

# The Implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy to Manage and Support Teaching and Learning Processes in KwaZulu-Natal



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## ABSTRACT

The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy was developed to enable South African schools to respond systemically to diverse needs within an inclusive education (IE) system. This study explored teachers' role as case managers with the implementation of the SIAS policy in inclusive education in three schools in the Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal. One departmental head and one principal from each of the selected schools were interviewed while two focus group discussions per school consisting of six teachers were conducted. The researcher used a reflective journal during the research process to ensure that the study was conducted rigorously as this improves the quality of the study. This qualitative study was grounded by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory. The findings revealed that teachers lack adequate knowledge of the SIAS policy, leading to insecurity in its implementation. Overcrowded classes also pose a challenge, hindering teachers' ability to provide individual support. The research aimed to contribute to a greater understanding of teachers' challenges in understanding SIAS policy and the effective implementation of inclusive education. This study discusses the inadequate knowledge, understanding, and skills of teachers in implementing the SIAS policy effectively. To remedy this, regular workshops should be provided to teachers, which should explain the SIAS process or protocol, provide information on the responsibilities of all stakeholders, and inform teachers about their roles and responsibilities as case managers. Additionally, collaboration between the DBST, SBST, parents, and teachers is essential for the successful implementation of the policy, as it aims to provide teachers with the necessary support and resources.

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## INTRODUCTION

The SIAS policy aims to enhance educational access for those who are hindered from learning, such as those who are not in regular schools due to various barriers, and provides a framework for the assessment, screening and support of learners with learning impairments and for the development of services,

programmes and activities for learners to enhance participation in schools.<sup>1</sup> The social model of the SIAS policy considers the needs of the individual.

The SIAS policy outlines the requirements and procedures for admitting and supporting learners with special needs in special education settings and schools. It provides a framework for schools to identify and assess learning barriers, and to provide appropriate programs, support, and resources for learners with special needs.<sup>2</sup>

The SIAS process identifies the level and extent of support needed in classrooms and schools to improve the participation of learners, particularly those with learning barriers. These barriers include socioeconomic factors, unsafe environments, inadequate support services, language, and communication issues.<sup>3</sup> Inadequate recognition, parental involvement, and resources for effective teaching and learning strategies may also contribute to learning challenges.

According to Minister Angie Motshekga, the SIAS policy was introduced in 2014 and developed new functions for role players within the education support system, that is, District-Based Support Teams (DBST), School-Based Support Teams (SBST), Special School Resource Centres (SSRC) and Full-Service Schools (FSS).<sup>4</sup> The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of role players in developing a more inclusive educational system. It guides how to support and provide additional interventions to learners with special needs.<sup>5</sup> The policy also acknowledges the important role of parents, teachers, and the community in creating an inclusive environment for all learners, staff, and communities.<sup>6</sup> It recognises the teacher's role as a case manager in fostering a conducive learning environment.

The move toward inclusive education in the South African education system was aimed at allowing learners with learning disabilities to reach their potential. Individuals with low support needs would attend ordinary schools or neighbourhood schools ensuring that those with moderate support needs could attend a FSS or be supported by resource centres for ordinary schools.<sup>7</sup>

However, the execution of IE in South Africa has been inconsistent. According to Hess, elements of exclusion have been observed in distinguishing between learners that require high-intensive, moderate and low levels of support, thereby placing them in either special, full service or mainstream schools, which has affected the progression of the execution of IE.<sup>8</sup> This was one of the reasons the SIAS policy was launched in 2014.

SIAS policy was developed to enable South African schools to respond systemically to the various needs within an IE system.<sup>9</sup> It aims to enhance the quality of education for all learners, specifically those with learning barriers and impairments. This policy framework aims to establish a uniform approach to identify, assess and support learners while focusing on support and management of the learning and teaching processes for those who encounter learning barriers. The SIAS policy shifts the focus from being an organiser of support provision to a more encompassing framework that encompasses a variety of resources, personnel, and programmes that will enhance learner participation in ordinary and special schools.<sup>10</sup>

There are many studies conducted on inclusive education in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> However, there is little research done on the implementation of the SIAS policy in South Africa. Therefore, to bridge the gap, the research study was designed to explore teachers' experiences with the implementation of the SIAS policy in inclusive education, as well as the SIAS policy implementation process.

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<sup>1</sup> Nareadi Phasha and Paseka A Mosia, "Access to Curriculum for Students with Disabilities at Higher Education Institutions: How Does the National University of Lesotho Fare?," *African Journal of Disability* 6, no. 1 (2017): 1–13.

<sup>2</sup> S. Rottaro, "Exploring Collaboration between Psychologists and Learning Support Teachers during the SIAS Process" (Stellenbosch University, 2022); Department of Basic Education Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>6</sup> S.A. Hess, "Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy in Mainstream Schools" (Stellenbosch University, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Republic of South Africa, *Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*.

<sup>8</sup> Hess, "Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy in Mainstream Schools."

<sup>9</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>11</sup> Petra Engelbrecht, "Inclusive Education: Developments and Challenges in South Africa," *Prospects* 49, no. 3 (2020): 219–32.

To understand teachers' experiences as case managers, the research followed a qualitative research approach underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm and supported by a case study research design. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data as it involves identifying themes that can encapsulate the stories found in the accounts of data sets. Teachers play an important role in the SIAS protocol and are fundamental in the successful implementation of the SIAS policy. Thus, the main aim was to investigate teachers' role as case managers with the implementation of the SIAS policy. This will assist in developing teachers' skills and knowledge in the application of the policy and address various hindrances they have encountered.

In the subsequent sections, the literature review including the various stages and role of the teacher as case managers in the SIAS protocol and the levels of support is explained. The theoretical framework, underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory is discussed. The methodology including population and sampling, data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations is also explained. Thereafter, the themes and discussion of findings are explained. Lastly, recommendations are provided.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Role of Teachers as Case Managers in the Sias Protocol

The teacher's role as a case manager is crucial in the SIAS protocol and involves screening, identifying, assessing and supporting. Ntseto *et al.* and Hess provide a concise outline of the various stages and the role teachers play as case managers.<sup>12</sup>

*Stage 1* is the initial screening led by a learner profile that teachers must complete. All learners must be screened at admission and beginning of each phase, and their findings must be documented in a learner profile. This will be the expert learner profile used by the Department and will be captured in the Learner Unit Record Individual Tracking System (LURITS).

*Stage 2* comprises identifying and addressing barriers to learning and development at the school level and states that teachers should become case managers to manage the support procedure of a vulnerable/at-risk learner and parents/guardians/caregivers of the learner should be actively involved in the SIAS decision-making process. Teachers, however, will be directed by documents, which start with Support Needs Assessment 1 (SNA1). The following must be captured on SNA1: areas of concern: confirmed with discussions with parents/guardians/caregivers and a support plan and review date. SNA 2 guides the SBST on learner referrals.<sup>13</sup> The identification of learning barriers made by the teacher is reviewed, and then a process is formulated to strengthen the support system of the learner is formulated. Acting on the support process and setting a review date is also the role of the SBST. Reviews must be conducted at least once per term. Exceptions from standard procedures can be allowed for learners who are vulnerable to abuse.

However, if support cannot be arranged at the school level, the DBST is the subsequent step and *Stage 3*. The DBST is an integral part of the SIAS protocol. Its role is to manage the various stages of identifying, assessing, and supporting. Here, SNA 3 guides the DBST upon learner referrals, which means that a review of the support process is developed by the SBST and the teacher.

### Levels of Support

The SIAS policy provides guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of various support programmes. There are three levels of support: low, moderate, and high. The low level includes proactive and preventive provisions that cover support requirements for public schools, often included in the policies and procedures of departments and agencies.<sup>14</sup> Schools can provide specialist interventions, either once or twice a term, to meet learners' needs. The curriculum and school design should be tailored to meet

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Motshidisi Ntseto et al., "Exploring the Impediments to the Implementation of Policy of Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support in Schools: Implications for Educational Evaluators," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 8, no. 2 (2021): 1383–92; Hess, "Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy in Mainstream Schools."

<sup>13</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

the needs of learners and teachers, which can be achieved through accommodation at the school level. There are also programmes available for staff on policy implementation.<sup>15</sup>

The moderate-level support provisions are usually above the various requirements that are covered by the programmes, policies and standards of public schools and can be provided once-off, on a short-term, or intermittent basis. These support provisions can easily be accommodated in the regular operations of schools or classrooms, and they should be made available to all public schools.<sup>16</sup> There are transversal teams that are composed of support personnel from various schools at the district and circuit level who have the duty of monitoring and supporting the employment of an IE programme. They are also required to frequently engage teachers to guarantee that the support that is provided is effective. Additional planning time is also required for the various tasks and activities that are related to the execution of an IE programme, such as the assessment and curriculum. These activities are monitored by the SBST. Furthermore, there are training and outreach programmes for management and teachers on awareness and policy implementation.<sup>17</sup>

The high-level support provisions are comprehensive and specialised, often exceeding the requirements of public school programs, policies, and standards. They are typically provided through dedicated schools or classes to ensure that learners receive the necessary accommodations and support. While high-level support is usually offered at special schools, it should not be viewed as restricted to specific locations. When a school cannot meet the needs of a learner, alternative arrangements must be made to ensure that the learner receives adequate support in an ordinary school.<sup>18</sup> A range of support services, including supervision and individual assistance, are provided regularly to reduce the teacher-to-learner ratio. Additionally, induction programs and ongoing training are implemented to prepare teachers for their responsibilities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The SIAS policy is based on the Bronfenbrenner Bio-Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights the significance of every individual in the school.<sup>19</sup> The SIAS policy intends to move the focus of basic education away from the location of barriers within the learners and toward the establishment of all systems that can support lifelong learning. The systems include family, teachers as well as community.<sup>20</sup>

The multiple forms of support and intervention that are designed to help individuals with learning barriers must also ensure that the order in the various systems is not disturbed.<sup>21</sup> Aside from the physical barriers that prevent learners from learning, other factors can help them succeed in their studies. To make decisions regarding the support that they can provide, implementers of the SIAS Policy should thoroughly explore both the support factors and barriers in their systems which relate to school officials who should consider the various support structures that are available within their school. This step should help them identify support structures and factors necessary to assist their learners succeed. It is only after all of these have been used that a referral can be made to another system.

Although the primary cause of learning barriers is not their own actions, other systems, such as the home, community, and school, can also contribute to this phenomenon. This means multiple factors that can affect a learner's learning capability can be influenced by the multiple barriers that are in the

<sup>15</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>19</sup> Manthema Florina Matolo and Awelani M Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 20, no. 9 (2021): 207–21.

<sup>20</sup> Manthema Florina Matolo and Awelani M Rambuda, "Evaluation of the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa.," *International Journal of Education and Practice* 10, no. 1 (2022): 11–24; S.Y. Stofile, "Factors Affecting the Implementation of Inclusive Education Policy: A Case Study in One Province in South Africa" (University of the Western Cape, 2008); Johnnie F Hay, "Implementation of the Inclusive Education Paradigm Shift in South African Education Support Services," *South African Journal of Education* 23, no. 2 (2003): 135–38.

<sup>21</sup> Matolo and Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa."



school.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the SIAS policy, established in 2014, thus aims to move the focus away from the learner and toward the establishment of all systems that can support lifelong learning.

## METHODOLOGY

In this research, a qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate. Interpretivism was considered appropriate for this study as the various characteristics of the interpretivist paradigm allow researchers to engage in qualitative methods that are most appropriate and relevant. These methods can then be used to better understand the experiences of the participants' experiences.

A case study research design was considered suitable for this research study to gain insight into teachers' experiences as case managers with the implementation of the SIAS policy.

### Population and Sampling

Three schools in the Pinetown district of KwaZulu-Natal were selected for this research study due to the implementation by the schools of the SIAS Policy in inclusive education and ease of access. From each school, one principal and one departmental head were purposely sampled to participate in semi-structured interviews and twelve teachers were chosen to participate in focus group discussions.

### Data Collection

The study aimed to collect data using various techniques to answer research questions. These techniques include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and a reflective journal which permitted the researcher to explore information and elicit a deeper understanding of the data.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data as it involves identifying themes that can encapsulate the stories found in the accounts of data sets. The most crucial component of thematic analysis is that the analysis process must be systematic in order to produce a high-quality final output.

### Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical conduct in this research, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the UNISA Research Ethics Committee. The consent to conduct research in the province was requested and allowed by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. Subsequently, principals from the selected schools were approached asking for their consent to conduct research at the schools. Participants were invited to participate in the study and informed about the study and the reasons for conducting it. They were informed that the interview would be recorded and that they should signify their consent in writing. The confidentiality clause, which clearly states that all materials related to this study remain between the researcher and the participants, was also elucidated. Electronic files and transcripts are stored securely. Anonymity was ensured as the identities of the individuals have been protected.

## PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Three schools were chosen from the schools situated in the Pinetown District of KwaZulu-Natal. Within these schools, principals, departmental heads, and teachers were purposely sampled to participate in the study. Their demographics are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Demographics of participants**

School	Code	Participant	Grade	Data Collection
A	A1	Female	Principal	Semi-structured interview
	A2	Female	Departmental Head	Semi-structured interview
	A3	Female	R	Focus group (F1)
	A4	Female	1	Focus group discussion (F1)
	A5	Female	2	Focus group discussion (F1)

<sup>22</sup> Matolo and Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa."

School	Code	Participant	Grade	Data Collection
	A6	Female	3	Focus group discussion (F1)
	A7	Female	4	Focus group discussion (F1)
	A8	Female	5	Focus group discussion (F1)
	A9	Female	Departmental Head	Focus group discussion (F2)
	A10	Female	3	Focus group discussion (F2)
	A11	Female	4	Focus group discussion (F2)
	A12	Female	5	Focus group discussion (F2)
	A13	Female	6	Focus group discussion (F2)
	A14	Female	7	Focus group discussion (F2)
B	B1	Male	Principal	Semi – structured interview
	B2	Female	Departmental Head	Semi – structure interview
	B3	Female	RA	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B4	Female	1A	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B5	Female	1B	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B6	Female	2A	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B7	Female	2B	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B8	Female	3A	Focus group discussion (F3)
	B9	Female	3B	Focus group discussion (F4)
	B10	Female	4A	Focus group discussion (F4)
	B11	Female	4B	Focus group discussion (F4)
	B12	Female	5A	Focus group discussion (F4)
	B13	Female	6B	Focus group discussion (F4)
	B14	Male	7A	Focus group discussion (F4)
C	C1	Male	Principal	Semi – structured interview
	C2	Female	Departmental Head	Semi – structured interview
	C3	Female	RA	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C4	Female	1A	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C5	Female	2A	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C6	Female	3A	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C7	Female	4A	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C8	Female	5A	Focus group discussion (F5)
	C9	Female	5A	Focus group discussion (F6)
	C10	Female	5B	Focus group discussion (F6)
	C11	Female	6A	Focus group discussion (F6)
	C12	Male	6B	Focus group discussion (F6)
	C13	Female	7A	Focus group discussion (F6)
	C14	Female	7B	Focus group discussion (F6)

### ***The SIAS Policy***

The SIAS policy aims to provide quality education to previously excluded learners and address inequalities in the education system with respect to the needs of vulnerable individuals with learning barriers. It seeks to develop standardised methods to identify and support these learners and is based on the need for school management, professional development, monitoring, and early intervention.<sup>23</sup>

The SIAS process assists teachers in identifying and assessing the level of support that is needed to help learners with learning barriers.<sup>24</sup> The process involves the participation of various individuals including school administrators, teachers and caregivers. The SIAS policy considers the various factors

<sup>23</sup> Faith Karimupfumbi and Veronica M Dwarika, “Teachers’ Experiences of Using the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Strategy to Support Learners Who Present with Characteristics of Dyslexia,” *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 1107.

<sup>24</sup> Karimupfumbi and Dwarika, “Teachers’ Experiences of Using the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Strategy to Support Learners Who Present with Characteristics of Dyslexia.”

that affect the support of learners with learning barriers and ranks the level of support that is required based on these factors.

Various barriers prevent them from learning, such as language, poverty, and disruption of family. In addition, there are also other factors, such as disability and an inflexible curriculum, that prevent them from participating in school.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Teachers' Understanding of the SIAS Policy***

The SIAS policy intends to establish a framework to screen, identify, assess and support learners with learning barriers to enhance participation in schools, as mentioned by one participant: *"The SIAS policy helps to support and enhance learner participation, to include all learners as well as to support the teaching and learning processes which affect the learners"* **(Participant A4)**.

Participants from the selected schools demonstrated a general understanding of the policy. Most of the participants indicated that it provides support for those with learning barriers. One participant said that *"it supports learners with learning barriers"* **(Participant A9)** while another participant from a different school noted that *"it identifies learners with learning barriers and it supports them"* **(Participant B2)**. The SIAS policy intends to provide quality education to vulnerable learners and those with learning barriers and the process is applied at different levels of the system identifying the early stages of learning barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals.<sup>26</sup> Each level focusses on a different intervention. One participant acknowledged that the policy *"Intends to enhance education access for learners with special needs and learning impairments"* **(Participant B9)**.

The SIAS policy declares that learners should be equipped with opportunities to receive quality education despite their backgrounds. The policy outlines the various steps for teachers to follow in recognising and supporting all learners with special needs. This process can be done using evaluation procedures and methods, as well as collaboration with parents. Participant B3 said *"We screen learners during admission. The results are recorded in learner profiles"* **(Participant B3)**, and Participant B1 reported that *"I used to screen all the learners at admission and beginning of each term, and record results in LURITS"* **(Participant B1)**. Participant B1 received training at a previous school and as a result, knew how to screen and record findings, which is an important step in offering support to learners with barriers. Apart from this participant, no other participant mentioned the learner profiles and forms, as stipulated in the SIAS policy, which illustrates the participants' inadequate knowledge of the policy.

A negative attitude toward a learner with learning difficulties may have a significant impact on their life.<sup>27</sup> As a result, teachers need to possess essential attitudes and beliefs to implement the SIAS Policy.<sup>28</sup> However, the concern is that many teachers have the notion they are incapable of screening and identifying learners' barriers and then providing support and monitoring during the teaching while adapting the curriculum to fit the learners' needs. Additionally, they claim that departmental support is insufficient, which is supported in the literature.<sup>29</sup>

Teachers have a limited understanding of the SIAS policy, which hinders their ability to effectively implement it and support learners with barriers. Participants across schools indicated a very basic understanding of the policy, and most have not received any training on its implementation.

### ***Skills that Teachers Possess with the Implementation of the SIAS Policy***

Teachers need skills to organise and prepare materials, as well as develop a conducive learning environment. This is evident in School A as one participant said *"I am able to easily identify a barrier of*

<sup>25</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>27</sup> Vusi S Mncube and Nicholas Lebopa, "The Dynamics of Implementing Inclusive Education in Schools.," *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society*, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Mncube and Lebopa, "The Dynamics of Implementing Inclusive Education in Schools.," P. Engelbrecht, L. Green, and S. Naicker, *Inclusive Education in Action in South Africa* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> J. Melane, "Exploring High School Teachers' Understanding and Implementation of the SIAS Policy in a Mainstream School" (Stellenbosch University, 2022); T Majoko et al., "The State of Inclusive Education in South Africa and the Implications for Teacher Training Programmes," *Teaching for All Research Report. Roodepoort: British Council*, 2018; E. Landsberg, D. Krüger, and E. Swart, *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A South African Perspective*, 3rd ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2016); J. Bornman and J. Rose, *Believe That All Can Achieve: Increasing Classroom Participation in Learners with Special Needs* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2010).

learning amongst learners and effectively work with other educators to arrange materials to help these learners and extra attention is also given to them” (**Participant A10**).

IE emphasises supporting the needs of all learners.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, IE policies declare that support should be a fundamental component of the regular education programme for all learners with needs and should be implemented in a manner that ensures that learning impairments are removed.<sup>31</sup> Teachers must develop effective teaching methods that can accommodate the varying needs of each learner. This can be done by various teaching methods.<sup>32</sup> According to Kusuma and Ramadevi, being able to design activities that are both engaging and challenging for all learners is also important to ensure that they are given the necessary tools and resources in addition to taking into account all their needs.<sup>33</sup>

One participant mentioned that “*I have the ability to provide support for students’ academic, social and emotional needs*” (**Participant C9**) while another participant indicated that “*I have skills of support*” (**Participant B5**). Being able to identify and value the various skills that each learner brings to class is also important to ensure that they are not only assessed based on academic abilities. This can help teachers ensure that they are teaching all learners the necessary skills, evident in School B where one participant said, “*I guide the learners to follow the best practices and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses*” (**Participant B14**). This participant identifies strengths and weaknesses of the learners in a variety of ways. This participant has an intuitive feel for identifying learners who are struggling by observing the learners in a group setting and having conversations with learners regarding the issues that they experience and the topics they enjoy.

Teachers must establish a conducive learning. One way is creating a safe space for communication where active listening is encouraged. According to Rogers, Lyon and Tausch, listening can also help establish a caring environment for all learners.<sup>34</sup> Participants from Schools B and C indicated that they have the skill of being a good listener. One participant said, “*I have skills in communication and listening*” (**Participant B9**), and one participant from School C said, “*I am a good listener*” (**Participant C1**). Learner-teacher emotional connections can positively impact learner wellbeing and school experience, motivating learners to work harder and perform well.

It is important to motivate learners with learning barriers. One participant said, “*My skill of motivation allows my learners to do better*” (**Participant A3**). Hawthorne declares that motivation is a key factor that drives people to take action and achieve their goals.<sup>35</sup> It helps learners stay focused, attentive, and engaged in goal-oriented behaviors. Motivated learners can overcome obstacles and excel in their learning, with the support of their teachers. Motivation can improve various positive outcomes, such as academic performance, wellbeing, creativity, cognitive skills, and commitment to learning.

### ***Skills Required for the Implementation of the SIAS Policy***

Mehta and Panju and Mastropieri and Scruggs state that teachers must know the various learning styles and motivational patterns of learners’ learning and they need to present information in a manner that is understandable to the learners.<sup>36</sup> There are various competencies that teachers can use to address the needs of learners.

Believing in learners is essential.<sup>37</sup> Teachers must know about each learner's potential and support systems to help them reach their full potential. This can be achieved through an inclusive vision of

<sup>30</sup> Martyn Van der Merwe, Jean V Fourie, and Amarachi J Yoro, “Learning Support Strategies for Learners with Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Perspectives of Recently Qualified Teachers,” *African Journal of Disability* 9, no. 1 (2020): 1–10.

<sup>31</sup> Department of Education (DoE), *Education White Paper 6 – Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Pretoria: Department of Education, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> P. Mittler, *Working towards Inclusive Education: Social Contexts* (London: Routledge, 2012); Van der Merwe, Fourie, and Yoro, “Learning Support Strategies for Learners with Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Perspectives of Recently Qualified Teachers.”

<sup>33</sup> A Kusuma and K Ramadevi, “Inclusive Education-Teacher Competencies,” *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 1, no. 3 (2013): 24–40.

<sup>34</sup> C. Rogers, H. Lyon, and R. Tausch, *On Becoming an Effective Teacher: Person-Centered Teaching, Psychology, Philosophy, and Dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Hawthorne, “Understanding the Importance of Motivation in Education,” *High Speed Training* 17 (2021).

<sup>36</sup> Anju Mehta and Namreta Panju, “Teaching Competencies in Inclusive Classroom,” *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature* 6, no. 8 (2018): 131–36; M.A. Mastropieri and T.E. Scruggs, *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Mehta and Panju, “Teaching Competencies in Inclusive Classroom”; S. Vaughn and C.S. Bos, *Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning and Behavior Problems* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2012).



learning. In addition to the classroom setting, teachers need to consider various factors that affect a learner's skill and attitude development and have a strong understanding of their educational backgrounds. One participant said, *"I think all teachers need to know their learners' potential"* **(Participant B6)**.

Mehta and Panju and Vaughn and Bos further explain that cooperation between staff is essential when working with learners with learning barriers.<sup>38</sup> There is an increasing diversity in the classrooms and as a result, teachers need to collaborate with other staff members which can assist in reducing the number of problems that can occur in the classroom. One participant said, *"We should have teacher support groups. Ideas could be shared in these groups"* **(Participant A6)**.

Individualised instruction is an educational approach that tailors learning to learners' backgrounds, learning styles, motivations, and interests. Special education aims to provide personalised programmes to meet the needs of learners. Maintaining a consistent, high-quality instructional approach requires teachers to utilize diverse teaching techniques and procedures to improve learner performance.<sup>39</sup> They can also accommodate the varying learning styles of their learners by using different environmental, social, and psychological conditions. One participant said, *"I think we need different techniques when working with learners with barriers"* **(Participant C8)** while another participant said, *"I am organised and patient"* **(Participant B5)**.

In this age of advanced technology, participants suggested that engaging in multimedia could help learners with learning impairment. However, teachers must undergo training to be provided with relevant technology skills: *Training is required in multimedia to teach learners with dyslexia as this will teach the learners to be practically engaged. For example, voice recognition tech(nology) can assist in transcribing ideas through speech and text as this can be beneficial for learners with difficulties with handwriting"* **(Participant A8)**. This aligns with Azmi, Nasien and Omar who suggest that multimedia enables the transmission of information across different sensory modalities, such as the tactile, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic senses.<sup>40</sup> In addition, it was found that using visuals enables the learners to concentrate for longer periods.<sup>41</sup>

The goal of support is to manage the admission of learners, identify suitable resources, develop structures for institutional development, and provide monitoring and assistance regarding curriculum and instruction.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, teachers require support and training to implement the SIAS policy.

### ***Teachers' Experience as Case Managers***

For the SIAS policy to be successful, teachers are tasked with the role of case managers. Emerging from the data is participants' understanding of their role as a case manager in providing support to learners with learning barriers. One participant said, *"My role comprises supporting the teachers and making sure that all 'slow' learners are supported accordingly in order for them to be accommodated in inclusive schools"* **(Participant A11)**. Most participants indicated that their role as a case manager is to support learners with learning impairments, *"My role entails supporting and monitoring learners"* **(Participant B12)**.

Participants from School C indicated that their role as case managers is ensuring that learners' needs are met: *"I make sure that all learners' needs are met and supported"* **(Participant C6)**, and *"I ensure that my learners' needs are met"* **(Participant C12)**. Teachers, as case managers, are responsible for ensuring that learners receive the necessary support. They also ensure that the school's policies and

<sup>38</sup> Mehta and Panju, "Teaching Competencies in Inclusive Classroom"; Vaughn and Bos, *Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning and Behavior Problems*.

<sup>39</sup> Mehta and Panju, "Teaching Competencies in Inclusive Classroom"; Vaughn and Bos, *Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning and Behavior Problems*.

<sup>40</sup> Aini Najwa Azmi, Dewi Nasien, and Fakhrul Syakirin Omar, "Biometric Signature Verification System Based on Freeman Chain Code and K-Nearest Neighbor," *Multimedia Tools and Applications* 76 (2017): 15341–55.

<sup>41</sup> Garfield Bester and L Brand, "The Effect of Technology on Learner Attention and Achievement in the Classroom," *South African Journal of Education* 33, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>42</sup> P. Engelbrecht and L. Green, *Responding to the Challenges of Inclusive Education in Southern Africa*. (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2007); Mastropieri and Scruggs, *The Inclusive Classroom: Strategies for Effective Instruction*; Lilian Lomofsky and Sandy Lazarus, "South Africa: First Steps in the Development of an Inclusive Education System," *Cambridge Journal of Education* 31, no. 3 (2001): 303–17.

procedures are designed to meet learners' needs, which means that the teachers, as the case manager, need to effectively implement the various steps of the SIAS policy.<sup>43</sup>

One participant explained, “*As a case manager, my job is to administer and advocate assessments responsible for giving advice and connecting with learners who experience learning barriers*” (**Participant A6**). According to the SIAS policy, A case manager coordinates the assessment and support services for learners, including conducting assessments, preparing referral forms, and consulting with parents/guardians to determine appropriate support.<sup>44</sup>

A school case manager assists learners, the school system, and parents by ensuring that all aspects of the learner's education are satisfactory. They collaborate with schools to identify areas where the learner can benefit, analyse the situation, and find solutions to facilitate effective communication among the school, learners, and parents ensuring that there is effective communication among the school, learners and parents.<sup>45</sup> However, one participant did not quite understand their role as a case manager: “*I maintain discipline in the class, keep the school neat, greet everyone with a smile, always come early*” (**Participant B6**).

### ***Challenges with the Implementation of the SIAS Policy***

Participants mentioned that the learners at their schools were particularly vulnerable and experienced a wide range of challenges which had a major effect on their learning: *There are physical, emotional, and mental barriers that learners face*” (**Participant A13**).

Most of the participants noted that there are two main barriers that learners experience: poverty and family disruption. One participant from School A stated, “*Learners in my class face many barriers such as the impact of poverty, family disruption, language and learning difficulties*” (**Participant A8**) and a participant from School B added, “*There’s poverty and family disruption*” (**Participant B13**). Poverty is a paramount factor affecting learners' education in South Africa. Despite government efforts to improve opportunities for disadvantaged communities, poverty remains a major obstacle to education. Poverty can prevent children from attending school and cause poor health, obstructing their education.

A participant from School C noted that “*Poverty ... The indigent learners cannot concentrate in class as they do not even have food to eat sometimes*” (**Participant C14**). The effects of this issue are severe in South Africa. Nortje and Pretorius explain that children living in poverty may experience issues regarding the development of their abilities.<sup>46</sup> This is evident in the less developed regions. Pretorius noted that learners living in poverty are more prone to experiencing issues related to their inadequate access to education and health services.<sup>47</sup>

Participants revealed that learners face other challenges, such as language barriers and peer pressure. One participant stated, “*Language barriers, poverty amongst certain groups of learners, learning difficulties such as ADHD and dyslexia*” (**Participant A7**). It can be challenging to understand a non-native language or to get used to speaking another language, particularly as the home language is not used as the LoLT. In South African schools, there is a transition from the home language to the LoLT.

One participant from School C posited, “*There are language barriers and peer pressure*” (**Participant C13**). Toppr defines peer pressure as the influence that peers exert on others, leading them to adopt certain lifestyles and opinions.<sup>48</sup> It can have various harmful effects, such as frustration if individuals are not willing to perform their tasks and can negatively impact a learner's academic and career prospects.

Taking the responses into account, the participants were aware that learners’ needs are not only for support but also a need for more structured and personalised education for the learners with needs.

<sup>43</sup> ZipRecruiter Marketplace Research Team., “What Is a Special Education Case Manager and How to Become One,” 2020, <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/career/Special-Education-Case-Manager/What-Is-How-to-Become>.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed Editorial Team, “What Is a School Case Manager? (With Salary and Job Outlook),” Indeed, January 27, 2023, <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/what-is-school-case-manager>.

<sup>46</sup> Martinus Jacobus Nortje, “The Effect of Poverty on Education in South Africa,” *Educator Multidisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2017): 47–62; W. Pretorius, “63% of Young SA Children Live in Poverty: Study,” *News24*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/63-of-young-sa-children-live-in-povertystudy-20160513>.

<sup>47</sup> Pretorius, “63% of Young SA Children Live in Poverty: Study.”

<sup>48</sup> Toppr, “Peer Pressure Essays for Students and Children,” 2019, <https://www.toppr.com/guides/essays/peer-pressure-essay/>.

However, when using the policy, teachers often experience a range of challenges that start with the first steps required by the policy, that of screening, identification, and assessment. A participant stated, “*We have to identify learners throughout the whole term because admission is done throughout the year – quite a lot of learners need support*” (**Participant C5**). It seems that teachers need to be adaptable and consider that screening, identification and assessment are ongoing throughout the year. However, the issue of large numbers of learners being admitted to schools and overcrowding in classes is a challenge.

Participants from all selected schools noted that overcrowded classrooms are an issue as indicated by one participant from School A who reported on “*overcrowded classrooms*” (**Participant A3**). This was affirmed by other participants, who complained about “*barriers such as overcrowding in the class*” (**Participant B11**) and “*classroom overload*” (**Participant C8**). In South Africa, the overcrowding of classrooms can be caused by the implementation of compulsory and free education since 1994.<sup>49</sup> A participant from School C noted that screening is affected by overcrowded classes: “*The screening is not done correctly due to a large number of learners in the classroom*” (**Participant C7**). The participants reported that it was difficult to provide individual support due to overcrowded classes, which began with the initial screening. Overcrowded classrooms are considered a stressor for teachers that could impact their ability to identify and address the learners' needs.

The curriculum, best managed at the school and classroom levels, should be adaptable to meet the needs of learners. This means that the teacher employs curriculum differentiation to respond to learners' needs. However, the participants were challenged by the curriculum: “*The curriculum is a problem. It's not flexible to accommodate the learners' needs*” (**Participant B14**).

The high number of curriculum requirements, coupled with varied teacher qualifications and experience, as well as inadequate skills and knowledge, present significant challenges that require more support.<sup>50</sup> One participant said that “*a challenge regarding the implementation is the support provision to learners and educators*” (**Participant B7**). Participant B8 also indicated that “*Support is not adequately provided to teachers when experiencing such barriers*” (**Participant B8**).

The participants recognised that there are learners with various impairments. However, the teachers lack sufficient support and resources to effectively manage and support these learners. Schools also seem inadequately equipped to support the large numbers of learners with diverse needs, as mentioned by one participant from School C: “*There are inadequate facilities at school*” (**Participant C11**).

The SIAS policy aims to create an inclusive environment through collaboration between teachers, parents, and school districts. Effective implementation requires training, support, and coordination among departments. Consistent and sustained support for vulnerable learners can be more cost-effective through cross-sector collaboration, with all staff members engaged in related activities.

### ***Implementation of the SIAS Policy***

The SIAS policy aims to create an inclusive environment for all learners. It requires parents and teachers to collaborate in developing this environment. This involves teachers having the necessary knowledge about learners' various needs and playing a significant role in identifying learners with impairments and making necessary changes to the curriculum.<sup>51</sup>

Training, district support, and seamless coordination of all directorates and state departments are needed to effectively implement SIAS policy.<sup>52</sup> Teachers require the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the SIAS process, which can be achieved through regular training and support. The relationship between the DBST and the SBST is essential for successful policy implementation, and coordination among the various state departments and agencies is also critical.

<sup>49</sup> M.G. Matshipi, “Teaching of Literacy Competencies to Learners in Overcrowded Classrooms in the Mamaila Circuit, Mopani District” (University of Zululand, 2018).

<sup>50</sup> Petra Engelbrecht et al., “Enacting Understanding of Inclusion in Complex Contexts: Classroom Practices of South African Teachers,” *South African Journal of Education* 35, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>51</sup> M.C. Mtonjeni, “An Investigation into Teachers' Abilities to Engage Parents of Learners to Assist Their Children with Learning Difficulties” (University of the Western Cape, 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Inclusive Education South Africa, “Understanding the SIAS: Fact Sheet,” accessed September 10, 2024, <http://www.included.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Understanding-SIAS.pdf>.

However, it has been revealed that participants had very little understanding of the SIAS policy, resulting in their inability to effectively implement it. There was a significant gap in the implementation of the policy, with factors such as overcrowding, time constraints, curriculum, inadequate training, resources, support, and knowledge hindering the participants' ability to implement the policy effectively and support learners with learning impairments.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the analysis as discussed in the themes and sub-themes indicate that teachers possess inadequate knowledge of the SIAS policy, and as a result, they feel insecure in implementing the policy. Additionally, it is evident that the teachers require training and support for the SIAS policy to be implemented effectively and to support learners with barriers to learning.

The achievement of the policy depends on the attitudes of teachers.<sup>53</sup> To efficiently support learners with learning difficulties, teachers must have the willingness to help them overcome their obstacles and motivate learners to achieve their academic goals.<sup>54</sup> Teachers should be patient and have a good understanding of the challenges that their learners face. Adverse attitudes of a few teachers toward learners with learning difficulties can prevent them from effectively implementing the SIAS policy. The negative attitudes of some teachers towards learners with learning difficulties can prevent them from implementing the SIAS policy.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, it is vital that school leaders help change the teacher's attitudes and environment of teachers to meet learners' needs.<sup>56</sup>

In South Africa, it is believed that the application of the SIAS policy has not been efficient due to inadequate proper training for teachers.<sup>57</sup> According to Tezera, for policies to be successful, they need to be implemented properly, and the training of teachers is a significant aspect that can assist in improving educational quality.<sup>58</sup> The conceptualisation and execution of policies should be entrusted to teachers who understand the rationale behind them.<sup>59</sup> However, teachers must have the required knowledge and skills to implement the SIAS Policy as well as overcome any challenges that they may experience.

According to the Department, there is a need for teachers with mandatory skills and attitudes to provide the best possible education to all learners, but teachers experience several challenges in implementing the policy.<sup>60</sup> The success of it hinges on teachers' understanding of the policy, their ability to employ the policy as well as the support offered to teachers who are regarded as key implementers. In addition, some teachers are still unaware of the importance of inclusive education despite the emphasis of the Department. This is evidenced by the participants' general understanding of inclusive education as well as the part that the SIAS policy plays and its relevance in offering quality education for all.

Teachers lack the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively implement inclusive education policy and create an inclusive environment. This is because the policy was not part of their initial teacher training, and they have had to rely on inadequate workshops and support from the DBST and SBST. There has not been sufficient training to empower teachers to implement the policy, and the continuous professional development provided by the DBST has not been adequate.

<sup>53</sup> Matolo and Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa."

<sup>54</sup> Norma Margaret Nel et al., "Teachers' Perceptions of Education Support Structures in the Implementation of Inclusive Education in South Africa," *Koers* 81, no. 3 (2016): 1–14.

<sup>55</sup> Toyin Mary Adewumi and Cina Mosito, "Experiences of Teachers in Implementing Inclusion of Learners with Special Education Needs in Selected Fort Beaufort District Primary Schools, South Africa," *Cogent Education* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1703446.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Policy on Screening, Identification and Support*.

<sup>57</sup> Matolo and Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa."

<sup>58</sup> Debela Tezera, "Factors for the Successful Implementation of Policies," *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review* 7, no. 8 (2019): 92–95.

<sup>59</sup> Matolo and Rambuda, "Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa"; Ann-May Marais and Elsabé Wessels, "Investigating the Interpretation and Implementation of Policies That Guide the Teaching of Reading in the Foundation Phase," *Reading & Writing* 11, no. 1 (2020): 1–8; Adewumi and Mosito, "Experiences of Teachers in Implementing Inclusion of Learners with Special Education Needs in Selected Fort Beaufort District Primary Schools, South Africa"; Brent C Elder, Michelle L Damiani, and Benson O Oswago, "From Attitudes to Practice: Utilising Inclusive Teaching Strategies in Kenyan Primary Schools," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 20, no. 4(2016): 413–34.

<sup>60</sup> Department of Basic Education (DBE), *Guidelines for Full-Service/Inclusive Schools* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2010).

Teachers face challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate resources, and insufficient time to provide individual support to learners who need it. The SIAS process is intended to ensure learners are screened, identified, and assessed, allowing teachers to develop the necessary support, including curriculum adaptation. However, teachers also need to ensure curriculum coverage, which can be difficult given the constraints they experience. Addressing these challenges would require providing teachers with the necessary training and development, as well as support.<sup>61</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The research revealed teachers' limited knowledge of the SIAS policy. To effectively implement an IE system, teachers will need essential knowledge and skills. Continuous professional development, such as regular training and support, is recommended to ensure that the policy is fully understood and that teachers are well-informed and have developed the relevant skills.

This study recommends that the Department ensure the SIAS policy is understood and interpreted correctly by teachers for inclusive education (IE) to be effectively implemented. Regular workshops and training for teachers, and providing schools with the necessary resources and tools, are essential to support teachers and ensure quality IE. The Department, District, and schools must collaborate to provide all learners with the same learning opportunities. Teachers need training to stay organised and efficient, which can help them focus on their learners and their specific needs. Teachers should be experts in their subjects to answer learners' questions, and training can help them expand their knowledge and gain deeper insight.

## CONCLUSION

The establishment of support structures for teachers is a crucial step toward realising the vision of IE and the component of SIAS strategy. This study found that although there are numerous support structures set, some teachers have inadequate capabilities and comprehension and schools lack the proper resources to support teachers. It is recommended that SBSTs consider hiring private psychologists and other health professionals to issue additional support to the teachers and their learners. This would allow them to discuss and share their insights and help establish a comprehension of the context of their learners' barriers. With the help of psychologists, teachers can obtain a deeper comprehension of the various characteristics of learners at different stages of their development which would assist them in creating teaching strategies that cater to the learners' varying needs.<sup>62</sup> The study was conducted on a limited basis and mainly focused on the teachers' experiences as case managers with the implementation of the SIAS policy. Future research could involve gaining a deeper understanding of the various stakeholder groups, such as the SBST, which could provide valuable insights into the implementation of inclusive policies. The implementation of IE could benefit from future research that includes the involvement of various groups such as the government, learning support teachers, teachers from schools that are part of the public sector, non-governmental organisations and parents.

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<sup>62</sup> P. Sinha, "Eight Benefits of Educational Psychology to the Teacher," July 4, 2022, <https://classplusapp.com/growth/8-benefits-of-educational-psychology-to-the-teacher/#:~:text=Educational psychology helps educators understand,the student's personality and behavior.>



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