



## Evaluating the Practices of Inclusive Education in the Secondary Schools: A Social Realist Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to evaluate inclusive education practices at secondary schools in rural settings in the Lebopo Circuit of South Africa. The qualitative research approach was used to evaluate inclusive education practices using the social realist perspective. The study used the case study research design together with an interpretive paradigm to evaluate the daily practices of inclusive education. The study consists of a population of 10 teachers, 5 School-Based Support Team (SBST) members and 5 principals from the selected schools. The participants were selected following purposive sampling and some participants have experience in implementing inclusive education. Data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews, observation and document review. The data was analysed thematically. Archer's social realist perspective and Bernstein's pedagogic discourse were used as theoretical lenses to evaluate the practices of inclusive education in the circuit under study. The study results revealed that teachers misinterpret the policy of inclusive education because they view it as a policy supporting only learners with disabilities. The study further showed that the majority of schools do not have functional school-based support teams, and they are not aware of and do not perform their duties as expected. The study concluded that there is a knowledge gap in School-Based Support Teams in fulfilling their roles in inclusive education practices, no sufficient support from the parents and monitoring by the Department of Basic Education in the implementation of inclusive education practices. The study recommended that the School-Based Support Teams be provided with continuous sufficient training with the engagement of the district-based support teams and that a parent-teacher collaborative approach be used to accomplish positive outcomes.

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### INTRODUCTION

The inclusion policy was established in 2001 to ensure that all learners in South African schools get equal education, regardless of their learning differences and diverse needs. Ainscow explains inclusive education as the policy that aims at providing equal education opportunities and access to an enabling education for every child regardless of their different learning needs.<sup>1</sup> The policy is obligatory for all teachers, school-based support teams and principals to comply with its principles. When the process of implementing inclusive education

<sup>1</sup> Mel Ainscow and Abha Sandill, "Developing Inclusive Education Systems: The Role of Organisational Cultures and Leadership," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14, no. 4 (June 2010): 401–16,415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603110802504903>.

practices is appropriately managed, it enhances the quality and standard of the process of teaching and learning, and all schooling environments will be enabled. This is because inclusive education practices are set to condemn the segregation of learners with diverse needs from mainstream schools, ensuring that all learners are supported to aid their academic performance. However, it appears that the schools in the Lebopo Circuit did not execute inclusive education practices realistically, and consequently, it deferred the progress of the implementation process. Miles et al. utter that the process of implementing inclusive education in New Zealand is done at a slow pace, and there is little evidence currently of children with disabilities being in schools.<sup>2</sup> Miles et al. also attribute the above conundrum to the absence of contextually and culturally appropriate measuring tools used to monitor the progress of implementing inclusive education policies.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this renders the current implementations of inclusive education policies ineffective and unable to fulfil the goal of accommodating all learners in schools.

When the South African government came into power in 1994, it implemented numerous policies to eradicate apartheid policies of exclusion. The primary mandate of the post-apartheid South African government policies was to ensure that all people were treated equally through the provision of equal rights and opportunities to participate in the economic and educational affairs of this country. It is through equality that the need for inclusion was prioritised. Hence, South Africa developed the Inclusive Education policy in 2001 to accommodate learners who were previously excluded from educational participation during apartheid and those who were still excluded in the post-apartheid government. Although the inclusion policy supports quality education for all learners in general schools, there are still problems regarding the practices of inclusive education in schools in Mokhele.<sup>4</sup>

Timmons argues that inclusive education remains the theory and away from the practice because teachers still grapple with problems in the implementation. Given this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the practices of inclusive education using Social Realist perspectives to determine its effectiveness and quality. The quest for this study is embedded in the bothersome issues of the standard and quality of inclusion practices in rural-based schools, which raised the thought of whether inclusive education serves its purpose of providing equal education for every learner. The research question underlying the study is; “What are teachers’ perspectives regarding the quality and standard of inclusive education practices in rural-based secondary schools?” This study is aligned with the pledge of the Education Department for schools to deliver quality and standardised education for all learners. The motivation of this study is to evaluate the practices of inclusive education in rural-based secondary schools using the concepts of structure, culture and agency, to suggest possible strategies to empower teachers, and also the approaches to enhance the standard and quality of the practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Timmons and Breitenbach, the inclusive education policy was invented in Canada in the 1950s aiming to provide opportunities to children who were debarred from societies because they were considered to be uneducable, evil creatures and possessed.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Grant shows that countries like Canada and India were the countries to first initiate the inclusion policy, but teachers in those countries still struggle to understand the processes of executing inclusive education.<sup>6</sup> Teachers have a problem with accepting that inclusive education is a policy that needs to be put into practice because of the complications that emerge from the policy. In addition, Florian concurs that inclusivity seems to be a complicated process for many teachers all over the world.<sup>7</sup> According to Hinds, practice “is the process of putting into action a programme or set of activities that are new to the people in an attempt to create change.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Susie Miles, Donna Lene, and Laisiasa Merumeru, “Making Sense of Inclusive Education in the Pacific Region: Networking as a Way Forward,” *Childhood* 21, no. 3 (2014): 339–53.

<sup>3</sup> Miles, Lene, and Merumeru, “Making Sense of Inclusive Education in the Pacific Region: Networking as a Way Forward.”

<sup>4</sup> Matseliso Lineo Mokhele, “Teachers’ Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development: A Case Study of the Mpumalanga Secondary Science Initiative (MSSI) Project” (2011), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Vianne Timmons and Marlene Breitenbach, “A Model of Teacher Support for Children with Autism: A Prince Edward Island Story.,” *Education Canada* 44, no. 1 (2004), 11.

<sup>6</sup> A Grant, *Access Audit Handbook* (London: Centre for Accessible Environments, 2013), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Lani Florian, “Inclusive Pedagogy: A Transformative Approach to Individual Differences but Can It Help Reduce Educational Inequalities?,” *Scottish Educational Review* 47, no. 1 (2015): 5–14.

<sup>8</sup> L Hinds, *Teacher Training and Development* (London: Sage Publication, 2017), 7.

### **The Challenges experienced by Teachers during the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policies**

Walton argues that the quality of inclusive education in South Africa in terms of its standards cannot be tracked.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, South Africa adopted the policy of inclusive education from other countries after a long period when the country's education system was dominated by the segregation of learners with special needs.<sup>10</sup> It is well known that in South Africa, learners with various needs were not provided with the opportunity to be in mainstream schools under the apartheid system. The lives of learners with learning challenges are worth living, as they enjoy the provision of equal education with all learners, and this is after the introduction of inclusive education practices in South Africa. Walton explains that inclusive education is a process of corresponding with traditional culture and communities and reproducing with Ubuntu.<sup>11</sup> Slee has said that "inclusive education has taken on different forms currently because it is now understood to be a goal or vision, an ideology, a practice, a policy, a field of knowledge production and a pedagogic discourse."<sup>12</sup>

Rosenholtz et al. argue that the education standard is a succinct and written description of the way teaching and learning should be conducted to achieve curriculum goals.<sup>13</sup> However, Booth shows that the standard of education is not a curriculum, but education as the procedure of teaching and learning that focuses on all elements of educational expectation and experience, including assessment and grading.<sup>14</sup> In the case of inclusive education, McCall asserts that standard encapsulates the body of knowledge, the experience of dealing with challenges in the general classroom and providing learners with learning barriers equal access to basic education.<sup>15</sup>

McDonough substantiates that the inception of the inclusion policy was established at a time when teachers were unprepared for the implementation.<sup>16</sup> McDonough further alludes that the reaction of teachers towards inclusive education is negative generally.<sup>17</sup> Roberts mentions that South African teachers are not yet ready to practice inclusive education in general education.<sup>18</sup> Roberts advances an argument that learners with special needs drop out of the general schooling system because they face rejection.<sup>19</sup> All of these issues raise the question of whether teachers have sufficient skills to teach all learners despite their diverse needs. Chataika et al. assert that South Africa is still in need of models that would be used to equip teachers with the required skills to implement inclusive education.<sup>20</sup> Brand, Favazza and Dalton have introduced a Universal Design Learning (UDL) guideline that simplifies and addresses the need for a stretchy curriculum which will be more helpful to teachers in the practice of inclusive education.<sup>21</sup> However, it remains questionable whether this framework will result in quality practices of inclusive education or not to address the challenges that teachers are facing in the implementation of inclusive education practices.

### **The measures that can be put in place to support teachers in implementing inclusive education**

According to McCall, achieving inclusive education should start from the elements that will guide inclusive education in the global context.<sup>22</sup> McCall further shows that creating inclusive education standards is difficult but not an impossible task to achieve.<sup>23</sup> This is because it can start with consultation and participation of teachers or learners with disabilities. The reviewed study shows that by 2030, the success of inclusive education should be fulfilled in the sense that general education needs to graduate learners with learning challenges who will be ready to plan, arrange and invent products, physical and digital environments that are general and accessible. Moreover, inclusive education standards should create infrastructure for a human rights model of disability. On

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Walton, "Decolonising (through) Inclusive Education?," *Educational Research for Social Change* 7, no.SPE(2018): 31–45.

<sup>10</sup> Walton, "Decolonising (through) Inclusive Education?"

<sup>11</sup> Walton, "Decolonising (through) Inclusive Education?"

<sup>12</sup> R Slee, *The Irregular School* (London: Routledge, 2011), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Rosenholtz, Stephanie Chan and Benjamin Balas, "A Crowded Model of Visual Search," *Journal of Vision* 9, no.8(2009): 1197.

<sup>14</sup> Tony Booth, "Promoting Educational Development Led by Inclusive Values in England," *Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Practices*, 2017, 1–20.

<sup>15</sup> Karen McCall, "Globally Defining an Inclusive Education Standard," *Journal on Technology and Persons with Disabilities* (2016), 36.

<sup>16</sup> K.I.M McDonough, "Action Research and the Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants," *The Modern Language Journal* 90, no. 1 (2006): 33–47.

<sup>17</sup> McDonough, "Action Research and the Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants."

<sup>18</sup> Brent W Roberts, "Contextualizing Personality Psychology," *Journal of Personality* 75, no. 6 (2007): 1071–82.

<sup>19</sup> Roberts, "Contextualizing Personality Psychology."

<sup>20</sup> Tsitsi Chataika et al., "Access to Education in Africa: Responding to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities," *Disability & Society* 27, no. 3 (2012): 385–98.

<sup>21</sup> Susan Trostle Brand, Antoinette E Favazza, and Elizabeth M Dalton, "Universal Design for Learning: A Blueprint for Success for All Learners," *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 48, no. 3 (2012): 134–39.

<sup>22</sup> McCall, "Globally Defining an Inclusive Education Standard."

<sup>23</sup> McCall, "Globally Defining an Inclusive Education Standard."

the other hand, Booth reiterates that achieving good standards of inclusive education will mean that general education should be able to warrant that learners with diverse needs are well acquainted with technological devices because the education system is transforming into the fourth industrial revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Soukakou assessed the quality of teaching in inclusive classrooms using the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) and reported that the inclusive classroom profile is good but still names and shames learners who have challenges.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Joyce, Weil and Calhoun claim that profiling should be used to advance the daily practices of inclusion in the sense that the requirements of learners with special needs will be catered for in regular classrooms rather than isolating them.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Ankutse, notes that using traditional measures to assess quality in inclusive classrooms is very useful, although they are not adequate for apprehending the dimensions of quality that affect the support for learners with special needs.<sup>27</sup>

Moswela, Mukhopadhyay, Moloiswa and emphasise that there are currently no effective criteria to measure inclusive education.<sup>28</sup> This means that there are no set standards for the quality delivery of inclusive education or standardised indicators to ensure effective practices of inclusive education. They further indicate that the current models used to frame an evaluation of inclusive practice should also be reviewed.<sup>29</sup> This will provide illustrations of operative measurement approaches to evaluate inclusive educational practices at every level of administration, i.e., from the departmental level to classrooms.

According to Mahlo, when standardised approaches are applied in line with the best practices, they can efficiently expose teachers to innovative ideas and methods for their daily teaching.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, they can help instil knowledge and instructional methods in teachers across the whole country. Furthermore, they can visibly prove the commitment of a nation to a particular course of action. Coşkun affirms that teachers in Istanbul face difficulties regarding the practice of inclusive education and are unable to produce strategies to deal with the difficulties.<sup>31</sup> As such, teachers tend to hate the practices of inclusive education or rather have negative perceptions and low morale. Teachers claim that they do not receive sufficient guidance to implement inclusive education in schools. They are unable to tell if what they do in practice is right or wrong. Inference can be made from this that the difficulties that teachers are encountering regarding the implementation of inclusive education can be resolved through continuous workshops or professional development.

Hehir and Katzman show that even though many countries developed different models and frameworks for inclusive education, little is being done about the strategies to be used in ensuring quality and successful practices of inclusivity in the classrooms.<sup>32</sup> The existence of challenges in the practices of inclusive education persists to be an educational crisis in many countries. Kirschner emphasises that there is still an increased number of learners diagnosed with disabilities in the whole world resulting from the bigger focus on assessment and early diagnosis.<sup>33</sup> According to Coskun, there is a need for assessment for teaching in inclusive classrooms; measuring the implementation of inclusive policy; identifying and removing barriers to inclusion, resourcing, financing; and evaluating effective teacher preparation for inclusion.<sup>34</sup> It can be deduced from the above argument that there should be a detailed review of the literature on the indicators for measuring inclusive education. Reflecting on the reviewed studies, there is an increasing demand for strategies that will drive the practices of inclusive education to quality standards.

<sup>24</sup> Booth, "Promoting Educational Development Led by Inclusive Values in England."

<sup>25</sup> Elena P Soukakou, "Measuring Quality in Inclusive Preschool Classrooms: Development and Validation of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2012): 478–88.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Joyce, Marsha Weil, and E Calhoun, "Models of Teaching Boston," *MA: Allyn and Bacon*, 1996, 28.

<sup>27</sup> N Ankutse, *Inclusive Education Concept in Ghana* (Accra: Gambi Publishers, 2017),3.

<sup>28</sup> E Moswela, S Mukhopadhyay, and S M Moloiswa, "Teacher Trainees' Level of Preparedness for Inclusive Education in Botswana Schools: Need for Change," 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Moswela, Mukhopadhyay, and Moloiswa, "Teacher Trainees' Level of Preparedness for Inclusive Education in Botswana Schools: Need for Change."

<sup>30</sup> Francina Dikeledi Mahlo, "Experiences of Learning Support Teachers in the Foundation Phase, with Reference to the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Gauteng" (2011), 45.

<sup>31</sup> Yelkin Diker Coşkun, Ülkü Tosun, and Esra Macaroğlu, "Classroom Teachers Styles of Using and Development Materials of Inclusive Education," *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2009): 2758–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2009.01.489>.

<sup>32</sup> T Hehir and L.I. Katzman, *Effective Inclusive Schools: Designing Successful School-Wide Programs* (San Francisco : Jossey-Bass, 2012), 11.

<sup>33</sup> Suzanne R. Kirschner, *Inclusive Education*, ed. W. George Scarlett (Sage Encyclopedia of Classroom Management : Sage, 2015),112.

<sup>34</sup> Coşkun, Tosun, and Macaroğlu, "Classroom Teachers Styles of Using and Development Materials of Inclusive Education."

## Theoretical Framework

This study is strengthened by the theory of Archer. According to Archer, the social realist theory explains how the morphogenetic approach provides an understanding of culture, structure and agency.<sup>35</sup> Morphogenesis is a notion that was developed by Margaret Archer's social realist theory. "The term morphogenesis refers to "change (-genesis) in the shape of things (morpho-), thus, a change in agency, or culture or structure."<sup>36</sup> A contrary term to morphogenesis is the term morphostasis which as its name suggests, refers to a situation where there is no transition. The morphogenetic cycle is an analytical framework, which follows the course of time. Archer's theory demonstrates the nexus between culture, structure and agency rather than collapsing them into one item.<sup>37</sup> The emphasis of this study was to evaluate how the practices of inclusive education were executed in the rural secondary schools of Lebopo Circuit. Thus, it was deemed that the practices of inclusive education in this study would better be interpreted using the Social Realist theory of Archer.<sup>38</sup> In the case of inclusive classrooms, this study focused on the morphogenesis of teacher agency and aimed to explore how teachers can be empowered to teach all learners irrespective of their different needs. The skills of implementing inclusive education take a long to acquire and require good training. This implies that systematic change can support the agential morphogenesis. Archer's theory played a vital role in this study because it showed that inclusive education practices hardly succeed if schools persistently experience structural and cultural issues, as well as teachers' agency.<sup>39</sup> Below is the application of all three theoretical lenses into the practices of inclusive education in schools:

### Culture

Archer notes that culture is described by interactions between people who are in a common social structure.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Archer states that culture incorporates the cultivation of people, i.e., supplying them with the ethics that give them direction to practical conduct.<sup>41</sup> Culture drives the notion of teachers' practice of inclusive education and how learners react to the teachers' strategies for implementing the practices of inclusive education. In this study, the implementation of inclusive education needs teachers who are willing and prepared to deal with learners with various learning needs and be able to accommodate learners with diverse needs.<sup>42</sup>

### Structure

Different philosophers define the term 'structure' differently. For instance, Geldenhuys and Wever define structure as "the factors of influence, e.g. social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability and customs that limit an agent and their decisions."<sup>43</sup> Again, Winters explains structure as a building or object that is constructed from several parts and resources.<sup>44</sup> Using the explanation provided by Geldenhuys and Wevers means teachers in inclusive education have to teach learners from different families with different backgrounds (social classes, cultures and religions).<sup>45</sup> It is, therefore, the duty of teachers to ensure that learners are given equal opportunities in the classroom because failure to do so may result in null and void practices of inclusive education. In this study, resources include guidelines such as the White Paper 6 and the Screening, Identification and Support (SIAS). Archer emphasises structure as an important element for the success of any policy implementation.<sup>46</sup> The current researcher held the view that schools should have classes that are conducive for different types of learners to learn and that the schools should accommodate learners with learning needs or difficulties. The DBE indicates that for a school to be ready for inclusive education, structural changes such as ramps to classrooms and toilets to accommodate learners who are physically impaired should be made available in all schools.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Margaret Scotford Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> White Paper 6, *Special Needs Education and Training Systems* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2001), 35.

<sup>43</sup> Johanna L. Geldenhuys and N E J Wevers, "Ecological Aspects Influencing the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Mainstream Primary Schools in the Eastern Cape, South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 33, no. 3 (2013), 17.

<sup>44</sup> Marcus A. Winters, "Understanding the Gap in Special Education Enrollments Between Charter and Traditional Public Schools," *Educational Researcher* 44, no. 4 (May 1, 2015): 228–36, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X15584772>.

<sup>45</sup> Geldenhuys and Wevers, "Ecological Aspects Influencing the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Mainstream Primary Schools in the Eastern Cape, South Africa."

<sup>46</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Basic Education (DoE), *Reviews of National Policies for Education* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2013), 11.

## Agency

According to Muthusamy, agency is the degree to which individuals influence a situation.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Archer argues that agents are 'people' in the socio-cultural system, who pursue the same objective.<sup>49</sup> In the context of this study, teachers have the agency's power to interact with learners to ensure that the practices of inclusive education become successful in schools. Fullan argues that teachers have a vital role in ensuring that the policy is successful in these discourses and practices.<sup>50</sup> It is therefore clear that the concepts of culture, structure and agency are interrelated and depend on one another to influence a successful implementation.<sup>51</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach was found relevant as it enabled the researchers to generate in-depth information regarding the sentiments of teachers on how the practices of inclusive education are applied in secondary schools following the social realist perspective. An interpretive paradigm was also applied and aided in investigating the teachers' daily practices of inclusive education to determine the successful implementation. The case study design provided an opportunity for the researchers to have an in-depth view of the challenges of inclusive education practices in the Lebopo Circuit as a case. The study consists of a population of 10 teachers, 5 School-Based Support Team (SBST) members and 5 principals from the selected schools. The participants were selected following purposive sampling and some participants have experience in implementing inclusive education. The data was gathered directly through semi-structured interviews with individual participants to observe and know their feelings regarding the implementation of inclusive education practices. Documents were used to gather additional data to complement the information provided by participants. The data was analysed thematically.

## RESULTS

Teachers are the custodians of the implementation process. The study focused on the teachers' perspectives on the practices of inclusive education in secondary schools. Teachers were interviewed on their perspectives on the practices of inclusive education. The following sub-themes and subjects emerged: quality planning and support by the Department of Basic Education, Misinterpretation of the inclusive education policy, the credibility of the School-Based Support Teams in schools, the application of the policy of Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support, the inappropriateness of learner profiling, teachers' lack of motivation, and parental involvement. The sub-themes and issues that emerged were used to guide the discussions below and Archer and Bernsteins' theories were used to underpin or confirm the findings.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The main theme is the teachers' perspectives on the practices of inclusive education. From the main theme, the following sub-themes emerged: roles played by different structures in inclusive education, misinterpretation of the policies for inclusive education, the credibility of the School-Based Support Teams in schools, the application of the policy for Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support, the inappropriateness of learner profiling, teachers' lack of motivation, professional teacher development and parental involvement. Each of the sub-themes is discussed below.

### Roles played by Different Structures in Inclusive Education Practices

The study showed that the structures involved in the practices of inclusive education are important and they add value in enhancing the quality and standardised practices. Danielson elucidated that for inclusive education practices to be effectively carried out, the structures need to be involved and work together.<sup>52</sup> This was attested by Slee who maintains that inclusive education cannot take place in a vacuum.<sup>53</sup> Some pillars provide support and encouragement to teachers and learners in the process of implementing the practices of inclusive education. The structures involved here are the Department of Basic Education, the District-based support teams, the principals, the school-based support teams, the infrastructural structure (e.g. buildings), the Non-governmental organisations and the community at large. Archer asserts that where there are humans there is interaction to

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<sup>48</sup> Nirashnee Muthusamy, "Teachers' Experiences with Overcrowded Classrooms in a Mainstream School." (2015), 36.

<sup>49</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Fullan, "Stratosphere: Integrating Technology, Pedagogy, and Change Knowledge," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 62, no. 4 (2013): 429–32.

<sup>51</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*.

<sup>52</sup> Charlotte Danielson, *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (AsCD, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Slee, *The Irregular School*, 13.

bring a systemic change.<sup>54</sup> This includes all the structures that are involved in education that need to engage to ensure that the cycle of implementation reaches success. Archer further initiated the morphogenetic cycle as a logical structure which follows the course of time.<sup>55</sup> In the arena of inclusive education, the central focus is the morphogenesis of teacher agency, where teachers have to gather different knowledge and capabilities for quality and standardised implementation to improve the practices in schools, with the support of all the structures involved. It is a tight series that could take time but is worth working on.

### **Misinterpretation of the Inclusive Education Policy**

The study found that the first step to successful practices of inclusion is to understand the policies connected to inclusive practices. However, the study revealed that teachers misinterpret inclusive education as a policy that concerns learners with special needs or disabilities. UNESCO describes the inclusive education policy as the framework that caters for all learners, and guides in overcoming the hindrances that restrict learners from being present and taking part in the teaching and learning process.<sup>56</sup> However, the misinterpretation remains an impediment to the effective practices of inclusive education. Polikoff et al. say that if teachers misunderstand a policy, they are likely to reject or accept it based on misinformation, and this would either impact negatively or positively on the implementation of the policy.<sup>57</sup> Sinatra and Broughton suggest the use of refutation texts as the strategy to address the misinterpretation of educational policies such as inclusive education.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, Sinatra and Broughton refer to refutation text as the approach to rectifying people's misunderstandings of an issue.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, it turned out in the study that some schools try to do their most in implementing the practices of inclusive education. Nevertheless, the schools do not reach the level of quality and standardised implementation. Bubpha argues that the policy of inclusive education was introduced to bring transformation into the quality of life for all learners and to enable their self and social development, to create education quality assurance.<sup>60</sup> However, Kuyini and Desai noted that teachers do not commit much to the implementation process, because they do not see it as worthwhile, since they think the policy is meant for learners who are disabled, and mainstream schools have fewer percentages of learners with disabilities.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Credibility of the School-Based Support Teams in Schools**

The study revealed that School-Based Support Teams are important structures that have to plan and provide adequate resources that would augment the quality of education for every learner, even those with special needs. However, the study found that School-Based Support Teams in rural schools are not credible or functional. According to Mahlo, the best tactic to augment the quality implementation of the practices of inclusive education is by empowering the School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), because as of yet, they do not possess the relevant knowledge and skills to support teachers and learners.<sup>62</sup> Naicker discussed the following categories as the tools to be considered by the school-based support team in addressing the challenges of both teachers and learners, which are: The Whole School Development (WSD) which regulates the needs of the entire school, the Learner Support Portfolio (LSP) which is responsible for the early identification of needs and provision of exact interventions for all learners encountering learning barriers and lastly; the EWP6 states that Educator Support Portfolio Committees (ESPs) ensures that teachers are well equipped with necessary knowledge and skills and to also assist in eradicating the barriers during the teaching and learning process.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*, 2.

<sup>56</sup> UNESCO, *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. Paris. UNESCO (2014), 7.

<sup>57</sup> Katie Pak et al., "The Adaptive Challenges of Curriculum Implementation: Insights for Educational Leaders Driving Standards-Based Reform," *AERA Open* 6, no. 2 (2020): 1.

<sup>58</sup> Gale M Sinatra and Suzanne H Broughton, "Bridging Reading Comprehension and Conceptual Change in Science Education: The Promise of Refutation Text," *Reading Research Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (2011): 374–93.

<sup>59</sup> Sinatra and Broughton, "Bridging Reading Comprehension and Conceptual Change in Science Education: The Promise of Refutation Text."

<sup>60</sup> Suchada Bubpha, "Models of Inclusive Education: One Size Does Not Fit All," *International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education* 3, no. 2 (2014): 328–34.

<sup>61</sup> Ajay K Das, Ahmed B Kuyini, and Ishwar P Desai, "Inclusive Education in India: Are the Teachers Prepared?," *International Journal of Special Education* 28, no. 1 (2013): 27–36.

<sup>62</sup> Mahlo, "Experiences of Learning Support Teachers in the Foundation Phase, with Reference to the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Gauteng," 176.

<sup>63</sup> Kamala Naicker, "Leadership for Inclusive Education: A Case Study of a School Management Team in an Urban Primary School." (2019); Department of Basic Education (DoE), *Quality Education for All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2014).

Based on this study, none of the categories mentioned above are in existence. The school-based support teams are not aware of their duties in schools. However, the researcher explained the duties to teachers who wanted to know. According to Kirschner, a school-based support team is expected to assist teachers in identifying and assessing the learner's barriers and come up with strategic planning on how to deal with such.<sup>64</sup> It has been proposed that the National Department of Education have to provide specialist personnel to offer adequate initial training that will be continuous and high-quality professional development training. In concurrence, Florian said that in the situation of teaching in an inclusive context, teachers need to be guided in identifying learning barriers that serve as obstacles to achieving quality practices of inclusivity.<sup>65</sup> The committees have to be guided by the policy for screening identification, assessment and support to ensure that all learning barriers are identified and taken care of. Hoskins showed that the development of inclusive schools needs patience and passion and that is what the current study intended to achieve.<sup>66</sup>

## SUMMARY

The study revealed that teachers in rural schools do not have sufficient knowledge to execute the practices of inclusive education with diligence. They do not engage in activities of inclusive education, hence the slow progress in the implementation of the practices of inclusive education. The study also found that the Department of Basic Education does not provide adequate support to School-Based Support Teams because they were not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in serving the schools to help learners with diverse needs, as well as the teachers. The study also showed that the teachers' lack of expertise to apply the guidelines in screening, identifying, assessing and supporting learners, the ineffectiveness of the school-based support teams, teachers' lack of interest in scholarship (to enhance their knowledge that they keep abreast with the educational developments), no integration between the annual teaching plans (ATPs) and work schedules and the inclusive education practices, less training for teachers are the contributing factors to the slow progress in the implementation of the practices of inclusive education. The implementation of Inclusive education is complex and therefore needs teachers to be provided with sufficient support for them to be well prepared.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Thorough training and professional development for school-based support teams: The study discovered that the school-based support teams are not fully aware of their duties and the application of the SIAS policy. The study recommends that teachers should be trained continuously to ensure that they acquire adequate knowledge of their duties.
- Appropriate learner profiling: It is recommended that learners be profiled at the beginning of every year when they register for their new classes. This will assist teachers in knowing the type of learners they have in their classrooms.
- Continuous meetings: It is further recommended that the school-based support teams meet every quarter to discuss and share ideas on the issues that would improve the well-being of both the teachers and learners at the schools and to ensure that the schools are enabling teaching and learning to take place efficiently.

## CONCLUSION

The study was carried out to evaluate the practices of inclusive education in secondary schools of Lebopo Circuit, in Limpopo Province. There is a lack of criteria to measure quality and standard in the practices of inclusive education in schools, hence the poor practices of inclusive education remain predominant. Reflecting on the findings on the roles played by different structures in the implementation of inclusive education practices in secondary schools, particularly in rural contexts, it is clear that the Department of Basic Education is seen to be neglecting rural schools by failing to provide physical support and professional development for teachers. The practices of inclusive education are done improperly without the agency of School-Based Support Teams and District-Based Support Teams. The study, therefore, concludes that rural schools need the strong collaboration of School-Based Support Teams and parents for operative and successful Inclusive education practices to be shaped, and to produce their knowledge and skills for the development of the academic lives of the learners.

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<sup>64</sup> Kirschner, *Inclusive Education*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> Florian, "Inclusive Pedagogy: A Transformative Approach to Individual Differences but Can It Help Reduce Educational Inequalities?" 6.

<sup>66</sup> Barbara Hoskins, "Developing Inclusive Schools" (Bloomington, IN: The Forum on Education, 1996), 12.



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I.B. contributed the abstract, introduction and background of the study, the research questions and the literature review. K.S. wrote the theoretical framework, methodology, conclusion and recommendations of the study. L.K. wrote the discussion of the findings.