Internal Teacher Support in a Special School for Learners with Hearing Impairment in Gauteng

Ntsoaki Teresa Mokala and Maximus Monaheng Sefotho
Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Corrresponding author: ntsoaki.mokala@wits.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The current paper discusses teachers' understanding of the level of internal support they receive from the school for learners with hearing impairment in Gauteng. The study employed interpretivist paradigm to illustrate how the teachers experience support from different specialists in the school. The study purposely selected nine teachers to hear their stories of the level of support they receive from the school. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed as instruments of data collection, and the data were analysed thematically. Analysis denotes support in the form of supportive heads, specialists and their roles, in-service training, collaboration, the use of team approach and a need for psychosocial services. The conclusion provides strategies that teachers in special schools for learners with hearing impairment could employ to support one another and effectively collaborate with other specialists in the school.

Keywords*: special education, hearing impairment, collaboration, in-service training, pedagogy*

INTRODUCTION

The South African education system has a history of discrimination, segregation and marginalisation (Lenta, 2016). Deaf education is no exception to this as the schools that were initially set up depended on the skin colour as well as the ethnic groups (Magongwa, 2020). As such, schools for the white learners with hearing impairment had more resources than schools for the learners with hearing impairment of colour. As a result, schools for the Black learners with hearing impairment have been neglected over a long period (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). As time progressed, the issues of education for the Deaf were revised; hence, the Constitution and the White Paper articulate that the use of sign language must be utilized in schools as a medium of instruction for the learners with hearing impairment (Magongwa, 2020; Makoelle, 2012; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). As a result, services for the learners with hearing impairment improved and the legislation on the education of learners with hearing impairment was introduced. This opened equal access for such learners with the aim to empower and accommodate them accordingly (Bell, Carl & Swart, 2016).

With so many debates surrounding the best method of teaching learners with hearing impairment, the democratically elected government revised different policies to respond to use and recognises South African Sign Language (SASL) as the language that should be used in teaching learners with hearing impairment (Magongwa, 2020). It is important to note that South African special school for learners with hearing impairment use different approaches to teaching learners with hearing impairment. Some schools make use of sign language as a medium of instruction, while others, like the one the current was carried out, make use of spoken language. This approach therefore calls for the use of different assistive devices to amplify learners' hearing abilities (Farooq, 2015). According to Nair (2015), learners with hearing impairment use different methods of communication and assistive

devices, which include hearing aids, cochlear implants, speech, speech/lip reading, bone anchored hearing aid and other applicable assistive listening devices, or a combination of these.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) is the starting point in support of equality, democratic values of human dignity and freedom through the Bill of Rights. Reference to education, the constitution aims to redress the inequalities of the past within one education system through inclusive education measurers. The principle of education for all is further encrypted within the South African Schools Act of 1997. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) is a founding document for inclusive education is South Africa. Mokala (2017, p. 6) supports that "…the White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (DoE, 2001) is the first official document that introduced inclusive education as a discourse and policy in South Africa." Mapepa and Magano (2018) observe that since 1994, the democratic South African government has faced the challenge of providing quality education for its multicultural population. Consequently, one of the mandates pursued include the aim to address the right to education for all. The DoE (2001) echoes the same sentiments by stipulating that all children with disabilities have rights to education and training.

As such, all children have the right to enjoy a full service of education and maintain a high level of self-dependence and social participation. This is further encrypted in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) to ensure equity for all citizens as Section 29(1) states: "Everyone has the right to basic education including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible." Unfortunately, some learners do not have equal access to education due to their impairments as they face challenges such as marginalisation, exclusion and oppression within the education system. The Education White Paper indicates that inclusive education is established to address such issues as it is about maximising the participation of all learners in the curriculum of education institutions and uncovering and minimising the barriers to learning (DoE, 2001, p.16).

BACKGROUND

The Deaf community in South Africa emerged from a charity case view of disability, where churches opened many schools; and this community has been evolving. Deaf education has been embedded within the segregationist and marginalising practices dominated by racial discrimination, because the South African education system has a history of racial discrimination and marginalising practices (Bell et al, 2016). The schools that were initially set up depended on the skin colour as well as ethnic groups. As such, schools for the white learners with hearing impairment were more resourced than schools for the learners with hearing impairment of colour. As a result, schools for the Black learners with hearing impairment have been neglected over a long period. As time progressed, the issues of education for the Deaf were revised. Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, Koskela and Okkolin (2017) explain that equity and redress are the cornerstone principles of South African education policies. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) and the White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) articulate that the use of sign language must be utilized in schools as a medium of instruction for the learners with hearing impairment. As a result, services for the learners with hearing impairment were improved and the legislation on the education of learners with hearing impairment was introduced. This opened equal access for such learners, thus empowering and accommodating them

accordingly (Engelbrecht, 2020; Engelbrecht et al., 2017).

There are controversial debates surrounding the best method of teaching learners with hearing impairment. The democratically elected government revised different policies to respond to the recognition of SASL as the language that should be used in teaching learners with hearing impairment. The change of the language policy in South Africa include emanated from the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996). It is worth noting that the language policy in South Africa is a never-ending dilemma, and SASL is no exception to this (Reagan, 2019). Educational issues in the South African context are entangled in a debate on which language must be used as a medium of instruction. SASL is surrounded by several controversies because it is viewed as a minority language. On a more practical level, Reagan (2019) articulates that The Constitution of the Republic South Africa recognises a total number of eleven official languages and SASL is excluded from this list. However, Chapter 1(6) 5 of the Constitution makes provision through the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) to promote and create conditions for the development and use of;

i. All official languages;

ii. The Khoi, Nama, and San languages; and

iii. Sign language

Reagan (2019) further notes that under PanSALB, the National Language Board was created specifically for SASL to pursue two objectives: (I) initiating and implementing strategic projects aimed at creating awareness, identifying needs and promoting SASL, (ii) identifying and funding projects aimed at developing SASL.

The education sector too acknowledges the use of SASL for learners with hearing impairment. The South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 mentions the use of SASL as an important consideration for language policy in public schools. Chapter 2, the Constitution further asserts, “Everyone has a right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where the education is reasonably practicable” (29(2)). The South African Schools Act further elaborates, “A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school” (chapter 2. 6(4). Against this background, it is the aim of this study therefore, to determine the extent to which the use of SASL is a medium of instruction for learners with hearing impairment.

Previous research conducted both nationally and internationally, show that teachers are supportive of inclusive practices (Makoelle, 2012). However, there are some findings which indicate that teachers experience difficulties in implementing inclusive practices in their teaching due to factors such as inexperience, limited resources, lack of training, inadequate knowledge of legislation and low confidence towards inclusion (Makoelle, 2012; Walton & Rusznyak; Mosia, 2014). Contrary to this, the findings of the current study indicate that teachers are able to include all learners in their teaching due to the support they get from the school at all levels. Walton (2017) opines that for successful implementation of inclusive education, the systems leaders and the school must be supportive to the teachers. This calls for a policy that is supportive of inclusive education structures and practices. Therefore, there must be a good relationship between policy, law and the school leadership. Supportive environment fosters a culture of inclusion. Engelbrecht, Nel, Nel & Tlale (2015) echo the same sentiments by indicating that the South African education system needs to be supportive of teachers for successful implementation of inclusive education.

Ntinda, Thwala and Tfusi (2019) conducted a study on the experiences of the teachers of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students in a special needs school in Eswatini. This qualitative research study used interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis to generate data. The study purposely selected eighteen teachers who teach Deaf or Hard-of-hearing learners. The study revealed that teachers experienced gaps in their competency to teach in mainstream classes as they felt that their training did not adequately equip them. Additionally, "variation in sign language impacting learner engagement hindered teacher's communication with the deaf and hard-of hearing students and their parents" (Ntinda et al., 2019, p. 79). Furthermore, the teachers indicated that they need support in the form of collaboration with specialists, have assessment instruments, consultation and language needs. Like the current study, Ntinda et al.'s (2019) study was conducted in a special school for learners with hearing impairment.

Another study was conducted by Kelly, McKinney and Swift (2020) entitled "Strengthening teacher education to support deaf learners". The focus of the study was on the needs of learners with hearing impairment "and use the findings as a basis from which to strengthen their education" (Kelly et al., 2020, p. 1). The findings of the study revealed that teachers did not receive sufficient training to teach learners with hearing impairment. Therefore, they were did not have necessary skills to address unique language and needs of deaf learners. In the study, the researchers have strengthened the view that teachers of learners with hearing impairment do not have SASL skills as a prerequisite to teach in special schools for learners with hearing impairment. For this reason, it seems they lack necessary language skills and pedagogic practices which are needed to address the needs of learners with hearing impairment (Kelly, et al., 2020). Teachers acknowledged that the Department of Education provides short training workshops to close this gap, but they find the training insufficient to equip them with the necessary skills (Kelly, et al., 2020; Magongwa, 2020; Mcilroy, 2017).

Teaching learners with hearing impairment can be very challenging for teachers, more especially when dealing with learners with unique language needs. Therefore, there is a need for support for teachers. Support entails getting on-going in-service training, collaboration and availability of resources. Working in a collaborative supporting environment helps teachers to do better. Against this backdrop, the article discussed teachers' experiences of internal support they receive from the school. It further investigated how teachers collaborate with the specialists and the role-played by the entire specialist in to support teaching programs that help to address all learners' need. Furthermore, the aim of the study was to investigate the role of specialists such as audiologists and therapist, and the impact of the support they offer to the teachers in their effective pedagogical teaching practices. The study used interviews and focus group discussions for data collection. In this paper, data was obtained from telephonic and face-to-face interviews as well as online focus group discussions with the teachers. The impetus of this study arose from a PhD study conducted in a special school for learners with hearing impairment on understating teachers' narratives of their teaching experiences in a special school. The following section features the theoretical framework.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We approached the current study through Florian's framework of inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2012; 2014; 2015) which recognises the need for teachers to see difference in learning as a strength rather than a dilemma in teaching. This frame of reference was used in reasoning,

reflecting and exploring how teachers narrate their experiences of support in a special school for learners with hearing impairment. The framework affirms that teachers should be committed to continuing professional development as a way of developing more inclusive practices (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This is an important tenet for the current study as it focused on teachers' narratives about the level of support they receive from the school, which is a basis for their development.

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) are of the view that inclusive pedagogies are the provision of rich learning opportunities for all at the same time, rejecting the notion of marking some learners as different. In line with the focus of the current study, it is imperative that teachers should strive to accommodate all learners regardless of their difference. These concepts enabled this study to explore the teachers' experiences of internal support from the school as they teach learners with hearing impairment. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011, p. 815) have proposed for a new way of viewing inclusion as understanding, 'how teachers enrich and extend what is ordinarily available in a classroom lesson or activity…' This view deals away with the traditional believe that certain learners can perform better than others can, as this old view restricts the ability of those who have been labelled as needing intervention. This is relevant for the current study as the support they receive helps to enrich learning environments and assisting learners with hearing impairment to reach their full potential. The concept of proving rich learning environments was consequently used in this study to examine the impact of the internal support teachers receive on the teaching and learning processes. In this study, considering this theoretical lens, teachers are expected to develop rich learning environments, which are available to everyone, which becomes more visible when they receive internal support. It is this understanding of Florian's inclusive pedagogy that was used in this study. Therefore, in the case of this study, providing conducive learning environments for all learners becomes possible through the support that the teachers receive in the form of collaboration, in-service training and availability of resources. The succeeding section outlines the research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study sought to explore teachers' narratives of the level of support they receive in teaching learners with hearing impairment in a special school in Gauteng.

The following research questions guided the study:

(i) What kind of support do teachers receive from the school?

(ii) How does the internal support teachers affect teaching and learning?

(iii) How do specialists in the school support teachers in their effective pedagogical teaching practices?

RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The current paper was framed qualitatively from an interpretivist paradigm. Researchers working with people mostly use qualitative inquiry. Macmillan and Schumacher's (2010) believe that making use of qualitative research methodology can provide a detailed description and analysis of a practice, process or event. As a methodology, qualitative research accepts people's perceptions of the world while they collect, analyse and interpret data. It seems relevant to adhere to this methodology in this study because our interest was on arguing for the understanding of a supportive environment for educating learners with hearing

impairment in South Africa, thus creating our own interpretations (Maree, 2016). Qualitative research was deemed fit for the study as it is mostly used by researchers pursuing case study research (Macmillan & Schumacher; 2010; Sefotho, 2013). Data triangulation was acquired with different data collection techniques. Furthermore, the use these two methods of data collection ensured trustworthiness of qualitative research. The use of interviews and focus group discussions further increased data triangulation for the study as different opinions were revealed about teachers' experiences. Khetoa and Motsei (2021) argue that making use of two research techniques to investigating a phenomenon maximises both accuracy and reliability of findings. The study employed purposive sampling technique because the teachers identified were 'likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 326). It is called purposive sampling because the researcher has a choice on whom to include as the sample of the study. The teachers who participated in the current study were selected because they were willing to take part in the study and had experience and knowledge needed for the purpose of the study

In the sections that follow, we present the design and the methods used to collect data from one school.

Research design

This is a qualitative research study, which used a single case study research design. A case study research is a type of design in which the researcher is interested in what can be learned from a particular casein case study research design, researchers "immerse themselves in the activities of a single person or a small number of people in order obtain an intimate familiarity with their social world…" (De Vos, De Hauw, Van der Heijden, 2011, p. 320). The it is important to note that qualitative research aims to make sense of people's lived experiences by making sense of the events they experience (Yin, 2014).We adopted an interpretive lens of a case study since it granted us a chance to understand the subjective view of the teachers in a special school setting. A case study approach also afforded us a chance to get involved personally with the participating teachers by listening to their stories about the level of support they receive from the school. In what follows, we discuss the procedures followed in the study.

Procedures

The first step towards this research study was to apply for ethics clearance from the University of Johannesburg. Permission to conduct the research was granted with protocol number **SEM 1-2021-04.** The Gauteng Department of Education also granted permission to conduct the research study in the chosen school. Consent to participate in the study was also granted by the participants by signing. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) consent to conduct with the potential participants mainly protects and respects the rights of the participants. Hammersley (2013) explains that consent informed consent is all about access to documents, information, people and the research site. Kumar (2011) is of the opinion that signing consent to participate in a study implies that the participants understand their role in the study. Prior to signing the forms, the participants received information letter that outlined clearly the objectives of the study as well what participating in the study entailed. Most of the interviews were conducted telephonically and those that were conducted face to face followed all COVID-19 health protocol, using semi-structured interviews. Data was recorded digitally and later transcribed verbatim. In collecting data, I followed an interview schedule that guided me to ask the same questions to all the participants. This included a list of primary questions on

which I made follow up on depending on each participant's response. The first author collected all data and transcribed it. Both interviews and focus group questions were open-ended and sought to gain information about teachers' narratives of their teaching experiences in a special school for learners with hearing impairment in Gauteng. At the beginning of each interview, teachers were thanked for agreeing to be part of the study completing and the format of the interview was explained (this includes information on the anticipated length of the interview and permission to audio record the conversations), and the interviewer informed teachers that they could end the interview at any time. The interviewer then confirmed that the study has followed all necessary protocol and their safety is a priority.

In an effort to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the identity of the participating teachers was kept anonymous and pseudonyms were used. According to Maree (2016) to keep the anonymity of the participants, the researcher must promise not to share the information about the participants.

Participants and the research site

The participants of this study comprised nine teachers from a school for children with hearing impairment. The Children's Communication Centre (the Centre) is a therapy centre and clinically driven pre-school, specialising in the development of listening, speech, language and communication skills for children with significant hearing, speech, language and communication challenges. The focus of the school is to provide a facility with small group, clinically driven pre-school; intensive therapy; and early intervention programmes for children with significant speech, language, hearing and communication challenges. The school focuses on teaching learners to acquire speech with the use of hearing aids to enhance their hearing ability.

Data collection

Data was collected through two methods; telephonic interviews and online focus group discussions. Palaiologou, Needham and Male (2016) define an interviews as qualitative data collection instruments that seek to generate knowledge in relation to a topic of interest and situate data in participants' social settings through the process of interchanging viewpoints among people of interest. People of interest in the current study were teachers of learners with hearing impairment in a special school in Gauteng. Interviews were deemed necessary for the current study as they attempted to understand the world from the teachers' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Willing (2013) defines focus group discussion as a qualitative data collection instrument in which researchers have group discussions with the participants who are the source of data for the study. The purpose of conducting focus group interviews was to bring the teachers together in one group, to discuss and share ideas about their teaching practices, and the level of support they receive from the school as they teach learners with hearing impairment (Hennink, 2013).

Data analysis

Analysis of data for this study followed Creswell's (2013) six-step process of qualitative data analysis. Data analyses were based on procedures outlined by Berg (2007). The first step was to manage data through sorting and organising it for data analysis. Secondly, we read the transcription. The next step was to classify data through codes, manually. Following this, described the themes to make sense of data and finally interpreted the meaning of each theme identified. The researchers transcribed data from the interviews and focus group discussions. The results if the

study were first coded and inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the codes. This process was guided by Charmaz (2011) advises that coding must be thorough Following this, inductive themes were developed and the interpretation was guided by the research questions.

Ethical considerations

The University of Johannesburg granted ethical clearance for this study with protocol number **SEM 1-2021-041.**The Gauteng Department of Education granted permission to the principal researcher to conduct the study at the chosen special school for learners with hearing impairment. Teachers signed consent forms to indicate their willingness to take part in the study. The participants' anonymity was guaranteed and no participants were coerced in taking part in the study. Furthermore, the participants were reassured that their participation in the study was voluntary and they could withdraw anytime without being penalised.

RESULTS

The following themes emerged from data analysis: supportive heads, specialists and their roles, in-service training, collaboration, whole team approach and availability of resources.

Supportive heads

Majority of the teachers indicated that they get a lot of support from the heads. They argued that the support they receive is very helpful. This is captured in the following verbatim extracts.

We have phenomenal heads-The head of school is a speech therapist, she is very helpful (Participant A, Lines 96-97)

*I get support in that our heads are involved in each and every case…they give suppor*t (Participant B, Lines 335-336)

Specialists and their roles

The findings the study indicate that the school has different specialists ranging from the audiologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapist. Different specialists have a range or roles they play in supporting the teachers and carrying out support for all learners. Learners receive individualised support according to their needs. The following summaries summarise the collective views on the roles of specialists:

We have occupational therapists, and physios who gives us a lot of training (Participant A, Lines 107-108).

Audiologist train us, whoever is on expert in their field will come and train us and if we need help, we shout (Participant A, Lines 111-112).

Therefore, when a child comes to the school, they are assigned a therapist; speech therapist. If they need an OT or physio or any additional therapist, we then usually refer. We do have different therapists in the school, or they can go to outside therapist. It is either they get a physiotherapist, or an occupational therapist and or physiotherapist. It is necessary they go for an eye test, or they go for hearing, whatever needs to be done. And we also have the Centre head who oversees everything so the speech therapists are the team leaders, team managers, so if there is anything or problem with the child behaviour or anything so the first person you will talk to, or who would be contacting other people would be the team leader, speech therapist (Participant E, Lines 973-982).

In-service training

It appears that in-service training plays a significant role in helping teachers to effectively teach and address all learner's needs. Data from the individual interviews revealed that teachers receive training on topics specific to the needs of the learners with hearing impairment. The following are

some of the teachers' comments on in-service training:

We have in-service or onsite training very often (Participant B, Line 337).

Our head gives us many language-training sessions (Participant A, Lines 105-106).

Audiologist train us, whoever is on expert in their field will come and train us and if we need help, we shout (Participant A, Lines 110-112).

We have in-service training for both the teachers and therapists so we do get some people to come in to do some in-service training, but other therapists do on their speciality – speech, language, OT , physio etc. , example Auditory verbal speech therapist will do presentation to enhance their understanding how they do-teachers and therapist (Participant E, Lines 1076-1080).

Collaboration

The data from individual interviews revealed that collaboration is one the strength in a school for learners with hearing impairment. The teachers mentioned that working collaboratively helps them to have different views, which would not be possible when working alone. Again, collaboration helps one to be open to criticism and try new ways of teaching. This is evident from verbatim excerpts captured below:

I think we all support each other (Participant A, Line77).

You know we lean on each other so yah, we are very professional (Participant A, lines, 98-99).

We work together; there is a lot of collaboration (Participant A, Lines 210-211).

Collaboration helps because sometimes you find that you have your own way of dealing with things and it may be different with what another person does. Therefore, when you sit down and listen, what other people are saying, it also helps you to grow and improve from what they are saying. You learn, in a way to deal with kids, how you communicate, how you warm to you, how you get things done dealing with difficult kids, how to calm them, all that so allow yourself that space to learn and grow as a person (Participant F, Lines 1318-1323).

I like the inter-disciplinary work, which is a lot of fun. I find it very interesting, you know working with children with complex developmental disorders and working with other therapists, like the Occupational therapists, and the Physiotherapists and the other professionals like teachers and doctors. I find that very interesting and incredibly rewarding and exceptionally rewarding because we can look at the child holistically and treat them holistically. I think working with children is exceptionally rewarding and because of the far-reaching effects, you can have on the child (Participant H, Lines 1531-1538).

Whole team approach

The teachers share the conviction that to survive in this context, there is a need for a whole team approach. This means that on a regular basis, they meet and discuss all children's progress and any challenges that they may encounter. The teaching approach calls for teachers to work hand in hand with the audiologists, the speech therapists, physiotherapist, and class assistants. The comments made by the teacher sample suggest that working hand in hand helps them to holistically address learners' needs. This is captured in the verbatim excerpts below:

We pretty much get on with the whole group and they are all ready to help with anything (Participant A, Lines 100-101).

That is the strength we have in our school. It is a whole team approach- we have meetings once a week- involving all the kinds, we even have a WhatsApp group, so the kids have something with the or she will put it on the or audiologist or anybody. We always have constant communication with each other and we have a problem we solve it together. The OT will come sit in classroom with the physiotherapist and get some guidance. We also have speech therapists doing language once a week (Participant C, Lines 666-669).

When you are at a place like the Centre, where there is a real whole team approach between the teacher, the therapist, the doctors and the parents that you know when you have a system like that in place. The system is very well oiled and people respect each other and people really work for the benefit of the children (Participant H, Lines 1508-1512).

Need for socio-psychological services

Some of the teachers indicated that they are in need of socio-psychological support in the form of counselling. The conviction is that, dealing with learners with hearing impairment can be very demanding and stressful on their part. Therefore, they feel that the school should support them by proving counselling services to help them cope better and effectively teach and avoid burn out. This conviction is provided by the reasons provided below:

...so it is very overwhelming for the parents as well as teachers and I wish we could have at least one session of counselling. We all need that kind of support (Participant C, Lines 632-635).

I would like counselling for the teachers. Because you work very difficult cases, very difficult parents and you must need to get some things off chest. You do try to have some distance from the children but you do get attached to some of them and some of them have underlying problems and you know that this child might not even make it up to the age of 6 or so (FG, Participant C, Lines 1904-1909).*It is very much needed. We used to have one on site. We used to have a psychologist on site just to help it used to be very helpful because you could refer parents and children together and it was onsite and it was interconnected to the Centre* (FG, Participant B, Lines 1929-1932).

DISCUSSION

Results from the current study need a careful interpretation as the participants of the study were relatively a small sample and the findings may not be generalised. It is important to note that the experiences of the participants of the current study may not be a reflection of the experiences of teachers in special schools for learners in Gauteng or South Africa in general. Therefore, there is a need for a similar study with a larger population.

From the current study, teachers' narratives of the internal support they received from the school revealed that they did not experience any major challenges, which hinder the teaching and learning processes. This is because they got enough support, collaborate with different specialist and receive on-going in-service training. This is contrary to what many researchers found in their studies conducted with different teachers who teach learners with hearing impairment (Chake, 2018; Lehloa 2019; Majoro, 2021, Ntinda et al., 2019).

The findings indicate that teachers are in need of socio-psychological services such as counselling. This is contrary to what Chake's (2018) study found in his study where the teachers revealed that they had the support of a social worker who supported them to deal with their emotional challenges. Chake (2018, p. 47) adds further "Teachers also get help on how to deal with issues like breakdown when they are overwhelmed with work and personal problems."

The study further revealed that teachers collaborate with different specialists in the school. According to Mambo (2011, p. 34) "collaboration involves a partnership among many people to facilitate the implementation of inclusion." For instance, the collaboration of teachers, school administrators, parents, special education teachers, teacher aids, health workers, school board members, vocational teachers, and community resources is important". The results of this study contradict what Lehloa (2019) found. Lehloa's (2019) study revealed that there is lack of collaboration between the teachers and sign language interpreters working with them. "Teachers seem indifferent to learners' diversity, showing deficiencies in how the school organises itself for diversity. This means that teachers are unable to engage learners and follow their lead in their teaching" (Lehloa, 2019, p. 56). Equally, Majoro (2021) found that teachers do not have enough time to collaborate with sign language interpreters. The findings of the current study revealed that teachers also collaborate with the parents in an effort to allow for a close relationship between the school and the teachers. This according to the participants allows for a carry-over between the school and the home environment.

Another factor that came up from the findings of the currents study is the issue of whole-team approach. The teachers expressed that their approach to teaching and design of teaching and therapy programmes is whole team.

In-service training is another finding that emerged from the study. The teachers indicated that they receive on-going training sessions on different issues that are context specific. This allows them to respond accordingly to the needs of the learners and provide supportive teaching programmes. Contrary to the findings of the current study, a study by Ntinda et al (2019) revealed that the teachers experienced gaps in their competency to teach in mainstream classes as they felt that their training did not adequately equip them. A study by Eloff and Kgwete (2017) revealed that when teachers did not have the necessary skills to support learners with hearing impairment since they perceive themselves as incompetent and find it difficult to address the unique needs of the learner population. According to Walton and (2017), in-service training empowers teachers as it equips them with necessary skills that will help them to address the diverse needs of learner population. Lehloa (2019, p. 57) is of the opinion that when teaching programmes are appropriate and respond to learners needs, "learning can take place without which learners can be emotionally disturbed with no access to education". According Lehloa (2019, p. 46) "Today teachers are able to live and treat deaf learners like their own because of the training received."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers' perceptions of support are very crucial towards their commitment and satisfaction, as they lead to developments in teaching and learning processes. The main goal of this study was to explore teachers' experiences of the internal support they receive in teaching learners with hearing impairment in a special school setting. The current study identified a gap in research on teachers' narratives of the level of internal support they receive in special schools for learners with hearing impairment. The findings of the study point to strong internal support teachers receive in the form of collaboration with the specialists in the school, ongoing in-service training, whole team approach and supportive heads. The teachers lamented that there is a need for psychological support in the form of counselling and this poses a challenge as it hinders successful teaching to take place. The recommendation is that the school should organise psychological support to the teachers in the form of counsellors or psychologists to help them cope with occupational challenges, which are even

more in a special school setting. The study could possibly fill the gap by adding to the existing body of scientific knowledge. In the light of this, the study concludes that teachers' experiences about their teaching experiences are crucial as they help to improve educational policies in the strive for equality in education.

REFERENCES

Bell, D., Carl, A. & Swart, E. (2016). 'Students with hearing impairment at a South African

university: Self-identity and disclosure'. *African Journal of Disability,* 5(1), a229. \http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v5i1.229.

Berg, B. (2007). *Qualitative Research Method for the Social Sciences.* Long Beach: California State University.

Chake, N. (2018). Evaluation of support and training sign language services at Setotolwane Secondary School. Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo.

Cohen, L., Manion L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education* (8th Ed). New York: Routledge.

Creswell, J.W. (2013*). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among 5 traditions.* San Francisco, CA: Sage Publications

Department of Education. (2001). *Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System. Pretoria*: Government Printers.

Engelbrecht, P. (2020). Inclusive education: Developments and challenges in South Africa. *Prospects,* 49(3), 219-232.

Engelbrecht, P., Savolainen, H., Nel, M., Koskela, T., & Okkolin, M. A. (2017). Making

meaning of inclusive education: Classroom practices in Finnish and South African classrooms. Compare: *A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 47(5), 684-702.

Engelbrecht, P., Nel, M., Nel, N., & Tlale, D. (2015). Enacting understanding of inclusion in complex contexts: classroom practices of South African teachers. *South African Journal of Education,* 35(3), 1-10.

Farooq, M. S. (2015). Learning through Assistive Devices: A Case of Students with Hearing Impairment. *Bulletin of Education and Research,* 37(1), 1-17.

Florian, L. (2015). *Conceptualising inclusive pedagogy: The inclusive pedagogical approach in action. In Inclusive pedagogy across the curriculum.* Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Florian, L. (2014). What counts as evidence of inclusive education? *European Journal of Special Needs Education,* 29(3), 286-294.

Florian, L. (2012). Preparing teachers to work in inclusive classrooms: Key lessons for the professional development of teacher educators from Scotland's inclusive practice project. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 63(4), 275-285.

Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K. (2011). Exploring inclusive pedagogy. *British Educational Research Journal, 3*7(5), 813-828.

Hammersley, M. (2013). *What is Qualitative Research?* London and New York: Bloomsbury.

Kelly, J. F., McKinney, E. L., & Swift, O. (2020). Strengthening teacher education to support deaf learners. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-19.

Khetoa, S., & Motsei, S. (2021). An evaluation of the opinions of students enrolled in Sesotho modules at the University of the Free State. *Perspectives in Education*, 39(2), 175-190.

Kumar, R. (2011*). Research Methodology* (3rd Ed). London; Saga Publication.

Lehloa, H. (2019*). Investigating access to education for learners with hearing impairment at*

secondary schools. Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Education, National University of Lesotho.

Lenta, T. (2016). The promotion of holistic wellbeing in a school of the Deaf in South Africa

(Doctoral dissertation, North-West University (South Africa), Potchefstroom Campus).

Macmillan, J & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in Higher Education* (7th Ed). Upper raddle River, N5 Pearson.

Magongwa, L. (2020). *The introduction of South African Sign Language as a first language*

subject in schools for the deaf in Gauteng: teachers' experience. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Wits University.

Majoro, N. E. (2021*). Challenges of using sign language interpreting to facilitate teaching and learning for learners with hearing impairment*. Unpublished Masters Thesis; National University of Lesotho.

Makoelle, T.M. (2012). The state of inclusive pedagogy in South Africa: A literature review.

Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology, 3(2), 93-102

Mambo, J. A. (2011). *Exploring teachers' perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education in a regular primary school: A Papua New Guinea study. Unpublished* Masters Dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington.

Mapepa, P., & Magano, M. D. (2018). Support to address barriers to learning for learners who are deaf. *African Journal of Disability*, 7(1), 1-8.

Maree, K. (2016). *First steps in research* (2nd Ed). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers

Mcilroy, G. W. (2017). The implementation of South African Sign Language (SASL) and Sign Bilingualism in a school for the Deaf interpreted through the identity metaphors used by school leadership (SMT) and teachers (Doctoral dissertation: Wits University).

Mokala, N.T. (2017). *The extent to which teachers at a full-service school in Soweto understand and practice the principles of a full-service school*. Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Wits University.

Mosia, P. A. (2014). Threats to inclusive education in Lesotho: An overview of policy and implementation challenges. Africa Education Review, 11(3), 292-310.

Nair, J. (2015). South African Disability Alliance (SADA), secretary@sadisability-alliance.co.za, Definitions, 20 April 2016.

Ntinda, K.; Thwala, S. and Tfusi, B. (2019). Experiences of teachers of deaf and hard of hearing students in a special needs school: An Exploratory

study. *Journal of Education and Training Studies.* 7(7) 79-89.

Reagan, T. (2019). *Linguistic legitimacy and social justice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Republic of South Africa. (1995). *Pan South African Language Board Act (no59)*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Republic of South Africa. (1996a). *South Africa School Act 84 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Republic of South Africa. (1996b). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Sefotho, M. M. (2013*). Narratives of differently abled persons: informing career guidance Policy.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Pretoria.

United Nations (UN), 2006, Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, viewed 3 January 2022 on http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/ahc8adart.htm#art2.

Walton, E. (2017). Inclusive education in initial teacher education in South Africa: practical or professional knowledge? *Journal of Education*, (67), 101-128.

Walton, E., & Rusznyak, L. (2017). Choices in the design of inclusive education courses for pre-service teachers: The case of a South African university. International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 64(3), 231-248.

Yin, R.K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.