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Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed to explore the implementation of the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support policy. It underpinned by the Bio-Ecological systems Theory (BEST) which outlines the importance of the surroundings and the interaction of the surrounding in the social and cognitive development of a child.

Methodology: Data was gathered from a sample 32 participants comprising of 30 teachers from three primary schools and two district officials of the King Cetshwayo District. Survey questionnaires and focus groups interviews were used as data collection instruments. The data is presented into themes namely knowledge and understanding of the SIAS policy; addressing learning barriers identified in primary schools; teachers' knowledge and skills in working with learners with problems; common learning problems identified in primary schools; and impact of the SIAS policy to the development of learners. These main themes bred the sub-themes namely SIAS policy as a guideline;

documented procedure on identifying learners with problems; supporting learners with learning problems as per the SIAS policy; parental involvement; teacher development about the notion of SIAS; cascaded training for teachers; behavioural problems; reading and writing problems; personal and scholastic development of learners; and general successes of the SIAS policy in the education setting.

Findings: The key findings of the study revealed that SIAS policy of inclusive education is not effectively implemented. This is due to teachers not prepared enough in terms of skills and confidence in working with learners with learning problems.

Recommendations: The research therefore recommends that training development needs to be well effected for teachers to align themselves with SIAS policy in working with learners with learning barriers.

Keywords: *Screening, Identification, Assessment, Support, Inclusive Education*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Department of Basic Education (DoE) introduced White Paper 6 policy which aimed at promoting inclusivity for all learners in the public educational setting (DoE, 2001), to help the home, school and the larger community to accommodate persons with special needs (Okongo, Ngao, Rop, & Nyongesa, 2015). To further strengthen the implementation of this policy the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced a screening and support management structure called the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) (DBE, 2014). SIAS provides procedures on how the school personnel should assist in reaching out to the needs of the learners with learning barriers within inclusive classroom environment (DBE, 2014). It is one of the aspects that seek to strengthen inclusive education within the educational setting by allowing access to quality and equal education for all learners. Inclusive education is a process of addressing diverse needs of all learners by reducing barriers to and within the learning environment (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). The study evaluates how teachers implement the SIAS policy in primary schools and how the policy has been helpful to teachers and learners. The district-based support team (DBST), school-based support teams (SBST), and teachers are significant personnel to ensure effective implementation of SIAS policy to address the diverse needs of learners. This is because they drive the teaching and learning processes and support structures of social development and self-esteem for learners in local schools to progress in their scholastic stance (DBE, 2014).

The problem of inadequate training guidelines and teacher preparedness for inclusive education still arise as educators work with learners with learning disabilities in regular classrooms. A study conducted by Aiello and Sharma (2018) in University of Sarlino, Italy, on the effects of the Learning Support Teachers' Course as part of improving skills to teach in inclusive classrooms, revealed that participating to the professional development course positively influence their intentions and skills to teach in inclusive classroom. These findings suggest that training improves the understanding and application of support relevant to the needs of learners with learning barriers (Aiello & Sharma, 2018). Therefore, exposing teachers to adequate structured training on the implementation of policies improves their skills in teaching and learning processes within the inclusive classrooms.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study was to explore the implementation of Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support Policy by teachers in selected primary schools in King Cetshwayo District. The study intended to provide answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent is the SIAS policy helpful to teachers in selected primary schools in King Cetshwayo District?
- What is the level of teacher preparedness in providing support to learners with learning barriers as provided in SIAS policy in selected primary schools of King Cetshwayo District?
- What are the determinants of best practices in the implementation of SIAS policy in selected primary schools in King Cetshwayo District?

Statement of the Problem

The schools that the learners are enrolled into seem to have ongoing challenges attending to the learners who require special skills. This is indicative in many cases where learners repeat the same grades for several times. This may be because teachers are not paying much attention to the learners in the classroom due to a large number of pupils accommodated by each and every single classroom. One of the studies done in South Africa on implementation of inclusive

education revealed that teachers are not skilled and motivated enough to drive the teaching and learning processes in inclusive classrooms (Nell, Tlale, Engelbrecht, & Nel, 2016). Learners with learning barriers may not be coping with the classroom environment because of the lack of the support structures and resources in place to assist them during teaching and learning processes. Failure of being supported may result in learners dropping out from schools.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevance of the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) in Primary Schools

As the majority of schools and districts adopt policies to include learners with significant support needs in general education settings, a need exists to better understand how these practices, as per the policy, are implemented (Kurth, Lyon & Shogren, 2015). SIAS policy requires that teachers understand different students to be able to identify their needs and to support accordingly. The needs of learners may be posing challenges to the scholastic performance of particular learners.

Inclusive schools and classrooms are mostly about belonging, nurturing and educating all learners, regardless of their differences in ability, culture, gender, language, socio-economic status and ethnicity, and they are viewed as places that both embody and support learning for a diverse range of learners (Engelbrecht, Savolainen, Nel, Koskela & Okkolin, 2017). They are the platforms for the children to build their self-esteem, gain maturity, and develop good interrelationship skill. Therefore, it takes a conducive environment where learners are accepted regardless of their diverse presentation of self in terms of race, age, physical appearance, capabilities, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and sexual preferences.

Classrooms succeed in learners' population to survive and thrive in the generation to reflect the best practices in making the classroom learner-centred, knowledge-centred, assessment-centred, and instruction-centred (Tomlinson, 2015). The teaching environment need to be conducive enough in making sure that all learners' needs are catered for and all learners are able to participate equally. Equal interaction that facilitates learning needs to be ensured in the way the assessments are done, and in the delivery of knowledge. Section 5 of SASA makes provision for all schools to be full-service schools by stating that public schools may not administer any test related to the admission of a learner to a public school (South African Schools Act, 1996).

Full service schools are defined as well-resourced schools which must receive great support to be able to cater for the range of learners with learning needs. Inclusive education policy has received a lot of attention and reflects the commitment of the South African government to address diversity in the learner population and provide a continuous support within a democratic South Africa. International guidelines such as The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the standard rules on the equalisation of opportunities for disabled persons and the World Conference on Education for All provide an overall framework of policy development (Du Plessis, 2013).

Education for All expressed among others the following initiatives as requirement to have the policy implemented; the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all and improving the quality of education (UNESCO, 2000). Chapter Two of the Constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996) stipulates that every person should be treated fairly without any discrimination by any person or state, and that has a right to access equal and quality education from any Department of Education setting. Therefore, a child with disabilities should be allowed access to education. It is within the school where a school pack

published in 2008 which is about Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) is conducted and the child is assisted (Zungu, 2014).

Weeks and Erradu (2013) argue that educators themselves also need support in providing high intensity assistance for learners who experience intellectual barriers to learning (Thabede, 2017).

According to Engelbrecht (1999), in Geldenhuys and Wevers (2013), the rights discourse is committed to extending full citizenship to all people and emphasizes equal opportunity, self-reliance and independence. This full citizenship will allow the provision of equal educational opportunity to all diverse learners and equitable distribution of resources. Hence, all learners' physical and psychological needs are safe and secured within the learning environment.

It is argued that all learners should receive quality education and inclusion should be the universal right to all schools that provide inclusive education. This challenges the struggles against the violation of human rights, and unfair discrimination (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). This is supported by the Salamanca Statement which states that every learner has a constitutional right to learning and should have access to quality education, and teaching should take into consideration the diversity of the features and needs of children (UNESCO, 1994).

Teacher Preparedness for the Implementation of SIAS Policy

In the school setting, teachers need to be prepared enough to support learners with barriers. A number of attributes including competences, attitudes and emotions need to play a role in their interaction within inclusive education. Their personalities and emotional intelligence also contribute immensely to the provision of inclusivity within schools.

Teacher training in respect to inclusivity is viewed as important in developing skills and attitudes required for successful inclusion (Vaz et al., 2015). A further concern is that learning support teachers generally do not give such learners additional support, and some even believe that they are neither qualified nor competent enough to support mainstream teachers in this area (Dreyer, 2008). The incompetence of teachers deprive learners with adequate support. Most teachers are not motivated enough to assist learners with learning needs because they believe they do not have necessary skills.

Formal educational training is being identified as one of the main factors that promote an inclusive attitude which help teachers to plan accordingly for best practices. Pedagogies that combine formal training and planned hands-on experience individuals with learning disabilities have been shown to improve preparedness of teachers and positive attitudes towards inclusion. Moreover, irrespective of degree type, trainee teachers had a better understanding of the potential of children with disabilities after completing a unit of study with a strong focus on inclusive education (Vaz et al., 2015). Little support is provided to the teachers on how to attend to the needs of the learners without excluding them from the curriculum (Mkhuma, Maseko & Tlale, 2014). The school management team should then encourage and motivate all teachers to attend workshops and training on inclusive education policies.

Inclusive education policies in South Africa emphasize that all learners should be provided with equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities but the implementation of inclusive education is still influenced by lack of resources and the attitudes and actions of the teachers in the classroom (Engelbrecht, Nel, Tlale, 2015). According to Engelbrecht, Green and Naicker (2004), teachers need to be sensitive of their strengths, weaknesses and vulnerability to be able to identify and address the needs of the learners with learning barriers. One of the studies about inclusivity revealed that gender is a predictor of attitudes about inclusion of learners with learning disabilities. Male teachers tend to have a more negative

attitude than female teachers (Vaz et al., 2015). Female teachers are reported to be tolerant in implementing inclusive education.

Self-efficacy is also considered as the strong predictor for effective teaching within inclusive classrooms (Tournaki & Podell, 2005). There are more analogous observations reported in literature. Teachers who express higher level of self-efficacy tend to work longer with learners who experience learning problems, attend to the special needs of children, and work with their parents and make less negative predictions about learners' abilities (Tournaki & Podell, 2005). Such teachers are more likely to listen to learners, are less ego-involved, and are less angered or insulted and more willing to solve learners' problems rather than punish them when confronted by such learners (Sharma & George, 2016).

Support Available for Teachers

There is widespread support for inclusion but less support in terms of the implementation of inclusion policies because teachers are not emotionally prepared to pioneer inclusion within schools (Zulu, 2014:14). Little support is provided to teachers on how to attend to the needs of learners without excluding them from the curriculum. Providing education in inclusive classrooms is the most challenging activity that require teachers to be committed and have effective support from the District Support Teams, and School-based Support Teams for optimal coordination of teaching and learning support processes.

Studies have revealed that teacher attitudes and expectations are significant barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive classrooms and equitable participation of all learners. Attitudes are conceptualized as relatively stable constructs comprising cognitive, affective and behavioural components (Vaz et al., 2015). Teachers need to be emotionally capable to effectively facilitate pedagogical practices for equal benefit for all learners within the school. One of the studies conducted in Zimbabwe revealed that teachers need competencies to identify and support learners with learning problems so that all learners benefit efficiently from teaching and learning processes (Love, & Horn, 2021). This suggests that an initiative to be invented for learners on inclusive education, the teachers should be competent enough to deliver teaching and learning methods invented with inclusive education in primary schools.

It seems as if there is a lack of basic and appropriate learning support material. This support is hindered by the unavailability of assistive devices, inadequate facilities at schools, inaccessible environments, inappropriate and inadequate support services, lack of human resource development including education and training of teachers and other role players to deal with learning difficulties, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of mother tongue teachers which contribute to conditions that may cause systemic barriers to learning. Pedagogical barriers can be linked to an inflexible curriculum that causes learning breakdown, inflexible teaching and assessment approaches that do not cater for diverse learner needs and styles (such as visual, auditory, kinaesthetic), insufficient support from and for teachers.

Currently, in South Africa, a transdisciplinary collaborative approach towards diagnosis and support in a socio-ecological model is encouraged, where all role players (including health professionals, parents, teachers and even learners) interactively share their knowledge and expertise, support one another, and work collectively towards providing the most appropriate support for a learner experiencing barriers. Education White Paper 6 (2001) constituted certain support structures. This includes a support team at school level, namely the School Based Support Team (SBST), and a District Based Support Team (DBST) (Department of Education, 2001).

The SBST comprises mainly of teachers at the schools, but may also involve health professionals from the community. The DBST consists of a variety of support professionals who provide support to all schools in the district area. Schools are divided into Special Schools as Resource Centres (SSRC) for learners with a high intensity of support needs, and Full Service Schools (FSS) for learners with a moderate intensity of support needs (Department of Basic Education, 2014). Yet, these schools are not available in all districts, and are therefore accessible for only a limited number of learners.

Successes in the Implementation of the SIAS Policy

Research demonstrates that students with severe disabilities can learn academic, communication, social, and self-determination skills in inclusive settings. And placing students with disabilities in a general education setting can increase learning expectations for all students (Kurth et al., 2015). Across this body of work, common features are accommodations and adaptations, a culture of belonging, professional collaboration, and engagement with peers (Kurth et al., 2015). The framework of inclusive education allows building of good relationship with different stakeholders for the purpose of enhancing the wellbeing of learners.

According to Okongo, Ngao, Rop and Wesonga (2015), inclusivity has an impact on the development of learners who experience learning problems and the ones without problems. Improved academic skills, social skills, communication skills and peer relationships are some of the most important benefits of inclusion (Okongo et al., 2015). Nondisabled students can serve as positive speech and behaviour role models for those with disabilities and students with disabilities offer their nondisabled peers acceptance, tolerance, patience and friendship.

Learners without problems learn different aspects of socializing with learners with learning needs. They learn from one other. They develop a string of relationships and social cohesion which provides them with an opportunity to explore different areas of communication and ways of doing things. This effective opportunity enhances self- esteem of learners as they feel humane and nurtured, and comfortable around their peers. Hence, they develop good social interaction with teachers and their scholastic performance is improved.

Collaboration between general teachers and special education teachers is some of the ways to work effectively in tackling challenges that arise in inclusive classrooms (Gebhardt, Schwab, Krammer & Gegenfurtner, 2015). Teachers are positive about the notion of inclusivity and they perceive it as the possible perspective and can be successful if they receive relevant support to cater for the needs of learners (Nell, Tlale, Engelbrecht & Nel, 2016). Teachers at the Full Service Schools should provide various levels of support to neighboring schools; for example, they can share resources, skills and technology, and ideas on how to prepare learning material and good practice examples (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the Bio-Ecological Systems theory of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner. Bronfenbrenner was influence by a Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who is a founder of Social learning theory. Vygotsky argues that individuals learn in social contexts and the social contexts influence the learning of the particular individual (Paquette & Ryan, 1992). Bioecological systems theory then stipulate that human development is influenced by the social contexts that we live in where we interact with one another at different levels (Mahlo, 2013). He argued that there are systems that generate proximal processes within systems namely microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The objective of this theory is to conceptualize the environment and its role in the process of development from the currently operating forces, which are personal characteristics, time, and

reciprocal relationships (proximal processes) and social context, which influence the future developmental outcomes of a human being (Tudge, Payir, Merçon-vargas, Cao, & Liang, 2016).

Personal Characteristics

Personal characteristics refer to the qualities of an individual mostly defined by the background and the environment in which the person is living. They may serve as the reinforcing elements and as the product of the development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Personal characteristics involve age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, special needs, behaviour, and ethnicity which facilitate the interaction of the child with the surrounding environment, which is the microsystem of the child. They have an impact on how the environment may be influenced to capacitate the growing child to reach the ultimate level where effective change in growth and acquisition of skills required in the learning and home environment are manifested. Microsystem involves family, parents, peer group, classroom, religious setting, and teacher of a child coupled with the reciprocal relationship taking place between the elements in the system (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016).

Interaction of all elements within the microsystem of the child affects the personal development of the child. For example, the reciprocal relationship the parent and the teacher have contributed to the intra-psychological development of the child. This includes becoming cognisant of the strengths and weaknesses of the child, and reach the consensus on the possible activities the parent and the teacher may perform to enhance the scholastic performance of the child. When the learner is identified with reading and writing problem he or she may require specific amount of attention and specialised skills from teacher to assist the learner cope with the teaching and learning environment. According to SIAS policy, the teacher needs to screen and identify learners with problems, and develop an Individual Support Plan together with the parent by means of reaching out to the needs of a learner (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The support plan should include the characteristics which need to be enhanced in the child's life, and how such may be achieved without expectations that are beyond the abilities that the child present with (Department of Basic Education, 2014). This suggests that parents are also important role players in the development of the child's educational plan, and should provide guidance and necessary reinforcement to scholastic activities of the child while at home. The kind of support should take into consideration the child's personal characteristics. Consistent support from school and home may provide the child with great opportunity in developing effective learning skills.

Proximal Development as an Important Human Building Block

The principle of proximal development is crucial because the kind of the relationship that the family, school, and peers have with the child may positively or negatively influence the development of the child concerned. The process involves a pattern of activities and roles between school, family, and peer groups in relation to the child's experiences (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2016). The activities mainly occur within the system or across different systems of the child. They are characterized by face to face contacts with each structure and the reciprocal relationship with immediate family, school, teachers, and peers (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). People who are at the immediate environment of the child enhance the child's sense of belonging through support and love.

Engelbretch, Nel, Nel and Tlale (2015) stated that the good nurturing and supporting system that encompasses sufficient support and sense of belonging provides the child with an opportunity for emotional development which contribute to the self-esteem of the particular child. For example, the continuous healthy relationship between the teacher, the parent, and

the child with his or her peers contributes immensely in the personal development of the child because of the appreciating and non-discriminative environment into which the child is being exposed. The immediate environment may also become a risk factor if love and support are not evident or when there are absent patterns of activities that provide opportunities for growth and understanding. For example, the relationship is better explained if the immediate environment of the child has the common goal of enriching and enhancing the child's life. This means parents, teachers, peers, and family members should provide opportunities for the child to engage with all individuals without being excluded from either peers or any members of the family or the community. Ensuring cohesion and good relationship amongst all learners may be one of the strongest determinants of effective teaching and learning within schools. SIAS asserts that if the child has been identified as having or will be experiencing learning problems in the near future, the teacher should immediately build the communication with the parent for effective participation of the child within the education setting (Department of Basic Education, 2014). This means that communication should include goal setting on the support that the child will need for scholastic achievement. There should also be activities of awareness of learning problems within schools that are facilitated across all the learners to ensure all learners understand one another and are able to build cohesive relationships.

Social Context

It is understood that social contexts such as macrosystem, mesosystem, and exosystem where a child is not an active participant in some, the interrelationship of these contexts affect the development of the child (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). These contexts include the school management team, parents and community, the school governing body, the school-based support team, and the district support team as responsible parties to steer the implementation of SIAS policy of inclusive education. The part of work that is designed in terms of the curriculum activities within the education setting should be informed by the needs of the learners within the school and the community around the school. According to Paquette and Ryan (1992), the interaction of all these systems has an impact on the closest context that works in supporting the schools in the challenges they face, and in making the best in providing sufficient support needed by the teacher to steer teaching and learning processes. The cultural values, economic patterns, political philosophy, and laws of the society have a cascading influence throughout the interaction across the systems where the child is developing (Tudge, Payir, Merçon-vargas, Cao & Liang, 2016).

They are mainly referred under the macro system context. Macro-system involves the Education White Paper 6, SIAS policy, Guidelines for Inclusive Learning Programmes, and other policies that impact on teacher and learner support and development. South African Constitution forms part of this system, where rights to human dignity is enforced by law. Every child has a right to quality, equal and free education. This is the system that greatly influences the practices or activities that are performed at the school level. The development of curriculum, CAPS, takes place in this system. There might be challenges teachers face in terms of adjusting the curriculum to suit the needs of the children with learning needs. This may be due to short-term goals of teachers and their competency levels which could limit the intervention given to the individual child therefore making less meaningful change when attending to the child's problems. The curriculum seems to not contextualise the needs of the learners in terms of the support they need, as a result learners with learning problems have difficulty in grasping the content effectively within the classroom environment. The society is also responsible for assisting the child in engaging in the activities that enhance the self-esteem of the child, and encourage peer relationship. Children with problems also need to be given the opportunity to be at school, engage with other peers, and find ways of living in a positive way.

Society should also support the school in making learning meaningful through collaborating in activities that enforce positive growth and development of learners. This means that parents should allow their children to engage in activities, irrespective of the diversity in their abilities that encourage communication and collaborative play with one another. This should take place even at home and in the neighbourhood areas.

Time Dimension

Time dimension refers to the changing period relating to how the systems interconnect with one another (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2016). For example, the phasing in of new educational policies as a result of research. These may result in either providing or restricting the opportunities for learners or staff because of the duration of training and adjustments to the new developments. Learners may experience challenges as a response to the changing environment, therefore it is important that support structures be cognizant of the needs of the interacting systems and personal characteristics of the child. This dimension include considering the future progress of learners with learning needs, on the kind and intensity of support programs they need, and on the evaluation of how the current support provide impact on the development of such learners (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). When learners progress to the next grades of education, the intensity of the workload also increases as the child develops. This may provide teachers and the supporting team with the assignment of evaluating support provided in the previous grades and establish or mend the support programs to ensure that the maximum scholastic performance of the child is maintained.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Sampling

The study gathered data from 30 teachers purposively selected from three primary schools. In addition, two district officials were interviewed.

Instrumentation

Survey questionnaire - 30 teachers responded through the survey questionnaires. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather primary information about teachers' understanding of the SIAS policy. This group led to the selection of 8 teachers to partake at the focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews – participants were sample from the list of the survey questionnaires respondents. The purpose of the focus group was to evaluate the implementation procedures and protocols, and successes that primary schools have in the implementation of SIAS. Each primary school was supposed to be represented by three teachers, however, one of these three schools brought only two teachers. Interviews were held in groups per school. The data was then analyzed using the thematic analysis where data was presented using main themes and sub-themes, to make meaning of the information collected from the participants of the study.

Ethical Consideration

A core part of research is its ethical processes, which for many embraces principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, protection of individual's identity and dignity as well as the truthful presentation of research results (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2015). Ethical clearance was obtained from UZREC at university of Zululand. The gate pass to primary schools was obtained from Department of Basic Education. The researcher explained the nature of the study to participant and they have signed the consent to participate.

4.0 FINDINGS

Objective 1: The Extent of Helpfulness of SIAS Policy to Primary School Teachers

It is evident from the responses given by the participants that Screening of learners for learning barriers is performed in their schools. About 60-80% of teachers agree to perform the screening for learning barriers. 90-100% of them are able to identify learners with learning problems. 80% of the participants from school A viewed SIAS policy as addressing the needs of the learners, while 50% of school A and B do not think the SIAS policy addresses the needs of learners in schools. Therefore it seems that the policy assist some teachers in working with all learners in their schools.

Object 2: Teacher Preparedness in Providing Support to Learners with Learning Barriers as Per the SIAS Policy

The level of preparedness differs per school as reported by the participants in the study. 50 % in Schools A, B, and C agreed that they have received training on Screening, Identifying, Assessment, and Support policy in working with learners with barriers. 20-40% of all three schools reported to have corresponding knowledge about teaching in an inclusive environment, while others reported not having the corresponding information on teaching within inclusive environment. When they were asked about support they receive to teach in inclusive classrooms, 50% of Schools A and C agreed, while School B 70 % of teachers do receive support. The rest of the teachers reported not receiving classroom support in inclusive teaching environment. Having received classroom support 50% from Schools A and B have reported to have programs actively in place for supporting learners with learning problems, and in School C only 60% agreed to have such support. Some teachers do feel comfortable in working with learners with learning problems as evident where at 100% rate at School A have agreed so. In schools B and C, only 50% and 30% respectively reported to feel comfortable in working with learners with learning barriers. All other teachers reported they are not able to work with children with learning problems

Objective 3: The Implementation of the SIAS Policy to Determine the Best Practices

The best practices of the implementation of the SIAS policy is rooted in knowledge, and the comfortability that teachers have about learners with learning. This is when they can identify the impact of inclusivity in the development of all learners both personally and scholastically. 50% of teachers from School A and B, 90%, and 70 % from School C agreed that inclusive education does contribute to the personal development of learners. When it comes to positive impact on scholastic performance, 50% from Schools A and B, and 70% from school C agreed to have witnessed improvement.

Focus Group Interviews with Teachers and District Officials

There were seven questions formulated for the focus group interview to allow the participants to provide their opinions and experiences regarding the implementation of the SIAS policy in the primary schools. Five similar questions were formulated for the district officials. The data is presented according to the identified themes and sub-themes both from teachers and district officials.

Theme 1: Knowledge and Understanding of the SIAS Policy

Sub-Theme 1.1.: SIAS Policy as a Guideline

Teachers provided their opinions regarding the policy implementation when they were asked how they understand the policy and its purpose:

SAT2: “What I know is that the purpose of SIAS is to assist in screening for learners who have learning problems.”

SBT1: “SIAS is a policy in White Paper 6, which states how teaching and learning should be conducted in schools. If I remember very well, it goes as far as stating that learners with learning barriers should be given equivalent learning opportunities as the ones without barriers.

SCT1: “Policy itself is a guideline to identifying children who needs assistance who present with learning barriers...umhhh... different types of learning barriers of which the trainer, the teacher is supposed to identify. And then the process that we have to go through to seek assistance as such for the child, depending on the degree of assistance needed. That’s how I understand the policy document...and the forms that we fill in here.”

Teachers expressed their level of understanding of the SIAS policy at a general level. They articulated that it is a policy that supports inclusive education. However, they feel that the policy is not broad enough to accommodate learners with learning barriers:

SCT1: “The document itself is pretty comprehensive in all areas, the history, how do you help the child coming from all areas, am I right?”

“Umh...but still, I... sometimes... I had the experience where a child has absolutely defied every aspect of the document. I found myself in a situation where I was not filling the document I had to write reports.”

“Because the profile of the document didn’t accommodate the child, and the child’s needs. So sometimes I wonder whether the SIAS document is too rigid”

The teacher in school C articulated that the policy is understandable, but it does not cover the whole profile of a learner being identified. As a result, other teachers provide their observation according to their own writing scale to elaborate more about the abilities of the learner concerned.

The district office participants have agreed with the teachers about the SIAS policy as a guideline for teachers in working within the inclusive teaching and learning environment.

DO1: “Help educators in primary schools to have a standardized way of identifying children with barriers.....Because in the past schools were struggling more with the support than the identification. Maybe they have identified the learner and that was just a general identification not just that they have gone.”

DO2: “Also to add EWP started in 2001 so it’s about to reach 20 year milestone. This SIAS policy was a way of trying to implement Education White Paper 6 in a national. So it’s a vehicle through which we can say where we are in terms of Education White Paper 6.”

They further mentioned that the SIAS policy helps teacher in identified and supporting learners with learning barriers.

Theme 2: Addressing Learning Problems Identified in Primary Schools

Teachers use various ways to identify and support learners with learning problems.

Sub-Theme 2.1. Documented Procedure on Identifying Learners with Problems

Teachers when they asked about how they screen and identify the learners with learning barriers and whether they have a documented procedure, they provided the following responses:

SAT2: “There is no document procedure on how to screen and identify learners with problem. As an experienced teacher you recognise on your own that this learner has a problem”

SBT1: “We don’t have something that is written down, but if the psychologist, since I once referred a learner, and got a referral from the psychologist that guided me. But if someone who has never referred a child, does not have such information. There is no criteria, you just identify on your own way by looking at things that are happening then you report about them, then they decide the way forward.”

SCT1: “I am a Grade 4 teacher, so when a child comes into the...at the beginning of the year we don’t screen children as such by set up any particular tests. Our experience on the child and the ability on certain aspect of subject and the skills they require, that is how we identify learners who need assistance.... I am an intermediate phase so I cannot speak for the foundation phase.”

The teachers are applying their own experience and expertise on how they can make the environment better for all the learners. They do not have a documented procedure that guides them about identifying learners with learning problems. Some apply their teaching experience, and some get guidance from the school psychologist present during that particular time.

The district office participants reported the following when they were asked about the documented procedure to identify and support learners in schools:

DO1: “The screening procedure should be standardized because it is self-explanatory in the policy document itself.”

Sub-Theme 2.2.: Supporting Learners with Learning Problems as Per SIAS Policy

In this study, participants reported that they are able to provide minimal support to learners with learning problem because they have not been trained to work with such learners. They rather refer learners to the district office, when they feel they cannot manage them within classrooms. However, they do support learners with learning problems.

SBT1: “Sometimes other learners struggle with reading. Then you make a chart and insert pictures. You instruct the learners to read while looking at the picture relating to the given word. You then determine that the learner is able to read because there is a picture associated to the word.”

SCT1: “Yes you do. You focus on them but you get them to work on what they have to cope with. Whereas with the normal child you have to write sentences and use their imagination and write the story but with these, you have to provide pictures and think about the picture, the different approach altogether to help them to write sentences. Sometimes you have to use close procedure where, when the child is unable to write a sentence, you have to give a similar sentence but with missing words that type of a thing. Mhhh ... group teaching is not easy with grade 4, because the curriculum is fast...”

SCT1: “In our school we have made an effort to try and accommodate children who do have learning barriers, who struggle. Last year we were using what we call the service centre where the children would be supported, get extra support with learning material in it...”

Providing enormous support to learners as per their learning needs is done within the schools. Teachers reported that they provide visual support where needed and individual attention for the learners who have reading and writing problems. Teachers from School C reported that they give extra classes to their learners to alleviate their learning problem which they might be overcome within the full-service environment. For learners with problems they cannot handle, all participants indicated that they identify learners, communicate with their parents, and eventually refer them to District office for placement to either the special school or remedial school.

Sub-Theme 2.3: Parental Involvement

The parents or legal guardian of a learner should be part of the decision making process about the support to be provided to the learner and agrees thereof (Nel, & Grosser, 2016). The cooperation of parents and teachers assist in the whole support in the home and school environment simultaneously. The teachers provided the following responses when they were questioned about how the parents involve themselves in a way of supporting learners with learning problems:

SBT1: “We consult parents...If parents agree, you then refer the child because here at school we have referral forms where you write your own observations.”

SBT2: “Some of them do not accept their children’s conditions. When they realise that the child is fine while at home, they expect you as a teacher to recognise their children as if they do not have problems with learning.”

“One of the parents was not cooperating. I had to consult the grandmother, and eventually the learner was placed at the special school.”

SAT1: “There is something that we once have done about the ones who have problems in writing. For example, we gave them the exercises to write on and we instructed them to copy from the board, but it still became a problem. We then sat down as the SIAS committee within the school and identified all those learners. We invited their parents for a meeting and explained to them about the performance of their children. They were given documents to sign and those documents were sent to the District Office. The responses came back and the learners were placed in remedial school and were said to receive a grant.”

It is evident that other parents have positive attitude towards the learning support for their children with problem. However, others are reluctant to accept the problems their children present with. This has required some teachers to involve extended family members who understand the situation presented on the table.

Theme 3: Teachers’ Knowledge and Skills in Working with Learners with Learning Problems

Sub-Theme 3.1. Teacher Development about the Notion of SIAS

Teachers are positive about the notion of inclusivity and they perceive it as the possible perspective and can be successful if they receive relevant support to cater for the needs of learners (Nell, Tlale, Engelbrecht, & Nel, 2016). Training is one of the fundamental aspects that need to be fulfilled to pioneer the inclusivity within the schools. It provides knowledge and a deep understanding for the particular course concerned. Learning support teachers also generally do not give learners additional support, and some even believe that they are neither qualified nor competent enough to support mainstream teachers in this area (Dreyer, 2008). In this study, teachers reported the following when they were asked whether they were equipped with skills regarding the implementation of SIAS policy:

SAT3: “No,”

SAT2: “There is no support that we get. If I remember very well, I once attended a workshop that lasted for two days.”

SAT1: “We went to different trainings AT2. I went to the one that lasted for a week, and it was in conjunction with other things. Since then...It was many years ago this happened. By that time it was called by another name, and the name SIAS came along just now.”

SBT1: “that training is not easily accessible to anyone. The department only gives the mandate saying...ok, now we are embarking on inclusive education... That’s it!

District officials indicated that the plan had been devised in providing support to the teachers regarding the implementation of the policy. They indicated that all schools had representatives to attend workshop. Those representatives included two members of SMT, and one teacher per school.

DO1: “Eventually when the training took place on SIAS the whole idea was to orientate them into all form of the document and how to screen the child using the form and how to support the child using the form. From the teachers at school classroom support level further on to the school-based support team level. So our work could last for about two days where we have a practical session where we give the case studies and completed the documents based on the case studies so that they can see how it is done. I’m not sure whether how the training took place in other districts because when we were trained at provincial level, the training was basically standard it was not just specific in terms of filling in the actual forms.”

DO2: “So it was like we are training the trainer so from each school we request SBST to pick 3 people, one from the from SBST chairperson which is the principal, the HOD who are monitoring this kind of staff, and the educator so that after they have been trained they will go back to their respective schools and train all staff.”

The training was only limited for the SMT, DBST, while teachers were not involved. The type of training also is said to be more theoretical, as there is nothing major that is being practically displayed to them during workshop.

The SMT went to the training and they came back to train teachers. This training only included an aspect on how to fill in the SNA forms for the child with learning barriers, and what is contained in the document. They feel the training opportunities are not sufficient. It also stemmed out that teachers who have trained have received training before the paper strategy was called SIAS. Teacher argued that they should be given necessary skills to working with learners who experience barriers in learning. This should happen at least four times a year to equip them with skills to work with learners with learning problems.

Sub-Theme 3.2.: Cascaded Training for Teachers

Teacher training in respect to inclusivity is viewed to be important in developing skills and attitudes required for successful inclusion (Vaz, Wilson, Falkmer, Sim, Scott, & Cordier, 2015). Such training assist teachers in understanding how the presented subject, which is SIAS policy in this study, is to be channelled and implemented for effective teaching and learning processes. Therefore, this is how participants from the district office responded in respect to the support they provide to teachers for implementing SIAS policy in primary schools:

DO2: “Yes, that is the model we have devised and using. The reason for that it’s because it becomes difficult to invite the entire staff. Because in terms of the venue we can’t accommodate them and logistically and budgetary it’s difficult and we can’t get everyone physically because they inaccessible in terms of how we get there. Of course we are not allowed to put the whole school on hold during teaching time.”

DO1: “that is the model which all sections of education uses. Ideally we should be training the whole school, ideally if we have more people to do the training that is another thing we need. Well when the district was trained at the provincial, there were supposed to be training team for SIAS made up of people from the special needs education section, governance and

management, circuit managers were also there at some point, and exams section were supposed to be there because it concerned an issue of concessions as well, but none of those came.”

SCT1: Yeah that happened. SMT went and reported back as to just what this document is all about and what we are supposed to do. When we have a child or we come across a child with the.... How we fill it in and what is needed, you know... umh... to fill in the document. But if you are talking about skills in terms of a glossary payroll in the class...No.”

School C reported that teachers had received feedback from their SMT on how to fill in the SNA forms. Teachers were supposed to receive cascaded training from their representatives, however district officials are not sure whether this happened to all schools. Teachers from other schools could also not articulate anything about receiving training from either SMT or DBST regarding the SIAS policy. However, some school had requested DOE officials to assist them in this regard:

DO2: “Some schools are not sure how the SIAS works, they even requested us personally to come to their schools to assist them about developing ISPs.”

District officials also reported that they could not accommodate the whole staff per school because of budget, venue, and human resources. This is evident as most teachers during the interview reported to not have had anyone from the district office to provide training for them. Even the SMT and DBST at some seem to not have provided the expected cascaded training as directed by the District officials.

Theme 4: Common Learning Problems Identified in Primary Schools

Sub-Theme 4.1: Behavioural Problems

There are identified behavioural problems that are common among the young children. Teachers from School B and School C mentioned that most of children misbehave, and that cost them the loss of attention to their scholastic activities, hence, they struggle to succeed. They gave the following opinions when they were asked about the kind of learning problems the learners mostly present with.

SCT2: “There are individuals who have learning barriers like hyperactivity...hyperactive child is very difficult at focusing but they are quite capable and not presenting with the inability to do their work but it’s just the focus issue, the concentration issue. I have a child presently in one of my classes who does have severe emotional barrier that is because of his background.”

SBT1: “Misbehaviors...they are misbehaving most of them and struggle to read. Not that they have problems with eyesight, no...it’s just...you can see it’s psychological.”

Sub-Theme 4.2.: Reading and Writing Problems

Learners also struggle with reading and writing. The struggle may be in writing through letter omission, reversals, and inability to produce the given word. Reading may be identified through the inability to pronounce the given word.

SAT1: “Problems that we come across with... you find that a child is doing grade 6 but is struggling with consonants like ‘b’, also fails to read the full word with, she or he rather omits the vowels. For example, ‘ubaba’ the child will write ‘ubba’.”

SBT1: “You find that maybe how a learners reads, you see that there is no understanding”

SBT2: “Others fail to write at all.”

Teachers have reported the reading and writing, and behavioural problems as the most prevalent problems that learners present with in primary schools.

Theme 5: Impact of the SIAS Policy to the Development of Learners

Sub-Theme 5.1: Personal and Scholastic Development of Learners

Child's development becomes successful in acquiring skills within the environment when he or she has developed a positive emotional relationship with the immediate environment such as parents, teachers, and peers; and when such environment provides an opportunity that is sufficient to influence the development of the child (Tudge, & Rosa, 2013). Allowing development for all learners including the ones with learning barriers is one of the key emphasis among the SIAS policy. However, when teachers were questioned about their opinions whether the policy contribute to development of learners, they provided the following response:

SBT1: "SIAS is not contributing to the development of learners...because at the end the department instruct us what to do. There is a child who comes at school not knowing anything and you have to teach that child along the way. If ever the child struggles..."

SCT2: I think there is little movement, it's very little, not much because we as teachers we are trying on our own to use the pictures, we are trying on our own..."

SCT1: "The document itself is pretty comprehensive in all areas, the history, how do you help the child coming from all areas, am I right?"

"Umh...but still, I... sometimes... I had the experience where a child has absolutely defied every aspect of the document. I found myself in a situation where I was not filling the document I had to write reports."

"Because the profile of the document didn't accommodate the child, and the child's needs. So sometimes I wonder whether the SIAS document is too rigid"

The teacher in School B reported to have not witnessed any impact that SIAS has on the development of learner, while at School C they have seen little improvement. The participants also believe that the document itself is not flexible enough accommodate all aspect of information to be recorded about the child. Others had to write their own reports to elaborate more on the observation made and behavioural aspect portrayed by learners with learning problems.

According to Okongo, Ngao, Rop, and Wesonga, (2015) inclusivity has an impact on the development of learners who experience learning problems and the ones without problems. When learners with diverse abilities are grouped together, each develop good self-esteem. This is because they learn from one another, and appreciate each other's unique self. This study has different outcome as the practicality in building a cohesive inclusive environment for all learners seems to be challenging. The district Officials reported the following when they were asked about the impact of SIAS to learners:

DO2: "The turnout on the implementation of SIAS impact negatively in personal development of learners because if you see someone being able to perform while you are struggling, so yourself esteem in one way or another is affected."

DO1: "Emotionally we have seen some of the children, not physically but in a paper work submitted where the child is withdrawn. So the child is struggling academically, and it may be where the bullying is involved. So that how I think children with barriers become affected emotionally. The lack of implementation of support from the educator to these learners, firstly not identifying earlier the child and not doing something about the barrier, is what actually is contributing to that."

"I think emotionally these children are struggling because they have not been understood."

District officials reported that from their own analysis based on the reports from the schools, learners with learning problems become more affected. Hence, they struggle more in their scholastic performance. This is because they are in an environment where they are not well taken care of by being acknowledge according to their limited abilities and provided with enormous support.

Sub-Theme 5.2.: General Successes of SIAS Policy in the Education Setting

It is evident that the SIAS policy is not well implemented within the primary schools. Hence there are not plenty successes that the participants could report on. This is because of the challenges they experience within the education system at large. The participants revealed that when they were asked whether they have any general successes which they can identify so far during the implementation of SIAS policy

DO1: “I feel if the SIAS is implemented tremendously in these children, we would be developing a stronger society. Even though they have barriers but they won’t feel that there is nothing they can’t achieve. Well right now I feel so that sad because other children we came across if because their children have come along with them here. There is influx of grade 7 pupils who have not found spaces in high school is amazing. It is because that when the parent has realized that there is something wrong about the child and that makes you question what happened in that grade R to grade 7! And those children have been repeating grades in between the years.”

DO2: “Someone just told me that they are not allowed to retain the children in grade R. so they should progress them to grade 1 regardless of their abilities.”

DO2: “Mmmhhh... some schools are trying because you find relevant documents for meetings and training for SIAS.”

Discussion of Research Findings

Research findings are to answer the aim of the study which is to explore the implementation of the SIAS policy by teachers in selected primary schools in King Cetshwayo District. The findings are grouped according to the three research objectives.

The Extent of Helpfulness of the SIAS Policy in Primary Schools

Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy of inclusive education is being implemented within the primary schools in King Cetshwayo District. Teachers are aware of the policy as a guideline on how to screen, identify, and support learners with learning barriers. SIAS policy document provide direction to teachers to effectively implement inclusive education within classrooms. Where it is well implemented, they consider SIAS policy helpful because it breaks down on how teachers need to work during teaching and learning processes in inclusive classroom. It also guides what kind of support they should provide for each specific learner presenting learning barrier. However, the researcher noted that whilst teachers have the document in place and know about how it works, they do not adhere to the guiding principles that are outlined within the policy document. This has been indicated by the unavailability of standardized procedure on screening and supporting learners with learning barriers which should be used during enrolment period for each learner (SIAS, 2014).

Guidlund (2018) on his study about emotional behavioural disabilities found that teachers described the curricula as being too rigid for learners with emotional and behavioural problems, and others, even though the Salamanca statement (1994) states that the curricula should be adapted to the students’ needs. This correlates with the findings of this study as other teachers expressed that the SIAS document is not flexible enough, and the curriculum is not designed

to accommodate learners with problems. Teachers apply their own experience and expertise. This results to late identification, while they are busy adhering to the CAPS policy. Hence, they do not have enough time to make identification at an early stage as per the SIAS policy. Norwich (2007) suggested that questions relating to how children with special educational needs can be identified and how the inclusive curriculum should be, must be considered. This may contribute in giving the direction to the teaching and learning processes on how to include learners with learning problems within the curricula.

The support given to the learners with learning problems include accommodating learners through individual attention, visual learning, and referral to the available specialist, if any, to assess and make recommendations regarding further support of the learner concerned. Parent also become part of the support plan for their child as indicated in the SIAS policy document (DBE, 2014). The proximal relationship between teachers and parents is one of the crucial aspects in the development of the child as they form part of the child's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2016). Hence, they are important decision makers in helping the learner.

During the interview with district officials; it was noted that teachers in other schools do not use the SIAS policy document. They provide similar information across all referrals which suggests information has been copied and pasted; therefore, it is not goal oriented for the learner. For example, referrals with no observations recorded daily, and there are missing reports from the SBST together with an Individual Support Plan that a teacher has created for that particular learner. There is also the same information across referrals whereas they are supposed to put different information as learners have different problems. This indicates an imbalance in the provision of support to learners with learning disabilities within the schools.

Teacher Preparedness or SIAS Policy Implementation

Teachers should implement this policy regardless of their personal views. Schools are often without resources, which leaves teachers with little sense of ownership of inclusion within the school environment (Takala, Hausstätter, Ahl, and Head, 2012). For them, to work within an inclusive environment requires collaboration of all relevant stakeholders in improving teaching and learning processes within mainstream schools. Stakeholders include different health professionals, educational specialists, and special education teachers; and with such in place, they require skills development.

Teachers in primary schools are not equipped with the necessary skills to work with learners who experience barriers in learning. This includes not having received appropriate training about the implementation of the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support from the District-Based Support Team or School Based Support team. Norwich (2002) also noted that teachers worry about learners with problems who do not have necessary skills to acquire scholastic content within mainstream classrooms (Guidlund, 2018). This is evident in this study as teachers reported that they do not know how to support learners with learning barriers, however, they do what they can.

Other teachers have not received training at all, while some have received only the cascaded training from their SMTs. Those who have received training about the policy implementation are the ones that went for training that had been in conjunction with other trainings. Hence, they were not rooted in SIAS policy implementation during that training. Other teachers received cascaded training as a form of feedback on how to fill in the SNA forms for learners with problems. Their level of understanding and knowledge allowed them to refer most learners who experience learning barriers. In other instances, they put learners with barriers on hold while they continue with those who are not experiencing learning problems. This is because

they fail to include learners with diverse learning abilities and they feel they do not possess necessary skills to work with those learners.

The level of confidence with teachers in working with learners with problems is not sufficient. They believe they have not given sufficient training and support from either the DBST or SMT. Problems related to receiving support emerge from the district level where the district itself does not have the relevant parties to provide support to the primary schools, because the district does not have a well-structured DBST. This is against the SIAS policy where it states that the DBST should be formed in all regions and provide support to microsystems of the child concerned (SIAS, 2014). People who are acting on behalf of DBST are also involved with exam monitoring which shifts the focus from the inclusivity arena. According the participant interviewed from the district office, the DBST is supposed to include representation from all management sections, namely the Circuit Managers, Exam Management, Infrastructure Management, and all other managerial sectors of the district. Unavailability of the DBST brings problems within the system of education and eventually affect the implementation of SIAS policy as all structures should be role players in supporting learners with learning problems.

SIAS policy is implemented in isolation from other policies like progression policy, CAPS and Curriculum Development. It is viewed as neglected and is not given adequate attention. Teaching and learning in primary schools focus more on pushing the syllabus by adhering to the given time and activities to be performed at a given point in time. Less effort is put on finding the foundation of each learner's performance based on the classroom output during activities. There is also limited consideration of providing support to learners with learning needs.

Best Practices of SIAS Implementation

The literature has identified positive impact that the SIAS policy has in schools if it is well implemented. According to Ofsted (2006) in Shaw (2017), there is little difference in the quality of provision and outcomes for children in mainstream schools and those in special schools. However, they reported that mainstream schools with provision for additional resources were particularly successful in achieving high academic, social and personal outcomes. This suggest that the availability of resources to assist learners with learning barriers increases their scholastic performance. This may also include achievements such as better understanding of different abilities amongst learners; and improvement on self-esteem of the learners with learning barriers. In this study, it was found that inclusive classrooms are difficult to manage. Teachers in primary schools focus more on the learners who are capable of easily acquiring information than the ones with learning barriers. They give more time and attention to those who capture the content quickly.

Including all learners in one educational system regardless of their abilities does not take away their differences, rather it makes the differences appear more (Guidlund, 2018). There is little movement in terms of the achievements regarding the implementation of the SIAS policy because there is only provision of basic support. For example, in a situation where a learner struggles to read, they provide a picture associated with a word so that the learner will understand. In other cases, they provide individualized attention to learners who struggle with reading and writing as well as with behavioural problems. In the cases where they feel they cannot handle, like emotional cases, extreme writing and reading problems, they refer to either the district office through the SNA forms or the available psychology professional who rarely comes to school.

The King Cetshwayo District is slow in the implementation of the SIAS policy. In some schools, teachers received cascaded training whereas in some they have not had any training

opportunity. This has made the school setting not to have a plan on identifying learners with problems and supporting them accordingly. They do not have active programs in place within primary schools where learners could receive extra support. There is no standardized documented procedure on screening and identifying learners with problems, as required by SIAS policy. Teachers apply their own general skills based on their experience of working with learners, and pick up problems amongst those learners who are struggling. There is little improvement that has been found through this study regarding the implementation of the policy.

The emotional health of learners with learning problems becomes somehow affected as they could see that they differ from others since they are attended later than the ones without problems. This is also supported by the study by Shaw (2017) where parents articulated that they prefer their learners to be accommodated in special school where they will improve, because mainstream schools fail to put inclusive education into practice but push the agenda of raising standards and accountability. However, the study has come up with a number of challenges; therefore, the recommendations are discussed in the following section.

Additional Findings

The issue of personal characteristics came out, where the attitude teachers have towards inclusive education affects the implementation of SIAS policy. As much as teachers are not well equipped with relevant skills; some do not care about the scholastic development of learners with problems. The learners may be noted as having learning problems at an earlier stage; however, they will be condoned to other grades without being attended and supported by the teacher concerned. That is why we find learners with learning problems in higher grades.

The majority of learners with problems are said to experience problems such as reading and writing, and behavioural problems. These problems are most prevalent among learners in primary schools and pose impediments in their scholastic performance.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Training and Development

It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education provide them with the training that specifically speaks to SIAS policy document and how it is applied within the school environment. This will equip them with skills to identify learners with learning problems and support them accordingly. Training will also motivate teachers since they will acquire knowledge about diverse learning abilities, hence they will find it easier to mingle different learners within the curriculum, without any disruptions. Such training would be beneficial if they receive it at least once a term during the initial stage of the training process. This timeframe will provide them with relevant content on working with diverse learners while tackling the challenges they come across. Teachers require extra support from the SMT, SBST, and DBST when working with learners who have learning problems. Constant evaluation from these structures will allow them to learn and improve on how they do the work in inclusive classrooms.

Enrolment and Staffing

It is recommended that they get teacher assistants or qualified teachers who will be permanently working with them. This will assist in attending to all learners equally and be able to identify learners with problems early. This will also improve performance of all learners as every learner will be able to receive immediate support in class.

This initiative of permanent assistant teachers will work well in alleviating the problems of large enrolments. Since most schools have overflow of enrolment per class, which contributes to ineffective implementation of inclusive education as per SIAS policy, the more there are staff to work with learners the greater the possibility of enhanced scholastic performance amongst learners. Teachers have recommended that in line with staffing, the Department of Basic Education should also allow primary schools to have an enrolment ratio of at least 1:30 per class as opposed to 1: 60-70 per class that the schools are currently obtaining.

There is a great need of specialists such as remedial teachers and special needs teachers in primary schools to work with mainstream teachers. This will facilitate the process of supporting all learners efficiently because every child that is challenged will be able to receive immediate support.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study has identified loopholes in the implementation of the SIAS policy. To further accommodate this, the following areas are suggested for further research: Provision of Support to teachers in Primary Schools; DBST structures working in isolation from the SIAS policy; balancing the scholastic and emotional needs of all learners; Standardized Qualification for Special Needs education; Infrastructural development for primary schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study was conducted among teachers in three primary schools and two district officials within King Cetshwayo District. This study achieved an aim of exploring how teachers implement the SIAS policy of inclusive education in primary schools. This study objectives, namely the extent of helpfulness of the policy, teacher preparedness regarding SIAS policy implementation, and best practices identified through the implementation of SIAS policy were also achieved. The findings revealed that teachers have the policy document with them in schools. However, they are not putting into action what the SIAS policy document is entailing. This is because they are not prepared enough in terms of skills and relevant etiquette regarding the implementation of the policy to assist learners with learning barriers. Hence, we find learners with problems dropping out of school because they do not receive relevant support that allows them to progress while gaining confidence with their limited abilities. Therefore, the researcher has discussed recommendations such as the training and development of teachers regarding inclusive education, particularly application of SIAS policy; and easing enrolment ratio and staffing to feasible provision of additional support to learners with learning problems. Mixed method approach was applied to obtain data from all the participants of the study. The sample was extracted from the target group through purposive sampling. Both data from survey questionnaires and focus group interviews provided a reflection of how teachers support learners in primary school. The purpose was to allow the extension and elaboration of information that participants might have regarding the topic of concern. Special needs experts for provision of immediate support; and Special Needs Resources.

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