Exploring challenges of student support in foundation phase

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ABSTRACT

This paper explored causes of challenges of learner support in foundation phase in Ekurhuleni south district. The goal of the study is to comprehend the fundamental causes of the challenges in delivering effective instruction to students. A purposive sampling technique was employed to choose fourteen teachers to participate in the study. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were the two techniques employed to gather data. Moreover, data analysis was done using qualitative content analysis. Two factors that contribute to difficulties with student support are teacher shortages and cramped classrooms. Together, these difficulties show how important it is for teachers, department heads, and members of the community at large to work diligently and together to remove these obstacles and create an inclusive learning environment where every student has an equal opportunity to succeed. Teachers must complete inclusive education training in order to confidently carry out the SIAS policy processes, which include screening, identification, assessment, and the provision and monitoring of support during teaching and learning in the classroom. It is essential to provide adequate classroom space through infrastructure development and wise resource allocation in order to create an environment that promotes the hiring of student support instructors and the provision of the greatest possible help to students.

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Introduction

The 1994 UNESCO paper states that the core tenet of an inclusive school is that all students, regardless of any challenges or differences they may have, should learn together whenever possible and receive support. These educational institutions ought to offer a range of services and support to correspond with the variety of obstacles to learning that each student faces. One of the biggest contributions to the construction of inclusive schools is made by teachers. The researcher was motivated to look into this subject in order to promote inclusive education and guarantee that students with a range of requirements get the assistance they need to succeed in the Foundation Phase. This study aims to add to the current conversation on educational innovation and development by examining the difficulties that teachers face in their pursuit of successful and engaged students. The ultimate goal is to benefit students, teachers, and the educational community as a whole.

According to studies done in South Africa, teachers find it difficult to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms, and contextual factors such the lack of formal support networks play a big role (Walton et al., 2014; Engelbrecht et al., 2003). This necessitates continuing professional development for teachers, support in the classroom, and the learning of competencies necessary to aid teachers in mobilizing support at the district and local school levels (DoBE, 2011).

The never-ending process of inclusive education and the search for strategies to identify and remove learning obstacles are major challenges for South African education (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007).

Teachers still find it difficult to implement the high standards of instruction that they are expected to uphold (McLeskey, Waldron & Reddy, 2014).

This study investigated the root causes of the foundation phase learner support issues in the Ekurhuleni South District.
The research question which guided the study was stated as follows:

What causes challenges of student support in the Foundation Phase in Ekurhuleni South District?

This paper is organized as follows: literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, data collection procedure, data analysis, ethical considerations, data analysis, discussion of the findings, conclusion and recommendation.

Literature Review

The literature suggests that there are a number of reasons why learner support can be difficult, although the results vary according on the situation. Understanding issues related to difficulties in providing student assistance for students who face learning barriers in the Foundation Phase as well as suggested mitigation strategies can be gained from this examination of the research. The chapter begins with a global perspective, then shifts to focusing on Africa and subsequently South Africa, with a primary focus on the difficulties associated with student assistance during the Foundation Phase. The primary focus is on investigating the root causes of student support issues in the foundation phase in the Ekurhuleni South District, as well as elements that function as learning barriers independent of the student (Becker, Newton & Sawang, 2013).

There have been talks of implementing inclusive education in the South African educational system, with a focus on the necessity for instructors to practice it in the classroom. As things are, though, a number of teachers are still ignorant of the importance and ramifications of international events that have altered the nation's educational landscape. To make matters more difficult, some teachers lack the necessary training to enable them to fulfill the fundamental prerequisites of the inclusive school project (Henry & Nambla, 2020). Achieving a more inclusive education system is difficult "due to an interaction between the existing limitations brought about mainly by poverty, under-development, legacies of colonialism, and current global inequity," according to Walton and Engelbrecht (2022:3), who concentrate on the Global South, of which South Africa is a part. The authors also emphasize how "complex, dynamic, and interactive" (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022:4) South Africa's educational system is when it comes to inclusive education. To successfully implement inclusive education, it is imperative to comprehend the intricate and interconnected processes of socio-cultural, historical, and economic factors that influence educational systems (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022).

High rates of inequality and poverty are the main problems that plague African nations and prevent the intended advancement in the delivery of high-quality education. The continent's schools are characterized by inadequate infrastructure as well as other issues like parents' lack of interest in their children's education, government funding that falls short of what the schools require, a scarcity of resources, teachers with inadequate training, and teachers working with multiple grade levels (Arias, Calago & Calungsod, 2023). The provision of efficient and high-quality education is mostly hampered by the aforementioned problems. The biggest obstacles to an inclusive classroom, according to the teachers, are lack of time, large class sizes, and insufficient training. Both the external environment and school institutions may be the source of the aforementioned interactions.

Another obstacle to social inclusion in the educational system is the situation of poverty. Reportedly, the majority of Syrian migrants who reached Turkey have almost no valuable possessions and no cash. They were therefore totally dependent on the Turkish government and unable to pay for their basic needs (Amnesty International, 2014). Challenges. (Soylu & Kaysili, 2019). With the expanding diversity of classrooms, teachers are no longer able to think about how to excite their students. Rather, teachers must think about what motivates their students and how to set up their classrooms to best suit their diverse variety of interests. According to Ginja and Chen (2020), a well-differentiated learning environment is one that is adaptable (in terms of time, space, and resources, for example) and carefully planned to satisfy the specific needs of each student for challenge, purpose, affirmation, and power.

Theoretical Framework

The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner was used in this investigation. Because it explains how a person's environment influences their growth and development, the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner's theory was thought to be appropriate for the current study (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Landsberg et al., 2005). An example of Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic theory (the second revision) can be found in Figure 3.1. According to Bronfenbrenner's thesis (1979:905), culture "provides the immediate context for human development" and plays a significant impact in an individual's daily behaviours. This is pertinent to the current study since the culture in urban and undeveloped areas leads people to consider that it is forbidden to bear a child with disabilities, and some even go as far as blaming it on the witchcraft perpetrated by Africans (Ref). As a result, the children and adults grow up with stigmatisation in such communities. Because culture affects how people develop on a daily basis, Vélez-Agosto et al. (2017) revised Bronfenbrenner's theory to include it in the microsystem category.

The Microsystem (children and their immediate family), Mesosystem (teachers and parents), Exosystem (parental work schedules), Micrsystem (cultural values, customs, laws), and Chronosystem (changes in the child's internal and external environment) are the five (5) levels of connections that Bronfenbrenner (1979), uses to define the structure of the environment. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, the child is the focal point and the starting point, around which are positioned all other settings that have an impact on the child while taking into consideration the five (5) tiers of relationships that make up the environment's structure.
It was determined that Bronfenbrenner's theory, with its ecological perspective, was suitable for the present investigation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Landsberg et al., 2005). It describes how an individual's environment affects their personal development. Bronfenbrenner (1979:905) asserts that culture "provides the immediate context for human development" and has a major influence on people's day-to-day behaviours. This is relevant to the current study because urban and underdeveloped cultures promote the idea that it is wrong to have a child with a disability; some even go so far as to attribute the problem to African witchcraft. Growing up in these locations causes stigma for both adults and children. Later, Bronfenbrenner's theory was updated by Velez-Agosto et al. (2017) and placed under the microsystem category.

Research & Methodology

To gather information for the study's research objectives and subtopics, a qualitative method was employed. The most popular methods for gathering data in this situation are focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observations. This suggests that, in order to provide relevant answers to research questions at the lowest feasible cost, qualitative research is the act of converting a problem into data for analysis (Asenahabi, 2019).

It was appropriate to use a deliberate sampling strategy (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019). This made it possible for the researcher to have a thorough grasp of the issue being studied, which is the difficulties encountered in inclusive educational settings. The rationale behind selecting participants was the belief that they possessed the necessary information to address the research issues. The group's core membership consisted of 10 grade teachers, two Foundation Phase department heads, and two principals. Together, these individuals represented fourteen teachers from two Foundation Phase primary schools located in the Ekurhuleni South District.

These teachers were selected due to their experience working with Foundation Phase students who need extra assistance and their ability to articulate the challenges they face in implementing inclusive education.

Data Collection Procedure

Primary sources for this study were focus groups and interviews, while a research notebook with field notes served as a secondary source to help gather pertinent data. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions promoted cooperation and gave participants the freedom to provide details and expound when necessary (Polat, 2020). Interviews with the participants took place at their respective schools; nevertheless, the interviews' scheduling did not conflict with the lessons being taught. Not only were the interviews audio recorded, but nonverbal cues were as well.

Using a checklist, the researcher took notes on different topics during the focus group talks and interviews to document impressions and other aspects that surfaced. The researcher was able to reflect on and make sense of her thoughts and feelings regarding the experiences and knowledge of the teachers with the use of this checklist. Recoding quick notes in the diary during interviews and discussions helped to ensure that journal writing did not become overly demanding, which helped to overcome potential obstacles brought on by the time-consuming nature of the process (Turner, 2020).

Data Analysis

The dates, locations, and times of the information acquired through focus groups, interviews, and the research journal were appropriately labelled. The researcher transcribed all voice recordings in order to better recall the meaning of each issue raised in the interviews (Akinwoye & Khan 2018). These transcriptions were given meaningful names, and a master data catalogue was created with the origins listed above. The data corpus that was utilized in subsequent phases of the theme analysis was assembled by the researcher in this step. The information included in the field notes, which were entered into the research journal, was vital to the study's conclusion and helped with reflection and explanation of the events that took place there.

Maintaining the privacy of the participating institutions and students was made easier by the use of pseudonyms. Each participant received a code that represented their school, position, and number, and the institutions were designated as School A and School B.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the University of South Africa's criteria for addressing ethical concerns in qualitative research. The Ethics and Advanced Degrees Committees (see Appendix A) gave their approval before the investigation began. The administration of the Ekurhuleni South District Office and the relevant committee at the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) were contacted to get permission to conduct the study (see Appendices C and D).

All participants gave their time, and their replies are to be kept confidential. The researcher observed the rules of qualitative research and the ethical and scholarly standards supported by the institution at all times during the course of the study.

Potential participants were educated about the purpose of the research and possible approaches to improve inclusive education and student support in South African schools so they could decide for themselves whether or not to take part in the study. The consent forms for participation, interviews, and recording were signed by the participating instructors. All people, regardless of their original language, could comprehend the forms because they were written in simple English. On the participant forms, the direct phone numbers of the supervisor and researcher were listed as emergency contacts.
Analysis and Findings

The findings revealed a number of systemic factors that contribute to difficulties with student support, such as a lack of resources, crowded classrooms, time constraints, insufficient support systems, and, most importantly, a lack of training for teachers. Other external factors that also play a role include low socioeconomic status and low parental participation. Together, these difficulties show how important it is for teachers, department heads, parents, and the community at large to work together to remove these obstacles and create an inclusive learning environment where every student has an equal chance to succeed.

Theme 1: Limited understanding of inclusive education, the SIAS policy and student support

The findings revealed that the majority of participants considered inclusive education as a process of accommodating all students in the class regardless of the barriers to learning they face, in which they receive equal learning and help.

In general, all participants demonstrated an overall understanding of inclusive education. PISA acknowledged that “inclusive education is the type of education which embraces all types of students in mainstream schooling introduced in The White Paper 6 long time ago. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2001), teachers are the main resources that can help in achieving the goals of inclusive education. The findings show that participants agreed that inclusive education caters to all students and that these students should receive the appropriate support, regardless of numerous barriers that students face. These findings are in line with the objectives of inclusive education, which seek to provide all students with the appropriate help and resources to overcome learning challenges (Melane, 2022). Participants indicated that students are given equal education and support.

Though many teachers are perceived as being at a disadvantage due to the inadequate training they received in the field, Paju (2021) asserts that formal instruction is required to improve teaching staff attitudes and behaviours toward the implementation of inclusive education (Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale, 2015). Engelbrecht et al. (2015) state that administrative concerns pertaining to the practice, exposure to the finest inclusive practices, cooperation with parents and coworkers, and the availability of support systems should all be covered in training on the implementation of inclusive education. It seems that teachers frequently lack the skills and expertise required to carry out inclusive education.

Research by Mpu and Adu (2021), which indicated that teachers felt unprepared to teach in inclusive classroom environments due to their lack of knowledge, preparation, and abilities, supports this finding. Walton (2017) claims that inadequate teacher preparation for implementing Education White Paper 6 has hampered the advancement of inclusive education. However, Masalesa (2022) concedes that retraining teachers in inclusive education will equip them with the skills necessary to work with students who face challenges and carry out inclusive education effectively. It seems that teachers frequently lack the skills and expertise required to carry out inclusive education. Research by Mpu and Adu (2021), which indicated that teachers felt unprepared to teach in inclusive classroom environments due to their lack of knowledge, preparation, and abilities, supports this finding. Walton (2017) claims that inadequate teacher preparation for implementing Education White Paper 6 has hampered the advancement of inclusive education. However, Masalesa (2022) concedes that retraining teachers in inclusive education will equip them with the skills necessary to work with students who face challenges and carry out inclusive education effectively.

The goal of the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) is to establish a framework for procedures for identifying, evaluating, and delivering programs for all students who need extra help participating and being included in school (DBE, 2014).

Participants had a general comprehension of the SIAS policy although their understandings were varied, stating that the SIAS policy assists students who face learning challenges.

Theme 2: Lack of training for teachers

Teachers in the Foundation Phase are often trained to instruct students in that particular phase; therefore, they should be able to help and support students in the classroom through scaffolding, feedback, counselling, and peer support. Nevertheless, addressing certain learning challenges necessitates expertise in particular competencies, and frequently, teachers lack the necessary knowledge to execute targeted learning assistance.

Teachers who participated in this research shared how they addressed learning hurdles in the inclusive classroom by utilizing a range of diverse approaches, strategies, and techniques. To help students who are facing learning obstacles, teachers also employ a variety of Learning Teaching and Support Materials (LTSM). It is not only academic issues which relate to learning barriers, “Student support often relates to social, physical and emotional issues” (FG1P3), which means that teachers need to be prepared with the relevant knowledge and skill to deal with all issues that may arise in the classroom.

Therefore, it is essential that classroom teachers obtain more in-depth training in order to assist students who are having difficulties in their classes. As previously mentioned, in order to guarantee that instructors are comfortable in their role of providing learning support, training should expose them to the finest inclusive practices (Engelbrecht et al., 2014).

One of the main factors influencing increasing teachers' productivity and effectiveness is providing them with a variety of skills, information, attitudes, and behaviours to support students' accomplishment (Khan & Abdullah, 2019). To successfully support and
help students who are having difficulties studying, teachers need to possess the necessary skills and expertise to manage diversity in the classroom. UNESCO (1994) states that inclusive education is a part of teacher preparation programs, however pre-service training hasn't always done this.

Furthermore, it is suggested by Crispel and Kasperski (2021) that teacher-education programs incorporate inclusive education courses. Research indicates that even while teachers may support inclusive education, they often feel unprepared since some do not have access to outside resources and are concerned about their ability to manage the situation (Chu, Craig & Yeworiew, 2020). This can be the result of inadequate expert instruction and training in inclusive education and student support.

The findings from the participants indicated that “Most of our teachers have got no idea, they were not trained to deal with students with barriers to learning. They will be complaining pointing the students that they don’t want to do the work” (HODISA). Another participant explained that “We are not specialising in inclusive education. Sometimes we lack knowledge on how to handle those students (HOD2SB). “We even feel that we don’t do justice to students (abantwana)... but now we are just running and it’s like we are using the same blankets for all the students,” expressed worry from participant HODISA. A participant from School B made an interesting observation, stating, "Teachers... they don't understand the reason why they have to support these students" (P2SB).

Teachers in South African schools must be well-capable of understanding the ramifications of implementing policies in order for inclusive education and student support to become a reality (Matolo & Rambuda 2021). The results make it clear that teachers must receive training before working with a variety of students in their classes. Without enough assistance and training, they find it difficult to run inclusive classes. This implies that teachers need special training in order to assist students who struggle with learning: “The person who renders support is well informed or trained” (PISA). One participant said that “I think if we can have timeous workshops, training on inclusion” (HODISA), they might be more prepared to work with students who have barriers to learning. For example, some students have specialised barriers, such as speech barriers, and teachers are not equipped to deal with this type of learning barrier, “I might not have knowledge of how to assist students with speech [problems] because I am not a specialist ... But if we can get training or development on how we can assist those students” (HOD2SB). “I can say I need more training and workshops on how to deal with those students and it will help us as teachers to deal with those students,” stated a different participant (FG2P3).

Mngo and Mngo (2018) found that teachers who had received greater training and experience in working with students who had learning disabilities were more supportive of inclusive education; on the other hand, resistance to the practice was linked to either inadequate or non-existent teacher preparation. Research indicates that the ineffectiveness of legislation implementation stems from instructors’ incapacity to integrate inclusive pedagogies in the classroom (Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel & Tlale, 2014). The participants' observations that classroom teachers lack the knowledge and abilities necessary to conduct inclusive education in their classrooms and support students who are facing learning hurdles are supported by this body of research. Thus, more training is desperately needed so that teachers in the classroom may confidently help students who are struggling with their lessons.

Participants in Schools A and B indicated that they needed additional training via workshops on the implementation of the Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy, inclusive education, and support for students with learning barriers because they had not received any training during their pre-service teacher training. Participants indicated that the district should set up ongoing training: “I think if the Department can conduct workshops at least once in a term that includes the training of all foundation phase teachers to equip them on SIAS policy and students support strategies” (P2SB). Another participant said that “OK, first of all I would like to receive a support on how to assess or assist those students and teachers as they come to me to ask how we help these students … If I can get a proper development on SIAS” (HOD2SB). As stated by participants, “We need more training from the Department on how to complete the SIAS documents and how to manage large numbers of students” (FG1P1), it appears that training needs to concentrate on a number of areas.

The participants reported that even though they had undergone some training, the ongoing support from the district was poor: “When the district officials come, they will tell you to carry on as long as they have written their names and checked the work. There’s not much support we get from the district but because you are dealing with students with serious challenges, sometimes the district will come and check the work only to find out your work is behind” (HODISA). The comment from FG1P4 is concerning: “The facilitators do come, but we need to be guided, not shouted at.”

Regarding the quality of the workshops organised by the district, FG1P5 reported that “They just convene workshops where they tell us what we need to do when we have identified students with difficulties in the classroom. They speak as if it is very simple to support students with learning barriers.” “Every time we attend the workshop, it is the same thing that you do 123 over and over again and they are done,” the participant continued (FG1P5).

The findings imply that inclusive education training for teachers ought to be given top priority, and that the development of a support network ought to be covered in this training. The empirical study demonstrated that systemic, internal, and external learning barriers affect foundation phase students. The findings indicate that a deficiency in professional development workshops and ongoing training for teachers has impeded the effective execution of inclusive policies in schools. While most teachers said they had attended every workshop, it didn't seem like any of them had equipped them with the skills needed to handle the learning difficulties students in their courses experienced and to promote inclusive pedagogy.
It is crucial that teachers have the resources and training necessary to implement the program, notwithstanding the challenges they encounter (Engelbrecht, 2020). According to Mncube and Lebopa (2019), the fact that instructors are not receiving enough training and education in inclusive education has an impact on how the SIAS policy is implemented. Therefore, in order to create inclusive classrooms that work, it is imperative that teachers have the chance to grow in their knowledge and skill set.

**Theme 3: Overcrowded classrooms**

Overcrowding occurs when there are more students in a classroom than it is designed to accommodate. This syndrome has a detrimental effect on teaching and learning even in normal situations, but inclusive classrooms are especially hard hit. High teacher-to-student ratios in the classroom have an impact on class size in South African schools, which in turn affects the attention that instructors provide to their students in the classroom (Majoko & Phasha, 2018).

“I started in 2019 in Grade 1. The challenges I have in my class is that I have 52 students in the class and the class is overcrowded” (**FG2P1**). Dealing with so many students, especially in Grade 1, where they require individualized attention and care, is really challenging. The issue of overcrowding in Foundation Phase class was also raised by **FG2P5**: “We have overcrowded classroom and also lot of activities to give the students and it a problem because when you give them activities you also need to move around to check especially in Foundation Phase class.”

It is very challenging to support students who have learning challenges in large classrooms with little space: “The overcrowded classroom is so difficult to support the kind of students in that class because you cannot reach all of them” (**FG1P5**). “...there is no special place where you can keep them so that they cannot be disturbed by their peers. The peers are around they want to talk to one another” (**FG1P5**).

The teacher-to-student ratio needs to be adhered to ensure effective teaching and learning. **FG2P5** explained that “If students are below 35 you can reach all of them but if they are above 40 it will be difficult.” “...If you have more than 60 students then it becomes difficult to support the students because it is no longer a classroom, but a mass meeting, and you won’t reach every child when the number is big. It will be difficult even to identify those students if not wise” (**P2SB**). Participant **FG2P4** agreed about numbers in the class: “The greater the number in class the less attention is given to the struggling students. When the students are more in class you cannot reach them equally so those that are clever and intelligent will catch up easy and fast but those that have barriers will remain the same” (**FG2P4**). According to **P2SB**, “it becomes difficult to support the students if you have more than 60 because it is no longer a classroom, but rather a mass meeting, and you won’t reach every child when the number is big.” It will be challenging to even identify those students.

Even though classrooms may be overcrowded, teachers are motivated to support their students: “You will find that the classrooms are overcrowded but that doesn’t stop one to support the student” (**FG2P2**).

The responses from the participants made it clear that having too many students in a classroom limit how well the area may be organized for instruction and learning. A student-to-teacher ratio of 50:1 or more is challenging for any instructor to oversee, particularly in Foundation Phase classes where students still require one-on-one interaction and intense supervision. Teachers must pay special attention to and provide relevant support to students who are experiencing learning difficulties. When students spend too much time attending to potential disorders that could arise in full courses, class management problems may arise. It is challenging for teachers to give specialized support to students who require it in large class sizes if they lack the requisite knowledge, skills, and classroom management abilities. Teachers will also need to overcome this obstacle in order to carry out the SIAS policy (Melane, 2022) and provide the necessary student support.

**Theme 4: Allocation of time, the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and resource provisioning**

For every subject in every phase, a Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) document was created. Mathematics, Home Language, First Additional Language, and Life Skills are the courses covered in the Foundation Phase (DBE, 2011). For every subject, the department has created Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs) that detail the curriculum for each term, each week, and both official and informal assessments. According to each grade level, it also specifies how much time should be allotted for the teaching of life skills, mathematics, first additional language, and home language (DBE, 2011:6). **P2SB** explained that “you have got your ATP that prescribe by the end of this week you must be finish with this.” The ATPs for each subject in each phase are available from the Department’s website.

In a typical classroom setting, teachers struggle mightily to cover the lesson plan, but it becomes extremely difficult when there are a lot of students present: “You have got 60 students for 30 minutes, you have got your Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) that prescribes by the end of this week you must be finish with this” (**P2SB**), which means that teachers are always under pressure to complete all tasks. Teachers believed that each period should be extended from thirty minutes to at least an hour for thirty minutes does not allow teachers to provide support to students who require it, in line with Tuswa’s (2016) results. “When you provide full support, you got class of 60 students and out of the 60 maybe you have 5 that need support ... where do you start? When you support students obviously you need to give individual attention, support. You have student 1,2,3,4,5 you identify the challenges, and you need to deal with them as individuals” (**P2SB**).
McConnell, Conrad, and Uhrmacher (2020) claim that lesson planning helps teachers select, create, and carry out lesson plans that provide students with worthwhile experiences while addressing difficult and relevant planning subjects. This type of instruction uses a curriculum that is demanding, scaffolding, relevant to the students, and values the diversity of student cultures. It's interesting to note that just one participant mentioned curriculum adaptation - “We have been trained in curriculum differentiation” (FG2P2) - to fit the needs of the students in the class.

In addition, students with barriers tend to work slower than their peers “They don't participate, concentrate lack of concentration” (FG1P5) and “students write and finish slowly” (FG2P2). Students need to progress at their own pace and by extending the allocated time, students will have more time to complete their tasks. “The time to support the students is not enough” (FG1P5). Tuswa (2016), who found that time allotment was insufficient to manage inclusive courses, assist students, and consider all different learning styles, supports this conclusion.

In accordance with the Annual Teaching Plan, department heads also provided information on time allocation and the difficulties teachers face in completing their assigned job. “What I have experienced from my teachers when you check their work, firstly they have to have the timetable which is different which must be inclusive differentiation, but they will always tell you about the time that is so little” (HODISA). This aspect also applies to the district: “sometimes the district will be monitoring your work only to find out that your work is behind because you were helping students that need support so that they can fit in and improve their performance” (HODISA).

“The paperwork that is too much and we even feel that we don't do justice to the students, but we are impressing the Department of Education officers so that they can get what they want, but otherwise more teaching time is needed when you are dealing with inclusive class,” refers to another time-related challenge that teachers face (HODISA).

Time was also needed for teachers to carry out the interventions: “During intervention class they don’t want to write, they don’t even finish the work you are giving them, but when they are in the computer room, they make sure that they finished all the activities they are given” (FG1P4). But because students rely on scheduled transportation to and from school, scheduling time for interventions after school is frequently jeopardized: “The students use transportation, and you will have to arrange the transportation if you choose to retain that particular student who uses transportation to get home” (FG1P5).

The remarks made by the participants indicated that scheduling time can be difficult, particularly when instructing students who want assistance.

It is imperative to stress the value of having sufficient and appropriate material resources to facilitate learning when implementing inclusive education. To effectively assist the teaching and learning process, teachers need relevant learning and teaching support materials (LTSM). This is particularly important in a welcoming environment. These include “textbooks, stationery, consumable materials, non-consumable materials, library materials and resources as well as e-learning materials and other materials to assist students,” as stated in the Gauteng Department of Education's (GDE) Learning and Teaching Support Material Policy (GDE, 2011:9–10).

A number of resources were recognized by Principal PISA as being necessary to guarantee the success of teaching and learning in inclusive education. The principal firstly referred to the infrastructure: “renovations should be done on the infrastructure where teachers can be provided with sufficient space for carrying out their duties ... extra and more learning spaces to be created”. He also notes the importance of “sufficient resources that are available at our disposal that can help in coming to all positive and effective outcomes that shall be intended to achieve.”

FG1P4 reported that “In reading I use the laptops, where they see all the alphabets, then I tell them to press goat and they see that goat and the word goat when they are in the computer class using laptops.” FG1P5 confirmed that “children are very good in technology students use laptops or gadgets.” FG1P5 mentioned “I use the computer with the students that have been identified as students that need support. They do wonders when they are in the computer class, so when the government mentioned that they are giving out tablets so I was happy that these students with learning barriers will benefit from this.it has to start with interest first then able to master it.” FG1P2 also reported that students often “can use a cell phone” as a resource for learning.

Other participants identified basic resources: “I use blocks for mathematics patterns” (FG1P1) and “In grade 1, I create some different books for those who have problems and then I just use simple work like pictures, songs, visual clues and clue cards and objects” (FG1P3).

PISA raised the issue of human resources: “The provision of relevant therapists who will operate from outside the classroom.” The principal suggested that inclusive education should be properly administered “where our teachers and specialists and other therapist can be in a position to successfully and affiance focus to students as individuals, so that each and every individual challenge can be successfully addressed.”
Theme 5: Socio-economic status

The majority of students from the two schools delegate responsibility to their grandparents instead of remaining with their biological parents, per the research findings. Poverty exists in the home, with some child-headed families and uneducated parents or caretakers facing unemployment. Parental involvement in the educational process is hampered by all of these issues.

Income, education, and employment all contribute to a person’s or family’s socio-economic standing (SES) relative to others. It was found that “Some students are from severe poverty-stricken families, where their meal of the day will be from the nutritional centre at the school. I am talking about the students where there is no one employed at home there is no source of income. I am talking about students that are from child headed families with deserted by the parent. The school goes an extra mile by arranging food parcels for those students in order to support them and the school has the relationship with other department outside the department of education, social department, department of health where we engaged them to come in here and help according to the merit of the challenge and the expectation that their HR will have embrace” He further stated that “The school is no a fee paying school situated in an old township of Krielhong where most parents are not employed and some students are from child-headed families” (PISA).

Two of the participants pointed out that “The department of health come to school because they do their work as administering the injections to the students” (HODISA). Another participant mentioned that “You need to be sympathetic with these students, hug them because others are having so many challenges at home, they are raped, and they keep it as a secret.” She further pointed that “They are being intimidated that when they speak out, they will be killed, so they are no other place where they can go, they need to go back after school in that same house where they are threatened. They need to be loved, and some other children they don’t have clothes” (FGIP4). A participant from the same school agreed with this statement and said that “We are dealing with students that have learning barriers affected by these socio-economic factors where they live in squatter camps, and you have to impact knowledge on the brain that tells you that my mother was beaten, we ran to the neighbours and sometimes they come to school with empty stomach. Some were disturbed by the dancing that took place in the neighbourhood ... they come to school sleepy and there is nothing that will be taken serious by that student” (FGIP5).

At times students like this might develop emotional and behavioural issues. The participant explained this by saying “The world that we are living in is so cruel and so much is happening, so they experience things that I as an adult never experienced” (FGIP3). The aforementioned remarks make it abundantly evident that children who are born into poverty bear the consequences of their circumstances, which have an impact on their physical, behavioral, and developmental health. Additionally, the social and academic divide between low-income and high-income households continues to grow. Due to a lack of parental support and a disdain for education, there is no at-home teaching of concepts; other possible causes include child neglect, starvation, and poverty. Anxiety, depression, low self-confidence, and low self-esteem are all variables that may contribute to learning obstacles for students (Nyagwench-Nyamweya, 2022).

Conclusion

The study’s objective was to investigate the root causes of the foundation phase learner support issues in the Ekurhuleni South District. Participants in this study were unable to articulate their understanding of inclusive education, despite the fact that it significantly affects student support and teacher practice. The results showed that a barrier to student assistance is a lack of teacher preparation, especially when teachers are supposed to be able to manage and assist students with a variety of requirements.

The results showed that teachers need extra time in addition to pertinent materials to serve their students. According to Netshidiizivhani and Molaudzi (2023), materials resources like teaching aids and assistive technology, as well as textbooks, labs, libraries, and classrooms, should be made available to support teaching and learning, which will have a positive impact on students’ academic achievement.

The study’s conclusions show that poverty exacerbates issues related to student support, which are influenced by students’ origins and have an impact on students’ support. Low parental involvement was reported, which was particularly concerning because Bronfenbrenner's microsystem - which views the home as the primary influence on a child's development - suggests that students who face learning challenges need parental support throughout the teaching and learning process.

The study concludes that equitable access to authentic learning opportunities is necessary for today’s classrooms to be inclusive. Encouraging all children to engage fosters an inclusive culture that helps students overcome learning difficulties and is driven to realize their maximum potential. Teachers who lack training in inclusive education, its implementation, understanding of the SIAS policy, and pedagogical content competence find it challenging to serve students who confront hurdles to learning. Therefore, for successful support of students who have learning difficulties, ongoing professional development in inclusive education and student support is essential. Support for teachers from the SBST and DBST is also essential. For student support to be effective, teachers must address factors like inadequate support systems, overcrowding in classes, time constraints, poor infrastructure, and restricted resource allocation. This will help teachers create an environment that supports both effective teaching and learning as well as helping students who are facing learning barriers.
This study sheds light on the intricate problems that hinder the Foundation Phase of the Ekurhuleni South District from offering efficient student support. Together, these difficulties show how important it is for teachers, department heads, parents, and the community at large to work together to remove these obstacles and create an inclusive learning environment where every student has an equal chance to succeed. A bigger sample size that includes parents, the DBST, and government policymakers may be beneficial for future research. Subsequent research endeavours may investigate the efficaciousness of student support post-training.

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