



Navigating classroom management: Experiences of teachers with disabilities in South African Multicultural Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of teachers with disabilities (TWDs) in managing classrooms within South African multicultural primary school settings, an aspect that has received limited attention in the existing scholarly literature. The research is informed by Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) to identify issues and challenges related to disability, cultural diversity, policy requirements, and institutional and structural barriers, to enhance classroom practices for TWDs. This study used an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach to probe, through semi-structured individual interviews, the experiences of five TWDs with specific representations of visual impairment, hearing loss, mobility impairment, and communication disorders. Through the use of thematic analysis, the findings of the study indicate that the severity of the impairments seemingly does not hamper the effectiveness of TWDs; rather, systemic, policy, infrastructural, and general classroom impediments do. Notwithstanding these limitations, TWDs demonstrate resilience and make significant contributions to the teaching and management of multicultural school spaces and to the promotion of inclusive pedagogical practices. The paper presents disability-responsive training, tougher policy implementation, institutional considerations, and the acknowledgement of TWDs as agents of inclusive educational change as necessary measures to improve the classroom conditions for TWDs.

Keywords: Teachers with disabilities, multicultural classrooms, classroom management, institutional ableism, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

Classroom teaching in multicultural settings is an inherently complex endeavor, whilst increasing cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity intensifies behavioral challenges and raises the stakes

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for effective classroom management (CM).¹ Empirical studies link inadequate teacher preparation in behavior management to higher classroom disruption, greater teacher stress, and diminished learning outcomes.² The existing scholarly literature highlights classroom conduct as a widespread issue and documents an increase in disruptive behavior. In certain educational settings, such as the prohibition of corporal punishment in South African schools, which has primarily been explored from the perspective of non-disabled teachers or presented as a problem pertaining to learners with disabilities, and more specifically, the classroom management techniques used by teachers with disabilities (TWDs) to deal with learners misbehavior and a variety of other issues affecting their teaching.³ Broadly defined, teachers with a disability (TWDs) are registered educators with a lasting physical, mental, cognitive, or sensory condition. When combined with workplace obstacles, this condition significantly hampers their daily teaching and classroom management responsibilities compared to their peers.

A further critical, under-researched dimension is the experience of teachers with disabilities (TWDs) as they negotiate multicultural classrooms. TWDs remain under-represented in research and workforce statistics,⁴ and their pedagogical contributions, rooted in lived experience, empathy, and learner-centred practices, are frequently marginalized.⁵ Existing studies note that the barriers are institutional (inadequate accommodations, lack of policy inclusion, and limited participation of TWDs in professional communities).⁶ As a result, TWDs' needs in multicultural classrooms and the CM strategies they employ appear to be poorly theorized.

Within the social model of disability (with a focus on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory), which predicts structural barriers rather than individual competence,⁷ and Critical Disability Theory, this paper explores the experiences of TWDs and their related practices and challenges in managing teaching in multicultural classrooms in the Mangaung Educational Metropole of the Free State province, South Africa. By centering TWDs' voices, the study fills a significant gap, provides an empirically grounded approach to inclusive CM, and contributes to policies and practices aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 "Quality education" and Sustainable Development Goal 10 "Reduced inequalities".⁸ As a result, the research moves TWDs from peripheral subjects to those agents whose expertise and experiences inform a more equitable and effective multicultural teaching context of South Africa. In light of the latter, this study probes how TWDs' experiences in multicultural settings within the South African education system affect their teaching and CM.

¹ Ahmed Chouari, "Cultural Diversity and the Challenges of Teaching Multicultural Classes in the Twenty-First Century," *Arab World English Journal* 7, no. 3 (September 15, 2016): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol7no3.1>; Khadija Marvi, "Impact of Cultural Diversity in Classrooms of Secondary Schools," *Creative Education* 14, no. 1 (2023): 197–211.

² Regina M. Oliver, Joseph H. Wehby, and Daniel J. Reschly, "Teacher Classroom Management Practices: Effects on Disruptive or Aggressive Student Behavior," *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 7, no. 1 (January 24, 2011): 1–55, <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2011.4>; Nathan A. Stevenson, Janet VanLone, and Brian R. Barber, "A Commentary on the Misalignment of Teacher Education and the Need for Classroom Behavior Management Skills," *Education and Treatment of Children* 43, no. 4 (December 18, 2020): 393–404, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43494-020-00031-1>.

³ Elizabeth T. Gershoff, "School Corporal Punishment in Global Perspective: Prevalence, Outcomes, and Efforts at Intervention," *Psychology, Health & Medicine* 22, no. sup1 (March 6, 2017): 224–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2016.1271955>; Eunice K. Najoli, Tawanda Runhare, and James B. Ouda, "Attitudes of Stakeholders and the Use of Corporal Punishment as a Tool for Discipline in Public Secondary Schools, Western Region of Kenya," *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 07, no. 11 (2019): 51–69, <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2019.711005>.

⁴ Carmit Gal et al., "Shaping Inclusive Classrooms: Key Factors Influencing Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusion of Students with Special Needs," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 5 (April 27, 2025): 541, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15050541>.

⁵ Dianne Chambers et al., "Teachers' Perspectives of What Works: Implementation of AT for Students with Disabilities," *Assistive Technology* 34, no. 3 (May 4, 2022): 352–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2020.1826597>.

⁶ Sandra-Milena Carrillo-Sierra et al., "Perceptions of Barriers to Inclusion in Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions," *Societies* 15, no. 2 (February 14, 2025): 37, <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15020037>; Jacomina Motitswe, "Teachers' Perceptions on Including Learners with Barriers to Learning in South African Inclusive Education System," *African Journal of Disability* 14 (May 31, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v14i0.1543>.

⁷ R. Sivaguru and M. Irudhaya Mary, "Understanding Inclusive Education, the Barriers and Ways to Promote Successful Inclusion in Our Education," *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 11, no. S1i2-Nov (November 20, 2023): 111–15, <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS1i2-Nov.7328>.

⁸ Munish Saini et al., "Sustainable Development Goal for Quality Education (SDG 4): A Study on SDG 4 to Extract the Pattern of Association among the Indicators of SDG 4 Employing a Genetic Algorithm," *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 2 (February 11, 2023): 2031–69, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11265-4>; Beauty Zindi and Tasneem Majam, "Harnessing SDG 4 (Quality Education) towards Post COVID-19 Recovery in the Education Sector," *Health Economics and Management Review* 6, no. 1 (2025): 110–29.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research studies on CM, multicultural education, and disability reveal intertwined opportunities and problems that precondition TWDs' professional lives, particularly in South Africa.⁹ Effective CM is universally recognized as central to teaching and learning; however, available models often presuppose non-disabled teachers in culturally homogeneous contexts.¹⁰ These assumptions do not account for the two-level challenge TWDs face, as they must negotiate disability-related obstacles and multicultural classroom interactions.¹¹ The existing literature thus calls for a reconceptualization of CM that anticipates disability, culture, and structural inequality as mutually constitutive aspects that affect teaching practice.

Rethinking CM through an Intersectional Lens

Traditional definitions consider CM to be the organization of physical space, the routine of instruction, the regulation of behavior, and relationship-building. Nevertheless, teacher behavior and action towards cultural responsiveness, inclusivity, and flexibility of CM are required in multicultural South African classrooms.¹² These requirements are compounded under TWDs, who should not only deal with learner behavior but also struggle with institutional obstacles, which include inaccessible zones, attitudinal prejudice, and lack of professional assistance.¹³ The idea that CM is a wide range of teacher behaviors stems from the notion that TWDs tend to make several changes to their routines to accommodate their physical abilities, such as modifying classroom layouts to accommodate wheelchairs or adjusting management cues based on proximity.¹⁴ Such adaptations are not examples of restrictions and illustrate inclusive and learner-centered practice.¹⁵ These sentiments highlight the importance of conceptualizing CM within TWDs as an adaptive practice, grounded in embodied experiences of TWDS, learner diversity, and structural inequalities.

Behavior, Discipline, and Authority in Multicultural Classrooms

The end of corporal punishment in South Africa after apartheid increased the susceptibility to preventive and relational discipline methods.¹⁶ In the case of TWDs, where their authority is frequently undermined by ableist beliefs, such a relational stance is necessary and difficult. Cultural beliefs mediate learners' interactions and their interpretation of disability, which, in turn, can result in classroom compliance, respect, and cooperation.¹⁷ It has been a well-known fact among researchers that learners can interpret the disability of a teacher as a lack of competence or authority, especially in cultures that stigmatize or

⁹ Chouari, "Cultural Diversity and the Challenges of Teaching Multicultural Classes in the Twenty-First Century."

¹⁰ Roshini Peiris-John et al., "Educating Health Science Students about Disability: Teachers' Perspectives on Curricular Gaps," *Disability and Health Journal* 14, no. 1 (2021): 100985.

¹¹ Sarah Imhoff, "Why Disability Studies Needs to Take Religion Seriously," *Religions* 8, no. 9 (September 13, 2017): 186, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090186>; A. T. Olagunju et al., "Psychosocial Wellbeing of Nigerian Teachers in Special Education Schools," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 51, no. 4 (April 14, 2021): 1131–41, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04606-0>.

¹² Ilaha Ashrafova, "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Inclusivity in the Classroom," *Global Spectrum of Research and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (September 1, 2024): 100–110, <https://doi.org/10.69760/gsrh.0101202409>; Saini et al., "Sustainable Development Goal for Quality Education (SDG 4): A Study on SDG 4 to Extract the Pattern of Association among the Indicators of SDG 4 Employing a Genetic Algorithm."

¹³ Kifah Bani Odeh and L. M. Lach, "Barriers to, and Facilitators of, Education for Children with Disabilities Worldwide: A Descriptive Review," *Frontiers in Public Health* 11 (January 16, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1294849>.

¹⁴ Anne M Hayes and Jennae Bulat, "Disabilities Inclusive Education Systems and Policies Guide for Low-and Middle-Income Countries," 2017.

¹⁵ Dwi Arnia Ulfa, Sunardi Sunardi, and Zaini Rohmad, "Identification of Classroom Physical Environmental for Wheelchair Users in Inclusive Schools," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 5, no. 5 (September 29, 2018): 273, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v5i5.413>.

¹⁶ Olufunmilayo Tenidade Obadire and Dzivhonele Albert Sinthumule, "Learner Discipline in the Post-Corporal Punishment Era: What an Experience!," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 2 (2021): 1–8; Amy Sarah Padayachee and Ntombizandile Gcelu, "Collaboration: The Key to Managing Discipline in South African Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 42, no.4 (2022): 1–9.

¹⁷ Neha Gogate, Kiran Satpute, and Toby Hall, "The Effectiveness of Mobilization with Movement on Pain, Balance and Function Following Acute and Sub Acute Inversion Ankle Sprain – A Randomized, Placebo Controlled Trial," *Physical Therapy in Sport* 48 (March 2021): 91–100, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ptsp.2020.12.016>; Liling Yang et al., "Teachers' Experiences of Managing Children with Epilepsy in School: A Qualitative Study," *Epilepsy & Behavior* 121 (August 2021): 108039, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yebeh.2021.108039>.

tie disability to dependence.¹⁸ The perceptions instigate the CM efforts, which pose emotionally intensive labor on TWDs who have to establish legitimacy all the time. Nonetheless, inclusive and understanding approaches, such as co-constructed rules, dialogic discipline, and routines, have been shown to promote shared accountability and mutual respect, providing TWDs with effective ways to preserve order without resorting to conventional means of authority that do not suit their capabilities.¹⁹

Policy, Institutional and Infrastructural Barriers for TWDs

Numerous studies emphasize the structural, institutional, and pedagogical exclusion of TWDs. Even in South Africa, where the constitutional and legislative provisions on employment equity are progressive, the Employment Equity Act, White Paper 6, and policies on disability inclusion are in place, empirical evidence suggests that policy implementation remains intermittent.²⁰ Schools usually do not have the infrastructure, assistive technologies, or institutional cultures to support disabled employees. TWDs often face job discrimination from employers, recruitment agencies, and other stakeholders.²¹

International practices such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), have proven beneficial for systematic accommodation. Still, South African institutions do not meet these expectations. Basic accommodations such as altered schedules, accessible classrooms, mentoring, and workload differentiation are not distributed equally.²² The lack of proactive accommodations compels TWDs to operate in contexts that are not accommodated to their needs, requiring them to engage in invisible labor to negotiate access and authority in new environments. The policy frameworks favor rights, though research indicates that TWDs do not have regular channels of exercising their rights.²³ Devoid of systematic career development, professional growth opportunities, and mentoring connections, TWDs are frequently pushed to the margins, limiting their involvement and retention in the profession and failing to address their infrastructural needs.²⁴

Multicultural Education as a Resource and a Challenge for TWDs

The concept of Multicultural education (MCE) in South Africa is presented as the answer to historical imbalances and discrimination, fostering equity, cultural awareness, and inclusion. The main concepts are the integration of content, minimizing bias, fair pedagogy, and the inclusion of school cultures.²⁵ These values align with the requirements of TWDs, whose success depends on favourable conditions that do not ignore cultural and disability diversity.

Research shows that multicultural classrooms can be facilitative environments for TWDs when diversity is genuinely appreciated. MCE promotes encounters with difference, stereotype challenge, and

¹⁸ Imhoff "Why disability studies needs to take religion seriously."

¹⁹ Laura Arcangeli et al., "Attitudes of Mainstream and Special-Education Teachers toward Intellectual Disability in Italy: The Relevance of Being Teachers," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 19 (October 7, 2020): 7325, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17197325>; Peiris-John et al., "Educating Health Science Students about Disability: Teachers' Perspectives on Curricular Gaps."

²⁰ Amukelani P. Mahlaule, Cheryl M.E. McCrindle, and Lizeka Napoles, "Inclusive Education and Related Policies in Special Needs Schools in South Africa," *African Journal of Disability* 13, no. 0 (September 11, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4102/AJOD.v13i0.1358>; Ulfa, Sunardi, and Rohmad, "Identification of Classroom Physical Environmental for Wheelchair Users in Inclusive Schools."

²¹ Douglas Kruse et al., "Assistive Technology's Potential to Improve Employment of People with Disabilities," *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 34, no. 2 (June 22, 2024): 299–315, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-023-10164-w>; Carmen del Rosario Navas-Bonilla et al., "Inclusive Education through Technology: A Systematic Review of Types, Tools and Characteristics," *Frontiers in Education* 10 (February 12, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2025.1527851>.

²² Hayes and Bulat, "Disabilities Inclusive Education Systems and Policies Guide for Low-and Middle-Income Countries."

²³ Ann Abney et al., "Understanding the Unseen: Invisible Disabilities in the Workplace," *The American Archivist* 85, no. 1 (2022): 88–103, <https://doi.org/10.17723/2327-9702-85.1.88>; Geneviève Jessiman-Perreault et al., "Understanding the Unmet Accommodation Needs of People Working with Mental or Cognitive Conditions: The Importance of Gender, Gendered Work, and Employment Factors," *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation* 34, no. 1 (March 25, 2024): 251–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10926-023-10132-4>.

²⁴ Fred Sanfilippo, "The Importance of Mentorship in Career Development," *The American Journal of Pathology* 195, no. 10 (October 2025): 1758–65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajpath.2025.07.002>.

²⁵ Mzamani J Maluleke and Ndishunwani Vincent Demana, "Assessment of Pre-Service English Language Teachers' Knowledge of Multicultural Education in South Africa," *JETT* 16, no. 4 (2025): 468–86; Argyro Rentzi, "Social Justice in Education: Creating an Inclusive Culture at Schools through Critical Multicultural Theory," *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 5, no. 1 (2024): 94–97.

inclusionary thinking, which foster positive attitudes among learners toward TWDs.²⁶ When implemented effectively, multicultural pedagogy can turn classes into inclusive communities in which students perceive the teacher's disability not as a weakness but as a distinct aspect of human diversity.²⁷ However, challenges persist. Curriculum frameworks like CAPS, despite their good intentions, have, in most cases, failed to provide practical advice on how to deal with disability in the multicultural environment. Instructionalists are supposed to respond to linguistically and culturally heterogeneous learners, while TWDs must address inaccessible resources, insufficient training in inclusive pedagogy, and structural barriers that increase the workload burden.²⁸

TWDs are employed in culturally diverse classrooms where the attitudes towards disability vary. It has been found that learners may be inclined to cultural beliefs that associate disability with negative traits, such as ineffectiveness or helplessness, concepts that weaken TWDs authority and make CM more complex and culturally responsive.²⁹ TWDs could consider using culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogical tool to promote mutual expectations, participatory rulemaking, cooperation, and culturally sensitive communication in multicultural learning spaces. A culturally responsive teaching approach engages learners from various ethnic, racial, and social-class backgrounds by employing pedagogies that are informed by culture, utilising the distinct cultures, languages, and life experiences of learners as assets to enhance the relevance, engagement, and effectiveness of learning.³⁰

Positive Contributions of TWDs to Multicultural Classrooms

Despite institutional barriers and a lack of essential facilities and resources, studies consistently identify meaningful assets that TWDs bring to multicultural school spaces. Their autobiographical experiences of marginalisation often foster empathy, patience, and sensitivity, encouraging learners who also have issues with belonging, identity, or cultural adjustment.³¹ The relational orientation of TWDs, the ethical concern for fairness, and tendencies toward learner-centred pedagogy align with multicultural and inclusive teaching principles. With the help of existing infrastructure and professional development, TWDs demonstrate their ability to be no less effective than their non-disabled peers and even more effective in certain cases.³² They are found in various classrooms, which is a model of resiliency and diversity in leadership and helps break ableist stereotypes.³³

Research further indicates that the process of co-creating behavioral norms leads learners to become more responsible and respectful of various authorities, including TWDs.³⁴ There is also an increasing reliance on technology to support TWDs in facilitating lessons in a constructive manner. TWDs can be supported by assistive devices, voice-recognition software, and existing digital platforms that help manage classrooms, deliver instruction, and ensure learner engagement.³⁵ Technology, when combined with diverse and differentiated approaches, including multilingual digital content, could increase TWDs' accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural responsiveness in multicultural classes.

²⁶ Peter Karacsony et al., "The Impact of the Multicultural Education on Students' Attitudes in Business Higher Education Institutions," *Education Sciences* 12, no. 3 (March 2, 2022): 173, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030173>.

²⁷ Silvia Molina Roldán et al., "How Inclusive Interactive Learning Environments Benefit Students Without Special Needs," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (April 29, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.661427>.

²⁸ Karacsony et al. "The impact of the multicultural education on students' attitudes in business higher education institutions."; Yang et al. "Teachers' experiences of managing children with epilepsy in school".

²⁹ Gal et al. "Shaping inclusive classrooms; Motitswe "Teachers' perceptions on including learners with barriers to learning in South African inclusive education system.".

³⁰ Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: A.k.a. the Remix," *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (April 1, 2014): 74–84, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751>.

³¹ Brigit M Carter, Danica Fulbright Sumpter, and Wanda Thruston, "Overcoming Marginalization by Creating a Sense of Belonging," *Creative Nursing* 29, no. 4 (2023): 320–27; Dion T. Harry et al., "Elevating Marginalized Student Experiences of Belonging in the Life Sciences: A Qualitative Case Study Approach," *CBE—Life Sciences Education* 23, no. 4 (December 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.24-02-0055>.

³² Gal et al. "Shaping inclusive classrooms"; Zindi and Majam "Harnessing SDG 4 (Quality Education) towards post COVID-19 recovery in the education sector.".

³³ Brianna Stein, Fumiko Hoeft, and Caroline G Richter, "Stress, Resilience, and Emotional Well-Being in Children and Adolescents with Specific Learning Disabilities," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 58 (2024): 101410.

³⁴ Ashrafova, "Culturally Responsive Teaching: Strategies for Promoting Inclusivity in the Classroom."

³⁵ Alzahrani, Marzouq Ali. "The importance of assistive technology for students with disabilities in the comprehensive education schools in the KSA." *Creative Education* 16, no. 4 (2025): 453–476. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2025.164028>.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach of the current study is integrative, incorporating Critical Disability Theory (CDT) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) to place TWDs within the context of nested socio-institutional frames. CDT reframes disability as a product of social, political, and cultural arrangements rather than individual deficit, foregrounding power, intersectionality, and disability pride.³⁶ EST complements CDT by mapping how interactions across microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels shape everyday classroom practices and constraints. In Bronfenbrenner's theory, the SMT functions across three systemic levels. For teachers, it acts within the microsystem through daily face-to-face management and supervision. For learners, this theory operates within the exosystem, as its administrative policies and structural decisions indirectly shape the classroom environment. Finally, the School Management Team (SMT), which is the internal, formal leadership structure responsible for the day-to-day professional and academic running of a South African school, bridges these layers at the mesosystem level by coordinating critical communication between teachers, learners, and families.³⁷ Together, these EST and CDT lenses reconceive CM for TWDs as an outcome of structural relations, immediate interactions, and cultural ideologies.

Operationally, CDT directs attention to discursive and policy-level forms of ableism, asking how institutional norms, stereotyping, and exclusionary practices reproduce barriers to effective management. EST operationalizes context: the microsystem captures teacher-learner and colleague dynamics; the mesosystem examines school-family and administrative linkages; the exosystem attends to policy, training, and resource flows; the macrosystem interrogates cultural beliefs about disability and multiculturalism.³⁸ Analytically, the framework guides coding and interpretation toward (a) instances where structural forces constrain or enable TWDs' agency,³⁹ (b) adaptive management strategies emerging from lived experience,⁴⁰ and (c) multilevel interactions that reproduce or mitigate classroom disruption.⁴¹ This synthesis foregrounds TWDs as both subjects of marginalisation and sources of pedagogical innovation. It frames research questions, data collection, and analysis to reveal how policy, institutional practice, and cultural meaning-making intersect to shape inclusive CM, thereby generating actionable insights for policy and practice aligned with social justice and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) imperatives.⁴² The SDGs reshape global development priorities by challenging traditional economic policies and targeting systemic inequality and environmental degradation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Process

This qualitative research study investigates the lived experiences of Teachers with Disabilities (TWDs) in public multicultural primary school classrooms across South Africa. The objective of this investigation is to analyse how disability, inclusivity, culture, institutional contexts, and policy constraints intersect to shape classroom management dynamics. Specifically, the study explores how these intersecting components shape daily teaching practices, classroom management, teacher authority, institutional barriers, and professional identity. The researchers selected a qualitative process to capture

³⁶ Aurora H. Brinkman et al., "Shifting the Discourse on Disability: Moving to an Inclusive, Intersectional Focus.," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 93, no. 1 (2023): 50–62, <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000653>.

³⁷ Carolyn Dickens et al., "Using Ecological Systems Theory to Enhance Community Health Literacy," *HLRP: Health Literacy Research and Practice* 9, no. 1 (January 2025), <https://doi.org/10.3928/24748307-20241126-01>.

³⁸ Karacsony et al., "The Impact of the Multicultural Education on Students' Attitudes in Business Higher Education Institutions"; Dielle J. Lundberg and Jessica A. Chen, "Structural Ableism in Public Health and Healthcare: A Definition and Conceptual Framework," *The Lancet Regional Health - Americas* 30 (February 2024): 100650, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2023.100650>.

³⁹ Susheel Joginder Singh, Zhi Zhi Diong, and Rahayu Mustaffa Kamal, "Malaysian Teachers' Experience Using Augmentative and Alternative Communication with Students," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 36, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 107–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07434618.2020.1785547>.

⁴⁰ Amberly Brigden, Alison Shaw, and Esther Crawley, "'It's a Medical Condition ... You Need to Support as Much as Possible': A Qualitative Analysis of Teachers' Experiences of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome / Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME)," *BMC Pediatrics* 21, no. 1 (December 4, 2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-020-02461-7>.

⁴¹ Zindi and Majam, "Harnessing SDG 4 (Quality Education) towards Post COVID-19 Recovery in the Education Sector."

⁴² Raphael Lencucha, Alua Kulenova, and Anne Marie Thow, "Framing Policy Objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals: Hierarchy, Balance, or Transformation?," *Globalization and Health* 19, no. 1 (January 23, 2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-023-00909-w>.

rich, context-based insights into complex experiences that quantitative metrics cannot fully measure alone. The study followed a rigorous sequential process: identifying the research problem, formulating literature-grounded questions, developing a narrative interview schedule, securing institutional ethical approval from the Faculty of Humanities, Central University of Technology, recruiting participants, conducting interviews, and performing a detailed thematic analysis.

Research Paradigm

The study is grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that meaning is produced through individuals' interactions with their social worlds. The interpretivist paradigm is particularly appropriate for research that seeks to understand subjective experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes.⁴³ Rather than striving to measure data variables or generalize findings across an entire population, this stance allowed the researchers to deeply explore how TWDs navigate and interpret their professional realities within unique multicultural school settings. By embracing an interpretivist view, the study explicitly recognises that TWDs experience multiple, diverse realities depending on their diverse school environments. This approach validates the participants' personal stories as authentic and valuable sources of academic knowledge, ensuring that individual voice and agency remain central to the research.

Research Approach and Design

A qualitative research approach was utilised, primarily employing semi-structured one-on-one interviews as the primary methodological framework. Narrative inquiry was adopted as the research design to ascertain TWDs' classroom experiences in public multicultural primary school settings. Narrative inquiry is particularly suited to studies that examine identity, power, embodiment, and professional experience, as it allows participants to construct and share stories that reflect how they make sense of their lived realities. This approach allowed the researchers to effectively capture the temporal, emotional, and context-specific dimensions of teaching with a disability. The semi-structured format balanced a clear focus for the purpose of this study with the flexibility needed for participants (TWDs) to introduce new, significant details to their perceived experiences- this was vital for uncovering the complex connections between disability, classroom management, cultural diversity, and multicultural environments without limiting or biasing the responses.

Sampling

The target population consisted of TWDs employed in public multicultural primary schools within the South African basic education system. The researchers applied a purposive sampling technique to select participants capable of providing information-rich data aligned with the research objective. The selection criteria required that participants self-identify as having a disability, have current employment in a public school, and have direct teaching experience in a public multicultural primary school. For the final sample, five teachers (two males and three females) with various disabilities such as low eyesight, hard of hearing, paraplegia, stuttering, and mild deafness were selected. Each of the five teacher participants has between seven and fifteen years of teaching experience, a bachelor's degree, and a professional qualification. Although this sample size is small, it is highly appropriate for narrative inquiry, which prioritises the depth of individual data over statistical representativeness.⁴⁴ The sample featured diversity in disability types, teaching experience, subject specialisation, and geographical context, which enhanced data richness and supported the transferability of the findings.

Data Collection Process

Data collection relied on semi-structured narrative interviews using an open-ended guide containing 15 core questions. These questions focused on classroom management, experiences of discrimination and

⁴³ Nasrin Pervin and Mahani Mokhtar, "The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 11, no. 2 (2022): 419–28.

⁴⁴ Marie Stenberg et al., "Supporting Each Other towards Independence: A Narrative Analysis of First-year Nursing Students' Collaborative Process," *Nursing Inquiry* 31, no. 3 (July 13, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nin.12627>.

stigma, institutional support, cultural dynamics, professional identity, and assistive technologies.⁴⁵ To accommodate accessibility, interviews were held via telephone or online platforms, lasting roughly 45 minutes each. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and immediate field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and context. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and nuance of participants' narratives. Data were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework.⁴⁶ The researcher used a six-phase thematic analysis framework, beginning with data familiarisation and moving to inductive coding so themes could emerge naturally. These codes were organized into broader categories showing the intersection of disability, culture, and institutional environments. Anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms (TWD1–TWD5). The study established trustworthiness through credibility (member checking), dependability (an audit trail), confirmability (reflexive journaling), and transferability (thick descriptions). Trustworthiness was ensured through established qualitative criteria, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.⁴⁷

Ethical statement

Ethical clearance was granted by the Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee and the provincial Department of Education. Participants received information sheets detailing the study's purpose, methods, and risks. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their involvement, including the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Pseudonyms were applied across all transcripts and reports to protect the participants' personal identities.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, was employed to analyze qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with TWDs working in multicultural schools in South Africa.⁴⁸ Interview transcripts were systematically coded, with initial codes derived inductively from the raw data. Related codes were then clustered into categories, which were subsequently refined into broader themes that captured patterned meanings across participants' accounts. Although participants differed in disability type, years of teaching experience, subjects taught, and provincial context, strong thematic convergence was evident across the dataset. This convergence allowed for the identification of five overarching themes that reflect how disability operates within multicultural educational environments characterized by uneven institutional support, entrenched stigma, and a persistent gap between inclusive policy and everyday practice. The findings are discussed through the combined analytical lenses of CDT and EST. CDT foregrounds disability as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon shaped by power relations and normative assumptions,⁴⁹ while EST situates teachers' experiences within nested systems ranging from immediate classroom interactions to broader institutional and policy environments. Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced understanding of how personal experiences of disability intersect with cultural meanings, organizational structures, and professional practice.

The following five themes, namely, disability and classroom management dynamics; cultural constructions of disability and teacher authority; institutional and structural barriers to inclusive practice; stigma, discrimination and social relations; teacher agency, adaptability and pedagogical innovation, will now be discussed.

⁴⁵ Omolola A Adeoye-Olatunde and Nicole L Olenik, "Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews," *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy* 4, no. 10 (2021): 1358–67.

⁴⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

⁴⁷ Janice M. Morse et al., "Verification Strategies for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 1, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690200100202>.

⁴⁸ Braun and Clarke "Toward good practice in thematic analysis".

⁴⁹ Vinaya Manchaiah et al., "Social Representation of 'Hearing Loss': Cross-Cultural Exploratory Study in India, Iran, Portugal, and the UK," *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, 2015, 1857–72; Mirko Aldè et al., "The Ongoing Challenges of Hearing Loss: Stigma, Socio-Cultural Differences, and Accessibility Barriers," *Audiology Research* 15, no. 3 (April 24, 2025): 46, <https://doi.org/10.3390/audiolres15030046>.

Theme 1: Disability and classroom management dynamics

The findings of this study indicate that classroom management for TWDs is deeply shaped by the interactions among impairment, communication practices, and cultural diversity in South African classrooms. Classroom management, traditionally understood as the teacher's ability to regulate behavior, maintain authority, and sustain learner engagement, emerged as a complex, negotiated practice for participants in this study. Consistent with earlier research,⁵⁰ participants' narratives reveal that disability does not simply create individual challenges but also interacts with multicultural classroom dynamics, reshaping how authority, discipline, and order are enacted.

Across all interviews, communication emerged as a central mechanism through which classroom management is either strengthened or undermined. Participants highlighted that effective management relies heavily on the ability to read verbal and non-verbal cues, monitor learner behavior, and intervene timeously. For teachers with visual, auditory, mobility, or speech-related impairments, these processes were often constrained, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms where meaning is communicated in multiple ways. This is reflected in the following responses:

"I rely more on tone of voice than body language, which can lead to misunderstandings, especially with learners from cultures that rely heavily on nonverbal cues." (TWD 1)

"Some learners mumble or speak softly, which I struggle to hear. And with accents, it gets harder." (TWD 2)

"I can't walk around to check on learners during group tasks. I have to rely on voice control and helpers." (TWD 3)

"Learners from different backgrounds interpret stammering differently. Some are patient. Others think I'm not confident or don't know my subject." (TWD 4)

"Yes, especially when students speak softly, or with unfamiliar accents. I often have to ask them to repeat themselves, which can disrupt flow." (TWD 5)

These latter responses are affirmed by the findings of scholars who argue that TWDs often experience compounded limitations in classrooms where communication is sensory-dependent and culturally coded.⁵¹ In multicultural environments, accents, speech patterns, and culturally specific interaction styles intensify the risk of misinterpretation, particularly for teachers with hearing or visual impairments. From an ecological systems perspective, this highlights the microsystemic nature of classroom management, where everyday interactions are shaped by broader cultural norms.⁵² While communication barriers posed challenges, participants also reflected on how disability altered traditional forms of surveillance and behavioral regulation. Classroom management is often premised on the teacher's physical mobility and visual monitoring of learners. For some participants, the inability to move freely or visually scan the classroom created moments of vulnerability:

"Sometimes when I'm focused on my screen, a few start doing their own thing." (TWD 1)

"Chaotic at times. I often have to repeat myself, and learners lose focus." (TWD 2)

However, contrary to deficit-oriented assumptions, other participants reported that their disability sometimes enhanced learner discipline and respect:

⁵⁰ Iryna Babik and Elena S. Gardner, "Factors Affecting the Perception of Disability: A Developmental Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (June 21, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.702166>; Fatemeh Bambaerloo and Nasrin Shokrpour, "The Impact of the Teachers' Non-Verbal Communication on Success in Teaching," *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism* 5, no. 2 (2017): 51.

⁵¹ Susan Agostine, Karen Erickson, and Charna D'Ardenne, "Sensory Experiences and Children With Severe Disabilities: Impacts on Learning," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (April 29, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.875085>.

⁵² Bambaerloo and Shokrpour "The impact of the teachers' non-verbal communication on success in teaching."

"Surprisingly good. I think they know I don't have physical power, so they listen more to my voice." (TWD 3)

"I think they respect me more when I'm honest about my hearing. I tell them I might miss things, but that I still expect discipline." (TWD 5)

These contrasting experiences resonate with the observation of two scholars who argue that disability does not uniformly weaken authority. In some cases, learners interpret disability as resilience or moral strength, leading to increased respect rather than defiance.⁵³ This suggests that classroom management for TWDs is not fixed but relational and context-dependent, shaped by learners' perceptions, teachers' self-presentation, and cultural norms regarding authority.

Theme 2: Cultural constructions of disability and teacher authority

The second theme centers on how disability is culturally interpreted within multicultural school settings and how these interpretations shape learners' and colleagues' perceptions of teacher competence and authority. Consistent with Critical Disability Theory (CDT), participants' narratives reveal that disability is not experienced merely as a physical or sensory condition, but as a socially constructed identity that is continuously interpreted through cultural beliefs, stereotypes, and expectations.⁵⁴ Participants repeatedly emphasized that learners from different cultural backgrounds attach different meanings to disability, particularly in relation to communication, fluency, and authority. These interpretations directly influenced learner behaviour and classroom dynamics:

"Learners from different backgrounds interpret stammering differently. Some are patient. Others think I'm not confident or don't know my subject." (TWD 4)

"People associate fluent speech with intelligence. If you pause too long, they assume you don't know what you're saying." (TWD 5)

"Some learners mumble or speak softly, which I struggle to hear. And with accents, it gets harder." (TWD 2)

Some academics contend that fluency and vocal confidence are equated with intelligence, competence, and leadership across various cultural contexts, lending credence to the aforementioned participant responses. As a result, communication problems are frequently mistaken for intellectual limitations.⁵⁵

This misinterpretation places TWDs in a precarious position, where authority must be constantly reasserted and defended. At the same time, participants also reported moments of empathy, adaptation, and renegotiation of ableist norms by learners:

"They're more curious. Some offer help even when I don't need it." (TWD 1)

"Some even try to sign basic words or speak slowly when they see me in the corridor." (TWD 5)

"I think they view me as a strong woman because of what I've overcome." (TWD 3)

These accounts complicate simplistic narratives of discrimination and align with some scholarly views that argue that young people can actively challenge ableist assumptions when exposed to diversity in everyday contexts.⁵⁶ In these instances, disability became a site of relational learning rather than a site of exclusion. However, cultural interpretations of disability also intersected with respect and

⁵³ Babik and Gardner "Factors affecting the perception of disability: A developmental perspective."

⁵⁴ Manchaiah et al. "Social representation of "hearing loss"; Aldè et al. "The ongoing challenges of hearing loss".

⁵⁵ Fidelis Emuze and Matthew James, "Exploring Communication Challenges Due to Language and Cultural Diversity on South African Construction Sites," *Acta Structilia* 20, no. 1 (June 30, 2013): 44–65, <https://doi.org/10.38140/as.v20i1.133>.

⁵⁶ Sally Lindsay et al., "Experiences of Ableism and Racism Among Racially Minoritized Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities," *Disabilities* 5, no. 4 (November 27, 2025): 109, <https://doi.org/10.3390/disabilities5040109>.

authority in ways that were emotionally taxing for participants. Several teachers described subtle forms of disrespect, mockery, or disengagement:

"When I struggle to say a word, some learners stop paying attention or whisper." (TWD 4)

"Others make jokes when I ask them to repeat themselves." (TWD 2)

"Sometimes they talk among themselves because they think I can't hear them, which is partially true." (TWD 5)

These experiences reflect CDT's assertion that disability is often constructed as a deviation from cultural norms of efficiency and control.⁵⁷ Authority, in this sense, is not automatically granted to teachers with disabilities but must be continually negotiated within cultural frameworks that privilege able-bodied communication and performance.

Theme 3: Institutional and structural barriers to inclusive practice

The third theme highlights how institutional environments, infrastructure, and policy implementation shape TWD professional experiences. Across all interviews, participants reported that their difficulties were not solely attributable to impairment, but to systemic failures within schools and the broader education system. These findings reinforce the social model of disability, which locates disablement in environmental and organizational barriers rather than individual limitations.⁵⁸ Participants consistently described school environments that lacked basic accommodations:

"No enlarged materials, and the lighting is poor. I've asked for improvements, but nothing has changed." (TWD 1)

"I don't hear announcements over the intercom, and no subtitles in videos used in lessons." (TWD 2)

"Some ramps exist, but many doors are too narrow. There's no disabled toilet in my block." (TWD 3)

"No speech support, and no awareness programs. I feel invisible most of the time." (Interviewee 4)

"Important info is often shared verbally in meetings without written backup." (TWD 5)

These accounts illustrate exosystemic failures in which institutional practices and physical designs exclude disabled teachers from full participation.⁵⁹ Even when accommodations existed, they were uneven and superficial, suggesting symbolic compliance rather than genuine inclusion. Participants were particularly critical of the gap between disability-related policies and their implementation. Although most were aware of policies such as the Employment Equity Act and White Paper 6, they reported little tangible impact at the school level:

"Most policies are just paperwork. In reality, we are left to advocate for ourselves with no real budget or planning." (TWD 1)

⁵⁷ Silvia Bonaccio et al., "The Participation of People with Disabilities in the Workplace Across the Employment Cycle: Employer Concerns and Research Evidence," *Journal of Business and Psychology* 35, no. 2 (April 22, 2020): 135–58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9602-5>.

⁵⁸ Chung Sik Kim et al., "Effects of Ramp Slope, Ramp Height and Users' Pushing Force on Performance, Muscular Activity and Subjective Ratings during Wheelchair Driving on a Ramp," *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics* 44, no. 5 (September 2014): 636–46, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2014.07.001>.

⁵⁹ Amarachi J. Yoro, Jean V. Fourie, and Martyn van der Merwe, "Learning Support Strategies for Learners with Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Perspectives of Recently Qualified Teachers," *African Journal of Disability* 9 (February 6, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v9i0.561>.

"The department has no clear plan for Deaf or hard-of-hearing teachers. It's all one-size-fits-all." (TWD 2)

"They only react after you push for years. There's no proactive planning." (TWD 3)

"Stammering isn't even on most official disability lists. That says everything." (TWD 4)

"Policies aren't always followed." (TWD 5)

These findings echo the critiques of various who argue that South Africa's inclusive education framework is undermined by weak enforcement, a lack of accountability, and insufficient resource allocation. The burden of adaptation is thus shifted onto individual teachers, rather than being addressed structurally. Severe systemic issues, such as overcrowded classrooms, deficient teacher training, and a lack of professional backing, neutralise the effectiveness of the School Based Support Team (SBST). The SBST is an internal committee that coordinates support for students facing learning obstacles. This collaborative team of school leaders and teachers identify learning barriers, develops Individual Support Plans (ISPs), and guides teachers in inclusive practices.⁶⁰

Theme 4: Stigma, discrimination and social relations

The fourth theme foregrounds the social and relational dimensions of disability within school environments, focusing on stigma, discrimination, and the everyday social politics encountered by teachers with disabilities. Across all interviews, participants recounted experiences of marginalization that were often subtle, normalised, and embedded in routine interactions with learners, colleagues, and school leadership. These findings reinforce the argument of Critical Disability Theory that discrimination against people with disabilities is frequently enacted through everyday institutional practices and social attitudes rather than overt exclusion.⁶¹ At the learner level, all participants reported experiencing incidents where their disability became a focal point for mockery, disrespect, or testing of boundaries. These incidents ranged from overt acts of ridicule to more covert behaviors that undermined authority. One participant with low vision described an experience that had a lasting emotional impact:

"A boy once mocked how my screen reader talks. It upset me more than I let on." (TWD 1)

Similarly, teachers with hearing impairments reported being targeted based on assumptions that they would not detect misconduct:

"A few learners whispered insults, thinking I wouldn't hear. I caught one, and he apologized after being reported." (TWD 2)

"One student deliberately whispered rude comments during a quiz. I confronted him calmly and made it a learning moment for the class." (TWD 5)

For the participant with a stammer, learner misconduct was experienced as deeply humiliating, particularly when it occurred publicly:

"A learner once mimicked the way I got stuck on a word. It happened in front of others. I was humiliated." (TWD 4)

These experiences illustrate how disability becomes a site of vulnerability within classroom power relations. Learners' actions were often informed by ableist assumptions that communication difficulties signal weakness or incompetence. Such findings align with scholars who argue that stigma

⁶⁰ Yolanda Mpu and Emmanuel O Adu, "The Challenges of Inclusive Education and Its Implementation in Schools: The South African Perspective," *Perspectives in Education* 39, no. 2 (2021): 225–38; Kim et al., "Effects of Ramp Slope, Ramp Height and Users' Pushing Force on Performance, Muscular Activity and Subjective Ratings during Wheelchair Driving on a Ramp."

⁶¹ Bonaccio et al. "The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle: Employer concerns and research evidence."; Aldè et al. "The ongoing challenges of hearing loss".

in educational contexts is frequently reproduced through learner behavior that mirrors broader societal discourses about disability. Stigma was not limited to learner interactions.⁶² Participants also described complex and uneven experiences of collegial relationships. While some reported strong peer support, others experienced avoidance, silence, or exclusion, particularly around discussions of disability. One participant noted:

In contrast, another participant described a sense of social invisibility:

"Good on the surface. But most don't know how to talk about speech issues, so they avoid the topic." (TWD 4)

This avoidance was not always experienced as hostile, but it nevertheless contributed to feelings of isolation. Forms of social distancing reflect discomfort rather than malice, yet they still reinforce exclusion by rendering disability unspeakable within professional spaces. Power relations with supervisors and school management further reflected institutionalised stigma.⁶³ Several participants reported being excluded from leadership roles, public-facing responsibilities, or decision-making processes, often justified implicitly by efficiency or performance concerns:

"He avoids assigning me leadership roles, which I think is because of my disability." (TWD 2)

"He once said I shouldn't do assemblies because I take too long to speak." (TWD 4)

These practices support CDT's contention that organizations often marginalize people with disabilities under the guise of professionalism and productivity.⁶⁴ Even when supervisors were described as polite or professional, participants frequently perceived a lack of genuine engagement or advocacy:

"She's polite but doesn't really check on me or ask what I need." (TWD 1)

At the same time, the data reveal that stigma was not experienced uniformly. One participant with a mobility impairment reported relatively low levels of stigma, attributing this to openness and narrative control:

"Minimal. I think being open with my story helps reduce it." (TWD 3)

This suggests that visibility of disability, school culture, leadership attitudes, and individual coping strategies mediate stigma. However, the unevenness of these experiences highlights the absence of systematic, institution-wide approaches to addressing disability-related stigma. Instead, social inclusion appeared to depend largely on individual goodwill rather than structural commitment, echoing findings that inclusive school cultures remain fragile and personalized.⁶⁵

Theme 5: Teacher agency, adaptability and pedagogical innovation

Despite significant challenges in classroom management, cultural stigma, and institutional barriers, the fifth theme reveals that teachers with disabilities demonstrate high levels of agency, adaptability, and pedagogical creativity. Rather than positioning themselves as passive recipients of exclusion, participants actively reconfigured their teaching and classroom management practices to accommodate both their impairments and learners' diverse needs. This finding strongly challenges deficit-oriented discourses that frame disability as incompatible with effective teaching.⁶⁶ A dominant strategy across interviews was the use of structure, consistency, and predictability to compensate for reduced surveillance or communication barriers. Participants described deliberately establishing clear routines and expectations:

⁶² Brinkman et al., "Shifting the Discourse on Disability: Moving to an Inclusive, Intersectional Focus."

⁶³ Angel Deroncelle-Acosta and Althia Ellis, "Overcoming Challenges and Promoting Positive Education in Inclusive Schools: A Multi-Country Study," *Education Sciences* 14, no. 11 (October 27, 2024): 1169, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111169>.

⁶⁴ Bonaccio et al. "The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle".

⁶⁵ Caroline Desombre, Marine Delaval, and Mickaël Jury, "Influence of Social Support on Teachers' Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (September 30, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736535>.

⁶⁶ Bani Odeh and Lach, "Barriers to, and Facilitators of, Education for Children with Disabilities Worldwide: A Descriptive Review."

"Consistency and structure. I also build strong routines where students know what's expected even if I don't see every move." (TWD 1)

"Clear routines, written instructions on the board, and always confirming that learners understand expectations." (TWD5)

"Strong routines, visible rules, peer monitors. I also keep a calm but firm tone." (Interviewee 3)

These approaches align with those who emphasize that structured environments promote equitable learning, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms.⁶⁷ Importantly, these strategies benefited not only the teachers themselves but all learners, illustrating how disability-responsive practices often enhance inclusivity more broadly. Participants also described adapting their pedagogical approaches to minimize reliance on modalities affected by their disabilities. Teaching strategies were deliberately diversified to include visual, collaborative, and learner-centered methods:

"I use oral discussions, peer reading groups, and recorded materials. I avoid large amounts of handwritten work." (TWD 1)

"I use visual content, posters, and peer-led discussions so I don't rely only on listening." (TWD 2)

"Group discussions, visual presentations, and letting learners take turns explaining concepts." (TWD 4)

"I use visuals, diagrams, experiments, and project-based assessments." (TWD 5)

These practices resonate strongly with principles of Universal Design for Learning, even though participants rarely used the terminology explicitly. Certain scholars argue that educators with disabilities often intuitively adopt inclusive pedagogies because their lived experiences sensitize them to diverse learning needs.⁶⁸ Technology emerged as a critical enabler of teacher agency, particularly where institutional support was lacking. Several participants relied on assistive technologies, often self-funded:

"I rely on my screen reader (JAWS), a digital magnifier, and I've recently started using audiobooks in class." (TWD 1)

"Just my hearing aids and a classroom mic system I bought myself." (TWD 2)

"I use a personal voice amplifier during class and pre-record some lesson parts as videos with captions." (TWD 5)

While these tools enhanced teaching effectiveness, participants emphasized the injustice of bearing the financial responsibility for accommodations. Self-resourcing reflects systemic failure, in which institutions transfer the cost of inclusion onto disabled individuals.⁶⁹ Crucially, participants articulated a strong sense of professional commitment and purpose. Many viewed their presence in classrooms as transformative, not only for themselves but for learners and colleagues:

"I think being open with my story helps reduce stigma." (TWD 3)

"Just being interviewed makes me feel heard, literally and emotionally." (TWD 5)

⁶⁷ Kathleen Markey et al., "Navigating Learning and Teaching in Expanding Culturally Diverse Higher Education Settings," *Higher Education Pedagogies* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2023.2165527>.

⁶⁸ V Priyadharsini and R Sahaya Mary, "Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Inclusive Education: Accelerating Learning for All," *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities* 11, no. 4 (April 1, 2024): 145–50, <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11i4.7489>.

⁶⁹ Mariela Verónica Samaniego López et al., "Technologies in Inclusive Education: Solution or Challenge? A Systematic Review," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 6 (June 7, 2025): 715, <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15060715>.

These reflections underscore that teachers with disabilities are not merely beneficiaries of inclusion but active contributors to more humane, reflective, and equitable educational environments. Their adaptability and pedagogical innovation directly contest deficit narratives and affirm the value of disability as a source of professional knowledge and insight.⁷⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

In navigating classroom management possibilities in South African public multicultural primary schools, TWDs could co-construct their workplace accommodations, organise peer networks, and lead several professional development initiatives. TWDs could further reshape the school climate to accessible, equitable, and dignified public multicultural classroom spaces. TWDs could also actively respond by formally requesting engagements with School Management Teams (SMTs) and, as such, co-create their own individualised support plans for effective classroom management.

School Management Teams (SMTs) and School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) must proactively dismantle the subtle, normalised stigma and marginalization experienced by TWDs by institutionalising anti-discrimination policies and relational support structures. SMTs should cultivate a rights-based school ethos through regular, focused disability sensitisation workshops that explicitly challenge social biases among learners, colleagues, and leadership. Simultaneously, SBSTs must establish safe, confidential reporting avenues and peer-support networks to respond to discriminatory practices in multicultural public primary schools. Furthermore, TWDs should actively reconfigure their teaching strategies in responding to classroom management and cultural barriers.

The Department of Basic Education should shift toward an adaptive, institutionally supported policy for classroom management in South African multicultural public primary schools by providing structural support, such as teacher assistants and assistive technologies. This approach aims to reduce the individual strain on TWDs whilst they navigate classroom management dynamics and enhance learner engagement and equity through collaborative, inclusive and multicultural learning spaces. By standardising universal design in school infrastructure and ensuring accountability in policy implementation, the education system could possibly reduce the impact of institutional barriers.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored classroom management experiences with TWDs in multicultural classroom spaces in South African schools. Using in-depth narrative interviews with teachers who live with low vision, hearing loss, mobility difficulties, and communication disorders, the results can be used to understand how disability, pedagogical practice, institutional barriers, and socio-cultural perceptions and policies interrelate. In all cases, participants were resilient, innovative in pedagogy, and dedicated to learner achievement. However, all their attempts were always curtailed by structural deficiencies, such as bad infrastructural facilities, poor assistive technologies, low administrative backup, and endemic cultural stigmatization of disability. The paper confirms that successful classroom management by TWDs does not depend on the severity of impairment but rather on contextual enablers and constraints within the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem of the multicultural learning environment.

Systemic barriers, such as inaccessible physical environments, inconsistent administrative support, policy-practice mismatch, and subtle or overt stigma, are also noted in the study. These limitations sabotage inclusive education agendas and impose a disproportionate burden on teachers who must negotiate accommodations themselves, accommodations that are supposed to be provided in theory. However, the teacher participants' resilience underscores the need for systemic change through targeted training, sensitive school administration, and resource distribution based on experience rather than draft policies. The results thus necessitate a re-conceptualizing of inclusion with a disability-focused approach, where TWDs are not just viewed as beneficiaries of inclusion, but as experts who will have more to share in inclusive school education. Finally, the research contributes to the knowledge on the intersection of disability, culture, and classroom management in daily learning activities.

⁷⁰ Can Yang, "Adapting Teaching Methods to Accommodate Diverse Learning Styles in Education," *Journal of Higher Education Research* 5, no. 6 (February 24, 2025): 535, <https://doi.org/10.32629/jher.v5i6.3382>.

Nevertheless, future studies should extend this study by using larger multisite samples, conducting comparative provincial research, and further exploring leadership practices to yield more acceptable and generalisable results that can truly enhance the systematic provision of support to TWDs.

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