has made it clear that the process of learning support requires teachers to possess specific skills and knowledge to identify and support learners who struggle with learning in their classrooms.<sup>15</sup> As a result, teachers must become an effective, self-assured, critical, and informed group able to support learners with diverse learning barriers through differentiated instruction.<sup>16</sup>

A qualitative research methodology of an interpretative exploratory nature was employed to collect data from participants. Data were collected from educators and school administrators. This study investigates the support available to teachers in overcoming learning barriers through an analysis of the perspectives of both teachers and principals. This study was conducted in the schools where the teachers are employed, as qualitative research is typically performed in the participants' native settings or environments. The study is structured around several key themes: a conceptual exploration of learning barriers; a thorough review of pertinent literature; the research methodology, which includes the research design, approach, and procedures for data presentation and analysis; a detailed discussion of the findings; and, ultimately, the recommendations and conclusions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The concept of learning barriers

Lassoued et al. view the challenges or obstacles that impede the process of acquiring knowledge or skills as learning barriers.<sup>17</sup> These barriers can be internal or external, and they can be different for each learner. Cognitive or emotional factors such as low self-esteem, low motivation, learning disabilities, or trouble concentrating are examples of internal barriers.<sup>18</sup> External barriers may also include ecological

<sup>10</sup> Oana Burcu, "Refocusing Group Work on Collaborative Learning and Diversifying Assessments in Political Science Departments," *European Political Science* 19, no. 1 (2020): 140–57; Anastasia Mavidou and Domna Kakana, "Differentiated Instruction in Practice: Curriculum Adjustments in Kindergarten," *Creative Education* 10, no. 03 (2019): 535–54, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.103039>.

<sup>11</sup> Raesetja Gloria Ledwaba, "Teacher Training Guidelines for Curriculum Differentiation in a Foundation Phase Programme" (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2017).

<sup>12</sup> D. DeMatthews et al., "Principal Leadership for Students with Disabilities in Effective Inclusive Schools," *Journal of Educational Administration* 58, no. 5 (2020): 539–54; Umesh Sharma, "Inclusive Education in the Pacific: Challenges and Opportunities," *PROSPECTS* 49, no. 3–4 (November 20, 2020): 187–201, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09498-7>.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> A.C. Tebid, "Support Strategies to Assist Foundation Phase Teachers with Implementation of Inclusive Education: A Case of Selected Johannesburg West Schools," *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning* 14, no. 2 (2019): 108–24.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Basic Education, *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Carol Ann Tomlinson, *Everybody's Classroom: Differentiating for the Shared and Unique Needs of Diverse Students* (Teachers College Press, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> Z. Lassoued, M. Alhendawi, and R. Bashitialshaer, "An Exploratory Study of the Obstacles for Achieving Quality in Distance Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Education Sciences* 10, no. 9 (2020): 232.

<sup>18</sup> Niki Lytra and Athanasios Drigas, "STEAM Education- Metacognition – Specific Learning Disabilities," *Scientific Electronic Archives* 14, no. 10 (September 29, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.36560/141020211442>.

factors such as restricted access to assets, insufficient marketing strategies, or social and language differences.<sup>19</sup>

The primary impediments to these learners' learning, according to Cain et al., were a lack of parental support, a lack of self-confidence, and limited access to educational resources.<sup>20</sup> Although Rizvi and Nabi and Sibanda-Kunda and Chibwe analysed the learning barriers experienced by learners with learning challenges/ hindrances in the mainstream, they distinguished factors such as absence of proper facilities, negative perspectives of teachers and companions, and restricted admittance to assistive innovations as critical barriers to learning.<sup>21</sup> To ensure that all learners have access to effective and inclusive learning environments, teachers and policymakers must first identify and remove these obstacles. Learning barriers, such as physical barriers, including mobility barriers, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and disabilities, may prevent a learner from accessing the materials they need to learn. An emotional barrier, such as anxiety or stress, may make it difficult for learners to focus on the task at hand. A cognitive barrier, such as poor concentration, can make it difficult for a learner to focus, take in information, and retain what they have learned.<sup>22</sup>

### Challenges teachers face in addressing learning barriers in the classroom

Teachers face numerous difficulties in managing learning barriers in the classroom, including addressing individual needs and adapting teaching strategies. Adams and Hitchcock highlight that teachers deal with learners' diverse assets and challenges, limited resources, and insufficient support from administrators.<sup>23</sup> Graham and Weiner emphasize the difficulty of adjusting strategies for different learning styles.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Lepore and Brown note that managing classroom behaviour and disciplinary issues can also be problematic.<sup>25</sup> Ianes et al. stress the need for cooperation between teachers, schools, and parents to address these issues.<sup>26</sup>

The challenge of overcoming language barriers is another significant obstacle for teachers. To effectively assist learners who do not understand the language of instruction, teachers must have the requisite knowledge and skills. Llosa and Snyder posit that the inability to comprehend language can be a significant learning obstacle detrimental to academic achievement.<sup>27</sup> Harlow and Cowell further opine that teachers face various challenges in addressing learning barriers in the classroom.<sup>28</sup> Gallagher and Holmes also point out the need for culturally responsive pedagogy to support the increasing cultural diversity in classrooms.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>19</sup> I.U. Iruka et al., "Examining How Rural Ecological Contexts Influence Children's Early Learning Opportunities," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 52 (2020): 15–29.

<sup>20</sup> M. Cain et al., "Barriers to Physical Activity for Australian Students with Vision Impairment," *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 2023, 1–19.

<sup>21</sup> Y.S. Rizvi and A. Nabi, "Transformation of Learning from Real to Virtual: An Exploratory-Descriptive Analysis of Issues and Challenges," *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning* 14, no. 1 (2021): 5–17; J. Nyirenda, J.T. Sibanda-Kunda, and J. Chibwe, "Challenges of Inclusive Schooling on Academic Performance of Students with Visual Impairment at Munali Boy's Secondary School, Zambia," *European Journal of Special Education Research* 6, no. 3 (2020).

<sup>22</sup> Stephen L. Chew and William J. Cerbin, "The Cognitive Challenges of Effective Teaching," *The Journal of Economic Education* 52, no. 1 (2021): 17–40.

<sup>23</sup> C. M. Adams and C. H. Hitchcock, "Learning Barriers for Students with Disabilities," *Intervention in School and Clinic* 52, no. 2 (2017): 93–99.

<sup>24</sup> S. Graham and B. Weiner, "Teachers' Views on Students' Writing and Remediation Practices: Implications for Writing Instruction," *Reading and Writing* 30, no. 7 (2017): 1443–67.

<sup>25</sup> A. Lepore and K. Brown, "Supporting Challenging Behaviours in the Classroom: Strategies and Resources for Effective Implementation," *Intervention in School and Clinic* 54, no. 2 (2019): 123–30.

<sup>26</sup> D. Ianes, H. Demo, and S. Dell'Anna, "Inclusive Education in Italy: Historical Steps, Positive Developments, and Challenges," *Prospects* 49, no. 3–4 (2020): 249–63.

<sup>27</sup> L. Llosa and J. Snyder, "Preparing Teachers to Work with English Learners: Designing and Aligning Teacher Preparation Programs," *Journal of Teacher Education* 68, no. 1 (2017): 62–74.

<sup>28</sup> Harlow and Cowell, "Building Teacher Capacity to Address Barriers to Learning."

<sup>29</sup> T. Gallagher and S. Holmes, "Interpreting the Diverse Needs of Students: A Framework for Developing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 20, no. 1 (2018): 81–95.

## Strategies used to support learners experiencing learning barriers in the classroom

Teachers can use a variety of methods to ensure that learners get the help they need to do well at school. Differentiated instruction tailors teaching strategies to individual needs, such as using additional practice or audiobooks for learners with reading challenges.<sup>30</sup> Universal Design for Learning (UDL) offers various ways to present, express, and engage with material, using multimedia and various methods of assessment.<sup>31</sup>

Loh and Ang suggest that cooperative learning provides peer support and improves skills through activities such as peer tutoring and group projects.<sup>32</sup> Assistive technology, such as text-to-speech and speech recognition tools, can also support learners with disabilities.<sup>33</sup> Creating a positive and inclusive classroom environment, as noted by Ferrán, Hofman and Schraepen, helps learners feel valued and supported.<sup>34</sup> Teachers should adapt their methods to accommodate different learning styles and needs.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Psychologist Albert Bandura developed Social Learning Theory, which is also known as Social Cognitive Theory, in 1977 as an extension of behaviourism. According to the Social cognitive theory, learning occurs through a process of observational learning, in which individuals observe and model the behaviour of others. This theory suggests that teachers can help learners overcome learning barriers by providing opportunities for observational learning, such as observing and modelling appropriate behaviour. Social cognitive theory also suggests that individuals learn by receiving feedback on their performance and by experiencing rewards or consequences for their actions. Teachers can use this information to provide appropriate feedback and rewards to help learners overcome learning barriers.

Social cognitive theory is relevant to the study of teacher support to overcome classroom learning barriers. Social support and modelling are two examples of the impact of the environment on shaping human behaviour and learning, according to this theory. Teachers play a crucial role as role models and social agents for their learners in the classroom. As a result, learners' self-efficacy, motivation, and overall academic performance can be significantly improved by providing teachers with sufficient support to overcome learning barriers. Moreover, the Social cognitive theory features the meaning of perception, self-guidelines, and inspiration in moulding learning behaviour, which are basic abilities that teachers can foster themselves and elevate in their learners to overcome learning barriers. Therefore, the study looked at how teachers framed their interventions to address learners' learning barriers within the social context. This meant that teachers could use shaping principles and motivation approaches through the provision of social support to learners.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research methodology of an interpretative exploratory nature was employed to collect data from participants. The researcher asked the teachers and principals who participated in the study open-ended questions from which textual data were created to understand the participants' experiences. The use of open-ended questions during interviews allowed the researcher to probe the participants further, as it allowed them to dig deeper into the problem being explored.

This study used a case study design to explore the support for teachers handling learning barriers. Non-probability or purposive sampling was used for sampling in this study. The researcher purposively sampled two schools in the Chris Hani District, West. Three teachers and one principal were selected from each school, resulting in a total of two principals and six teachers. Ethical considerations included the assurance of confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and permission. As this study is drawn

<sup>30</sup> Carol Ann Tomlinson, "Differentiated Instruction," in *Fundamentals of Gifted Education* (Second edition. | New York, NY : Routledge, 2017: Routledge, 2017), 279–92, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315639987-26>.

<sup>31</sup> CAST, "Universal Design for Learning Guidelines Version 2.2. ." 2018, <http://udlguidelines.cast.org>.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Chee-Yen Loh and Chin-Siang Ang, "Unravelling Cooperative Learning in Higher Education," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 5, no. 2 (2020): 22–39.

<sup>33</sup> Sarah Ko and Linda S Petty, "Assistive Technology Accommodations for Post-Secondary Students with Mental Health Disabilities: A Scoping Review," *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology* 17, no. 7 (2022): 760–66.

<sup>34</sup> Olga Rodríguez Ferrán, Bart Hofman, and Beno Schraepen, *Inclusive Education: Research and Practice* (Wanceulen SL, 2023).

from a broader Bachelor of Education Honours degree mini-dissertation, the researcher first obtained ethical clearance from the Walter Sisulu University. This clearance was used to obtain permission from the Department of Education (Chris Hani District). Armed with the letter from the district office, permission was sought from the school principals. Participants were first informed of their role and responsibilities in the study, as well as their informed consent, before agreeing to participate in the study.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Data was collected through interviews with eight participants from two schools, coded School P and School S. The participants were identified as PT1-PT4 and ST1-ST4. The findings of this study are classified into themes from the data collected when the researcher conducted interviews and observations.

### **Theme 1: Challenges that teachers experience when dealing with learning barriers in the classrooms**

The following first-person anecdotes capture the numerous obstacles teachers face in addressing learning barriers and implementing inclusive education in their classrooms. These verbatim accounts underscore the difficulties teachers face, which range from parental disengagement to insufficient resources, overcrowded classrooms, and the difficulty of responding to unique learning requirements. These testimonials shed light on the multiple challenges that teachers face when trying to offer a quality education to all children in the midst of numerous obstacles. The following themes emerged from the data:

#### **Learner- related Challenges**

Learners often face a variety of obstacles in educational settings that impede their academic success and general participation. Writing, reading, conceptual comprehension, problem-solving, memory retention, and information processing are among the core areas of learning addressed by these tasks. Furthermore, these issues can arise in a variety of ways, ranging from a lack of confidence and sporadic attendance to incomplete or incorrectly completed assignments. Furthermore, behavioural disorders, along with fragility and a reserved manner, provide significant challenges for teachers, making it difficult to effectively assess learners' comprehension and give targeted help. The following are firsthand anecdotes offered by teachers that capture the complexity and subtleties of these learner-specific difficulties in the educational landscape.

*PT1: We are facing many challenges when it comes to dealing with learning barriers because some learners are having difficulties in writing and reading their schoolwork. Learners' cognitive development is slow, and they are struggling when it comes to understanding concepts, problem-solving, memory retention or processing information.*

*PT2: Some of my learners are struggling to write and copy notes from the chalkboard. If they are copying notes from the chalkboard, they write something that is totally different from what is written on the chalkboard.*

Some of my learners are vulnerable and quiet and that makes it hard to tell whether they understand what is being taught in class, or they were born like that and parents do not provide much information about a learner, so the teacher can identify the specific barriers that a learner is facing.

*PT4: Learners do not do their schoolwork properly, and they are not motivated to participate in the classroom. But some learners are good when it comes to playing soccer, netball or singing.*

*ST8: There is a challenge when it comes to the admission of large numbers of learners, which poses problems. Not every teacher is familiar with the application of differentiation during lessons. Learners*

*themselves find it difficult to accept themselves as having a barrier, so this poses problems once identified.*

These teacher statements give a deep insight into the diverse nature of the problems that learners face on their learning journey. These challenges have a substantial influence on a learner's overall development since they affect not only academic success but also emotional and behavioural components. Addressing these difficulties requires a multifaceted strategy that includes individualized support, collaborative efforts among teachers, parent participation, and a supportive learning environment. Understanding these barriers is critical to developing successful solutions to empower learners and foster an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

### **Parental and Home Situation Challenges**

Parental engagement and support are critical in determining a child's educational path and general well-being. However, some learners face significant challenges as a result of parental disengagement in their academic achievement and negligence in providing the necessary care. The lack of parental support not only affects a learner's confidence but also manifests in physical ways, such as untidy uniforms, which affects their self-esteem and academic performance dramatically. The following are firsthand testimonials from teachers that shed light on the issues that result from poor parental participation and home environment neglect, as well as the consequences for learners in the educational environment.

*PT1: We, as teachers we also face challenges when it comes to a lack of support from parents. Some parents are not caring and supportive of their children's school work; instead, they just send their children to school without having an interest in their academic performance or the overall mental well-being of the child. You will find that it is a Monday morning, but the children's uniforms are dirty, and show how the parents of the learner are not caring people and play a crucial role in learners' behaviour and academic performance, because a learner ends up losing self-confidence and his/her academic performance can be negatively affected.*

*PT2: Some of my learners are vulnerable and quiet, and that makes it hard to tell whether they understand what is being taught in class, or they were born like that, and parents do not provide much information about a learner, so the teacher can be able to identify the specific barriers that a learner is facing.*

*PT4: Some of the challenges I face are that learners lack confidence due to their learning barriers, to the extent that they do not attend school regularly. This is making things hard for us as teachers because the learners are dragging us as we have to repeat what we have taught when they were not at school.*

*ST5: Some learners also have behavioural issues that make it difficult for us as teachers to focus on the curriculum. As teachers, we often feel the lack of support from the school administration and from parents.*

These responses from teachers clearly portray the repercussions of deficient parental help and disregard in a learner's essential consideration on their educational advancement. The absence of parental inclusion hampers scholarly execution and incurs profound misery, reducing a learner's certainty and hindering their scholastic accomplishments. Perceiving the critical role of guardians in sustaining a favourable learning climate, these responses highlight the requirement for cooperative endeavours among teachers and guardians to guarantee a steady structure for each learner's prosperity.

### **Classroom and Teaching Environment Challenges**

Classroom conditions significantly impact the viability of schooling, especially in addressing the different advancing requirements of learners with learning barriers. In any case, teachers often face significant difficulties due to overcrowded classrooms and the absence of fundamental assets and

devices. The battle to oversee different necessities, particularly for learners confronting obstacles, is exacerbated in settings with restricted assets and enormous class sizes. Moreover, the recognisable proof and tendency of individual learner needs become progressively complicated in such conditions. The following are narratives from teachers, revealing insight into the intricacies emerging from congestion, asset deficiency, and troubles in taking care of assorted needs within the classroom setting.

*T3: Classrooms are overcrowded, and learners with learning barriers are a part of those classrooms. I am struggling to manage the classrooms because learners with barriers require a lot of support, and that makes it hard for me to support all learners in an overcrowded classroom.*

There is a lack of resources to help us as teachers meet the diverse learning needs and abilities of all learners. It is important for us as teachers to consider various resources and assistive technologies for learners to reach their full potential.

*ST5: We as teachers experience a lack of resources, large class sizes, and a lack of teacher training on how to support learners with barriers. These are crucial when implementing inclusive education in schools.*

*ST6: There is a lack of resources and support, which includes a lack of materials and technology, as well as a lack of training and professional development opportunities. Additionally, we find it difficult to identify and address the specific needs of individual learners, especially in large classes. We also struggle to communicate the relevance of the subject matter to learners who are disengaged or unmotivated. As teachers, we face administrative challenges, such as a lack of time to properly address learning barriers in the classroom.*

These responses clarify the imposing difficulties teachers face inside overcrowded classrooms, grappling with restricted assets to address different emerging necessities. Crowded classrooms present obstacles in offering satisfactory help to learners with barriers, frequently altering their true capacity for scholastic development. The shortage of assistive resources further compromises learning, making it difficult to match instructing techniques with individual learner needs. These accounts highlight the compelling need for interest in assets, more modest class sizes, and methodologies working with customised learning approaches, guaranteeing that each learner receives the fundamental support for their educational journey.

### **Educational System and Managerial Encounters**

Teachers face a slew of obstacles in the educational environment, many of which are rooted in the institutional framework and administrative restraints that limit their capacity to effectively help learners with hurdles. Inadequate teacher training and professional development in tactics geared to varied learning needs is a major barrier to offering inclusive education. Furthermore, administrative obstacles such as time limits and a lack of required assistance hamper the implementation of efficient teaching approaches. Furthermore, learners' hesitation or difficulty in admitting their limitations adds another degree of complication. Firsthand perspectives from teachers are provided here, illuminating the structural and administrative hurdles that impede attempts to provide an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all children.

*PT3: There is a lack of resources to help us as teachers to cater for the diverse learning needs and abilities of all learners. It is important for us as teachers to consider various resources and assistive technologies for learners to reach their full potential.*

*ST5: We as teachers experience a lack of resources, large class sizes, and a lack of teacher training on how to support learners with barriers. These are crucial when implementing inclusive education in schools. As teachers, we often feel the lack of support from the school administration and from parents.*

ST6: *There is a lack of resources and support, which includes a lack of materials and technology, as well as a lack of training and professional development opportunities. Additionally, we find it difficult to identify and address the specific needs of individual learners, especially in large classes. We also struggle to communicate the relevance of the subject matter to learners who are disengaged or unmotivated. As teachers, we face administrative challenges, such as a lack of time to properly address learning barriers in the classroom.*

ST7: *The challenge is that there is not enough time, but as a teacher, you must go the extra mile in everything that you are doing so that your goals can be achieved. Another challenge is that it is hard to manage a classroom that has learners with learning barriers, as they need more support and attention when dealing with them.*

These responses highlight the structural barriers and administrative restrictions that teachers face when trying to provide inclusive education. The lack of adequate teacher training and professional development limits their ability to successfully meet varied learning requirements. Furthermore, administrative difficulties, such as a lack of resources and support, impede the adoption of inclusive teaching techniques. Furthermore, learners' failure to recognise their own barriers adds another degree of complication. These narratives emphasise the critical importance of thorough teacher training, administrative support, and measures to encourage learners' acceptance of their hurdles, all of which are critical components of establishing an inclusive educational system.

## **Theme 2: Strategies teachers use to support learners with learning barriers in the classroom**

It is critical to classify teacher practices and techniques when examining them to better understand how teachers handle varied learning needs and build inclusive environments within educational settings. The following breakdown highlights significant themes and emphases present in the tactics used by these teachers to serve learners with varying learning needs. These categories illustrate the many facets of teaching techniques as well as the various efforts made to promote inclusive learning environments.

### **Inclusive Education Practices and Curriculum Adaptation**

Teachers function as builders of an environment that celebrates diversity and accommodates varied learning requirements in the quest for inclusive education. The reports to come capture the many ways teachers use to achieve diversity in teaching practices and curriculum adaptation. These accounts shed light on the proactive steps teachers take to personalise their methods, work with stakeholders, and meet the unique needs of their learners.

PT1: *We as teachers collaborate with stakeholders by establishing strong partnerships with parents, caregivers, and support staff to identify and address specific learner needs. We work together to create an inclusive learning environment where everyone feels valued and supported. As a teacher, I recognise and celebrate the diversity of all learners, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties, or from different cultural backgrounds. When planning and implementing educational activities, I consider learners' individual needs and abilities.*

*As a teacher, I try all means to provide differentiated instruction for all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. Sometimes I adapt teaching strategies and resources to meet the diverse learning needs of all learners using various teaching methods, materials, and assessment approaches to ensure everyone can participate and learn effectively.*

PT2: *I adapt the curriculum by modifying and customising it to make it accessible and relevant to all learners. By providing additional support, accommodations and adjustments, such as charts and number cards, to enable all learners with learning difficulties to engage fully in the classroom. I monitor and evaluate learners by regularly reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of my education practices. By*

*reflecting on the progress and challenges faced by learners with diverse needs and making necessary adjustments to ensure continuous improvement. I work with parents to gain a broader understanding of the learner's strengths and weaknesses. This helps me to avoid making assumptions about the learner's abilities or challenges.*

*PT3: I use body movement as a strategy that allows learners to create letters and numbers with their bodies. This helps learners to know how to write numbers and letters correctly.*

*In a classroom that is overcrowded, I try to design learning activities and materials that meet the diverse needs of all learners, regardless of their different abilities and disabilities. I also group learners in diverse groups so that they can learn from each other and build on one another's ideas. I create a learning environment that is conducive to independent learning. I also encourage learners to take ownership of their learning by setting their own goals, managing their own learning, and evaluating their own progress.*

These accounts demonstrate the extensive efforts of teachers to establish an inclusive educational environment. These initiatives demonstrate the dedication to accommodating varied learner requirements, from collaborative interactions with stakeholders to the effective use of novel teaching methodologies and the diligent monitoring of learner development. Teachers seek to create an environment in which every learner feels appreciated and supported in their individual educational path by demonstrating adaptive approaches and tailored goals.

### **Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environment**

Creating a welcoming and supportive learning environment is a key component of good teaching approaches. The study will look at particular tactics used by teachers to create an environment in which diversity is acknowledged, healthy connections are fostered, and behavioural standards are created to promote a conducive learning environment.

*PT4: I recognise and appreciate the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and abilities of my learners. I celebrate and respect the uniqueness of each learner and create an inclusive classroom environment where everyone feels valued and appreciated.*

*I also try to build positive relationships with my learners. As a teacher, I strive to understand the strengths, interests, and aspirations of each learner, creating a sense of trust and belonging. These relationships help me to support and empower my learners to reach their full potential.*

*As a teacher, I organise extra classes for learners with learning difficulties. By drafting lesson plans that are relevant for all learners.*

*ST5: I try to modify the learning environment to meet the needs of the learners. By creating an inclusive classroom that embraces diversity and promotes a supportive learning environment.*

*As a teacher, I established clear rules and expectations for behaviour. I wrote down and posted the rules in the classroom. My plan included the consequences for breaking the rules, rewards for meeting the expectations, list of strategies for addressing and correcting inappropriate behaviour.*

These accounts emphasize the critical role of teachers in creating a conducive school environment. From recognising learner variety and fostering connections to establishing clear behavioural standards and altering the learning environment, these approaches demonstrate teachers' commitment to creating an atmosphere in which every learner feels appreciated, engaged, and encouraged to grow.

### **Application of Resources and Teamwork**

Effective teaching often depends on resourcefulness and collaborative efforts within educational contexts. The narratives that follow will dive into particular tactics used by teachers to use existing resources, facilitate cooperation with experts, and tailor instruction to meet the requirements of various learners. These accounts provide light on the proactive actions taken by teachers to successfully harness

resources and create collaborative partnerships, both of which are required for inclusive and meaningful teaching methods.

*ST6: I make use of available resources, such as online materials and technology, to try to support learners in the classroom. Collaborating with other teachers and specialists to share ideas and resources to address learning barriers in the classroom. I create a supportive and positive learning environment where all learners feel valued and supported, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.*

*Differentiating instruction to meet the needs of individual learners in the classroom. Building relationships with learners and their families to better understand their needs. I use a range of teaching strategies to engage and motivate all learners in the classroom. I seek out professional development opportunities to improve teaching practices.*

*ST7: As a teacher, I try to differentiate content, considering the objectives of a lesson, then provide learners with flexible options about the content they learn to meet the objectives, from subject or topic to approach or presentation. I create groups to show learners that they can even trust each other and work together, but as a teacher, you must encourage teamwork and make learners understand that each learner is unique. As a teacher, I create trust, placing more emphasis on respecting each other. Also, making my learners feel free to ask questions when applicable. If things get intense for others, offer or avail myself to help or to assist. If learners struggle to stay focused or take in lots of information at once, I try to break tasks down into smaller parts that feel more manageable and allow them to feel like they are accomplishing things throughout the day.*

These accounts demonstrate teachers' proactive and flexible ways to optimize resources and foster cooperation in educational settings. These initiatives emphasize teachers' dedication to establishing adaptive and inclusive learning environments, from resource use to content differentiation and collaboration. Teachers strive to provide an engaging and supportive educational experience for all learners by accommodating varied needs and fostering collaborative interaction.

### **Suggestions to redress challenges for learners with Varied Learning Needs**

Identifying and meeting the diverse learning needs is a vital component of a well-rounded education. The study analyses the enormous efforts made by teachers to detect learning hurdles, send learners to specialist help, and provide additional remedial programs to accommodate a variety of learning requirements in the sections that follow.

*ST8: Teachers who have already managed to identify learning barriers among certain learners notify the special needs teacher, who further assists in referring the matters to social services, as there are no psychologists in schools. There are those teachers who offer remediation classes after hours to help cater for the diverse learning needs of all learners in the classroom.*

This narrative sheds light on the proactive actions taken by teachers to effectively accommodate varied learning demands. These measures, ranging from detecting hurdles to providing specialized help and remedial classes, indicate teachers' commitment to ensuring fair learning opportunities for all learners, emphasising the need for individualised support in establishing inclusive educational environments.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Challenges teachers experience when dealing with learning barriers in the classrooms**

The study highlights several issues teachers face when addressing learning barriers. These include writing challenges (from basic grammatical errors to complex expression issues), reading difficulties (due to decoding and comprehension deficits), and comprehension problems (which extend beyond decoding to text interpretation). Johnson emphasizes the significance of detailed instruction in the areas

of phonemic awareness, phonics, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension to effectively address reading challenges.<sup>35</sup> Behavioural issues also impact learning, with the Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework that offers strategies to create a more positive learning environment.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, parental disengagement and neglect contribute to the difficulties, impacting learners' confidence, attendance, and general academic progress.

As revealed by the study, overcrowding in classrooms, a lack of resources, and a lack of specialized assistance hamper teachers' efforts to fulfil various learner needs, emphasizing the importance of increased resources and reduced class sizes.<sup>37</sup> Another study by Adams and Hitchcock state that "Every learner's unique skills learner's individual asset and shortcoming, social foundation, learning style, financial status and physical and inner challenges are some of the challenges teachers face when addressing learning barriers in the classroom, including a lack of resources, limited time, and a lack of support from administrators or other staff difficulties ought to be considered."<sup>38</sup> Institutional difficulties, such as a lack of teacher training and administrative restraints, impede the implementation of inclusive education methods, underlining the importance of thorough teacher training and administrative assistance in order to develop a fully inclusive educational system. Gallagher and Holmes maintain that in order to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment, teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about various cultures, practices, and norms.<sup>39</sup>

### **Strategies teachers use to support learners with learning barriers in the classroom**

To help learners who are having difficulty learning, teachers employ a range of strategies in the classroom. To satisfy various learning objectives, they use inclusive teaching methods, curriculum customization, customised instruction, and collaborative approaches. Tomlinson states that differentiated instruction occurs when teaching strategies and materials are tailored to each learner's specific requirements, and it is one of the strategies used.<sup>40</sup> The teacher evaluates the learning needs of each learner and then creates a plan tailored to that learner. Teachers also prioritize creating learning environments that are inclusive and helpful by fostering connections, recognizing diversity, and setting clear expectations for behaviour. Using already-existing resources, collaborating with experts, and tailoring instruction to each learner's requirements, they highlight the need for teamwork and ingenuity. According to research by Loh and Ang, opportunities for peer support and interaction can help learners overcome obstacles by empowering cooperative learning.<sup>41</sup> In addition, teachers identify and respond to a wide range of learning needs by referring learners to specialized assistance and providing additional support through remedial classes. This demonstrates their commitment to addressing individual learning barriers in an inclusive setting for all learners.<sup>42</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations to the Department of Education**

Education departments should prioritize comprehensive training programmes that provide instructors with the skills they need to adopt inclusive educational practices, modify curriculum, handle disruptive behaviours, and meet the needs of different learners. Continuous professional development opportunities should be made available to teachers in order to keep them up to speed on good teaching practices. Such initiatives should include study subsidies in

Bachelor of Education Honours and Postgraduate diplomas in Inclusive Education.

<sup>35</sup> Nickole S. Johnson, "Understanding the Perspective of Educators and Administrators as It Relates to the Effectiveness of Phonics and Phonemic Awareness Reading Instructions for Elementary Students" (Trident University International, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> G. Sugai and R.H. Horner, "Sustaining and Scaling Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports: Implementation Drivers, Outcomes, and Considerations," *Exceptional Children* 86, no. 2 (2020): 120–36.

<sup>37</sup> Khutso Pitso Mankgele, "The Consequence of Overcrowded Classrooms in the Teaching and Learning of Entrepreneurial Subjects in Secondary Schools," *Asian Journal of Management, Entrepreneurship and Social Science* 3, no. 04 (2023): 1533–45.

<sup>38</sup> Adams and Hitchcock, "Learning Barriers for Students with Disabilities."

<sup>39</sup> Gallagher and Holmes, "Interpreting the Diverse Needs of Students: A Framework for Developing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy."

<sup>40</sup> Tomlinson, "Differentiated Instruction."

<sup>41</sup> Loh and Ang, "Unravelling Cooperative Learning in Higher Education."

<sup>42</sup> Mitchell and Sutherland, *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education: Using Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies*.

The study suggests that the departments of education must work to reduce classroom congestion and provide enough resources, such as materials and specialized support, to better meet the needs of individual learners. Financial support should be enhanced to allow adequate classroom materials and resources.

The Department of Education should form cooperative support structures to strengthen school- and district-based support teams to assist teachers in successfully recognizing and managing learning barriers. Facilitate collaboration among school community stakeholders to share resources, ideas, and experiences for better support.

### **Recommendations to Principals and School Management Teams**

The study recommends that SMTs implement inclusive teaching methods, such as differentiated instruction, collaboration, and curriculum adaptation to accommodate diverse learning needs. To develop inclusive settings, schools should celebrate diversity, offer supportive learning environments, and establish clear behavioural expectations. Resources and tools should be made available to teachers, tools technology and resources that aid in the efficient management of learning issues. Create platforms or networks that allow teachers to share best practices, educational resources, and strategies.

### **Recommendations to School Principals**

The study recommends that school principals should emphasize the importance of parents' and communities' involvement in promoting learners' academic achievement. They should also encourage collaboration among teachers, parents, and communities to improve learners' well-being and academic success. The study suggests that school principals should advocate for responsiveness and understanding to promote a more inclusive educational environment, emphasize the need for empathy and understanding for learners' different origins, learning styles, and social-emotional needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study investigated the difficulties that teachers experience when dealing with learning barriers in the classroom. It is clear that these barriers involve a wide range of issues, ranging from individual learner requirements to institutional constraints. Despite these challenges, teachers show great resilience and dedication by implementing a variety of ways to promote inclusive educational settings. The findings highlight the diverse character of the constraints to efficient education delivery. Learner-related issues, institutional flaws, and inadequate support systems all have an impact on teachers' ability to provide optimal learning experiences for diverse learners.

However, the study sheds light on teachers' proactive efforts. They demonstrate an unrelenting commitment to serving learners' different needs and developing inclusive learning environments through inclusive teaching approaches, ingenuity, and collaboration with specialists. The recommendations made in this study give a roadmap to improve teacher support systems and resolve highlighted problems. Improved teacher training and ongoing professional development, along with more resources and smaller class sizes, lay the foundation for more effective educational methods. Encouraging the use of inclusive teaching approaches, encouraging parental and community involvement, and developing collaborative support systems are all critical elements in building an atmosphere conducive to overcoming learning challenges.

Furthermore, providing teachers with tools, technology, and resource-sharing platforms, as well as pushing for empathy and understanding, will be critical in establishing a truly inclusive educational ecosystem. Overcoming learning barriers requires a multifaceted approach that includes not only targeted interventions but also systemic changes. The study advocates collaborative efforts among education departments, schools, communities, and stakeholders to foster an environment in which teachers are provided with adequate support, resources, and training to effectively manage learning barriers, thereby cultivating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

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