Experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs in selected Fort Beaufort District primary schools, South Africa

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Abstract: The implementation of inclusion policy for learners with special education needs has been a matter of interest for South African schools. This study sought to explore pockets of good practice found in the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs (SEN). A qualitative research approach was employed and a case study design used. The study purposively sampled eight teachers and eight principals from eight selected primary schools, as well as one provincial and three district officials. Semi-structured interviews were employed as instruments of data collection, and the data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that teachers accommodate learners with SEN despite the fact that some of them do not have qualifications/training in SEN. The study also established that teachers experienced varied challenges in implementing the inclusion of learners with SEN. These challenges included lack of parental participation, heavy workload, inadequate training for teachers, multi-grade challenges, and lack of resources. Although challenges were encountered, this study concluded that there were pockets of good practice in the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. Good practices identified by the current study included giving remedial work, the use of...
teaching aids, giving individual work, and informing parents of children’s challenges. The paper recommends collaborative effort among stakeholders and adequate training of teachers to ensure effective support for learners with SEN.

Subjects: Statistics for Social Sciences; Education - Social Sciences; Inclusion and Special Educational Needs; Learning Difficulties; Curriculum Studies;

Keywords: experience; good practice; qualitative research; special education needs; South Africa

1. Introduction

Inclusive education was one of the items considered in 1994 at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Salamanca Conference (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The Salamanca Statement on inclusive education is a significant international document in the field of special needs (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). It states that every learner has a constitutional right to learning and should have access to quality education. Thus, teaching should take into consideration the diversity of the features and needs of children (UNESCO, 1994). Accordingly, inclusion is a universal right and the establishment of inclusive schools is part of the establishment of an inclusive society.

Human rights issues have been actively investigated across many states and also in South Africa. The country has a responsibility to the global imperative, of implementing inclusive policy (2003Al Zyoudi, Al Sartwai, & Dodin, 2011; Engelbrecht in Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, & Engelbrecht, 2003, p.7). The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Education (UNESCO, 1994) observes that the most potent means of creating a friendly community, eradicating a biased character, building an inclusive society, and attaining education for all, is mainstreaming with an inclusive reference point. Inclusive schools should offer good education for all children, which will lead to efficiency and savings in education (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education seeks to address and respond to the diversity of learners’ needs through their greater involvement in schooling, cultural practices and community activities, and to reduce marginalisation within schooling (Peters, 2004; UNESCO, 2009).

Sub-Saharan African countries have developed policies on inclusive education which are being implemented (Chireshe, 2011; Donald, Lazarus, & Loiwana, 2002; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Simui, Waluya, Namitwe, & Munsonje, 2009). Countries like Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia, for example, have encountered a lot of challenges in the implementation. Among such challenges are inadequate resources in terms of financial, physical, human, material, infrastructural, curricula and support facilities. Training of teachers, who are implementers, is also a major challenge (Chireshe, 2011; Donald et al., 2002; Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013; Mitiku, Alemu, & Mengsitu, 2014; Naong & Mateusi, 2014; Simui et al., 2009).

Inclusion policy was enacted over 15 years ago in South Africa. The policy is outlined in the 1996 South African Constitution, the South African Schools Act of 1996, and the Education White Paper 6 (2001). Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht, and Nel (2016), notes that the White Paper 6 has paved way for the enactment of inclusive education, and associated support structures feature as pivotal aspects of that implementation, within the South African context. According to White Paper 6 (2001), the Constitution declares the right to basic education for everyone. This should be inline with section 9 that obliges everyone to be equally treated. In addition, section 9 states that no one should be directly or indirectly deprived on any grounds which includes disability. Inclusive education is intended to facilitate learning access for all learners through fighting discriminatory attitudes. Hence, inclusion is not only about learners being in a class physically, but also about getting quality education so that they can succeed and contribute effectively to the development of society, the economy, and the country at large (Sisonke Consortium, 2006).
The structures responsible for the implementation of inclusive education have been identified as the National Department of Education in collaboration with provincial education departments, district-based support teams (DBST), special schools/resource centres, full-service schools, and ordinary schools (Department of Education [DoE], 2001). There is a set of regulations and implementation guidelines, which sets out the monitoring process and the respective roles of those involved in ensuring inclusion of all learners (DoE, 2001). The implementation process has started, and all schools are required to ensure that all learners access education (Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart, & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Skinner, 2016). Special schools target learners who require high level thorough instructional and extra provision; either on a full or part-time basis. Class teachers from special schools service an expanding learner base by providing expertise and support to district teams, neighbourhood, ordinary and full-service schools. Functions of special schools include the provision of specialised professional support in curriculum, assessment and instruction, and developing learners’ strength and competencies (DoE, 2001a; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005).

In full-service schools, the target populations are learners with moderate levels of support. The class teacher receives physical and human resources in the form of district-based support teams and institutional level support teams. Both teams assist teachers to accommodate learner diversity in the classroom. The full-service schools are expressly prepared to support a full range of barriers to learning in an inclusive education setting. They cater for the full range of learners’ needs (DoE, 2001; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Ordinary schools ensure that all learners are included. They are also required to ensure there is early identification of, and intervention for, learners who experience barriers to learning. Apart from the class teacher, ordinary schools have institutional level support teams (ILST), who coordinate educator and learner services. Both institutional level support teams and district-based support teams (DBST) also help teachers in building greater flexibility in teaching methods and assessment of learning (DoE, 2001a; Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Each school is required to have an ILST to implement inclusive education at the school level. The ILST co-ordinates learners, teachers, curriculum and institutional developments at the school with regard to: developing strategies to meet those needs, especially managing and supporting curriculum differentiation; accessing suitable resources; building staff capacity for inclusive education; and ensuring the sustainability of inclusive education at the school. In order to address the needs of each learner, the school is required to provide an individual support plan (ISP) (DoE, 2001). This plan is intended for learners who need extra attention. The strategy is jointly designed with the parents, the teachers and the ILST. This is temporary as it has to be checked at regular intervals to ensure its efficacy. It should be implemented to improve learners’ involvement in classroom activities, taking into consideration all issues that may hinder their improvement at an academic, social or emotional level (DoE, 2001). At the district level, there is a district based support team to coordinate the process and provide support to individual schools. The form of the support includes; facilitating the admission of all learners to school, identifying appropriate resources, monitoring and offering support required regarding curriculum and institutional development, creating and developing structures like the ILST, and playing a central coordination role (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005).

South African schools are grouped into quintiles. Sixty percent of the schools in the country are grouped as quintiles 1, 2 and 3, and are mainly in rural areas and townships. Schools under these quintiles are no-fee schools and are given R1,316 by the state per learner each year. The other 40% of the schools in South Africa are categorised as quintiles 4 and 5. They are mostly based in wealthy areas. These schools receive fees from parents and minimal state funding. Schools under Quintile 4 are given R660 for each learner annually, while quintile 5 institutions receive R228 (10L News, 2018).

Some teachers were trained on a new inclusive education strategy called Screening, Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) introduced in 2008 (DoE, 2008). After the workshop,
the teachers were expected to implement these strategies in their respective schools. All teachers, whether trained or not, are to screen the learners in their classes. Teachers are expected to show the level of learners’ coping with school work. The document further expects teachers to be able to identify the sources of barriers to learning. After the teachers have identified the learners with learning barriers in class, depending on the nature and the severity of the learning barriers, they are expected to assess and support the learners with learning barriers. A teacher can work out ways of helping the particular learner through his/her ISP. If the efforts made in the ISP are still unsuccessful, the teacher can refer the matter to the ILST within the school, that is coordinated by the teacher who attended the workshop. The ILST will review the ISP provided by the teachers and if they believe that the support given by the teachers to the learners with barriers is not adequate, the ILST will inform the DBST about the particular learner and they will complete the SIAS with biographical information and a scholastic report of the learner (DoE, 2008).

It has been made clear by the Department of Education that all schools have to ensure that all learners access education (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Mastropieri et al., 2005). In other words, all schools have to implement inclusive education and districts have to ensure that they provide adequate support (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005). According to the DoE (2011, p. 3), “Inclusivity should be the main focus of the organisation, planning and teaching at each school.” Teachers are important to the success of inclusive education as attested to by some researchers (Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012; Carrington & Brownlee, 2001; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). De Boer et al. (2011:331) state that “teachers are seen as key persons to implement inclusive education. Positive attitudes are therefore argued as playing a considerable role in implementing this educational change successfully.” Schoeman (2012) posits that teachers need to know how to identify barriers to learning and know how to address them by differentiating the curriculum, the forms of assessment that are used, as well as the classroom methodologies.

According to Unianu (2012), one of the challenges of implementing inclusion of learners with SEN is the attitude of teachers. The author notes that many factors influence teachers’ attitudes, and one such factor is the teachers’ experience with learners with SEN. This means teachers are undermining their work themselves when they hold a negative perspective on disability. As a result, they lose their confidence in teaching learners with SEN, which has a negative impact on inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011). Rejection of learners with SEN is one of the most manifest negative attitudes in schools (Ghergut & Grasu, 2012). Some teachers support the inclusion of learners with SEN with reservation (Johnstone & Chapman, 2009; Opertti & Belalcáza, 2008). For instance, some teachers of mainstream classes feel they are not prepared to teach learners with SEN as they think it may result in poor learners’ academic performance (Chhabra, Srivastava, & Srivastava, 2010).

Teachers have informally raised a number of concerns through the media regarding inclusion of vulnerable learners, particularly those with special education needs (Ainscow, 2012; SOS Children Newsletter, 2012). These concerns include teachers having difficulties coping with diverse learners in their classrooms, inadequate training, difficulties adapting to an individualised curriculum, lack of funding, inadequate teacher support, lack of knowledge, lack of time, and heavy workloads (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007; Singh, 2010; Skinner, 2016). Given these concerns reported informally by teachers through the media, it is not clear what is taking place at the school level in terms of implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. In their report, members of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education and its engagement with the Department of Basic Education in Cape Town (Department of Basic Education, 2016), registered their concern that inclusive education implementation was not taking place as expected.

Although the government has put in place policies to ensure learners with SEN access education, it is not clear how inclusive policy is implemented by teachers to ensure all learners access education. It has been observed that, despite difficult working conditions, there are pockets of good practice of implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in some schools although it is not
clear how these teachers implement them (City Press 02 September, 2012; SOS Children Newsletter, 2012). On that basis, this study sought to find out the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in the Fort Beaufort District.

2. Objectives
The objective of the paper was to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in selected Fort Beaufort Education District primary schools in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The specific objectives were as follows:

- To identify resources for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.
- To investigate workload of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.
- To explore training/skills for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.
- To examine good practices found in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

3. Methodology
This research employed a qualitative research methodology. A case study design was adopted within an interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research is characterised by exploring and understanding the meaning that “individuals or groups ascribe to a human problem.” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37, 2014). Maree (2010) sees qualitative study as a systematic inquiry of phenomenon of interest. In this study, the phenomenon of interest was the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. The design was appropriate for conditions under which the teachers, principals, education district and provincial officials expressed their opinions on their experiences in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in selected primary schools in the Fort Beaufort District.

3.1. Sampling method
The study was conducted in Fort Beaufort District, now called Amathole District in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Fort Beaufort had a population of 25668 in 2011 and was founded in 1831. It is at the confluence of the Kat and Brak Rivers between the Keiskamma and Great Fish Rivers. The town consists of both urban and rural areas. It is also a home for academic staff and students of Fort Hare University in the neighbouring town of Alice.

The researchers purposefully selected appropriate participants that would best share their experiences in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. The flexibility of purposively sampling allowed researchers to save time and money during data collection. It also assisted in targeting participants who could give information on their experiences in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in selected Fort Beaufort District primary schools, South Africa. Eight primary schools were purposively selected from the 220 primary schools in the Fort Beaufort District. Principals and other educators were gatekeepers who served as intermediaries between researchers and the participants. They assisted the researchers to identify the right participants and to gain access to the research sites and the participants. Eight teachers with long experience in the service and those who showed deeper understanding and good practice in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN as identified by the gatekeeper were selected. It was assumed that these teachers had first-hand information on inclusive practices and could exhibit deeper understanding and pockets of good practices of inclusive education. The principals of the eight selected primary schools, three education district officials and one provincial official were purposively sampled for in-depth interviews. These were some of the key people as far as implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in the schools, district and province was concerned. They were in charge of monitoring and support for the implementation of inclusion policy.
3.2. Data collection
The participants were interviewed using one-on-one semi-structured interviews. This allowed the researchers to collect direct information about the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in order to comprehend the meanings, ideas and significance that participants attributed to their experiences in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in selected primary schools in the Fort Beaufort District (Kuada, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were employed by the researchers as they offered the chance to probe the participants’ responses. The researchers followed up by asking for more explanation if a response on the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN seemed not clear.

3.3. Data analysis
Qualitative data were coded systematically according to the specific concepts and themes. The themes were then analysed to address the main question which sought to investigate the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in selected Fort Beaufort Education District primary schools, Eastern Cape, South Africa. In this study, audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim. The findings were taken to the participants to confirm. The raw data from the interview was coded to form data sets. Responses were transcribed and interpreted based on the research questions. The researchers organised the data and compiled data sets for each research question. Inductive themes were also developed for the study.

Credibility means that which can be trusted based on rigorous evidence or argument, and authority. Credibility is an essential procedure that offers authority to the participants’ point of view and reduces the risk of bias. It creates confidence in the findings (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). In order to obtain credibility of the results of any research, there are methods to be followed. These methods include member checks, data triangulation, and investigator triangulation (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Researchers employed member checking with the participants to see if the data corresponded with the information given. Member checking allowed participants to evaluate findings from the data, so they would be able to confirm whether or not the data capturing was accurate (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 2014). The use of multiple sources, that is, data from the teachers, principals, district and provincial officials, enhanced the credibility of the data collected.

3.4. Ethical procedures
The researchers observed all ethical procedures before and during the study. Ethical clearance was received from the researchers’ institution. The researchers were permitted by the Eastern Cape Education District to assess schools and interview participants. The gatekeepers were employed to gain access to the research sites and the participants. The selected participants were assured that the information was only for research purposes. The issues of informed consent and confidentiality were adhered to. The participants in this study are pseudo named: T1-T8 (teacher), P1-P8 (principal), EDO1-EDO3 (education district official) and PO1 (provincial official).

4. Results

4.1. Experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs
The need for teachers to be supported in an inclusive setting cannot be over-emphasised. Research shows that teachers have negative or neutral attitudes towards implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs in the mainstream schools as they feel they are not competent to accommodate learners with special education needs (De Boer et al., 2011). The paper investigated the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs. Responses were sought from teachers, principals, district officials and a provincial official (Table 1).
4.2. District personnel support for inclusion of learners with SEN

Essential to inclusive education is the provision of support for all learners and teachers. Researchers found that some teachers experience inclusion of learners with SEN as challenging. Lack of formal support structures is counted as one of the challenges (Engelbrecht et al., 2003; Walton, 2014). This demands continuous teacher training, classroom support and development of teachers’ skills to harness support in the school environment and at district levels (Department of Basic Education, 2011). In response to a question which sought to determine the support and adequacy of support the teachers got from the district offices, participants confirmed that they received some form of support from the district office. The study also revealed lack of personnel at the district office to support inclusion. The responses that follow were generated.

T4 commented:

We get support in forms of workshops, in-service training, and materials. The support is not enough. You will see that the workshop is supposed to be like a week, but they squeeze it to a day or two, and this is not helpful. (T4, male, 53 years old, 16 years’ experience)

T5 said:

They come to do a lot of intervention in reading and writing ability. They also check the learners to see if their cases are severe, to know how to support; like in the case of a learner who could not hear at all, they get funding for the hearing aid. They also give advice and organise workshops but I think they should organise more workshops. (T5, female, 37 years old, 7 years’ experience)

T7 commented:

District officials support us by taking learners with SEN out to social workers. They counsel learners. Support from district officials is adequate but they can do more. Though the officials are not enough compared to the number of schools under their catchment areas, the district can also help by sending more teachers to schools.

However, one of the teachers criticised the district officials for not visiting classrooms when they went to her school.

### Table 1. The following opinions, presented under the following themes, were noted as shown in table 1 below:

| Themes               | Sub-themes                                                                 |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Resources            | District personnel support for inclusion of learners with SEN               |
|                      | Materials/resources                                                        |
|                      | Teacher/Parents’ attitudes                                                 |
| Workload             | Large class size/Overcrowding/Multi-grade classes                           |
| Training/skills      | Skills and expertise in dealing with learners with special education needs. |
| Good practices       | Learners with SEN who were in multi-grade classes, gained from the lessons of other grades as the teacher taught. There were special classes for learners with SEN after school hours to assist the learners. Teachers worked as social workers and managers to support learners with SEN. |
They don’t come to our classes. We call to tell them about our challenges. When they arrive, they stay in the staff room and talk about the problems. I think another problem is, there are many schools but the district officials are not many. Their support cannot be beneficial in this situation. (T1, female, 48 years old, 14 years’ experience)

From the interviews with the principals, some of them disclosed that schools received support from the district for the implementation of inclusion of learners with SEN, but this support was not adequate. Conversely, some of the principals claimed the support was adequate. The following are some of the comments in this regard.

P5 stated:

We can depend on the department of education for their support in many spheres, that if a child has a barrier, irrespective of the barrier, you just pick up your phone and call them or pop in there and explain your problems. They visit schools and they are ready to help. Personal visits to family houses; they do that from time to time. Provision of materials; we are workshopped fairly on a regular basis and the support is adequate. (P5, male, 55 years old, 14 years’ experience)

P8 added:

We get first aid kit, books, uniforms, workshops for teachers; and the workshops are fruitful because we gain more information from them on how to help these learners. However, the district can do more. They should give books on special needs and workshops. They should come to school to see our challenges as individual schools because schools don’t have the same problems. (P8, female, 55 years old, 13 years’ experience)

However, one of the principals lamented that there was no form of support from the district, for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

P2 stated:

No support. We have not been going for workshops, we have not been trained. (P2, male, 58 years old, 14 years’ experience)

Another principal corroborated that there were few district officials carrying a heavy workload.

The officials always complain about their workload. The workload is huge and they are very few in number. With the few numbers, they cannot get much work done. It is difficult for them. If they come at the beginning of the year, we will not see them again until the next year. And we try to go to them but they tell us about the problem they are having too. (P6, female, 57 years old, 14 years’ experience)

In their own interviews on the support provided for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN and the adequacy of the support, the district officials disclosed that they supported the implementation of inclusion of learners with SEN by providing guidance and monitoring on the inclusive policy. They organised training/workshops for teachers on how to accommodate all learners in their classrooms. It was also stated that the district officials conducted onsite visits to schools. The district officials gave their experiences on the issue as follows:

Our workshops are on a regular basis. We do a lot of activities, workshop in different areas. We monitor, we go round the schools and give whatever they ask for, like information, materials and placement of learners with severe SEN in special schools and full service schools, we give support. I think the support we give is adequate but can always do better from our side too. (EDO3, female, 47 years old, 5 years’ experience)
This was reinforced by another district official who explained the support given to teachers was workshop and advocacy, but she also mentioned that this support was not enough.

One thing is workshops, advocacy. Another thing is, when they really invite us, we are there. If they refer their learners to us, help is given. The support is not adequate because even us as officials, we are few and how many schools? 258. Can you give something adequate? It’s a drop in an ocean. (EDO2, female, 45 years old, 4 years’ experience)

In support, the provincial official pointed out that the districts provided workshops directly at schools.

PO1: ... Organising various workshops. We support schools in the province through the districts. We organise workshops on curriculum differentiation, sign language and interpretation. We advise and so on, but schools have access to these workshops through their districts. The support is not adequate but we are trying our best to help and support learners with SEN.

One of the district officials complained about inadequate support from their office to teachers.

Another barrier is the systemic barrier. The problem in the system itself is inadequate support from the district. There are fewer personnel. Those are the barriers I think teachers face in our district. (EDO1, male, 45 years old, 11 years’ experience)

It emerged that there was some form of support from the district and provincial offices for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. The support included school visits, giving advice/information, providing materials, conducting training workshops, and placement of learners with severe SEN in special and full-service schools. However, the majority of the participants lamented that the support for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN was not adequate. The study revealed that there were no adequate district officials to support the inclusion of learners with SEN. This indicates that the needs of learners with SEN, and teachers, were not properly addressed.

4.3. Skills and expertise in dealing with learners with special education needs
The importance of having teachers with both knowledge and ability to teach learners with SEN can not be over-emphasised. A global call for inclusion of learners with SEN means that the majority of learners with SEN are accommodated in regular classrooms. This means, teachers are to teach learners with SEN with little training to prepare them. This study sought to establish the skills and expertise teachers possessed to enable them to deal with learners with SEN. Some of the teacher participants stated that the Department of Education organised workshops on inclusive education in order for them to be able to support learners with special education needs. What follows are some of their comments in this regard.

T2 said:

We get workshops from the department. The workshops are interesting and we are asked to come and apply the knowledge to the learners. The programmes are relevant to implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. (T2, female, 35 years old, 6 years’ experience)

T6 disclosed:

I attended workshops organised by the department of education on inclusive education. Besides, I have just completed my B.Ed. last year, which had a course called Inclusive Education. That course has helped me a lot. We were taught about White Paper six. We were taught to love children, to have a heart, to accept children irrespective of their challenges/barriers. (T6, female, 60 years old, 20 years’ experience)
P5 revealed:

Last year, I attended a week-long workshop on inclusive education in Port Elizabeth where many district officials were in attendance. At one stage during the workshop, I think it was the second day, they called me unprepared. I had to brief the house on what we do at our school, what the cooperation is between the school and the department. I was asked to do it and I was proud to do it. Afterwards, schools were coming to ask about this whole thing of inclusion of learners with SEN. The district can still do more but I understand that there are a lot more schools, In fact, we are fortunate to get the support we are always getting from the district. (P5, male, 55 years old, 14 years’ experience)

However, some participants revealed that they faced challenges in dealing with learners with SEN as some of them did not have the right skills for teaching these learners.

T6 pointed out that;

First and foremost, we are not trained. There is no time because of the work load is much because of the type of school we have (multi-grades) and we are just few teachers. If we can have skilled teachers in this area, it would have been better. This is a rural area; we are not able to help these learners after school hours because we don’t stay in this area. (T6, female, 60 years old, 20 years’ experience)

T4 disclosed that:

One of the challenges is lack of knowledge to deal with those learners. Learners have different needs so I don’t know how to handle those different needs. It is challenging because we don’t know how to cope with them. Sometimes, let me be honest, I ignore them because I don’t know how to handle those learners. (T4, male, 53 years old, 16 years’ experience)

EDO3 said:

The challenge is that they are not really trained. When I talk about training, I do not mean a two-day workshop and the department will say implement this with a two-day workshop. (EDO 3, female, 47 years old, 5 years’ experience)

PO1 noted that:

Many teachers in regular schools do not have the skills and expertise in dealing with children with special needs. They don’t have the qualification to do that. They have problem of identification—to identify those with barriers. There are inadequate resources/equipment. (PO1, male, 56 years old, 16 years’ experience)

There was some degree of consensus that teachers encountered challenges in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. Some of these challenges included; lack of adequate training for teachers, systemic barriers, lack of support, overcrowding, lack of materials, shortage of teachers. However, the study also revealed that some participants were trained for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

4.4. Teacher/parents’ attitudes

Positive attitudes are indispensable for success, particularly when learners with special educational needs (SEN) are placed into regular classrooms. In this section, the researchers sought information on how teacher/parent attitudes influenced the inclusion of learners with SEN.

A district official explained that teachers do not want to implement inclusive education because they think they are not qualified as they do not hold qualifications in special needs.
The following response attests to this:

Teachers think, maybe they need a qualification, so even those who have got qualifications in inclusive education don’t practice it when you check their schools. You really don’t know what can really be a solution but attitude is the greatest barrier in the implementation of inclusive education. (EDO1, male, 45 years old, 11 years experience)

In the same vein, another education district official said that teachers’ attitude is a hindrance to the inclusion of learners with SEN. These were her words:

The attitude of teachers is another challenge, in that they don’t see it as their duty; they don’t see the training offered as anything, they undermine the training.

This district official further explained:

Teachers are not interested to accommodate these learners. We have only a few success stories of teachers with positive attitudes who are accommodating learners with special needs. Some teachers do not have knowledge on how to implement inclusive education. “There is no time,” that is what they complain about. They are not prepared to sit after teaching hours to assist learners with SEN. (EDO2, female, 45 years old, 4 years experience)

In addition, participants complained about parents’ attitudes as manifested in their lack of participation that stalled inclusion of learners with SEN. The following responses reveal the sentiments of the participants.

T2 revealed that:

Some of these learners are not cared for at home so teachers are the parents here at school. Some of these learners are abused. We have to comfort them. Sometimes, we go to the police station to report abuse. We go to social workers. We take children to hospitals. We play the role of counsellors, managers and teachers. Some children will not write in class. You must find out what went wrong. It is difficult because at home, they are denied that. Reason being that some of these learners are not being cared for. Their parents get drunk every day. Some are left alone; some of them their parents are dead. (T2, female, 35 years old, 6 years experience)

T5 affirmed that:

Parents are not cooperative. When you call them to tell them about their children, they will tell you, there is nothing wrong with the child. There is also lack of information. These parents do not know anything about inclusive education, even about their children. When they are pregnant, they don’t go for anti-natal classes and even post-natal, and you find that at birth, the weight of the child is not what it should be, or maybe something has gone wrong with the child because of the carelessness of the parents. So, when you are calling them to tell them what you have noticed in the children, they just give you that “I don’t care” attitude. (T5, female, 37 years old, 7 years experience)

T6 stated:

We don’t have parents’ support. When you call them, they say “no I’m busy; he is like this even at home.” So we don’t get support from parents. When you tell parents to allow their children to repeat a class they say, ‘No he can’t repeat’. (T6, female, 60 years old, 20 years experience)

P8 said:
Our learners face abuses at home. A learner will come to school without taking breakfast or doing the homework; maybe because the parents were fighting. There is no motherly and fatherly love for the children. The parents are drinking too much and involved in drugs. (P8, female, 55 years old, 13 years’ experience)

In this section, teacher/parent attitudes were found to be a challenge to the inclusion of learners with SEN. The narration of teachers’ attitude by the EDOs on inclusion of learners with SEN indicates that teachers see the inclusion of learners with SEN as extra burdens which are not usually encountered in teaching other learners. Also, it was revealed that teachers felt they were not adequately trained for the inclusion of learners with SEN. Furthermore, the study indicated that parents were not supportive towards the inclusion of learners with SEN. Some of them were in denial that their children had special needs. This slowed down the inclusion of learners of with SEN. However, pockets of good practice were found as one of the EDOs established that there were some success stories of teachers implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

4.5. Class size-multi-grades/workloads

Some of the challenges to teaching and learning all over the world are overcrowded classrooms and heavy workloads. They reduce the quality of teaching and learning. In response to a question which sought to determine the class size for the inclusion of learners with SEN, participants complained about the class size as a hindrance to implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

A teacher explained that learners with SEN were not well accommodated in teaching and learning in his classroom because of the class size. He commented that:

... those learners are not catered for in a regular class. There are no special teachers to attend to them. We just teach them but not sufficiently. I’m not happy, I have got 46 learners. I have only little time for learners with SEN in my class, so I’m not happy. (T4, male, 53 years old, 16 years’ experience)

Another teacher also complained that overcrowding had not made it possible to cater well for all her learners. She said:

I am not satisfied because the classes are too big. One teacher cannot cope with fifty or sixty learners. It is impossible for teachers to handle these learners. (T5, female, 37 years old)

Similarly, the participant principals elaborated on the challenge of class size as revealed in the responses below:

We have special classes for learners with SEN after school hours. We have big classes also. It ranges, in the foundation we have average of 56 learners in the class; in the intermediate, we have an average of forty learners, and when it comes to the senior, we have 40–60 learners. It is very much difficult to handle, especially when, at the intermediate phase (learners between 13–15 years old), it becomes rowdy and undisciplined. Overcrowding is a problem. (P5, male, 55 years old, 14 years’ experience)

Mostly, it is the number in the classroom. Teachers have more than 42 learners in the classroom, so it is very difficult for teachers to do individual teaching or to concentrate on that learner who has barriers. (P7, male 58 years old, 15 years’ experience)

In corroboration, an education district official confirmed that overcrowding was a major challenge hindering inclusion of learners with SEN.

EDO1 commented:
The first problem is the number in the classroom. Most of our classrooms are larger than normal, and it makes it difficult. Even if a teacher is to use curriculum adaptation; it will be difficult to do this in a very large classroom. (EDO1, male, 45 years old, 11 years' experience)

Similarly, some participants commented on the heavy workload due to the multi-grade system.

T6 lamented that:

There is no time because the work load is much because of the type of school we have (multi-grades) and we are just few teachers. (T6, female, 60 years old, 20 years' experience)

P5 stated:

I think more needs to be done, more needs to happen from the educator's side as well as the department's side. If teachers need to be well equipped, they will know what to do. For instance, the issue of multi-grades and overcrowded classrooms, until such issues are dealt with, one will never be satisfied. (P5, male, 55 years old, 14 years' experience)

However, there was an advantage noted in multi-grade classrooms. EDO2 commented that:

There is advantage in multi-grade if Grade 1, 2 and 3 are combined. As the teacher teaches, those slow learners in Grade 3 can pick up from the lesson the teacher teaches grade 1 or 2. (EDO2, female, 45 years old, 4 years' experience)

It was revealed that class size, multi-grade classes, and heavy teacher workloads created stressful working conditions for teachers. This affected teaching strategies and other classroom activities. Class size and workload determined teachers' successful inclusion of learners with SEN. In spite of these challenges, there seemed to be pockets of good practice. For instance, there were special classes for learners with SEN after school hours to assist them to catch up with the other learners. In addition, there were advantages in multi-grade classes as learners with SEN gained from the lessons of other grades as the teacher taught.

4.6. Materials/resources

The information on materials/resources was considered important, as resources make it possible for implementers of the policy to assess the level and extent of teaching and learning process in schools. Hence, the study sought to establish the adequacy of material/resources for implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. Below are some of the things participants said in this regard.

Some teachers and principals stated that there were adequate teaching materials. As T2 pointed out: Learners use the general books. The general books are adequate for all learners. (T2, female 35 years old, 6 years' experience)

P7 said:

We have enough learning and teaching materials. (P7, male 58 years old, 15 years of experience)

P6 said:

We have enough teaching and learning materials. Those learners who cannot cope in their grade, teachers always find something to give them from textbook of lower grades. (P6, female, 57 years old, 14 years' experience)

EDO1 disclosed that:
Schools have adequate resources because they ask and get whatever teaching materials they need. (EDO1, male, 45 years old, 11 years’ experience)

EDO2 stated that;

Materials are enough, in fact more than enough. (EDO2, female, 45 years old, 4 years’ experience)

EDO3 commented that:

The textbooks are available because they cut across all schools. (EDO 3, female, 47 years old, 5 years’ experience)

Contrary to the views of the teachers, principals and the district officials above, some participants’ views were that schools did not have enough materials for teaching and learning.

P8 opined that;

There are inadequate resources/equipment. The inadequacies in human and other resources such as equipment curtail implementation of inclusive education. (P8, female, 55 years old, 13 years’ experience)

To corroborate P8’s idea on materials/resources, a teacher had this to say:

We do not have enough materials, like textbooks arrive late. For example, I got one textbook two weeks ago and schools are closing this Friday. (T1, female, 48 years old, 14 years’ experience)

T5 and P2 also concurred that delay in the delivery of textbooks was a challenge to having adequate materials.

We have shortages of textbooks, reading books. We do not get textbooks on time when we apply for them. (T5, female, 37 years old, 7 years’ experience)

The department has ordered materials for 2013 but my school has not got material for Mathematics for the intermediate phase and Xhosa. The materials are not enough. Sometimes, as a teacher, you borrow from other schools and photocopy; which is expensive and we have large classes. (P2, male, 58 years old, 14 years’ experience)

In agreement, POI commented:

There are not sufficient/enough in all schools. The abnormality of the past is still affecting our schools. If you can go to the Ex-Model C schools, that gap; they are better equipped than the old rural schools. Though we are trying to close that gap, but it is not going to be easy. (PO1, male, 56 years old, 16 years’ experience)

The study established that the Department of Education does not provide adequate materials and resources in some schools, while it was also revealed in other schools that materials and resources were adequate. This could mean that the inclusive policy was probably not being implemented fully in some schools. Considering the fact that some teachers were not trained for inclusion of learners with SEN, some teachers could be discouraged and frustrated.

Furthermore, the study revealed textbooks as the most ubiquitous teaching and learning material in schools. However, other materials and equipment such as concrete objects, tapes, CDs, upper cuts, posters, counting blocks, charts, flash cards, posters, bottle tops, cards, counters,
magazines and newspapers were also available in small quantities at some schools. The following are some of the participants' responses in this regard:

T1 commented:

We don’t have materials for learners with SEN. We are using materials for ordinary learners like textbooks, bottle tops and flash cards; we don’t have material for learners with SEN. (T1, female, 48 years old, 14 years’ experience)

In addition, another teacher disclosed that:

We don’t have special materials for learners with special education needs. I use my own teaching aids like my cards and my flash cards. Special materials are not in the mainstream schools. Therefore, we use the available materials to teach all learners in the classroom. (T5, female, 37 years old, 7 years’ experience)

Participating principals largely agreed with their teachers that there were no special learning materials for learners with SEN in their schools. The following are some of their responses in relation to the teaching and learning materials available at their schools.

P7 commented that:

Teachers use materials provided by themselves, the school also provides materials. We buy textbooks, cards, counters. There are no special materials for learners with special education needs. All learners use the same materials. Teachers make use of these materials to accommodate all learners. (P7, male 58 years old, 15 years’ experience)

P8 said;

We make photocopies from textbooks because we don’t have enough. And at times we improvise. (P8, female, 55 years old, 13 years’ experience)

From their interviews, one of the district officials made the following comment:

EDO1 pointed out:

We don’t have special materials for learners with SEN. They use the general ones and teachers adapt them to suit learners’ purpose. You get special materials in special schools not in ordinary schools. Those materials include textbooks, flash cards, posters and so on. (EDO1, male, 45 years old, 11 years’ experience)

The provincial official noted that there are textbooks and other materials in schools which are used by all learners but they are not sufficient/enough in all schools. Government supplies all the teaching and learning materials. There were almost unanimous indications from all four groups (teachers, principals, district officials and the provincial official) that there were no special teaching and learning materials for learners with SEN in regular schools. All the learners used the same materials. However, the good practice indicated here was that teachers improvised and adapted these general teaching and learning materials to suit the needs of learners with SEN, as special materials were only found in special schools.

5. Discussion

Findings on the experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs revealed that systemic barriers were experienced in the implementation of inclusive education. These included inadequate support from the district as there was scant personnel. Richards and Rodgers (2014) note that the availability and provision of adequate support and resources determine the teachers’ attitudes. Where support and resources are insufficient or have been reduced, the
teachers’ attitudes will become negative. It was also established that some teachers did not have skills as they were not really trained for implementing inclusion for learners with special education needs. This made it difficult for them to adequately accommodate learners with special needs inclusion of learners as they were not specialists in the area. This is corroborated by Laurillard (2013) who asserts that teachers should be empowered through training. A great level of collaboration should be the norm in a mainstream situation. Taweechaisupapong (2015) states that congenial relationships are essential in the training and support of teachers who are involved in inclusive settings. Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013) opine that the only way for inclusive education to be successful was for teachers to be given further training which must be continuous.

It was also discovered in this study that parents were not helping matters as many of them were not aware of inclusive education. Rogan and Grayson (2003) note that learners’ backgrounds are essential for education. Many issues such as home environment, parental commitment to education, health and nutrition, and parental proficiency level in the language of instruction influenced learners’ attitude to learning, and their reaction to change. It emerged that inclusive education was demanding for teachers dealing with many emotional issues of learners. It was a burden to combine the duties of parents (for those who were also parents) and teachers at the same time. The study established that teachers played the role of social workers. They often had to leave their schools to visit the Department of Education, the Social Welfare offices, the police station, and learners’ homes to solve learners’ problems of stress and sexual abuse. In their study in Saudi Arabia, Alquraini and Gut (2012) found that teachers took on pastoral roles when implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs. They had to assume pastoral roles and create opportunities for relatively intimate discussions because learners felt safe and were able to open up about their problems when teachers were approachable. However, it was found that teachers were committed to doing so because they felt that the programme requires special kinds of teachers, teachers “with hearts” who are role models, who see teaching as a calling (Alquraini & Gut, 2012).

Another finding of this study was that implementing inclusion of learners with SEN was time-consuming and increased teachers’ workload as the majority of the selected schools were multi-grade schools with few teachers. Ramrathan and Ngubane (2013) note that there is inadequate support for teachers from the Department of Basic Education. The multi-grade schools are not well resourced and are considered lower quintile schools. The findings also revealed that inclusion of learners with SEN was not practicable in large classes where there is insufficient support in place. According to Bornman and Rose (2010, p. 7), “[a] general lack of support and resources, as well as the prevailing negative attitudes toward disability, all contribute to the general bewilderment in South African schools towards inclusion.” Inclusive education increases teachers’ workload. The successful implementation of inclusive policy depends on teachers’ ability to include learners with SEN in mainstream classes. Some teachers did not have the ability and skills to accommodate different learners in one classroom without significantly increasing their workload (Stofile, 2008). Education White Paper 6 states that “new curriculum and assessment initiatives will be required to focus on the inclusion of the full range of diverse learning needs ... since curricula create the most significant barrier to learning and exclusion for many learners” (DoE, 2001, p. 31–32).

It was established that there were shortages of teaching and learning materials which affected the inclusion of learners with SEN and slowed down the pace at which teachers and learners worked, and required teachers to make expensive photocopies. However, it emerged that some respondents were not affected by shortages of teaching and learning materials. Teachers who took advantage of the situation to improvise were not affected by the shortage of materials. Improvisation was a good practice of implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. Some respondents talked of adapting materials and also looking for alternative or additional simplified resources to enable learners with SEN to learn. Some of the respondents noted that there were no shortages of materials in their schools. It emerged in this section that despite the difficult working conditions in this context, there were good practices of inclusion of learners with SEN.
It was revealed through this study that textbooks were the most widely available material used in implementing inclusion of learners with SEN in the selected schools. It was indicated that mainstream schools dealt with mild cases of special needs while special materials were found in special schools because they dealt with severe cases. However, other materials such as posters, charts, magazines, pictures, newspapers and CDs were also available in small quantities at some of the selected primary schools in the Fort Beaufort District. Rogan and Grayson (2003) state that the material support involves infrastructure like material resources such as learners’ text-books, facilities and other equipment used in the learning process and specialist rooms.

However, some of the selected schools showed good practice of inclusion of learners with SEN. These schools pointed out that the innovation of teachers was essential when implementing inclusion of learners with SEN, apart from specialist knowledge in inclusive education, especially in contexts with limited resources. For instance, it was observed that despite difficult working conditions as well as lack of specialist training, some teachers in schools in poor rural areas were implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs. There were special classes organised for learners with SEN after school hours to assist them. Teachers also played the role of social workers and managers to support learners with SEN. There were manifest advantages in multi-grade classes as learners gained from the lessons of other grades as the teacher teaches. In other words, there were pockets of good practice of inclusive education policy in some of the selected primary schools, despite challenges that came with implementing inclusion of learners with SEN.

6. Conclusion
The findings of the study revealed that although inclusion of learners with SEN has been introduced to schools and is being practiced in some of the selected schools, there were issues over the programme implementation process. Teachers experienced challenges in form of shortage of teaching and learning materials, shortage of qualified teachers, inadequacy of in-service training, a range of implementation challenges, and inadequate support with inclusion of learners with SEN. However, there were pockets of good practice of inclusive education policy in some schools despite all the challenges that came with implementing inclusion of learners with SEN. These included the ability of some nonspecialist teachers to implement inclusion of learners with SEN, advantages of multi-grade classes, special classes organised for learners with SEN after school hours to assist these learners and teachers play the role of social workers, and managers rendering support to learners with SEN.

7. Recommendations
Based on the findings above, the study makes the following recommendations:

Teachers should undergo in-service training to help them reorient their thinking about inclusive policy. The Department of Education should also appoint special teachers to be responsible for assisting teachers in their schools. In addition, there should be adequate provision of resources, and adequate funding to enable the special teachers to do their work. Strong partnerships or collaborations among learners, teachers, parents and the Department of Education should be encouraged by organising programmes/workshops to enlighten all the stakeholders on the implementation of inclusive policy for learners with SEN. Furthermore, the Department of Education should provide adequate teaching and learning materials in all rural and urban primary schools as a matter of urgency. Finally, there is a great need for adequate district support and monitoring.
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