Challenges of teaching in the context of inclusive education: An exploration.

By

Jerome Simiso Jali

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Supervisor: Dr Sithabile Ntombela

DECLARATION

I declare that the study "Challenges of teaching in the context of Inclusive Education: An exploration" is my own work and that this dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any university. All sources consulted and quoted have been indicated, cited and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature…………………………..   **Date……………………….**

Jerome Simiso Jali

Statement by supervisor

This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval

Signature…………………………..   **Date……………………….**

Dr Sithabile Ntombela

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ABSTRACT

In accordance with post 1994 education policies, there is currently a move in South Africa towards implementing an inclusive system of education. Effectively this means that mainstream schools will be expected to admit and educate learners who experience barriers to learning.

Teachers are perceived to be the major role players in ensuring that the implementation of new policies in education is successful. However, there are some concerns that the policy of inclusion is difficult to implement because teachers are not adequately well prepared and supported. Against this background, the researcher undertook an exploration of the challenges teachers experience teaching in the context of inclusive education. The objectives were to establish what teachers understand by inclusive education; to identify challenges teachers experience teaching in the context of inclusive education and to find out the kind of support they require to successfully implement inclusive education. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative research approach was employed. Data were collected from a sample of six teachers from one selected secondary school in Umlazi District through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

The findings of this study reveal that the participants in the selected school are not adequately prepared for the implementation of the policy of inclusion; they need more information. This is shown by their lack of conceptual knowledge of the policy of inclusion. Teachers are also faced with a number of challenges in their attempts to implement inclusive education. This in essence means that they require support in order to deal with these challenges.

Key words: Inclusive education, Mainstream Teachers, Experiences, Implementation.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAPS - Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DoE - Department of Education

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education

INSET - In-service Education Training

LoLT - Language of Learning and Teaching

LSEN - Learners with Special Educational Needs

NCESS - National Commission on Education Support Services

NCS - National Curriculum Statement

NCSNET - National Commission for Special Needs in Education and Training

OBE - Outcomes Based Education

RNCS - Revised National Curriculum Statement

SAFCD - South African Federal Council on Disability

SGB-School Governing Body

WCED - Western Cape Education Department

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER ONE

Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

Inclusive education has a long history internationally, although it is a fairly new phenomenon which emerged in the early 1990s in South Africa. As a result it is not yet well understood and therefore, it is still difficult to implement. The changes in the world regarding inclusive education have, to a large extent, influenced the movement towards inclusive education in South Africa (Naicker, 1996).

Inclusive education is perceived to be one of the ways to increase educational access to a large number of students who have been marginalized or excluded because they experience barriers to learning. Policy documents such as the inclusion policy (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht,1999) emerged in South Africa in the early 1990s, reflecting a vision of an education system that includes all learners, and caters for the wide diversity of learner population. This shift in policy is reflected in the framework for action on special needs education (UNESCO, 1994, p.6) which argues that "schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include children with disabilities and gifted children and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas or groups". This is in line with inclusive education which refers to the opportunity for people with disabilities to participate fully in all educational activities. However, within the contemporary inclusive classrooms, teachers face increased pressure as it is their role to embrace diversity as compared to the previous generation of teachers (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). Furthermore, they are required to be psychologically and professionally prepared to take the role of an inclusive teacher and to have positive attitudes towards learners who experience barriers to learning (Mullen, 2001). As a result, teachers in mainstream schools need to develop a different set of skills and knowledge in order to be able to deal with learners who experience barriers to learning. Inclusive education demands that the teachers should be able to meet the needs of all students including those who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms.

The successful implementation of inclusive education depends entirely on teachers' preparedness to embrace diversity in their classrooms. Studies that have been conducted on the experiences of teachers in implementing the policy of inclusion indicate that mainstream teachers have different views on the philosophy of inclusion. Some teachers view it as an exciting challenge, whose stresses are seen as

life-sustaining, enjoyable and beneficial (Bernard, 1990), while others view it as challenging and having the potential to cause teachers to become psychologically and physically stressed (Whiting & Young, 1996).

1.2 Focus of the study

The focus of the study was to explore teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. The research site was a selected secondary school in the Umlazi District in Durban. This study intended to contribute towards the successful implementation of inclusive education as it shed light on the teachers' experiences of teaching learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms.

1.3 Rationale of the study

In line with constitutional principles of equality and equity, the democratic transformation of South Africa has been reflected in the education policies for all sectors of the country in an attempt to transform the South African education from one of "total inadequacy" (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002, p. 297) and discrimination on the basis of disability, culture, language, race, etc., to an inclusive system that aims to meet the unique and diverse needs of all South African learners. Having one unified inclusive education system in South Africa is important in re-dressing the inequalities of the past education system and preventing barriers to learning and development. Barriers to learning and development may rise from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Department of Education, 2001). Barriers to learning and development are the factors that lead to learning breakdown and prevent learners from reaching their full potential (Department of Education, 2001).

The researcher's personal observation is that mainstream teachers, who are expected to embrace diversity in their classrooms, have different experiences in terms of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. The majority of teachers are uncertain about what their roles are in the successful implementation of inclusive education and what the concept "inclusive education" actually means. According to Christie (1998) and Haskell (2000), teachers are seen as the most integral role players in implementing education policies, but their voices are ignored when policies are formulated. As a result they lack understanding of the policy of inclusion. Du Toit (1996) argues that teachers' lack of understanding of the policy of inclusion is likely to have a negative impact on the learners' academic

achievements, self-esteem and behaviour. Therefore the assumption is that inclusive education will only be successful if the teachers are given an opportunity to be members of the team driving the process of implementing it.

The rationale of this study emanated from limited studies that have been conducted in South Africa on the teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. It was therefore of critical importance to find out what the teachers usually go through in dealing with learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms and to find out what kind of support they need to successfully implement inclusive education.

1.4 Theoretical framework

Research shows that academic studies need theoretical frameworks in order for assumptions and concepts to be made clear, while ensuring that the research is situated within certain understanding in the world of education (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2005; Neuman, 2006). For this study, "an exploration of teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education," to be focused and coherent, it was framed within two theoretical frameworks namely: the human rights theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

1.4.1 Human rights theory

Inclusion is a struggle to achieve universal human rights, which originates in the international human rights movement. Hence, many countries in the world, including South Africa, are moving away from the education systems that segregate other students to a more inclusive education system. When South Africa became a constitutional democracy in 1994, many changes which affected both general and special education sectors were introduced. These changes were introduced by the Department of Education (DoE) when it had to restructure and redesign education by moving away from the education setting that segregated learners with disabilities. The DoE shifted towards embracing the principle of education as a basic human right as enshrined in the new constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996).

1.4.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

The ecological systems theory is the study used, and focuses on an approach first described by Bronfenbrenner (1989) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is the human development theory. It describes socialization as a way of becoming a member of society. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 27) defined human development as the process through which a growing person acquired a more extended differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of sustaining, or restructuring that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and context.

This theory has been renamed "bio-ecological systems theory" as it sees the learners as being influenced by the forces around them and constantly makes meaning of their lives within their social context (Castle, 2001; Kim, 2001). This theory also claims the existence of interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. Furthermore, it maintains that every part together with all other parts ensure the survival of the whole. For the teachers to be able to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms, they need to maintain a harmonious relationship and interdependence between themselves and the learners, in particular those who experience barriers to learning. This theory defines how complex layers of the environment each have an effect on a child's development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), child development happens within four nested systems, namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. In this study the focus was on the microsystem.

1.5 Critical questions

1. What are teachers` understandings of inclusive education?
2. What challenges do teachers experience as they teach in the context of inclusive education?
3. What kind of support do teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education?

1.6 Research design and methodology

A descriptive and interpretive case study approach was employed as a design for this study. In addition a qualitative research methodology within an interpretivist approach was selected for this study. According to Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), interpretivist studies assume that people create and

associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretivist researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them.

This study aimed at providing detailed and wider accounts of the experiences of mainstream teachers of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. Qualitative approaches are designed to obtain maximum information from the participants in their natural setting (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). This design helped the researcher to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena where there is little disruption of the natural setting (Berg, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, qualitative approaches are useful because they produce detailed data from a small group of participants while exploring feelings, impressions and judgments (Coll & Chapman, 2000).

1.7. Data collection instruments

1.7.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews were used following a predetermined interview schedule. The main goal of using semi-structured interviews was to explore things like similarities and differences across voices. This data generating instrument was ideal because it provided clear instructions for the participants and provided in-depth and reliable comparable data. The study was focused on the participants who had been working together for a considerably long time and had similar concerns about implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Semi-structured interviews gave the participants an opportunity to expand upon their answers, give more details, and add additional perspectives.

1.7.2 Open-ended questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was another data collection instrument used in this study. This type of questionnaire asked more open-ended questions which the respondents had to answer as they liked. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000), the type of data collected from an open-ended questionnaire is textual or descriptive.

1.8 Selection of participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. This method of sampling means that the researcher makes specific choices about who he or she wants to include in the sample (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). In this study one mainstream secondary school was selected as a site for the study and six teachers who teach in the same school were selected to be the participants. These teachers were used in this study since the main focus was on their experiences in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms. According to Berg (2003, p.27), a research sample is composed of elements which contain the most common characteristics of the population. Six teachers were selected to participate in the study. Their selection was based on their experience as teachers in a regular school.

1.9 Data analysis

After data from the interview had been collected, it was analysed with respect to the themes and issues that emerged through the literature review, and was interpreted and presented. All interviews were recorded and transcribed into written text by the principal investigator. According to Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2011) transcribing interviews can provide important detail and an accurate verbatim of the interview.

1.10 Validity and reliability

In qualitative approach, research lacks procedure that guarantees validity and reliability and the study cannot be generalised (Slonim-Nevo & Nevo, 2009). However in this study some measures were taken to enhance validity and reliability. To measure the accuracy of the research, the participants were asked to read their interview transcripts and thereafter comment whether they were accurate and reflected what they had said. The researcher also asked his peers (other researchers) to examine the data. If the data has been examined by more than one researcher, something that might have been missed by one researcher might be picked up by the other researcher (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Assumptions are that when participants read their transcripts, they might reflect on their attitudes and change their ways of thinking. Angen (2000) elaborates on validity when suggesting that researchers need to explore if the research will be helpful to the target population. The researcher also used an audio tape recorder to record interviews which would make the transcripts more accurate. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim.

1.11 Ethical issues

Consent letters were issued to the principal of the selected secondary school and to the participants. Permission to conduct the study was also sought from the KwaZulu-Natal DoE and from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office. Before the commencement of the study, a full disclosure of the purpose of the research was given to the participants. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were not be coerced to participate in the study. They were also not coerced into completing a questionnaire. The informed consent of the participants was obtained in writing. Their confidentiality, anonymity, and non-identifiability were guaranteed. The participants were also informed about the benefits of the research, either to them (participants) or to other researchers or the society. They were also informed that the research would not harm them but it had the potential to improve their situation.

1.12 Structure of the dissertation

The following is a summary of the chapters that are covered in this thesis:

- Chapter one is an overall orientation of the research and it gives an overview of the study.
- Chapter two presents terminology and concepts related to inclusive education. It also discusses the South African and international review of literature on the experiences of teachers in teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. This chapter also includes the theoretical framework that underpins the study.
- Chapter three explains the procedures that were employed to conduct this study. It explains the research design and provides an in-depth discussion of the research methodology used. It also explains aspects such as data collection, target population, describes the context in which the data was collected, instruments used, validity and ethics and data analysis. The methods of collecting data, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were specially constructed to answer three critical questions in depth.
- Chapter four describes the analysis of raw data. It also describes the process of interpreting meaningful and relevant units of the transcriptions of the interviews and questionnaires which were the main data resources, the coding of these units and the categories and themes that emerged. The theoretical framework will be used to re-conceptualize and interpret the derived themes.
- Chapter five consists of a summary, conclusion, recommendations and limitations of the study.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the study by providing the background, rationale and focus of the study, presented a theoretical framework, methodology and research design and issues of validity and reliability.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide information, through the study of existing literature, on inclusive education and its implementation in South Africa and internationally. The purpose of a literature review in any study is to distinguish what has been done from what needs to be done, and to assist the researcher in discovering important variables relevant to the topic. In line with what is happening all over the world, the South African education system is currently moving away from an education system that segregated learners who experienced barriers to learning towards a more inclusive education system. Mainstream schools are becoming more inclusive, and this change does not only affect certain subsystems in the school but the whole school system. Chapter 9, section 74 of the South African Schools Act, No. 6 (DoE, 1996) stipulates that "every public school shall, as far as it is reasonably possible, attempt to accommodate the specialized education needs of any learner who attends such school". The move to restructure and redesign the education system to an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners has been received with mixed feelings by the teachers in the researcher's school and across the country. As a result, this study intends to explore the challenges that teachers in mainstream schools experience in their endeavours to create an inclusive environment in their classrooms.

2.2 An operational definition of terms

The following are the definitions of terms used in this study.

2.2.1 Experience

The Oxford Dictionary (1999) defines experience as "the practical involvement in a new activity, event, etc; knowledge gained through this." The American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2006) further defines experience "as the process of apprehending knowledge or skill through…the senses of mind." The term *experience* is derived from the German verb *erfahren*, which means the acquisition of knowledge, getting to know, becoming aware of something. According to Du Toit, & Kruger (1993, p.19). Experience is related to emotional or affective dimension of being human and indicates an evaluation of a fluid situation in broad categories of pleasant and unpleasant Vrey

(1990, p. 42) maintains that experience influences involvement in every important action as well as the quality of the relationship thus formed.

The teachers' experiences of teaching in the context of inclusive education in this study will have both a denotative and connotative character, which make an experience unique to one who experiences.

2.2.2 Inclusive education

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO,1994) defined inclusive education as a developmental approach aiming to meet the educational needs of all children, youth and adults, paying attention to the learners who experience barriers to learning and who were subjected to exclusion in many countries in the world. It means the right to education for all (Naicker, 1996). The term inclusive education is used to describe education policies that uphold the right of students who experience barriers to learning to belong within mainstream education (Green, 2001: p. 4). According to Sebba and Ainscow (1996), inclusive education is the process by which a school attempts to respond to all learners as individuals by considering and restructuring its curricular organisation and provision and allocating of resources to enhance equality of opportunity. Inclusion refers to the full-time placement of children with mild, moderate and severe disabilities in regular classrooms (Garuba, 2003). It involves the full participation of all students in all aspects of schooling, it also involves regular schools and classrooms being responsive, willing to adapt and change to meet the needs of all students as well as celebrating and valuing difference (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2010). Broad definitions of inclusion suggest that learners with a wide variety of needs such as: cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and/or physical needs are considered (Ainscow, 2007; Head & Pirrie, 2007).

The concept of inclusive education in the South African context embraces the democratic values of equality and the recognition of diversity. According to the South African government's White Paper 6: Special Needs Education (DoE, 2001), inclusive education acknowledges that all children can learn, and acknowledges and respects differences, including age and gender in children. DeBoer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) define inclusive education as the development to keep learners with disabilities in regular education settings instead of referring them to special schools. However, this seems to be a narrow view compared to how this concept is defined in South Africa. Different authors define inclusive education from their own context and perspective. For example, Naicker (1996) defines

inclusive education in the South African context with regard to the recommendations of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET). Engelbrecht *et al.* (1999, p.384-394) also define inclusive education in the South African context as a shared value which promotes a single system of education dedicated to ensuring that all learners are empowered to become caring, competent and contributing citizens in an inclusive, changing and diverse society. The understanding of inclusive education is linked to the acknowledgement that children can, during the process of learning, experience barriers to learning and development.

2.2.3 Barriers to learning

In South Africa barriers to learning were associated mostly with the intrinsic factors (internal), that is medical and disability models (Engelbrecht *et al.,* 2008). However, there has been a paradigm shift in the way barriers to learning were conceptualized in South Africa. The current understanding is that specialized barriers to learning are caused by a number of factors, some of which may not necessarily be of the learner's making, but could be social or lie within the school and/or curriculum (Pather, 2007). Barriers to learning are those factors that hinder teaching and learning. These factors include factors relating to specific individual characteristics, various aspects of the curriculum, the physical and psychosocial environment within which teaching and learning occurs, dynamics and conditions relating to the learner's home environment, and community and social dynamics, which have an impact on the teaching and learning process (DoE, 2005). Barriers do not exist all the time but can arise suddenly due to change in circumstances, emotional trauma and a variety of other factors.

Barriers to learning can be divided into four groups (Lomofsky, Lazarus, 2010, p. 311-312), namely:

- *Systemic barriers:* lack of basic and appropriate learning support materials, lack of assistive devices, inadequate facilities at school, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of mother tongue teachers.

- *Societal barriers:* severe poverty, late enrolment, gangs/violence in neighbourhoods and at home.

- *Pedagogical barriers:* insufficient support of teachers, inappropriate and unfair assessment procedures, and inflexible curriculum.

- *Medical barriers:* sensory disabilities, neurological disabilities, physical disabilities, and cognitive disabilities.

An inclusive approach to teaching, learning and assessment is emphasized in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). Teachers are the most important role players in ensuring that the barriers to practice inclusivity in their classrooms are prevented. The four groups of barriers to learning mentioned above deserve equal attention from teachers. Teachers should always remember that it is very rare to find a learner who experiences only one specific barrier to learning. Sometimes a learner can experience a combination of two or more barriers to learning that need to be identified and addressed. The key to preventing barriers from occurring is the effective monitoring and meeting of the different needs among the learner population and within the system as a whole. If these needs are not met, learners may fail to learn effectively or be excluded from the education system (DoE, 2005).

2.2.4 Learners with impairments

Impairment is a normal part of human life and children with impairments are to be found in every society, culture and community throughout the world (International Save the Children Alliance, 1997). There are many different types of impairments both visible and invisible. The extent to which children with impairments are disabled depends on a number of factors, such as attitude and behaviour of others (parents, teachers and neighbours) towards them, the satisfaction of their basic needs, policies which exclude them, the accessibility of the environment, and their access to appropriate basic support for their development (International Save the Children Alliance, 1997). In the South African context, an impairment or disability can be a barrier to learning if it interferes with a child's ability to learn.

2.2.5 Learners who experience barriers to learning

According to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (2004), learners who experience barriers to learning are learners with needs in addition to the needs of the so-called "normal" learners. These additional needs can be anything on a continuum of additional needs ranging from on the one hand the additional needs of the gifted learners, to, on the other hand, additional needs of those learners with severe handicaps. All learners need support, which could be of an extensive nature (a whole year).

Traditionally, learners who experience barriers to learning fall into various categories (WCED, 2000, P. 15), such as:

- Learners with physical and cerebral handicaps;
- Learners with sensory handicaps such as deafness and blindness;

- Learners with mild, moderate or severe mental handicaps;

- Learners with neurological handicaps;

- Learners with behavioural problems and youth at risk;

- Learners with specific learning difficulties;

- Learners who are temporarily ill and need to be hospitalized or chronically ill learners;

- Learners from poverty stricken backgrounds and scholastically deprived learners.

2.3. The rationale of inclusive education in South Africa

In line with what is happening around the world, the South African education system is moving away from separate special education towards a policy of inclusion (Engelbrecht *et al.,* 1999). This is reflected in the education policy developments introduced in 1994 when South Africa became a democratic country which condemned the segregation of persons with disabilities from the mainstream society. The new developments were supported by the parent bodies, the Disability Desk of the Office of the Deputy State President (Mr Thabo Mbeki) and the disability movement. The Ministry of Education also supported the introduction of inclusive education and training system.

The philosophy of inclusion requires all role players including teachers to regard inclusive education as an opportunity to review how educational activities can be done differently, with the purpose of providing quality education for all (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). Although there are some teachers who have received training in the restructuring and redesigning of the education system to an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners, there are still those who have reservations about supporting the widespread placement of learners with special educational needs in regular classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Research done by Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2010) suggests that most of the teachers who are positive about inclusion are those who have had the opportunity to practice it and see the benefits. It is important to note that the teachers' perceptions of inclusive education will not only determine their acceptance of inclusive policies, but will also have an impact on their commitment to implement such policies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

The main purpose of introducing inclusive education in South Africa and internationally was to create a caring inclusive society (Carrim, 2007; DoE, 2001). Inclusive education means the right to education for all (Naicker, 1996; Lazarus, Davdoff & Daniels, 2007). It also involves the participation of all

students in all aspects of schooling. According to Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2010), inclusive education involves regular schools and classrooms being responsible, willing to adapt and change to meet the needs of all students, as well celebrating and valuing differences. Teachers have an important role to play in making sure that they create a caring society that is prepared to embrace diversity. They are perceived to be the key element in the successful implementation of inclusive policies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Haskell, 2000). Research conducted on inclusive education within the South African school system has found that there is a perception that teachers are the centre of implementing inclusive educational principles, strategies and policies (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Engelbrecht & Forlin, 1997; Bothma, Gravett & Swart, 2000; DoE, 2001). Mainstream teachers are now expected to be psychologically and practically prepared to take on the role of inclusive educators (Mullen, 2001).

Research shows that proper implementation of inclusive education depends mainly on the willingness of teachers to include and accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning in regular classrooms. Research done by Cant (1994), Whiting and Young (1995), supports the view that teachers are key to successful implementation of inclusionary programmes. Too often change in education has failed because insufficient attention has been paid to the current practices and needs of those who are expected to put it into effect (Wearmouth, Edwards & Richmond, 2000, p. 30). Teachers are expected to implement inclusive education by showing preparedness to teach learners in the context of inclusive education. According to Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), this depends entirely on their attitudes towards inclusive education which are influenced by their previous experiences of teaching students with disabilities and knowledge of how to deal with diversity in their classrooms, training regarding teaching learners who experience barriers to learning, level of confidence, appropriate curriculum for all students, and the availability of resources.

2.4 An international perspective on inclusive education

Inclusive education has its origins in developed countries. It started in Scandinavian countries when learners with disabilities were integrated into regular schools (Meijer, Pijl & Hargarty, 1994) and other countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom followed suit (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1997) and later, Italy and Spain. The first formal provision of education for people with disabilities started in 1817 when the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb was established (Stainback & Stainback, 1995, p. 16). In 1948 the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the right of every child to an education (UNESCO, 1994). When the parents of the children with disabilities became aware of the human rights and equal opportunities for all was beginning to happen in education, they started to form groups that campaigned for the rights of students with disabilities to learn in regular classrooms with their peers (Stainback & Stainback, 1995, p. 20). In 1994 the US government passed a law called Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) which ensured free and equal education for all children, handicapped as well as non-handicapped, in the least restrictive environment (Ramdeo, 2006).

Inclusive education is an issue that is on top of the agenda in most of the countries around the world today. Societies all over the world respond differently to learners with disabilities. There has been a strong tension between exclusion and inclusion in international countries such as the USA. Although there is a growing agreement all over the world that all children have the right to be educated together, it has been difficult in countries such as the USA and other developed countries to incorporate learners with disabilities into mainstream classes. For many years these countries did not know what kind of education they had to provide their disabled children with. However they had to decide what sort of education would be provided to these children. They established a special education system that provided for learners with disabilities. This marked the beginning of inclusive education.

Inclusive educational practices have been endorsed internationally. In 1994, representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organisations met in Salamanca, Spain, with the purpose of promoting inclusive education for children, youths and adults with special needs. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education came from this meeting. The Salamanca Statement of principles, policy and practice in special education and framework for action states that regular schools with an inclusive orientation can play a pivotal role in combating discriminatory attitudes, creating communities that are ready to embrace diversity, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10).

The UNESCO-sponsored "Education for ALL" initiative states that all children, including those with impairments and other special needs, are entitled to equity of educational opportunity. In the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons, United Nations member countries confirmed their

support of human rights, education, integration, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress for persons with disabilities (Smith-Davis, 2002, p. 77).

2.5 Inclusive education in the South African context

The changes that started in the countries such as the USA, Spain, Italy and the Scandinavian countries regarding inclusive education, encouraged the movement towards inclusive education in South Africa. Before 1994 the structure of education in South Africa embraced the abuse of human rights of many of its citizens. During the apartheid era, there were two types of learners in the country, namely: the "normal" learners or learners with ordinary needs who formed the majority, and the learners with special educational needs who formed the minority. There were also 18 racially divided education departments. Each education department had its own policies regarding learners with special educational needs. Some of these departments did not make any provisions for learners with barriers to learning. The learners with special educational needs (LSEN) required specialized programmes in order to be engaged in some form of learning. This created exclusion since the LSEN had to be placed in special schools which were under-resourced. Special schools for children who were mentally handicapped were known as training centres. The "normal learners" were placed in mainstream schools. Learners were not only categorized according to the disabilities they had, but they were also categorized according to their race and culture. The apartheid regime also provided the two categories of learners with different systems of education. Many black learners were mainstreamed by default and others were excluded from going to school.

 When democracy was declared in 1994, the new government had to redress the past imbalances by providing basic education to all learners (Lasndsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2010, p. 16). It also had to ensure that the country had a new unified education and training system which would be based on equality. The country's main aim was to introduce social, political, economic and educational transformation aimed at developing a more inclusive society (Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2001, p. 213). According to the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 (RSA, 1996) which includes a Bill of Rights, everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education, and to further education, which the state must make available and accessible. Engelbrecht (1999, p.7) argued that inclusive education in South Africa has its origin in a rights perspective. This basic right to education is further developed in the Constitution in Section 9 (2), which commits the state to the achievement of equality and non-

discrimination in all educational institutions. These clauses are meant to protect all learners including those with disabilities and those with special educational needs. To achieve this government had to fulfil its obligation to provide basic education to all learners and acknowledge that the country needs a new unified education and training system (inclusive system) which must be based on equity. The South African Federal Council on Disability (SAFCD) called for the development of a single inclusive education system for South Africa, with a central theme of a statement indicated as follows:

> Learners with special education needs (LSEN) have a right to equal access to education at all levels in a single inclusive education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of all learners, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning, as well as different language needs in the case of deaf learners where their first language is sign language, and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricular, organisational arrangements, technical strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. (SAFCD, 1995, p. 1)

This statement was followed by a national call for the introduction of inclusive education the intention of which was to address the educational needs of all learners in a non-threatening, supportive learning environment, which includes learners who were formally disadvantaged and excluded from education because of barriers to learning. The National Department of Education has an obligation to make changes to the provision of education and training which is responsive and sensitive to learners with special educational needs. The DoE started by ensuring that the rights of learners with disabilities were made the first priority in the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (DoE, 1997b). In South Africa the inclusive education activists did what many countries around the world had done, that is to fight for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). As a result the principle of inclusive education was included in the new education policy developed in 1994. South Africa like other countries in the world is committed to creating "equal opportunities for all learners to learn and succeed".

The appointment of NCSNET and NCESS

To make sure that the principle of inclusive education was properly promoted and facilitated, the National Department of Education appointed a National Commission for Specialised Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and a National Commission on Education Support Services (NCESS) in October 1996. Their task was to conduct a joint investigation and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in education and training in South Africa (DoE, 1997a, p.1). A joint report on the findings of these two commissions was presented to the Ministry of Education in November 1997 and the final report was published in 1998. After studying the findings

of the two bodies, the Ministry of Education drafted a policy framework that focused on the full range of diverse learning needs with all bands of the education and training system.The NCSNET and NCESS (DoE, 1997a) in their report entitled "Quality Education for All: Overcoming Barriers to Learning and Development," argued that a paradigm shift was required and that this involved challenging discriminatory attitudes among the role players in education (DoE, 1997a). These discriminatory attitudes are the main reasons why students are excluded on the basis of their race, gender, culture, disability, religion, sexuality and other characteristics (DoE, 1998, p. 15). The two bodies also reported that historically learners who were excluded from the system were those who were categorised as having special needs, including those with disabilities. The NCSNET/NCESS (DoE, 1997a) also reported that all the factors that prevented the system from meeting different learning needs and were the main cause of exclusion could be regarded as barriers to learning and development (DoE, 1998, p. 12). The report of the two bodies contributed to the understanding of the nature and extent of barriers to learning within South Africa. It also contributed to creating awareness as to what it meant to use acceptable and respectable terminology such as "barriers to learning" when referring to special needs. The task of the NCSNET/NCESS was to develop an understanding of concepts such as "special needs" and "education support". The report of the NCSNET/NCESS led to the publication of the Education White Paper 6 in July 2001.

The Education White Paper 6: Special needs education. Building an inclusive education and training system

The situation with regard to inclusive education has reached an advanced stage in South Africa. The DoE released the Education White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building inclusive education and training system in July 2001 (DoE, 2001a). This policy reflects the DoE's commitment to building an inclusive education and training system. According to the National Department of Education (2001a, p. 16), the inclusive education and training system accepts and respects that every learner is unique and therefore has unique learning needs. The Education White Paper 6: Special needs education: Building inclusive education and training system acknowledges that:

> Different learning needs arise from a range of factors including physical, mental, sensory, neurological and developmental impairments, psychological disturbances, differences in intellectual ability, and socio-economic deprivation." (DoE, 2001a, p.7)

In the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001a) inclusive education and training is described as support for all learners within a systemic and developmental approach. This paper recognises that developing learners' strengths and empowering and enabling them to participate actively and critically in the learning process, involves identifying and overcoming the causes of learning problems. The National Department of Education released this policy in 2001 with the purpose of ensuring that inclusive education would be implemented in South Africa over a period of 20 years. Its release marked the birth of inclusion in all domains and at all levels. The Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training (DoE, 2001a, p. 6) defines inclusive education and training as a system of education that:

- Acknowledges that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support.

- Accepts and respects that all learners are unique and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of human experience.

- Seeks to change the attitudes towards learners with learning barriers and disabilities.

- Acknowledges and respects differences in learning whether due to age, gender, language, HIV status, disability or ethnicity.

- Empowers learners by developing individual strengths and helping them to be able to participate critically in the process of learning.

- Acknowledges that learning does not only take place at school, but it also takes place in the home and community, and within formal and informal types of structures.

- Maximises the participation of all learners in the culture and the curricula of educational institutions and uncovers and minimises barriers to learning (DoE, 2001a, p.16).

The introduction of inclusive education required the paradigm shift from a medical model of disability to a socio-critical model that is based on the belief that society must change to accommodate the diverse needs of its entire people. For many years medical and psychological perspectives have been very influential in shaping special education (Barton & Oliver, 1992). The publishing of the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system in July 2001 marked the beginning of the process of including learners with special needs into mainstream schools. This has not been easy because of a number of challenges faced by the teachers who are the main role players toward the implementation of inclusive education.

According to the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an inclusive education and training system (DoE, 2001), inclusive education is about:

- recognising and respecting the differences among all learners and building on the similarities;
- supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus should be the development of appropriate teaching strategies that are informed by the diverse learning needs of the learners, and that will be of benefit to all learners and educators;
- focusing on overcoming barriers to learning in the system. The focus should be those structures and processes at all levels of the system that prevent learners from achieving success (DoE, 2001a, p. 20).

2.6 The implementation of inclusive education

2.6.1. Teachers' understandings of inclusive education

Research indicates the significance of the attitudes of teachers towards including learners who experience barriers to learning in general education classes (Christie, 1998). Attitudes have been used to refer to teachers' feelings towards inclusive education as measured by the attitude scale. Gall, Borg & Gall (1996) define attitudes as an individual's viewpoint or disposition towards a particular object, a thing, an idea etc. Chambers and Forlin (2010, p. 74) add that an attitude "is a learned, evaluative response about an object or an issue and ... a cumulative result of personal beliefs". Schechman & Or (1996), in Swart *et al*. (2002), argue that a person's perceptions and attitudes are often related directly to learning experiences provided by the environment and the generalized belief systems of the society while they also have a direct influence on the way in which one responds to the world. This means that the attitudes may have a cognitive component, an emotional/affective component and a component of observable behaviour (Swart *et al*., 2002, p.178). *A cognitive component* consists of the individual's beliefs or knowledge about the attitude object. Teachers' beliefs or knowledge about including learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms can present this component, for example, there are teachers who believe that learners who experience barriers to learning are not supposed to be in regular classrooms, but they belong in special schools. *An emotional/affective component* refers to the feelings about the attitude object. In terms of inclusive education, an emotional component may reflect teachers' feelings about including learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms. *An observable behaviour* component simply means that attitudes

may be learned indirectly by means of observing others and seeing their reactions (Swart et al., 2002, p 178-180; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).. It is therefore very important to mention that attitudes of the teachers have a critical role to play towards successful implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms.

Teachers are seen as key persons to the successful implementation of any educational idea or concept. The successful implementation of inclusive education also depends on their attitudes and knowledge (Coles, 1998). The teachers' perspectives on inclusive education have the potential to determine the outcomes of its implementation in their schools and in their communities (Moberg, 2003). Teachers need to have positive attitudes towards learners who experience barriers to learning (de Boer, Pitj & Minnaert, 2011, p. 331-353). The studies conducted by Lipsky and Gartner (1997); Engelbrecht & Forlin (1998); and Bothma, Gravett & Swart (2000) on inclusive education confirm that teachers are the most important component in the implementation of inclusive educational principles, strategies and policies. They are seen as the primary resource for the implementation of inclusive education policy through practicing inclusive practices in their classrooms. The study conducted by Naylor (2005) established the pivotal role of classroom teachers in promoting and achieving an inclusive school experience. The study also attested that the teachers' attitudes have a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive education. Some studies point out that teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education are typically positive (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000; Keuster, 2000). The positive attitudes of the teachers towards the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms are argued as playing an important role in implementing this educational change successfully. D'Alonzo, Giordano and Van Leeuwen (1997, p. 309-310) argue that teachers' attitudes do not only set the tone for the relationship between teachers and learners with barriers to learning, but they also influence the attitudes of non-disabled learners.

Furthermore, the attitudes of teachers towards the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning influence the type and quality of teacher-learner relationships, thereby directly impacting on the learners' educational experiences and opportunities (Cook, 2001, p. 204). A study undertaken by Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) indicated that educating learners who experience barriers to learning in inclusive settings resulted in positive changes in teachers' attitudes. Teachers would like classes to be inclusive, but the realities of everyday life dictate otherwise (Van Reusen, Shoho &

Barker, 2001). Although the movement for inclusive education is part of a broad human rights agenda, a large number of teachers in regular schools have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of learners who experience barriers to learning (Florian, 1998). A study by Du Toit (19991) showed that teachers often resist inclusion because of their established beliefs about teaching, an unwillingness to modify their teaching methods to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning, or a perception that learners with learning disabilities are an additional burden. They perceive the concept of inclusion as a concern meant to bring children with disabilities to mainstream schools (Avarmidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). Others see special education personnel as having the responsibility for learners with disabilities, even if they are enrolled in regular classes.

A study conducted by Jobling and Moni (2004) found that many teachers believed that responsibility for the academic progress of learners who experience barriers to learning remained with special education teachers and that the placement of such learners in regular classrooms was for socialization purposes only. A majority of teachers with a negative view of the process of inclusion are those who are not actively involved in inclusive practices (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002, p. 134). A study by Vaughn, Schumn, Jallard, Sluther and Samuel (1996) which examined teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, found that the majority of teachers who had negative feelings towards inclusion and those who were not participating in inclusive programmes, felt that the decision-makers did not know what was happening in the classrooms. According to the project report of the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), teachers seem to be overwhelmed by the changes which are being introduced in the education system and their morale is at its lowest level (DoE, 2002a). Their morale is affected by the fact that inclusive education requires educators to perform tasks which are not in their job description (Shisana, Pelzer, Zungu-Dirwayi, & Louw, 2005).

Studies have also shown that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of learners with disabilities differ according to the nature of disabilities or educational problems being presented (Ward, Center & Bochner, 1994). Learners with emotional and behavioural difficulties are viewed by teachers as more problematic and difficult to handle than learners with other types of disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). The impact of students with severe emotional and behavioural disorders in the classroom is reflected in the fact that a number of novice teachers cited it as a reason for their resignation (Ewing, 2002). According to the findings of a study conducted by Bowman (1986),

students with medical and physical disabilities are welcomed into the classroom; however teachers resist the inclusion of students with more significant disabilities.

2.6.2 Teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education

Several authors describe experience with inclusive education as a factor that influences teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning. Dealing with learners with disabilities is not a big challenge if the teacher has dealt with such learners before. According to Avissar (2000), Avramidis *et al*. (2000), Hodge and Jansma (2000) and Jobe, Rust and Brissie (1996), possessing previous experience in teaching learners who experience barriers to learning is a prerequisite to successful implementation of inclusive education. Teachers with previous experience of dealing with learners who experience barriers to learning feel comfortable when they have to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms.

The study by Janney, Snell, Beers and Ranes (1995, p. 436) found that experience with low ability children was an important contributing factor to their eventual acceptance by teachers. Several other studies conducted by Leyser and Lessen (1985), Steinback, Steinback and Dedrick (1984), and Shimman (1990) have also stressed the importance of increased experience and social contact with children who experience barriers to learning, in conjunction with the attainment of knowledge and specific skills in instructional and class management, in the formation of favourable attitudes towards inclusion. These studies on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion indicate that as experience of mainstream teachers with children who experience barriers to learning increases, their attitudes change in a positive way (LeRoy and Simpson, 1996). The studies also indicated that teachers with active experience of inclusion held significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those who did not have any experience with inclusion (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000).

2.6.3 Lack of professional development (pre-service &in-service).

The essence of educational change consists of learning new ways of thinking and doing, new skills, knowledge, attitude etc. Implementation is at the heart of any educational change (Fullan, 1991, p. 84). Engelbrecht *et al.* (2007, p. 59) observes that when change is introduced, teachers are frequently blamed when implementation fails. Some of the factors that are normally cited are incompetence, non-cooperation, lack of commitment and laziness. Peters (2004), as cited in Engelbrecht and Green (2007,

p. 57), further points out that most implementation efforts focus on teaching educators effective strategies and ignore the conditions within which educators must carry these out.

Teachers are key to the transformation of schools and in order for them to lead the reform efforts, they need to be afforded expanded and enriched professional development opportunities (Pottas, 2005). Practicing teachers are the key to the successful implementation of an inclusive system and they will need time, on-going support and in-service training (Swart *et al.*, 2002, p. 175). Clearly the demands and challenges that face teachers in the performance of their professional role and responsibilities must be addressed (Pottas, 2005, p. 10). Teachers are thus expected to accept new responsibilities and to extend their roles as facilitators to new, perhaps even personally threatening areas (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002, p. 4). Fullan (1991), as cited in Hargreaves (2003), pointed out that schools today have to manage, coordinate and integrate numerous changes of multiple innovations. These multifaceted societal changes have implications for implementation of inclusive education, including making educational change, faster and more complex change, intensifying teachers' work and increasing the pressures on them to bring about fundamental changes in learning and teaching in order to accommodate diversity and provide a quality of education for all. Teacher education programmes should be informed by current research on variables that are key to the successful inclusion of students with diverse learning needs in mainstream classroom settings (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000).

Teachers have a significant role to play in the development of schools as inclusive communities and to this end, pre-service teacher education is indispensable. However, Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000), Buell, Hallam and Gamel-McCormick and Sheer (1999), and McLeskey, Waldron, Swanson and Loveland (2001) argued that unfortunately many of these in-service development programmes that were intended to promote inclusive education have proved both inadequate and inappropriate, resulting in negative feelings towards the implementation of inclusive education. In a similar vein, the training of teachers for mainstream education did not adequately include learners with difficulties. In their report on the implementation of inclusive education Browder and Cooper-Duffy (2003) pointed out that many mainstream teachers in different countries are prepared to facilitate social inclusion, but do not favour academic inclusion and resist learning new skills. This resistance to learning new skills from teachers, as Schmidt *et al.* (2002) argue, is the result of the teachers' belief that they already possess the necessary skills of 'good teaching'. However, if used alone, most traditional teaching methods will not support the success of students with special needs in a mainstream classroom.

An important study conducted in six countries including South Africa revealed that the training of teachers can be seen in direct relation to their attitude towards learner diversity. Training was identified as one of the key elements in the success of the development of inclusive teaching (Marchesi, 1998, p. 116). Dockrell and Lindsay (2001, p. 370) argue that teachers find themselves in a predicament. While they are held responsible for teaching the child, they are confined by the deficiencies or shortcomings in their circumstances so that they cannot effectively address their learners' needs. In light of this reality, Pottas (2005, p. 12) argues that it seems logical that many teachers in the South African context cannot regard inclusion with anything but negative feelings and even suspicion. Fullan (1991) points out that there is overwhelming evidence that teachers are the key force in determining the quality of inclusion. They can play a crucial role in transforming schools, or bring about no change at all. Petty and Saddler (1996, p. 15) refer to numerous studies indicating the importance of teachers' attitudes for successful inclusion. They maintain that a schools' philosophy and the attitude of the staff are crucial. Thus, an understanding of teachers' perspectives and their attitudes towards inclusion and the changes it requires is essential to the management and accomplishment of meaningful transformation in South African education. The fact that teachers feel that they have been compelled to make changes when they have not had any substantive participation in policy decisions frequently gives rise to negative attitudes and resistance. Teachers' beliefs and confidence in their own ability to teach learners with special educational needs is a further factor, as is their concern for the needs of 'regular' learners in their classes. Another subjective reality is teachers' resistance to change - they find it threatening to have to change their proven teaching methods to accommodate learners with special educational needs (Swart, Engelbrecht, Eloff & Pettipher, 2002, p. 186).

Teachers' lack of understanding and skills necessary to effectively teach diverse learners in inclusive classrooms is one of the factors that contributes towards their resistance of inclusive practices (Henman, 2001). The assumption is that the negative attitudes teachers have towards inclusion are caused by lack of skills and training. Teachers need appropriate professional knowledge on the kind of learners they have in their classrooms. However, according to Wearmouth, Edwards and Richmond (2000, p. 36), the empowerment of teachers is neglected in the South African documentation on inclusive education. This view is shared by Bartak, and Fry (2004) and Gould and Vaughn (2000) when they point out that both pre-service and in-service courses that address the skills and the attitudes of the teachers towards students who experience barriers to learning are deemed inadequate by many

teachers in mainstream schools. Teachers attribute their unpreparedness to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms to their lack of appropriate training in this area (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000). According to D`Alonzo, Giordano and Van Leeuwen (1997), having educators who do not feel they have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach diverse learners in inclusive classrooms creates an inevitable barrier to the implementation of inclusive practices.

Teachers do not only lack understanding of inclusive education, but they also lack skills and competence (Engelbrecht, Forlin, Ellof & Swart, 2001; Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2001). Without the necessary skills and knowledge, teachers feel less confident about their ability to effectively teach and include learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. Lack of knowledge and skills have become a systemic barrier to implementing inclusive education. Most of the teachers in mainstream schools have no pre-service training and they also have a very limited experience on the policy of inclusive education (MacPherson-Court, McDonald & Sobsey, 2003). As a result they have a very limited knowledge about learners who experience barriers to learning which is gained through formal studies during pre- and in-service training (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). To be a competent teacher in an inclusive context requires the acquisition of a specific set of skills and attributes and knowledge (Loreman *et al.,* 2010). Inclusive education is about identification and minimization of barriers to learning, therefore teachers' professional development is important (Burstein, Sears, Wilcozen, Cabello & Spanga, 2004). Teachers in mainstream schools in South Africa were exposed to the apartheid education system which was teacher centred. In 1995 the Ministry of Education released its White Paper 6 on Education and Training, a policy which was meant to move away from apartheid policies and emphasized equality of access and non-discrimination (DoE, 1995). Teachers who have not been trained regarding the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning, have negative attitudes towards such inclusion.

According to Munby, Lock, Hutchinson, Whitehead and Martin (1999), the increasing diversity among children in today's classrooms calls on teacher training programmes to train teachers to respond positively to the challenges of inclusive education. According to Bender, Vail and Scott (1995), Daane, Beirne-Smith and Latham (2000), Gans (1987), Malon, Gallagher and Long (2001) and MacPherson-Court, McDonald and Sobsey (2003), mainstream school teachers perceive themselves as unprepared to implement inclusive education in their regular classrooms because they do not have the required skills for dealing with learners who experience barriers to learning and they have never

attended specific workshops on inclusive education. Rose (2005) argues that teachers are not well prepared by their professional training to manage and overcome inequalities in their classrooms. It appears that the empowerment of teachers is neglected in the South African policy documentation on inclusive education. As a result, re-training of teachers is a pre-requisite and it has to be both theoretical and practical (Burstein et al., 2004). Lack of support from the district and from the communities is another concern among teachers (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Any effective teacher regardless of context requires competence in an understanding of inclusion and respect of diversity, collaboration with stakeholders, fostering a positive social climate, instructing in ways conducive to inclusion, engaging in inclusive instructional planning, engaging in meaningful assessment and engaging in lifelong learning (Lewis & Norwich, 2005). Putting inclusive education into practice and within diverse classrooms, teachers have to support and teach according to the needs and preferences of learners with barriers to learning (Perold, Louw & Kleynhans, 2010).

Teachers who struggle to teach learners who are experiencing barriers to learning are those who have not received any formal training on addressing learners' needs in an inclusive classroom. Teachers who have been formally trained in inclusive education do not struggle to embrace diversity. Teachers who find it difficult to deal with learners with barriers to learning are those who received formal training which prepared them to teach in the mainstream school setting (Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2001). As a result they have very little interest in practicing inclusive education in their general classrooms. Their prevalent understanding of inclusive education is a narrow one and a lot of them believe that disabilities are medical concerns and should be handled by doctors (Hay, Smit & Paulsen, 2001). Teachers' lack of understanding of inclusive education increases the anxiety and fear of individuals with differences (D'Alonzo, Giordano & Van Leeuwen, 1997). The study by Ghanizadeh, Bahredar and Moeini (2006) showed that the more teachers know about a learning barrier, the more positive their attitudes were towards the inclusion of learners with that type of barrier/disability. Therefore teacher training in the awareness of disabilities and appropriate strategies for teaching students with disabilities has a positive impact on academic success.

There is a strong relationship between information and attitudes and knowledge and attitudes (Batsiou, Bebestos, Panteli & Antoniou, 2008). For the teachers to be able to teach learners with barriers to learning and those with disabilities in an inclusive school, they need to acquire skills and training.

Professional development in the form of In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) in inclusive education is one of the possibilities to close the gap created by lack of training. Evans, Lunt, Wedell & Dayson (1999, p. 65) argued that "it is important for any professional development training to be continuous and provide opportunities for teachers to consider, discuss, argue about and work through the changes they are exposed to during training which are likely to make a lasting impact on their practice". Teacher training in the awareness of disabilities and appropriate strategies for teaching learners with disabilities has a positive impact on academic success. Bagwandeen (1994), Engelbrecht and Forlin (1997) and Bothma (1997) are of the opinion that relevant pre-service training can go a long way in shaping the attitudes of the teachers towards learners who experience barriers to learning. It is also important to prepare teachers and help them understand their roles in implementing inclusive education in their classrooms. Professional development needs to be linked to school development and should be school-based and context-focused (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, (2010). Teachers are key role players towards implementation of inclusive education. However their lack of training in dealing with learners with barriers to learning is a strong barrier towards implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms.

2.6.4 An inflexible curriculum and assessment policy

Curriculum has been perceived and implemented from the perspective that general education classrooms have a standardized set of curriculum requirements or pieces of knowledge and skills that every learner must achieve to successfully complete the grade (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). However this is not the case with mainstream schools which have learners who experience barriers to learning. Teachers who teach in these mainstream schools feel they are obliged to deliver a standard curriculum and focus on the area content that excludes other learners. As a result they feel learners who experience barriers to learning should be placed in special classrooms outside of the regular class environment (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). These learners need special resources and adaptation to the curriculum or different assessment strategies to help them with their learning. This is challenging to the teachers because the curriculum that they are expected to implement does not cater for the individual differences and can have a negative impact on delivering the subject matter. The rigid and inflexible nature of the curriculum that does not cater for learners who experience barriers to learning can lead to learning breakdown (DoE, 2001a; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001, p. 311-312). This is a huge

challenge to the teachers who are expected to accommodate such learners in their mainstream classrooms and do not have special resources.

The provision of curriculum which is accommodative to all learners in inclusive settings is of great importance to a successful implementation of inclusive education (Giangreco, 2007). Students who experience barriers to learning should be provided with individualized programming. Teachers are required by law to develop an individualized education programme for each student with barriers to learning (DoE, 2001a). These programmes are an appropriate tool for helping in the education of students with diverse education needs. The curriculum is a focal point of inclusionary school practices. In a classroom with different learners, an education team has a responsibility to consider all possible curriculum content for each learner as learners' learning priorities vary in complexity, depth and breadth (Ryndak & Alper, 1996, p. 56).

Teachers are also concerned about the ever changing curricula. In 1998 they were introduced to Curriculum 2005 (C2005) and Outcomes Based Education (OBE) which was skills-based as opposed to an old content-based curriculum. This curriculum framework was described as a single, outcomes-based, learner-paced, and learner-based and was considered inclusive in nature. It was regarded as a curriculum framework that would provide access to all learners and would be responsive to the needs of all learners (Naicker, 2005). Teachers had to teach in ways which were consistent with the principles of C2005 and OBE. In 2002 the DoE (2002a) introduced the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and the National Curriculum Statement (NSC) and in 2010 the DoE introduced the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The introduction of the new curriculum framework meant that the schools had to change how they are organised (Ntombela, 2006).

2.6.5 Assessment strategies

The purpose of assessment of learners who appear to have barriers to learning is to gather information about their learning which would contribute meaningfully to their learning support. Teachers are expected to look beyond assessing learners with barriers to learning. They should think about the learning support the learners need. The continuous assessment of learners' skills, knowledge, attitudes and value is of paramount importance. It forms the foundation of the learners' development throughout his/her schooling. Assessment in inclusive classrooms is another huge challenge teachers have to face. Teachers do not know which assessment strategies to employ in the inclusive classroom as it

comprises of learners with different intelligent quotients (IQ). They also do not know which aspects of the learner to assess. Assessment should not be seen as an isolated task but it is part of an educational cycle. Teachers in inclusive classrooms should use different methods and strategies of assessment for learners who are experiencing learning barriers. They should use assessment methods such as: individual assessment, peer assessment, self-assessment, group assessment, parent assessment and portfolios.

2.6.6 Changing teaching methods and inadequate resources

Teaching learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms is a challenge to teachers because it forces them to change their teaching methods. Teachers are confronted with a challenge to change the way they give instruction to the learners. Teaching learners with barriers to learning is different from the way "normal" learners are taught. Learners who experience barriers to learning require more instruction time, other learning methods and skills (Pilj & Meijer, 1997). Many teachers who teach in mainstream schools have limited access to resources. The biggest challenge to the teachers is to equally distribute the resources they have at their disposal between highly gifted learners and those who experience barriers to learning. In their study, Vaughn and Schumm (1995) argue that responsible and successful inclusion programmes require adequate resources, planning and support personnel. The unavailability of resources is one of the factors affecting the success of inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning. Classes are overcrowded which is a challenge because teachers find it difficult to give the learners with learning barriers individual attention (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

2.6.7 The language of learning and teaching or medium of instruction

Teachers who teach learners whose mother tongue is not the medium of instruction often experience difficulties in disseminating information to the learners. Most of the schools in South Africa are using English as a language of teaching and learning (LoLT). This is due to the fact that most of the learners come from different language backgrounds and they need to learn English to follow the English-medium school curriculum. These learners are referred to as English second language learners (ESL Learners).

According to Landsberg, Kruger and Nel (2010, p. 150-153) some of the challenges of teaching and learning in English as a second language are:

- communication breakdown may occur in the classroom, resulting in learning breakdown, as communication is very important for learning and development in both formal and informal contexts;
- that learners' proficiency in English is poor and this has a negative impact on their academic performance;
- that learners are expected to learn other languages beyond English;
- that teaching learners in more than two languages needs to be supported with appropriate materials and in-service training.

Teachers who teach learners whose first language is not the language of learning and teaching should encourage their learners to use their primary language skills and allow them to experience the normal language developmental milestones (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2010). This is very important because learners will not lose their first language. Learners struggle to listen to English because the phonological system, phonetic rules as well as tone melodies such as high, low, rising and falling tones may differ from their language (Rost, 2001). Teachers who teach ESL may use methods and approaches which promote fluency and communication as opposed to conventional grammar teaching which may fail to meet the expectations of a learner. Another challenge in teaching learners the second language is their learners may live in the society where only their spoken language is used. This does not help them to improve their proficiency in the LoLT. Teachers who speak one language always discourage learners to communicate with their friends in another language.

2.6.8 Socio-economic deprivation

Poverty is the inability to acquire essential material means to maintain life (Van der Berg & Louw, 2003). It is one of the challenges faced by the previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa. Poverty has a negative impact on the lives of people with disabilities; it causes them to live lives of neglect, isolation and despair (CALC, 1997). The prevalence of family poverty among school-going children in South Africa is high. Family poverty sets in motion a chain of events that together create barriers in the school achievement. This is one of the biggest challenges faced by teachers. They find it challenging to include learners who come from poverty stricken backgrounds, such as informal settlements and other previously disadvantaged communities in their inclusive classrooms. Poor living conditions, under-nourishment, lack of proper housing and dysfunctional families have a negative impact on learners and on their academic performance (CALC, 1997). Learners who come from poor,

dysfunctional and child-headed families often experience difficulties in terms of coping with their school work. They cannot concentrate in class, they are temperamental, and they are also violent to their peers. Others do not come to school regularly because of ill health and under-nourishment and results in poor performance. Poverty is a strong predictor of poor academic performance. It leads to under-achievement. Children from poor families tend to perform poorly in tests of reading and mathematics.

Recently the study that was held in the Western Cape suggested that poverty index proved to be a strong indicator of results and showed that there was a clear relationship between the poverty index and performance (Western Cape Education Department, 2004). Poverty also manifests in the child's appearance and behaviour which together contribute to a certain perception of the child (Fleisch, 2007). Learners from poverty stricken households usually have low self-esteem. This is one of the barriers associated with poverty. Teaching such learners is a very big challenge to the teachers and teachers have to ensure that they motivate them on a daily basis. Specific practices associated with poverty affect the learners' proficiency in reading; the shortage of money to pay for direct and indirect school costs is one of them.

Most of the mainstream schools in the townships and rural areas do not have basic services. This makes the lives of learners who experience barriers to learning very difficult because they are unable to reach learning centres due to the shortage of transport and inferior roads. This is one of the causes of the high rate of absenteeism and lateness among learners with barriers to learning.

2.6.9 Inappropriate and inadequate provision of support

a) Support systems

A study to identify the main causes of stress of teachers in mainstream schools conducted in Gauteng and Western Cape by Engelbrecht *et al.* (2001, p. 258) indicated that despite an increase in the number of learners who experience barriers to learning in mainstream classes in South Africa, teacher support systems are still inadequate. The assumption is that this inadequacy is caused by the lack of professional competency. The kind of training teachers received during the apartheid era did not expose teachers to the support systems required to enable them to develop the necessary skills to handle learners who experience barriers to learning (Engelbrecht & Forlin, 1998). Teachers'

confidence in their own ability to work with learners who experience barriers to learning, can only be addressed by the availability of support systems (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick & Sheer, 1999). Support systems result in teachers changing their negative perceptions of inclusive education. A study on teacher preparedness for integrated classrooms conducted by Bothma, Gravett and Swart (2000, p. 214) in the Gauteng Province, concluded that a small percentage of the teachers indicated that they received support from the services. Bothma, Gravett and Swart (2000) argued against expecting teachers to manage their stresses effectively in an unsupportive environment as it causes a barrier towards effective implementation of inclusive education.

b) *The District-based Support Teams*

The establishment of district-based support teams by education districts is of paramount importance for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The district-support teams should comprise of district specialists and former special school teachers. Key functions of the district-support teams (DoE, 2001), include:

- providing evaluation needs and support of all schools in their district including centres of early childhood education, adult education centres, colleges, furthure and higher education institutions.
- ensuring that special schools are transformed into resource centres.
- ensuring that the implementation of national inclusive education is monitored.
- ensuring that the needs and support required by each school in the district is responded to in terms of curriculum, assessment and instructions.
- upgrading and training of staff as part of the district-support team.

c) *Support from the school management team (SMT)*

Support from the administrative staff has been cited in a number of studies as a significant factor in determining the attitudes of the teachers towards inclusion. Idol (1994), Larrivee and Cook (1979) argued that the teacher feels comfortable and reaffirmed if the principal and the school management team (SMT) foster a positive learning environment for both teachers and learners. Teachers in mainstream settings believe that the support of the SMT is critical in order for them to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms (Daane, Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Principals need to accept ownership of all students and support inclusive placement in order to inspire the same feelings among other school personnel (Gameros, 1995; Idol, 1994).

d) The School-based Support Team (SBST)

A school-based support team (SBST) is an internal support which is coordinated by a member of staff who has received training in either life skills education, counselling or learning support. This team should comprise mainly teachers within the staff itself, parents and learners (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker & Engelbrecht, 1999). Mainstream schools are required by law to establish school-based support teams that will coordinate inclusive services and network with the specialists from district-based support teams and resource centres (DoE, 2001). The purpose of the SBST is to support teachers who are experiencing problems and do not have training and skills of dealing with learners who experience barriers to learning in mainstream settings.

Key functions of the SBST include different forms of classroom-based support, (DoE, 2002, p.117) such as:

- Identifying learners who experience barriers to learning and coordinating the curriculum; and
- Collectively identifying teachers' needs and in particular, barriers to learning at learner, teacher, curriculum and institutional-levels.
-

2.6.10 The severity of a learner's disability

The attitudes of teachers toward the inclusion of learners with disabilities into regular classrooms are shaped by the type and severity of the disability (Croll & Moses, 2000; Agran, Alper & Wehmeyer, 2002). Research shows that there is a concern from the teachers regarding inclusion of learners with severe disabilities into mainstream classrooms (Forlin, 1998; Westwood & Graham, 2003). Teachers view the inclusion of learners with multiple disabilities into mainstream classrooms as impractical (Sigafoos & Elkins, 1994). Another study by Sigafooos and Alkins (1994) found that teacher attitudes were less favourable about including learners with multiple physical disabilities into regular classes.

2.6.11 Lack of parental recognition and involvement

Parents are the most consistent advocates of their children's best interests. Their involvement in education issues is an integral part of developing a more inclusive education system. Education for all and inclusive education include the possibility that parents have a greater say in the education of their children (Donald, *et al.,* 1997, p. 248-249). The South African Schools Act further states that parents

have the right to decide which school they wish their children to attend and that only in extreme cases can a school refuse learners admission. Therefore it is important for the teachers to collaborate with parents if they want to get useful information about their children. According to Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (1997)., the inclusion process demands involvement, dedication and commitment from parents, since parents share a special relationship with their children, and they also understand their children's needs and are readily available to offer personal support where necessary. In many instances parent-based groups are making a significant difference in the movement towards inclusive programmes. Blanco (1997) argues that the formulation of policies designed to help disabled individuals requires a global, integrative and participative approach that involves various institutions.

The parents' active involvement in the teaching and learning process is important for effective learning and development. Lack of education is one of the reasons they do not want to get involved in education matters. The teachers' attitudes towards parents' involvement also discourages the parents from participating in the education of their children. Teachers do not know which roles they can involve the parents in. Lack of resources to facilitate involvement and lack of empowerment contribute to parents' unwillingness to be involved in the education system. Language that is used by the schools to communicate with the parents creates a barrier. A number of schools write correspondence letters in English and as a result parents do not participate in the activities of their children's schools due to communication breakdown.

2.6.12 Teacher/learner ratio

Large classes may be viewed as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusive education (Agran, Alper & Wehmeyer, 2002; Pronchnow, Kearney & Carroll-lind, 2000). Research findings highlighted concerns about the teacher-to-learner ratio. Teachers feel inclusion is only possible with small class sizes and adequate resources. Overcrowded classes make it difficult for the teacher to give individual attention to all the learners in a class. This view is supported by Stoler (1992), Van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2001), who argue that larger classes place additional demands on the regular teacher, while reinforcing concern that all students may not receive proper time and attention. Studies have also shown that individual assistance by teachers to learners who experience barriers to learning can be helpful (Wasik & Slavin, 1993). The number of learners in each class in the mainstream school should not exceed 25 especially if there are learners with disabilities. According to Wedell (2005), teaching

large classes with few resources is one of the challenges which put a great deal of pressure on the teachers.

2.6.13 Inaccessible and unsafe built environments

An inaccessible and unsafe built environment is another barrier identified in the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001a, p. 7 & 18). The Department of Education's Draft Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (2002) state that physical access and safety of the environment are social constructs that reflect our values concerning diversity (DoE, 2010). Most of the schools in South Africa especially those that were built before the National Building Regulations of 1996 do not adhere to the new building standards and therefore accessibility needs to be enhanced (DoE, 2002, p. 53). Accessibility needs to be viewed in terms of geographical location of the school, and a school for learners from a poverty-stricken community should be in an area that is easily accessible to community members and should have all the essential services within reachable distance (DoE, 2002).

2.6.14 Teachers' level of confidence

A number of teachers in mainstream schools generally lack confidence as they try to accommodate learners who experience barriers to learning in their classes (Sigafoos & Elkons, 1994). This may be caused by their lack of skills in modifying their curriculum in order to suit learners with individual learning needs. The Draft Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (DoE, 2002) indicated that fear and lack of awareness about disabilities would be a barrier to the learning of the learners.

Teachers who have positive attitudes toward inclusive education and who do not lack confidence in implementing inclusive education in their classrooms are those who have had increased training in the field of inclusive education (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). Another study by Le Roy and Simpson (1996) showed that the more teachers experienced teaching learners who experience barriers to learning, their confidence to teach such learners also increased. However those with inadequate knowledge with regard to instructional techniques and curricular adaptations lacked confidence and as a result had negative attitudes toward inclusive education (Lasar, Brenner, Habel & Coleman, 1997).

These negative attitudes will spread to others and that could negatively influence the learner who experiences barriers to learning.

2.7 Theoretical framework

This section of the dissertation discusses the theoretical framework of this study. Neuman (2006, p.52) defined a theoretical framework as a very general theoretical system with assumptions, concepts and specific social theories. According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2005), theoretical frameworks help the researcher to make explicit assumptions about the interconnectedness of the way things are related in the world. They further state that a theoretical framework is the lens through which the researcher views the world.

In this study two theoretical frameworks were chosen, namely: the human rights theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

2.7.1 Human rights theory

 In order to understand the realities surrounding the new movements in South Africa, it was necessary to adopt an explanatory framework which does not only refer to education, but to social life in general. A human rights theory could be relevant in this study. The main purpose of the human rights theory is to develop an awareness of the fact that education is a human rights issue. According to Mittler (2000, p. 12), inclusion is a struggle to achieve universal human rights, it originates in the international human rights movement. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed the right of every child to an education (UNESCO, 1994). As a result many countries including South Africa are moving away from the education system that segregates other students to a more inclusive education system.

The political changes that took place in South Africa after 1994 when she became a constitutional democratic state affected both general and special education sectors. These changes influenced the DoE to restructure and redesign education by moving away from the education setting that segregated learners with disabilities. The new government also committed itself to the transformation of education, and key policy documents and legislation stressing the principle of education as a basic human right are enshrined in the new South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). Section 9(2) enshrines the right to equal learning opportunity to all and protection against unfair discriminatory

practices. It states that all learners, irrespective of their disabilities, race, gender and age, should have the right to learn successfully.

The new constitution also makes it illegal for the state organisations, groups or individuals to discriminate against anyone, on any grounds (RSA, 1996, Article 9, 3). Avramidis and Norwich (2010) argue in support of the notion that the movement for inclusive education is part of a broad human rights agenda and that all forms of segregation are morally wrong. The education section of the Bill of Rights in South Africa's Constitution states that every child has a fundamental right to basic education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning (DoE, 1996). In the study conducted by Dyson and Forlin (1999, p. 28-31), they argued in support of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action that "the human rights issue in education was the strongest protagonist for the development of inclusive classrooms". The White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) provides a framework for systemic change for the development of inclusive education. Inclusive education means the right to education for all (Naicker, 1996; Lazarus, Davidoff & Daniels, 1999, p. 47). Inclusive education in the South African context has been promoted as an educational strategy that contributes to a democratic society. The first step is to move away from seeing disability only in medical terms to seeing it in terms of the rights of the disabled.

2.7.2 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The second theoretical framework that underpinned this study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory is based on an approach first described by Bronfenbrenner (1988, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The term "ecology" is derived from a Greek term (Oikos = house, environment and Logos = knowledge). This theory stresses the quality and context of the child's surroundings. It is also suited for the description of human socialization. It describes socialization as the way of becoming a member of society. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is the human development theory.

This theory has been renamed "bio-ecological systems theory" as it sees learners as being influenced by the forces around them and constantly making meaning of their lives within their social context (Castle, 2001; Kim, 2001). This theory also claims the existence of interdependence and relationships between different organisms and their physical environment. Furthermore it maintains that every part together with all other parts ensures the survival of the whole.

According to Costanza (1998, p. 2) and White, Greenman, Benton and Boots (2006), ecological intervention embraces the notion that it is impossible to understand the meaning of persons or systems in their contexts, unless, for example, the teacher and the learner develop shared criteria for their definition. The ecological intervention embraces the notion that the varieties of different features in the environment affect both the teacher and the learner. This theory defines complex layers of environment, each having an effect on a child's development. It identifies four interconnected systems namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem.
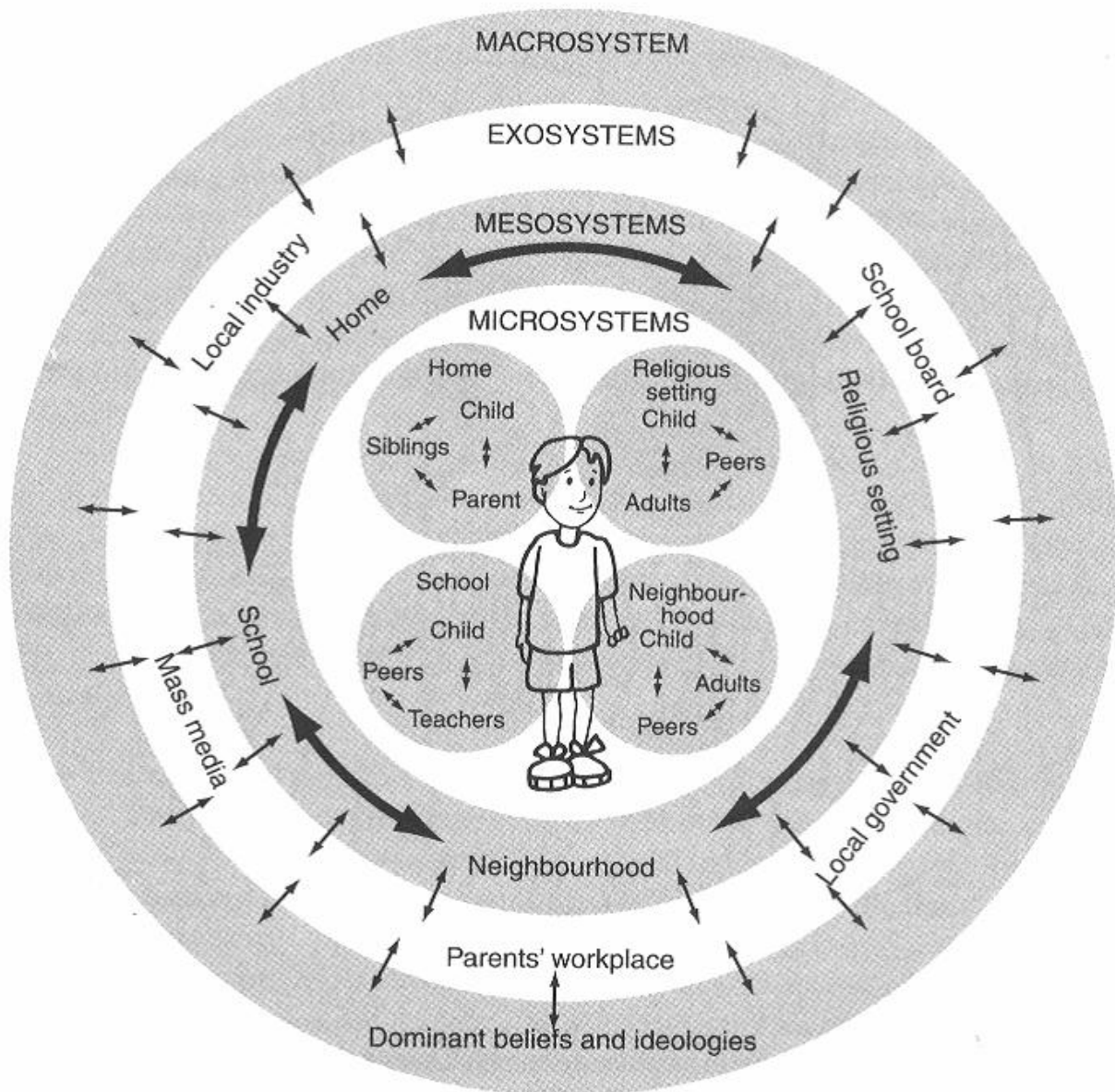
2.7.2.1 Figure 1: The ecological approach, which hypothesizes the layers of influence on a young child's development. (Picture scanned from Penn, H. (2005). Understanding early childhood education, issues and controversies)

The microsystem: This is the closest environment for a child and includes the structures with which the child maintains direct contacts (Berk, 2000). Structures in the microsystem include family, school, neighbourhood or childcare environments. The school class is a microsystem for the child since it is another environment where the child maintains direct contact with other children and teachers. Paquette and Ryan (2001) maintain that at microsystem level the relations between persons happen in two ways - from the child and towards the child. For example, a child's parents have an influence of his/her beliefs and behaviour, but the child can as well influence the parents' beliefs and behaviour. Bronfenbrenner calls this bi-directional influence and points out how such relationships exist on the levels of all environments. In a microsystem the bi-directional interactions are their strongest and they have a most powerful influence on the child.

The mesosystem: This refers to interconnections between two or more settings or the interactions outside the family environment such as school and peer influences. At this level, peer group, school and family systems interact with one another. As a result what happens at home or within the peer group can have an influence on how a learner performs at school.

The exosystem: This layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with some structure in his/her microsystem (Berk, 2000). The child may not be directly involved at this level, but he/she does feel the positive or negative force involved with the interaction with his/her own system.

The macrosystem: This is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. It encompasses the relationships and interactions a child has with immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000). Structures in this layer include family, school, neighbourhood, or children's environment. It is the wider social, cultural and legal context that encompasses all the other systems.

This theory's view of inclusive education suggests that children with or without disabilities develop in a complex social world and that it is necessary to observe interactions at multilevel contexts and examine changes over time at all levels. According to MacCormick (2006), the developmental ecological systems psychologists describe the child as embedded in a series of interrelated systems that interact with one another. This interaction is bi-directional, the developing child affects and is

affected by nested systems. This theory also stresses that the child's learning occurs within the context of normally occurring routines in familiar settings. For a child with disabilities familiar settings refer to the general education environment or any natural setting where typically developing children are present. An understanding of the needs of the child with disabilities must be accompanied by a careful analysis of the opportunities that exist in the typical educational setting to address the goals and objectives designed to alleviate those needs.

Teachers are the main adults in the lives of the learners for many hours each week, as a result they have an important role to play in the learners` persona and social development. Therefore, harmonious relationship and interdependence between teachers and learners who experience barriers to learning is important. The relationships a child develops in school become critical to his/her positive development. The amount of time children spend in school determines the weight of the relationships fostered there. A school is a place where a child may for the first time develop relationships with adults outside their immediate family. These relationships help the child to develop cognitively and emotionally. White *et al*. (2006) argue that in an ecosystem the components behave in the ways that keep them together and they move towards the goal or destiny. The ecological systems theory stresses that should there be a breakdown in one part of the system, another part will try replacing it, so that the living pattern can be balanced and maintained. Therefore, to maintain the balance, all systems operating around the learner must work together so that the learner can be developed and educated in a stable environment.

2.8 Summary

This chapter examined educators' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education on international and South African levels. The main idea that emerged from the studies were that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of learners that experience barriers in regular classrooms are influenced by a number of factors. It also emerged that a paradigm shift on the part of the teachers is a prerequisite towards the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Literature also indicated that although teachers are the main role players towards the successful implementation of inclusive education, they are not always prepared to meet the needs of learners with severe disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher outlines the research design and methodology used in this study. To explore the experiences of teachers teaching learners in the context of inclusive education, it was necessary to engage qualitative research methods. Qualitative research provided the opportunity for these teachers to articulate their understandings, perceptions and experiences around inclusive education. This chapter provides a brief description of the context which attests to the circumstances of these teachers from a township secondary school. The researcher explains the sampling strategy, and describes data collecting tools where he argues for the use of semi-structured individual interviews and semi-structured questionnaires. Inductive analysis of data and patterns of themes that emerged from interviews and questionnaires are also explained. Finally, the ethical considerations, validity, trustworthiness/reliability and limitations of this study are explained in detail.

This study was undertaken to answer the following critical questions:

1. What are teachers` understandings of inclusive education?
2. What challenges do teachers experience as they teach in the context of inclusive education?
3. What kind of support do teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education?

3.2 Research design and methodology

According to Durrheim (2002, p. 29), a research design is "a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research".

The approach that was used in this study was qualitative in nature. This approach was employed because of the nature of the study which was explorative. Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2011) assert that qualitative research seeks to explore a particular group and not to generalise it over the whole population. The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of the teachers of implementing inclusive education in mainstream settings. Bless and Higson-Smith (2004) described the qualitative approach as using relevant words or descriptions to record aspects of the world. The qualitative research methodology starts from the philosophical assumptions that researchers bring with them, their own world views and beliefs (Cresswell, 2007). The raw data was collected in a non-numerical form which was qualitative. According to Neuman (2000), qualitative data is in the form of words and pictures, while quantitative data is in the form of numbers. Qualitative approaches are designed to

obtain maximum information from the participants in their natural setting. Berg (2003, p. 5) argues that this design helps the researcher to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena where there is little disruption of the natural settings. Denzin (2008) concurs that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, trying to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. In his study, Patton (2002) defined qualitative research as attempting to understand the unique interactions in a particular situation. The main aim of understanding is not to predict what might occur, but to understand in depth characteristics of the situation and the meaning brought by participants and what is happening to them at the moment. Furthermore qualitative approaches are useful because they produce detailed data from a small group of participants while exploring feelings, impressions and judgments (Coll & Chapman, 2000). The qualitative research methodology was relevant for this particular study because its main focus was on the experiences of teachers working in the same school where the study was conducted.

3.3 Research paradigm

This study was done within the *interpretivist paradigm*, and the main aim was to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). The term paradigm originated from the Greek word "*paradigma"* which means "pattern" and was firstly used by Thomas Kuhn in 1962 to denote a conceptual framework shared by a community of scientists which provided them with a convenient model for examining problems and finding solutions. Kuhn (1977) defined a paradigm as an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools.

The interpretivist research paradigm emphasises qualitative research methods, which are flexible, context-sensitive and largely concerned with understanding of complex issues (Carcary, 2009). Rowland (2005) argued that in the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher is not seen as entirely objective; rather he/she is part of the research process. This view was shared by Walshman (2006, p. 321) who reiterated that "researchers are biased by their background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others".

According to Willis (1995), interpretive researchers believe that reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world; as a result, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological beliefs that reality is socially constructed. The term "*ontology"* refers to a branch of

philosophy concerned with articulating the nature of the world (Wand & Weber, 1999). Whereas the term *"epistemology"* refers to the nature of the relationship between the researcher and it denotes "the nature of human knowledge and understanding that can possibly be acquired through different ways of inquiry and alternative methods of investigation" (Hirschheim, Klein & Lyytinen, 1995). Interpretivists are against foundationalists who believe that there is no single route or correct method to knowledge (Willis, 1995). They attempt to derive their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest (Walshman, 1993).

Within this qualitative approach, a descriptive and interpretive case study was adopted as a research design of this study. Yin (2002) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that (a) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when (b) the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident; and in which (c) multiple sources of evidence are used. According to Stake (2008), a case study is an in-depth analysis of a single entity. It is a choice that a researcher makes as to what to investigate, identified as a single case. Creswell (2007) on the other hand defines a case study as a single instant of a bounded system (e.g. an event, process, an activity or individuals) based on extensive data collection.

These definitions were helpful in distinguishing the research methodology of this study from all other research designs. Adopting a case study approach enabled in-depth qualitative analyses of the experiences of teachers of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education in a single school. Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead (1987) argue that case research is particularly appropriate for practical-based problems where the experiences of the actors are important and the context of the action is critical, and while there are many definitions and characteristics of case studies, there is a broad agreement about its use in examining and disseminating practice in inclusive education. The case study method appeared to be the most appropriate method for understanding the complexity of organisational phenomena, as it contributes to the way we understand individual, organisational, political and social phenomena (Yin, 2003).

3.4 Research site

The school selected for this study is a secondary school in Umlazi Township. This township is situated 18km south of Durban. The selected school is a public school in a previously disadvantaged community. It accommodates "normal" learners and learners with barriers to learning. In this

community, the rate of unemployment is relatively high. It is surrounded by informal settlements and most of the learners come from poverty-stricken backgrounds.

The appearance of the school is attractive, but not conducive for learners with physical disabilities. It is a double storied school, which makes it difficult for learners with disabilities to gain access to classes on the first floor since the buildings do not have ramps. The school has a staff establishment of 50 teachers excluding non-teaching staff. The school starts from Grade 8 to Grade 12. The learner enrolment during the year 2013 was 1650; this means the teacher-learner ratio is supposed to be 1:33. However, the shortage of classes makes it difficult for each class to have 33 learners. The classes are overcrowded in such a way that the average number of learners in each class is 55. The school is a predominantly African school with African teachers, the majority of which received their training during the apartheid era. The language of teaching and learning (LoLT) is English.

The school begins at 7h15 and ends at 14h30 every day. From 7h15 to 7h30 learners and teachers gather for prayers and announcements. The first period commences at 7h45.

3.5 Sampling

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges teachers experience teaching in the context of inclusive education. As a result the participants of the study were to be drawn from teachers working in a mainstream secondary school. Bless and Hogson-Smith (2004) defined sampling as a subset of the whole population which is investigated by a researcher and whose characteristics will be generalized to the entire population. It is practically impossible to interview the entire population; therefore selecting a sample is a prerequisite. The population of this study comprised of six (6) teachers working at a selected high school in the Umlazi District.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants and the school where the study was going to be conducted. According to Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2000), purposive sampling increases the utility of information obtained from small samples. This method of sampling means that the researcher makes specific choices about who he or she wants to include in the study (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). There are two main methods of sampling, namely: probability and non-probability sampling (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). Purposive sampling was used as a non-probability sampling since the main aim was to collect in-depth data. Rea and Parker (2005) define purposive

sampling as a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher uses judgment in selecting respondents who are considered to be knowledgeable in subject areas related to the research.

A single school was selected for this study because it met all the needs for this investigation. Six (6) teachers who teach in the same school were selected as the participants. They were selected based on their experience working in a mainstream secondary school and because of their willingness to participate in this study. Three participants for the interviews were two males and the other four were females. Their ages ranged from 30-50. Three of the participants had undergraduate teachers' qualifications, while the other three had undertaken postgraduate studies in education. The participants were individually interviewed in semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. All interviews took place in the staff room after school hours. The time chosen for interviews was at the discretion of the principal, the participants and the researcher. These teachers were used in this study since the main purpose was to explore their experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. According to Berg (2003, p.27), a research sample is composed of elements which contain the most common characteristics of the population.

3.5.1 Table 1: Demographic representation of participants for semi-structured interviews and open ended questionnaires

PSEUDONYM	AGE	GENDER	TEACHING SUBJECT	TEACHING EXPERIENCE	QUALIFICATION
Penelope	50	Female	English	27	STD, ACE
Senzo	47	Female	Life sciences	23	PGCE, B. Ed Honours
Mantombi	47	Female	History	23	PTD, ACE, B. Ed Honours
Mlu	40	Male	Maths	16	B. Paed
Simphiwe	35	Male	Physical science	12	B. Ed
Hlengiwe	30	Female	Life orientation	7	B. Ed

3.6 Data collection techniques

Tuckman (1978, p. 14) argued that many studies in education and other related fields rely on interviews and questionnaires as their main sources of data collection, so were the semi-structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires used in this study.

3.6.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

In this study, data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews of 30 minutes to one hour in length following a predetermined schedule. An interview guide, consisting of six (6) open-ended questions with probes, was used to gather information from each participant. This interview guide was developed through a review of literature relating to teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in this study to give flexibility to both the researcher and the participants (Rose & Cole, 2000). Earl and Mouton (2002) define a qualitative interview as an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which an interviewer has a general plan of inquiry.

The interview is regarded as a very important instrument in the collection of data for the qualitative researcher (Coll & Chapman, 2000). The interview is applicable and convenient in collecting in-depth data about people's opinions, perceptions or beliefs from a small sample rather than on a large scale (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2007). It allows the participants to express their opinions and their perceptions in their own words. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in the context of this study since one of the main purposes was to explore things like similarities and differences of ranges across voices of the teachers in terms of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. It also afforded some flexibility to both the researcher and the interviewee. Greeff (2005) argues that semi-structured interviews are considered to be appropriate in eliciting specific information about policy implementation. This data collecting instrument was ideal since the study was focusing on the participants who have been working together for a considerably long time and have similar concerns about implementing inclusive education (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews give participants an opportunity to expand upon their answers, give more details, and add additional perspectives (Watts & Ebbutt, 1987). The questions were open-ended, yet directed at obtaining particular information.

3.6.1.1 Pilot testing of interviews

It is important for each participant in the study to understand the interview questions in the same way. To ensure that this happened in the interview, the researcher started by piloting the interview schedule to six pilot participants, which also helped to enhance its clarity, accuracy, and reliability.

The interview questions were piloted at the neighbouring school during the month of November, 2012. The way in which the questions are phrased is one of the most important ways to determine how an interviewee will respond (Patton, 2002). This school was similar to the school where the study was going to be conducted. This process helped the researcher to make some changes to his interview schedule.

3.6.1.2 The interview procedures

One semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was conducted with each participant at the school site to participate in the study. The interviewer started by establishing a rapport with the interviewees and he also explained the purpose of the interview. The researcher came to the interview with a list of questions to ensure the coverage of the major topics; modifications of questions during the interview were made to show sensitivity to the individuals and the context of the school. Six teachers were requested to participate in the study and they consented and participated. The duration of each interview ranged from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the staff room after school hours to avoid any unnecessary interruptions. The advantage of using open-ended questions in an interview is that data is obtained relatively systematically. As suggested by Patton (2002), data was collected by note taking, by using an audio tape recorder and using follow-up memos after the interviews. Note taking helped the researcher to formulate new questions during the interview and it also helped the researcher in locating specific quotations from the tape.

Tape recorded interviews allowed for more accuracy in data collection and they also allowed the researcher to be more attentive to the participants (Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999). Each tape- recorded interview was transcribed verbatim to ensure a greater degree of accuracy. An interview guide **(Appendix A)** was also used to control and ensure that all areas of the interview were covered with all the participants of the investigation. To ensure credibility and conformability of transcribed interviews, copies were hand delivered to all six participants.

3.6.2 Open-ended questionnaire

A questionnaire can be defined as "a written list of questions, the answers to which are recorded by respondents" (Kumar, 1999, p. 110). The respondent receives the questionnaire, reads the questions, interprets what is required and then writes down his/her answers. The researcher has to ensure that the questions are easy to read, understand and follow, because unlike in an interview situation, the respondent cannot ask questions or receive answers immediately.

One open-ended questionnaire was designed to supplement the data from interviews. Open-ended questions provide the opportunity for the respondents to answer the questions in his/her own words. These questions are used when the researcher is "concerned with process and meaning rather than cause and effect" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 156). Questionnaires were used when the researcher realised that there were still some gaps, in connection with answering the questions about the challenges teachers experience in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants.

According to Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2011), if a site-specific case study approach is to be employed, qualitative, less structured, word-based and open-ended questionnaires are more appropriate. Open-ended questions are useful if the possible answers are known or the questionnaire is exploratory (Bailey, 1994, cited in Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011).

Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2007) regard a questionnaire as an appropriate tool if one wants to collect data on a large scale within a short space of time. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to give detailed information. Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2007) argue that a well-designed questionnaire can increase the reliability and validity of data to acceptable levels.

3.6.2.1 The format and content of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two sections (See appendix B). Section A is made up of questions 1-4. The purpose of this section was to gather biographical data about each participant. Section B is made up of questions 1-6. The purpose of this section was to establish the experiences, perceptions and views of the participants on the inclusive education policy.

3.6.2.2 Development of questionnaire items

Some strategies that were employed in the development of the questionnaire items included:

- Thorough examination of issues raised in the literature on inclusive education; after which questionnaire items were selected that were in line with the hypothesis and the research questions.
- Identifying the main issues of inclusive education, and then from there the concepts of the issues that were going to be tested were identified.
- Questions from other authors on a similar topic were considered (Lazarus, Davidoff & Daniels, 2007, p.65).

3.6.2.3 Pilot testing of questionnaires

It was also necessary to run a pilot test to pre-test the questionnaire and to revise it based on the results of the test. The researcher used the opportunity when a number of the teachers were not invigilating to sample the questionnaire. A sample of 25 pilot teachers was selected to fill out the questionnaires and their comments were helpful to shape the final questionnaire. Pilot testing the questionnaire helped to determine whether questionnaire items possessed the desired qualities of measurement. According to Van Dalen (1979, p. 153), questionnaires are to be used to measure variables in an investigation, they must be pre-tested, refined and subjected to the same criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity.

3.6.2.4 Final questionnaire (Appendix B)

The final questionnaire was administered to the six teachers selected through purposive sampling.

3.7 Data analysis

The aim of data analysis is to transform data into an answer to the original research questions. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), data analysis is a practice in which raw data is ordered and organised so that useful information can be extracted from it. Qualitative research generates huge amounts of data, therefore it is important to analyse it as early as possible. This helps to reduce the problem of data overload by choosing significant features for future focus (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Qualitative data is analysed by organising it into categories on the basis of themes and concepts. Categories that were explored in this research included teachers'

understanding of inclusive education. challenges teachers experience in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms, and support needed for the inclusion programme to be effective,

A thematic analysis was used as a method of analysing data and ideas appeared from individual interviews and questionnaires. Data analysis procedures that followed a step by step constant comparison method were used to develop themes (De Vos, 2002):

Step 1: Managing data

An outline of paraphrased items was generated based on each interview text. Transcripts and tapes were utilised to organise data. Data was managed by colour coding using highlighters to define categories for data analysis. This helped to change raw data into manageable thought units for analysis.

Step 2: Reading and writing memos

Each interview transcript was examined separately and whenever a new theme emerged, it was highlighted. The identified themes within the transcript were then compared across transcripts.

Step 3: Describing, classifying and interpreting

Overall themes were then developed. The researcher started by identifying salient themes, recurring ideas and patterns of belief that link people. As categories emerged, they had to be internally consistent but different from one another. According to De Vos (2002) classifying means taking the qualitative information apart and looking for categories, themes or dimensions of information. Interpretation on the other hand involves making sense of data; this requires the researcher to search for other explanations for this data and the connection among them.

Step 4: Representing and visualising

This procedure was followed for each transcript analysed. A summary of all transcripts was compiled in which sub-themes were compared to come up with overall themes that were later used to report the finding of the study.

3.8 Reliability and validity

Reliability refers to the extent to which one's findings can be replicated (Merriam, 1988, p. 170). The main purpose of reliability is to ensure that the mistakes and subjectivity in a study are as minimal as possible (Yin, 2002).To ensure that the results were dependable the researcher used the following strategies as suggested by Cohen, Mannion & Morrison (2011). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim into written text by the principal investigator. Transcribing interviews can provide important detail and an accurate verbatim of the interview (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Recording and transcribing interviews has the following advantages:

- It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews;
- It allows more thorough examination of what people say;
- It permits repeated examination of the interviewees answers;
- It opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data (i.e. a secondary analysis);
- It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases;
- It allows data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher (Heritage, 1984, p. 238).

To measure the accuracy of the research, the researcher asked other researchers to examine the data. If the data is examined by more than one researcher, something that might have been missed by one researcher might be picked up by the other researcher (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). The researcher also asked the participants to read the interview transcripts and comment whether they gave the true reflection of what they said in the interview. The researcher also used an audio tape to record interviews which would make the transcripts more accurate as these can be revisited to confirm or authenticate data.

3.9 Ethical issues

The use of interviews and questionnaires as data collecting tools involves obtaining ethical clearance. Interviews concern interpersonal interaction and produce information that involves invasion of private space and thus results in revelation of human conditions (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Ethical considerations are important in the interpretivist paradigm as they assist the participants with clear information about their rights to participate (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011).

In this study a number of potential ethical issues were considered. Consent letters were sent to the Department of Education (Pietermaritzburg-Head Office, KZN), University of KwaZulu-Natal research office, to the principal and the SGB of the selected school and to the participants. The consequences of the research for the participants were considered as an important area of concern especially concerning any official reports or future publications. The principal, the SGB and the participants were informed that the name of the school and the participants would remain anonymous and all data was confidential to the researchers. The school and the participants were also given new names to be used for the duration of the study. All participants were given verbal and written information about the research in advance of the data collection. All participants were advised of their rights to withdraw or refuse to participate in the research at any stage. They were also informed about the benefits of the research, either to them (participants) or to other researchers or society. The participants were informed that data collected would be stored in a lockable locker in the supervisor's office for a period of five years, thereafter it would be destroyed. Questionnaires were distributed to all teachers at the site. The questionnaires contained a letter with the nature of the study, instructions to complete the questionnaire and a confidentiality clause. The interview was conducted after school hours to avoid unnecessary disruptions.

3.10 Limitations of the study

A limitation of this study was a small sample size which was restricted to one school. Having limitations in the research does not compromise the value of the study. The study looked at inclusion as a process in which learners who experience barriers to learning may strive for a stigma-free environment demonstrating social, emotional and academic growth. The attitudes teachers might have towards learners who experience barriers to learning, might make them look at the subject of inclusion subjectively. The responses were limited to general classroom teachers within one urban setting

3.11Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology which provided an in-depth discussion of the qualitative approach process and strategies employed in this study. It has described qualitative methods using the interpretivist paradigm; semi-structured individual interviews and a semi-structured questionnaire as data collection tools. A detailed description of the research site was provided. This chapter also provided a discussion on validity, ethical issues, data analysis and limitations of the study. The following chapter (Chapter 4) reports on the analysis and the interpretation of the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher provides a detailed inductive analysis of data after the verifications of transcripts were done. An in-depth analysis of transcribed verbatim data arranged in themes that emerged from data collected is also presented. Two theoretical frameworks, the human rights theory and ecological systems theory, were used as a lens through which data was analysed.

Semi-structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect data which answered the following research questions:

- What are teachers` understandings of inclusive education?
- What challenges do teachers experience as they teach in the context of inclusive education?
- What kind of support do teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education?

Emerging themes:

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Teachers' understandings of the inclusion education.	
Challenges teachers experience in implementing inclusive education	Lack of teacher training and skills. Overcrowded classes. Inadequate resources. Inflexible curriculum.
Support teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education.	

4.2 Table 2: Themes and sub-themes from the semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

4.3 Analysis of findings from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teachers' understandings of inclusion education

Participants indicated that teachers experienced problems with the definition of the term "inclusive education". They indicated that teachers do not know what inclusive education means. They also indicated that teachers did not understand the primary reasons for inclusive education. Their responses also revealed that these educators assumed that inclusive education was the concept that mainly concerned itself with disabilities. This was captured in the responses from all participants.

Penelope said:

"The majority of the teachers do not have a clue of what inclusive education is. When they define inclusive education, they see it as the Department of Education's attempt to accommodate learners with disabilities in mainstream schools with the purpose of closing down special schools".

The definations given by the participants indicate that teachers do not have adequate information about the policy of inclusion. Teachers have misconceptions about it. This is evident from the response by Mantombi who said:

"Uhmm, what can I say? For me, the term inclusive education means that those learners who are disabled should not mix with the learners who are 'normal', if you know what I mean? Inclusive education is more associated with disabilities as we all know that there are special schools where such learners go to".

The misconceptions that teachers have about inclusive education could have a negative impact on its implementation. There are teachers who believe that if learners who experience barriers to learning are mixed with "normal" learners, proper teaching and learning will not take place. This was evident from the response of one of the participants Simphiwe when he said:

"Inclusive education means you include all learners in the same class, however, they should be of the same ability because if they are mixed, those learners who are, let's say, experiencing problems with understanding the work in class, will be left behind and become a mockery of others, you know how children are".

The response from Mlu was:

"I think inclusive education is for the primary schools because in those schools learners have to be taught and prepared for higher classes so that when they select their subjects they will not have a problem as to which career path they must follow".

There is a misconception among teachers in mainstream secondary schools that it is the responsibility of primary school teachers to identify and help learners who experience barriers to learning in their classrooms. This calls for the DoE to disseminate more information about the policy of inclusion to secondary school teachers. There are teachers who believe that the DoE is shifting the responsibility of teaching learners who experience barriers from the special school teachers to mainstream teachers. This was evident from Mlu`s response when he defined inclusive education as::

"a Department of Education's strategy to do away with special schools by bringing learners who experience barriers to learning back into mainstream education".

When Hlengiwe was asked to define inclusive education this is what she had to say:

"What can I say? I think inclusive education is an education policy which seeks to integrate mainstream and special schools, I`m of the view that the Department of Education is trying to do away with special schools".

These misinterpretations of inclusive education can be attributed to the teachers' lack of information about inclusive education. The majority of the respondents felt that teachers were not adequately prepared to implement inclusive education in regular classrooms. These responses suggest that since there are problems with defining inclusive education, its implementation will not be easy. According to Ntombela (2006), teachers' limited understanding of Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) is one of the main reasons they do not implement inclusive education at all in their classrooms and those who do, implement it poorly. The Education White Paper 6 (2001) explained the terminology very clearly but teachers indicated that that they were not well informed about what exactly inclusive education means.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Challenges teachers experience in implementing inclusive education

Regarding the question on the challenges teachers experience in teaching in the context of inclusive education, it was interesting to note that the teachers do experience problems with the implementation of inclusive education in their classrooms and that these problems impede on their knowledge and management of learners who experience barriers to learning in their classrooms. In fact the way the teachers viewed learners who experience barriers to learning could be argued to be a challenge in itself. The educators articulated their frustrations of having to deal with learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. This was evident in the following responses:

"It is hard to tell because management and the department expect us to teach and not to diagnose learners. Even if we diagnose learners, where do we start and what do we do? Yes, we have learners in our classrooms that have difficulty with learning but we are powerless we cannot help them. It is a very sad situation". (Mlu)

"First of all, most of the learners who come to us from primary schools already have these learning barriers. The worse part of it is that we are not aware of them because there is absolutely nothing to indicate or inform us about the learners' abilities, all we receive are reports with good marks on them". (Senzo)

The above responses indicate that teachers need to acquire knowledge on what they should do to identify learners who experience barriers to learning. Their lack of knowledge of the barriers to learning can be attributed to their inadequate knowledge of the policy of inclusion.

4.3.2.1 Sub- theme 1: Lack of teacher training and skills

All participants of the study indicated that teachers in mainstream settings do not have skills required for the inclusive classroom setting. They also revealed that teachers do not possess the necessary training and qualifications to teach learners who experience barriers to learning.

This was evident in their responses when they responded as follows:

"We just don't know what to do with learners coming to us already having special educational needs. We are not trained to deal with such learners. We don't have any skills, let alone knowledge of what should be done to handle them". (Simphiwe)

Teacher training is important in the teaching and learning process. The majority of teachers in mainstream settings do not have adequate training and skills on implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms. Lack of training and skills are viewed as barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education. The same sentiments were echoed by one of the participants who remarked as follows:

"We end up not knowing what to do because you find that half of the class fails and we are accountable as educators and yet you cannot chase the learners away just because they fail. It really creates a bad impression on us as educators most of all we do not have the skills nor the knowledge to provide remedial education to these learners. Where do we find the time for that given that we have to finish the syllabus at stipulated dates and we have to account for failure to do so". (Hlengiwe)

The same sentiments were echoed by Mlu who remarked that:

"We, the teachers who teach in regular classrooms have not been prepared to deal with learners who experience barriers to learning in our classrooms. We have learners with different disabilities in our classes and we find it extremely difficult to handle them, we do not have the required skills. We need proper training".

The responses above suggest that teachers in mainstream settings were unable to cope with the demands of inclusive education. Professional development which include educational programmes such as workshops, in-service courses, teacher to teacher mentor programmes are needed to assist teachers who teach in mainstream settings (Gugushe, 1999).

The same sentiments were echoed by Mantombi who said:

"When there is a learner with a disability in your class you find it difficult to handle such a learner, for example, when I have to take learners to the sports field during my life orientation period that learner has to stand on the side line and watch others do physical training. It's difficult we need help".

Another participant (Penelope) said:

"We are unable to assist learners who experience barriers to learning, including those with disabilities. We lack basic skills. I believe the Department of Education needs to train us on the proper

implementation of inclusive education, the Department of Education should at least offer short courses that will give us basic skills and the problem will be solved".

Senzo added to what the last participant had said when he said:

"It really surprises me that the Department of Education is expecting us to implement inclusive education, when we have never been trained how to implement it, it is really strange".

These responses proved that teachers have not received formal training in respect of the implementation of inclusive education from either pre-service or district offices. The Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001a, p. 18) described teachers as the main role players for achieving the goal of an inclusive education and training system. As a result teachers need to be adequately trained for new demands in education. Faller (2006, p. 5) concurs that teachers are not adequately trained and he attributes this to the fact that universities are ill equipped to provide adequate teacher training programmes for all school phases. Teachers who have not undertaken training regarding the inclusion of learners with disabilities, may exhibit negative attitudes towards such inclusion (Van Reusen, Shoho & Barker, 2001). Teachers need to be trained in pre- and in-service programmes to focus on the strengths of learners and to regard the different cultural and ethnic background of learners as having the potential to stimulate a richer learning environment. Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden (2000) hold the view that special education qualifications acquired from pre- and in-service courses were associated with less resistance to inclusive practices.

4.3.2.2 Sub- theme 2: Overcrowded classrooms

The participants in the study indicated that overcrowding in their classrooms was another barrier to successful implantation of inclusive education. They claimed that big classes made it difficult for the teachers to give individual attention to learners who experience barriers to learning since each class size ranged from 50 to 70 learners. This was evident in some of the responses by the participants. For example, Penelope who was really concerned about the teacher-learner ratio in this school had this to say:

"You know what? The reality in our schools, especially schools for previously disadvantaged communities, is overcrowding. It becomes impossible to give individual attention to the learners who experience barriers to learning because there is not enough space for it and also there is no time to do

so…there is a lot of paperwork to complete, we are overburdened with a lot of assessment to complete at a given time and this frustrates us".

In South Africa most of the secondary schools have overcrowded classes, more than 40 learners in one classroom. Conducting inclusive classes and implementing inclusive practices would be difficult in large classes. Inclusive education requires teachers to pay individual attention to learners who experience barriers to learning. Therefore, classes have to be manageable. This view was supported by Senzo, when he said:

"We do not know whether we are implementing inclusive education or not. It is very difficult for us especially in secondary school because my understanding is that learners should be given different sets of work and we are expected to group teach and pay attention to individuals especially those who do not cope with the work. Now tell me, how do you do that in a class of 75 learners, it's impossible! "

The same sentiments were shared by Mantombi who said:

"*Classes in mainstream schools are too big…as a Grade 9 teacher I have four classes to teach and each class has an enrolment of approximately 65 learners. You can imagine how difficult it is to attend to these learners' individual needs, especially those who have barriers to learning".*

This was supported by Mlu who said:

"…teachers are willing to include all learners in their classrooms, but the biggest problem is that our classes are overcrowded which makes it extremely difficult to attend to the individual needs of all learners".

Hlengiwe expressed her frustration when she said:

"…the conditions in my school do not allow us to implement inclusive education. The classes are overcrowded; we are unable to identify learners who need help. Learners with special needs need classes with small numbers".

The same frustration was displayed by Simphiwe who said:

"Tell me, how does one implement inclusivity in a class that has more than fifty learners? It is practically impossible. Our classes are overcrowded, which makes teaching learners with special needs a nightmare. It is difficult. I do not see inclusive education succeeding".

Senzo expressed his position when he said:

"I don't think the Department of Education is in touch with reality here. How do they expect us to implement inclusivity when our classes are so congested? Tell me is it possible to attend to the needs of more than 50 learners in one class?"

Overcrowded classes are perceived to be one of the barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education (Van Reusen, Shoho & Barker, 2001). Learners in inclusive classrooms may not receive individual attention from the teachers when classes are overcrowded. Participants mentioned that it would be difficult to conduct inclusive classes with class sizes that are too large.

4.3.2.3 Sub- theme 3: Lack of resources

All the participants expressed their concerns about the lack of resources. They indicated that they found it extremely difficult to implement inclusive education in classes that are under-resourced. This was evident in their responses. Their responses emphasized the impact shortage of resources have on the implementation of the policy of inclusion. Senzo expressed his position when he remarked:

"This school does not have the resources to help learners with special educational needs. In my opinion such learners need to be accommodated in well-resourced schools in both the townships schools and rural schools. This school does not have laboratory apparatus, the library is virtually empty and in classes learners do not have books. This makes our work difficult".

The same sentiments were echoed by Hlengiwe when she said:

"Our school does not have the resources which make teaching learners who experience barriers to learning easier. Our school is really struggling. If I want to take a class that has disabled learners, I need different to have different resources at my disposal. Look the classes are overcrowded and three learners sit in the same desk. There is not enough space in our classrooms to accommodate so many learners. We do not only need more classrooms, but desks and books as well ".

Mlu expressed his frustrations about the shortage of resources when he said:

"How do you teach learners who do not have text books? The school does not have adequate resources; in my class learners share books and the school library is empty. There are no teaching aids. If you ask the principal to buy you the teaching aids, you are told about the shortage of funds. It is a really frustrating situation".

Simphiwe had this to say about the shortage of resources:

"Our classes are overcrowded and there is shortage of resources. I teach three classes in grade 10, each class has about 55 learners. They don`t have textbooks and there are no books in the school library. These are some the challenges we always have to face, I don`t think we`ll be able to implement inclusion under these conditions"

The same sentiments were echoed by Penelope when remarked:

"There is also a shortage of financial resources in this school. When you approach the school management team on the shortage of resources, they respond by telling you that there is no enough money to buy the teacher-learner support material. Our school is a fee paying school, but the majority of learners resist paying. This makes implementing inclusive education an extremely difficult task."

Mantombi also expressed her frustrations about lack of financial resources when she said:

"It is true that if we are serious about implementing inclusive education, we need to have all the resources at our disposal. Teaching different types of learners with different barriers to learning is difficult if the school does not have all the resources needed".

Effective teaching and learning is unlikely to take place when there are no resources. The findings of this study have revealed that teachers in mainstream schools have limited access to resources. The shortage of resources is one of the factors affecting the success of inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms. According to Vaughn and Schumm (1995) responsible and successful inclusion programmes require resources. The same view is supported by Oakes and Saunders (2000) who argue that the shortage of teaching and learning materials has a negative impact on the learners especially those who experience barriers to learning. It forces the teachers to change

their teaching methods in order to accommodate all learners. It also forces most parents to remove their disabled children and take them to special schools.

4.3.2.4 Sub theme 4: An inflexible curriculum

The majority of the participants indicated that an inflexible curriculum might be the factor that may contribute towards the exclusion of learners with disabilities from a learning system. Teachers also feel that they are not properly prepared for the diversity in education. They have difficulty in dealing with the administrative requirements of the new curriculum, and as a result teaching has become stressful to them. The presently used curriculum requires the teachers to do a lot of administrative work at the expense of teaching.

Simphiwe said:

"The curriculum that is being used in the general classroom does not cater for learners with disabilities; it only suits the so-called "normal learners". The issue of the curriculum needs to be revisited. If we are serious about implementing inclusivity in our regular classrooms, we need to have a curriculum that will allow learners to learn at their own pace".

The concern raised above indicates that the curriculum that is used in mainstream/regular classrooms does not cater for all learners. This is not in line with what Giangrenco (2007) suggested in the literature review that the provision of curriculum that is accommodative to all learners in inclusion settings is of great importance to a successful implementation of inclusive education.

The same sentiments were echoed by Senzo when he said:

"We do not have time to attend to the needs of our learners. The curriculum does not allow us to do so. Since I joined the teaching profession the curriculum has been changed almost four times. As teachers we do not know what is expected of us in terms of teaching learners who experience barriers to learning. The demands of the curriculum make it impossible to implement inclusive education in our classes. We spend most of our time writing".

The response above was supported by Hlengiwe who also expressed her frustration about the curriculum. This is what she said:

"This curriculum is tailor made for learners who are highly gifted and those without disabilities. The fact that the policy makers have had to change the curriculum about three times shows that there is a lot of confusion in our country, we do not know which curriculum is most suitable for our learners…a few years ago we were introduced to OBE and when we were beginning to become used to it, then came NCS and RNCS now it is CAPS. The common denominator is, none of the curricular says anything about learners who experience barriers to learning, and we are confused".

The same sentiments were echoed by Mantombi when she added:

"If the Department of Education wants to see proper implementation of inclusive education taking place in regular classrooms, it must start by addressing the issue of a curriculum. The current curriculum does not include all the learners. It excludes learners who experience barriers to learning and those with disabilities".

When the curriculum does not accommodate all learners in mainstream settings, it becomes difficult for the teachers to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. Teachers who teach in mainstream schools feel obliged to deliver a standard curriculum and they usually focus on the area content that excludes other learners. The rigid and inflexible nature of the curriculum that does not cater for all learners can lead to learning breakdown (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001).

4.3.3 Theme 3: The kind of support teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education

Regarding the question on the kind of support that educators need to implement inclusive education, it was clear that there was no support received from management, education personnel, parents and colleagues. All the participants agreed that the support they need to implement inclusive education is inadequate and ineffective. They expressed their dissatisfaction about lack of support from the school management team and the district support teams. In spite of this, educators were aware that teaching in inclusive classrooms is not a 'one size fits all' strategy, it demands from them the skills, attitudes and knowledge to deal with the diversity of the learner population in their classrooms. They were also aware that in order for them to teach these learners they have to devise new strategies to ensure that they carry out their task with the utmost caution because they are accountable to learners, parents, and management and education personnel. However, notwithstanding the above, educators raised concerns and this was clearly evident in their responses.

"Who will give us support when we do not even know how to diagnose the learners in the first place? Where do we go in order to receive such support? Nobody is interested to help us; we have to fend for ourselves". (Mantombi)

The above statement indicates that teachers are willing to implement the policy of inclusion. However, their obstacle is lack of support. It is difficult for the teachers to implement new policies when no support is given. Moreover, the management does not give teachers a chance to be capacitated in terms of implanting inclusive education. The School Management Team does not work hand in hand with the teachers, they keep the documents that contain valuable information in their offices. This was raised by Penelope when she remarked:

"Including learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms is a step in the right direction. They deserve an opportunity to learn with their peers in the same environment. This will go a long way in creating an inclusive society, where people are not judged according to their disabilities, but this is only possible if there is enough support from the law-makers and other stake holders in the field of education. I haven't been to any workshop on inclusive education, principals and HOD's attend such workshops because we are always told if we attend workshops we will be wasting teaching time since we have to finish the syllabus. Where does this leave us as teachers who are expected to implement inclusive education?"

When teachers have no understanding of a policy and no skills to implement it, it is not reasonable to expect them to be effective in their work. This is worsened by situations where management is seen to withhold information, as Simphiwe stated:

"It is a pity because even though management attends these workshops, they come back with handouts which are kept in their offices and they report back that they have been to workshops. They do not explain in detail what was said, but give us a summary of the workshop".

The workshops about the policy of inclusion that teachers attend do not serve any purpose at all, especially when the teachers who attend them do not disseminate any information to the rest of the staff. Teachers who attend workshops on the policy of inclusion should ensure that they capacitate all the members of the staff. This was evident from the response by Mlu when he expressed his frustrations about the workshops. This is what he had to say:

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"Even when one of us attends the workshops with one management personnel, there is no time given to him/her to report back to the rest of the staff, nor is he or she delegated to co-ordinate, or ensure that implementation takes place".

The same concern was raised by Hlengiwe who said:

"Implementing inclusive education in our school is extremely difficult. It is further complicated by the fact that we don't get any support from the authorities. I believe if the Department of Education wants to see a successful implementation of inclusive education in our schools, they should send experts to help by showing us how to include learners with barriers to learning in our classrooms".

The above response suggests the kind of support teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education. Teachers indicated that there needed experts such as school counselors to visit their school on a regular basis.

"It is difficult to implement inclusive education in our schools because the Department of Education just dumps learners who experience barriers to learning in our schools and expects us teachers to perform miracles without getting any assistance for it. The DoE should at least hire and deploy more school counsellors to our schools". (Senzo)

Teachers find it extremely difficult to implement a new policy in education if they are not given any support. The policy of inclusion is a new phenomenon; therefore teachers who are expected to implement it need support from different stake holders. There is a strong belief among teachers that the policy of inclusion was imposed on them. This was reiterated by Mantombi when she said;

"We really need school-based counsellors. Learners come to school with all sorts of problems, for example, in our school we have learners from very poor communities, some come to school hungry, others come to school under the influence of drugs. We often find it difficult to help them since we are not trained in that regard. I think if we could be given support, we will be able to implement inclusion without any difficulty".

The same sentiments were echoed by Senzo when he remarked:

"The Department of Education has to come on board. In our schools we are faced with a situation where there are learners who have chronic illnesses and as teachers we do not know what to do with

these learners. We need school nurses and counsellors in our schools to help such learners. I remember one learner in one of the classrooms in this school who is epileptic, no one among us knows what to do with this learner when he falls sick".

Some of the learners who experience barriers to learning do not get any assistance from their parents. This places an extra burden on the shoulders of the teachers. Teachers have to find more time to help learners who do not get help from their parents. This view was supported by Simphiwe when he added on what he had said earlier about lack of support, when he remarked:

"I think it is high time parents participated in the education of their children. In my opinion parents just dump their children in our schools and expect us to do everything. We need their support; they must stop watching from a distance. I, as an individual, think, the policy of inclusion is a good policy that will help a lot of learners, especially those with special educational needs to go to school with their friends who are not experiencing the same challenges as them. I also think it will be a good idea to place disabled learners in the mainstream classes according to the nature of their disability, but this will not be easy if we get no support from other stake holders. Parents should also come on board and assist us to assist their children".

The findings of the study reflected that teachers felt that inclusion was not working very well due to lack of support from the concerned stakeholders. All the participants perceived inclusion as a challenge. They indicated that lack of support from the district support team, the school-based support team and the parents makes it difficult for the teachers to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. According to Muthukrishna and Schoeman (2000) school-based support team should be formed to support teachers and learners who experience barriers to learning. The district support team is also expected to give specialist advice to teachers and learners who experience barriers to learning.

Parents should also come on board as they are perceived to have a very big role to play in the education of their children. According to Mokoelle (2004) there seems to be a tendency in South African schools for parents not to participate in the education of their children due to factors such as: non recognition by teachers and illiteracy. Their non-involvement does not only affect their children but teachers as well. There are benefits of parental involvement, as the Department of Education (2002) argues, parents are sources of support in the teaching and learning environment. This view is

supported by Bronfenbrenner (1989) who argues that there should be a strong supportive link between the school and the family.

4.4 Discussion of findings

This section will focus on summarising the findings obtained via semi-structured interviews and semi-structured questionnaires. As mentioned in chapter one the aim of this study was to explore the experiences of teachers teaching learners in the context of inclusive education.

Responses derived from interviews and questionnaires indicated that educators have not grasped the essence of the concept "inclusive education". Their knowledge and understanding of the concept clearly indicated gaps and this impacted negatively on their effective implementation of inclusive education in their classrooms. They all attested to the distorted notion of the concept, hence assuming that inclusive education is specifically directed to primary schools and learners with disabilities. These responses indicated that there was some confusion about inclusion, confusion which was perceived as presenting a challenge for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The participants acknowledged that their conceptualizations of inclusive education are varied and insufficient. De Boer, Pijl and Minnaert (2011) found that the term "inclusive education" is confusing and difficult to define. The idea of inclusive education as a confusing concept is supported by the notion of inclusion confusion as expressed by Dyson (2001), who argued that there are different types of confusion surrounding inclusive education, namely the definition of the term inclusive education, labeling, curriculum and goals of inclusion, as well as etiology and what can realistically be achieved.

The findings also revealed that teachers hold positive views towards the inclusion of learners who experience barriers in mainstream settings. However, they indicated that they find it extremely difficult to embrace diversity in their classrooms since they have not received adequate training on dealing with such learners. In particular, in this study the participants also indicated that they did not have any skills or expertise to implement inclusion in their classrooms. The findings revealed that teachers viewed the workshops they attended on inclusive education as a waste of time. They were too short; they lasted for few hours and did not cover everything teachers needed to know about the new policy of inclusion.

The findings of this study have also indicated that teachers view overcrowding as an obstacle to the successful implementation of inclusive education. These findings are consistent with the findings of the studies by Agran, Alper and Wehmeyer (2000), Pronchow, Kearney and Carroll-Lind (2000), and Van Reusen, Shoho, and Barker (2001), which viewed larger classes as a stumbling block towards the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classes. Engelbrecht *et al.,* (2001) argue that it is difficult to implement inclusive education in overcrowded classrooms.

An inflexible curriculum was identified as being one of the most serious barriers towards the successful implementation of inclusive education. The rigid and inflexible nature of the curriculum itself prevents it from meeting the diverse needs of the learners. When learners are unable to access the curriculum, learning breakdown occurs (DoE, 2001a; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Learning breakdown may occur when teachers use teaching styles that do not meet the needs of the learners, which is often as a result of inadequate training. Learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms may experience barriers of an inflexible curriculum (DoE, 2001a, p. 7 &18) from teachers using inappropriate teaching styles. In order to rectify the problem of an inflexible curriculum, the DoE's Draft Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education (2002) states that C2005 provides the basis for a flexible curriculum (DoE, 2002, p. 173). To ensure that C2005 was successfully implemented in all schools throughout South Africa, and teachers were required to attend special training workshops. Teachers feel that the overall relevance and quality of training was inadequate.

Lack of support from the district office, from the SMT as well as from the parents was also mentioned as one of the factors which make implementation of inclusive education difficult. All the participants agreed that the school-based support team was unavailable to offer support to the teachers and to the learners who experience barriers to learning at their school. According to Muthukrishna and Schoeman (2000, p. 319), an inclusive education policy places the responsibility of addressing the barriers to learning and development of learners who experience barriers to learning on the school-based support team.The majority of the participants indicated that the district-support team was unavailable which forces their school to function without specialist advice concerning learners who experience barriers to learning. According to DoE (2001) the education districts are expected to establish the district-based support teams composed of district specialists and former special school teachers. These district-

support teams are responsible of providing evaluation of needs and support of all schools in their district including centers of early childhood education, adult centers, further and higher education institutions (DoE, 2001).

The shortage of financial resources was mentioned by all the participants as one of the barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education. In their study, Hall and Engelbrecht (1993) mentioned the availability of funds as one of the main issues in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of teachers in teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. In this chapter the researcher analysed and discussed data gathered through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with the teachers. The research findings in this chapter reflect a number of issues which need to be addressed in the implementation of inclusive education policy

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This is the final chapter of the study. It provides the summary of the findings of the study and the recommendations to different stakeholders who are responsible for the successful implementation of the policy of inclusion. It highlights the limitations of the study. It also focuses on conclusions based on the findings of the study. The study was designed to explore the experiences of teachers teaching in the context of inclusive education. The focus was on whether teachers are ready to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms. South Africa is in the process of implementing a twenty-year plan of inclusive education in schools.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To conduct an analysis of teachers` understandings of inclusive education a literature review and present an overview of the policy of inclusion.
- To explore the challenges teachers` experiences teaching in the context of inclusive education.
- To establish the kind of support they need to implement inclusive education successfully.

In accordance with these objectives the research questions that were addressed in the study were as follows:

1. What are teachers` understandings of inclusive education?
2. What are the challenges teachers experience teaching learners in the context of inclusive education?
3. What kind of support do teachers need to implement inclusive education?

5.2 Summary of the findings

The summary of the findings focus on:

- Teachers' understandings of inclusive education.
- Challenges teachers face/experience in implementing inclusive education.
- The kind of support teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education.

5.2.1 Teachers` understandings of inclusive education

The study revealed that the majority of teachers have a very limited conceptual knowledge of the policy of inclusion. This was evident when they were unable to give the correct definition of the concept "inclusive education". Their understanding of inclusive education was not in line with definitions given in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). From the above findings, it emerged that the participants' understanding of the policy of inclusion is not in accordance with the local and international definitions. The majority of the participants view inclusive education as the Department of Education's attempt to take learners with disabilities to regular schools. The findings of the study also revealed that the implementation of inclusive education was not successful because teachers lacked knowledge and skills. The participants indicated that they needed more training on the implementation of the policy of inclusion.

5.2.2 Challenges teachers face/ experience in implementing inclusive education

The findings of the study revealed that teachers face a number of challenges in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms and this was attributed to the lack of training and skills. Without a coherent and proper plan for teacher training in the educational needs of learners who experience barriers to learning, attempts to include these learners in mainstream schools will be difficult. Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) argued that pre- or in-service courses are a pre-requisite for teachers who teach in mainstream schools.

The findings of the study also revealed that overcrowded classes contribute immensely towards teachers' failure to implement inclusive education. Teachers struggle to give individual attention to their learners in overcrowded classes.

Inadequate resources were also identified as a barrier towards the successful implementation of inclusive education. The participants indicated that there is scarcity of resources in their school which makes it difficult to implement inclusive education properly.

The participants mentioned the inflexible curriculum as another barrier towards the successful implementation of the policy of inclusion.

Lack of support from the school-based support group and from the district-based support group was mentioned by the participants as another barrier

The study also identified teacher training, professional development, small classes, provision of support by the school-based support team, support from the district office, support from the parents, and provision of resources as some of the issues that are important for a successful implementation of inclusive education.

5.2.3 The kind of support teachers need to successfully implement inclusive education

The findings of the study revealed that the majority of teachers are prepared to implement inclusive education in their classrooms. However, they expressed their concerns about lack of support needed to implement this policy. They indicated that the school-based support team to assist teachers is unavailable at their school. Muthukrishna and Schoeman (2000, p. 319) argue that inclusive education policy places the responsibility of addressing the barriers to learning and development on the shoulders of the school-based support team. They also indicated that without the support of the district-based support team, implementing inclusive education in their classrooms is virtually impossible. Lack of parental involvement was also highlighted by all the participants as another barrier to successful implementation of inclusive education.

5.3 Recommendations

Recommendations to improve practice in schools

The research established that the challenges that teachers experience prevent effective implementation of inclusive education, which in turn impacts negatively on learners. It also established that there are learners who experience barriers to learning in every teacher's class. Challenges that teachers face in their classrooms have to be identified, acknowledged and addressed at all levels of education. The successful implementation of inclusive education calls for the provision of support. Inclusion is about maximizing participation of all learners and minimizing barriers.

The findings of the study elicit the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Teacher training

Inadequate teacher training in terms of implementing inclusive education was highlighted as a major concern in the research findings. It is clear that the systems are becoming inclusive; as a result professional development is essential because of the major challenges facing the teachers in mainstream schools.

- All teachers and all personnel at all levels of education must receive adequate training on how to implement inclusive education.
- Teachers should be trained to use appropriate teaching strategies and resources to deal with all kinds of disabilities. This training should be provided by tertiary institutions.
- Significant knowledge about inclusive education should be included in education programmes.
- The Department of Education should deploy specialist education to mainstream schools to model inclusive strategies to the teachers.
- Suitably qualified and skilled personnel should be available in districts for capacity building at all levels.
- Research consultations with universities and engagement with experts on inclusive education is important to ensure the rights of the learners are not violated.
- Sufficient in-service training regarding implementation of inclusive education should be planned as this may result in more teachers becoming motivated to have inclusive schools. In-service training may also improve teachers' acceptability of learners who experience barriers to learning.

Recommendation 2

Provision of resources

The research findings also highlighted lack of resources as another stumbling block towards successful implementation of inclusive education. Vaughn and Schumm (cited by Gugushe, 1999) stated that responsible and successful inclusion programmes need considerable resources, including time for planning, teaching aids, and support personnel that may be needed.

Recommendation 3

Addressing teacher-learner ratio

The research findings highlighted the teachers' concerns regarding teacher-learner ratio. Participants indicated that learners who experience barriers to learning require individual attention from the teachers and this is possible with small class sizes. Wedell (2005) argues that teaching large classes without or with few resources makes teaching and learning extremely frustrating. The failure rate among learners may increase, as a result causing the morale of the teachers to be low. Christie (1998) indicated that the class ratio needs to be less than fifteen for inclusive education to be successful. The findings of this study were similar with those of Engelbrecht *et al.* (2006) in their research on inclusion where they mentioned large class sizes as one of the challenges teachers had to cope with.

Recommendation4

Teaching strategies and methods

Teachers should ensure that the methods they use when teaching suit the needs of all learners in their classrooms.

Recommendation 5

Formation of district-based support teams

District-based support services should be put in place to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education. This may encourage the Ministry of Education to work with other ministries.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study may be used with some caution, since the study is covering the experiences of teachers of one mainstream school and therefore cannot be generalized beyond the boundaries of this particular school. A small sample size of only six participants was another limitation. More relevant, important and rich descriptive data could have been acquired had the research population been bigger. The study also represented only one racial group in South Africa and the experiences of other racial groups may have influenced these findings. Finding the appropriate times for conducting interviews which had to take place within the available time and without causing any disruption to the normal classroom proceedings was another limitation of the study.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

In this study the researcher researched the experiences of teachers teaching learners in the context of inclusive education. From the concerns raised by the participants in the previous chapter, the researcher concluded that most teachers did not object to the implementation of the inclusive education policy. Their attitude towards inclusive education was positive. They were willing to teach learners with disabilities in their classrooms. However, they indicated that they felt incompetent, and that they needed more training, support services, manageable classes and resources for the successful implementation of inclusive programme. Teacher knowledge should be designed to help develop a professional knowledge to address the diverse needs of various learners in general classrooms. More information needs to be disseminated on the teacher education model for inclusive classrooms. This emphasizes that teachers need vast amounts of in-service training (INSET) to cope with the new challenges in the education system. Easy access to information by the teachers is another prerequisite. The policy makers should also make it a point that factors that may influence teachers' attitudes negatively are considered and are eliminated.

There was also a concern from the teachers about the overcrowded classes, lack of support from school-based support team, from the district support team and from the parents. The shortage of funds was also highlighted as one of the barriers to successful implementation of inclusive education.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher's final analysis is that more research is needed on teacher preparedness to implement inclusive education in South Africa. The findings of this particular study indicate that teachers at this school face challenges teaching in an inclusive context. This could be an indication of teachers` experiences in other schools around South Africa. It is therefore recommended that a large scale study should be conducted which will be the voice of more than six teachers and more than one selected school.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand about the concept inclusive education?
2. What do you see as obstacles to your fulfilling your role as an inclusive teacher?
3. What kind of support do you think should be given to the teachers in an inclusive setting?
4. How do you feel about the inclusion of learners with disabilities in you classroom?
5. Do you think the needs of the majority of learners with disabilities are met in your classroom?
6. Have you made any adaptations to your planning and teaching program to include the needs of learners with barriers to learning?

Appendix B

CONFIDENTIAL

QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A:

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA:

PLEASE TICK

1. **GENDER:**

MALE

FEMALE

2. **RACE:**

AFRICAN WHITE ASIAN COLOURED

3. **POSITION HELD:**

PRINCIPAL

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

H.O.D

EDUCATOR

OTHER
(SPECIFY)…………………………………………………………………………………

AGE:

0-20 20-30 31-45 46 and above

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

5. yrs 6-15yrs 16-25yrs 26 and above

1. **TYPE OF QUALIFICATION(S)**

PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA

ACADEMIC DEGREE

PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

SECTION B

TEACHERS` EXPERIENCES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

☐

1. What is your understanding of inclusive education?

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2. What are the responsibilities of teachers in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms?

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3. What type of learning barriers have you identified from your learners?

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4. What are your experiences in implementing inclusive practices in your class?

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5. What kind of support systems are needed for the successful implementation of inclusive programme?

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6. What additional skills and training do teachers need inorder to succeed in implementing inclusive education?

Appendix C

LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AND SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

W945 Amawele Circle

Umlazi Township

P.O. Umlazi

4031

23 July 2012

The Principal

Qhilika High School

P.O. Box 543271

Umlazi

4031

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct a research study

I am an M.ED student at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). I hereby request your permission to conduct a research study in your school. The topic of my study is: Exploring teachers experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education.

The purpose of the study is to gather data from teachers about their experiences in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms. It also aims at exploring how far inclusive education has been implemented in the Umlazi District schools. The findings of the study will help to add on the existing knowledge about the experiences of teachers in teaching learners in the context of inclusive education as well as to provide information that will facilitate implementation of inclusive education.

The research study requires personal interviews with your educators regarding issues on their personal experiences in implementing inclusive practices in their classrooms. These interviews will take

approximately 45 minutes, audio taped and will be conducted after school hours. Questionnaires will also be distributed among among the participants.

Data collected will solely be used in the study and not for any other purpose. Educators/teachers, however, will not be obliged to respond to questions that they will feel uncomfortable to respond to and will be free to withdraw from the study at any time. Only pseudonyms will be used in the study and every attempt will be made to ensure confidentiality of the data gathered.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Jerome .S. Jali (Mr)

For more information you can contact me at: 0835971794 (cell) or 0319069481(H) or e-mail me at simiso@telkomsa.net or contact my supervisor Dr S`thabile Ntombela at (W) 031-2601342

Should consent be granted for the educators to participate in the study, kindly complete the attached declaration and provide your signature.

I _____ (Chairperson of the school governing body/Principal) hereby grant permission to the researcher (Mr. J.S. Jali) to conduct a research study in my school. I understand that the school name, the names of the participants and their responses will be kept confidential. I also understand that the participants have willingly agreed to participate in the research study and that they can withdraw at any time**.**

Signature: _____ Date:_____

APPENDIX D

CONSENT LETTER. (TEACHER PARTICIPANT)

W945 Amawele Circle

Umlazi Township

P.O. Umlazi

4031

23 July 2012

To whom it may concern

I am an M.ED student at the University of KwaZulu Natal (Edgewood Campus). I hereby request you to be a participant in my research. The topic for my research is: Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education.

I would like to request you to participate in the interview sessions of the study. The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of teachers in teaching learners who experience barriers to learning in regular classrooms. You will be required to share your experiences and your views about implementing inclusive education in regular classrooms. Data from this session will be tape- recorded. No potential benefits will be derived from participating except the feeling of adding new knowledge to the existing knowledge about implementation of inclusive education in regular classrooms. The information gathered in this study will be kept in a safe place at the University of KwaZulu Natal for the period of five years, after this period the documents containing research data will be destroyed. Participation in this research is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, there will be no negative and undesired impact by so doing. As a participant in this study your identity will remain anonymous. All information shared in this session will be kept confidential and will not be used for any other purpose other than for the purpose of this study.

Yours sincerely

J.S. JALI (Mr)

For more information contact Mr. J.S. JALI at 0835971794(cell) or 0319069481(H).You can also contact my supervisor Dr S`thabile Ntombela at 0312601342(W) or e-mail her at ntombela1@ukzn.ac.za. Kindly complete the attached letter and provide your signature should you agree to participate in this research study.

Declaration

I _____ hereby voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. I have received a briefing regarding the research study by the researcher in advanced. I am also aware that the results will be used for the purposes of the study only, that my identity will be kept confidential, and that I am free to withdraw at any time if I so wish.

SIGNATURE:_____**DATE:**_____

kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar	Tel: 033 341 8610	Ref.:2/4/8/344

Mr Jerome Simiso Jali
W945 Amawele Circle
Umlazi Township
P.O Box Umlazi
4031

Dear Mr Jali

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **EXPLORING TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING LEANERS IN THE CONTEXT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION,** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 January 2013 to 31 December 2014.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the following school:

    (a)   Qhilika High school

Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education

21/05/2013
Date

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

27 August 2012

Mr Jerome Simiso Jali   209532007
School of Education

Dear Mr Jali

Protocol reference number: HSS/0810/012M
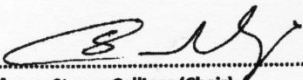Project title: Exploring teachers' experiences of teaching learners in the context of inclusive education.

EXPEDITED APPROVAL

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation.   In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.   PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Steven Collings (Chair)

/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Sithabile Ntombela
cc Academic leader: Dr MN Davids
cc School Admin: Mrs Sindhamoney Naicker

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