

Original Paper

Analysis of the SIAS Policy and its Integration with CAPS: Evaluating Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support Mechanisms in South African Schools

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Abstract

Inclusive education remains central to South Africa's post-apartheid education reform, aimed at ensuring that all learners regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic status have equitable access to quality education. Despite this commitment, the practical realisation of inclusion remains uneven due to a misalignment between the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). This study examined the extent to which SIAS is integrated with CAPS in promoting inclusive education in South African schools. Employing a qualitative desktop research design, the study analysed key policy documents, scholarly literature, and evaluation reports. Lasswell's Policy Cycle Model and Bernstein's Pedagogic Device informed the analytical framework, offering insights into how educational policies are formulated, implemented, and recontextualised in practice. The findings reveal that while SIAS and CAPS share similar inclusive intentions, their implementation is fragmented and inconsistent. The prescriptive nature of CAPS constrains curriculum flexibility, impeding teachers' ability to effectively apply SIAS strategies. Moreover, inadequate teacher training, limited systemic support from School-Based and District-Based Support Teams, and administrative challenges further widen the policy practice gap. The study concludes that meaningful inclusion requires better policy coherence, sustained teacher development, and institutional capacity building. It contributes to policy and academic discourse by offering evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the integration of SIAS and CAPS, thereby advancing an equitable and inclusive education system in South Africa.

Keywords

Inclusive education, CAPS, SIAS, Integration, Policy Cycle Model

Introduction

Inclusive education has become a central pillar of South Africa's post-apartheid education agenda, underpinned by the constitutional mandate to provide equitable access to quality education for all

learners. Within this framework, two key policy instruments the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) play critical roles in shaping inclusive classroom practices. The effective integration of these policies is fundamental to ensuring that learners experiencing barriers to learning receive appropriate and timely support within mainstream education settings. The SIAS Policy offers a structured mechanism for identifying, assessing, and providing support to learners with diverse learning needs, thereby operationalising South Africa's commitment to inclusive education. In contrast, CAPS prescribes a standardised curriculum and assessment framework aimed at ensuring uniformity and comparability of learning outcomes across schools. However, the intersection of these two policies often presents implementation challenges. Teachers must reconcile the inclusive and flexible ethos of SIAS with the rigid, content-driven demands of CAPS, frequently under conditions of resource limitations, large class sizes, and insufficient systemic support. This study investigates the extent to which SIAS and CAPS are aligned in practice and how their integration influences inclusive teaching and learning. By exploring teacher experiences, classroom realities, and institutional mechanisms, the study seeks to illuminate the tensions, opportunities, and strategies that shape policy enactment. Ultimately, it contributes to ongoing debates on how South African schools can better harmonise policy frameworks with the lived realities of inclusive education.

Research background

Inclusive education has been central to South Africa's educational transformation since 1994, grounded in the belief that all learners regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic status deserve equitable access to quality education. This vision was formally articulated in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), which sought to integrate learners with diverse needs into a unified education system. The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy of 2014 was introduced to operationalise this goal by providing a structured framework for early identification and support of learners experiencing intrinsic or extrinsic barriers to learning. The policy outlines the responsibilities of teachers, School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) in addressing these barriers. However, studies reveal that the implementation of SIAS remains inconsistent due to limited teacher training, high workloads, large class sizes, and insufficient systemic support (Nel et al., 2016; Ntseto et al., 2021; Maseko, 2024).

Problem statement

In principle, South Africa's inclusive education framework aspires to ensure that all learners regardless of ability, background, or socioeconomic status have equitable access to quality learning opportunities. The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014) was developed to operationalise this vision through structured interventions that identify and support learners experiencing barriers to learning, while the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) provides the pedagogical and assessment

framework guiding classroom instruction. Ideally, the integration of SIAS and CAPS should create a coherent system that promotes participation, equity, and academic success for all learners. However, in practice, this integration remains fragmented and inconsistent, as teachers often struggle to apply SIAS processes within the rigid, content-driven demands of CAPS. Studies highlight systemic challenges such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate understanding of inclusive pedagogies, administrative burdens, overcrowded classrooms, and limited institutional support, all of which hinder effective policy implementation (Nel et al., 2016; Maseko, 2024). Consequently, learners with additional support needs continue to be underserved, and the inclusive education ideals envisioned in Education White Paper 6 (2001) remain largely unrealised. This study therefore investigates how SIAS and CAPS are integrated in South African schools, explores the challenges teachers face in aligning these frameworks, and provides evidence-based insights to strengthen policy coherence, classroom practice, and teacher capacity in advancing inclusive education.

Research Aim and sub-questions

The aim of this study is to analyse how the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy is integrated with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in South African schools, focusing on the challenges and opportunities that influence the effective implementation of inclusive education practices.

Research Sub-questions

1. How do teachers perceive and implement the SIAS policy within their classroom contexts?
2. In what ways does the integration of SIAS and CAPS facilitate or constrain inclusive education practices?
3. What strategies can enhance the alignment between SIAS and CAPS to better support learners with diverse educational needs?

Literature Review

Policy Context in South African Education

The evolution of inclusive education in South Africa is deeply intertwined with the country's socio-political history. During apartheid, education functioned as an instrument of racial segregation and inequality, entrenching white dominance and deliberately under educating Black learners through the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (Abdi, 2001). This system institutionalised exclusion and unequal access to quality education. The 1976 Soweto Uprising became a turning point, symbolising collective resistance to linguistic and structural oppression in schools. The advent of democracy in 1994 marked a decisive shift, with the South African Constitution (1996) affirming every citizen's right to basic education. In pursuit of equity and redress, the South African Schools Act (1996) was enacted to democratise school governance and ensure fair resource distribution (Naidoo, 2004).

Curriculum reform became central to this transformation. Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), introduced as Curriculum 2005, sought to promote learner-centred approaches aligned with global trends. However, its implementation faltered due to inadequate resources, teacher uncertainty, and

conceptual complexity (Maodzwa-Taruvunga & Cross, 2012). Consequently, OBE was replaced by the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in 2011, a more structured and standardised curriculum. While CAPS brought clarity and uniformity, its rigidity reflected a pendulum swing away from OBE's flexibility. This historical trajectory illustrates that South African curriculum reform has often been driven by political symbolism rather than practical realities. Building on this critique, the present study interrogates whether current frameworks such as SIAS and CAPS genuinely redress historical inequities or unintentionally perpetuate them under the guise of inclusivity.

The SIAS Policy: Purpose and Implementation

The Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014) was introduced to operationalise the inclusive vision of Education White Paper 6 (2001). It establishes a systematic process for identifying learners experiencing barriers to learning and ensuring appropriate support through collaboration among teachers, School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs), and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs). Central to SIAS is the principle of early identification and intervention, promoting a holistic approach that considers both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers, including poverty, language, and resource constraints (Pillay & Tlale, 2024). The policy prescribes a three-stage model involving teacher-led identification, SBST collaboration for intervention planning, and DBST engagement for complex cases. Documentation tools such as SNA 1–3 forms facilitate monitoring and decision-making processes.

Despite its robust conceptual framework, SIAS has faced implementation challenges. Many teachers report insufficient training, administrative overload, and limited support from district structures, leading to inconsistent application across schools (Pillay & Tlale, 2024). Functional SBSTs and DBSTs are often absent or under-resourced, while educators struggle to balance the demands of teaching with specialised screening and reporting tasks. These barriers contribute to a persistent policy practice gap, raising concerns about whether SIAS can fulfil its inclusive mandate without sustained capacity-building and systemic support.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education, 2011) represents an effort to standardise education delivery and assessment while promoting democratic and inclusive values. It aims to produce critical, responsible citizens capable of problem-solving and social participation (Schoeman, 2018). However, scholars note that CAPS's prescriptive structure often restricts teacher autonomy, leaving limited room for adaptation to learners with diverse needs (Schoeman, 2018). This rigidity is particularly problematic in under-resourced contexts, where teachers face large classes, minimal materials, and competing academic demands. Although CAPS aspires to inclusivity, its standardised expectations often marginalise learners who require differentiated support. Nevertheless, with adequate training and resources, CAPS can be applied more flexibly. Schoeman (2018) suggests that subjects like Life Orientation offer valuable opportunities to address socio-emotional and real-world issues, reinforcing inclusivity when implemented creatively. The

challenge, therefore, lies not only in the curriculum's design but also in teachers' capacity and institutional support to interpret and enact it inclusively.

Integration of SIAS and CAPS

The effective integration of SIAS with CAPS is essential for realising inclusive education. While SIAS promotes flexibility and responsiveness, CAPS emphasises uniformity and pace (Maseko, 2024). This structural tension creates practical dilemmas for teachers, who must support diverse learners while adhering to rigid content schedules and assessment requirements. Studies reveal that the administrative burden of SIAS documentation (e.g., SNA forms), coupled with the pressure to meet CAPS timelines, overwhelms teachers particularly in large, resource-poor classrooms (Pillay & Tlale, 2024). As a result, learners needing accommodations or modified instruction often remain unsupported, undermining both policy intentions.

The lack of synergy between the two frameworks reflects broader systemic issues such as weak teacher preparation, inadequate policy communication, and insufficient district-level support. Maseko (2024) argues that while both SIAS and CAPS are grounded in equity, their disjointed implementation perpetuates exclusion. This study therefore examines how teachers navigate these competing demands in practice, particularly in township schools where challenges of overcrowding and limited resources are most pronounced.

Challenges and Gaps in Implementation

Persistent systemic constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, scarce learning materials, and weak teacher development further hinder inclusive education. Ajani (2021) highlights that rural and under-resourced schools often lack libraries, laboratories, and essential textbooks, impeding both CAPS delivery and SIAS interventions. Teachers frequently report insufficient training to interpret CAPS requirements or implement inclusive strategies effectively, while irregular workshops and limited mentorship reduce their confidence (Ajani, 2021). Inadequate monitoring mechanisms and the punitive nature of some evaluations exacerbate teacher frustration and limit professional growth.

These challenges underscore that achieving inclusivity requires more than well-crafted policies; it demands sustainable investment in teacher capacity, infrastructure, and ongoing support. Current literature often focuses on the technical aspects of policy implementation, overlooking teachers' lived experiences in mediating these tensions. This study contributes to bridging that gap by foregrounding teachers' perspectives on how SIAS and CAPS intersect in everyday practice, offering insights into achieving genuine inclusivity within South African classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is guided by Harold Lasswell's Policy Cycle Model (1950s), which offers a systematic lens for analysing the stages of policy development, implementation, and evaluation. The model conceptualises policymaking as a dynamic, cyclical process encompassing agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation (Freeman, 2020). It provides a heuristic framework for understanding how educational policies evolve and interact within complex

institutional and socio-political contexts.

Applied to education, the Policy Cycle Model facilitates a critical examination of how inclusive education policies are translated from national intentions into classroom realities (Mainardes, 2006; Stofile, 2008). It highlights that teachers and school administrators are not passive recipients of policy, but active interpreters who mediate implementation based on contextual challenges and available resources. In this study, the model is particularly useful for unpacking how the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy intersects with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) during implementation.

Through this framework, the study interrogates how inclusive education ideals articulated at the agenda-setting and formulation stages are enacted or constrained within classroom practice. The implementation stage is especially relevant, as it illuminates teachers' experiences in balancing SIAS processes with the standardised demands of CAPS. The evaluation component of the model provides a means to assess whether the integration of these policies achieves its intended outcomes, such as early identification of learning barriers and equitable learner support.

Thus, the Policy Cycle Model enables a holistic exploration of policy coherence and practice alignment. It serves not only as an analytical tool to trace systemic and pedagogical gaps but also as a conceptual basis for proposing evidence-based recommendations to enhance the effective integration of SIAS and CAPS in advancing inclusive education in South African schools.

Methodology

This study employed a desktop research design, using systematic literature review and document analysis to examine how the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy integrates with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) in South African schools. Operating within a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the research sought to understand how inclusive education is constructed and interpreted through policy texts, evaluation reports, and scholarly literature. This paradigm recognizes that knowledge is socially and contextually mediated, allowing the study to explore diverse perspectives embedded in policy and academic discourse (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lines, 2023).

Data sources included official government documents (SIAS Policy, CAPS, and Education White Paper 6), evaluation reports from provincial education departments and NGOs, and peer-reviewed academic publications. The study applied qualitative content analysis to systematically identify themes, patterns, and contradictions related to policy alignment, teacher preparedness, and systemic barriers (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis was guided by Lasswell's Policy Cycle Model to interpret how policy intentions translate into classroom practice.

Ethical considerations of ethical number (W2525ECE73H) were observed through accurate citation, faithful representation of sources, and careful handling of any sensitive information reported in secondary data. While the study's limitations include reliance on existing literature without primary field data, this approach provides a rigorous foundation for understanding policy integration and

informing recommendations for enhancing inclusive education. Overall, the desktop methodology enabled a comprehensive, contextualized, and systematic examination of SIAS-CAPS interactions, highlighting challenges and opportunities for improving inclusive practices in South African schools.

Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

The study examines the integration of the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), focusing on how screening, identification, assessment, and support are conceptualized and implemented in South African schools. The analysis identifies points of convergence and tension between the two frameworks, revealing how inclusive education is articulated, operationalized, and constrained in practice. Using Lasswell's Policy Cycle Model (1951) and Bernstein's pedagogic device (2000) as guiding frameworks, the interpretation seeks to ensure alignment of policy intent with classroom realities and identifies challenges and opportunities for improving inclusive education.

Overview of Key Documents

The SIAS Policy (2014) provides a structured approach for identifying learners with learning barriers and facilitating individualized support through School-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) and District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs). It emphasizes early detection and collaborative interventions, reflecting the inclusive education principles outlined in White Paper 6 (2001) (Naicker, 2018). However, research highlights challenges in practical implementation, including limited teacher training, resource constraints, and administrative burdens (Ntseto, 2019). These findings were corroborated in the study's document analysis, showing that SIAS's theoretical strength is constrained by contextual school realities.

CAPS (2011) provide a standardized national curriculum with aligned content, learning outcomes, and assessment requirements. While it supports consistency and accountability, its prescriptive nature often limits adaptation for learners with diverse needs (Hoadley, 2020; Landsberg et al., 2016; Chisholm, 2018). The study found that the rigid assessment structures in CAPS frequently impede the flexible, learner-centered interventions promoted by SIAS. This tension between standardized curriculum demands and inclusive support reflects broader systemic challenges noted by Makoele (2020) and Walton (2018), where teachers struggle to reconcile assessment requirements with individualized support strategies.

Other guiding frameworks include Education White Paper 6 and DBE circulars, which provide overarching principles and implementation guidance. Despite these resources, the translation of policy into practice remains uneven, highlighting persistent inequities in South African schools (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018). These documents collectively serve as critical lenses for examining policy alignment, implementation challenges, and systemic barriers to inclusive education.

Analytical Framework

The study employed qualitative content analysis to systematically examine how inclusive education is conceptualized in SIAS and CAPS (Krippendorff, 2018). Policy texts, evaluation reports, and academic

literature were coded inductively and deductively to identify key themes related to inclusion, equity, curriculum flexibility, and teacher support (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). Bernstein's (2000) pedagogic device informed the analysis of how educational knowledge is selected, interpreted, and recontextualized in policy, while Lasswell's Policy Cycle Model guided interpretation across agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation stages (Mainardes, 2006; Freeman, 2020; Stofile, 2008).

The analytical lens focused on four central concepts: (1) Inclusion, assessing whether all learners can meaningfully participate; (2) Equity, evaluating resource allocation and access to support; (3) Curriculum Flexibility, examining whether CAPS permits adaptation to individual needs; and (4) Teacher Support, considering professional development and structural mechanisms that enable effective inclusive practice.

Analysis of SIAS

Theme 1: Screening and Identification of Learners, SIAS emphasizes early detection of both intrinsic (e.g., learning disabilities) and extrinsic barriers (e.g., poverty, language challenges). While theoretically comprehensive, studies show that teachers often lack the expertise to accurately identify barriers, resulting in under- or misidentification (Engelbrecht, 2020; Maseko, 2024).

Theme 2: Assessment Approaches, SIAS promotes holistic assessment, including developmental, social, and contextual factors, operationalized through Individualized Support Plans (ISPs) (DBE, 2014). Administrative demands and insufficient training, however, limit teachers' capacity to implement these plans effectively (Pillay & Tlale, 2024).

Theme 3: Support Mechanisms, SIAS outlines a tiered support system involving teachers, SBSTs, DBSTs, and specialized professionals. While aligned with international best practices (Stofile, 2008), practical implementation is uneven due to resource shortages and insufficient district-level capacity (Nel et al., 2016).

Analysis of CAPS

Theme 4: Curriculum Flexibility and Inclusivity, CAPS provides standardized content and assessment schedules, which often constrain flexibility. Subthemes include: (1) Assessment Accommodations, where formal provisions exist but are inconsistently applied; (2) Teacher Roles, where guidance on differentiation is minimal; and (3) Alignment with Inclusive Goals, where CAPS' rigid structure contrasts with SIAS's learner-centered philosophy (Engelbrecht, 2020; Nel et al., 2016).

Comparative Analysis: SIAS-CAPS Integration

While both policies share a commitment to inclusive education, tensions arise between SIAS's flexibility and CAPS's prescriptive standards. Teachers face competing demands, balancing curriculum coverage with individualized support. Both policies provide limited guidance on practical integration, leaving implementation contingent on school-level capacity. Literature supports these findings, highlighting administrative pressures, limited teacher preparation, and contextual inequities as barriers to effective inclusive education (Engelbrecht & Savolainen, 2018; Walton, 2018).

Interpretation of Findings

The analysis indicates that SIAS and CAPS are partially integrated: policy visions align, but classroom practice reflects inconsistencies. SIAS supports early identification and learner-centered interventions, whereas CAPS prioritizes standardized assessment and content coverage. This misalignment undermines the practical realization of inclusive education, demonstrating the need for explicit integration strategies, professional development, and institutional support.

Implications

Findings underscore the need for coherent alignment between SIAS and CAPS, including: explicit curriculum differentiation guidelines, flexible assessments, and strengthened SBST/DBST support. Teachers require ongoing training and reduced administrative burdens to implement inclusive practices effectively. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that all learners, particularly those with barriers to learning, receive equitable opportunities to succeed academically and participate meaningfully in South African classrooms.

Discussion

Alignment and Tensions Between SIAS and CAPS

The findings demonstrate that while SIAS and CAPS share the overarching goal of promoting inclusive education, their operational logics differ. SIAS emphasizes flexibility, individualized support, and early identification, whereas CAPS prioritizes standardized curriculum delivery and assessment. This tension reflects Bernstein's (1999, 2000) concepts of curriculum classification and framing, where CAPS's strong framing constrains the learner-centered ethos of SIAS. The misalignment contributes to inconsistencies in classroom implementation, with teachers often prioritizing curriculum coverage over learner support, as echoed in studies by Engelbrecht (2020) and Nel et al. (2016).

Implications for Teachers and Schools

Teachers are central to the integration of SIAS and CAPS but face multiple challenges, including limited training, administrative pressures, and resource shortages. The study highlights the need for targeted professional development, clear guidelines for curriculum adaptation, and strengthened SBST and DBST support. These findings align with international best practices in inclusive education (Stofile, 2008; Booth & Ainscow, 2019), emphasizing that teacher capacity and institutional support are critical to translating policy into practice.

Policy and Implementation Considerations

The Policy Cycle Model (Lasswell, 1951) provides insight into systemic barriers. The agenda-setting and policy formulation stages reflect South Africa's post-apartheid commitment to equity, yet the implementation stage reveals gaps between policy intent and school realities. CAPS' prescriptive nature often limits flexibility, while SIAS' detailed support procedures require robust institutional capacity to be effective. This reinforces previous literature on the persistent challenges in inclusive education policy implementation (Engelbrecht & Walton, 2018).

Opportunities for Strengthening Integration

Despite the challenges, opportunities exist for aligning SIAS and CAPS more effectively. Explicit cross-referencing between the two policies, incorporation of flexible assessment strategies, and clear guidance for classroom-level adaptations can enhance coherence. Improved resource allocation and professional development would empower teachers to balance curriculum demands with individualized support, ensuring that inclusive education moves beyond policy rhetoric into classroom practice.

The discussion confirms that policy alignment alone is insufficient; successful inclusive education requires coherent integration of curriculum standards and support frameworks, alongside strengthened teacher capacity and institutional support. By addressing these gaps, South African schools can better realize the vision of equitable, inclusive education as envisaged in White Paper 6 (2001), SIAS (2014), and CAPS (2011).

Summary of Key Findings

The study reveals that while the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) share a common vision of inclusive education, their integration is inconsistent and largely ineffective in practice. SIAS emphasizes flexibility, individualized support, and early intervention, whereas CAPS enforces a structured curriculum and standardized assessments. This fundamental difference creates a policy-practice gap, where teachers struggle to balance inclusive support with curriculum compliance.

The research highlights that teachers' competence and structural constraints significantly impede effective inclusion. Limited professional development, administrative burdens, and insufficient guidance from School-Based and District-Based Support Teams (SBSTs/DBSTs) reduce teachers' capacity to implement inclusive strategies. Structural inequities, such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate learning materials, and inconsistent district-level support, further exacerbate these challenges. As a result, learners often do not receive timely interventions, undermining the goals of Education White Paper 6 (2001) and the intended inclusivity of SIAS and CAPS.

Recommendations

To enhance SIAS-CAPS integration and promote inclusive education, the following recommendations are proposed: Establish a unified implementation framework linking SIAS procedures explicitly to CAPS requirements, including curriculum adaptation and differentiated assessment strategies. Prioritize teacher training and professional development in inclusive pedagogy, curriculum differentiation, and assessment adjustments. Conduct school-level studies, especially in rural and under-resourced settings, to explore how teachers implement SIAS within CAPS.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to knowledge on inclusive education policy by critically examining the interaction between SIAS and CAPS. It highlights the persistent policy-practice gap and identifies structural, institutional, and pedagogical factors that hinder effective implementation. Practically, it provides actionable guidance for policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators on strengthening policy alignment, enhancing teacher capacity, and fostering learner-centered approaches.

By connecting theoretical insights with practical strategies, the study offers a framework for more coherent, contextually responsive, and sustainable inclusive education in South Africa.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should explore teachers' experiences and perceptions of implementing SIAS within CAPS across diverse school contexts. They should further develop and test monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the long-term coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability of inclusive education policies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that while the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) Policy and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) share a common commitment to inclusive education, their integration remains partial and inconsistent, creating a persistent policy-practice gap. SIAS emphasizes flexible, learner-centered support and early intervention, whereas CAPS prioritizes standardized curriculum delivery and assessment, resulting in tensions that teachers must navigate daily. The research demonstrates that teacher capacity, structural constraints, and limited institutional support significantly hinder the effective implementation of inclusive practices. Without coordinated guidance, professional development, and adequate resources, inclusive education remains largely rhetorical rather than operational. To realize the vision of Education White Paper 6 (2001), inclusive education requires coherent alignment between SIAS and CAPS, strengthened teacher support, and systemic interventions that address resource inequities and administrative burdens. This study highlights that achieving meaningful inclusion is not merely a policy objective but a moral and social imperative, demanding collaborative, context-sensitive, and sustainable practices. Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on policy integration and inclusive education in South Africa, providing evidence-based insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers. By bridging policy vision and classroom realities, the unification of SIAS and CAPS has the potential to transform the educational landscape, ensuring equitable, supportive, and high-quality learning opportunities for all learners.

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