

Original Paper

Breaking the Boundaries of Prescription: Teachers' Perceptions of Their Inclusive Pedagogic Practices in a Full Service School

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Abstract

The present study investigated the extent to which teachers at a Full Service School in Soweto understand and practise the principles of a Full Service School. I focused on three teachers in the foundation phase. Classroom observations, individual semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to generate data. This qualitative study was framed theoretically by Florian's framework of inclusive pedagogy. Extrapolation of data suggests that teachers understand the concept of inclusion, make use of different teaching approaches and they indicate that there are quite a number of challenges they face on a daily basis.

Keywords

Inclusive education, inclusive pedagogy, inclusive practice, Full Service School

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is a global phenomenon which received much impetus through the world conference at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). It has been around for quite some time now but the challenge lies with the confusion that people have in understanding what it really means to be inclusive. Ntombela and Raymond (2013) indicate that inclusive education seems to be a slippery concept that is difficult to pin down. The confusion arises from different policies in different countries; as a result, different perceptions come into play. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) propose a simple way for teachers to understand and employ different inclusive measures in their daily teaching practices by distinguishing between inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education as well as inclusive practice. Booth et al. (2000) define inclusive education as a process of increasing participation and decreasing exclusion from the culture, community and curricula of mainstream school. Inclusive practice on the other hand, refers to the things that people do to give meaning to the concept of inclusion (Florian, 2009), while inclusive pedagogy is a method of teaching

that incorporates different teaching and learning styles.

Furthermore, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p. 815) propose that to be inclusive encompasses understanding “how teachers enrich and extend what is ordinarily available in a classroom lesson or activity...”. This new approach is against the traditional believe that certain learners can perform better than the others as this restricts the ability of those who are labelled as needing intervention. Florian (2013) articulates that in an education dominated by the bell-curve thinking, identification of special educational needs seems to lower teachers’ expectations about what is possible for a student to achieve. This “deterministic” view of education induces pessimism among teachers who believe that they do not have power to make a difference to the learning of children (Hart, 1998 in Florian & Spratt, 2013). Florian and Spratt (2013) further assert that the inclusive pedagogical approach is opposed to practices that address education for all by offering provision for most with additional or different experiences for some.

As a result, Florian proposes a new theoretical framework in inclusive education. This framework has three aspects at the centre. Firstly, a shift in focus from one that is concerned with only those individuals who have been identified as having additional needs to the learning of all children in the community. Secondly, rejecting deterministic beliefs about ability as being fixed and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others. Lastly, seeing difficulties in learning as professional challenges for teachers rather than deficits in learners that encourage the development of new ways of working.

1.1 Participants

The teachers I selected represent certain types of characteristics as they teach at Foundation Phase in a Full Service School. They were relevant for the requirements of my study as they teach in Grade One, Two and Three, thus I used purposive sampling of a Full Service school in Johannesburg. Thomas (2009, p. 1040) asserts, “a purposive sample involves the pursuit of the kind of person in whom the researcher is interested”. I decided to conduct my study in the given school because it is equipped with appropriate staff to provide for full range of learning needs amongst all the learners. The research respondents were three teachers from the Foundation Phase, one from each class. My focus was mainly on the three classes of foundation phase because Grade One lays the foundation for the phase, Grade Two becomes the core while in Grade Three exit examinations and evaluations are implemented. Having tabled the sampling techniques used in my study, I now turn on to research methodology and the paradigm that guided my study.

2. Research Methodology and Paradigm

Since in this study my aim was not to establish objective knowledge but rather to explore how knowledge and realities “reside in the minds of individuals ... [and] may be uncovered by unpacking individual experiences” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 56), it was not aligned with positivist ideas about truth, but instead was constructivist in its philosophical stance. Thus, my research was based on

the belief that “the only thing that [researchers] may come to know is people’s constructions of their own realities and therefore research emphasizes data concerning how individuals construct knowledge” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 63). In this research I applied methods which would get teachers to reconstruct their ideas about inclusion and about their practices while I was trying to understand the meanings that they attach to these. As a result, I aligned my study to a qualitative research paradigm, although it must be said that my approach tends towards what Denzin and Lincoln (2011) refer to as a “soft” approach to paradigms, as indicated by the pragmatic approach below. Since the current study investigated the extent to which teachers at a Full Service School understand and practise the inclusive principles of a full service school, it was based on collaborative human activities with the aim of gaining and understanding the interaction between the teachers and students in an inclusive environment. In this regard, the qualitative research paradigm accepts that people’s subjective experiences and activities are valid, multiple and socially constructed, and analysis of them falls within the constructive paradigm (Eloff & Ebersohn, 2004).

My study was based on qualitative research approach because my intention was to describe, understand and interpret how different teachers in their inclusive classrooms construct inclusion and inclusive education in the school setting (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2010). As Cresswell (2003) notes, I was interested in promoting a better understanding of the teachers’ practices, increasing insight into their conditions, with much emphasis on improved understanding of their behavior and experience. For this reason, a qualitative research approach was appropriate for the present study as I dealt with teachers and gathered data on how their implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms aligns with Florian’s inclusive pedagogy. As a result, I was looking at how the teachers construct their knowledge of inclusive pedagogy. Since my focus was on a particular type of teachers, I used purposive sampling technique to choose the school and the teachers who would participate in my study (Cozby, 2009). Having justified the reason for choosing a qualitative research method for this study, the next section will discuss the research instruments I used in this study.

3. Data Collection

Data collection took place for a period of two weeks in which the first week was observation while the second one was interviews. The focus of the study was on the extent to which teachers at a full service school understand and practice the inclusive principles of a full service school. As a result, observations, interviews and document analysis methods were the most relevant for this study. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note, through these methods, I was able to understand the meanings teachers attach to their inclusive teaching practices through the reflections of their own subjective experiences. The main intention of the time I spent at the school was to observe three teachers in the foundation phase. The choice to do observations was to see whether the teachers in the phase had the same understanding of inclusion and made use of the same inclusive practices in their teaching. I recorded the observations myself, handwriting the notes and at times I supplemented them with audiotapes. The use of audio

recorder served to provide full details and also saved me time to record the events by writing them while observing as I could not record them all within that short period of time. It was then that after that, I transcribed the clips later for data analysis. The interviews followed the observations. I had an interview schedule which guided me, as well as the field notes I had written while observing the teachers. The interview schedule consisted of ten questions which required the teachers to reflect on their teaching practices as well as their understanding of the nature of their school. I analyzed the document which stipulates the principles of a Full service school. This helped me to identify whether the school fits the given criteria of what a full service school should be like as well as the expectations of the teachers.

3.1 Procedure

Before undertaking my study, I applied for ethics clearance from the University of Witwatersrand. The Gauteng Department of education also granted me permission to conduct my study in the school fit for my study. I first consulted the principal of the school to discuss the purpose of my study as well as the expected time I would spend in the school. Once this was sorted, I made an appointment to meet the teachers to discuss the purpose of my study and how we would work in terms of the observations and individual interviews. The participants and I agreed on the suitable time in their time tables to observe them teach. Each of the teachers would be observed twice, both during English and Mathematics classes. We also agreed on the suitable time to conduct the interviews as this had to happen outside contact time of teaching. Before observations, the teachers signed informed consent sheets, agreeing to be interviewed and observed. They granted me permission to audio-tape both the observations and the interviews as stipulated in the letters. I transcribed each of the interviews, while during the observations, I kept a journal and field notes. These two helped me to maintain reflexivity as a researcher in order to reflect on factors such as how my presence might impact on the study as well as my feelings during data collection. I later analyzed these.

3.2 Ethical Considerations

My study was given ethical clearance by the Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand with the protocol number 20146ECE035M. Before conducting field research, all participants signed the informed consent forms. Since I was to conduct observations, as much as the learners were not the participants of this study, I gave them informed consent forms for their parents to sign.

4. Results

In what follows I discuss the themes that I identified during data analysis. The following themes came up: teachers' understanding of inclusive education, diversity, how teachers practice inclusion, and challenges. The following section will discuss each of these themes.

4.1 Teachers' Understanding of Inclusive Education

When asked about their understanding of inclusive education, the respondents indicated that for them inclusive education is about accommodating all learners regardless of their difference. The respondents

of this study seem to agree with Kersten and Nilholm (2014) who define inclusion as meeting social or academic needs of pupils with disabilities and all learners in general. One respondent said:

“For me inclusive education is about teaching and accommodating learners in a mainstream class without discriminating. It is about embracing diversity and helping learners who struggle”.

(Respondent A)

Another respondent indicated that inclusive education is a policy that guides teachers to work in a mainstream class.

“Inclusive education is a policy that helps teachers to work in one class. It says that teachers or schools must accommodate all learners in one class regardless of their disability or problem. It says learners must be treated equally and all must receive support”. (Respondent B).

From the responses, these findings indicate that teachers have a sophisticated understanding of inclusive education. This is indicated by the elements that prevail in their definition of inclusive education. Among others they indicated that inclusion embraces diversity and the main focus is on the learners.

One of the questions asked was concerned with the views on the school’s policy on inclusion. All respondents were positive that the policy is good and very useful to both teachers and learners as it strives for inclusion of all learners. Some respondents indicated that it is good on paper but difficult to implement.

“You see this policy says we must include all learners without discriminating, but in reality inclusion is difficult to implement in this school. How do we address all learners’ needs when we have such large classes?” (Respondent A)

One of the respondents indicated that,

“The school has a very good policy that looks at all aspects of the teaching and learning environment. It looks at different things such as discipline, conduct and how things must run. There is also an important factor which is the vision of the school, so it is our duty as teachers to take the vision of the school forward”. (Respondent B)

From the above statements, inclusive education is understood in different ways by many people as Kersten and Nilholm (2014) assert that most commentators agree that inclusion is a concept that is hard to define and given many interpretations. It is seen as an approach that provides opportunities for social interaction, as well as an education system that accommodates learners in a public school. From this statement, inclusive education is understood as the system that eradicates segregation of learners experiencing barriers to learning. Classrooms need to be more inclusive by leading to increased access to curriculum, development of child’s independence and equal opportunities for all learners.

4.2 Diversity

One of the outstanding features of an inclusive classroom is acceptance and respect for diversity. This practice promotes acceptance as each learner must be recognized by being approved, praised and respected. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) support that maintaining the dignity of the learners in the

classroom promotes recognition and acceptance. When learners are accepted, they feel included in the classroom. Accepting and embracing learners' difference is presented in different pedagogic practices which include classroom setup, groupings and provision of support to individual learners. Inclusive classrooms by nature are made of diverse learners, considering that diversity is one of the key characteristics of inclusive education, as it aims at addressing the diverse needs of learners, be it because of race, culture or disability. From my observation, the classrooms had a diverse population of learners. They were diverse in terms of the disabilities, both physical and intellectual as well as the languages learners speak.

The respondents indicated that their understanding of diversity is not related to the physical and intellectual disability only. According to respondent A, the seating arrangement is of utmost importance as those who happen to have hearing problems tend to be seated in the front rows so that they could lip read the teacher. Additionally, teachers also employ different strategies to accommodate learners. On the other hand, respondent B indicated that she addresses diversity by making use of differentiated lesson planning for those who experience barriers to learning. In this way, learners are given activities according to their level of abilities. This means that while a certain group was carrying out activities, the other does those related to the grade's assessment standards. The last respondent gave a detailed explanation of straddling assessment standards of different grades in order to give learners activities according to their level of ability. Respondents A and C mentioned that the activities that were given to learners with barriers to learning were reflected in the differentiated lesson planning. Respondent B further articulated that the reason for using differentiated lesson planning is to address learners' level of ability as a priority to teaching and learning, and to be able to assess those orally using pictures and objects or even body language.

It is not always that diversity is seen as a good thing. Some teachers take it as a challenge that prevents them from being fully inclusive in their teaching.

“One other thing that poses a challenge to us is that we have to use different teaching methods to teach all learners accordingly since our classes are mixed with ‘normal’ learners and those with learning problems. Being able to master the inclusion of all requires a lot of practice and dedication. I do not want to find myself being unfair to some learners while trying to accommodate others. It is a challenge to work with diverse learners with diverse needs and social problems. The more learners we have, the more challenges we face”. (Respondent C)

“I sometimes run out of ideas on how to address the needs of all these learners. Yes, by nature this school accommodates all learners with different needs, but it is a challenge to us as teachers to address them, especially because we have large classes and no assistants”. (Respondent B)

From the comments, there is a clear ambivalence among the teachers about their struggle with accommodating all learners in their classrooms. The challenge stems from the fact that they do not know how to accommodate learners with special needs without excluding others, more especially in their overcrowded classrooms. Having discussed teachers' understanding of diversity, the next section

will show how the teachers practice inclusion and at times end up being exclusionary in an attempt to include learners with learning disabilities or even getting confused on what to do when faced with such learners in their classes.

4.3 How Teachers Practice Inclusion

One of the key barriers to learning and development is attributed to the curriculum delivery through teaching strategies. DoE (2009) asserts that the most important way of addressing barriers arising from the curriculum is to make sure that the process of teaching and learning is flexible enough to accommodate different learning needs and styles.

It is important that teachers make use of a variety of teaching methods. Voltz, Brazil and Ford (2001) suggest that teachers should use a variety of different methods and strategies of instruction. The main reason for this is that a single method would never suffice in a diverse classroom filled with learners with different needs. Using a variety of teaching methods and materials would therefore cater for many learners in the classroom and the teachers do not have to do much extra planning to accommodate everyone. In the next section, inclusive practices will be discussed in detail.

4.3.1 Differentiation

Differentiation is one of the teaching strategies that have received popularity in the inclusive education practices. According to Mentis, Quinn and Ryba (2005) and Westhood (2008) differentiation refers to doing things differently to target the observed differences among learner behaviour and learning patterns. Differentiated learning can be described as an approach to teaching in which the teacher *“proactively modifies the curriculum, teaching methods, resources, learning activities and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in the classroom”* (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 48).

There is a call for differentiated teaching because of the vast diversity in classrooms in relation to academic capability and performance. In making use of differentiated instruction method, the teacher is expected to individually assess and determine the learning needs of each learner individually. Raveaud (2005) indicates that the teacher will use the same teaching resources for each learner and assessment will vary to the individual needs of each learner. Differentiated instruction is one of the ways of giving heterogeneous groups of learners in inclusive classrooms opportunities for valuable learning experiences (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005). Thus, it involves the teacher setting different outcomes for learners even though the teacher is teaching one concept. Raveaud (2005) defines differentiation as the process by which teachers adapt curriculum objectives, teaching methods, learning activities and other issues to match the educational needs of individual pupils. The teachers are encouraged to learn to develop classroom routines that attend to learner variance in readiness, interest and learning profile. Learning profile according to Raveaud (2005) is about students' preference mode of learning that can be affected by a number of factors including learning style, intelligence, preference, gender and culture. As Raveaud (2005) notes, the main reason for differentiation is that modifying instruction to draw on students' interest is a way of enhancing motivation, productivity and

achievement. As such, questions and tasks that are interesting to students are more likely to lead to enhanced students' engagement with the task. Differentiation must be concerned and practiced as a reflection and extension of educational best practices. Raveaud (2005) further articulates that differentiation should be proactive and not reactive. This means that the teacher plans one lesson for everyone, and tries to adjust on the spot when students signal that the lesson is not working for them. Thus, the teacher employs flexible use of small groups in the classroom. The reason for using groups is that students in small within-classroom learning groups achieve significantly more than students not learning in small groups. Also, students in grouped classes have more positive attitudes about learning and stronger self-concept measures than those in ungrouped classes (Raveaud, 2005).

"Being in an inclusive context requires one to be flexible. Due to a diverse population of learners we serve, at times I have to change the lesson I have planned on the spot. When I see that learners are not responding accordingly and the lesson is not working, I do change the lesson right there and then. It needs one to be dedicated and always aware of such a need". (Respondent A)

"At times I come to class prepared to teach something and end up changing it because I see learners cannot follow. This calls for me to always be alert and spontaneous". (Respondent C)

From these responses, teachers seem to believe they are differentiating, whereas I believe that they are just being flexible. It can be deduced that teachers may know about differentiation, but they do something different in their practice. Thus, I conclude that they may try to be inclusive but this is neither inclusive practice nor inclusive pedagogy.

4.3.2 Response to Instruction

One other classroom strategy that is proposed in an inclusive classroom is response to instruction. The main aim of this method is to reduce special educational referrals for students whose learning difficulties are attributed to poor or inadequate instruction (Liasidou, 2012). The main feature of this strategy according to Liasidou (2012) is a move away from categorization and special intervention, thus concentrating on providing an appropriate high quality and effective education for all students, including those with disabilities. This strategy tries to support learners in a mainstream classroom without removing them to special schools or making use of any specialist help. This means that by adhering to an inclusive pedagogy, the strategies strive for support and inclusion of all learners without labelling, classifying or even marginalizing. Teachers make it their responsibility to accommodate all learners regardless of their ability or disability thus creating inclusive environments that welcome and celebrate the unique character that each learner brings in the classroom.

"I indicated that we work hand in hand with the remedial teacher and the occupational therapist. As a result, it is our duty to screen learners and allocate them accordingly. We have different intervention methods to help us accommodate learners as much as we can. If we refer the learner to a special school, it means all our efforts did not succeed". (Respondent B)

Only one participant has indicated that she makes use of direct instruction. The teacher is the one who has more years in the teaching profession and this can be attributed to the fact that she was trained in

the previous years when direct instruction was the main method of teaching.

4.4 Collaboration

Collaboration is one of the outstanding aspects in an inclusive setting. DoE (2009) outlines collaboration as one of the outstanding qualities of a Full Service school in which it stipulates that a Full Service school has a collaborative approach to service delivery. Collaborations means that two or more people work together within an inclusive setting, it can either be teachers working hand in hand or teachers working with other specialists such as therapists, social workers and doctors or nurses. It is the team's responsibility to provide educator and parental support as well as psychological and medical support to the learners. The study under review showed that the teachers relied on the remedial teacher, occupational therapist as well as the specialist teacher. This came because teachers did not believe in their abilities to help learners who experience learning challenges in their classrooms. The participants showed their reliance to the support team.

The full service school under investigation has a remedial teacher and an Occupational Therapist who help to support those learners who need extra support in their learning. As a result, teachers collaborate with these specialists on a regular basis. Engelbrecht et al. (2003) indicate that the school support team should be used to facilitate organizational change towards inclusion. Therefore, it is the team's responsibility to provide educator, parental and learner support to offer psychosocial, paramedical and medical support. In one classroom observation, some learners were taken out of the classroom and the teacher explained that they had a session with a remedial teacher. This can be seen as exclusion than an inclusion practice. Having to remove learners from class means that they miss part of the class activities that take place in their absence. This was observed when I was in one class and the teacher had to make a note in her books so that she could account why some learners did not have certain class activities.

"The presence of the remedial teacher is very helpful as once she has planned the programme for those who need support, she sits with us teachers to discuss things that we should also incorporate in our teaching to accommodate and further help such learners. This means that whatever they do with the remedial teacher does not happen in isolation, rather it matches with the activities in the class".

(Respondent B)

"I don't know what I would be without the help of the remedial teacher and the occupational therapist. This means whenever I encounter problems I know where to run to for help". (Respondent A)

The other participant says,

"The presence of the remedial teacher has made it easier for me as a teacher to understand the complexities of the inclusive practices better. I know I am not on my own". (Respondent C)

It is evident from the statements that teachers have a belief that they cannot do it on their own without the help of the specialists. However, they were not ready to incorporate the specialists in their classroom as they saw them as people who have much more knowledge than them. This again stems from the educators' perception that they are not skilled enough to handle learners with special needs in

their classrooms. When teachers feel they do not have adequate skills and knowledge to teach, they create a barrier to the implementation of inclusive education. Stofile, Raymond and Moletsane (2013) posit that without possession of the necessary skills and knowledge, educators are likely to lose their confidence in their ability to effectively include learners with diverse needs. From the participants' responses, there is a contradiction in terms of what teachers understand by collaboration. On one hand, one believes that collaboration means working together and sees specialists as people they run to when help is needed. On the other hand, some participants understand collaboration as dependency. Dependency means that the teachers cannot perform their duties without consulting the specialists and feel inadequate to give support to learners.

There needs to be an effective team approach towards learning support and curriculum planning. Learning support has to be coordinated effectively throughout the school allowing time for joint planning in a school day between teams of educators and welfare assistants (DoE, 2009). Teachers collaborate at different levels, whether teachers in a phase or teachers who teach the same subject. Within an inclusive setting in a full service school, teachers have indicated that they collaborate at different levels, from subjects to those who teach a phase. They meet on a weekly basis to discuss progress as well as challenges they face and a way forward. The respondents said,

“What I like most about this school is that I am never alone. The support we get from other teachers is strong, the weekly meetings that we have help us discuss issues, and we talk about ways of accommodating learners. This helps us to share ideas”. (Respondent A)

“The main success in this school lies with us teachers working together as a team. You cannot survive in this environment if you are not a team player”. (Respondent B)

“What is fulfilling for me is the fact that we work collaboratively as a team. I don't want to imagine what it would be like to work on your own. We always know that we are a team. At times, I call another teacher to share the lesson with me. We share ideas, work as a team and we are prepared to succeed in our teaching no matter what”. (Respondent C)

Data suggests that teachers work closely together as a team. When they work as teachers, they seem to have that freedom to each other unlike in the case of specialists where the teachers seem to be dependent on the specialist than sharing ideas. According to Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) one of the key levers of Inclusive Education is the establishment of Institutional Level Support Teams and the District Based Support Teams. It is through teamwork that teachers share their experiences, challenges as well as ways to solve problems in their classrooms. Thus, both teachers and learners get the support they need when teamwork is utilized accordingly. Raymond (2008) argues that individuals cannot achieve inclusive education. The belief is that it is necessary to build a team of teachers, parents and professionals in meeting the needs of learners in an inclusive setting. The respondents indicated that they support one another in the school because of the training they receive from the School Based Support Team. Park, Henkin and Egley (2005) argue that teams can be places where teachers establish and strengthen dispositions required for positive change and innovative approaches to the solutions of

complex problems. While the support that teachers get from one other and available structures goes a long way towards enabling inclusive practices as will be seen, it is often not sufficient to combat the structural challenges they face in the form of overcrowded classes, language barriers, poverty and lack of parental involvement. Having discussed how the teachers understand collaboration, the following section will discuss the challenges teachers encounter in their teaching practice.

4.5 Challenges

Regardless of the skills and innovations of the teachers, all the participants indicated that there are some challenges that they come across in their teaching. All of them complained that they were overloaded with work in their classes as they have large numbers of learners. This becomes a serious challenge especially when learners need more attention on specific activities. The teachers also need support in their classrooms and this is a challenge, as they do not have teacher assistants. The respondents believe that the Department should provide each class with a learner support teacher to assist in some activities and learning areas.

“We are facing serious challenges when it comes to support. We need support in our classrooms, and for the fact that we are a Full Service School; one would expect to find structures fully functional. We need all the support that we can get to help all learners overcome their barriers. We need the assistant teachers to help us implement inclusive education successfully”. (Respondent B)

It is evident from this statement that teachers believe that the presence of classroom assistants would make their workload more manageable. The implication is that with assistance, these teachers might be able to put their understanding of inclusive practices more effectively. In the following section, the challenges that they face in this regard are examined in more detail.

4.5.1 Overcrowding

One of the findings that show a remarkable similarity is the challenges that the teachers face when applying inclusive practices in their teaching. They indicated that the size of the classroom is a major challenge. In the three classes that I observed, the first one had 49 learners, the second 51 and the last one had 48 learners. Smith et al (2004) conducted a similar study and found the same results in which they indicate that class load was an important consideration for educators in an inclusive class and educators thought that their classes were too big and not in favour of including learners with difficulties. All of the respondents indicated that the main challenge is overcrowding as indicated below:

“Overcrowded class is the major challenge. The teacher-learner ratio does not allow full inclusion to take place”. (Respondent A)

“You see the classes are overcrowded, like now I am sitting in a classroom with 51 learners and it is hard to reach those who are struggling”. (Respondent B)

“To tell the truth we have a serious challenge with large classes. It is very challenging cope with learners who have diverse needs”. (Respondent C).

This is the theme that was found to be present in all the respondents' responses in terms of the challenges they face in implementing inclusive practices in their teaching. Access to quality education

is one of the ethos of inclusive education. From the interviews, all teachers complained about large classrooms which prevent them from attending to all learners' needs. All the respondents have the same complaint as their classes range from 48-51 learners in one class. During the visit in the school, my observation was that all classes were overcrowded and the space was not enough for different activities. One of the challenges of overcrowded classes is when teachers have to give individual support to those who need it. The classes are too large to manage and it becomes even worse for new teachers in the field. Most participants clarified that their attempts to meet learners' needs were unrealistic due to the limited time for individual attention and consultation. Hay and Malindi (2005) acknowledge that overcrowded classes may jeopardize the implementation of Inclusive Education. In the next section, more challenges that were identified will be presented as per the interview schedule.

4.5.2 Lack of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in education has been attributed to effective learning and development. Ofollabi, Mukhopadhyay and Nenty (2013) confirm that parents' knowledge, concern and contribution to their child's education will definitely shape them towards appreciating schooling, and at the same time prompt them to embrace positive behaviour. However, lack of recognition of parents, negative attitudes towards their involvement as well as lack of resources to facilitate their involvement can contribute to inadequate parental involvement in the education system. Ofollabi et al. (2013) concur that most research on the subject documented how lack of parental involvement contributes to the recent increase in factors such as achievement gap, inequality and discriminating experience of children with disabilities in the day-to-day life. From the interviews, all respondents indicated that parents were not fully involved and supportive of the teaching and learning process. It was indicated that most parents neglected their children and were uncooperative.

"We are sitting on a serious problem here as many parents do not give their children support at home. When we give learners homework, most of them come back to school without doing it". (Respondent A).

They mentioned that most parents are illiterate and most learners were staying with grandparents or foster parents and they cannot help them with their school work. DoE (NCSNET) stipulates that the active involvement of parents and the broader community in the teaching and learning process is central to effective learning and development. Lack of parental involvement has been attributed to factors such as negative attitudes towards parental involvement, lack of resources to facilitate such involvement, lack of parent empowerment and support for parental organizations, particularly in poorer communities (NCSNET). According to DoE (2009) in a Full Service school, the need for parental empowerment is of utmost importance. All respondents indicated that the worst cases are when parents are called in at school and they do not show up. This is a challenge when they have to provide intervention programmes as parents need to sign concerned forms. Mwelil (2009) argues that lack of parental support and negligence in teaching and learning creates barriers to learning, which teaching practice is aimed at identifying and addressing learners' needs especially within an inclusive curriculum.

Ntombela and Raymond (2013) strongly believe that parents or other primary caregivers are important resources in the teaching and learning process and the unavailability of parental support negatively affects children's learning.

4.5.3 Poverty

According to UNESCO (2005), poverty often determines whether a child can attend school or not. Due to their financial burden, parents are often pressed to provide even the necessities of life. Poor living conditions, undernourishment, lack of proper housing and unemployment have a negative impact on all learners. Poverty has adverse effects on children and can lead to either lower performance or even drop out from school. Ntombela and Raymond (2013) add that poverty affects millions of school-going children, especially those living in rural areas, causing many to leave school early. From the interviews, poverty was identified as one of the challenges that teachers face in an inclusive class, indicating that most learners were from extended families and depended on their parents' pension grants.

"Most of the learners in our school come from poor family backgrounds. This means that most learners come to school hungry". (Respondent B).

This means that learners could not fully concentrate well in class because of fatigue and hunger. Most participants indicated that this leads to high rates of absenteeism and it affects intervention programmes as there is no consistency in the attendance of any support given. Learners do not do well when they are hungry, malnourished and tired. During my observation in most classes, learners who have been identified as coming from impoverished families were not actively involved in most of the classroom activities. One of the respondents indicated that this poses a challenge to them, but the feeding scheme in the school helps in addressing such a problem.

4.5.4 Language

The medium of instruction in the school is English and it poses a challenge to many students and their parents as well. DoE (2005a) states that learners enter a school in which the language of learning and training (LOLT) is not their home language. The educators of all learning programmes are expected to give support and supplementary learning in the LOLT until such a time that learners are able to learn effectively through that medium. NCSNET asserts that a further area of barriers arising from the curriculum are those which result from the medium of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning for many learners take place through a language that is not their first language.

In the present study, one of the participants indicated that language is a problem to some learners and they have to end up code switching.

"We have a challenge as we are a full service school, the neighbouring school is different from us. When we receive learners from other schools, their home languages are indigenous languages. When we admit them, it becomes a problem. Like I was speaking to another learner in Zulu because she is from the Eastern Cape and does not yet understand English. It's better now as she can understand some of the words. So those are the challenges, language is a serious barrier". (Respondent B).

The teachers tend to code switch most of the time in order to accommodate all learners as they use

quite a number of indigenous languages, though most of the time English is used. Because South Africa has 11 official languages, it becomes a challenge since learners find themselves learning in the second or even the third language and this causes a barrier to learning. Ntombela and Raymond (2013) note that for most children in South Africa learning takes place through a second or even a third language. Even worse many learners are taught by teachers who speak a language different from their own, or by teachers who are also struggling with the language of learning and teaching. Ntombela and Raymond (2013) further support the participants' view that mismatch between learners' home language and language of teaching and learning have serious implications for learning. Florian does not address any of the above challenges that seem prevalent in this study and many other studies conducted in South Africa. This may stem from the fact that South Africa is a developing country and faces such socio-economic challenges especially in education, while Florian conducted most of her studies in a very developed country which is advanced and is not faced with challenges such as poverty or over-crowded classrooms.

5. Conclusions

The aim of the study was to investigate the extent to which at a Full Service School in Soweto understand and practice the principles of a Full Service School. This paper has therefore brought the research to its conclusion, in which the research questions formulated have been investigated and the aims achieved, by summarizing the main findings and data collected, I was in a position to outline the teachers' understanding and practices of inclusive principles of a Full Service School.

5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made for future research

- Further research interest on topics that will give more details on the ways in which teachers use inclusive practices in different contexts
- Conduct further research on comparative studies on inclusive practices at full service and mainstream schools
- Conduct similar research with larger samples and different contexts in South Africa and other African countries

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