

## Implementing a Responsive Curriculum to Diverse Learners

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**ABSTRACT** This study reasserts the fragility of inclusive curriculum as a tool for arguing in favour of educational disablement as identity politics. The significance of implementing a responsive curriculum, which addresses the needs of diverse learners, by reducing barriers to and within the environment, is cemented. It caters for all learners irrespective of gender, colour, religion and language. Teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive curriculum are addressed. Questionnaires were administered to eight schools situated in the John Taole Gaetsewe district in Kuruman in the Northern Cape Province. Six mainstream schools in the Circuit 1 in Kuruman were randomly selected from a total of 17 while the remaining two were special schools. Although results indicated that teachers supported inclusive curriculum to a certain extent, it became evident that resources and curriculum change were some of the challenges which may impede teachers in implementing a responsive curriculum to diverse learners.

### INTRODUCTION

Jorgensen and Schuh (2012) are of the opinion that inclusion in education is an approach to educating learners with special educational needs. By contrast, an inclusive and responsive curriculum focuses on the learner's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the learner. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate learners with disabilities from learners without disabilities. A premium is placed upon full participation by learners with disabilities and upon respect for their social, civil, and educational rights. Inclusion gives learners with disabilities skill they can use in and out of the classroom.

There are still some barriers to learning which exist within the system that make learners vulnerable to exclusion and learning breakdown. These barriers require a responsive curriculum to such diverse learners. These barriers could include poverty, ideology, physical inaccessibility to schools, an inflexible curriculum, inappropriate language and communication channels, lack of or inappropriate transport and similar factors. To teachers, an inclusive curriculum means rethinking their attitudes towards disability. The first step is to steer away from viewing disability only in medical terms to viewing it in terms of the rights of the disabled learner. Secondly, barriers to learning in the system need to be identified and interventions need to be made. A teacher needs to examine what impediments exist in the systems that prevent disabled learners from accessing learning (DoE 2011, 2012).

The South African Ministry of Education is committed to implementing quality education that ensures that people with impairments can boast that they live in a society that highly values their lives and continually enhances their full participation. The introduction of inclusive education in South Africa was spelt out in Education Paper No. 6 for Special Needs where it states explicitly that learners who experience mild to moderate disabilities will be accommodated within the mainstream whereas those with severe and multiple disabilities will be retained in special schools (DNE 2001). The education system has always been plagued with a poor scholastic achievement of learners who are perceived to be innately capable of doing well. This has been evident from the comments of the newspapers when Grade 12 results were released. It is in that respect that researchers believe that the inclusion of learners with barriers to learning from special schools into the mainstream is likely to be met with mixed reactions from teachers, emanating from varying attitudes towards the implementation process. The Ministry of Basic Education's overall policy has an overarching outcome of building a world-leading education system that equips all South Africans with the knowledge, skills and values to be responsible citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Education enables people to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable them to participate fully, socially and economically, in the community. The Ministry of Basic Education's role is facilitative rather than directive, with the sole

purpose of empowering education. The ministry empowers through its leadership, management of the infrastructure, problem-solving ability, and assistance of those at risk of underachievement (DNE 2001). The Ministry's mission is to raise achievement and reduce disparity. Quality education enables any learner to achieve his or her full potential. Expectations rise each year, and the educational achievement levels of all learners must also continue to increase. At the same time, there are currently significant differences in the levels of educational achievement between groups in our community. It is the Ministry of Education's responsibility to tackle these disparities, as well as to raise the overall level of educational achievement (Hegarty 2007).

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical Framework*

Vygotsky's theory on dysontogenesis (TD) underpins the study. TD formulated a practice oriented paradigm of education for learners with special needs. Dysontogenesis (*dys-* anomaly, *ontos-* being, *genesis-* development). Deficient development compared to normal individual development. The article will use the social constructionist epistemology which constitutes a basis in developing a unique vision for future models of a responsive curriculum, of an inclusion based on positive differentiation (Gindis 2012). According to TD a positive resource oriented approach implies a favourable societal view on learners with disabilities, giving preference to strengthening and empowerment of individual skills rather than the traditional stress on weaknesses or deviations. Vygotsky considered disability as a "social aberration" (Karpov 2012), without refusing the primateship of biology. According to Vygotsky, "social aberration" spring from children's changing social, environmental relations – causing disturbances in social behaviour. This study will mainly focus on the Vygotskian socio-constructionist view on disability requiring an implementation of a responsive curriculum to diverse learners.

Landsberg (2005) and Newman and Holzman (2011) put it aptly when she indicated that teachers' attitudes in a school curriculum are important and need to be explored, shared, challenged, restructured and rethought when working in in-

clusive settings. The Commission on Special Needs conducted, identified among others, the existence of negative attitudes towards diversity and that those negative attitudes were a barrier to learning. Engelbrecht et al. (2001) also recognise the importance of teachers' attitudes towards change. Lefton and Valante (2008) point out that attitudes are established through learning, often early in life. Praisner (2007) conducted a survey of elementary school principals where inclusion was already in operation. The results show that about one in five principals' attitudes towards inclusion was positive whilst the rest were uncertain. Lerner (2007), Carl (1995) and Sieborger (2008) highlighted that while teachers are likely to need extra effort, principals as leaders and key figures, play an influential role in motivating teachers to succeed in the implementation of inclusive education system. The assumption that the majority of teachers' attitudes towards Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) is negative is a concern to Ingstad (2005) who maintained that society's response is a rational and considered one to a situation in a particular context like sending a disabled child to live at the farm placed such a child in a position where he could be both cared for and find a role. Livingstone (2004) and Rodina (2011) are of the opinion that the picture is a complex one, and current attitudes are a result of a series of sociological changes over the last 100 years such as the rise of wage labor in the mines of South Africa and modern medical techniques both leading to a visible increase of disability in a society that saw itself under threat and breaking down in the face of colonialism and industrialization. According to Hornsby (2000: 47).

*"Physical disabilities and impairments such as deafness and blindness were expected parts of the aging process and in the elderly signaled the potential for spiritual transcendence and increased proximity to the ancestors. In the young however (these) indicated past or ongoing misfortune brought on by ancestral displeasure, human machinations, or the unknowable actions of a distant God".*

The methodology of the study was both qualitative and quantitative. The study was conducted in a peri-urban area there is an outcry of teachers for parental involvement (which is not there) in problems of the schools involving learners. The perception is that they are worse off in

comparison to their counterparts in urban areas and they regard this study as a mouthpiece through which their concerns can be raised.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Approach**

The approach used in this study is both qualitative and quantitative. Questionnaires were the main instruments used and interviews were employed to create a semblance of triangulation. The qualitative method is described as naturalistic and humanistic and therefore true to life, whereas the quantitative method is mainly experimental. However, these two methods represent complementary components of the research process (Leedy and Ormrod 2001; Huysamen 1996). These approaches were used to determine what the participants know (knowledge and information) about inclusive education and what they thought (attitudes and beliefs) about its implementation in a school curriculum.

The two special schools were included because of the experiential knowledge of special schools settings and were perceived to be able to contribute greatly regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The resultant view would be balanced in the sense that it would be emanating from people who are conversant with the mainstream and special school settings.

**Research Ethics**

Researchers obtained consent from the participants prior the beginning of the study. The participants were told about the general nature of the study as well as about any potential risk that the study might cause. They were assured of confidentiality, and they were also told that they were free to decline participation.

**Population and Sampling**

A population may be defined as the total collection of individuals who are potentially

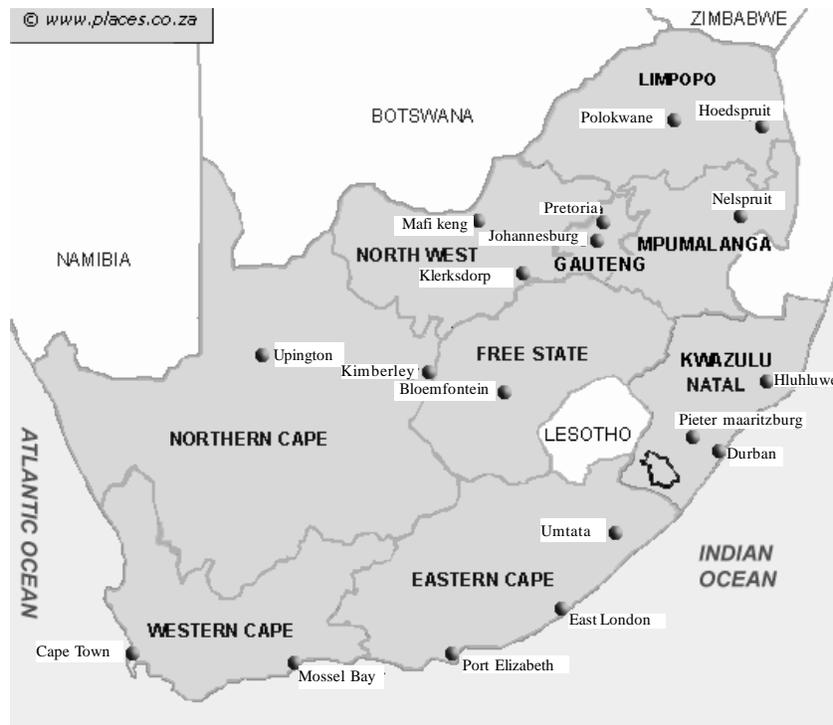


Fig. 1. Map of South Africa with its 9 provinces

available for observation and who have the attributes in common that a particular research questions examines (Huysamen 1976). In this study the survey population is drawn from John Taole Gaetsewe district of the Northern Cape and it comprises 17 mainstream Foundation Phase schools situated in the Circuit 1 in Kuruman. In addition to these 17 schools there are also two special schools which bring the total to 19 schools. The two special schools were included because of the experiential knowledge of special schools settings and were perceived to be able to contribute greatly regarding the implementation of inclusive education. The resultant view would be balanced in the sense that it would be emanating from people who are conversant with the mainstream and special school settings.

In this study, out of a population of 17 Foundation Phase schools six schools were randomly sampled. This means that all members of the population under study have an equal chance of being selected. Furthermore purposive sampling was undertaken. Purposive sampling refers to sampling where the researcher hand picks the cases to be included in his sample on the basis of his judgement of their typicality or on the expectation of delivering rich data (Cohen and Manion 1985). This additional sampling technique is undertaken in order to build a sample that satisfies the researcher's need and which is to increase the validity of the study. The two special schools were added to the six mainstream schools making a total of eight schools.

### Data Collection Instruments

Since many studies in education and allied fields rely on questionnaires and interviews as their

main source of data collection (Tuckman 1978), so too were the questionnaire and interviews used in this study. These methods were used to determine what the participants know (knowledge and information) about inclusive education and what they thought (attitudes and beliefs) about its implementation in a school curriculum. The following issues are covered by the questionnaire and interview schedule, and the researcher used them to uncover teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education:

- ♦ Knowledge of inclusive education
- ♦ Implementation of inclusive education
- ♦ Learners with special educational needs (LSEN)
- ♦ Barriers to learning
- ♦ Challenges that inclusion may bring
- ♦ Addressing these challenges

### Statistical Techniques

Descriptive statistics involves the measures of central tendency, variation and correlation. It describes what the data looks like: where their centre is, how broadly the spread and how they are related in terms of one aspect to another (Leedy and Ormrod 2001). In this study, computer-aided statistical analysis was employed. Diagrams, tables and figures were used as organisational tools to array the data. The SPSS program was used to compute the results of the study. The first step in the analysis was to compute the descriptive statistics for each respondent in the study. This included statistics like frequency distribution, percentages, mean and standard deviation.

The hypothesis to test the effect of school-type (mainstream versus special school) was formulated: There is a difference between attitudes of mainstream school teachers and those of special school teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education. To determine the statistical difference between the participants' attitudes, the Pearson's Chi-Squared could not be used because the sample size of special schools is relatively small (14). For this reason a compromise test known as the Student t-test was used. Thus a mixed methods approach was used. According to Borg and Gall (1979:350), the test of statistical significance is done to determine whether a null hypothesis can be rejected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Resources

Teaching and learning cannot occur in an environment which is lackadaisical, unpredictable and not directed towards optimising quality classroom time (Marsh 2002). Schools in South African provinces have a mix of affluent and high-poverty neighbourhoods which are vulnerable to creating an opportunity gap in

which the more wealthy learners have better resources which lead to better outcomes. The success or failure of any academic activity is determined by the availability of teaching and learning resources. A teacher from a mainstream school shared his frustrations by mentioning the following;

*“18 years into democracy, my grade 2 class is overcrowded with*

*120 learners. How can I apply a principle of individualisation?*

*How long does it take me to assess their work? In this school we have 25 LSEN.*

*How are we supposed to cater for them”?*

The Ministry of Basic Education’s special education is geared on ensuring that all education providers have the capacity to effectively support LSEN. The Ministry further expects that with improved teaching and appropriate support, LSEN can achieve to a greater extent than in the apartheid era (Montgomery 2000). For some learners this may mean higher academic achievement; for others it may mean better skills and competencies for adult life. LSEN face various challenges in the classroom and they require a different type of instruction from ordinary learners. These learners encounter challenges such as emotional and behavioral difficulties as well as communication and physical disabilities. There are various teaching solutions to aid these special learners. Learning institutions need to know exactly what difficulties their special learners have. This is where assessment techniques for LSEN become a necessity.

### **1. Braille**

The Braille system is a method that is widely used by blind people to read and write, and was the first digital form of writing. Braille was devised in 1825 by Louis Braille, a blind Frenchman. Seventy five percent of teachers registered their concerns about learners who do not have this system. Learners without Braille experience a challenge of submitting class work timeously. Teachers are supposed to exercise patience waiting for these learners to submit their work so that they should be able to read. The Department of Basic Education has to intervene with immediate effect to avoid further challenges of dysgraphia, dyslexia and dyscalculia on LSEN.

### **2. Neuropsychological Assessment Technique**

Eighty eight percent of participants stressed that neurological assessment is a tool for evaluating how much a learner’s performance may be influenced by unusual functions of the brain and nervous system (Lewis 2005). This type of assessment helps school psychologists to measure a LSEN’s skills systematically and determine the best learning environment for the learner. This assessment tool has traditionally been used by hospital clinicians and clinical psychologists. However, now that teachers have begun to recognise the value of neuropsychological assessment, many school psychologists are being trained to use it as a regular part of assessing LSEN (Herman and Seidenberg 2006).

Although many education experts have begun to use neuropsychology to explain why some LSEN have trouble acquiring language skills, learning to read (*especially at foundation level*), developing arithmetic reasoning skills, and so on, 82% of the teachers are concerned about the unavailability of this tool in most provincial schools. Using neuropsychology in schools can help teachers serve LSEN with learning disabilities more effectively because a learner who has neurologically related disabilities does not benefit from the same teaching techniques as a learner who learns at a slower rate. For curriculum assessment to be a success, both parents and teachers are encouraged to have a mutual working relationship. If a teacher suspects that a learner may be having this problem, he should resort to another testing mechanism. If it does not pay dividends, he should refer such a learner with the permission of the parent to a school psychologist. However, this is a taxing exercise which would require committed teachers.

### **3. Adaptive Tool**

Sixt seven percent of the participants reported that this assessment technique is performed when a learner is confirmed to have a learning disability. The motive behind this is to find out how best the learner can be assisted to adapt to a certain teaching method. This test also determines the individual’s behavior toward living independently. This examination can be administered through the use of questionnaires or through observation by an expert. Most schools from the Northern Cape do not have this tool.

#### 4. Achievement Technique

Here too, 70% of teachers registered their concerns about the unavailability of this achievement technique in schools. Once a LSEN starts the learning process in a special school, this method is suitable for assessing the progress and to determine the level of assistance required in the classroom. This tool is carried out through a standardized set of examinations that are conducted for every learner. The ultimate goal of this examination is to determine the learner's competence level in different areas such as writing and reading. The marks obtained enable the teachers to determine how to assist each learner in the learning processes.

#### Curriculum Change

Curriculum change in any country is an ongoing process which does not happen overnight. It warrants time, perseverance and dedication from teachers. Seventy-eight percent of the participants identified time factor as a tedious challenge to teachers. In the process of curriculum change, teachers and curriculum developers were presented with deadlines which they knew were impossible to observe and the process was always constrained by severe time pressures and overly optimistic planning (Sieborger 2008). Developing a curriculum that meets the needs of LSEN is a complex process that rarely follows a prescribed pattern because a curriculum is a dynamic process that needs to be reviewed constantly. A relevant curriculum that meets the needs of LSEN must be developed according to the specific character of a school by the whole staff. It is imperative that curriculum developers have to take precautionary measures that they do not destroy the system with too much red tape. Efforts should be directed towards understanding what it will take in the school's culture to effectively make a curriculum responsive. It is logical to expect that, if a school is to significantly change the way in which LSEN learn, substantial efforts in school development are required, because nearly all of the teachers who will be teaching in the new curriculum graduated from and have subsequently taught in a traditional curriculum. While a school development program is necessary, modifying the institutional culture is an essential prerequisite to successful curriculum change. Developing self-directed

learning and critical thinking skills in LSEN poses a major paradigm shift for most teachers.

#### Training of Teachers

According to Sinclair and Hanks (2005:853) training is learning teaching the skills that are needed for the job and has to be done meticulously. Eighty-six percent of respondents are concerned about the lack of training from government officials. A teacher from a special school mentioned the following;

*"I attended a four days workshop on Inclusive Education in Kimberly. That training was just a waste of time.*

*In that workshop teachers had frustrations with LSEN. The Government officials failed to advise us on how we should address challenges on the implementation of Inclusive Education as their focus was more on theory and not on practical issues."*

The training teachers received was haphazard and no follow ups were made. Although some of them are highly qualified they should be empowered with skills that will enable them to face the challenges with ease. Teachers find themselves torn between both academic and clerical work, and, although learners are supposed to keep their own portfolios, teachers, too, are compelled to have their own updated records which are to be kept safe for a certain period of time. This adds more responsibility to their workload. Teachers may object to the additional time necessary for developing and grading performance assessment, and may also have difficulty in specifying criteria for judging learners' work. Accordingly, teachers need expertise in terms of a curriculum undergoing change (O'neil and Kitson 2005:16).

#### Attitudes towards LSEN

- ❖ What is the attitude of teachers towards the implementation of a responsive curriculum to diverse learners?
- ❖ What is the attitude of teachers towards LSEN?

In response to the above questions, the following teacher's attitudes sounded negative. A teacher from school X reported the following;

*"Disabled children should be hidden in a house without windows so that neighbours*

*should not be able to see them. I believe it is an insult to have such children as they are bewitched.*

*These children are not supposed to be educated at all”.*

A newly appointed teacher from a mainstream school mentioned the following;

*“In my first quarter, it was difficult to teach LSEN. I spent sleepless night pondering about these disabled learners. I thought they were cursed by gods and I might also get cursed in one way or another.*

*I wanted to resign from the school because of these cripples in my class”.*

An experienced teacher from a special school remarked;

*“I have been teaching in this school for ten years. I mark books for LSEN. Shaking hands*

*with them is a nightmare. To be honest with you, I do not get used to these learners.*

*I wash my hands several times prior taking my dinner thinking that I may die”.*

Teacher Y from school Z mentioned the following;

*“I did not want any LSEN to touch my books or pen because I thought I would be sick and ultimately become disabled. I did not even want to touch their stationery. One day I needed a ruler, guess who volunteered to give it to me? I got it from a LSEN but I refused to use it because I was afraid of bad luck from the cursed learner. It was not my business how that learner took it. I did not care”.*

The findings are derived from a figure and tables. With reference to Table 1, item 1.1 shows that many teachers are aware that a responsive

**Table 1: Teachers’ views regarding a responsive curriculum to diverse learners**

	SD		D		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.1 Inclusive education is a mandate of the Ministry of Basic Education and has to be implemented in all schools	11	11.2	10	10.2	52	53.1	25	25.5	98	50
1.2 An advocacy of inclusive curriculum has been conducted for members of your school	11	11.2	27	27.6	46	46.9	7	7.1	91	50
1.3 Learners with mild to moderate disabilities from special schools will be accommodated in the mainstream.	11	11.2	23	23.5	52	53.1	12	12.2	98	50
1.4 Curriculum adaptation may mean simplification and therefore a lowering of the standard of education.	10	10.2	23	23.5	38	38.8	12	12.2	94	50
1.5 Inclusive curriculum will maximize participation of all learners in the culture and curriculum of education institutions and uncover and minimize barriers to learning.	4	4.1	34	34.7	48	49.0	21	21.4	95	50
1.6 Departmental mandate through circulars require that mainstream schools should not turn away learners with special educational needs.	8	8.2	22	22.4	57	58.2	23	23.5	97	50
1.7 The same assessment policy is used for mainstream learners as well as for learners with special education needs.	13	13.3	27	27.6	38	38.8	17	17.3	95	50
1.8 Learners with special educational needs need more support from teachers in terms of effort and time.	3	3.1	1	1.0	30	30.6	64	65.3	98	50
1.9 At some point learners with learning disabilities have been found not to cope in the mainstream and were subsequently referred to special schools.	2	2.0	6	6.1	42	42.9	46	46.9	96	50
1.10 Advocacy of inclusive curriculum has broadened your awareness to the point that you feel that the implementation of inclusive curriculum is in the best interest of all concerned.	8	8.2	18	18.4	45	45.9	26	26.5	97	50

SD = Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A=Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

curriculum to diverse learners is a mandate from the Department of Basic Education as reflected by 78.6% of teachers who agree. However, only a smaller percentage of those teachers, that is, 54%, acknowledge that an advocacy of inclusive curriculum has been conducted for their school as reflected in item 1.2. Item 1.5 shows a higher percentage of teachers, that is, 70.4%, being of the opinion that inclusive education will maximise participation of all learners and thereby minimise barriers to learning. In 1.6 a high percentage of 81.7% illustrates that teachers are aware that they should not turn away learners with special educational needs from the

mainstream schools. Item 1.8 shows a very high percentage of teachers, that is, 95.9%, being aware that the presence of learners with special educational needs in a school goes hand-in-hand with the need for more provision of effort and time on the part of teachers. Furthermore, teachers with a percentage of 89.8% can attest to the fact that some learners who have been mainstreamed by default have had to be referred to special schools because of their inability to cope (item 1.9). Lastly, item 1.10 reflects that a high percentage of teachers, namely 72.4%, indicate that they are of the opinion that inclusive education is in the best interest of all concerned. On

**Table 2: Views on success without assistance**

		SD		D		A		SA		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
2.1	All learners can learn irrespective of their learning disabilities.	7	7.1	13	134.3	38	38.8	38	38.8	96	50
2.2	All learners can learn up to grade 9 and beyond irrespective of their learning disabilities.	19	19.4	23	23.5	29	29.6	24	24.5	95	50
2.3	Learners with learning disabilities can mature into productive citizens who no longer depend on the state for social security grants	8	8.2	17	17.3	45	45.9	27	27.6	97	50
2.4	There are children whose learning disabilities cannot be overcome irrespective of the amount of effort and time that the teacher puts into his/her work.	7	7.1	16	16.3	42	42.9	31	31.6	96	50
2.5	Learners with severe learning disabilities may require additional support and time.	4	4.1	4	4.1	31	31.6	59	60.2	98	50

SD = Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A=Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

**Table 3: The impact of an inclusive curriculum**

Views on the impact of inclusive education and things that need to change to accommodate them	SD		D		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
3.1 The education of mainstream learners will suffer as a result of inclusive education as a lot of the teacher's time will be devoted to those learners with disabilities.	15	15.3	23	23.5	26	26.5	34	34.7	98	50
3.2 No matter how much effort and time teachers devote to learners with disabilities they cannot bring them to par with mainstream learners.	4	4.1	26	26.5	35	35.7	31	31.6	96	50
3.3 Inclusive curriculum is possible if there is change in the mindset of teachers.	5	5.1	14	14.3	48	49.0	25	25.5	92	50
3.4 Inclusive curriculum is possible if people respect the differences in learners due to HIV/AIDS or other infectious diseases.	6	6.1	16	16.3	46	46.9	28	28.6	96	50
3.5 Inclusive curriculum is possible if people acknowledge the difference in learners due to disability.	3	3.1	10	10.2	54	55.1	28	28.6	95	50

SD = Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A=Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

the whole, Table 1 illustrates that teachers generally have a positive response towards the implementation of inclusive education.

With reference to Table 2, item 2.1 indicates that 77.6% of teachers agree that all learners can learn irrespective of their learning disabilities, however, a lower percentage, that is, 42.9% indicates that not all learners can learn up to grade 9 and beyond, item 2.2. It would be reasonable to conclude that the reason for the inability to learn beyond grade 9 could be a learning disability. In item 2.3 only a small percentage of teachers 25.5% disagree that learners with learning disabilities can mature into productive citizens. This indicates that the majority of teachers are positive about inclusive education; that it can turn learners with barriers to learning into productive citizens. However, item 2.4 reflects that despite the positive effects that inclusion is intended to bring, 74.5% of teachers acknowledge that despite the efforts and time that teachers may ex-

pend there would still be those barriers to learning that cannot be resolved. The overall scenario as depicted by Table 2 indicates that teachers are positive about inclusive education. It also indicates that learners with barriers to learning will require varying amounts of assistance and that there will be learners whose barriers to learning cannot be resolved.

In Table 3, 61.2%, that is, (34.7 + 26.5) % of teachers feels that the education of mainstream learners will suffer as a result of inclusive education because teachers' will devote more time to the learners with learning disabilities. Furthermore 67.3% of the teachers are of the opinion that no matter how much effort and time teachers devote to learners with learning disabilities, they cannot bring them on par with regular learners. Teachers also agree that certain things need to change to make the implementation of inclusive education possible; for example, things like change of mindset and discrimination in terms

**Table 4: Teachers' views regarding learning disabilities**

<i>Views on the impact of inclusive education and things that need to change to accommodate them</i>		<i>SD</i>		<i>D</i>		<i>A</i>		<i>SA</i>		<i>Total</i>	
		<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
4.1	Teachers often judge the effectiveness of their teaching by their learners' performances.	1	1.0	6	6.1	58	59.2	33	33.7	98	50
4.2	Learners with learning disabilities often pose a great challenge to teaching and learning.	3	3.1	7	7.1	54	55.1	33	33.7	97	50
4.3	Learners with learning disabilities cannot proceed beyond Secondary Education.	20	20.6	49	50.0	18	18.4	10	10.2	98	50
4.4	Learning problems are first identified at the Foundation Phase but because they are never remedied, they persist even beyond the Secondary Phase..	6	6.1	10	10.2	49	50.0	33	33.7	94	50
4.5	Attention-deficit problems are rife in schools and they are mainly responsible for poor scholastic achievement.	6	6.1	13	13.3	67	68.4	5	5.1	95	50
4.6	If there is medication that can be administered to alleviate attention-deficit disorders, teachers would welcome them.	4	4.1	9	9.2	62	63.3	22	22.4	97	50
4.7	Teachers are not aware that there is medication that can help to curb the effects of some learning disorders.	5	5.1	25	25.5	47	48.0	18	18.4	95	50
4.8	Learners with mild to moderate handicaps can cope quite well in the mainstream.	7	7.1	14	14.3	57	58.2	20	20.4	98	50
4.9	Dyslexia i.e. inability to read or write, occurs commonly in schools and teachers are not trained to assist learners with this disorder.	12	12.2	18	18.4	28	28.6	39	39.8	96	50
4.10	If teachers were trained in remedial teaching, they would find Learners with Special Educational Needs not so challenging.	3	3.1	9	9.2	31	31.6	53	54.1	97	50

SD = Strongly Disagree; D= Disagree; A=Agree; SA= Strongly Agree

of HIV status and learning disability should change. This is reflected by items 3.3 and 3.5 with percentages 74.5% and 83.7% respectively. Thus while there is a positive attitude towards inclusive education, teachers agree that there are impediments against its implementation.

In Table 4, item 4.2, 97% of teachers perceive that learners with learning disabilities pose a great challenge to teaching and learning. However, 70.6% of teachers disagree that learners with learning disabilities cannot proceed beyond Secondary Education as illustrated by item 4.3. This can be understood to suggest that there are surmountable challenges involved in teaching learners with barriers to learning. Item 4.4 points out that these learning problems are first identified at the Foundation Phase but because they are not remediated, they persist even beyond the Secondary Phase. This is supported by 83.7% of the teachers. Item 4.5 reflects that many teachers feel that attention-deficit problems are rife in schools and they are mainly responsible for poor scholastic achievement of 73.5%.

Items 4.6 and 4.7 involve medication that can be administered to alleviate some learning problems. Many responses, such as 85.7% and 66.4% respectively, indicate that teachers would welcome such medication. Item 4.10 deals with training and 85.7% of teachers feel there is a need for teachers to be trained in remedial education so that they should not feel challenged by learners with special educational needs. The general trend as reflected by teacher responses shows that they are in agreement with all the statements except one. Amongst other things, performance of learners may be taken as a yardstick to measure effectiveness of teaching. It is contended that there are challenges but teachers would welcome training so that they would know how to address the challenges of inclusive education.

The findings revealed that the majority of teachers have negative and positive attitudes towards the implementation of inclusive education in a school curriculum. The study also revealed that teachers have a number of concerns they want to address apart from the challenges that inclusive education may bring. For instance, concerns such as overcrowding and lack of knowledge of remedial skills, were mentioned. Furthermore, to ensure successful implementation, it was perceived that awareness campaigns

should be raised and the infrastructure of existing buildings should be changed to suit the diversity of learners as indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5: LSEN in schools**

<i>Disability</i>	<i>No. of LSEN</i>	<i>Mains-stream Sc.</i>	<i>Special school</i>
Visually impaired	13	06	02
Hearing impaired	12		
Vocally impaired	12		
Physically disabled	13		
Total	50	06	

Table 5 on impairment refers to the following;

- ♦ Visually impaired refers to the blind
- ♦ Hearing impaired refers to the deaf
- ♦ Vocally impaired refers to the dumb
- ♦ Physically impaired refers to the cripples using wheelchairs, crushes and those suffering from epilepsy.

**Table 6: Biographical data of sample size**

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Regular</i>	<i>Special</i>	<i>Total</i>
Principals	3	2	5
Deputy Principals	2	-	2
Heads of Department	6	2	8
Teachers	32	3	35
Total	43	7	50

## DISCUSSION

Crow (2010) argues that inclusion has been used to refer to unconditional access while it refers to a sliding scale of partial participation for others. This degree of latitude is unacceptable. Moore (2011) in support of Crow (2010) suggested that teachers' grammar needs checking as when they speak of disabled learners they use the word 'disabled' as a verb rather than adjective in the first instance. People are not of themselves disabled, it is a relational concept within a sociological discourse rather than a pathological descriptor within a medical discourse. This engagement with language has profound implications for curriculum implementation to diverse learners. Vygotsky highly appreciated the role of social and collective life experience for learners with disabilities. According to Vygotsky, the personality of learners with disabilities is not determined by their disability, but rather by their social environment and its dialectical interaction with the learner, which is a socio-psychological realization of disability. Thus,

a responsive curriculum is crucial in the lives of diverse learners with or without disabilities (Yankun 2012).

The findings from this study reveal that most teachers generally have a negative attitude while few have a positive attitude towards the implementation of a responsive curriculum to diverse learners. It is imperative that the department of Basic Education provides support to teachers in curriculum assessment for learners with diverse needs, and use information obtained through assessment in programme planning. A responsive curriculum on inclusion differs from previously held notions of integration and mainstreaming, which tended to be concerned primarily with disability and 'special educational needs' and implied learners deserving accommodation by the mainstream. By contrast, inclusion is about the child's right to participate and the school's duty to accept the child. Inclusion rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities (Landsberg 2005).

From Table 1, it can be deduced that teachers are aware of the implementation of inclusive education because advocacy has been done in respect of their schools. Furthermore, the table reflects an acknowledgement of teachers that there are learners in their schools with barriers to learning but that they are urged not to turn away such learners. However, there have been instances where some learners were referred to special schools because of inability to cope in the mainstream. Despite the fact that learners with barriers to learning may require more effort and time, the general impression is that inclusive education is in the best interest of all concerned. The general impression as depicted by Table 2 is that all children have the capacity to learn but they need to be assisted. Assistance that may be required from teachers can be in terms of more effort and more time. The table presents a positive picture which may be indicative of the positive attitude that teachers reflect towards the implementation of inclusive education in a school curriculum.

Table 3 reflects that there are certain things that need to change for inclusive education to be successfully implemented. These are, amongst others, teachers' mindset and attitude towards diversity. This implies that conditions are not quite conducive for the implementation of inclusive education, but when certain imped-

iments have been removed, the situation will be ideal. This is a depiction of a positive response towards the implementation of inclusive education. Table 4 reflects that teachers acknowledge that learners with barriers to learning pose a challenge to teaching and learning. It shows also that learning disabilities exist and that they are regarded as being responsible for poor scholastic achievements. Scholastic achievement has been the hallmark for the effectiveness of teaching and learning at schools but now the emphasis seems to have shifted more to what the learner needs. This means that teachers should no longer regard learner performance as a yardstick of the effectiveness of their teaching.

While it may be necessary to scrutinize the tables closely in order to assess the trends they reflect, the figures speak for themselves. There is a correlation between the attitudes of mainstream and those of special school teachers on many aspects of inclusive education. However, on four aspects there are significant differences as reflected by Tables 1 - 6. One challenge that seemed to be prevalent in all schools is the issue of overcrowding in schools and this goes hand in hand with teacher-learner ratio which featured among many responses. However, there are talks among many quarters to the effect that overcrowding is no longer a problem in schools anymore. There is a Post Provisioning Model which purports to determine how many teachers should be in a school and this model is said to be addressing the issue of overcrowding. It appears that teachers need a lot of information so that they can be empowered. Most of the challenges, it seems, can be resolved through networking with colleagues from other schools engaging the School Governing Body and the community as a whole. However, the Department of Education through its officials should have a mechanism whereby it makes itself accessible to all schools.

## CONCLUSION

It became evident from the study an inclusive curriculum maximises the participation of all learners in the community schools of their choice and to rethink and restructure policies, cultures and practices in schools and learning environments so that diverse learning needs can be met. It was also pointed out that all students can learn and benefit from education, and that

schools should adapt to the physical, social, and cultural needs of diverse learners, rather than learners adapting to the needs of the school. Resources, curriculum change and haphazard training were some of the identified themes which may be problematic for teachers to implement a responsive curriculum to diverse learners.

Inclusion has become an educational imperative in many countries and South Africa is no exception. In South Africa this educational innovation comes in the midst of many transformations, which are intended to redress past injustices and backlogs and the teacher is caught in the middle of it all. It is for this reason that this study was undertaken; to determine the attitudes of teachers towards the implementation of inclusive education; to find out what they perceive as challenges and to find out ways of addressing these challenges. The survey method was employed using instruments such as observations, questionnaires and interview schedules. Questionnaires were used for coding and analysing data quantitatively; interview schedules were used to obtain qualitative data and also to cross check the responses. Observations were also used to check the responses from the questionnaires. The study set out to explore the attitudes of teachers in a school curriculum. What has become evident from the analysis is that teachers' attitudes are positive. The range of questions asked covered a broad spectrum of issues pertaining to inclusion, yet the responses were favourable. The results indicate that teachers support inclusive education though they would like certain things to change before it can be implemented; things like overcrowding of classes, infrastructure and others which may pose as impediments to the implementation of inclusive education. Teachers also think that they need appropriate training so as to be empowered for the task ahead. An inclusive and responsive curriculum requires some changes in how teachers teach, as well as changes in how learners with and without special needs interact with and relate to one another. A responsive curriculum practices frequently rely on active learning, authentic assessment practices, multi-level instructional approaches, and increased attention to diverse learners' needs and individualization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations flow from the conclusion of the research.

- All teachers should understand the importance of implementing a responsive curriculum to diverse learners.
- Schools should have a strategic plan in place. They must reduce the number of learners who require low levels of support.
- Current staff must be used to support learners and teachers in ordinary schools
- Motivation should be given to the DoE for additional staff and resources, and develop information sharing initiatives.
- No child should be denied access to any local school because of the impairment
- Teachers, parents and guardians, must have equitable access to the resources available to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Change should be supported to ensure that the education system values, respects and is successful for all learners with or without any disability.
- The Department of Basic Education (DoBE) should provide all the teachers with training on inclusive curriculum. The training should be intensive and not superficial like some of the workshops conducted by the DoBE have tended to be.
- The DoBE should alleviate problems of overcrowding in schools or allow the schools to use Section 21 money to build extra classes. The DoBE should explain the implication of post provision to teachers so that they can interpret what they perceive to be a shortage of teachers correctly.
- The DoBE should supply all the necessary resources to schools. The infrastructure of schools should be made safe and user friendly for everyone.

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