



RESEARCH ARTICLE

2024, vol. 11, issue 1, 52 - 62

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15258135>

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AMONG LEARNING SUPPORT TEACHERS AT METROPOLE EAST EDUCATION DISTRICT, SOUTH AFRICA

Nkepeng Esther KHOBOKO<sup>1</sup>, Peter J.O. ALOKA<sup>2</sup>, Erasmos CHARAMBA<sup>3</sup><sup>1 2 3</sup> Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4298-9211><sup>3</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8650-6931>

### Abstract

This study examined psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among South African learning support teachers. The study adopted a qualitative approach and a multiple case study of five primary schools in the Metropole East Education District, Western Cape, was conducted. Through semi-structured interviews, data from ten participants was gathered. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings of this study revealed that main psychological challenges of learning support teachers when implementing inclusive education are stress, burn-out, emotional exhaustion, low self-efficacy and negative teacher attitudes. The findings suggest that effective intervention strategies for teachers' mental health are required to lessen the burden of stress that learning support teachers are experiencing. Teachers also need to participate in mental wellness programs so that they can be emotionally and psychologically prepared to meet the challenges they will inevitably face in the classroom, which would allow them to successfully implement inclusive education. The study recommends that social workers, psychologists, and therapists should be stationed in schools, or alternatively, ordinary mainstream schools should be transformed into full-service schools.

*Keywords: Psychological challenges; learning support teachers; inclusive education implementation; schools*

### Introduction

Inclusion is defined as the process of placing learners in the mainstream as a matter of human rights, transforming the human values of integration into the immediate rights of learners who are excluded (Clark, 1995). The World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000, declared that Education for All must be an obligation and prerogative for the state. The forum also called for the UNESCO to organise international action on educational needs of every child. Their efforts are focused towards the development of education systems that are authentic, affordable and modern, and accessible to all without exclusion or discrimination (World Education Forum, 2000). Together the motivation of the World Conference on education for all and the 1994 Salamanca statement on special needs education have contributed to the international debates on what schools can do to be more inclusive. The Salamanca statement of the UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994) appealed for schools to be designed in a way that their educational programs implementations take into account the wide diversity of each individual child's characteristics and needs. Hence, many countries have revised their traditional ways of providing education for all the young learners. The South African education system has always been heavily influenced by international trends. For instance, in the 1960s, South Africa followed the leading American model by creating categories of exceptionality for physical, sensory, and cognitive disability (Joorst, 2010). According to Bornman and Donohue (2014), of the 70% of the children that can go to school, the majority of them are placed in separate special schools for learners with disabilities. The system of education by then was

accredited to the legacy of education policies introduced under apartheid. As a result, schools were segregated along disability lines, with white learners with disabilities receiving more funding than black learners (DoE, 1995).

In the Western Cape province of South Africa, each district has Inclusive Specialised Learner & Educator Support (ISLES) comprising of learning support, psychologists and social workers. In a setting called Inclusive Education Team, some specialist instructors, also known as Learning Support Teachers (LSTs), are assigned to resource centres (special schools), while others are assigned to ordinary public schools. The role of learning support teachers in Resource Centres is to provide support to learners referred from public ordinary schools due to scholastic or cognitive learning difficulties. Outside of resource centres, their primary role is to support Full-Service Schools and ordinary public schools, because the White Paper 6 states that full-service schools should be equipped to support learners in the mainstream (White paper, 2001). Other than this external support from the IE team, the FSS has the LST based at the school and is not itinerant like those in ordinary public schools. Certain itinerant LSTs in the public ordinary help grade 8s in the selected high schools as needing consolidation in grade 8 foundation. The study has been conducted in the Metro East Education District (MEED), where there are about two hundred government primary schools, nine Learning Support Advisors and ninety learning support teachers. Each LSA is allocated a range of seven to fifteen schools in different circuits, with about ten learning support teachers. The LSTs work on an itinerary basis, supporting two schools. Dreyer (2013) identified the roles of learning support teachers in primary schools as serving as change agents, collaborative team leaders, and information-consultation agents, and these roles are still relevant at the time of this study. Relatively few studies have documented the psychosocial challenges of LSTs to enhance the implementation of inclusive education.

### **Vygotsky's Social constructivist theory**

In 1968, Lev Vygotsky proposed social constructivism as an educational theory. In addition, theorists who follow this view argue that knowledge is not a self-sufficient entity and that knowledge is not directly transmissible from one person to another but rather is constructed or discovered in an individual and idiosyncratic manner (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Additionally, popular belief holds that these theorists are proponents of the central role of the social environment in learning, despite their diverse perspectives (Liu & Matthews, 2005). According to Hein (1991), learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it. For Mcleod (2019), knowledge is constructed, rather than innate, or passively absorbed. Moreover, Akpan et al., (2020) asserts that when we encounter something new, we reconcile it with our previous ideas and experiences, possibly by modifying our beliefs or discarding it as irrelevant. In any event, we actively generate our own knowledge. Al-Shammari, et al., (2019) substantiate that, constructivism implicates that a person must understand the importance of social dimension during the learning process through observation, treatment, interpretation, and adaptation of information on building a cognitive structure. For Akpan et al., (2020) knowledge could be accomplished through group discussions, teamwork, or any instructional interaction in a facility for learning or training, on social media, in places of worship, or in markets, hence social constructivism is also known as collaborative learning because it is based on student interaction, dialogue, and collaboration.

### **Literature Review**

Literature on psychological challenges among teachers hindering implementation of inclusive education at schools exists but with varied results. According to Kidger et al., (2021), the causes of school-related stress include an excessive workload, challenging learners' behaviour, and pressure to meet a growing number of externally determined goals. In a study cited by Jimenez (2021), it was discovered that teachers experience mental health-related sleeping difficulties less frequently than once per week. The fact that they do have trouble sleeping may hinder their ability to be productive at work because they would be overtired. It is a commonly held belief in England that levels of stress and anxiety rise in proportion to the amount of input required from teachers in order to implement inclusive education, and it is possible that this is the cause of some of the school-related challenges (Warnes, et al., 2022). Similarly, in Finland, Savolainen, et al., (2020) reported that teachers' self-efficacy has a positive effect over time on both types of attitudes and this implies that increasing teacher efficacy for inclusive practices is likely to change their attitudes toward positive direction. According to Kazanopoulos et al., (2022), self-efficacy is a person's perception of their ability to produce the desired outcomes and circumstances in life. In Greece, Kazanopoulos et al., (2022) found that teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs can plan and organize effective teaching, set specific, attainable goals, and have high expectations, while teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy are pessimistic, have low self-esteem, experience stress, can't finish their teaching tasks, are less organized and systematic, are strict, critical, and impose external control in the classroom. Saloviita, (2020) argues that attitudes towards inclusion has only weak associations with variables other than the teacher category, and that their self-efficacy has low associations with their attitudes towards inclusion.

In the special education sector, dealing with the emotional, behavioral, and educational needs of children who needs support on a daily basis makes teachers' jobs more demanding. In South Africa, a study by Namone, et al.,

(2021) argue that there is a gap on psychosocial and well-being programmes in education policies and that the Departmental Basic Education policies focus more on treatment and prevention measures rather than on psychosocial health and well-being. Moreover, a study conducted by Duncan et al., (2021) reported teacher motivation and attitudes as an impediment to the implementation of inclusive education. In the Western Cape province of South Africa, psychological challenges still exist for learning support teachers who implement inclusive education around various schools. Hence, Silbert and Mzozoyana (2021) reiterate that the psychosocial support is now more than ever critical for both teachers and learners especially in communities that constantly face multiple crisis. This includes the community where the study has taken place.

The challenge is that, in South Africa, teachers don't take their role seriously, don't value the professional development opportunities they are given, and even try to dishonor them (Adewumi, et al., 2019). According to Hassanein et al., (2021), the vast majority of teachers in the Arab region hold negative views regarding inclusive education. Hassanein et al., (2021) further argues that even if the government provides all the materialistic, opulent necessities for inclusion, their efforts will be ineffective so long as the majority of teachers maintain their current attitude towards inclusion. In Pakistan, Khalid and Othman (2022) found that if teachers have a positive attitude toward inclusion, they will be more willing to adapt their teaching strategies to accommodate a variety of students with varying learning needs. Positive attitudes toward inclusion are crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices and the development of a positive learning environment for all learners (Sannen et al., 2020 in Abraham, 2021). In Swaziland, Phiri, (2021) discovered that the attitude of teachers was another barrier to the implementation of inclusive education in Swaziland schools. This was not only because teachers did not receive formal training in relation to inclusive education, as stated in the Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011) regarding teacher training, but also because their attitude toward inclusive education to embrace change is fuelling the issue (Phiri, 2021). Similarly, quantitative studies in South Africa and Botswana discovered that teachers' negative attitudes toward IE were associated with inappropriate and uncontrolled learners' behaviour (Genovesi, et al., 2022).

In another study, Steinert and Jurkowski (2023) revealed no differences between the conditions in student teachers' knowledge about teaching in inclusive classes. However, student teachers in the condition with continuous co-teaching reported more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. In addition, Dignath, Rimm-Kaufman, and van Ewijk (2022) study reported that teachers' cognitive appraisals, emotional appraisals, and efficacy about inclusion were found to be in the mid-range of scales, indicating room for growth. Self-efficacy beliefs were higher for preservice than for in-service teachers. Teachers with special education training held more positive views about inclusion than regular education teachers. Moreover, Pillay, Patel and Setlhare-Kajee (2023) indicate that a school teachers' ability to support their learners varies per school and is based on their school's compliance to training their teachers on the school safety protocols and is not affected much by external training. Most recently, Aas, Uthus and Løhre (2024) findings are increased attention towards student behaviour, increased use of contextual explanations for student behaviour, a marked increase in ideas for adaptations, and ideas changing from exerting external control to engaging students in learning activities.

From the reviewed literature, several research gaps exist. First, some of the reviewed studies only focused on special schools and not on mainstream school settings. Moreover, some reviewed studies only focused on teachers and not the specialists such as the SBST coordinators as was the case of the present study. Therefore, the present study filled in gaps in literature by bringing in the perspectives of coordinators which has remained scanty in previous studies.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The study adopted a multiple case research design. According to Mills et al., (2010), multiple case study is a study that uses several instrumental bounded cases that are selected to create a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon than a single case can provide. When dealing with multiple case studies, the researcher has to explore variances within cases. Therefore, multiple case study enabled the researcher to investigate within each setting and across settings.

### Research participants

The sample size comprised 10 participants (5 LSTs and 5 School Based Support Team (SBST) were selected from Khayelitsha in the Metro East Education District. According to Mason (2010), the sample size of at least fifteen participants is acceptable for qualitative research studies. The researcher anticipated that by the tenth interviewee, as practically all of the participants are experienced and have certain qualifications, the material acquired would have reached saturation. A sample size of ten people was therefore appropriate in this study. In order to meet the knowledge requirement, a non-probability sampling technique was implemented using purposive and cluster sampling. In this study, the researcher sought the perspectives or information of experts in the field of education.

### Research Tools

The researcher to get a better understanding of the participants' experiences used semi-structured interviews. The interviews assisted in understanding the respondents' perspectives rather than making broad assumptions about their experiences. The researcher first built a rapport with participants in order to make it easy to facilitate face-to-face interviews with them. Because semi-structured interviews use a more conversational form of interview, they were a good fit for this type of study (O'Leary, 2004).

### Procedure

The researchers sought permission to conduct this research from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Humanities, Witwatersrand University and the research directorate of the Western Cape Education Department. After being granted with access to the participants, the researcher held a meeting to outline the aim of this study and arranged the dates for the interviews. Each of the interviews with participants lasted about 30 minutes, after which, the participants were allowed an opportunity to ask questions. With the participants' consent, the researcher recorded the interviews. Then, in order to prepare the data for analysis, the researcher meticulously transcribed every interview.

### Data Analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse data. First, the researcher familiarized herself with data by reading and re-reading texts and noting down initial ideas. Secondly, the researcher attended to some interesting features of data, by identifying text divisions relevant to the research question, identify meanings in these text segments and recorded them as coders (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thirdly, the themes were searched, reviewed, defined, and named. This entailed checking and rechecking themes of every level against the initial codes and at some point also against the original texts sections. Lastly, the researcher produced the report because of identified themes. This is perceived as a further step in the analysis because the themes were defined and prominent data extracts were used to explain each theme.

### Findings

The study explored psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers. The themes that emerged on psychological challenges include teacher stress, burn-out, emotional exhaustion, low self-efficacy and negative teacher attitudes. The themes are discussed as indicated below;

#### Theme 1: Teacher Stress

According to Haydon, et al., (2018), stress manifests in teachers and has significant effects on their perception of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout, attrition, student engagement, and physical health. The findings of the present study indicated that one of the psychological challenges faced in the implementation of inclusive education is teacher stress. With regard to how psychologically challenging their career has been as LSTs and SBSTs, most respondents showed how overwhelming and stressful it is to implement inclusive education in their schools. The participants reiterated that they experienced stress because of additional responsibilities in managing learners with barriers in the mainstream school. For example, one respondent reported, "It's too much for me neh? But at the same time I'm coping because it's been long time doing this. So, I've got other tactics to deal with." (SBST 1). Another respondent agreed that,

"You get involved...You also have your psychological problems. Whatever you feel, you feel overwhelmed sometimes because you're the coordinator and you are also SMT member because you are the HOD." (SBST 3)

On the basis of the qualitative results above, teachers experience stress due to multiple responsibilities that they are assigned in addition to the teaching roles when implementing inclusive education. Thus, teachers get overwhelmed by additional roles resulting to stressful experience. Despite having to support learners who have various learning barriers, teachers must also manage their own psychological issues, which causes them stress. In addition, another respondent also indicated that, "Everyone was...was not okay because you feel embarrassed when you've tried your best, but nothing has changed." (SBST 4). Other respondents also reported that they

experienced stressful challenges when implementing inclusive education because of the increased demands on them, added responsibilities and work overload. The following interview are the excerpts from four other participants regarding experiences of stress in implementing inclusive education:

"It's too much right now. Maybe it's because of my personality. I'm just going forward, you know. As time goes on, as we are growing up, we have life challenges we are facing. It's mixed up, with work on the other side and on the other side it's your personal life." (LST 1)

"It's really frustrating and sometimes I say haa! I want to go back to (subject X) because I just want... if I do something neh, I just want something that I can see, I can see that yeah now yah... With this one, I can't!" (LST 2)

"I feel overwhelmed when I am supposed to go and fetch the learners neh? You see we are working according to time, so they're taking so long to come in. I also take so long to go and fetch them, that is the challenge." (LST 4)

"It's too much right now. Maybe it's because of my personality. I'm just going forward. You know, as time goes on, as we are growing up, we have life challenges we are facing. It's mixed up, with work on the other side and on the other side it's your personal life. And then at work you suppose to work with parents, hand in hand and they don't cooperate." (LST 5)

"It's too much. I'm the HOD, departmental head. I'm dealing with the classes, all the classes that are under my supervision. And then this, no, it's too much. It's too much overload. I'm just doing it for just, I just agreed to do it because, um, district says it must be an SMT member." (SBST 3)

From the interview results presented above, it is evident that most teachers experience enormous stress when implementing inclusive education. Thus, it can be argued that teachers' stress emanates from the changing roles and responsibilities that they have to undertake in the classrooms with diverse learners. Moreover, the results also indicate that teachers are stressed due to multiple roles that is expected of them when handling learners with barriers in the classroom. According to what LST4 has stated, learning support teachers also have their own timetable that they must adhere to; therefore, it is extremely stressful for them when learners are not released on time to the learning support class and the LST has to go get them. Finally, stress among teachers is also brought about by high expectations on them which make them put in extra effort but which yields very little results. For instance, LST 2 no longer has an easy experience with learning support. The respondent believes that the only remaining option is to return to teaching mainstream subjects. The research further concludes that in comparison to the subject they used to teach in the mainstream, learning support teachers observe no progress in learning support. The next theme discussed on psychological challenges experiences by teachers is burn-out.

### **Theme 2: Teacher Burn-out**

According to Saloviita and Pakarinen (2021), burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal pressures in the workplace. The findings of the present study indicated that teachers experience burn-out when implementing inclusive education in schools. The teachers reported that they experience burn-out which was a result of perceived lack of trust by the school principal in handling assigned responsibilities on implementing inclusive education. The learner support teacher 1 reported the following regarding experiences of burn-out: "Yah, I can just go. That's what I'm good at." (LST, 1). From the quoted response, the respondent demonstrated that if given the opportunity, they would not hesitate to return to a mainstream class. This implies that teachers cannot cope anymore being in the learning support role considering the psychological challenges that they experienced. In addition to this, this is what the SBST coordinator's also reported having experienced burn-out as suggested by the desire to leave position of responsibility given the opportunity. The participant reiterated that the department believed that the school's SBST is functioning effectively. According to the participant, the department appears to be unaware that SBST is only holding the position for the sake of it. This is what the SBST coordinator reported concerning experiences of burn-out:

"I would give it to someone else if I had a chance but my principal doesn't want me to because he feels that since I'm there SBST is functioning very well and even the department of education is saying that at X Primary school, SBST is functioning very well." (SBST 1)

From the interview results above, it can be argued that teachers experience burn-out because of low recognition efforts on performance of their roles from the principals who are their immediate supervisors at school. The research argues that there is lack of recognition of teachers' efforts and roles in the implementation of inclusive education in schools.

### **Theme 3: Teachers' Low Self-efficacy**

According to Cherry (2023) self-efficacy is the confidence a person has in their abilities to perform a task or accomplish a goal. Low self-efficacy refers to situations teachers have very low beliefs in their ability to perform

school tasks. The findings of this study indicated that most participants reported low-self efficacy in their effort to implement inclusive education in schools. When asked about how they feel about being LST so far, five respondents showed some common trend of low self-efficacy in implementing inclusive education in schools. One LST described how little their achievements are despite the amount of work put in. The interview excerpt in support of this was reported as follows:

"Mmm... yhoo! You know it's not as easy to be a learning support teacher, more especially when you are experienced teacher. But I don't have...what do you call? ... yes qualifications for learning support. Umm...and then you find out that there are so many learners that have problems and even those that are coming here, you know... and it's not just easy, problem is that they can't even write or read. And you, you do as much but hey, to see that yeah there is no... it's just a drop in the ocean, it's..." (LST 1)

"When I sit and I do... what do you call it? Lesson plan. You know I can't sit down and make lesson plan and finish it in one day. You see? But haa! It's frustrating, you know when I was a teacher, a straight one you know, maybe we were 4 neh?, Then let's say grade 3 or grade 1 teachers because I taught grade 1 and 2, then we will say, okay you are doing umm... Maths, you are doing ehheh English, you are doing isiXhosa and.... And we will do this lesson plan together" (LST 1)

From the results above, it is evident that the participant seems to have reached a point of low self-efficacy by not being able to work as a team. This has led to frustration because of their inability to complete tasks on time. Another participant also reported that:

"It is because first of all, educators don't want to refer learners whereas as an inclusive school, we're supposed to refer. So, what we did, we made a roster so that each and every educator just come and present the learners that are having barriers in learning, you know? So, it's hard. It is because most of the educators don't want to refer" (SBST1)

On the basis of the results above, it can be argued that the coordinator of the SBST, despite having a roster, finds that teachers are reluctant to refer learners with learning barriers for professional support. Therefore, this makes it difficult for learning support teachers to make interventions with the struggling learners.

In addition, another SBST coordinator also reported low-self efficacy in implementing inclusive education due to perceived lack of meaningful change despite numerous efforts. The interview excerpt in support of this is reported as follows: "Everyone was...was not okay because you feel embarrassed when you've tried your best, but nothing has changed..." (SBST 4). This implies that when there is an effort and to do the task but with no results teachers may feel like there is no value in what they are doing. Another learning support teacher appeared to have the same opinion and reported the following:

"I don't have the problem. I like kids a lot and I like...you know, working with those needing support but it's those things... and you see there is also this thing, and I've got also another school. Two schools and there is no impact because I come here and it's my first day here, I've got 3 days here and 2 days at that school at (Location X), you know, and when I come back from that school I forgot what I have to do here" (LST 1)

The interview results above reveal that as LSTs work on an itinerant basis, it can be argued that being an itinerant teacher has a negative impact on them, as they tend to forget what they were doing when they were at another school for two or three days. As a result, they notice no change in their efforts to implement inclusive education in schools.

#### **Theme 4: Emotional exhaustion among teachers**

When someone feels emotionally spent and emotionally drained, they are said to be experiencing emotional exhaustion (Aldrup, et al., 2020). The findings of the study reported that teachers experience emotional exhaustion as a result of the varied learner issues that they handle in an effort to implement inclusive education in mainstream schools. Regarding their feelings of emotional exhaustion of learning support teachers, the participants reported that: "Mm..yah, when there is a specific problem about a child, maybe the child was raped then it became evident maybe, so I...I feel overwhelmed because even myself I became so emotional out of that" (LST 2). In addition, another learning support teacher also reported that:

"Yhooo! It's a lot. You know we are not only dealing with the learners with learning barriers alone. There are so many challenges that they face like emotional, the social problems that they have. Sometimes they make you feel sad." (LST 3)

From the interview excerpts above, it is evident that the roles of learning support teachers vary according to the cases they deal with in schools. Therefore, the researcher argues that learners face not only learning barriers, but also social and emotional challenges that in some way affect the learning support teachers emotionally.

The next theme discussed on psychological challenges is teacher negative attitude.

### **Theme 5: Negative teacher attitudes**

According to Desombre, et al., (2021) attitudes are defined as a psychological predisposition that is exhibited by judging a specific entity favorably or negatively. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education specifically refers to their beliefs, feelings, and intentions toward an inclusive policy (Desombre, et al., 2021). The present study revealed that teachers do not embrace inclusive education, since the majority of respondents reported that mainstream teachers are hesitant to refer learners and participate in school-based support teams. One participant reported as follows:

"I would like to say, first of all, we are experiencing even challenges here in the schools. Because honestly, educators do not really like this committee. It's just that...I don't really know why, but it's a fact they don't like it." (SBST 2)

From the interview results above, it is evident that there appears to be no special reason why teachers dislike or do not support inclusive education. However, it is apparent that teachers have negative attitudes towards the aspects that are meant to enhance the implementation of inclusion education. Not only do teachers lack support for inclusive education, but so do SBST members. Another participant weight in and reported that:

"And even us sometimes, other members, SBST members, even some of us who don't like the meetings, I mean the SBST members, let alone the teachers in the classes. Sometimes we don't even really meet the curriculum. We struggle to meet the curriculum, and to start the meetings. So maybe you are right. We can just try to conduct the research and find out from them what their reasons could be. Maybe that's why the department, as I said that all the... ehh, the school management, I mean all the SMT members, that means the school management members must be into this committee. Because the department is also aware that educators don't like the committee. So at least if the pressure comes from the school management to the educators, Yeah." (SBST 2)

As the department of education is also aware of teacher attitude towards inclusive education, the participant believes that limiting the membership of the SBST to members of the school management would assist teachers become more interested in inclusive education or learning support. It appears that some SBST members are merely there for the purpose of being there. Regarding active membership, they are ineligible. The LST explained;

"We meet but you know sometimes they put someone in this position, you know.... They are at this SBST team but the mind is not there, they don't like it, they don't value it. Maybe you can find out that it's only 2 to 3 people that are serious, the others will say, you know, "yhoo! haa, that thing of yours" when you are telling them about the meeting." (LST 1)

On the basis of the results above, it appears that just a few members of the SBST are committed to the committee, while the remainder do not even attend its meetings. They view the committee as something reserved for a select few, therefore isolating themselves from it. Another participant who shares the same sentiments as the learning support teacher reported as follows:

"The teachers refer the learners to the SBST. But the challenge we have, not every teacher wants to do ISP (Individual Support Plan) or GSP (Group Support Plan) because they think... um... they waste their time...they don't have time. They isolate, which is, they don't differentiate within their lessons. Because we normally preach that every day. The story that you are doing in your grade seven class is the same as that you are doing for even this level- grade one child. But the difference is that you lower the questioning, the how to do it, to each level, to their level." (SBST 4)

From the interview excerpt above, it is expected that learners with learning barriers will be presented to the SBST, along with an Individual Support Plan or Group Support Plan documents, so that both the teacher and the LST can implement them. However, from the results, majority of teachers do not aspire to complete those documents since they view them as a waste of their time. As a result, failing to develop, implementing, and accomplishing the whole process of referral result in a lack of differentiation in the classroom.

### **Discussion- Conclusions**

The study explored the psychological challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers. The study findings indicated that teacher stress is one of the psychological challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education. LSTs experience stress due to their increased responsibilities and roles in supporting learners with learning barriers, as well as managing their own psychological issues. These results are consistent with those of Warnes et al., (2022) who found that the behavioral issues that some respondents associated with Inclusive Education and perceived as an additional source of stress for teachers demonstrate the need for teachers' support. Similarly, Warnes et al., (2022), revealed that the behavioural issues that some respondents associated with inclusive education and perceived as an additional source of stress for teachers demonstrate the need for a higher level of paraprofessional and external support. Moreover, Kidger et al., (2021),



reiterate that the causes of school-related stress and pressure to meet a growing number of externally determined goals.

According to the findings, teachers burn out due to the school principal's perceived lack of trust in them to implement inclusive education. This finding is consistent with the findings of Thakur (2018), who discovered that special education teachers have a higher risk of burnout compared to teachers in the mainstream classrooms. The research findings also suggested that there is lack of recognition of teachers' efforts and roles in the implementation of inclusive education in schools. This finding agrees with Hassan (2017) which assert that in the times of crisis, many teachers as well as students may suffer from the psychological effects of trauma, loss of separation from family members and any other circumstances that may bring severe stress to them. Similarly, Johnson and Naidoo, (2016) reported that burnout is characterized by emotional exhaustion, a lack of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization, and it can be caused by prolonged exposure to stress. In addition, Thakur (2018), reiterate that special education teachers have a higher risk of burnout compared to teachers who work in mainstream classrooms. The inability of teachers to finish tasks on time is consistent with the findings of Kazanopoulos et al., (2022), who found that teachers who have high self-efficacy beliefs can plan and organize effective teaching. That could lead to teachers having attitudes, which is in line with Saloviita's (2020) claim that attitudes toward inclusion only have weak associations with factors other than the teacher category and that attitudes towards inclusion have weak associations with self-efficacy.

The study found that teachers dealing with diverse learner issues in mainstream schools to implement inclusive education are emotionally exhausted. Learning support teachers are emotionally exhausted because their roles vary depending on the cases they handle in schools. This finding is in line with that of Sibai (2018), who discovered that teachers may experience feelings of overwhelm and disorientation due to the shifting roles and demands placed on them. Stang-Rabrig et al. (2022) contend that teachers, as a group, are generally content with their jobs, but also report feeling worried or exhausted. Robinson, et al. (2023) also assert that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, which has a detrimental impact on school climates, high levels of burnout, and turnover. The findings showed that teachers dislike inclusive education for no reason. Due to lack of support for inclusive education, some teachers and SBST members have negative attitudes toward inclusion education implementation. In agreement, Nishan (2018) contends that despite having received specialized training in inclusive education, teachers do not embrace inclusion; however, taking a course on inclusion may improve teachers' attitudes toward inclusion as well as their general attitudes toward learners with special needs. This finding supports the findings of Adewumi et al., (2019), who claim that such teachers do not take their jobs seriously and do not value the opportunities for professional development that are provided to them. Similarly, Duncan, et al., (2021) revealed that principals thought teachers' unwillingness to take personal responsibility for their own professional development was to blame their knowledge gap and lack of cooperation. As a result, Zwane and Malale (2018) proposed that in order to achieve the shared objectives of inclusive education, mainstream and learning support teachers must collaborate closely and share their knowledge and experience.

### Conclusion

In the research findings presented, the psychosocial challenges of implementing inclusive education among learning support teachers and the kind of support they require were discussed. The study found that LSTs experience stress due to their increased responsibilities and roles in supporting learners with learning barriers, as well as managing their own psychological issues. Additionally, they are held to high expectations, leading to some LSTs contemplating leaving their current positions and returning to the mainstream. The study also showed that because of various reasons, teachers burn out. Teachers burn out due to school principal's lack of trust, dysfunctional SBST, and lack of recognition of teachers' roles in inclusive education. In addition to that, teachers have low self-efficacy due to poor teamwork, inability to complete tasks on time, and itinerant work. This study found that mainstream teachers do not support inclusive education due to reluctance to refer learners or participate in the school-based support team (SBST).

### Recommendation

The findings suggested that the department of education should limit the membership of the SBST to members of the school management to encourage teachers to become more interested in inclusive education. Social workers, psychologists, and therapists should be stationed in schools, or alternatively, ordinary mainstream schools should be transformed into full-service schools. This is because the study found that participating teachers indicated that they need comprehensive services such as those listed to be stationed in their schools. Having inclusive or full-service schools will eliminate the stigma attached to students who are referred outside their local schools for additional support. In addition, these students will not experience discrimination because they will be



supported in their local schools as opposed to being segregated. Teachers would also benefit because they would be better equipped with skills to manage their stress and learners' aggressive behaviour.

## References

- Aas, H.K., Uthus, M., & Løhre, A. (2024). Inclusive education for students with challenging behaviour: development of teachers' beliefs and ideas for adaptations through Lesson Study. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 39(1), 64-78. DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2023.2191107
- Abraham, J. (2021). Self-efficacy and the inclusive teacher. *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, 13(1), 47-51. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1303965.pdf>
- Adewumi, T.M., Mosito, C., & Vonzell, A. (Reviewing editor) (2019). Experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs in selected Fort Beaufort District primary schools, South Africa. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2019.1703446
- Akpan, V., Igwe, U., Mpamah, I., & Okoro, C. (2020). Social constructivism: Implications on teaching and learning. *British Journal of Education*, 8(8), 49-56.
- Aldrup, K., Ertanir, B., Köller, M., & Klusmann, U. (2020). Measuring teachers' social-emotional competence: Development and validation of a situational judgment test. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00892>
- Al-Shammari, Z., Faulkner, P. E., & Forlin, C. (2019). Theories-based inclusive education practices. *Education Quarterly Reviews*, 2(2), 1-10. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3415247>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Cherry, K. (2023, February 27). Self-efficacy and why believing in yourself matters. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-efficacy-2795954>
- Clark, C., Dyson, A., Millward, A., & Skidmore, D. (1995). *Innovatory practice in mainstream schools for Special Educational Needs*. HMSO.
- Department of Education, (1995). *White Paper on Education and Training in a democratic South Africa*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Department of Education (2001). *White Paper 6: Special Needs Education - Building an inclusive education and training system*. Pretoria: Department of Education
- Desombre, C., & Delaval, M., & Jury, M. (2021). Influence of social support on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.736535.
- Dignath, C., Rimm-Kaufman, S., & van Ewijk, R. (2022). Teachers' Beliefs About Inclusive Education and Insights on What Contributes to Those Beliefs: a Meta-analytical Study. *Educational Psychology Review*, 34, 2609-2660 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-022-09695-0>
- Donohue, D., & Bornman, J. (2014). The challenges of realising inclusive education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 34, 1-14. 10.15700/201412071114.
- Dreyer, L. M. (2013). Exploring the changing role of learning support teachers in the Western Cape, South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, 31(2), 54-64. <https://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie/article/view/1805>
- Duncan, J., Punch, R., & Croce, N. (2021). Supporting Primary and Secondary Teachers to Deliver Inclusive Education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(4), 1-10.
- Genovesi, E., Jakobsson, C., Nugent, L., Hanlon, C., & Hoekstra, R. A. (2022). Stakeholder experiences, attitudes and perspectives on inclusive education for children with developmental disabilities in sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review of qualitative studies. *Autism*, 26(7), 1606-1625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221096208>
- Hassan, A. (2017). *Approaches to providing psychosocial support for teachers and other school staff in protracted conflict situations*. Education Development Trust.
- Hassanein, E., Alshaboul, Y., & Ibrahim, S. (2021). The impact of teacher preparation on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education in Qatar. *Heliyon*. 7. e07925. 10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07925.
- Haydon, T., & Stevens, D., & Leko, M.M.. (2018). Teacher stress: Sources, effects, and protective factors. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 31, 99-107.

- Hein, G. E. (1991). Constructivist learning theory. Paper presented at the CECA (International Committee of Museum Educators) Conference, Jerusalem Israel, 15-22 October 1991, 1-10.
- Jiménez, T. I., & Estévez, E. (2017). School aggression in adolescence: Examining the role of individual, family and school variables. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 17(3), 251-260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2017.07.002>
- Johnson, S. D., & Naidoo, A. V. (2016). A psychoeducational approach for prevention of burnout among teachers dealing with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. *AIDS Care*, 29(1), 73-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2016.1201193>.
- Joorst R.H., (2010). Investigating the implementation of learning support strategies by teachers in the intermediate phase of a school in the Western Cape [Unpublished Master of Education Thesis, University of Western Cape].
- Kazanopoulos, S., Tejada, E., & Basogain, X. (2022). The self-efficacy of special and general education teachers in implementing inclusive education in Greek secondary education. *Education Sciences*, 12(6), 383-390. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/educsci12060383>
- Khalid, J., & Othman, N. B. (2022). Teachers attitude towards inclusive education in educational institutions of Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(2), 342-353.
- Kidger, J., Evans, R., Bell, S., Fisher, H., Turner, N., Hollingworth, W., Harding, S., Powell, J., Brockman, R., Copeland, L., Araya, R., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Gunnell, D., Morris, R., & Murphy, S. (2021). Mental health support and training to improve secondary school teachers' well-being: the WISE cluster RCT. NIHR Journals Library.
- Liu, C., & Matthews, R. (2004). Vygotsky's philosophy: Constructivism and its criticisms examined. *International Education Journal*, 6(3), 386-399.
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428>
- McLeod, S. A. (2019, July 17). Constructivism as a theory for teaching and learning. Simply Psychology. [www.simplypsychology.org/constructivism.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/constructivism.html)
- Mills, A. J., Durepos, G., & Wiebe, E. (2010). *Encyclopedia of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Namone, C., Winnaar, L., & Arends, F. (2021). Improving psychosocial support in SA schools during and after COVID-19 as part of a recovery plan. In Human Sciences Research Council. HSRC-Human Sciences Research Council. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/>
- Nishan, F. (2018). Challenges of regular teachers in implementing inclusive education in schools of Maldives. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 3(10), 88-102.
- O'leary, Z. (2004). *The essential guide to doing research*. Sage Publishers.
- Phiri, P. (2021). Teacher's experiences of implementing inclusive education in mainstream secondary schools in the Hhohho region, Eswatini (Swaziland) [MA Dissertation, University of South Africa].
- Pillay, J., Patel, L. & Setlhare-Kajee, R., (2023). Teacher awareness of psychosocial support available as per the Integrated School Health Policy in South Africa. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 13(1), a1172. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v13i1.1172>
- Robinson, L.E., Valido, A., & Drescher, A. (2023). Teachers, Stress, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Qualitative Analysis. *School Mental Health*, 15, 78-89 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09533-2>
- Saloviita, T. (2020). Attitudes of teachers towards inclusive education in Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 64(2), 270-282. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2018.1541819
- Saloviita, T., & Pakarinen, E. (2021). Teacher burnout explained: Teacher-, student-, and organisation-level variables. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 97, 103221. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103221>
- Savolainen, H., Malinen, O., & Schwab, S. (2020). Teacher efficacy predicts teachers' attitudes towards inclusion – a longitudinal cross-lagged analysis. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 26(9), 958-972. DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2020.1752826
- Sibai, V. (2018). Psychological Issues faced by teachers. Research Gate. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.13094.83521

Silbert, P., & Mzozoyana, T. (2022). Supporting SA's overburdened and mentally fatigued teachers. University of Cape Town. News, <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2021-10-22-supporting-sas-overburdened-and-mentally-fatigued-teachers>.

Stang-Rabrig, J., Brüggemann, T., Lorenz, R., & McElvany, N. (2022). Teachers' occupational well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of resources and demands. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2022 doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2022.103803.

Steinert, C., & Jurkowski, S. (2023). Preparing student teachers for inclusive classes: the effects of co-teaching in higher education on students' knowledge and attitudes about inclusion, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2023.2274113

Thakur, I. (2018). Relationship between workload and burnout of special education teachers. *Pakistan Journal of Distance and Online Learning*, 4(1), 235-242.

UNESCO, (1994). The Salamanca statement and framework on special needs. World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994).

Warnes, E., Done, E. J., & Knowler, H. (2021). Mainstream teachers' concerns about inclusive education for children with special educational needs and disability in England under pre-pandemic conditions. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 22(1), 31-43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12525>

World Education Forum, (2000). Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments. Dakar, Senegal: UNESCO.

Zwane, S., & Malale, M. M. (2018). Investigating barriers teachers face in the implementation of inclusive education in high schools in Gege branch, Swaziland. *African Journal of Disability*, 7, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajod.v7i0.391>