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Factors inhibiting and enabling the implementation of inclusive education in selected South African primary schools

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Abstract

Inclusive Education (IE) can never be emphasised enough, as it transforms schools by ensuring all learners can learn in the same space regardless of their differences. However, research suggests that rural schools across the globe are lagging, and the factors are not uniform due to varying contextual circumstances. Our study explored teachers' views on the factors that inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural schools. A qualitative multiple case study design and the interpretive research paradigm were adopted. Eleven teachers were purposefully selected from three primary schools. Data was collected through in-depth structured interviews and analysed using thematic data analysis. We found that the enablers of IE were workshops and informal curriculum differentiation. In contrast, unproductive workshops, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate resources, and poor parental support were inhibitors. These findings may be helpful to IE teachers and policymakers in their efforts to make primary schools inclusive. This study concludes that, regardless of the few enablers in place, IE is bound to fail in rural schools if rural teachers' views are abeyant and there are normalised issues such as overcrowded classrooms and insufficient resources. Therefore, it is recommended that responsible education stakeholders solicit rural teachers' views on what is working and what is not working in rural schools prior to any intervention.

Keywords: inhibitors, enablers, inclusive education, rural schools, teachers

Introduction and background

Inclusive Education (IE) reflects the state of education where learners of the same grade are educated under the same roof rather than separated based on their disabilities or needs (Tiernan, 2022). The significance of this phenomenon is proven by its warm reception around the globe and in South Africa and by how it is promoted by international legislation and treaties signed by countries including South Africa (Ndlovu, 2022). These treaties include the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Jomtien Declaration, the 1994 Salamanca Statement and the Framework of Action on Special Needs Education (Du Plessis, 2013). These treaties forced member states to establish policies to ensure proper implementation of IE. In South Africa, IE policies include the Education White Paper 6 and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

Owing to the presence and implementation of these policies, mainstream schools in South Africa managed to enrol more learners experiencing barriers to learning. Other countries have done the same, which is commendable (Leijen et al., 2021). The IE policies have also managed to positively influence the attitudes of teachers towards learners experiencing barriers to learning. This is proven by the teachers' growing urgency to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning (Mabasa-Manganyi, 2022). To further strengthen this initiative, the Department of Education (DoE) established the District-Based Support Teams (DBSTs) and Schools-Based Support Teams (SBSTs) responsible for the implementation of IE in South African public schools (Department of Basic Education, 2010).

Generally, the positive impact of these policies and teams on IE implementation in South African schools is substantial, proven by its

emphasis on crucial educational policies and legislations. However, the literature maintains that the success of IE is mostly experienced in urban schools, and the same cannot be said about schools in rural areas (Rose et al., 2021; Rude & Miller, 2018; Li & Li, 2023; Adebayo & Ngwenya, 2015). To understand this account, we did a quick scope of literature beyond South Africa. In the United States of America, Rude and Miller (2018) maintain that educators in rural areas struggle to offer their services to learners experiencing barriers due to institutionalised challenges such as poor funding and rural poverty. In India, Rose et al. (2021, p.1) found that "a disparity exists between the availability of professional support services available to families and children, with those living in the rural district experiencing greater difficulty in accessing appropriate support than their counterparts in the metropolitan city". These findings affirm that the implementation of IE is in shambles in rural schools around the globe, and South Africa is not spared.

In South Africa, efforts have been put in place to overcome the poor implementation of IE in rural areas, but their efficacy is under-reported. This is proven by the swelling number of latest studies identifying problems associated with implementing IE in South African schools (Dube, 2020; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Landa et al., 2021). The most common issues elevated in literature are poorly trained teachers and out-of-context interventions. Moreover, the voice of teachers as the front liners in implementing IE in rural schools is very faint. This is worrisome because their voices matter, and establishing any intervention that lacks their views is most likely to fail. Consequently, we maintain an assumption that some of the challenges experienced in the process of implementing IE in rural schools may be caused by the absence of rural teachers' voices on what is working and what is not working in rural schools. Therefore, our study explored teachers' views on the factors that inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The following research question guided this study:

- What factors inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa?

Problem Statement

Proper implementation of IE ensures that all learners can learn in a caring and supportive environment where differences are acknowledged and complimented (DBE, 2014). This can be observed from the efforts of countries across the globe to ensure the success of inclusive education. The efforts come from policies, legislation, capacity building, and monetary investments related to IE (DBE 2001, 2014). Although successes have been recorded, challenges seem to outweigh successes. Upon analysing this problem through literature, we have noted that most dissatisfaction with IE is skewed towards rural schools. Generally, rural schools are associated with poor infrastructure, poor parental support, over-crowdedness and misalignment with national policies. These issues make it difficult for teachers to implement the curriculum, let alone accommodating learners experiencing barriers to learning (Makofane et al., 2024; Themane & Thobejane, 2019). Consequently, the affected learners end up dropping out of school due to insufficient support (Hartnack, 2017). These issues affect the implementation of inclusive education and jeopardise the Education for All (EFA) world agenda. Moreover, these issues indirectly infringe the right of learners to education and social justice. Therefore, this study explored the inhibitors and enablers of implementing inclusive education in rural schools of Limpopo Province, South Africa. We selected Limpopo Province due to its vast rural nature.

Literature review

The conceptualisation of inclusive education

Slee (2011) asserts that there is no uniform definition of inclusive education because there are different perceptions around inclusive education practices. Bernard (2011) refers to inclusive education as a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners and using inclusivity as a key strategy to achieve education for all. Landsberg et al. (2011, p. 8) view inclusivity as an overall principle that should guide all education policies and practices, starting from viewing education as a fundamental human right and the foundation for a more just and equal society. Inclusivity is interpreted as the philosophy and practice of

educating learners with disabilities in general education settings.

Salend (2011) declares that inclusive education has been internationally recognised as a philosophy for attaining equity, justice, safety and quality education for all children, especially those traditionally excluded from mainstream schools due to disability, ethnicity, gender and other characteristics. In consideration of the above views about inclusive education, Sofile and Green (2016) report that the South African government brought several developments in education, one of which was the introduction of inclusive education, which aimed at redressing the inequalities of the apartheid government and to provide equal education for all learners. However, Bryant et al. (2018) argue that in developing countries, including South Africa, inclusive education practices are still far from achieving success because of the various challenges that are still controversial.

These challenges are even more rampant in schools considered to be rural. Although the definition of rural schools in South Africa is still fluid, for this study, we adopted the definition by the DBE (2017, p.9) in their National Framework for Rural Education, conceptualising rural schools as those that are in "areas that consist of tribal lands controlled by traditional leaders, as well as agricultural areas. It includes areas of dense settlement created by colonial and apartheid-driven land settlements and mining areas in rural contexts where mining is no longer active" (DBE, 2017, p.9). We selected this definition as it matches the context of the schools from which our data was collected. Teachers tend to experience the following challenges in rural schools.

Barriers encountered by teachers regarding inclusive education practices in rural schools

Physical barriers

Richards and Stambaugh (2021) identify the lack of access to basic services in rural schools as one of the physical barriers to learning, especially for learners with physical challenges. In addition, McCall (2016) questions how teachers in rural schools are teaching in classrooms where there are no facilities (e.g., buildings do not have ramps for learners using wheelchairs and no clear chalkboards for students who have eyesight challenges. McCall (2016) reiterates that physical barriers call for the idea of safety and quality of inclusive education practices that the Department of Basic Education demands from teachers. Burnett (2021) added that transport scarcity remains a key challenge for some children in rural areas, preventing access to education for physically impaired learners. This is because some learners in rural areas walk distances to reach schools, and their safety and energy for their lessons are compromised (Kaiser & Barstow, 2022).

Curriculum barriers

Forlin (2013) declares that no clear curriculum caters to inclusive education. Moreover, teachers follow a rigid curriculum that does not allow experimentation and gives little room for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Kwok, 2021). The above statement is true in that teachers in schools do not cater for learners experiencing learning challenges, such as slow learners. In other words, learners with learning challenges need different amounts of attention based on their different challenges. The learners are not given enough attention because teaching is aligned with the Annual Teaching Plans (ATPs). In concurrence, Slee (2011) notes that most curriculum materials used in mainstream schools disregard learners with learning challenges. Thus, the researchers believe the curriculum should be aligned in a sequence, pace and relations with the type of learners. The researchers also believe that the school curriculum should be aligned with the needs of learners because education is at the heart of serving the best interests of learners.

The challenges faced by rural schools are not unique to South Africa. Researchers have reported that these schools' education quality is significantly compromised (Shikalepo, 2020). This assertion has garnered support from authors worldwide. In India, Upreti and Malhotra (2024) highlighted poor infrastructure, a lack of resources, and poverty as key factors hindering the provision of quality education for all learners. In the United States, Tieken and Montgomery (2021) and Mattingly and Schaefer (2021) identified deep poverty, low funding, and inadequate infrastructure as major concerns. The similarities

in these rural education challenges suggest that the circumstances faced by rural schools are not solely dependent on a country's economic capacity but also on a lack of commitment to improving the situation.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted two theories to position itself in the context of rurality and implementation of inclusive education. We used Liang Shuming's (1893-1988) theory of rural education and the theory of curriculum implementation conceptualised by Rogan and Grayson (2003). Liang Shuming's theory maintains that rural education should be fixated on complementing social movements and transformation and encouraging social development. Jiang (2023) added that rural education should be used to fulfil societal goals because rural societies, by virtue of being rural, are at a disadvantage. This assertion is backed by Du Plessis (2014, p.111), who states that most rural schools are troubled mainly by issues such as "challenges of technology; curriculum challenges; lack of adequate resources; and poverty".

In this study, inclusive education is the societal goal of achieving access to quality basic education for all children. The study is grounded in the following tenet of Liang's theory of education: (i) Education should be localised - Liang believes that rural education should be tailored to meet the needs of the local communities' contexts, such as considering their cultural traditions and lifestyles. Furthermore, Liang advocates for integrating education and rural life, making educational activities a natural part of the community (Wen & Wu, 2023). Generally, rural areas are known to suffer from poor provision of services, poverty, illiteracy, etc. To understand the educational ramifications of these social problems, we need to use a lens that would allow us to view education in a rural context without comparing it to the suburbs. Therefore, this theory allowed us to ask, "What factors inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa?". We selected this theory because it has been used by Van den Stock (2023) in their study advocating for reforming rural circumstances

To understand how the rurality of a school affects the implementation of an inclusive curriculum, we used the theory of curriculum implementation. Although this theory is commonly used for discussing pure curriculum implementation matters, however, it provides room for discussing the implementation of other educational initiatives in school contexts. Hence, it is selected to discuss the implementation of inclusiveness in rural settings. This theory elevates three constructs: (i) Profile of Implementation, (ii) Capacity to Support Innovation, and (iii) Support from Outside Agencies (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). However, in this study, we only adopted the second construct (Capacity to support innovation) because it complements the purpose of this study.

The tenet of "Capacity to Support Innovation" seeks to analyse the determinants of influencing the successful adoption of novel ideas and practices in educational settings, such as schools. It is essential to acknowledge that schools possess varying capacity levels to implement specific innovations. The indicators that may reflect this capacity can be classified into four primary categories: physical resources, teacher-related factors, learner-related factors, and the overall ecology and management of the school environment. Additionally, the theory maintains that there must be an alignment between the four factors if a school is to achieve positive outcomes by implementing an initiative such as inclusive education.

This is critical because any misalignment can cripple any intervention, such as when a school lacks the necessary physical structure and related resources to implement inclusive education or when the teachers or school management lack the necessary skills and will to implement an intervention (Johnson et al., 2000). Furthermore, (Rogan & Grayson, 2003) maintain that learners' background and the support they receive from home can enable or hinder the implementation of an initiative like inclusive education as it is heavily multi-stakeholder reliant.

Methods

We have employed the qualitative research approach along with the interpretive research paradigm. Moreover, a multiple-case research design was used to guide the study. We

opted for these methods as they provided room for us to explore complex issues experienced by teachers in their quest to implement inclusive education (Coombs, 2022). A purposive sampling method was used to select the best participants for this study. It enabled us to select three rural primary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province, specifically targeting mainstream schools. Eleven Foundation Phase teachers were sampled from the three selected schools. Data was collected using in-depth structured interviews. The collected data was analysed using the thematic data analysis method. Through this method, we followed the six analysis phases: we familiarised ourselves with the data, generated initial codes, searched for themes, reviewed the themes, defined the themes, and wrote up this report (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Upon concluding this process, two themes emerged: (i) Enablers to the implementation of inclusive education in rural schools and (ii) Inhibitors to the implementation of inclusive education in rural schools. Before conducting this study, all the relevant permissions and ethical protocols were acquired and observed, including ensuring that all participants sign an informed consent form and that they are always kept anonymous.

Results

Our study explored teachers' views on the factors that inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The following themes guided the discussions of our findings:

Theme 1: Enablers to the implementation of inclusive education in rural schools

This theme captured factors teachers consider enabling their efforts to implement inclusive education. The theme produced two sub-themes, namely, Inclusive education workshops and Informal curriculum differentiation

Sub-theme 1. Inclusive education workshops

The participants acknowledged receiving pieces of training on inclusive education through workshops. They commended the DBE for providing such services because some had never been exposed to IE-related training at their tertiary levels. The following teachers captured the story of workshops: Teacher 1 from school B and Teacher 1 from school C.

"Okay, they come to train us how we must teach those learners with learning barriers. For those with eyesight problems, we must ensure that in the classroom, they must sit in front" (T1B)

A similar sentiment was expressed by T1C, maintaining that the cascade method is used to conduct workshops on inclusive education for them.

"The Department of Education normally pilots some schools, then, from the piloted schools, only one person per school goes for some minimal training, and they come back and share the information with all of us".

All the teachers reported greater awareness of inclusive education due to training provided through workshops organised by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). This highlights the DBE's efforts to educate all teachers about inclusion. While teachers have praised the workshops for their training value, they have also expressed concerns that the workshops may be ineffective to some extent. We have identified this as an inhibiting factor in the next theme.

Sub-theme 2. Informal curriculum differentiation

We labelled this an informal curriculum differentiation because teachers indicated that they judge from their experiences which learners need the differentiated curriculum without consulting with any policy or legislation. Teachers indicated that they make sure the curriculum is accessible to all learners by differentiating how they present and assess it. When we asked how they include learners experiencing barriers to learning, the teachers indicated that they include them by tailor-making the curriculum instructions specifically for learners experiencing barriers to learning. They also indicated that parents should be involved where possible so the learners can be given attention at home and school. In this regard, teacher 2 from school B had this to say:

"The learner would be given their special work depending on their needs, and sometimes we give them extra work, which they are expected to do when they get home and are assisted by the people at home" (T2B).

Teacher 2 from school C maintained that they even modify the curriculum assessment to accommodate learners experiencing barriers to learning.

"Their assessment is different from that of their normal counterparts because others are being "verbal" like how we are doing it now. We do this to make sure that all learners get a chance to participate fully in the assessment process because we cannot assess them the same way" (T2C).

Although teachers do not seem to follow the necessary SIAS processes to modify the curriculum and assessment, however, their efforts demonstrate their urgency to ensure all learners have full access to quality education. These efforts genuinely benefit all learners because it has been proven countless times that the one-size-fits-all curriculum fails to cater to the needs of all learners (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023). Although the teachers discussed the enablers, there are inhibitors to their efforts to be inclusive.

Theme 2: Inhibitors to the implementation of inclusive education in rural schools

This theme discusses factors that inhibit the implementation of inclusive education in rural schools. Three sub-themes have emerged to support this theme: Ineffective inclusion workshops, Overcrowded classrooms, Lack of resources, and Poor Involvement of Parents.

Sub-theme 1. Ineffective inclusion workshops

While we initially stated that workshops enable the implementation of inclusion, some teachers criticised them as obstacles. The following issues have been noted regarding the workshops.

The workshops only provide theory without any practical

Teachers lamented that the workshops provided them with theory without any practice. They also lamented poor monitoring by the district officials. Hence, they doubt the practicality of the theory. One of the teachers compared IE workshops to subject content workshops. She maintained that in content workshops, they are given the theory that must be implemented in their classes, and later, a district subject specialist visits schools for monitoring reasons, but this is not happening with IE. T2A added that:

*"The department provides us with the information we need to implement IE, but the information they give us is only theoretical. They never give us an opportunity to do that thing practically. They simply think that we are going to do it. For me, workshops for IE are not the same as the workshops where we are being equipped to teach content in a classroom. We have been to universities before, and we have been given an opportunity to do practicals and have somebody who will critically look at us and tell us where we are right or wrong and where we have to rectify. But, when it comes to IE, our officials only come here and give us theory, and no one bothers himself or herself to check if this thing is practical or not" (*T2A*).*

The workshops are too short and less informative

Teachers also complained about the workshops' duration, stating that they were too short and sometimes implemented in an undesirable way. They are considered short because some may take a few hours and come once in many years, with some teachers being in practice for over 30 years but only attended once. They criticise how the workshops are implemented, where, in some instances, the cascading method is used, resulting in distorted information. A glimpse of how these workshops were provided was given by T2C.

*"Let us say we consider the selection of one teacher for training per school as a training; it is also a problem because the training is only for one day because you find that, you are going to attend it at around 13h00. They would register you, and you would be shown rooms. Then, the experts do introductions, and you will come the following day to be trained until mid-day; that is it, we are done. The problem starts when we are expected to come and share the information with the teachers in our respective schools about what happened at our training. You found that the information has been distorted" (*T2C*)*

Sub-theme 2. Overcrowded classrooms

Teachers in rural schools indicated that they find it challenging to implement IE because the classrooms are overcrowded. They complained

that, due to their big classroom sizes, they deem it difficult to provide special attention to learners experiencing barriers to learning. Unfortunately, this demoralises the teachers because it makes them feel like they are not doing enough to accommodate all the learners. T2A deliberated on how overcrowding defeats their efforts to be inclusive.

"*The issue of overcrowding, even though you might not like it, is a determining factor when implementing inclusive education at the classroom level. You cannot be able to give special attention to a child with a certain type of impairment if the class is overcrowded. I find it a very huge task to accommodate that learner. We try all means to accommodate them, but I feel like what we are doing is not enough" (*T2A*).*

All eleven interviewed teachers expressed dissatisfaction with this issue, which has been discussed by researchers such as Meier & West (2020) and Matshipi et al. (2017). However, the state has ignored their concerns; instead, it continues implementing policies to improve schools while neglecting the underlying classroom problems. Moreover, it is important to note that the scarcity of resources also contributes to Overcrowded classrooms.

Sub-theme 3. Lack of resources

Teachers complained about the lack of resources as one of the inhibitors to implementing IE in rural schools. They lamented that the conditions in their schools force them to deal with all learners the same way, and in extreme instances, they are forced to use the wrong resources on the wrong learners. This was captured in the utterances of T2B:

*"I think they were supposed to give us enough resources and materials that would allow us to easily deal with learners facing barriers to learning because now we are expected to deal with these learners as if we are dealing with learners who are not facing barriers to learning and that becomes a burden to us as teachers. The department is always reluctant to provide us with the materials. Then, we would be forced to use the materials meant for learners who are not facing barriers to learning, and that's wrong because they are not giving us enough support" (*T2B*).*

T3C shared the same sentiment. Maintaining that even the schools' infrastructure makes access to curriculum difficult for some learners. The teacher expressed concerns about the safety and health of the learners being compromised by the conditions of the school.

"You know, even these chalkboards are not suitable for learners who are asthmatic or those who have sinus problems, but we must make use of what we have. Not long ago, we had a learner who was in a wheelchair, but it was difficult for him to move around because the school has no ramps. This is concerning, especially since we are labelled as a full-service school. I do not even want to mention the condition of the toilets; it is really bad!"

The issue of inadequate infrastructure and limited resources is a long-standing problem in most rural schools. What makes this situation worse is that it has become normalised, leaving the teachers helpless. This normalisation may imply that these challenges will never be addressed.

Sub-theme 4. Poor Involvement of Parents

Teachers indicated that most parents are sceptical of the fact that their children face barriers to learning. This is even worse if the child needs to be transferred to a special school because some parents block the process by refusing to sign the release documents. In such cases, the school would be forced to keep the child, although it would not be in the child's best interest. This teachers' frustration was shared by T3B, who maintained that:

*"Sometimes we screen the learner and then realise that the learner needs special education. We then call the parent of the learner, but if the parent refuses to let the learner be referred, then we can't do it. So, the parent is the one who has a final say. It's a serious challenge because most parents of learners with special needs don't agree to let their children be referred to special schools" (*T3B*).*

All the interviewed teachers expressed concern about the poor involvement of parents, which significantly hinders their efforts to support learners whose challenges require parental engagement.

Discussion

The findings of this study are demarcated into two themes: inhibitors and enablers of the implementation of IE in South African rural schools, and the discussion follows the same fashion.

Enablers to the implementation of IE in rural areas

Teachers elevated two factors they consider enabling their efforts to implement IE in their rural classrooms: IE workshops and informal curriculum differentiation. The first factor is the IE workshop. All the interviewed teachers indicated that they received training on IE through workshops arranged by the DBE at some point in their careers. Hence, these workshops are key as they glimpse what IE is about and how it must be implemented. Moreover, it provided the necessary skills for teachers to identify and support learners experiencing barriers to learning in their classrooms.

The implementation of IE workshops is also meant to respond to the biggest concern of teachers' lack of IE skills across the globe. This problem has been reported by a lot of researchers across the globe, such as Materechera (2020), who maintains that although teachers are willing to implement IE, this becomes a mountainous exercise if they do not have the prowess to do so. We agree with Materechera (2020) because almost any intervention in the education fraternity is bound to fail if the key stakeholders are not well-trained for its implementation. Therefore, through these workshops, teachers are equipped with relevant skills to identify and easily support learners experiencing barriers to learning (Ndlovu et al., 2024).

Although we established this finding in a rural area, it would be immaterial to make it exclusive for rural schools in Limpopo Province because the same finding had been established in other settings across South Africa by (Dalton et al., 2012; Ntombela, 2011), and beyond the borders (Loreman et al., 2016; Peters, 2002). All the researchers who have established this finding strongly suggested that it is the only way to deal with less trained in-service teachers. It is heart-warming to see that at least the policies are implemented to protect the rights and satisfy the needs of learners experiencing barriers to learning. This also feeds into the 4th Sustainable Development (SDG) goal: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2023). The significance of equipping teachers to implement an intervention is also emphasised by the theory of curriculum implementation (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). This theory argues that teachers must be thoroughly trained to implement an intervention that can inspire their motivation. Therefore, the workshops play a massive role in implementing inclusive education in rural settings.

The second factor is the informal differentiation of the curriculum. Teachers indicated that they differentiate the curriculum to make it accessible to all the learners in their classrooms. They do this by tailoring the curriculum to the observable needs of the learners. Furthermore, they also modify the curriculum assessment process to cater to the needs of learners experiencing barriers. According to Tomlinson and Jarvis (2023, p.599), "Differentiation provides a framework for responding to differences in students' current and developing levels of readiness, their learning profiles, and their interests, to optimise the match between students and learning opportunities". The thumb rule is that for a formal differentiation of the curriculum, teachers should properly screen the learners and keep proper records (Dijkstra et al., 2016; Cavilla, 2014). However, when requested, teachers could not provide any records of screened learners, necessitating curriculum differentiation. Hence, we labelled it an informal differentiation of the curriculum.

Although teachers may be doing this informally, they must, however, be commended for their resilience because the benefits of this are widely reported, not only in rural areas but across the country and the world. This finding is consistent with the assertions of Kabtyimer and Wei (2024), who maintained that teachers sometimes tailor the curriculum content based on the various needs of the learners. What sets this finding apart from ours is that this process must be formally executed by following the necessary steps, which in our context is not happening. This is a problem because the learners who experience

barriers to learning can move along the school grades without proper profiles. This usually results in learners being neglected if they encounter a teacher who fails to identify them correctly. Therefore, learner profiling must be given more attention when implementing IE, per the SIAS recommendations. Nonetheless, the effort and strides made by teachers cannot be overlooked.

The efforts made by teachers show that although teachers in rural areas may be having challenges, they can localise their efforts and approaches to cater to the needs of the learners in their rural contexts. This is highly advocated by Shuming's (1893-1988) theory of rural education, which maintains that education should be localised to easily cater to the needs of the learners in the context of the community in which the school is located (Wen & Wu, 2023). It is heart-warming to see that teachers in rural areas can make IE work despite the inhibitors they are facing. This shows that if IE can work in rural areas, then schools with advanced services will have no excuse for not implementing it. According to the theory of curriculum implementation, teacher resilience is the product of capacity development, as discussed in the workshops above (Lumadi, 2014).

Inhibitors to the implementation of IE in rural areas

The participants lamented that although they put in efforts to implement IE, they are inhibited by factors such as unproductive workshops, overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and poor involvement of parents. Some of the teachers indicated that although they consider workshops to be one of the enablers, but how they are presented to them makes it harder for them to gain an in-depth understanding of IE, which makes them inhibitors. Furthermore, teachers showed that the workshops only provide theory without adequate practice to test the efficacy of the theory. This is unlike the subject content workshops because they are usually followed up by monitoring to check if teachers are doing what they are expected to do. Moreover, teachers lamented that the IE workshops are usually short and fail to address the key aspects.

Although these complaints are profound, it is critical to note that based on the SIAS policy prescripts, the team required to conduct the workshops is not mandated to go beyond what they are doing. Maebana and Themane (2019) argued that the problem is that there is no clear cut of what should be included in the workshops. This is what Wen and Wu (2023) of Liang Shuming's (1893-1988) theory of rural education warned us about, maintaining that education should be localised. We are raising this argument because the workshops are not context-sensitive. Therefore, for these workshops to be fruitful, the organisers need to thoroughly analyse the context of the schools so that they can deliver context-based content. Teachers further complained about rural schools being overcrowded and less resourced.

In South Africa, some of the reasons rural schools are overcrowded and less resourced are that one rural school is required to serve big communities, the DBE takes a very long time to fix damaged schools, and school principals push to increase their school enrolments as that enhances their salaries (Matshipi et al., 2017). This issue is not unique to rural schools; they are also present in townships and some suburban public schools (Schlebusch et al., 2023). These issues in rural schools are not only a South African problem but a worldwide one. The same problem has been reported in countries such as the USA and India (Rude & Miller, 2018; Rose et al., 2021).

The observation that even rural areas in economically advanced countries are struggling with inadequate funding and resources indicates that the underlying issues may not be strictly economic but could stem from a lack of commitment from the state. This situation makes it challenging for teachers to effectively address the diverse needs of all the learners in their classrooms (Ndlovu, 2022). It is nearly impossible for a teacher to fully understand the needs of over sixty learners in a single class, contributing to the poor implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) in rural schools. Another pressing issue highlighted by teachers is the lack of parental involvement.

Teachers indicated that most parents struggle to accept that their children need extra help. We believe this denial could be exacerbated by the notion that most rural parents are illiterate (Williams et al., 2023; Nita et al., 2021). We agree with this view, as it was once defended by Yulianti et al. (2022) that parents in urban areas are more

active in their children's schoolwork than parents in rural areas because most of them are literate. This is proven by the fact that rural parents check their children's books way less than urban parents, and the same goes for meeting attendance (Hasnat & Kabir, 2024). However, Liang Shuming (1893-1988) maintains that to have a clear view of education in rural areas, we should localise it by avoiding comparing it with education in other settings of different circumstances. We agree with Liang Shuming that parental involvement in rural areas should not be viewed the same as in urban areas. In rural areas, many parents work long hours, and other learners often live with their grandparents. So, a context-based view of this problem is necessary.

On the other hand, the theory of curriculum implementation suggests that challenges faced by a school when implementing an intervention are a true reflection of its Capacity to Support Innovation. Furthermore, the capacity could change over time if more support is provided. This is the case because, according to Malcolm (2000, p.91), "teacher and school management factors may well be the largest contributors to the Capacity to Support Innovation construct, at least at the early stages of implementation". Therefore, for inclusive education to succeed in rural schools, we should question the Capacity of the school's management and teachers to support it.

Conclusion

The study explored teachers' views on the factors that inhibit and enable the implementation of IE in rural primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. It was motivated by poor implementation of inclusive education in rural schools. The results certified our assumption that some of the challenges experienced in the process of implementing IE in rural schools may be caused by the absence of rural teachers' voices on what is working and what is not working in rural schools. Furthermore, the results showed that teachers are willing to implement inclusive education; this can be determined from methods such as curriculum differentiation and attendance of IE workshops. However, their quest is inhibited by challenges such as the poor implementation of the IE workshops, overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and poor parental involvement. These inhibitors are also responsible for the low teachers' morale regarding implementing IE in rural areas because the challenges make IE seem impractical.

Recommendations

Firstly, the national education stakeholders responsible for implementing IE in rural schools should pay attention to the normalised issues such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of resources, and inadequately trained teachers before they can start discussing the implementation of IE. We are raising only this argument because these are the factors of which the DBE has full control. Secondly, teachers need to self-develop through familiarisation with the relevant IE policies (SIAS, White paper 6, and CSTL) because some of the issues they complain about are being done per the policy guidelines, such as providing workshops. Thirdly, IE interventionists should consider screening the contexts of the schools before implementing the intervention; this will help implement context-sensitive IE interventions. This is the case because rural teachers, as foot soldiers, know and understand their contexts, and roping them in could help policy developers to be context-sensitive.

Limitations

The study was limited to three primary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province. Therefore, the findings may not be generalised to a larger population.

Disclosure

All the authors listed in this study have made significant contributions to the write-up of this manuscript.

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