EXPLORING TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR READINESS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH BARRIERS TO LEARNING IN THE FULL-SERVICE CLASSROOM

by

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Declaration

I, Sandra Petronella Claassen, declare that the Master's Degree research dissertation that I herewith submit for the Master's Degree qualification Philosophy Master in Education at the University of the Free State is my independent work, and that I have not previously submitted it for a qualification at another institution of higher education.

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Date

Psychology of Education

Abstract

Following the Salamanca Conference held in Spain in June 1994, which placed a priority on individuals with disabilities, South Africa affirmed its dedication to inclusive education by releasing Education White Paper 6. One of the core strategies outlined in Education White Paper 6 for implementing inclusive education in South African schools is the establishment of full-service schools. Full-service schools provide support to learners with a wide range of learning needs. As a result of a range of factors that could lead to barriers to learning and development, the teacher needs to employ adaptive teaching techniques, tailored curricula and streamlined assessment methods. Ensuring that teachers possess the necessary skills and resources for this task is of utmost importance. Nevertheless, teachers find themselves grappling with challenges within the full-service school environment, which in turn shapes their perceptions of their readiness to assist learners facing learning barriers. Moreover, the available support structures for teachers, particularly in rural regions, often prove to be either lacking or ineffectual. Drawing from the ecological systems theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner, this study adopted an interpretivist paradigm to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with teachers at full-service schools within the Motheo rural district in South Africa. Thematic analysis was employed to determine teachers' perceptions, challenges and sense of preparedness in supporting learners within the full-service school context. The three main themes that surfaced were directly aligned with the three secondary research questions: 1) barriers experienced by teachers, 2) resources accessible to teachers in the rural full-service school, and 3) assistance required by teachers in the full-service school. Sub-themes emerged from the collected data. Recommendations are made to the Department of Education, school management teams and school governing bodies to address the findings in relation to the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. The study bears value because it highlights the challenges teachers experience, which support structures are available to them and which support structures are still necessary for teachers in FSSs in rural areas. This information may assist the DoE to understand the challenges teachers experience and to render the appropriate support needed.

Keywords: inclusive education, full-service schools, teacher perceptions, challenges, support structures, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, thematic analysis.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DBST	District-based support team
DoH	Department of Health
DSD	Department of Social Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ES	Education specialist
EWP	Education White Paper
FSS	Full-service school
LOLT	Language of learning and teaching
LSE	Learning support educator
LSEN	Learners with special educational needs
PLC	Professional learning community
SBST	Site-based support team
SE	Special education
SGB	School governing body
SIAS	Screening, identification, assessment and support
SMT	School management team
SSRC	Special school resource centre

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

The conversion of identified ordinary schools into full-service schools (FSSs) is one of the core strategies to implement inclusive education in South Africa (SA. Department of Education [DoE], 2001). These schools should be welcoming of all learners, regardless of the need, embracing not only those without additional learning requirements but also those with mild to high support needs (Khumalo & Hodgson, 2016:7; SA. Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2014; Van Niekerk, 2020:8). Statistics have indicated that around 40% to 50% of learners in mainstream South African schools are in need of additional support (Dreyer, 2014:180). According to UNICEF (2021), learners lost 54% of learning time during the Covid-19 pandemic, requiring additional support to cover the learning losses.

Teachers play a vital role in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa (Ayaya, Makoelle & Van der Merwe, 2020:1). They possess the potential to drive school transformation or uphold the status quo (Mphanda, 2018:14; Swart et al., 2002:183; Van Niekerk, 2020:213). Teachers in FSSs are expected to provide support across diverse individual levels of learning abilities, styles and ethnic backgrounds of learners (Sharma & George, 2016:3).

This study delves into the perceptions of teachers regarding their readiness to support learners with barriers in the full-service classroom. Special attention is directed towards teachers in the rural regions of the Motheo district in the Free State province, South Africa.

Problem Statement

In 2001, the South African Department of Education (DoE) issued Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6), aiming to reform previously inequitable education systems and establish an educational framework capable of accommodating a diverse range of learner needs (SA. DoE, 2001; Stofile, Green & Soudien, 2018:76; Van Niekerk, 2020:3). Due to historical inequalities in providing specialised support services to all learners in South Africa, the call for transformed education emerged. The need was emphasised to rectify inequalities and enhance inclusivity through an adjusted curriculum and varied teaching approaches, ensuring equal participation of all learners in society (Donohue & Bornman,

2014:2; Jacobs & Govender, 2020:86; SA. DoE, 2001; SA. DBE, 2010; Van Niekerk, 2020:3).

One of the core strategies of the DoE to implement inclusive education is through the phased conversion of a number of mainstream schools into FSSs (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:7; SA. DBE, 2010; Van Niekerk, 2020:4). FSSs are educational institutions that provide quality education to all learners in a non-discriminatory manner through meeting all learners' needs in the mainstream class (SA. DBE, 2010).

Teachers need to be highly skilled to meet the demands of the FSS (Nel et al., 2016:6; SA. DBE, 2014). These skills include the ability to screen, identify, assess and support learners with learning barriers. In addition, teachers must be able to implement differentiated methods to support learners, locate resources and measure success (Merga, 2019:11; SA. DBE, 2014). Teachers must also be able to collaborate effectively with stakeholders, use cooperative learning and accommodate different learning styles and abilities. If a teacher does not have the required skills, they will be faced with difficulties in supporting learners of a range of abilities in the full-service classroom (Daries, 2010:7; Merga, 2019; Sharma & George, 2016:4). The support provided by teachers is constrained by their own knowledge, skills and available resources (Nel et al., 2016:6).

The number of demands mentioned above for the FSS teacher may lead to various problems if teachers do not feel adequately equipped or skilled or are overwhelmed to meet these demands. This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers in the full-service classroom, as well as the challenges they face. Furthermore, it investigates the existing support structures for teachers in full-service classrooms, as well as identifies the support structures that teachers find inadequate, particularly in rural areas.

Background Information and Theoretical Framework of the Study

This section on the background of this study will focus on three aspects to contextualise and highlight the importance of this research study. The first discussion will focus on inclusive education within the context of the FSS, the second on challenges encountered by teachers in such classrooms, and the last on the existing support structures available to teachers, particularly in rural areas. These aspects will be discussed in the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

1.2.1 History of inclusive education and the development of full-service schools

Education is recognised as one of the fundamental human rights for people with disabilities. A significant milestone in this regard was the Salamanca Conference, held in Salamanca, Spain, from 7 to 10 June 1994, which prioritised discussions on people with disabilities (Mphanda, 2018:7; UNESCO, 1994). The conference concluded that special needs education should not exist in isolation but rather be integrated into the broader educational strategy (Ainscow, Slee & Best, 2019:671−672). South Africa aligned with global trends by implementing inclusive education by introducing Education White Paper 1 (EWP 1) in 1995, followed by EWP 6 in 2001, calling for a paradigm shift away from the traditional medical model to a social model (Ayaya et al., 2020:1; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:520−522; Motitswe, 2014:415).

EWP 6 introduced the FSS as a core strategy to implement inclusive education (SA. DBE, 2010). The DoE envisioned that FSSs will serve as examples of change for other schools, fostering inclusive practices, cultures and policies (Motitswe, 2014:416).

An FSS is an ordinary primary school equipped with the essential physical, material and human resources and professional staff to cater to a wide spectrum of learners. Learners included in the FSS are those without barriers to learning as well as those with mild, and occasionally high, barriers to learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016:7; Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:297; Motitswe, 2014:415; Mphanda, 2018:14). The DoE is, according to policy, committed to making every endeavour to meet the unique requirements of each learner, guaranteeing a school environment that is physically accessible, secure and equipped to the highest standard (Mphanda, 2018:14; SA. DBE, 2010). The goal is that FSSs should serve as beacons or flagships, inspiring other schools to embrace inclusivity and become inclusive institutions (SA. DBE, 2014:ix; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522).

FSSs should actively contribute to the support of neighbouring schools by exchanging resources, skills or technology and providing advisory assistance. Additionally, FSSs must establish strong relationships with other FSSs and resource centres to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, information and technological skills. Lastly, FSSs should collaborate closely with the district-based support team (DBST) to foster effective cooperation and support in inclusive education initiatives (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:524; Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:297).

Teachers play an important role in the successful execution of inclusive education and the effective operation of FSSs in South Africa (Ayaya et al., 2020:1). Teachers should possess diverse skills and comprehensive training to effectively provide support and guidance to learners (Dreyer, 2014:182; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:524).

1.2.2 Challenges experienced by teachers in the full-service classroom

Although the policy of inclusive education will ensure equal education for all (Jacobs & Govender, 2020:86; SA. DoE, 2001), there are factors that could impede the implementation thereof. One of these factors is the challenges experienced by teachers.

Challenges experienced by teachers can include teachers remaining unconvinced by the merit of inclusive education (Stofile et al., 2018:83), low teacher self-efficacy (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden, 2017:2), insufficient knowledge of barriers and relevant support to be rendered (Jacobs & Govender, 2020:8,9) and lack of time to render support (Merga, Roni & Malpique, 2020:7−9). Other challenges are insufficient resources and infrastructure at the FSS (Stofile et al., 2018:83), lack of parent and community involvement (Stofile, 2008:142−143) and, lastly, lack of capacity at school and district level (Alnahdi, 2019:13; Stofile, 2008:161−163).

Providing support in rural areas is challenging due to a shortage of essential resources and insufficient financial means to obtain the necessary materials (Stubbs, 2008:72). The next section will highlight the support structures that teachers need to be able to efficiently meet the needs of all learners.

1.2.3 Available support structures for teachers at full-service schools

Support systems and structures in schools need to be recognised and investigated for schools to be able to provide effective and quality education for all (Engelbrecht et al., 2015:1−2; Van Niekerk, 2020:5). No individual must face challenges in isolation (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:88). As teachers are expected to address the diverse needs of learners in the classroom, they are entitled to receive support (Dreyer, 2014:180). Effective support in the teaching environment can positively influence teachers to choose to teach at an FSS, where learners with various abilities are accommodated (Sharma & George, 2016:10).

Support structures that ought to be accessible within the FSS include the DBST, site-based support team (SBST), special school resource centres (SSRCs), learning support

educators (LSEs), professional learning communities (PLCs), quality learning and teaching campaigns (QLTCs), and the community (Nel et al., 2016:1). Additionally, the school governing body (SGB), school management team (SMT) and external support services play vital roles in supporting teachers (Dreyer, 2014:181). The availability or absence of these support structures can influence teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with a variety of needs within the FSS.

1.2.4 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

In the past, learners with barriers were viewed from a traditional medical approach. The medical approach, based on the learner's medical conditions, diagnosis and treatment, tried to locate deficits or abnormalities in the individual and then suggest interventions to "fix" the learner (Dreyer, 2014:180; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:521; Nel, Nel & Hugo, 2014:9; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:51).

In contrast with the traditional medical approach is the social ecological model. This model implies a paradigm shift from the specialness of learners towards the removal of obstacles in the society, while involving everyone in the life of the learner (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; Nel et al., 2016:2,3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:53).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, as cited in Nel et al., 2016:3) sees the ecological environment of the learner as a system of "nested structures". The set of structures consists of the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems (Nel et al., 2016:3). The ecological systems theory will be explored and discussed thoroughly in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.2).

The ecological systems theory is relevant to this study, because teachers should be aware of the eco-systemic levels and their interrelations to enable them to render holistic support to the learner (Van Niekerk, 2020:42). I used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to serve as the theoretical framework for this study, because knowledge of this theory enables teachers to identify a deficiency in a nested structure and render the relevant support to the learner on the required system. A holistic understanding of the systems could assist in understanding the learner and the origin of barriers experienced by the learner (Jacobs & Govender, 2020:90). Support systems also reside within the systems of the ecological systems theory as part of the school, family or community with diverse traditions or values (Nel et al., 2016:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:53).

Research Questions

Primary research question:

What are teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning?

Secondary research questions:

1. What challenges do teachers experience in the full-service classroom in supporting learners with learning barriers?
2. What resources are available for teachers in full-service schools in rural areas?
3. What do teachers need to improve their readiness to support a learner with learning barriers?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding their readiness to support learners with learning barriers.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify the challenges that teachers experience in the full-service classroom in supporting learners with learning barriers.
2. Determine the resources available in full-service schools in rural areas.
3. Explore what teachers need to improve their readiness to support a learner with learning barriers.

Research Design and Methodology

1.5.1 Methodology

The interpretive paradigm was employed to consider the interpretations of participants and their perceptions of the phenomenon under study. By studying participants in their natural environment, their perceptions could be better understood (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67; Van Niekerk, 2020:15). The interpretive paradigm is inclusive, because it accepts different

viewpoints from teachers from all groups. Through the interpretive paradigm, teachers' own background, experiences and viewpoint towards supporting learners with barriers could be discovered (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24−27).

Qualitative research relies on verbal data (words) and not on numerical data. Qualitative research can also be described as being naturalistic and focuses on the natural setting of interactions (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). In qualitative research, the researcher makes sense of the participants' world and their experiences (Ntseto, 2019:98). This study was approached from a qualitative perspective to explore teachers' perceptions about the phenomenon under study, namely their readiness to support learners with learning barriers in the FSS classroom.

1.5.2 Data collection

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted at two FSSs in rural areas of the Motheo district. These interviews involve open-ended questions that can be followed up by further probing or seeking clarification for an in-depth understanding, allowing new emerging lines of enquiry related to the phenomenon under study to develop (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:108). The interview schedule provides an overview of the topics of interest in the interview, but it has a flexible element with no fixed pattern to be followed. It is important to note that for this study, the questions did not follow a rigid pattern (Van Niekerk, 2020:22).

In this study, I made arrangements with the principals and participants well in advance for a suitable time and place to conduct the interviews. An interview schedule was used to ensure fluent and successful interviews. The interview schedule was also issued to the participants to prepare them for the topics to be covered. I explained the purpose and value of the study and interviews. Notes were taken during interviews for analysis purposes. Interviews were recorded with an audio recorder for transcription purposes. The duration of the interviews was between 30 and 45 minutes each (Van Niekerk, 2020:22). The questions led to an understanding of participants' readiness, confidence, perceptions and knowledge of available resources in teaching learners with learning barriers (Dreyer, 2014:183).

1.5.3 Participants

Two full-service primary schools in the rural areas of the Motheo district participated in this study. From each school, one Foundation Phase teacher, one Intermediate Phase teacher

and one SBST coordinator/support teacher were interviewed. Therefore, from each of the two schools, three teachers were interviewed, bringing the interviews to a total of six.

The criteria for participating in the research were that participants needed to 1) be either a Foundation Phase teacher, Intermediate Phase teacher or support teacher/SBST coordinator; and 2) have had experience in their field at an FSS for at least five years to provide comprehensive and insightful information in the interview.

1.5.4 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis can be described as a continuous and analytical process where data are organised, reduced and described. The researcher has to analyse the data to obtain a holistic view to have a thorough understanding of what the interviewee shared (Van Niekerk, 2020:33−34).

The verbal data gathered during the semi-structured interviews were collected through note-taking and audio recordings. The data were recorded and transcribed in its original form (Maxwell, 2018:1).

The thematic analysis in this study, based on the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke in 2006 and subsequently termed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), adhered to the following steps, as described in the study by Xu and Zammit (2020:2). First, I familiarised myself with the gathered data by transcribing the recorded interviews myself. Subsequently, I generated initial codes to establish meaningful groupings. Following this, I employed diagramming techniques to identify thematic connections. I then comprehensively reviewed these emerging themes by revisiting the raw data, ensuring that they effectively address the research questions. The themes were designated distinct names. Ultimately, the analysis culminated in the creation of a concise, coherent, logically structured and non-repetitive report (Nowell et al., 2017:10, Xu & Zammit, 2020:5−7).

Value of the Study

The study sought to explore teachers' perceptions on their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom, with focus on FSSs in rural areas. The study bears value because it may highlight the challenges teachers experience, which support structures are available to them and which support structures are still necessary

for teachers in FSSs in rural areas. This information may assist the DoE to understand the challenges teachers experience and to render the appropriate support needed.

Ethical Considerations

The moral integrity, values and principles of the researcher are reflected in the ethical procedures they follow to ensure trustworthiness and validation of the study. Honesty and reliability are also vital virtues for ethical research (Sotuku & Duku, 2015:112).

Significant criteria to be considered in the ethical process are informed consent, no harm to participants, anonymity and confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Dalton, Mckenzie & Kahonde, 2012:7; Daries, 2010:117; Van Niekerk, 2020:24−25,46). Each of the ethical criteria mentioned above will be discussed in Chapter 3.

In this study, the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State granted research consent and ethical clearance (reference number: UFS-HSD2021/1758/22) was allocated (Appendix A). In addition, permission was sought from the Free State DoE to conduct research in FSSs in the Motheo district (Appendix B).

Measures to Confirm Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness and Objectivity

In research, reliability refers to the dependability and accuracy of the values and results of the collected data (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:117). In this study, reliability was ensured through cross-examination and auditing (Daries, 2010:110; Stofile, 2008:117). The transcribed interviews were also sent to participants to ensure accuracy.

Validity evaluates how well the phenomenon being studied aligns with real-world realities (Kometsi, 2015:169). Validity was ensured by constantly reviewing if interview questions provided the relevant responses to the proposed research objectives of the study. I also ensured research validity by presenting the interview questions to my supervisor before conducting interviews. In addition, the selected sample represented the population accurately (Daries, 2010:111).

Trustworthiness was a focal point in this study, involving the review of the clarity, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the investigation (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:117).

Objectivity implies that the result of a study may not depend on the individual or researcher's opinion or values. Objectivity in this study was maintained by preventing personal perceptions from influencing the acquired knowledge. (Maul, 2018:1169).

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Background information and theoretical grounding

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

Chapter 4: Data analysis and presentation

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations of the study

Key Concepts

1.10.1 Inclusive education

Inclusive education can be defined as recognising the rights of learners to access, participate in and be accepted in the mainstream setting, with no exclusion of any learner, for any reason (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:7; Swart & Pettipher, 2013:4). Learners with different cultural, linguistic, physical, intellectual, emotional and socio-economic backgrounds as well as diverse abilities must be included in mainstream settings. Inclusive education focuses on the values of human dignity, human rights, freedom and equality (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:520−521; Swart & Pettipher, 2013:4).

1.10.2 Full-service schools

According to EWP 6 (SA. DoE, 2001), the FSS is an ordinary primary school that is equipped with the necessary physical, material and human resources and professional staff to accommodate a diverse range of learner needs (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522). The FSS can further be defined as an educational establishment that provides quality education to all learners by meeting all learner needs in a non-discriminatory manner in the mainstream class (SA. DBE, 2010:7).

1.10.3 Special school resource centres

SSRCs are institutions that are sufficiently equipped to provide education for learners with intensive educational needs (i.e., learners with severe or profound disabilities). A special school only admits learners that fit the specialisation offered by the specific special school (Daries, 2010:14; SA. DBE, 2014). Special schools will be converted to resource centres, functioning as part of the DBST to provide expertise and assistance to schools in the neighbourhood, especially to FSSs (SA. DoE, 2001:21).

1.10.4 Barriers to learning

Any factor that causes an educational breakdown is claimed to be a learning barrier. These factors may stem from the failure of the education system to accommodate diversity, consequently hindering learners' access to quality education (Swart & Pettipher, 2013:19). A distinction can be made between low, moderate or high/intensive levels of support (Ntseto, 2019:42; SA. DBE, 2010; SA. DBE, 2014).

1.10.4.1 *Low level of support*

A low level of support refers to curriculum and assessment adjustments suited for learner needs implemented at a mainstream or full-service school. This intervention is implemented within the school by the teacher, SBST or DBST.

1.10.4.2 *Moderate level of support*

A moderate level of support includes curriculum and assessment adjustments implemented within the mainstream or full-service school with expertise consultation from other FSSs and resource centres. Therapeutic or specialist services are sourced from outside the school.

1.10.4.3 *High/intensive level of support*

A high/intensive level of support is required for FSSs and special schools with a reduced teacher−learner ratio to provide the needed support to learners. Adjustments are continuously made to the curriculum with accommodations and concessions. Daily or weekly access to specialists is required, who must be available on site full time.

1.10.5 Support structures

In this study, support structures refer to formal and informal structures available at the FSS to support the teacher. Because these teachers are expected to identify and meet different needs of learners in the class, they are entitled to be supported (Dreyer, 2014:181). Rendering support to learners in the full-service classroom is the foundation of inclusive education. In this setting, everyone is welcomed, embraced, and supported by the whole school community. This means that no individual has to handle challenges in isolation (Swart & Pettipher, 2013:21).

1.10.6 Site-based support team

The SBST is the initial level of support for teachers in a full-service school. This team comprises of teachers, volunteers of the SMT, members of the DBST and community members (Nel et al., 2016:3; Nel et al., 2013:2). The SBST is responsible for coordinating learner and teacher support services. They must provide collaborative support through identifying and addressing learner, teacher and school needs (Dreyer, 2014:182).

1.10.7 District-based support team

According to the screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS) policy (SA. DBE, 2014), the DBST can be defined as a management structure whose responsibility is to coordinate and promote inclusive education. Education officials at district level must provide general management to ensure learning, care and support at inclusive institutions. The DBST draws on expertise in further and higher educational institutions and local communities (Nel et al., 2016:3).

1.10.8 Rural areas

Rural areas are often characterised by deprived contexts. Deprived contexts refer to communities with high rates of unemployment, a low standard of housing and poor road networks. Learners in these areas often stay with grandparents because the mother works elsewhere. The father is often absent in these households. Families in these deprived contexts are often robbed of an adequate standard of living as a result of the unpromising environments. Resources in urban schools are better mobilised (Khuzwayo, 2018:1,2,6). Rural areas also include tribal lands controlled by traditional leaders, agricultural areas and non-active mining areas (SA. DBE, 2017).

CHAPTER 2:
BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

In Chapter 1, I provided the background and rationale for the study. In addition, I introduced the problem statement, theoretical framework, research questions and aim and objectives of the study. The research design and methodology were explained, as well as the data analysis process.

Chapter 2 examines literature to support this study to determine the perceptions of teachers in FSSs on their readiness to support learners with learning barriers. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory serves as the theoretical grounding for this study.

The pertinence of this study is evidenced by the interplay between the challenges faced by teachers, the support structures available to them, and their resultant perceptions regarding their preparedness to effectively assist learners in the full-service classroom.

Background Information

2.1.1 History of inclusive education and the development of full-service schools

Engelbrecht and Green (2018:4-5) note that, in South Africa, the provision of teaching for learners with diverse needs has undergone various phases over the past three decades. Initially, there was a prevalent practice of excluding anyone who was considered "different", particularly learners with visible and easily recognisable impairments. These learners were deemed unfit for education, reflecting widespread stereotyping and misconceptions. Religious or philanthropic organisations often provided support for these excluded learners. Eventually, with the emergence of the traditional medical model, these learners began receiving separate education under the term "special education" (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:4,5; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:520; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:52).

Mphanda (2018:7) mentions that a fundamental human right that people with disabilities wanted to be recognised, was education. It was vital that countries worldwide had to

acknowledge the importance of accommodating individuals with a variety of needs. She adds that a significant milestone in this regard was the Salamanca Conference, which prioritised discussions on people with impairments (Mphanda, 2018:7). The Salamanca Statement was adopted during the World Conference on Special Needs Education. This conference was held in Salamanca, Spain from 7 to 10 June 1994. The conference witnessed the participation of 300 representatives from 92 governments and 25 international organisations (Mphanda, 2018:7; UNESCO, 1994). The conference concluded that special needs education should not exist in isolation but rather be integrated into the broader educational strategy on the grounds of educational justification, social justification and economic justification. It emphasised the importance of schools creating inclusive and welcoming communities, working towards a society characterized by inclusivity, achieving education for all (Ainscow et al., 2019:671−672). The release of the Salamanca Statement necessitated substantial policy changes concerning the education of learners with impairments (Ainscow et al., 2019:672; UNESCO, 1994).

Since the World Conference on Special Needs Education, debates on education around the world have been dominated by the implementation of inclusive education. South Africa aligned with the international developments in inclusive education and initiated its journey towards inclusive education with the introduction of EWP 1 in 1995 (Ayaya et al., 2020:1; Motitswe, 2014:415). EWP 1 and the South African Schools Act (1996), furthermore, called for a paradigm shift away from the medical model to a social model, which advocates for an inclusive education system where learners from diverse cultural and lower socio-economic backgrounds and learners with disabilities are accommodated in the mainstream class (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:520−522; Stofile et al., 2018:77).

In 2001, South Africa demonstrated its commitment to inclusive education by issuing EWP 6 on special needs education and the building of an inclusive education and training system. EWP 6 is a legislative and policy framework calling for the building of a single, inclusive system of education based on principles of social justice, human rights, a healthy environment, participation, social integration and redress, equal and equitable access to education, community responsiveness and cost effectiveness (Motitswe, 2014:415; SA. DoE, 2001).

Inclusive education is the dynamic process of meeting and addressing the diverse needs of all learners by minimizing barriers in the learning environment. Individual differences are seen not as obstacles but as opportunities to enhance learning. (Motitswe, 2014:415; SA.

DoE, 2001). In addition, inclusive education can further be defined as recognising the rights of learners to access, participate in and be accepted in the mainstream setting, with no exclusion of any learner, for any reason (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:7; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:47). According to Swart and Pettipher (2019:47), it is important to note that even though inclusive education is a global movement where schools worldwide are becoming inclusive, it is still important to understand the history, cultural background and diversity of South Africa. Comparisons to other countries must not be uninformed and must be seen in a South African context. The word *inclusion* cannot be described as monolithic, as it has different meanings in different contexts. However, these different contexts share underlying values, namely social justice, equity in education systems, and responsiveness to diversity (Mphanda, 2018:14; Swart et al., 2002:176).

Historically, the South African education system has been characterized by deep divisions, including those based on race, ethnicity, and ability. As a result, the system is segregated into mainstream and special needs schools (Mphanda, 2018:13).

EWP 6 introduced FSSs as a means to bridge the gap between mainstream and special needs schools. These schools were identified as pivotal in implementing inclusive education, highlighting their crucial role (Motitswe, 2014:415−416). The DoE envisioned that FSSs will serve as exemplary models of change, fostering inclusive practices, cultures and policies (Motitswe, 2014:416).

2.1.2 Full-service schools: definition, roles and expectations of teachers

The FSS is an ordinary primary school equipped with the essential physical, material and human resources and professional staff to cater to a diverse range of learners with mild to moderate, and in some cases high, barriers to learning (Khumalo & Hodgson, 2016:7; Van Niekerk, 2020:8). These barriers encompass physical, mental, sensory, neurological, chronic illness, socio-economic deprivation, and developmental impairments that might render learners at risk of marginalisation. The FSS not only accommodates their regular learners but also becomes accessible to most learners in the area experiencing mild to moderate barriers to learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:297; Motitswe, 2014:415; Mphanda, 2018:14; SA. DoE, 2001). Support can be organised into different levels: low, moderate and high/intensive levels of support (SA. DBE, 2010). Table 2.1 presents a summary of the organised levels of support.

Table 2.1: Organised levels of support

Level/s	Level of support provisioning needed	Educational institution where support will be available	Specialist support and learning and teaching support material (LTSM)
1 – 2	Low levels of support	Mainstream schools and FSSs with curriculum and assessment adjustments best suited for learners' needs. Adapted LTSM and once-off physical adjustments.	Specialist intervention within the school by the teacher, SBST or DBST. Adapted or portable assistive devices at school level needed.
3	Moderate level of support	Mainstream schools and FSSs with curriculum and assessment tasks adjusted in consultation from subject advisors. Specialised LTSM or devices should be accessed through FSSs, resource centres or the Department of Health (DoH).	Specialist support on DBST, district and circuit level. Therapeutic or specialist services must be sourced from outside if not available on the DBST. Specialised LTSM and devices assessed through the FSS or DoH.
4 – 5	High/intensive levels of support	FSSs and special schools with reduced teacher−learner ratio. Adjustment continuously made to curriculum. Accommodations and concessions implemented. Specialised and individualised assistive devices available full time.	DBST has intensive, continuous and specific consultations around individual cases. Access to specialists is required on a daily or weekly basis and they must be available on site full time. (Specialists include specialist teachers, occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologists, physiotherapists, psychologists, nurses, class assistants.) Individualised, fixed and specialist assistive devices assessed through special schools.

(Ntseto, 2019:42; SA. DBE, 2010:26, 2014:16,17)

The DoE in South Africa adopted a phased approach to transform ordinary primary schools into FSSs. The initial phase involved the conversion of a selected number of primary schools into FSSs in 30 districts across South Africa. As part of this progressive strategy, the goal was to convert 2000 mainstream schools into FSSs by the end of 2019 (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; Motitswe, 2014:416; SA. DBE, 2010). Every effort is made to ensure that each individual learner's needs are met, providing a physically accessible, safe and well-equipped school environment (Mphanda, 2018:14; SA. DBE, 2010). As

previously mentioned, the aim is for FSSs to serve as beacons or flagships, inspiring other schools to embrace inclusivity and become inclusive institutions (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; SA. DBE, 2010:1, 2014:ix).

The role of the FSS is to promote awareness of diversity and offer support to learners and educators requiring assistance (Nel et al., 2014:8; SA. DBE, 2010:7). Additionally, the FSS aims to establish a secure and supportive environment that motivates and supports educators in their work. Learners will experience a sense of belonging and active engagement in the learning process, while caregivers will be appreciated and involved in the school community (Motitswe, 2014:41; SA. DBE, 2005; Van Niekerk, 2020:233). As emphasised by Engelbrecht et al. (2016:524) and reiterated by Makhalemele and Nel (2021:297), the FSS should actively contribute to the support of neighbouring schools by exchanging resources, skills or technology and providing advisory assistance. Additionally, the FSS must establish strong relationships with other FSSs and resource centres to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, information and technological skills. Lastly, the FSS should collaborate closely with the DBST to foster effective cooperation and support in inclusive education initiatives.

At the FSS, it is essential to tailor the curriculum to cater to the unique needs of individual learners (SA. DoE, 2001:31–32; SA. DBE, 2014:8; Van Niekerk, 2020:204). Differentiating the curriculum is crucial for fostering inclusion (Van Niekerk, 2020:128), as without proper differentiation, the needs of learners with learning barriers will not be adequately addressed (Dalton et al., 2012:2). Various aspects of the curriculum must be differentiated, including the learning environment, programs, teaching methods, assessment, materials, language of instruction and teaching pace (SA. DBE, 2010:29; Stofile, 2008:94). To effectively implement a differentiated curriculum, teachers must possess specialised skills and knowledge to address the wide range of needs in a multi-level classroom setting, incorporating variations in main lessons (Alnahdi, 2019:13; Dalton et al., 2012:1−2; Daries, 2010:5).

As stated earlier, the SIAS policy (SA. DBE, 2014) outlines how teachers are required to instruct learners with learning barriers. This indicates that teachers hold a pivotal position in the successful implementation of inclusive education in South Africa (Ayaya et al., 2020:1). Teachers wield the power to drive school transformation or maintain the status quo (Mphanda, 2018:14; Swart et al., 2002:183).

FSSs are required to hire expert teachers capable of supporting and guiding learners effectively. These teachers should be skilled in collaborating with professionals and parents, implementing group teaching strategies, accommodating diverse curricula, fostering professional growth, identifying learners with specific needs and establishing educational goals (Nel et al., 2016:4,8; Sharma & George, 2016:41). In addition, they should be able to nurture parent relationships, provide learner support, facilitate peer networking, manage conflicts, embrace diversity, adapt teaching activities to address different learner needs, adjust curriculum and teaching methods and utilise responsive approaches for learners with educational needs. Furthermore, FSS teachers and staff should extend their support and resources to other schools (Ayaya et al., 2020:2; Dreyer, 2014:182; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:524; Nel et al., 2016:4,8; Sharma & George, 2016:41).

Regrettably, as reported by Ayaya et al. in 2020, a significant proportion of teachers have received little to no training, either through workshops or “on-the-go” training (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:89), on how to effectively teach learners with learning barriers. The existing teacher training has been deemed insufficient in adequately preparing teachers for inclusive teaching. Ayaya et al. (2020:2) express concern that it remains uncertain whether teachers possess a full comprehension of policies and their implementation, given the evident high failure and drop-out rates of learners, including those from FSSs. The lack of comprehensive training on the extensive array of skills required often confines teachers' support to their own knowledge, skills and available resources (Nel et al., 2016:6).

2.1.3 Rural Communities

This study focuses on full-service schools in rural areas, making it necessary to provide a brief overview of the key characteristics of rural communities.

A significant portion of South Africa's population resides in rural communities (Mkhize & Davids, 2023:298), which include tribal lands governed by traditional leaders, agricultural regions, and inactive mining areas (SA. DBE, 2017). These rural areas face unique challenges, often characterized by high unemployment rates, substandard housing, poor road infrastructure, limited access to clean water, and unreliable electricity (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019:1; Khuzwayo, 2018:1,2,6).

According to Du Plessis & Mestry (2019:1), rural schools are often isolated and underdeveloped, with inadequate infrastructure, sanitation, and physical resources. Additionally, these schools frequently lack access to clean water, decent roads, transport

for learners and teachers, consistent electricity, and communication technology. The low socio-economic status of many parents contributes to a lack of parental involvement in education, often because the parents themselves are illiterate. Schools, unable to provide necessary resources, rely on parents to supply stationery and other materials, further straining families already under financial pressure.

Learner absenteeism is common, with many learners taking on additional responsibilities, such as working on farms or caring for younger siblings at home. Furthermore, many learners find the curriculum irrelevant to their daily lives, which diminishes their interest in school (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019:2).

Mkhize & Davids (2023:298) highlight that School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are tasked with supplementing government-provided resources. However, SGBs, which include parents, frequently lack the skills and capacity to govern schools effectively and lack the capacity to execute their duties.

Every South African learner should have access to quality education with facilities and opportunities comparable to those in urban areas. Unfortunately, the poverty and unemployment prevalent in rural communities negatively impact both teachers and learners (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019:1).

The following section will delve into the challenges teachers face in the FSS.

2.1.4 Challenges experienced by teachers in the full-service school

To comprehensively discuss the challenges faced by teachers in the FSS, it is crucial to consider the historical and cultural context of the country providing support (Mphanda, 2018:14; Swart et al., 2002:176). According to Jacobs and Govender (2020:88), despite resource constraints, success at FSSs can still be achieved if the country remains dedicated to supporting learners with disabilities without discrimination based on race, health status or socio-economic class. However, the historical backdrop of South Africa, marked by segregation, poverty and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, may pose considerable challenges in shaping attitudes towards inclusive education (Jacobs & Govender, 2020:88). Several key challenges have been highlighted in this regard in literature.

2.1.4.1 *Teachers' understanding of inclusive education*

Teachers play a crucial role in the successful implementation of new policies and can be considered integral members of the interest groups that should actively participate in the

planning and decision-making stages (Smith & Benavot, 2019:196; Stubbs, 2008:58). However, excluding teachers from these crucial phases could lead to feelings of insecurity, confusion and low morale, with feelings of distrust and being left out with regard to the policy changes (Daries, 2010:3,47; Mogashoa, 2021:1984; Smith & Benavot, 2019:196).

Due to their exclusion from the planning phase of EWP 6, teachers might find it challenging to comprehend the policy's purpose and may lack the motivation to effectively implement EWP 6. This exclusion could result in difficulties in grasping the strategic intent and forming a coherent conception of EWP 6 (Stofile et al., 2018:83).

The introduction of inclusive education, along with the establishment of FSSs, lacked substantial evidence of properly targeted information campaigns to convince teachers of the merit of inclusive education within the FSS framework (Dignath et al., 2022:2611; Waldron & Redd, 2011:3). Frequently, only a handful of teachers from each school received training in inclusive education, and they encountered difficulties in effectively conveying its essence to their colleagues. As a result, many other teachers became disinterested in adopting the new approach, that is, inclusive education (Daries, 2010:50).

Swart et al. (2002:183), and supported by Dignath et al. (2022:2610), highlight, in addition, a misconception or contradictions that arose with the introduction of inclusive education. Teachers inaccurately perceived inclusive education as solely involving the placement of learners with disabilities in mainstream or full-service classrooms. Furthermore, the inclusive policy showcases an ideal model for education, but in reality, the policy does not always transfer to the full-service classroom as it was intended (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:4; Engelbrecht, 2020:223). This suggests an existing tension between the conceptual definition of inclusive education and its practical implementation (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:7). If teachers do not fully understand the purpose and necessity of inclusive education, their readiness to support learners in the FSS may consequently be affected.

2.1.4.2 *Teacher self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s belief in their ability to achieve expected levels of performance (Sharma & George, 2016:37). For this study, self-efficacy can be viewed as a teacher’s belief regarding whether they are equipped and ready to meet the expectations of the DoE. Teachers must believe that they can work in an inclusive environment in a full-

service classroom to be able to provide effective feedback, innovate creatively and communicate effectively (Alnahdi, 2019:13; Sharma & George, 2016:40).

The establishment of FSSs has led to teachers' responsibilities becoming more demanding (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden 2017:2). Teachers must navigate high-pressure situations and meet various expectations, while also fostering collaboration with diverse stakeholders, which include parents, para-professionals and the DoE, all in the effort to provide assistance to every learner requiring support (Sharma & George, 2016:39−40). Additionally, factors such as inadequate training, limited resources, a lack of support from authorities and absence of support structures at school level have a detrimental impact on teachers' self-efficacy (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden 2017:2; Nel et al., 2014; Sharma & George, 2016:7).

According to Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2017:3), teachers frequently experience frustration and demotivation and even contemplate resigning from their teaching roles due to their low self-efficacy. Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2017:3) furthermore state that teachers with diminished self-efficacy are more inclined to place learners with barriers in a separate class, as traditionally characterised by the medical model (Nel et al., 2016:2). These teachers are not experimenting with innovative methods of instruction to benefit learners (Makhalemele & Payne-van Staden, 2017:3). In addition, teachers with low self-efficacy will be absent more frequently, because they will experience more stress and burnout due to low self-confidence and feelings of ineffectiveness (Sharma & George, 2016:7).

With the absence or lack of teacher self-efficacy, teachers will not be able to support learners efficiently. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in influencing teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers in the FSS.

2.1.4.3 *Teacher knowledge through initial and school-based trainings*

As previously mentioned, teachers at the FSS are expected to have knowledge to be able to effectively identify, assess and support learners facing learning barriers, all while employing differentiated teaching methods and utilising available resources in the FSS (Merga, 2019:11; SA. DBE, 2014). In addition, teachers require unique and practical hands-on intervention skills. These skills involve dealing with real-life situations that may not have been covered in their initial theoretical training at tertiary institutions (Alnahdi, 2019:13; Merga, 2019:10; Sharma & George, 2016:4).

According to Nel et al. (2016:2), approximately 65% of mainstream teachers lack initial training on how to address diverse learning needs. Consequently, these teachers may find it challenging to support learners with a wide range of abilities in the mainstream class (Daries, 2010:7; Sharma & George, 2016:4), as they struggle to narrow the gap between the theory of inclusive education and practical implementation thereof in a real classroom (Sharma & Mullick, 2020:4).

School-based trainings are provided to teachers, but regrettably, only a limited number of them participate. The challenge arises when trying to disseminate the knowledge and attitudes gained from these trainings to the rest of the staff, as some teachers show little interest in the process (Daries, 2010:50). Although the brief trainings offered are beneficial, they fall short in fully addressing the needs of teachers (Donohue & Bornman, 2023:209).

A teacher's ability to support learners in the FSS is closely tied to their practical and theoretical training. Teachers without targeted training and knowledge may find it challenging to offer the necessary support to their learners.

2.1.4.4 *Factors consuming teachers' time*

Sufficient time is of utmost importance when providing supportive interventions to struggling learners (Nel et al., 2016:9). However, teachers in mainstream classrooms often find it challenging to allocate enough time to meet the individual needs of all their students. Several factors affect the availability of time in the classroom, with class size and numerous administrative tasks being particularly influential.

The larger the class size, the less individualised time is available to support each learner (Merga, Roni & Malpique, 2020:7). Additionally, the substantial number of administrative duties, including administrative tasks related to referring and supporting learners, add to the already heavy administrative burden, while decreasing the time a learner could receive support (Merga, Roni & Malpique, 2020:7−9; Nel et al., 2016:9). Furthermore, adapting the curriculum and assessments to meet the unique needs of each learner is a time-consuming process. It demands both time and expertise to tailor the curriculum according to each learner's individual requirements and pace, inevitably adding to the teacher's workload (SA. DoE, 2001:31−32; SA. DBE, 2014:8).

A significant amount of time is often spent trying to manage the behaviour of uncontrollable learners. Certain learners may display physical aggression and disruptive behaviour, necessitating ongoing motivation to adhere to classroom rules and address their disruptive

conduct. This can result in the expenditure of time that could otherwise be dedicated to supporting another learner in need (Alnahdi, 2019:11).

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) dictates the time teachers should allocate to various activities, leaving limited room for repetition (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:9; Merga, Roni & Malpique, 2020:8; Nel et al., 2016:6). According to Engelbrecht et al. (2016:524), and confirmed by Merga, Roni and Malpique (2020:8), the overloaded curriculum leads to a shift in focus, prioritising the completion of curriculum demands to meet departmental requirements. This restricts teachers' ability to develop support strategies tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners.

Several factors affect the time available for teachers to support learners in the FSS. These include administrative burdens, curriculum coverage demands from the DoE, behavioural issues of learners, teacher−learner ratio and the need to adapt the curriculum and assessments to cater to learners' needs. The scarcity of time may lead teachers to perceive that they are unable to adequately support learners in the FSS.

2.1.4.5 *Resources and infrastructure at full-service schools*

According to the SIAS policy (SA. DBE, 2014:8), resources such as assistive devices, specialised equipment and teaching and learning support materials will be provided for teachers and learners. However, ensuring inclusive education and adequate support for learners with barriers, along with the allocation of specialised staff and finances, posed a challenge for the DBE in 2015 across all provinces (Stofile et al., 2018:83).

According to the guidelines for FSSs (SA. DBE, 2010), it is essential for these schools to have the needed resources to establish infrastructure that is secure and easily accessible, fostering efficient teaching and learning. This includes an adequate number of classrooms to maintain a reasonable teacher−learner ratio, ensuring classrooms are accessible to all, including learners with disabilities. Additionally, the FSS must have suitable toilet facilities, including those accommodating wheelchairs, and provide a safe and secure environment for everyone. Importantly, none of these required conversions should be the financial responsibility of parents but that of the school. A school lacking the funds to acquire these resources will encounter significant difficulties.

Infrastructural challenges may give rise to various difficulties, such as classroom size limitations and the scarcity of classrooms. Another difficulty is issues related to the accessibility of classrooms and bathroom facilities for all learners, including those with

physical disabilities. Historically, classes were designed to accommodate 20 to 35 learners, but due to an increase in student numbers, the average class size has risen to 35 to 40 learners, creating accommodation challenges (Van Niekerk, 2020:179).

Although all schools receive funding categorised by the department, the determination of school fees lies in the hands of the SGBs. As a result, privileged schools tend to undergo further development, while lower socio-economic communities face additional disadvantages (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:523). The challenge lies in how to address the infrastructural needs without the needed short-term funding for schools to cover these costs (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:7−8; Engelbrecht et al., 2015:523; Jacobs & Govender, 2020:87).

2.1.4.6 *Parental and community involvement*

According to EWP 6 (SA. DoE, 2001), parental involvement and community partnership are considered crucial factors in the successful implementation of inclusive education. For effective parental involvement, parents must actively contribute to identifying and removing barriers to learning (Ntseto, 2019:69; Stofile, 2008:87).

One significant challenge faced by teachers is the lack of parental involvement, and in some cases, the illiteracy of parents. Parents often do not respond to communication attempts via phone calls, texts or letters (Nel et al., 2016:8). Learners may live with grandparents who struggle to understand assignments and cannot provide academic support. Some parents who want to be involved are unable to do so due to long working hours (Harty & Alant, 2019:281; Stofile, 2008:154).

Moreover, the poor socio-economic status of the community and parents can create additional obstacles to teaching. Hunger may cause learners to faint in class or compel them to stay at home. Addressing social disputes as a teacher consumes valuable teaching time, requiring the teacher to leave the class on occasion (Stofile, 2008:151−153).

The attitudes of the community also play a role in the inclusion of learners with disabilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2023:210; Swart & Phasha, 2019:628). If a community disregard disabled learners, these individuals may experience discrimination and be denied access to formal education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:5).

A challenge faced in collaborating with the community, including entities such as the police, social workers, ministers and nurses, is that teachers may lack confidence in the suitability of the services provided for addressing the specific barriers faced by the learners (Nel et al., 2016:11).

Challenges within a community and issues related to parental involvement can pose difficulties for teachers. This is because a learner who experiences hunger, discrimination or threats may struggle to learn effectively (Stofile, 2008:151−153; Swart & Phasha, 2019:614–615). When parents and the community fail to provide support and encouragement to teachers in their efforts to assist learners facing barriers, it could negatively impact teachers' perception of their readiness to provide such support.

2.1.4.7 *Lack of capacity at school and district level*

2.1.4.7.1 *Capacity at school level*

To verify a school's capacity to support all learners, various criteria need to be considered. These include the training of educators, both theoretically and practically, to provide the necessary support (Sharma & George, 2016:45), and the functionality and training of the SBST. Other criteria are the understanding of inclusive education by the SGB and SMT, sufficient human and material resources to address diverse learner needs, and the availability of support and collaboration between management and staff. The FSS must be equipped with human, technical (e.g., assistive devices) and infrastructural resources to cater to the diverse needs of all learners (Van Niekerk, 2020:177−178). However, a shortage of education support staff and resources can create additional barriers in effectively supporting learners (Engelbrecht, 2020:224; Stofile, 2008:161−162), which may create challenges for teachers to provide support.

To allocate educator posts or human resources at a full-service school, the weighting of learners with barriers should be considered by the DoE. Published in the *Personnel Administrative Measures* (SA. DBE, 2022:A11), the weighting of learners with barriers for purposes of allocating educator posts will apply as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Weighting of learners per barrier

Barrier	Weight per learner
Specifically learning disabled	3
Severely intellectually impaired	3

Epileptic	3.5
Cerebral palsied	3.5
Physically disabled	4
Severe behavioural problems	5
Hard of hearing	5
Partially sighted	5
Blind	5
Deaf	5
Autistic	6

Learners with mild to moderate learning disabilities are weighted according to the curriculum they follow. In a special school where vocational training is received, where focus is more on skills, learners receive a weighting of 2.5. If the DoE considers the ratio of learners per teacher, the specific weighting of learners must also be taken into account to accurately reflect the ratio.

The question arises whether this weighting of learners is considered when allocating posts at an FSS by the DoE. According to the above-mentioned information (see Table 2.2), classes should be smaller if learners with barriers are accommodated in the full-service classroom.

2.1.4.7.2 *Capacity at district level*

The DBST plays a crucial role in the efficiency of the FSS. It includes support staff such as curriculum and school managers, human resource planners, social workers, therapists, psychologists and other health professionals (SA. DBE, 2014). Unfortunately, Stofile's (2008:164) research reveals that inclusive education can be overlooked in the allocation of specialised posts within districts. This affects its prioritisation, creating a long waiting list for learners who need to be assessed and placed in special schools. Supporting these learners in the mainstream class can be challenging due to their intensive and high learning support needs (Ntseto, 2019:42; SA. DBE, 2010:26, 2014:16−17), which require a significant level of assistance.

Capacity on district level includes partnerships between the FSS, neighbouring schools and other service providers to exchange knowledge, resources, advice, examples and ideas (Jacobs & Govender, 2020:94). Special schools, acting as resource centres, and FSSs should establish relationships as part of the DBST services, offering knowledge exchange, professional development and support for sustainability (SA. DBE, 2010). Regrettably, as noted by Stofile et al. (2018:83), special schools encounter difficulties in

supplying specialised support personnel to aid FSSs in the region (Stofile et al., 2018:83). This results in a knowledge and resource gap that, if bridged, could enhance teachers' capacity to effectively assist learners.

For teachers to effectively support learners, it is essential that they are aware of available support structures and know where to seek assistance. The crucial support structures which should be accessible in all FSSs will now be explored.

2.1.5 Support structures for teachers in the full-service school

Support serves as the foundation of inclusive education and the FSS, where everyone is embraced, accepted and aided by the entire school community. This means that no individual has to face challenges in isolation (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:88). As teachers are expected to address the diverse needs of learners in the classroom, they are entitled to receive support (Dreyer, 2014:180). Effective support in the teaching environment can positively influence teachers to choose to teach at an FSS, where learners with various abilities are accommodated (Sharma & George, 2016:10).

Collaborative efforts among different stakeholders are crucial (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:88). Adopting a collaborative approach, rather than individual attempts, within the school can bring about positive change, benefiting learners, teachers and parents through collaboration between community, school and district level (Dreyer, 2014:180; Nel et al., 2013:2).

Teachers teaching at the FSS should have access to various support structures, including but not limited to the DBST, SBST, SSRCs, LSEs, PLCs, quality learning and teaching campaigns and the community (Nel et al., 2016:1). Additionally, the SGB, SMT and external support services play vital roles in supporting teachers (Dreyer, 2014:181).

However, it has been noted that teachers are not always aware of all available support structures to aid them (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:253). Therefore, the following section will elaborate on the support structures available for teachers in the FSS.

2.1.5.1 *Site-based support team*

The first level of support for learners and teachers in a school is provided by the SBST, which is a part of the mesosystem in the ecological systems theory (Nel et al., 2016:3; Van Niekerk, 2020:73). This team consists primarily of teachers at the FSS, including LSEs and care staff, SMT members, DBST members and community representatives,

depending on the school's size, composition and available teachers (Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:298; Nel et al., 2016:3; Nel et al., 2013:2; SA. DBE, 2005).

The SBST has various responsibilities, including establishing and nurturing support networks among stakeholders to identify the needs of the school and learners and provide necessary support. They are involved in in-service training for educators, resource sharing between networks, planning preventive strategies, monitoring learners' progress, and coordinating learner, teacher and curriculum development (Dreyer, 2014:182; Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:298; Nel et al., 2013:2). Furthermore, the SBST, being familiar with the FSS and inclusive education guidelines, monitors the development of individual support plans (SA. DBE, 2014). Dreyer (2014:182) emphasises that the SBST should receive support from the DBST.

However, some FSSs encounter tension and difficulties in fully realising certain policy guidelines, such as the establishment and functioning of an SBST. Makhalemele and Nel (2021:310−312) assert that SBSTs often face more challenges than successes due to uncertainness of SBST members of their roles, poor decision-making skills, lack of conflict resolution and inadequate problem-solving processes. These problems may result in the SBST appearing to be a mere formality on paper (Dreyer, 2014:182). An effective SBST will aid teachers in their decision-making and problem-solving processes through the various methods discussed above.

2.1.5.2 *District-based support team*

To promote shared support and collaboration, schools are organised into clusters (SA. DBE, 2014). The DBST is composed of a diverse group of professionals, including specialists in areas such as psychology, learning support education, health services, curriculum and management, and administration; community stakeholders; departmental professionals; and education specialists (ESs) at the district level. This team ensures access to additional support programs or services and provides specialised input for identifying and supporting the needs of learners and teachers (Nel et al., 2013).

As part of the individual's mesosystem, the DBST holds the responsibility of ensuring that the FSS has the necessary physical, material and human resources. The DBST plays a crucial role in providing support programs that involve skilled or specialised personnel and assistive devices for the school. Additionally, learners with barriers, whether in learning or physical aspects, are assessed by the DBST. Moreover, the DBST assists with curriculum

differentiation, offers illustrative learning programs, provides learning support materials and offers ongoing training and support to ensure teachers can make the curriculum accessible to all learners (Nel et al., 2016:4).

As part of the DBST, an ES is appointed at the district level. The ES is responsible for supporting a designated number of schools. Their role involves building partnerships, providing training, offering support to the SBST and assisting in community networking (Nel et al., 2016:4).

The support provided by the DBST significantly influences teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers. However, according to a study conducted by Makhalemele and Payne-van Staden (2017:10), the DBST may not be effectively enhancing teacher efficacy in FSSs. While learners receive support from the DBST, it is crucial to recognise that teachers also require adequate support to effectively fulfil their roles.

2.1.5.3 *Special school resource centres*

According to the DoE (SA, 2001), learners who need high and intensive levels of support should be placed in special schools. Efforts will be made to improve the quality of education at special schools to cater to the specific needs of these learners. Special schools are equipped with various resources and specialists, including therapists, nurses and psychologists, who provide health, psychological and social support to address identified barriers (Daries, 2010:43, SA. DBE, 2014). However, there is still a challenge, as some learners with intensive needs are currently accommodated in FSSs while awaiting placement in an SSRC, putting pressure on the teachers (Nel et al., 2016:11).

2.1.5.4 *Learning support educator*

As per the guidelines for FSSs (SA. DBE, 2010), a school with more than 500 learners is required to have a dedicated LSE. On the other hand, schools with less than 500 learners should have access to an itinerant LSE who serves a cluster of schools.

At the FSS, the designated LSE plays a crucial role by being available for consultation and providing support to educators, parents and external resources such as therapists, social workers, psychologists and the DBST. The LSE is responsible for organising training to address the identified professional development needs of the staff and coordinating the SBST (SA. DBE, 2014).

Moreover, the LSE can offer suggestions to tackle identified challenges and follow up on the implementation of these suggestions (Nel et al., 2016:11). A trans-disciplinary approach to collaboration between teachers and the LSE is essential to ensure access to the curriculum and learning support for all learners (Dreyer, 2014:182).

The presence of an active LSE at the FSS can significantly impact teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners. The LSE's effectiveness lies in fulfilling the roles outlined in policy, which include providing support to teachers, facilitating their professional development, networking with professionals and the DBST and coordinating the SBST. By working collaboratively with all stakeholders involved in learner support, the LSE can create a cohesive and supportive environment that enhances teachers' confidence in effectively assisting learners with barriers.

2.1.5.5 *Support in collaboration with parents and community*

Community relations play a vital role as they connect resources available at the FSS with those in the community, including both educational and non-educational institutions that can provide the needed support (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:88).

Parents also contribute significantly to the quality of learning. They can help by reporting learner and teacher absenteeism, ensuring school safety, returning school property and volunteering their time to repair desks and chairs. Moreover, parents can play a crucial role in identifying and reporting any signs of child abuse or neglect within the community. They can volunteer to assist teachers with tasks, such as listening to learners read in class, and also share their expertise on various topics to educate learners (SA. DBE, 2008).

The relationship between the FSS and the community is reciprocal. Community members, as valuable human resources, offer essential non-financial support and foster a love for learning through community engagement. In return, the school gives back to the community through outreach programs. When the FSS actively involve themselves in the community, the community reciprocates by getting involved in the school (Khuzwayo, 2018:8,12; SA. DBE, 2008).

The support received from parents and the community can significantly influence teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners in the FSS. This is because of the shared responsibility in providing support to learners, the provision of essential human and material resources to assist teachers and the fostering of collaboration between the FSS and the community.

2.1.5.6 *Professional learning community*

The guidelines for FSSs (SA. DBE, 2010) emphasise the importance of networking and collaboration among neighbouring schools to facilitate teachers supporting one another. The PLC reinforces the belief that continuous learning is essential for all teachers, and it values the contribution of every individual (Sharma & Mullick, 2020:11). Collaborating with teachers from different schools can boost teachers' self-esteem and confidence in supporting learners, resulting in improved academic and behavioural performance of students in the classroom (Dreyer, 2014:180; Sharma & Mullick, 2020:11).

Developing PLCs offers teachers opportunities to take responsibility of their own learning and to collaborate with experts from other schools. PLCs prove beneficial for both experienced and less experienced teachers. Less experienced teachers can gain valuable skills by engaging with experienced educators, while younger teachers can contribute their expertise in utilising technology for instruction and explaining innovative teaching methods (Sharma & Mullick, 2020:10; Waldron & Redd, 2011:2). PLC meetings can involve cooperative teaching and problem-solving, heterogeneous grouping and the sharing of successful teaching practices (Sharma & Mullick, 2020:10).

2.1.5.7 *School management team and school governing body*

According to Boscardin (2011:1), effective leadership involves providing innovative ideas and insights based on recent theories and research about contemporary issues. It also means that leaders must become a primary source of useful ideas on good teaching practices. According to Khuzwayo (2018:17), regardless of the economic challenges faced by the FSS, mobilising and managing teaching and learning resources is possible through servant leadership, which relies on the collective efforts of all parties involved in the FSS.

The attitude and actions of the school principal, along with those of the SMT, can either foster or hinder inclusion (Donohue & Bornman, 2014:4) and contribute to the establishment of a supportive school culture (Merga, 2019:4) by demonstrating effective teaching practices (Waldron & Redd, 2011:3). As per the guidelines for capacity building of SGB members (SA. DBE, 2021), the SGB of the FSS is expected to provide support for curriculum training and grasp the significance of inclusive education as well as methods for assisting teachers and students within the FSS. The leadership provided by the SMT and SGB can greatly influence teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners

in the FSS. This influence stems from creating a supportive school culture that fosters inclusion and leading teachers by setting a positive example.

The next section will delve into the theoretical grounding that was used for this study, namely Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Theoretical Grounding

In this study, the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) was used as theoretical grounding. Before delving into this theory, investigation on the transition in educational approaches for learners facing barriers, shifting away from the traditional medical model towards the social ecological model, will be conducted.

2.2.1 Transition from medical model to social ecological model

Mphanda (2018:4) mentions that within a given society, specific societal groups establish hierarchies based on the "normative standards" prevalent within that society. Deviation from societal norms is frequently viewed as abnormal, which can result in people with disabilities being unfairly regarded as deficient or inadequate. In addition, she states that normative standards frequently govern the allocation of certain rights and access to resources within a given society and, consequently, individuals with disabilities have been systematically deprived of full participation in society (Mphanda, 2018:4).

In the early 1900s, the traditional medical approach was adopted for learners facing barriers. The medical approach, based on medical conditions, diagnosis and treatment for the learner, tried to locate deficits or abnormalities in the individual and then suggest interventions to "fix" the learner (Dreyer, 2014:180; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:521; Nel et al., 2014:9; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:51). Furthermore, social and psychological factors pertaining to disability were disregarded and overlooked (Mphanda, 2018:4).

Within the paradigm of the medical model, learners facing barriers (formerly referred to as learners with special needs) are typically identified through assessments conducted by medical, psychological and special education experts. Subsequently, these learners are segregated into specialised educational settings due to the perceived differences between them and other learners (Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:5; Nel et al., 2013:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:52). In addition, the traditional medical model led to categorisation with exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Makhalemele & Nel, 2021:297).

The division of teachers into mainstream teachers and specialised teachers with specific skills and knowledge to provide learner support has been observed (Dreyer, 2014:3; Nel et al., 2014:9). Consequently, this approach has resulted in mainstream teachers perceiving their inability to adequately provide the required support, because they are not "specialised". Teachers held the belief that they lacked the needed knowledge and expertise to assist learners encountering learning barriers. This perception gave rise to the idea that only specialised educators could effectively support such learners, ultimately leading to a preference for placing them in segregated educational environments with dedicated "specialised" teachers (Dreyer, 2014:181; Engelbrecht & Green, 2018:5; Nel et al., 2014:9; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:53).

While the medical perspective remains suitable for diagnosing illnesses and providing treatment, the realm of social sciences emphasises the importance of recognising that barriers can originate not only within the learner but also in the learner's relations within the environment and community (Swart & Pettipher, 2013:5). It is noteworthy that the utilisation of the medical approach does not prioritise the exploration of diverse factors influencing learner needs or the mitigation of barriers to learning. This relates specifically to systemic barriers within the home, school or education system, and the removal of these barriers in society as advocated by the social ecological model (Engelbrecht et al., 2016:521–522).

The social ecological model, firmly rooted in the human rights paradigm that prioritises inclusion, equality and participation for all, advocates for a paradigm shift from perceiving learners as "special" to the removal of societal barriers. This model emphasises the active involvement of all individuals in the learner's life and encourages the exploration of diverse approaches to address the needs of learners facing a range of barriers (Dreyer, 2014:180; Engelbrecht et al., 2016:522; Nel et al., 2016:2−3; Nel et al., 2013:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2013:7,19).

Table 2.3 presents a comparison between the medical deficit model and the social ecological model.

Table 2.3: Comparison between the medical deficit model and social ecological model

Medical deficit model	Social ecological model
Intention: exclusion and separation	Intention: inclusion and integration
Fixing the learner to be normal	Developing systems to support the learner

Intervention by specialist staff	Collaboration between all role players
Special placement	Mainstream placement if possible

(Swart & Pettipher, 2019:54−55)

2.2.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

Bronfenbrenner's model is a multidimensional model and suggests that there are interwoven systems that can bring about transformation, growth and progress. Change, growth, and development occur when one system influences or is influenced by other systems (Swart & Pettipher, 2013:10).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) sees the ecological environment of the individual as a system of "nested structures", each system "contained inside the next like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; also see Nel et al., 2016:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:70; Van Niekerk, 2020:68−75). The learner as individual forms part of all systems, directly or indirectly. The systems affect each other, and the functionality of the entire ecological system relies on the interaction between the various systems (Van Niekerk, 2020:69). The set of nested structures consists of a micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem embedded and working together in a chronosystem (Nel et al., 2016:3; Van Niekerk, 2020:71). Limitations, challenges and complications in one system will have a direct influence on the other systems. These systems are interdependent on each other, and one must see the system as a whole (Nel et al., 2014:13).

Direct relationships within the microsystem and between the nested structures are known as proximal connections. Proximal connections can be described as the "engines of development". It is interactions that happen face to face, on a regular basis and involve a long-term relationship that is free of interruptions. Proximal connections include familiar and mutual connections between parents, teachers, families, friends and communities (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:2,5; Nel et al., 2014:12; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:66−67; Van Niekerk, 2020:72).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the systems of the interrelated nested structures in the individual's environment.

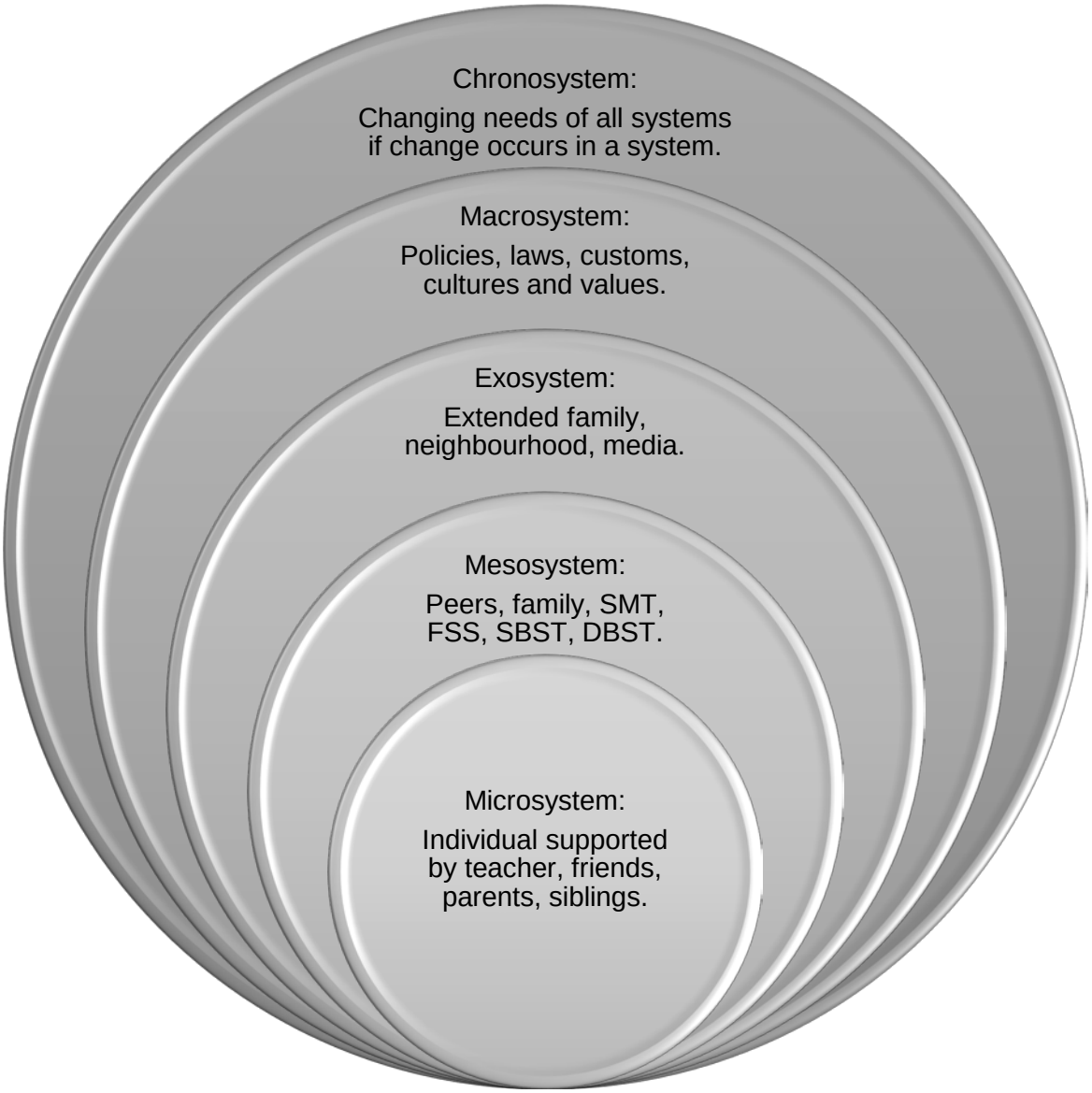

Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory nested structures
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Nel et al., 2016:3)

2.2.2.1 *Microsystem (individual capacity)*

The microsystem is the primary system with the most significant influence on the individual's development (Van Niekerk 2020:72), and support for the individual must originate from this structure. The microsystem refers to the central structure of the individual's daily interaction with parents, siblings, the teachers and friends (Nel et al., 2016:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:77). It also includes immediate relationships or organisations the individual interacts with (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:1). The microsystem should support the individual's feeling of belonging, love, support and protection. The individual's sense of belonging, love, support and protection is jeopardised by risks that

arise in contexts characterised by drug abuse, family violence and homelessness. This creates a disadvantageous situation for the individual (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:77; Van Niekerk, 2020:72).

For this study, it is relevant to note that the teacher must also be supported by family and those with whom the teacher interacts daily (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:77) within the teacher's own microsystem. This is because if the teacher is not supported, the learner will not be effectively supported (Nel et al., 2016:3).

2.2.2.2 *Mesosystem*

The microsystem is contained in the mesosystem. The mesosystem is a system of microsystems (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:72). The mesosystem is an extension of the microsystem that includes social structures in the intermediate context of the individual. The mesosystem consists of relationships between extended family members, peers and school. The system is shaped by interactions among its members (Van Niekerk, 2020:73). Unfortunately, learners from an unsupportive home are at risk to develop learning barriers (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:72). Proximal connections between the micro- and mesosystems can include parental involvement in the individual's education that can result in better academic performance (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:2).

The DBST, SBST, FSS, SSRC and SMT are also components of the mesosystem (Nel et al., 2016:3; Van Niekerk, 2020:73). In the FSS, teachers may experience support within the mesosystem. Apart from the teacher's family and colleagues, the SBST and DBST provide support to teachers (Dreyer, 2014:182), while the SMT cultivates a supportive culture of inclusivity (Merga, 2019:4).

2.2.2.3 *Exosystem*

The micro- and mesosystems are contained in the exosystem. The influence of the exosystem on the individual is indirect, because it focuses on the events happening to people close to the individual. The individual does not actively participate in the exosystem (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:2; Van Niekerk, 2020:73). These events will have an influence on the individual because of the proximal connections between the individual and the occupants of the exosystem (Van Niekerk, 2020:73). Occupants of the exosystem include extended family members, neighbourhood, media, neighbours, industries, health services, education system and local politics (Nel et al., 2016:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:72; Van Niekerk, 2020:73).

Socio-economic factors within poverty-stricken communities significantly impact the support provided to individuals in the exosystem. In economically disadvantaged households, children may be required to contribute to the family's financial support, possibly giving rise to socio-emotional challenges such as behavioural problems. Additionally, higher levels of parenting stress are prevalent in these households. It is important to note that such communities often face limited access to readily available resources (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:3−4; Stofile, 2008:93). Furthermore, dangerous neighbourhoods cause individuals and teachers to feel unsafe (Stofile, 2008:144).

Teachers are also indirectly influenced by occupants of their own exosystem: extended family members, neighbourhood, media, health services, neighbours, education system and local politics (Nel et al., 2016:3; Swart & Pettipher, 2019:72). Therefore, the presence of support from the exosystem will directly impact teachers' perceptions regarding their own capacity to assist learners.

2.2.2.4 *Macrosystem*

The macrosystem is an outer system that informs the micro-, meso- and exosystems. This is the most distant system in the individual's life (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:73). In this structure, important components include policies (for example EWP 6 and the SIAS policy), laws, customs, cultures, attitudes and values (Nel et al., 2016:3).

Policy plays a crucial role in shaping the characteristics and dynamics of the previous three systems (micro-, meso- and exosystems) operating in the daily lives of individuals. These policy decisions have a significant influence on the behaviour and overall development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:9).

2.2.2.5 *Chronosystem*

The chronosystem places emphasis on an individual's holistic development over time (Van Niekerk, 2020:70,74). It refers to temporary and time-based changes in any of the systems (micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems) which introduce new environments and impact development (Nel et al., 2016:3). Examples of such changes include inclusion or apartheid, which had diverse effects on individuals, as well as milestones such as child development and the birth of siblings. For teachers, the introduction of a new national curriculum can trigger feelings of insecurity or present new opportunities (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:74−75).

Since individuals respond to change differently, it is essential for all support structures to remain aware of evolving needs continuously in order to provide appropriate assistance (Nel et al., 2016:3).

2.2.3 Relevance of theoretical grounding to this study

This study focuses on teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom. Within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the process of providing teaching support, identifying barriers and minimising their impact is ideally implemented within the full-service classroom setting (Dreyer, 2014:181).

Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional model with regular face-to-face proximal connections between the interacting systems of the teacher will bring about change, growth and development (Nel et al., 2014:12; Swart & Pettipher, 2013:10). Teachers may experience change, growth and development through proximal connections between various entities, such as family, friends, communities and colleagues (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:66−67; Van Niekerk, 2020:72).

The "nested structures" discussed previously fit into the inclusive design of EWP 6. The vision of transformation in the education system needs to focus on the individual (micro), school (meso), district (exo), provincial and national (macro) levels, which, in turn, will influence the life of the individual (Stofile, 2008:86). Inclusive education focuses on the interaction between an individual's development and the systems in the life of the individual (Swart & Pettipher, 2019:67). Teachers can be seen as the key individuals in implementing inclusive education effectively (Ayaya et al., 2020:1) and can play a role in the transformation of schools (Mphanda, 2018:14). As such, they must feel supported in all the different nested structures, encompassing their individual capacity, the school environment as well as district, provincial and national levels.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory aided me in this study as it underscores that teachers cannot succeed in supporting learners with barriers if they are not interacting with stakeholders from other systems, such as the community, colleagues or family. This interaction should be a joint effort from all systems to render support to the teacher. In addition, this theory helped me through examining how the presence or absence of proximal connections between various systems in a teacher's life can either facilitate or hinder their readiness to provide support in the FSS.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented research on the theoretical grounding and background information related to teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers in the FSS. The exploration began with the transitions from the medical model to the social ecological model, where I delved into Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and its different nested structures.

Additionally, I explored relevant background information for this study, which included the history of inclusive education leading to the development of the FSS. I also examined the challenges encountered by teachers in the FSS and the support structures made accessible to them in accordance with existing policies.

The next chapter will present the research design and methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

An overview of the research design and methodology used in my research will be addressed in this chapter. The following aspects will be covered: the general methodological approach, the setting in which the research was conducted, the interpretivist paradigm, the tools I used to collect data, the participant selection procedure and data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter will also explain concepts such as reliability, validity, trustworthiness and objectivity. Lastly, ethical considerations will be discussed.

Research Design and Methodology

Educational research does not simply involve finding and following a recipe. It is rather a deliberate and reflexive process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:109). Research is a systematic process to acquire information through collecting, analysing and evaluating data to understand a phenomenon to be studied. This concept encompasses a methodical exploration that spans from the stages of development, testing and evaluation, all aimed at enhancing our collective understanding. Moreover, it involves the act of pondering the nuances of the inhabited world and devising approaches to satisfy curiosity (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:2).

The research design serves as the structural framework or “blueprint” that guides the researcher in planning and implementing their research. It encompasses a detailed plan for addressing the research questions and achieving the established objectives (Stofile, 2008:98; Ukachukwu, 2016:39). This framework ensures that the evidence is logically linked to the research question, providing a clear and coherent flow (Cohen et al., 2018:175).

The research methodology describes the steps and procedures that were used in this research. It includes the procedures that I, as researcher, used to collect, analyse, describe and explain the data and phenomenon under study (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:57; Ukachukwu, 2016:40).

In this section, I explain my methodology, using Figure 3.1, as proposed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016:106−109).

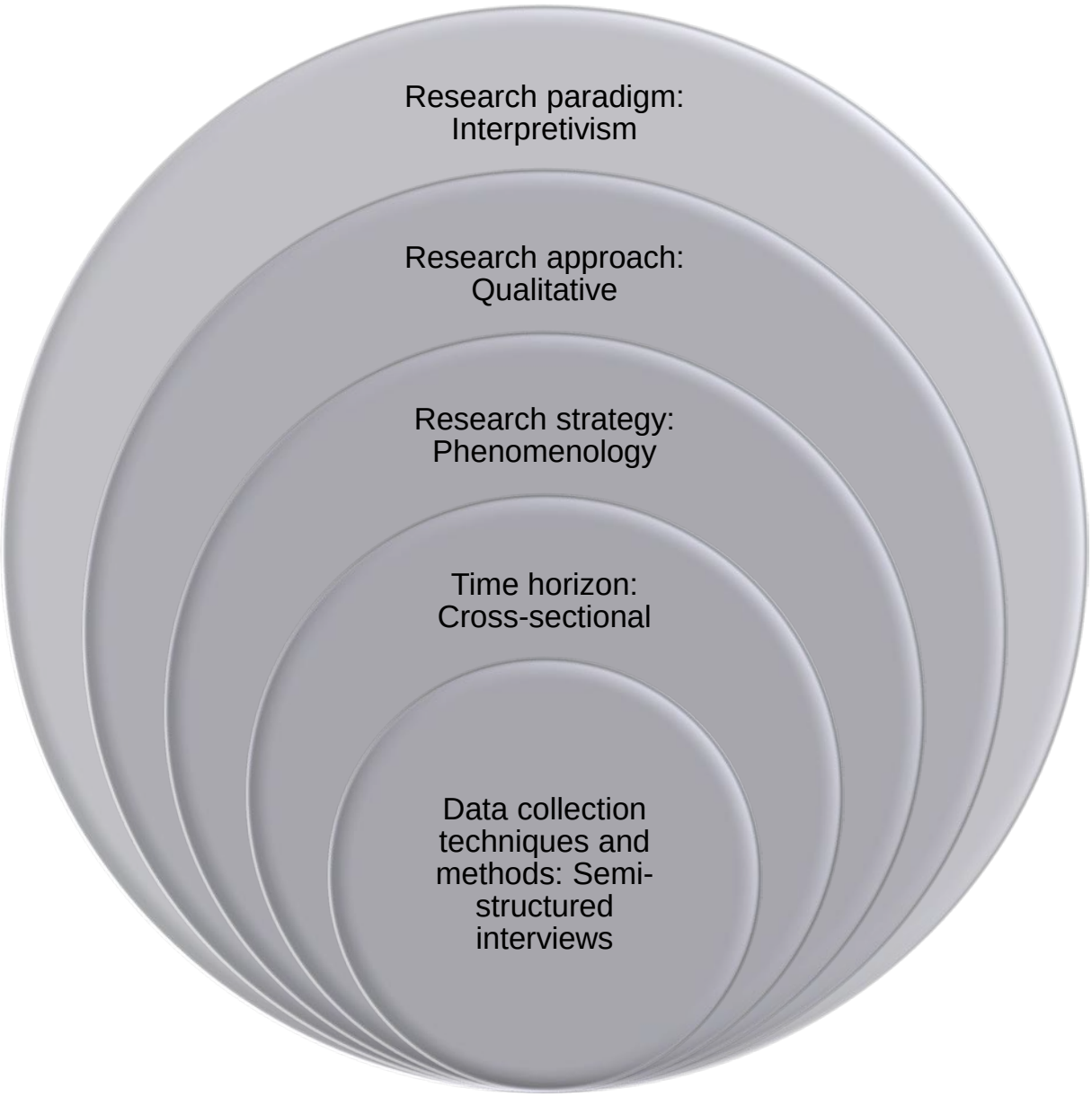

Figure 3.1: Research methodology for this study (proposed by Saunders et al., 2016:106−109)

3.1.1 Interpretative paradigm

In Nieuwenhuis' (2019a:58) perspective, a paradigm is the comprehension of the world and its perception. He also characterises a paradigm as a collection of assumptions or beliefs regarding reality that constructs a particular outlook grounded in faith, convictions and the interaction between the knower (I, the researcher, seeking to acquire knowledge) and the known (information and concepts the researcher is seeking to comprehend), also

known as epistemology. A paradigm can alternatively be described as a specific lens through which a problem or issue is perceived, frequently acknowledged on a global scale. This paradigm represents the individual's conception of the world, even though it lacks empirical validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:15; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:58).

Moreover, it encompasses a collective system of beliefs, shaping the identity of a community and influencing the definition of genuine problems and their potential solutions. A paradigm serves to provide clarity on the purpose and character of research, aiding in the organisation of thought processes regarding the research (Cohen et al., 2018:9).

I chose the interpretivist paradigm as framework for this study, which is characterised by its qualitative, meaning-centred, naturalistic and interactive approach to understanding participants (Cohen et al., 2018:8−9). Within the interpretive paradigm, emphasis is placed on how individuals interpret their world and subsequently act based on these interpretations (Pham, 2018:3).

Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm involves the study of individuals in their authentic environments and social contexts, leading to a deeper understanding of their perceptions. The researcher immerses themself in the participants' world, striving to perceive reality from the participants' point of view (Van Niekerk, 2020:66).

Notably, the interpretive paradigm is inclusive, welcoming diverse viewpoints from participants across different groups. In this study, the interpretive paradigm shed light on the participating teachers' personal backgrounds, experiences and attitudes towards supporting learners with learning barriers within the FSS (Thanh & Thanh, 2015:24−27).

The interpretive paradigm, as elucidated by Pham (2018:3), presents several benefits. It grants researchers the capacity to grasp the contextualised nature of objects, individuals and events. Investigations unfold in natural settings, facilitating the acquisition of genuine and contextually rich data related to the subject of study. Furthermore, as highlighted by Pham (2018:4), the researcher can delve into the thoughts, perceptions, emotions and values of participants, thus offering a deeper and more profound comprehension.

However, the interpretivist paradigm also comes with its set of disadvantages. The information obtained within this framework must be understood within its complex context and cannot be easily generalised to other individuals or situations, which can create challenges in terms of verifying and applying the research findings (Pham, 2018:4).

Additionally, the ontological perspective of interpretivism leans towards subjectivity rather than objectivity, meaning that research outcomes are influenced by the researcher's personal interpretations and beliefs (Pham, 2018:4; Van Niekerk, 2020:67).

I chose the interpretivist paradigm due to its natural, interactive, and social approach (Pham, 2018:4; Van Niekerk, 2020:66). This paradigm was beneficial to the study as it allowed participants to express their viewpoints based on their realities and interpretations of the world, leading to a deeper understanding of their perceptions of readiness to support learners in FSSs. Embracing diverse perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes provided a richer comprehension of teachers' experiences. I remained conscious of the risk of subjectivity, taking care to prevent my personal experiences and views from influencing the study results.

3.1.2 Qualitative research approach

I used a qualitative research approach for this study. Through this research approach, I delved into the authentic environments of individuals, aiming to interpret teachers' perceptions based on the significance attributed to it by the participating teachers themselves. This approach entails an exploration of the real-life experiences of the participating teachers involved in my study (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:10−11).

The approach to conduct qualitative research is dependent upon several factors. This includes the individual's beliefs about the nature of the world and the attainable knowledge (ontology), the understanding of knowledge acquisition (epistemology), the research purpose and objectives, the characteristics of the participants, and the researcher's proficiency in qualitative research methods, theories and paradigms (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:57).

A defining feature of qualitative research is its reliance on verbal (linguistic) data rather than numerical data. Qualitative research is also characterised as naturalistic, focusing on the genuine setting of interactions (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). In this approach, I, the researcher, sought to comprehend the participants' world and experiences through open exploratory research questions, aiming to gain an enhanced comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation. In the context of this study, I focussed on teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to support learners with barriers in a full-service classroom (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59; Ntseto, 2019:98).

In qualitative research, variables are typically left uncontrolled, as the aim is to capture the inherent freedom and natural behaviour. The phenomenon under investigation (in this case, teachers' perceptions) should not be restricted by boundaries, as it is essential for a comprehensive understanding (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2009:4).

Qualitative research serves various purposes. This includes, but is not limited to, describing, explaining, reporting and developing and testing theories, in this case related to teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom (Cohen et al., 2018:287).

I chose the qualitative research approach due to its linguistic nature, which facilitated the exploration of teacher-participants' real-life experiences. By using open exploratory research questions, this approach allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions. Participants were not restricted in their responses and could freely express their viewpoints on their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in FSSs.

3.1.3 Phenomenological research strategy

I adopted the phenomenological research strategy for my study. Phenomenological research is based on the viewpoint that the individual's knowledge (and perception) of the world is rooted in their experiences (Hammersley, 2013:27). Phenomenology is employed to explore the evolving patterns in which individuals construct meaning in their lives as they undergo a phenomenon over time (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:11). The goal is to interpret and comprehend the significance individuals attribute to their daily experiences. Achieving this understanding requires the researcher to immerse themself in the participant's world and adopt their perspective. This involvement can be facilitated by analysing the interviews, conversations and interactions the researcher engages in with the participants (Fouché, 2005:270).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the participants allowed for conversations through interactions that could be analysed to achieve my objective: to explore teachers' perceptions and experiences to support learners with learning barriers in the FSS (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:10−11).

3.1.4 Time horizon: cross-sectional

I, as the researcher, had to decide between a cross-sectional and longitudinal study when considering the timeframe (Haydam & Steenkamp, 2020:312). Cross-sectional research

involves conducting a study at a single point in time, capturing a “snapshot” of a population. It consists of representative samples interviewed on the same day and is primarily used for descriptive purposes. In contrast, a longitudinal study involves collecting data from the same group over an extended period (Cohen et al., 2018:265,348; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:144).

In this study, a cross-sectional time horizon was employed. Participants were interviewed once on the same day, and the chosen sample was representative of various phases and expertise within the FSS.

3.1.5 Data collection technique and method: semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are employed to gain comprehensive insights into a participant's beliefs and perceptions on a given topic (Van Niekerk, 2020:22). To collect data, I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions for guidance during the interviews. I chose open-ended questions because structured answers cannot accurately capture reality. Interviews transcend simple data collection, because they are social and interpersonal encounters, exploring people’s narratives and avoiding one-sidedness (Cohen et al., 2018:506). Through interviews, reality can be elucidated by focusing on formulating questions that invite elaboration, pursuing new avenues that emerge during the interview (Ukachukwu, 2016:44; Van Niekerk, 2020:22). Although semi-structured interviews are open-ended, they are planned events that require adherence to predetermined actions, distinguishing them from everyday conversations but allowing for flexibility (Cohen et al., 2018:507; Van Niekerk, 2020:22).

For this study, I prepared a set of predetermined open-ended questions to guide the semi-structured interviews. It is important to note that there was no fixed pattern to be followed, and that the questions did not follow a rigid pattern (Greeff, 2005:287; Van Niekerk, 2020:22). There was much opportunity for clarification, explanation and elaboration on questions and the responses of the participants (Cohen et al., 2018:511; Ukachukwu, 2016:45).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were held at two FSSs in rural areas of the Motheo district. The semi-structured interviews had open-ended questions that were followed up by further prompting, probing or seeking clarification for an in-depth understanding. From this, new emerging lines of enquiry developed that were related to the participants’ perceptions (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:108). I arranged for a suitable

time and place for interviews and arranged with the principals and participants well in advance. An interview schedule was used to ensure fluent and successful interviews. The interview schedule was also issued to the participants to prepare them for topics to be covered.

I explained the purpose and value of the study and interviews to the participants. I took notes during interviews for analysis purposes. Furthermore, I recorded the interviews with an audio recorder for transcription purposes. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, the timeframe recommended by Van Niekerk (2020:22). The questions led to an understanding of participants' readiness, confidence, perceptions and knowledge of available resources in teaching learners with barriers (Dreyer, 2014:183).

3.1.6 Participants

I intended to conduct semi-structured interviews at three full-service primary schools in rural areas of the Motheo district. However, only two schools from the Motheo district expressed interest in participating. Furthermore, the number of designated FSSs was significantly reduced in August 2019 by the DBE (SA. DBE, 2019).

From each participating school, one Foundation Phase teacher, one Intermediate Phase teacher and one SBST coordinator/support teacher were interviewed. This means that from each of the two schools, three teachers were interviewed, resulting in a total of six interviews. Permission letters to principals, information leaflets about the study and letters of request for teachers to participate were sent to the respective schools well in advance. Schools were contacted through email communication to arrange a suitable time for interviewing the participants. To ensure confidentiality, the participating schools were named School 1 and School 2.

The criteria for participating in the research were that participants needed to 1) be either a Foundation Phase teacher (named Teacher F), Intermediate Phase teacher (named Teacher I) or support teacher/SBST coordinator (named Teacher S); and 2) have had experience in their field at an FSS for at least five years.

Table 3.1 presents the biographical details of the teacher-participants (participants' names are not used due to ethical confidentiality).

Table 3.1: Biographical details of participants

Participant (school 1 or 2)	Gender	Position	Qualifications	Year qualification obtained	Roles and responsibilities
Teacher F (School 1)	Female	Teacher	B.Ed Foundation Phase	2016	Grade 3
Teacher I (School 1)	Female	Teacher	B.Ed Bachelor of Education	1996	Maths Grade 4 to 7
Teacher S (School 1)	Female	Teacher	B.Ed Foundation Phase and Psychology of Education and Learner Support	2010	Remedial, SBST coordinator
Teacher F (School 2)	Female	Teacher	B.Ed Foundation Phase and Pre-school Teaching	2016	Grade 1
Teacher I (School 2)	Female	Teacher	B.Ed Bachelor of Education	Not known	English Grade 4
Teacher S (School 2)	Female	Teacher	Diploma in Higher Education with Tswana, Remedial and Music	1997	Learners with special educational needs (LSEN) Grade 1−3

School 1 is a farm school located approximately 16 km outside a rural town, accessible only by a rough gravel road. This remote location requires staff to travel on the gravel road whenever they need to go anywhere. It is a Quintile 1 school, which means it is a no fee school, where parents are not requested to pay school fees. Learners, most of whom are from farming communities, are transported to the school by bus. While the school's language of instruction is English, the majority of learners are Sotho-speaking. The school has 192 learners and 13 educators. Among the learners, 17 have severe intellectual and other needs, and 26 have mild intellectual needs. Additionally, the school provides remedial classes for learners with less severe needs. School 1 is far from essential services such as clinics, police, shops or doctors. The nearest town is 16 km away, and the closest city, where specialist services can be accessed, is 150 km away.

School 2 is a public school located in the poorer area of a rural town, with 497 learners and 19 teachers. Among the learners, 5 have severe or other special needs, and 12 have

mild needs. The school also offers remedial classes for learners who are not placed in LSEN classes. It is a Quintile 1 school, which means it is a no fee school, where parents are not requested to pay school fees. Poverty and unemployment characterize the surrounding community. Although the language of instruction is English, most of the learners are Sotho-speaking. While the rural town has a clinic and a police station, it lacks access to specialist services such as therapists. The nearest city, where these services are available, is 110 km away.

3.1.7 Data analysis

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), qualitative data analysis is an inductive process that divides information into groups and identifies patterns and connections between the groups. Van Niekerk (2020:33) adds that qualitative data analysis is a continual and analytical process involving the organisation, reduction and description of data (Van Niekerk, 2020:33). The researcher must analyse the data to gain a comprehensive view and thorough understanding of the interviewees' shared insights (Van Niekerk, 2020:34). Hardy and Bryman (2009:4) describe data analysis as the search and arrangement of collected data to provide meaningful and relevant information.

For my study, I employed the thematic analysis approach to interpret and analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis, as described by Nowell et al. (2017:2), is a qualitative research method focused on identifying, analysing, structuring, explaining and communicating prevalent themes within a dataset. According to Xu and Zammit (2020:2), it involves identifying recurring meanings within the data, which is crucial for understanding the phenomenon being investigated, in this case, teachers' perceptions of their readiness to assist learners with barriers in the FSS. The process of generating themes includes familiarizing oneself with the data, generating codes, searching for themes, and reviewing, defining and titling themes (Daries, 2010:115; Jacobs & Govender, 2020:90). In this study, I conducted thematic analysis by collecting the verbal data generated during the semi-structured interviews through note-taking and voice recordings. I recorded and transcribed the data in its original form (Maxwell, 2018:1). In addition, I searched for category connections to form patterns or themes (Maxwell, 2018:568; Xu & Zammit, 2020:6; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:272).

Thematic analysis involves six steps that must be followed to analyse data thoroughly as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019). The six steps are to: familiarize oneself with the data,

generate initial codes, identify thematic connections, review the themes, name and define the themes, and lastly, compile a concise and coherent report.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the six steps employed in this study for conducting thematic analysis.

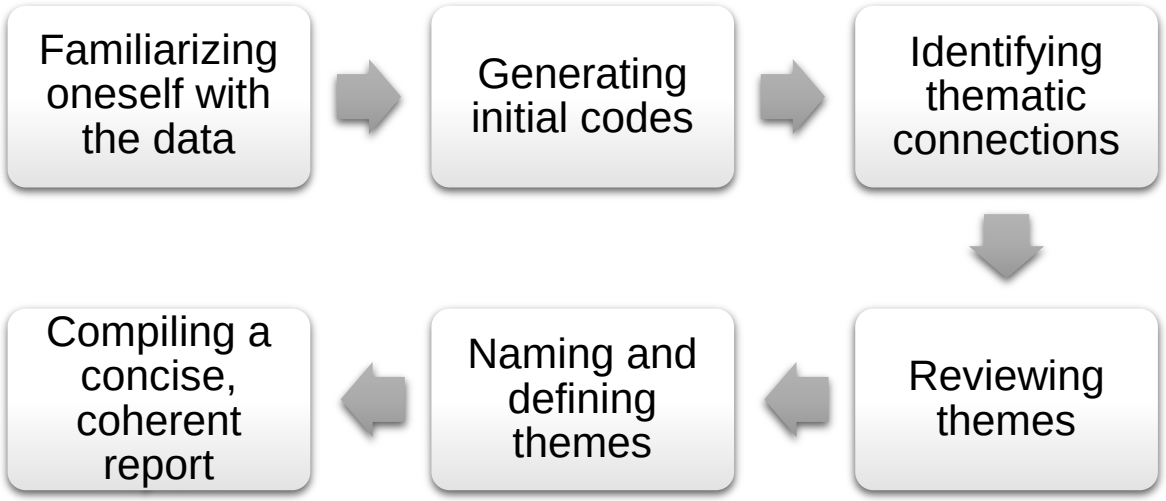

Figure 3.2: The six steps of thematic analysis (Xu & Zammit, 2020)

To commence with data analysis, I familiarised myself with the gathered data by transcribing the recorded interviews. Subsequently, I generated initial codes to establish meaningful groupings. Following this, I employed diagramming techniques to identify thematic connections. I comprehensively reviewed these emerging themes by revisiting the raw data, ensuring that they effectively addressed the research questions. The three secondary questions were answered in the three dominant themes that emerged: 1) barriers experienced by teachers in FSSs, 2) resources accessible to teachers in rural FSSs, and 3) assistance required by educators in rural FSSs.

Ultimately, the analysis resulted in a concise, coherent and logically structured report that can be used to draft recommendations for all stakeholders involved (Nowell et al., 2017:10; Xu & Zammit, 2020:5−7).

Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness and Objectivity

Objectivity implies that the result of a study may not depend on the individual or researcher’s opinions or values. Objectivity was ensured in this study. I remained mindful

of the risk of subjectivity, ensuring that my personal experiences and views did not influence the study's results. Furthermore, acquired knowledge was independent of my own perceptions (Maul, 2018:1169). Saldaña (2018) identified strategies to improve objectivity during research. He mentions in his book that researchers should, among other strategies, establish clear criteria to select participants, be transparent in their analysis of data and be aware of their own biases and assumptions and ways to diminish them. Reflecting on the above-mentioned strategies, I established clear criteria to select participants. These criteria were mentioned in Section 3.1.6.

Reliability pertains to the consistency and accuracy of values and test scores (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:117). Reliability was ensured in this study through cross-examination and auditing (Daries, 2010:110; Stofile, 2008:117). The transcribed interviews underwent a validation process where they were sent back to the participants to confirm accuracy. Participants were encouraged to thoroughly review their interview transcript and indicate any discrepancies if they felt the transcript did not faithfully reflect their interview.

Validity assesses the alignment of the phenomenon under study with the realities of the world (Kometsi, 2015:169). Validity was upheld in this study through various strategies, including literal recording and detailed descriptions of people and situations (Creswell & Poth, 2018:201). Prior to conducting the interviews, I presented the interview questions to my supervisor for input (Daries, 2010:111), and a voice recorder was employed to accurately capture participants' responses.

Trustworthiness was a focal point in this study. It involves the review of clarity, transferability, dependability and confirmability in the investigation (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:117). Two methods were used in this study to verify trustworthiness: member checking and peer review, as proposed by Lincoln and Lynham (2018:2037). Through member checking, participants had the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews and provide feedback on accuracy. Peer review involved my supervisor scrutinising the research questions, data collection and analysis procedure, and results interpretation to ensure quality and trustworthiness.

Acknowledging personal biases and assumptions, I was vigilant in separating my own experiences and assumptions about the challenges faced by teachers in FSSs in rural areas from the study. Concentrating on each school's unique challenges, I endeavoured to stay focused and objective throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

The Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State granted research consent, and ethical clearance reference number UFS-HSD2021/1758/22 was allocated (see Appendix A). In addition, permission was asked from the Free State DoE to conduct research in FSSs in the Motheo district (see Appendix B). The research study leaflet and consent form that was sent to school principals and participants can be seen in Appendix C. The transcripts of all the interviews are not attached to this document, but will be made available on request. The Turnitin report is attached in Appendix D.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, significant criteria to be included in the ethical process are: informed consent, no harm to participants, confidentiality and anonymity, and voluntary participation (Dalton et al., 2012:7; Daries, 2010:117; Van Niekerk, 2020:24−25,46). Each of these criteria will now be discussed shortly.

3.3.1 Informed consent

Participants over the age of 18, including teachers and principals, were requested to provide informed consent. An information leaflet regarding the research was provided to participants to explain the nature, value and purpose of the study. The rights and responsibilities of participants were also clarified (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:48; Van Niekerk, 2020:25). Participants of this study signed an informed consent form to confirm consent to voluntarily participate in the research process.

3.3.2 No harm to participants

It is important to remember that each interview item or question can be potentially harmful to a participant, depending on the way the question is phrased and the past experiences of the participant (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011:98). Before conducting the actual interviews, I asked my supervisor, colleagues and friends to rate the questions to be asked during the semi-structured interviews to eliminate potential uncomfortable situations. The ethical clearance committee also assisted to reduce potential harm to participants.

3.3.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

Assurance of confidentiality of the participants' responses is vital (Maree, 2019:48). Participants were guaranteed that their responses would remain private and not be made available to any unauthorised person. Under no circumstances were the responses made available to individuals who held authority over the participant (Maree, 2019:48).

Anonymity is an assurance to the research participant that information will not be traceable back to them (Van Niekerk, 2020:26). Participants were assured that their real names would never be used; codes were allocated to the participants throughout the research process (Maree, 2019:48).

3.3.4 Voluntary participation

No participants were forced to participate in this study. Permission was asked from the two principles of the participating FSSs to interview one Foundation Phase, one Intermediate Phase and one support teacher at their school. The principals were asked not to force any staff member to participate, but to ask for volunteers. All participants were informed that they may withdraw from the study if they did not wish to continue.

[redacted]Conclusion

This chapter focused mainly on the research design, methodology, participant selection procedure, and data collection and analysis procedure of the conducted research. Ways to ensure reliability, validity, trustworthiness and objectivity were explored. Ethical considerations were also discussed. The data analysis will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4:
PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding their readiness to support learners with learning barriers in FSSs in rural areas. At the outset of this chapter, a restatement of the research questions is presented. I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant with the aim of exploring their lived experiences regarding the said topic. This study employed thematic analysis for data coding and identifying emergent themes. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings pertaining to each of the secondary questions as generated from the data, which collectively respond to the primary research question. Below are the primary and secondary research questions of this study.

Primary research question

What are teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning?

Secondary research questions

1. What challenges do teachers experience in the full-service classroom in supporting learners with learning barriers?
2. What resources are available for teachers in full-service schools in rural areas?
3. What do teachers need to improve their readiness to support a learner with learning barriers?

Two FSSs from rural areas in the Motheo district participated in this study, named School 1 and School 2. Three teachers from each school participated in the semi-structured interviews: a Foundation Phase teacher (Teacher F), an Intermediate Phase teacher (Teacher I) and a support teacher (Teacher S).

Findings

The semi-structured interview questions were carefully formulated in alignment with the research questions. Consequently, the main themes that surfaced in the gathered data

directly correspond to the three secondary research questions of the study. The three main themes that emerged from the data analysis are: 1) barriers experienced by teachers in FSSs, 2) resources accessible to teachers in rural FSSs, and 3) support needed by teachers in rural FSSs.

From each of the mentioned themes, three dominant sub-themes emerged, as presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Findings with themes and sub-themes

Theme 1: Barriers experienced by teachers in FSSs		
Sub-themes		
Inadequate time	Lack of support by the Department of Education	Language of learning and teaching (LOLT) of school in contrast with the home language of the learner
Theme 2: Resources accessible to teachers in rural FSSs		
Sub-themes		
Support from teachers collaborating at FSSs	Support from the DBST	Community support
Theme 3: Support needed by teachers in rural FSSs		
Sub-themes		
Support needed from the Department of Education	Involvement by the SMT and SGB at FSSs	Parental involvement

During the coding and sorting of the data, sub-themes surfaced from the semi-structured interviews. Clear patterns of similarities and differences in the responses of participants became apparent. The data pertaining to the aim and objectives of this study will be presented in the upcoming section. The aim and objectives of the study (Section 1.4) remained the focal point and served as the guiding principles throughout the data analysis.

Themes that Emerged from the Semi-Structured Interviews with Participants

The participating teachers responded to the pre-designed questions, shedding light on their individual perceptions regarding their preparedness to assist struggling learners in the FSS. The three secondary questions were answered in the three dominant themes that emerged mentioned in Section 4.1.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Barriers experienced by teachers in full-service schools

This theme responds to the first objective of the study, namely to identify the challenges that teachers experience in the full-service classroom in supporting learners with learning barriers. Three dominant sub-themes emerged from the gathered data to understand the participants' challenges influencing their readiness to support the learners in class:

1. Inadequate time.
2. Lack of support by the Department of Education.
3. Language of learning and teaching of school in contrast with the home language of the learner.

4.2.1.1 *Sub-theme 1.1: Inadequate time*

Time to assist the learners with learning barriers presents a substantial challenge to teachers. Factors influencing the time teachers possess to support learners include the administrative demands of teachers, the packed curriculum, the number of learners in the class and the poor behaviour of learners.

Through the interviews, it became evident that participants desired to assist learners, yet they found themselves constrained by administrative obligations, including mark and error analysis, referrals of learners, subject improvement plans and curriculum coverage forms.

> **Teacher I (School 2):**
>
> *"Definitely a lack of time. I want to assist the learners one on one, but there is not enough time due to the administrative burdens of education."*

In addition, the packed curriculum does not allow time to render support and does not allow time for repetition.

> **Teacher I (School 2):**
>
> *"Another challenge is that the curriculum is very packed. There is no time for repetition to ensure understanding."*

Teacher S (School 2):

"Curriculum coverage is a huge problem for me. I cannot cover the expected curriculum with the learners in my class with different abilities."

A further factor that influences the availability of time to render support is the number of learners in a class.

Teacher F (School 2):

"Our classes are too big. There were times when I had 47 learners in my class. If learners are too many, it is difficult to help learners who do not understand the activity. Remember, it is not only one learner that struggles, but maybe six or seven learners."

Participants viewed disciplining poor behaviour as time that could have been better spent supporting another learner.

Teacher F (School 1):

"I've tried just yesterday to do Afrikaans reading in groups, but the discipline is a challenge."

Teacher S (School 1):

"This struggling learner is getting naughty and wants attention, even if it is negative attention."

Teacher F (School 2):

"Discipline becomes an issue when you support other learners."

4.2.1.2 *Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of support by the Department of Education*

A significant challenge that teachers experience is the lack of involvement by the DoE and the DBST. Participants perceived challenges from the DoE as lack of practical training by the DBST, lack of timeous assessments of learners by the DBST, progression of learners to next grade, untimely filling of available posts and post provisioning.

From the interviews, it was clear that participants had experienced inadequate practical training by the DBST. The participants viewed the effectiveness of workshops in a

predominantly negative way. Workshops were seen as more theoretical than practical "hands-on" training:

Teacher F (School 1):

"We did a workshop online presented by the department and SAOU (South African Teachers' Union). The SAOU workshops were mainly about completing SNA (Support Needs Assessment) forms and concessions. The department also previously presented these workshops. It is not practical examples to support learners in class. It (workshops presented by the DoE) is more theory than practical. Foundation Phase workshops include a lot of information on paperwork. We want to know exactly how to identify barriers. We did not study barrier identification. We want a practical workshop, not messages from the department's office, but the DBST visiting our school. Come and show us how to support each barrier, specific for our school. If half of my class has ADHD, come show us how to support learners. I don't say they must come to do my work for me, but give me practical, hands-on advice to support learners."

Teacher S (School 2):

"We sometimes attend workshops, but they are not always relevant to our situation. We need workshops about differentiation and motivating us with new ideas. We have a lot of workshops about accommodations, concessions and ATPs (Annual Teaching Plans), but it does not prepare us to support all learners."

A further challenge experienced by participants related to the DBST is the lack of timeous assessment of learners by the DBST:

Teacher F (School 1):

"I am here since 2018, but last week was the first time the department came to test the learners. Other schools apparently have a whole team visiting them, but we really had to wait a long time for a team to visit us."

Teacher S (School 1):

"We had an education specialist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, psychologist and social worker visiting our school last week for the first time in many years, but the education specialist was communicating with us frequently. There

are sometimes delays (with feedback from the DBST), depending on the DBST member that must provide the feedback. We sometimes struggle to get Clinic numbers (K numbers) with feedback from the DBST. What makes it difficult is that learners need an IQ score to be able to place them in a SE class. The psychologist who is finally appointed has too many schools to cover and cannot test all our learners on the waiting list."

A further significant factor presenting challenges to teachers is the progression of learners to the next grade by the DoE, even if the learner did not meet the requirements of the previous grade. A special focus in this regard is the automatic promotion of Foundation Phase learners after COVID-19 and the long-term effect thereof. This was confirmed by all the participants at School 1:

Teacher F (School 1):

"Yes. Another problem, not always blaming COVID, but the Grade 3s in my class have academic level of a Grade 1 child, because of the automatic promotions during this time. They were also a long time at home in 2020 and in 2021 not attending school."

Teacher S (School 1):

"Another challenge is that learners are simply placed in the next grade. Problem is never stopped. It just becomes bigger and bigger."

Teacher I (School 1):

"It (condonement of Maths) definitely has an influence, because of COVID. Grade 2 and 3 learners are only promoted automatically, and teachers can expect them to be on a Grade 1 level. The department does not expect Grade 1 work to be done. The curriculum must be completed on grade level."

In addition, participants viewed the untimely filling of posts and post provisioning by the DoE as a factor that may create challenges for teachers. Failure to promptly fill available positions, whether permanent or temporary, can lead to challenges such as larger class sizes, as pointed out by Teacher F from both schools:

Teacher F (School 2):

"There were also times where there was not a teacher for another class, and those learners were divided into my class and another teacher's class."

Teacher F (School 1):

"We have an LSEN and SE class, but only one teacher."

4.2.1.3 *Sub-theme 1.3: Language of learning and teaching in contrast with the home language of the learners*

Participants viewed the LOLT as a challenge when it differed from the learners' home language. This language barrier made communication among teachers, parents and learners confusing and hindered learning. Moreover, teachers depend on Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres to strengthen the LOLT, but not all learners attend ECD classes before starting Grade 1.

When the home language of learners is in contrast with the LOLT it creates challenges for teachers and parents to effectively support learners. This challenge was also confirmed through the interviews:

Teacher F (School 2):

"Language is also a huge barrier. If learners understood better what I said, it would go better, for example, the page we are on, the place on the page we are on."

Teacher I (School 2):

"I must mention that the language of teaching really presents a challenge to many learners."

The literacy level of parents in rural areas may also influence learners' performance. Teachers cannot consistently depend on parents to reinforce classroom learning and provide assistance with homework at home, because many parents do not understand the LOLT of the school.

Teacher F (School 1):

"They (learners) were a long time at home in 2020 and in 2021 not attending school (during COVID-19). We could not give work online. I tried to print a book for them,

but the parents did not even understand the work. The parents could not help the children. Even if I give homework on a normal school day, there is no one to help learners to read. I was stimulated when I was smaller at home by my parents, but the learners in my class are not stimulated by parents."

The lack of early academic stimulation and availability of ECD centres in the rural area presents a challenge for teachers, because learners are not efficient in the LOLT of the school:

Teacher S (School 2):

"Remember, the environment as rural area also plays a role. Here is not pre-Grade R stimulation; all learners were not included in Grade R."

4.2.2 Theme 2: Resources accessible to teachers in rural full-service schools

This theme answers to the second objective of the study, namely to determine the resources available in FSSs in rural areas. Three dominant sub-themes emerged from the gathered data. Teachers' perception of support and their ability to assist learners in a full-service classroom are directly shaped by the accessibility and adequacy of resources. The three sub-themes are as follows:

1. Support from teachers collaborating at FSSs.
2. Support from the DBST.
3. Resources from the community.

4.2.2.1 *Sub-theme 2.1: Support from teachers collaborating at full-service schools*

Teachers' colleagues were seen by participants as the most significant support for teachers. These individuals include the LSE, SBST members, colleagues and principal. The LSE, named the remedial teacher, was mentioned by participants from both schools:

Teacher I (School 1):

"The remedial teacher has knowledge on many areas. The remedial teacher gives support, because she has a mathematical background, and she gives advice."

Teacher F (School 2):

"We have an active remedial teacher that supports teachers. The remedial teacher helps us with referrals, gives regular feedback and helps to communicate with parents. She also helps by teaching remedial."

When participants were asked about the involvement of the SBST, all of them were eager to speak about the LSE. It seems as if they regarded the LSE as the SBST. The SBST as a team was viewed as a support structure by only one participant:

Teacher I (School 2):

"The SBST contributes towards the uplifting of the teachers."

Colleagues working with teachers also play a vital role in supporting them. These colleagues include both teaching and non-teaching staff. The school staff are friends who share ideas, seek advice, and support each other by providing a space to vent:

Teacher F (School 1):

"The teachers keep each other going. We travel together, where we exchange ideas and vent to each other."

Teacher I (School 2):

"It is important to promote collaboration to improve a good working relationship at the school."

In one of the schools in this study, the principal was perceived as a supportive figure due to her positive demeanour, direct involvement in assisting learners and responsibility in acquiring the technology utilised in the school. This technology plays a crucial role in aiding teachers to provide support.

4.2.2.2 *Sub-theme 2.2: Support from the district-based support team*

The DBST was mentioned as the only noteworthy support structure on the departmental level. Although participants experienced the DBST as being involved, challenges and obstacles still hindered full involvement by the DBST:

Teacher S (School 1):

"The DBST tries to assist us, but their hands are tied as well.

We had an education specialist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, psychologist and social worker visiting our school last week for the first time in many years, but the education specialist was communicating with us frequently."

The response from Teacher S at School 1 suggests that the DBST wants to be active at the school but faces obstacles that hinder regular visits to schools.

4.2.2.3 *Sub-theme 2.3: Resources from the community*

In the interviews, participants viewed the involvement of parents and other stakeholders, for example, clinics and farmers, as significant resources to teachers. Parents were perceived as a crucial resource, where the LOLT was not an obstacle regarding communication and support. Some parents make earnest efforts to assist their children:

Teacher I (School 1):

"I am surprised that parents are coming very far to fetch reports. Parents can realise that learners struggle, but they do not know what to do about it. Parents want to help learners, but do not know how to help children."

Clinics were perceived as a valuable resource for both teachers and learners, serving as a support system for the health of learners. Participants regarded clinics as a valuable resource, recognising that health-related concerns could potentially impede the learning process:

Teacher I (School 1):

"The clinic at VVV (a nearby town) is involved at school for health of learners."

Farmers from the community were also seen as a valuable resource, supporting teachers and learners with daily needs. They provided maize for the feeding scheme, which helped

eliminate hunger, supporting the teacher indirectly. Additionally, the farmers repaired the gravel road to the school, which the teachers also use for their commute.

Teacher S (School 1):

"The community will also be involved by, for example, fixing the road. A nearby farm also provides maize for the feeding scheme and sometimes provides for other needs our school might have."

4.2.3 Theme 3: Support needed by teachers in rural full-service schools

The third objective of this study was to explore how teachers can be supported to assist learners with barriers to learning. From the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, three dominant sub-themes emerged regarding support needed by teachers:

1. Support needed from the Department of Education.
2. Involvement by the SMT and SGB at FSSs.
3. Parental involvement.

4.2.3.1 *Sub-theme 3.1: Support needed from the Department of Education*

Participants indicated needing support structures from the DoE to improve their readiness to support learners in the class in specific areas. These included: provision of technology, age of admission of learners in Grade 1, DBST-related support with emphasis on involvement of the Department of Social Development (DSD), departmentally paid teacher assistants, appointment of full-time therapists at FSSs, involvement of SSRCs, and efficient transportation for learners to school.

Participants expressed a strong belief in the substantial advantages of integrating technology into classrooms. This encompassed the use of computers and screens and access to the Internet. While acknowledging successful outcomes with the Future Kids program in one school, which was generously sponsored by a friend of the institution, participants emphasised the potential of technology for elucidating new concepts, enhancing the enjoyment of learning, and providing explanations in Sotho. In rural schools where qualified Sotho teachers are not always readily available, creating a curriculum gap, technology is seen as a valuable tool to address and overcome this deficiency. Teachers will receive support through the provision of technology. Their efforts to explain difficult concepts to learners are often hindered by the lack of experiences and background

knowledge learners in rural areas have, but having visual aids readily available will greatly enhance their ability to teach effectively.

Teacher F (School 2):

"I think technology will be of huge help to support learners. I can show them videos on a screen about a topic, for example, addition. They will understand the concept of more and less, better. Maybe even a video in Sotho. I show the (DBE) book, but it is too small for the learners at the back to see."

Enrolling learners who are five years old in Grade 1 may pose potential challenges for their future academic experiences. The Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (SA. DoE, 1996) allows a child to enter Grade 1 when they are five years old and will turn six by 30 June of the next year:

Teacher F (School 2):

"Admission must also be done carefully. A challenge contributing to poor performance is the five-year-old learners in Grade 1, which are approved by the department."

From the collected data, participants also saw the need for a trained teacher assistant payable by the DoE to assist the teacher with various tasks in class, including managing discipline while individual support is rendered or assisting with groupwork:

Teacher I (School 1):

"If only we had trained assistants to support learners; if I had someone to help me in class that I do not feel alone with all the problems in class."

Participants emphasized their need for increased support from the DBST in assessing and placing learners, as well as in providing feedback to schools.

Teacher S (School 1):

"There are sometimes delays (with feedback from the DBST), depending on the DBST member that must provide the feedback. We sometimes struggle to get Clinic numbers (K Numbers) with feedback from the DBST. The psychologist who is finally appointed has too many schools to cover and cannot test all our learners on the waiting list."

Participants also emphasised the significance of involving a social worker from the DSD through collaboration between the DBST and the DSD. They mentioned that learners need to be supported emotionally and socially:

Teacher I (School 1):

"Social workers can be available with lot of effort. They can come, but it is challenging to get a social worker to come to our school."

Furthermore, participants saw the need for a full-time, departmentally paid occupational therapist, social worker and psychologist at FSSs:

Teacher S (School 1):

"I strongly feel that learners with barriers must be placed in a class or school with friends that have the same challenges as them − schools with occupational therapists and psychologist that can assist the learner hands-on daily. It would be ideal if therapists could be provided for each full-service school, but it is impossible. Therefore, I feel that learners must go to a school where therapists are available to assist them."

Involvement of SSRCs was seen as a needed support structure, as indicated in the analysed data. Based on the interviews, special schools, functioning as resource centres, do enrol learners with an intensive level of needs. Nevertheless, the lack of hostel facilities and transportation options compels parents to retain their children in FSSs. Outreaches by the SSRCs to FSSs were not mentioned by the participating teachers during the interviews.

Teacher F (School 1):

"I think the closest (special) school is in Bloemfontein. And then they must be placed in a hostel, and you don't know what will happen to them. Here is a girl that must go to a special school, but at least she gets love from home if she stays here."

In rural communities, the inadequate transportation of learners may contribute to increased absenteeism, fatigue and reduced concentration, thereby posing challenges for teachers in effectively supporting their students:

Teacher F (School 1):

"Transport is also a challenge that must be added. The departmental bus did not transport the learners from ZZZ (a nearby town) last term. It is impossible to catch up with those learners."

4.2.3.2 *Sub-theme 3.2: Involvement by the school management team and school governing body at full-service schools*

Participants also saw the involvement of the SMT as a support structure needed:

Teacher F (School 2):

"Additionally, support from SMT is needed, especially regarding behaviour and smaller classes."

The importance of the involvement of the SGB is outlined in Section 2.1.4.7 (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019:51).

4.2.3.3 *Sub-theme 3.3: Parental involvement*

Teachers need the support of parents. Parental involvement in supporting learners at home is crucial, but collaboration and open communication with parents will also help teachers better understand the learners' circumstances and home situations. This understanding will, in turn, illuminate the correct route of support to take.

Teacher I (School 1):

"I am surprised that parents are coming very far to fetch reports. Parents can realise that learners struggle, but they do not know what to do about it. Parents want to help learners, but do not know how to help children. They want to help, but they do not know how to help."

Teacher F (School 2):

"Some parents are involved, but many parents cannot communicate with me; we need a translator."

Discussion of Results

This section will explain the relationship between the literature, the study findings according to theme, and the differences identified.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Barriers experienced by teachers in full-service schools

Participants identified challenges that hinder them to render the needed support. These barriers include inadequate time to render support, barriers from the DoE, and the LOLT of the school being in contrast with the home language of the learner.

4.3.1.1 *Sub-theme 1.1: Inadequate time*

The time available for teachers to support learners is influenced by various factors, including the administrative tasks they must handle, the density of the curriculum, class size and learner behaviour issues.

The teachers participating in the study felt constrained by administrative duties, which they believed reduced their ability to support learners with barriers. Teachers are occupied with various tasks, including planning, marking, error analysis, curriculum coverage forms, referral forms, and subject improvement plans. As a result, there is little time left for providing individual support to learners. They are also concerned about completing the curriculum on time, leading them to rush learners through the required work and leaving little or no time for additional support. The packed curriculum, with its strict time allocations, allows minimal opportunity for repetition to ensure mastery of concepts. Teachers also worry about large class sizes, as the large numbers of learners make it difficult to address individual needs. Furthermore, large classes often lead to, among other problems, behavioural problems, further limiting the time teachers can devote to struggling learners as they have to manage aggressive and disruptive behaviour.

The participants' responses align with findings from the literature of, among other scholars, Merga, Roni and Malpique (2020:7-9) and Alnahdi (2019:11). According to Merga, Roni and Malpique (2020:7), there exists a correlation between the number of learners in class and the amount of support rendered and that an increased quantity of learners equals lower quality of support. Alnahdi (2010:11) makes mention of the time wasted in class to control uncontrollable, physically aggressive and disruptive learners in class.

4.3.1.2 *Sub-theme 1.2: Lack of support by the Department of Education*

Challenges perceived by participants in relation to the DoE include insufficient practical training provided by the DBST, delays in timely assessment of learners by the DBST, student progression to the next grade, untimely filling of available teaching positions, and post provisioning issues.

Participants mentioned that the DBST and DoE are training teachers. However, the responses suggest that while the DBST strives to train teachers, participants perceived the training to emphasise theory rather than the practical application of learner support. Teachers need practical, hands-on strategies to identify barriers and understand how to support each learner effectively within the school's rural context. Swart and Pettipher (2019:89) affirm that essential skills for teachers cannot be acquired solely through workshop attendance; instead, practical, on-the-job support is necessary.

Additionally, the participating teachers expressed concern that learners are not assessed promptly by DBST therapists, psychologists, social workers or other professionals, particularly those learners needing alternative placement in a special school or class. Participants also noted that even when assessments are conducted, feedback from the DBST is often delayed, leaving teachers waiting for extended periods. Moreover, the collected data indicate that the DBST operated without an assigned psychologist for an extended period, leading to a backlog in assessing learners. This is confirmed by Khumalo and Hodgson (2017:112), who reported a minimum of 231 vacancies at the provincial and district levels in 2017. Donohue and Bornman (2023:208) confirm the ongoing lack of support from the DBST to FSSs, particularly in rural areas, even two decades after the implementation of inclusion in schools.

Although participants understood that the DBST faces challenges that hinder their ability to visit schools and assess learners, these challenges are not the focus of this study and will not be explored further. However, addressing these DBST challenges can be included as recommendations in Chapter 5 to improve teachers' readiness to support learners.

Participants were concerned about learners progressing to the next grade without meeting the requirements of the previous grade, especially with the automatic promotions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants worried that if learners do not master previous work, they will have knowledge gaps in the next grade, causing them to fall further behind each

year. This situation forces teachers, in some cases, to cover Foundation Phase work for Intermediate Phase learners in addition to the Intermediate Phase curriculum.

These concerns of participants are consistent with the findings of Ardington, Wills and Kotze (2021:1). Learning losses arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, apart from opportunity loss to attend classes, another consequence was the deterioration of knowledge over time (Ardington et al., 2021:1). Ardington et al. (2021:9) also predicted that as learners are moving up in grade level, those learners who fell behind due to learning losses during COVID-19 will learn less each year. Teachers will consequently have multi-graded learners in a classroom in need of intervention and support.

Data analysis revealed that the untimely filling of posts and post provisioning by the DoE create significant challenges for teachers. In both participating FSSs, only one special class post is allocated, leading to overcrowded special classes or classes that mix learners with mild and severe intellectual disabilities.

Participants also noted that in mainstream classes, delays in filling posts force teachers to share learners across grades, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and less time to support individual learners. This problem is particularly acute in rural areas, where schools struggle to find suitable and experienced teachers due to a preference among educators to work in urban areas. Furthermore, rural schools often cannot afford to appoint additional teachers from the SGB budget, which places additional strain on the existing teaching staff at FSSs.

The finding regarding the untimely filling of posts and post provisioning by the DoE is affirmed by Sephton (2017:254-255) and Du Plessis and Mestry (2019:3). The DBE has introduced a model outlining the allocation of posts to schools, taking into account the needs of learners with disabilities or special educational requirements. This model involves assigning a weighting to learners based on their assessed needs through the SIAS process. Consequently, the post provisioning should be adjusted to allocate more teachers to support learners with special needs (Sephton, 2017:258). As published in the *Personnel Administrative Measures* (SA. DBE, 2022:A11), the weighting of learners with learning barriers for purposes of allocating educator posts must be applied (see Section 2.1.3.7.1).

4.3.1.3 *Sub-theme 1.3: Language of learning and teaching in contrast with the home language of learners*

Participants viewed the LOLT as a challenge when it is different from the learners' home language. This language barrier created confusion in communication between teachers, parents and learners, thereby hindering the learning process. This is a significant factor influencing teachers' readiness towards supporting learners with barriers in the rural FSS.

Participants identified significant factors that impact learners' efficiency in the LOLT of the school, including the inability of parents to communicate to the learner in the LOLT and the absence of ECD centres to prepare learners to speak and understand the LOLT. Often, parents in the rural areas are not fluent in English as the LOLT (as in the case of this research), because their home language is different (Sotho in this case). Learners must now deal with the language at school versus the language at home. This is particularly true in cases where parents, specifically in rural areas, lack the necessary reading skills. Illiterate parents cannot efficiently support learners at home as an extension of the school. The collected data indicate that when learners do not understand the LOLT, they have to rely on parents who do not understand the LOLT, creating numerous obstacles in the reinforcement of schoolwork at home.

This finding correlates with Ndandani (2014:22), who also mentions the difficulty that the LOLT creates in teaching learners in rural areas, because it is sometimes a different language from the language spoken at home. Ndandani (2014:17) adds that poverty or unemployment, among other factors, may influence the proficiency of parents to communicate in English.

From the collected data through the semi-structured interviews, it became evident that in rural and remote rural areas, the availability of crèches or ECD centres is nearly non-existent. When ECD centres are available, parents in these areas, often characterised by poverty, lack the funds to place learners in a paid ECD centre. The data confirmed that the absence of ECD centres and Grade R classes negatively affects learners' readiness for formal teaching in Grade 1, especially when the LOLT differs from their home language. The same issue arises for learners who attend Grade 1 without attending Grade R due to financial reasons, resulting in an increase in teacher challenges to support learners who did not attend ECD or Grade R classes.

Ndandani (2014:21) confirms the scarcity of ECD centres. This scarcity is attributed to the lack of space within public schools to establish these centres as well as a shortage of

adequately trained teachers capable of guiding the learning of three- to six-year-old children (Ndandani, 2014:21).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Resources accessible to teachers in rural full-service schools

Teachers' perception of support and their ability to assist learners in the full-service classroom are directly influenced by the accessibility and efficiency of resources, namely the support from teachers collaborating at FSSs and resources from the DBST and the community.

4.3.2.1 *Sub-theme 2.1: Support from teachers collaborating at full-service schools*

According to participants, the most significant source of support for teachers are the colleagues who work with them at the same school. These individuals included the LSE, SBST members, colleagues and the principal.

The LSE was seen as the most significant person providing support to teachers. Most participants were very enthusiastic about the engagement, assistance and guidance of the LSE. One participant vaguely mentioned the SBST as a supportive structure, but it was clear from the interviews that the LSE, who also served as the SBST coordinator in both schools, was regarded as the main source of support from this team.

The role of the LSE is to advise, support teachers and parents and create connections with therapists and the DBST. The LSE must also arrange for trainings for professional development, coordinate the SBST and provide suggestions to address identified barriers (Nel et al., 2016:11; SA. DBE, 2014). Focussing on the roles of the LSE, the data from the interviews indicate that participants saw these roles as fulfilled. However, it must be emphasised that teachers should be careful not to place the entire responsibility of support on the LSE. It is not the work and responsibility of one teacher alone to support but that of the whole team (Nel et al., 2016:10).

4.3.2.2 *Sub-theme 2.2: Resources from the district-based support team*

Participants indicated that the DBST was the only noteworthy support structure on the departmental level. They noted that members of the DBST, including an education specialist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, psychologist and social worker, visited their school. They also mentioned frequent communication between the education specialist and the school. While the DBST provides training to teachers, such as on completing SIAS forms or understanding concessions and accommodations, this training

is often theoretical and does not equip teachers to identify and support specific barriers in the classroom.

The DBST plays a crucial role in the success of the FSS by ensuring that teachers do not operate in isolation when assisting learners. The composition and roles of the DBST are clearly outlined in policy (SA. DBE, 2014).

4.3.2.3 *Sub-theme 2.3: Resources from the community*

Participants viewed the involvement of parents and other stakeholders, such as clinics and farmers, as significant resources for teachers. Some parents made earnest efforts to support teachers, but the difference between their home language and the LOLT remained a communication barrier. Farmers contributed to the feeding scheme, alleviating hunger to optimise teaching, and repaired the road used by teachers and learner transport. The clinic from a nearby town screened and supported the health of learners, indirectly aiding the teaching process. Despite these contributions, many community institutions were still not involved with schools, leaving them isolated.

Stofile (2008:89) mentions that networking between different governmental departments, for example, education, schools, community, health and non-governmental organisations, allows for horizontal and vertical management of barriers. Stubbs (2008:21) adds that it is also in the best interest of the school that the community participates in school-related strengthening of teachers for the task at hand.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Support needed by teachers in rural full-service schools

From the data collected in the semi-structured interviews, three dominant sub-themes emerged regarding support needed by teachers. These are: support needed from the DoE, involvement of SMTs and SGBs at FSSs, and parental involvement.

4.3.3.1 *Sub-theme 3.1: Support needed from the Department of Education*

According to participants, teachers needed certain support from the DoE to improve their readiness to support learners in the class. They mentioned support such as provision of technology, age of admission of learners in Grade 1, and DBST-related support with emphasis on involvement of the DSD. Furthermore, departmentally paid teacher assistants, appointment of full-time therapists at FSSs, involvement of SSRCs, and adequate transportation to school were other support structures that surfaced during the interviews.

Participating teachers expressed a strong belief in the advantages of integrating technology into classrooms. These advantages include elucidating new concepts, enhancing enjoyment of learning, offering mother tongue explanations, and covering the gap where a Sotho teacher is not available for Sotho classes. Carrim and Bekker (2022:19) confirm the value of including digital education in the classroom. They mention that digital education will increase learners' participation and engagement in their schooling by allowing them access to data and connectivity. They further suggest that digital education can support in developing more differentiated curricula and assessments.

Participants requested that the DoE should investigate the age of admission in Grade 1. The Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools (SA. DoE, 1996) allows a child to enter Grade 1 when they are five years old and will turn six by 30 June of the next year. Participants were concerned in this regard, because many Grade 1 learners are not ready for formal schooling when entering formal schooling at the age of five. These learners often struggle to adapt to the increased academic, physical and motor demands. Participants also noted that some learners lack adequate socio-emotional development, language skills, cognitive abilities and independence in daily living activities. De Wit, Du Toit and Franzsen (2020:28−29) confirm the participants' concerns and add that school readiness does not apply to age alone.

Participants identified the need for a trained teacher assistant in the classroom to help with tasks, allowing teachers to focus on supporting individual learners. The appointment of teacher assistants is specified in the guidelines for FSSs (SA. DBE, 2010).

Participants also expressed the need for clear guidelines from the department on effectively assisting learners facing barriers. They further underscored the necessity for practical workshops addressing challenging aspects of learner support and providing practical solutions applicable to large classrooms in the context of rural areas.

Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of regular updates from the DBST, including information on new assessments for learners. They stressed the recurring issue of timely feedback from the DBST regarding referred learners. Furthermore, according to the participants, some roles of the DBST are not fully executed due to the challenges encountered. The interviews also revealed that the SBSTs, despite being established support structures, do not operate effectively as a recognised support system for teachers. It became clear that teachers rely on the LSE as the SBST coordinator for support, and not on the whole team. As confirmed by Nel et al. (2016:4) and Dreyer (2014:182), the

DBST is responsible for assessing learners, training teachers and supporting the SBST. These sources confirm that the roles of the DBST are not fully carried out due to internal challenges.

Involvement by a social worker from the DSD was seen as a needed resource by the participating teachers. Participants mentioned that they were not sure if referred learners do receive the support needed, because of the absence of feedback from the DSD. Collaboration between the DSD and DBST is crucial to support inclusive learning, to support learners who experience barriers due to the environment they live in. It was not clear from the interviews whether the DBST was indeed collaborating with the DSD, especially in rural areas. Participants' concerns are confirmed by Ndandani (2014:17), while Nel et al. (2014:22) underscore the necessity of collaboration between the DSD and DBST.

Participants saw the need for full-time-appointed therapists at FSSs. Teachers lack the expertise to deliver specialised services, and they cannot solely rely on the DBST, which typically provides assessments and recommendations rather than hands-on assistance. In urban areas, parents often seek therapy for their children, but such resources are scarce in rural areas where financial constraints further limit access. Nel et al. (2013:2) confirm participants' concerns by mentioning that only a few schools have access to these professionals.

Connections between SSRCs and FSSs are crucial for supporting teachers and learners (Nel et al., 2016:4). However, the conducted semi-structured interviews did not reveal any mention of or emphasis on this level of support except for placement of learners with an intensive level of needs.

Participants mentioned the importance of reliable transport for learners between remote areas and the school. The availability of reliable transport may influence school attendance and learner performance. Gravel roads leading to some rural areas are often in poorly maintained condition. In my capacity as the researcher, I had to travel an 80 km stretch of gravel road to access one of the schools for interview purposes; this school is almost isolated and challenging to reach. In addition, learners who walk to school experience fatigue, struggle to concentrate in class, contend with harsh weather conditions, and face safety concerns. As a result, teachers are compelled to find opportunities to make up for missed work due to transportation issues. These challenges significantly disadvantage both teachers and learners in comparison to their urban counterparts. Participants were

concerned with the issue of transport, because it influences their opportunities to educate and support learners. These concerns are confirmed by Joseph and Carpenter (2017:279).

4.3.3.2 *Sub-theme 3.2: Involvement by the school management team and school governing body at full-service schools*

Participants did not mention receiving support from the SMT in assisting learners with barriers to learning, except at School 1, where the principal actively promoted a culture of support and personally assisted learners in the absence of an appointed teacher. Participants understood that school management must be committed to supporting both teachers and learners and fostering a supportive culture within the school. Unfortunately, participants reported not receiving this support from the SMT. Alnahdi (2019:13) and Donohue and Bornman (2014:4) confirm that the SMT should provide support through effective communication, creating a positive climate for teachers, efficiently allocating resources, and leading the development of support programs for learners.

As per the guidelines for capacity building of SGB members (SA. DBE, 2021), the SGB of the FSS is expected to provide support for curriculum training and grasp the significance of inclusive education as well as methods for assisting teachers and students within the FSS. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019:51) also point out that SGBs, which are comprised of mostly parents, are not always skilled and possess limited knowledge to effectively govern schools. Unfortunately, participants did not view the SGB as a support structure to teachers.

4.3.3.3 *Sub-theme 3.3: Parental involvement*

Participants observed that some parents were involved by collecting their children's reports and attending parent meetings. However, communication with parents is challenging due to the school's LOLT. Homework is often not completed because some parents are illiterate and cannot assist with homework or reinforcement at home. Teachers need parental involvement not only for enhancing the quality of learning but also for reporting absenteeism, ensuring school safety, monitoring learner behaviour and returning school property. Parents also need to be involved by volunteering their time for various tasks, such as doing repair work, assisting with the feeding scheme, listening to learners read in class, or sharing their expertise on various topics to educate learners. Parents can also help by identifying and reporting signs of child abuse or neglect within the community. These findings align with Nel et al. (2016:8), who mention insufficient parental involvement

at FSSs, partly due to the lack of response by parents to teachers' communication efforts, and emphasise that parental involvement is crucial support for teachers.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the collected data, the three objectives of the study were addressed. Three primary themes, directly aligned with the study's objectives, were identified. Each main theme was subsequently subdivided into sub-themes to provide a clearer understanding of the theme. These themes and sub-themes were deliberated upon through discussions, connecting the analysed data with existing literature in order to draw conclusions. The next chapter will present the recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 5:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was located in the rural areas of the Motheo district and explored the perceptions of teachers on their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom. Following the implementation of EWP 6 and the establishment of FSSs that admit learners ranging from those with no learning barriers to those with an intensive level of needs, it is essential for teachers to feel equipped to support these learners. This study investigated whether teachers in rural FSSs consider themselves prepared for this responsibility.

The aim of the study was to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding their readiness to support learners with learning barriers.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the challenges that teachers experience in the full-service classroom in supporting learners with learning barriers.

2. Determine the resources available in full-service schools in rural areas.

3. Explore what teachers need to improve their readiness to support a learner with learning barriers.

The interpretivist paradigm, using qualitative research, was employed in this study to investigate the participating teachers' perceptions. I conducted semi-structured interviews with six teacher-participants in two rural FSSs in the study area, with interview questions aligned with the research aim and objectives. These questions were open-ended, allowing for further probing and clarification. The criteria for participating in the research were that participants needed to 1) be either a Foundation Phase teacher, Intermediate Phase teacher, or support teacher/SBST coordinator, and 2) have had at least five years of experience in their field at an FSS to provide comprehensive and insightful information in the interview.

Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data. The three main themes that emerged from the data were: 1) barriers experienced by teachers in FSSs, 2) resources accessible

to teachers in rural FSSs, and 3) support needed by teachers in rural FSSs. The data were presented in Chapter 4.

A limitation of the study was the sparse and widely dispersed distribution of FSSs in the rural areas of the Motheo district, raising uncertainty about whether the sample of teachers selected from these rural FSSs was comprehensive.

Chapter 5 focuses on the conclusions and recommendations for this research study.

Summary of Findings

The aim of this research study was to understand the perceptions of teachers regarding their readiness to support learners with learning barriers. I will now offer a summary of the findings in response to the secondary research questions posed.

5.1.1 Challenges experienced by teachers in full-service schools

All teacher-participants mentioned challenges they experienced to render support in the FSS classroom. Challenges centred around the time available to teachers to support learners, lack of involvement from the DoE, and LOLT being in contrast with the home language of the learner.

Factors influencing the time teachers have to support learners are the administrative demands of teachers, the packed curriculum, the number of learners in the class, and the poor behaviour of learners. Furthermore, participants perceived challenges from the DoE as lack of practical training by the DBST, lack of timeous assessments of learners by the DBST, progression of learners to the next grade, untimely filling of available posts, and post provisioning. Lastly, participants perceived a significant challenge regarding the LOLT of the school being in contrast with the learners' home language, with the literacy level of parents and the lack of early academic stimulation being contributing factors.

The challenges faced by teachers occur across the micro, meso, exo, and macro levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Issues at the individual (micro), school (meso), district (exo), and provincial and national (macro) levels all impact a teacher's ability to effectively support learners in a full-service school.

5.1.2 Available resources for teachers in full-service schools in rural areas

Participants acknowledged available resources in FSSs in rural areas as support from teachers collaborating at FSSs, support from the DBST, and resources from the community. Teachers' colleagues were seen as the most significant support for teachers. These individuals included the LSE, SBST members, colleagues and the school principal.

The DBST was the only noteworthy support structure on the departmental level. Participants did experience the DBST as involved, although indicating that challenges and obstacles still hindered full involvement by the DBST. Participants viewed the involvement of parents and other stakeholders, for example, clinics and farmers, as significant resources to teachers.

The collaboration of individuals at the FSS and the involvement of the DBST were expected, as it correlates with the literature. The finding on the involvement by the community being limited to parents, clinics and farmers was disappointing. The community has many other support structures that could provide assistance, such as the police, libraries, local businesses and religious leaders, to name a few.

This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's theory, which emphasizes the importance of face-to-face proximal interactions between stakeholders, highlighting the need for a collaborative effort from all systems to provide support to the teacher.

5.1.3 Support needed by teachers in rural full-service schools

Participants identified the support needed to be able to assist learners with barriers to learning. Support from the DoE, the involvement by the SMT and SGB at the FSS, and parental involvement were emphasised during the interviews.

Participants indicated specific areas in which teachers need support structures from the DoE to improve their readiness to support learners in the classroom. These include: provision of technology, age of admission of learners in Grade 1, DBST-related support with emphasis on involvement of the DSD, departmentally paid teacher assistants, and appointment of full-time therapists at the FSS. In addition, some rural areas do not have access to the nearest SSRC and lack adequate transport for learners between farm and school.

The involvement of the SGB and SMT was also seen as support needed by teachers to assist learners with learning barriers. The SGB and SMT should foster the culture of inclusion and support teachers in leading by example.

Some of these findings concurred with the literature, although it is evident that theory does not always apply in practical situations. This can be seen in the lack of involvement by the DSD, the lack of involvement of SSRCs, and the lack of involvement by the SGB and SMT.

As key individuals in implementing inclusive education, teachers need to feel supported across all levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The presence or absence of this support significantly influences their readiness to effectively assist learners.

Recommendations

In this section, I provide recommendations and suggestions to improve teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in full-service classrooms, with a focus on the rural areas of the Motheo district.

- The administrative burden on teachers significantly impacts their ability to support learners effectively. It is imperative to scrutinise whether all administrative tasks are truly essential priorities. The curriculum is already densely packed, leaving minimal space for additional support. If learners receive insufficient support and consequently fall behind, it jeopardises the coverage of the curriculum. There exists a fundamental conflict between curriculum coverage and classroom support. In addition, teachers should have evenly distributed workloads that are manageable (SA. DBE, 2010).
- The efficacy of the DBST warrants thorough examination. Teachers are well aware of the myriad challenges confronting the DBST, such as limited availability of transportation, lack of administrative resources, and constraints in filling vacancies. These obstacles directly impede the DBST's capacity to deliver services efficiently. In addition, practical training sessions conducted by the DBST are indispensable for teachers, particularly in identifying learner barriers and managing classrooms with these barriers in consideration in the context of the school (Nel et al., 2013:12).
- SBSTs at schools need to be practically trained by the DBST to be effective. SBSTs do exist but are not always functional, relying on the LSE to render all the support to teachers.

- The practice of progressing learners to the next grade when they are not adequately prepared poses significant challenges for teachers instructing subsequent grades. Adequate time and resources for supporting these learners are often lacking. Strategies for addressing the needs of progressed learners must be carefully explored and put into practice.
- In rural areas, the timely filling of vacant posts is not always guaranteed. These vacancies encompass temporary as well as permanent positions. It is crucial to acknowledge that the SGBs of these institutions lack the financial means to hire teachers independently. It is recommended that the DoE investigate the obstacles in appointing relevant teachers and to remove such obstacles.
- Post provisioning poses additional challenges for educators. Unlike in the past, schools catering to LSEN no longer receive a second special education post, leaving these learners without dedicated teachers if they are placed in separate classrooms.
- There is a pressing need for ECD centres and Grade R facilities to stimulate early childhood learning. Making Grade R attendance compulsory for all learners before entering Grade 1 is imperative. Additionally, subsidies for Grade R should extend to exemption applications facilitated by the DoE.
- Uninterrupted provision of transportation by the department is essential. Disruptions in transport services create barriers, hindering the timely delivery of support where it is needed most and exacerbating time constraints. The National Learner Transport Policy, established on 23 October 2015, aims to facilitate transportation for learners to school. However, it seems that there are discrepancies between the application process and the actual implementation of the policy (Joseph & Carpenter, 2017:280–281).
- Teachers recognise the pressing necessity to integrate technology into the classroom environment, encompassing devices such as computers with large screens or whiteboards equipped with projectors, alongside essential software and Internet connectivity. These technological tools aid in elucidating complex concepts to learners, even accommodating instruction in their mother tongue if required.
- There is a call for a more thoughtful approach to Grade 1 admissions. Teachers advocate for the implementation of a school readiness assessment, particularly for learners who did not attend Grade R, to ascertain their readiness for Grade 1 entry.

- There exists an urgent demand for trained teacher assistants, funded by the department, to assist educators in catering to the individual needs of each learner in the classroom.
- The presence of full-time occupational therapists, psychologists, speech therapists, and social workers at schools is crucial for providing essential support. Teachers lack the expertise to deliver these specialised services, and they cannot solely rely on the DBST, which typically provide assessments and recommendations rather than hands-on assistance. In urban areas, parents often seek therapy for their children, but such resources are scarce in rural areas where financial constraints further limit access. Unfortunately, only a few schools have access to these professionals (Nel et al., 2013:2).
- Strengthening collaboration with the DoH is essential, especially considering that healthcare support for learners typically ends at six years, shifting the responsibility to the DoE. Collaboration with the DSD in the Motheo district must be fortified to ensure that learners receive the necessary support.
- Teachers in rural areas of Motheo perceive the SSRC as underutilised. Enhancing collaboration with SSRCs and providing training to educators on available resources is imperative. To address this, SSRCs must be linked to FSSs through clustering, allowing support to be provided to learners, teachers, parents and the community of the FSS. Workshops can be arranged to train FSS teachers in rendering the needed support (Nel et al., 2016:4).
- Collaboration with the DoE and the Department of Transport is recommended to ensure effective and uninterrupted transportation of farm learners to school.
- Schools can offer training and workshops to parents on the importance of learners understanding the LOLT of the school. These sessions can provide parents with strategies to help their children communicate in the LOLT, and guide them on the correct or preferred methods for assisting with homework.
- The participating teachers perceived the SGB as lacking empathy towards the objectives of the FSS. It is imperative to provide training for SGB members to familiarise them with the function and ethos of the FSS, as well as to engage parents in embracing the broader vision of the FSS.
- SMTs should also be easily accessible to provide support to learners. They need to comprehend the ethos of the FSS and actively promote assistance for learners. SMT members should approach learner outcomes without judgment but with encouragement and understanding. The principal and the SMT must have the

knowledge and skills to put the inclusive policies in practice, while creating a welcoming school atmosphere and taking lead in support programs for learners with learning difficulties (SA. DBE, 2010).

Value of the Study

The study bears value because it highlights the challenges teachers in rural FSSs experience, which support structures are available to them, and which support structures are still necessary. This information may assist the DoE and other stakeholders to understand the challenges teachers experience and to render the appropriate support needed.

Limitations of the Study

The number of designated FSSs was significantly reduced by the DBE in August 2019 (SA. DBE, 2019). There are only a few designated FSSs in the rural areas of the Motheo district, which causes uncertainty as to whether the sample was comprehensive in representing teachers from FSSs in rural areas.

There are evident concerns related to the education system regarding the inclusion of all learners facing learning barriers in FSSs in rural areas. This is particularly pronounced in Motheo, where FSS establishments are scarce and widely dispersed.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research process revealed that schools continue to utilize the medical deficit model (Nel et al., 2013). Both participating schools made use of the medical model, where learners with learning barriers were placed in a separate classroom, contradicting the guidelines for FSSs issued by the DBE in 2010. Further research is needed to determine why teachers, and parents, still prefer to place learners with barriers to learning in a separate classroom.

Alternative assessment diverges from departmental assessment established by the DoE, overlooking learners facing barriers to learning. Instead of tailoring tasks to accommodate diverse needs, all learners are required to complete the same assignments per grade. This contradicts the guidelines outlined for FSSs (SA. DBE, 2010), which advocate for providing alternative and adapted assessments to students encountering barriers to learning

(Motitswe, 2014:421). Further research is necessary to determine the effectiveness of these assessments for the learner with learning barriers.

Summary of the study

In this study, I presented research grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, focusing on its various nested structures. Additionally, I explored background information on teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers in FSS, as well as the history of inclusive education that led to the establishment of FSS. I also examined literature on the challenges faced by teachers in FSS, especially in rural areas and the support structures available to them under current policies.

The study employed qualitative research within the interpretative paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured conversations at two FSS in the rural areas of the Motheo district. Three teachers from each school participated in face-to-face conversations, which were recorded, and supplementary notes were taken during the interviews. These interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. Reliability, validity, trustworthiness, and objectivity were considered, and ethical considerations were addressed.

The analysis of the data addressed the study's three objectives, identifying three primary themes aligned with these goals. Each main theme was further broken down into sub-themes for a more detailed understanding. These themes and sub-themes were discussed by linking the analysed data with existing literature, leading to the study's conclusions.

In conclusion, I summarized the findings and provided recommendations to improve support structures and resources for teachers in FSS, equipping them to better assist learners with barriers in full-service classrooms. The study's limitations were discussed, along with suggestions for future research to explore the experiences of teachers in FSS in rural areas more comprehensively.

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Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Letter

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

UFS UV

GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

13-May-2022

Dear Mrs Sandra Claassen

Application Approved

Research Project Title:
Exploring teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full service classroom

Ethical Clearance number:
UFS-HSD2021/1758/22

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Adri Du Plessis
Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

Dr Adri du Plessis Digitally signed by Dr Adri du Plessis Date: 2022.05.13 15:21:43 +02'00'

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Appendix B: Free State Department of Education Approval to Conduct Research

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Research Permission: S.P. Claassen
Tel. 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za

education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

37 Sering Street
Tweespruit
9770

Dear Mrs. S.P. Claassen

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: MOTHEO DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that you have been granted permission to conduct research in the Free State Department of Education within the Motheo Education District. The details in relation to your research project with the University of the Free State are as follows:

Topic: Exploring teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom.

1. **List of schools involved:** Ebenaeser, Gelukwaars Plaasskool, Moipone Primary School and Refentse Primary School.
2. **Target Population:** Three Foundation Phase teachers, three Intermediate Phase teachers and three support teachers at the selected schools.
3. **Period of research**: From the second week of February 2022 until 30 September 2022. Please note that the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year. Should you fall behind your schedule by three months to complete your research project in the approved period, you will need to apply for an extension. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.
4. The approval is subject to the following conditions:
   4.1 The collection of data should not interfere with the normal tuition time or teaching process.
   4.2 A bound copy of the research document should be submitted to the Free State Department of Education, Room 101, 1st Floor, Thuto House, St. Andrew Street, Bloemfontein or can be emailed to the above-mentioned email address.
   4.3 You will be expected, on completion of your research study to make a presentation to the relevant stakeholders in the Department.
   4.4 The ethics documents must be adhered to in the discourse of your study in our department.
5. Please note that costs relating to all the conditions mentioned above are your own responsibility.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. MZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 25/01/2022

Enquiries: MZ Thango
Ref: Notification of research: S.P. Claassen
Tel: 051 404 8808
Email: MZ.Thango@fseducation.gov.za

education
Department of Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

District Director
Motheo District

Dear Mr. Moloi

NOTIFICATION OF RESEARCH: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH PROJECT IN MOTHEO DISTRICT

This letter serves to inform you that Mrs. S.P. Claassen has been granted permission to conduct research in the Motheo District under the auspices of the University of the Free State. The details in relation to the research project are as follows:

Topic: Exploring teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom.

1. **List of schools involved:** Ebenaeser, Gelukwaars Plaasskool, Molpone Primary School and Refentse Primary School.

2. **Target Population:** Three Foundation Phase teachers, three Intermediate Phase teachers and three support teachers at the selected schools.

3. **Period of research:** From the second week of February 2022 until 30 September 2022. Please note the department does not allow any research to be conducted during the fourth term (quarter) of the academic year nor during normal school hours. The researcher is expected to request permission from the school principals to conduct research at schools.

4. **Research benefits:** The study bears value in that it may enlighten teachers in full-service schools not only of their own strengths, but also of tools available for support. Through this study, the Free State Department of Education will benefit, because teachers could be made aware of and more positive and active towards learners with barriers in the inclusive classroom, because of the possibilities to support them. It will also raise awareness towards successes and challenges of teachers in the full-service classroom.

5. Strategic Planning, Policy and Research Directorate will make the necessary arrangements for the researchers to present the findings and recommendations to the relevant officials in the Department.

Yours Sincerely,

Mr. NZAMO W. JACOBS
DIRECTOR: QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

DATE: 25/01/2022

Appendix C: Information Leaflet and Consent Form

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

DATE

16-10-2021 to 31-03-2022

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Exploring teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners with barriers to learning in the full-service classroom

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Sandra Petronella Claassen *1998392243* *0727402788*

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

Faculty of Education

Department Psychology of Education

STUDY LEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Prof C. Beyers

beyersC@ufs.ac.za

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The proposed study seeks to determine how teachers perceive supporting learners with learning barriers and their own ability to address these barriers in the full service primary classroom. This study will focus on the full service school. The study bears value in that it may enlighten teachers in full service schools not only of their own strengths, but also of tools available for support. Through this study, teachers could be made aware of and more positive and active towards learners with barriers in the inclusive classroom, because of the possibilities to support them.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

The research is done by Sandra Petronella Claassen from the Department of Basic Education (DBE). I am conducting this research to explore teachers' perceptions of their readiness to support learners and, in addition, explore the availability of support structures to support the teacher.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2021/1758-0001

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

The participants were chosen as representatives for the foundation, intermediate phase and support teacher community at a full service school in a rural area. These teachers, with a minimum of five years' experience in their field, will provide comprehensive and insightful information during the interview. The principal of the full service school will be contacted to obtain contact details of the participant. The total number of interviews will be nine (9): a foundation phase, intermediate phase and a support teachers at three (3) full service schools.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The participant teacher will provide the researcher with information to explain the phenomenon under study: the teachers' readiness to support the learner with barriers in the full service class. The study will involve voice recording and note taking during semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews have open-ended questions that are followed up by further probing or clarification. The questions will lead to an understanding of participants' readiness, confidence, perceptions and knowledge of available resources in teaching learners with barriers. Questions will be themed around the teacher's knowledge of inclusive education, pre-service training and workshops, challenges experienced in the class, available and known support structures and their readiness to support the learner with barriers. The expected duration of the interview is 25 - 30 minutes.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Participation is voluntary and that there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. Being in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The teachers' participation in this study will benefit the Department of Education, because it will provide information regarding the teachers' perception of inclusion, challenges, available support structures and the readiness of the teacher to support all learners as directed by the DBE. Teachers will also benefit from this study, as it will make them aware of available support structures for them. The teacher's participation in the study will be kept confidential and the researcher and her study leader will be the only parties to receive information.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participation in this study, may inconvenience the teacher in tuition time. Therefor the participant can choose or suggest a more suitable time. No risk or harm will be part of this study. The interviews will be confidential with only the researcher and participant in the room.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Confidentiality of information will be maintained, e.g. your name will not be recorded, anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a fictitious code number, e.g. "teacher A from School A", and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Only the researcher and her study leader will have access to the data and these individuals will maintain confidentiality by signing a confidentiality agreement. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working

on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes like research reports, journal articles, conference presentations, etc. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked filing cabinet in an unknown location for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years, the information will be deleted and hard copies will be shredded. You may only be inconvenienced because of tuition time, but a more suitable time can be agreed upon. There are no foreseeable risks of harm and participants will not feel threatened, because only the researcher and participant will be in the room.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no payments or rewards. This is a voluntary participation where the teachers' time and energy will be the only inconvenience. The participant is free to suggest anytime best suitable. Your voluntary participation will be much appreciated as it will assisting the researcher to make recommendations to the DBE regarding challenges experienced by teachers.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Sandra P. Claassen on 0727402788 or at 1998392243@ufs4life.ac.za. The findings are accessible for six (6) months. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Sandra P. Claassen on 0727402788 or 1998392243@ufs4life.gmail.com. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof. C Beyers per email beyersC@ufs.ac.za.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, the undersigned,

_____ (*participant's full names to be included*), (the "**Participant**")

confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

_____ (the **"Study**") in relation to

_____

_____

and which Study is being conducted by

_____

(*insert the name of the researcher*), (the "**Researcher**").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that–

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;

6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview through voice recording and note taking.

Full Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): _____

Signature of Researcher: _____Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

QUESTIONS FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS FOR FOUNDATION PHASE, INTERMEDIATE PHASE AND SUPPORT TEACHERS

Hallo, I am Sandra Claassen. I am doing my M.Ed. degree and I chose full-service schools in the rural area as my focus. I am collecting information from full-service schools to see which challenges they might have and available support structures such a school possesses. I am working at a full-service school in the rural area myself, and therefore this study is very personal to me. There are no right or wrong answers. Let's look at question 1.

QUESTION 1: UNDERSTANDING OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

1.1. How would you define inclusive education?

1.2. How would you describe the function of a full-service school?

QUESTION 2: TEACHER TRAINING TO PREPARE TEACHERS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

2.1 How did your pre-service training prepare you to support learners with barriers? (Did you do subjects on college or university to prepare you to support learners with barriers?)

2.2 Do workshops presented for teachers improve their knowledge of supporting learners with barriers? (Do you often attend workshops presented by the Department of Education, to prepare you to support learners, e.g. workshops on identifying learners, assisting learners, assessment differentiation, curriculum differentiation, etc.)

QUESTION 3: PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES IN THE FULL-SERVICE SCHOOL

3.1 Do you experience any challenges in class due to inclusion and if you experience challenges, which three challenges are prominent? (If you sit with learners with different barriers in your class, which challenges do you experience?)

3.2 How, in your opinion, can the above-mentioned challenges be overcome?

QUESTION 4: AVAILABLE AND KNOWN SUPPORT STRUCTURES

4.1 Which resources/support structures are available at your school to support the teachers? (e.g., SGB, SMT, SBST, DBST, psychologists, social workers, parents, community, PLC's, etc).

4.2 How are above mentioned resources/support structures supporting the teacher? (Ignore if you already answered this question at 4.1.)

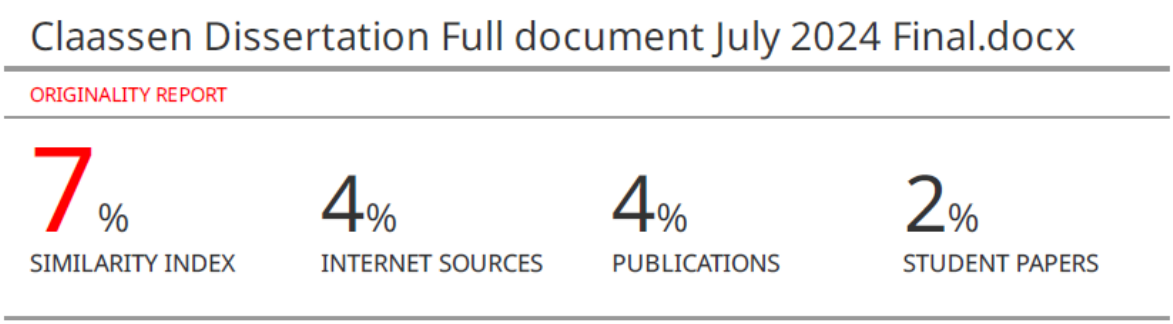
4.3 Which additional support do you as teacher need to improve your readiness to support a learner with barriers in the class?

QUESTION 5: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR READINESS TO SUPPORT LEARNERS WITH BARRIERS

5.1 Do you, as a teacher at a full-service school, feel ready to support all learners with diverse barriers in your class? (In summary, how to you feel personally about supporting all learners in your class currently, and why do you say so.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix E: Turnitin Report



Appendix F: Declaration by Language Editor

Rephrase it!
Academic Text Editing

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+(27) 076 081 0730
info@rephraseit.co.za

20 July 2024

Student: **SP Claassen**
Student number: **1998392243**

I declare that I language edited the master's dissertation titled, *Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of Their Readiness to Support Learners with Barriers to Learning in the Full-Service Classroom*

During the editing process, I looked for and corrected spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraph and syntax errors. Where I noticed inconsistencies or unclarities in the text, I made comments to draw the author's attention to the inconsistency or unclarity. I also made suggestions where changes could be made. Lastly, I double-checked the references in the text and in the reference list to make sure that they are consistent throughout. Where sources or source information were still missing, I indicated such to the author so that she could locate and add the missing information.

Disclaimer: The ultimate responsibility for accepting or rejecting the changes and recommendations rests with the student and I cannot be held responsible for any layout or language issues that might have emerged as a result of subsequent amendments to the text.

Yours sincerely

Johannes Pieter Odendaal