

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO TEACHERS' ABILITIES TO
ENGAGE PARENTS OF LEARNERS TO ASSIST THEIR
CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

By

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in the process of implementing inclusive education is one of the major considerations for ensuring support, especially to learners with learning difficulties. The involvement of parents in their children's education has been found to have a positive contribution and results in good learning outcomes. In the South African context, the Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) and the policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) emphasizes the importance of the role of parents in the process of implementing inclusive education. This study aimed to explore the ability of teachers to engage parents to assist their children with learning difficulties. A qualitative research method with a phenomenological research design was deemed suitable for the nature of this study with Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as a theoretical lens to underpin this study. Ten (10) teachers from two mainstream public primary schools in one of the townships in the City of Cape, Western Cape Province in South Africa were interviewed. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using a thematic data analysis. The findings of this study indicate that, teachers do all they can to assist learners with learning difficulties whilst parents of learners with learning difficulties do not participate in their children's schooling. In addition, teachers find it challenging to contact parents when they discover that a learner exhibits signs of learning difficulties. As a result, interventions that could be implemented to assist learners with learning difficulties are delayed. Furthermore, most parents do not cooperate with teachers in the process of assisting their children who have learning difficulties. Therefore, it is generally difficult for teachers in township schools to engage parents in the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties. In this regard, it has been recommended to schools and teachers that a programme aimed at educating parents about learning difficulties, and their role in the education of their children, especially those children with learning difficulties, should be established. Additionally, it has been

recommended that awareness campaigns should be continuously conducted in communities to educate parents about their role in schools and their role in maintaining the learning of their children beyond the school environment.



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KEY WORDS

Learner

Learning Difficulties

Barriers to Learning

Inclusive education

Parental involvement

Parental engagement

Teacher

Parent

Mainstream school

Special school

Bio-ecological systems theory

Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	: Attention Deficits Hyperactivity Disorder
EWP 6	: Education White Paper 6
DoE	: Department of basic Education
LDs	: Learning Difficulties
PPCT	: Process-Person-Context-Time
SIAS policy	: Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support policy
WCDE	: Western Cape Department of Education



DECLARATION

I declare that '*An investigation into teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties*', is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Full names: Mlamli Christopher Mtonjeni

Date: December 2020

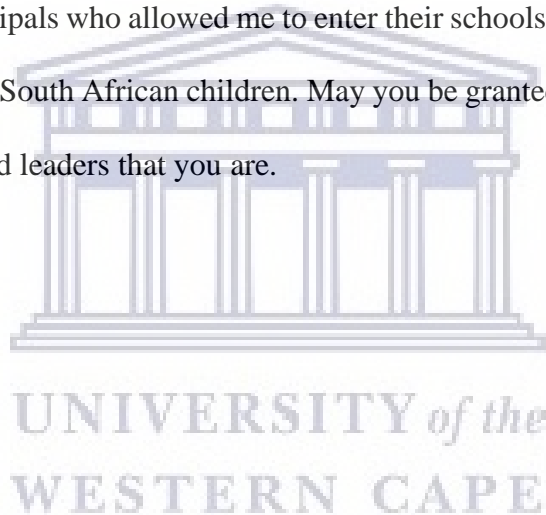


Signed:

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DEDICATION

To the Higher Power, I say thank you for keeping me strong through the difficult times I have faced in my life. I dedicate this study to all the children who experience learning difficulties and I say you deserve quality education like any other child in this world. To all the teachers who took their time to share their everyday experiences and struggles. Without you this study would not be a success. I feel as a complete part of the education system in South Africa through the knowledge I have gained from the conversations I had with you all. I say- continue to strive to better the inclusive education system in your classrooms, schools and in South Africa. To the school principals who allowed me to enter their schools to experience the beauty and struggles of educating South African children. May you be granted with more strength and wisdom to keep being good leaders that you are.



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The completion of this study has not been without challenges. The support I received has seen me through all the emotional and physical challenges. Therefore, it is fitting that I give acknowledgements where they are due:

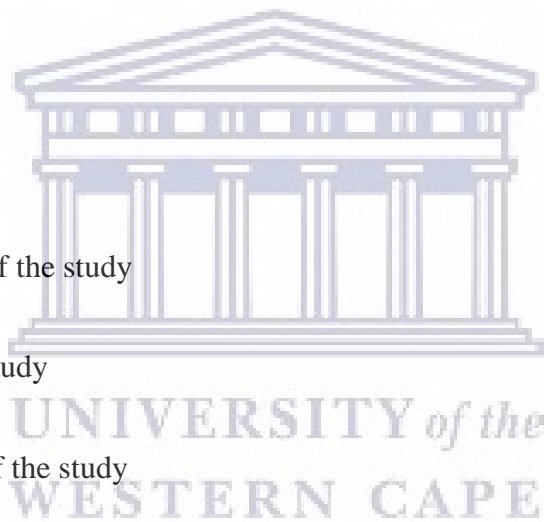
- Firstly, I would love to acknowledge myself for the passion I have for education and the necessity to make it accessible to all children in society. This passion has sustained me through all the challenges that I had faced in completing this study. This has been a very difficult topic to discuss as it is secondary to my own profession. However, through this study I have learnt a lot.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1. Background and Rationale	1
1.2. Theoretical framework	8
1.3. Problem statement	10
1.4. Research question	12
1.5. Aims and objectives of the study	12
1.5.1. Aim of the study	12
1.5.2. Objectives of the study	12
1.6. Summary of the research approach and design	13
1.7. Research methodology	13
1.7.1. Population and sampling	13
1.7.2. Data collection methods	14
1.7.3. Data analysis	15
1.7.4. Trustworthiness of this study	16
1.7.5. Ethical considerations	16



1.8. Significance of the study	16
1.9. Definition of terms and concepts	18
1.10. Outline of chapters	19



CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction	21
2.2. The Ecological Systems Theory	21
2.2.1. Microsystem	23
2.2.2. Mesosystem	25
2.2.3. Exosystem	28
2.2.4. Macrosystem	30
2.2.5. Chronosystem	31
2.3. The Bio-ecological Systems Theory	33
2.3.1. Process	35
2.3.2. Person	36
2.3.3. Context	37
2.3.4. Time	38
2.4. Summary of this chapter	39



CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction	41
3.2. Learners with Learning Difficulties	42
3.2.1. Dyslexia	43
3.2.2. Dysgraphia	43
3.2.3. Dyscalculia	44
3.2.4. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	44
3.3. Inclusive education in South Africa	45
3.3.1 Challenges to implement inclusive education in South African schools	49
3.4. Parental involvement	50
3.5. Parental engagement	52
3.6. The Role of school social workers in enhancing inclusive education	54
3.7. Summary of this chapter	56



CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction	58
4.2. Research question	58
4.3. Research approach	59
4.4. Research design	59
4.5. Research methodology	60
4.5.1. Research setting	60
4.5.2. Population and sampling	62
4.5.3. Pilot study	63
4.6. Data collection	64
4.6.1. Preparation of participants	65
4.6.2. Individual interview sessions	65
4.7. Data analysis	67
4.8. Rigor and trustworthiness	69
4.8.1. Credibility	69
4.8.2. Transferability	70
4.8.3. Dependability	71



4.8.4. Confirmability	71
4.9. Ethical considerations	72
4.9.1. Permission to conduct the study	73
4.9.2. Informed consent	73
4.9.3. Voluntary participation	74
4.9.4. Confidentiality and the right to anonymity	74
4.10. Limitations of the study	75
4.11. Self-reflexivity	75
4.12. Summary of this chapter	76



CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction	78
5.2. Demographic data of participants	78
5.2.1. Gender	78
5.2.2 Teaching Experience	79
5.2.3 School Grade	79
5.2.4 School Subjects of Specialty	80
5.3. Presentation and discussion of findings	80
5.3.1. Theme 1: Identifying Children with Learning Difficulties	80
5.3.1.1. Sub-theme 1.1: Writing skills	82
5.3.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2: Reading skills	84
5.3.1.3. Sub-theme 1.3: Disruptive behaviours	85
5.3.2. Theme 2: Possible causal factors of LDs	88
5.3.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Poor educational foundation	88
5.3.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Consumption of alcohol by mothers during pregnancy	90



5.3.7.3. Sub-theme 7.3: Social Workers can focus on the home circumstances

Of learners 116

5.4. Summary of this chapter 119

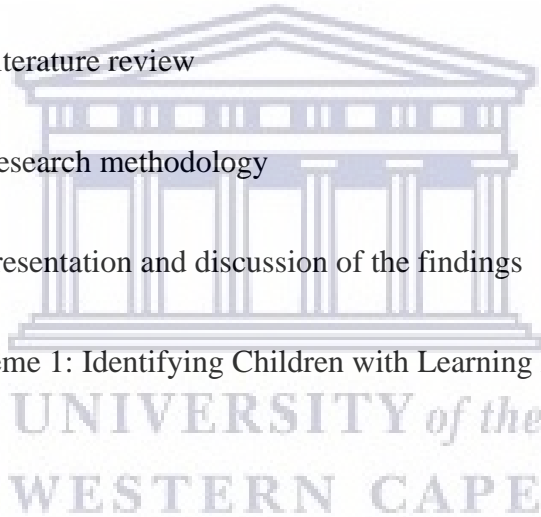


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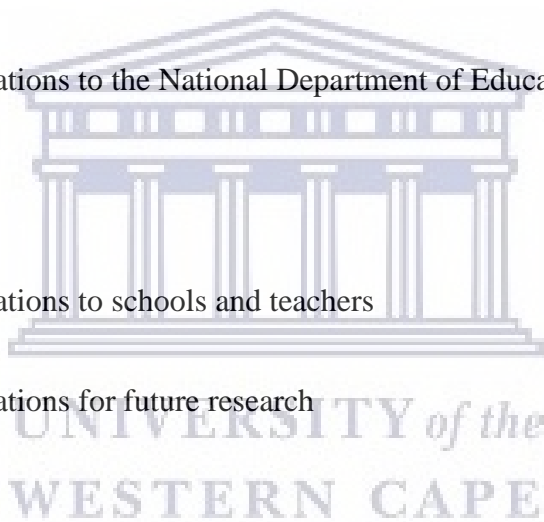
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction	121
6.2. Summary of the study	122
6.2.1. Chapter 1: Introduction of the study	122
6.2.2. Chapter 2: Theoretical framework	122
6.2.3. Chapter 3: Literature review	122
6.2.4. Chapter 4: Research methodology	123
6.2.5. Chapter 5: Presentation and discussion of the findings	123
6.2.5.1. Theme 1: Identifying Children with Learning Difficulties	124
6.2.5.2. Theme 2: Possible Causal Factors of LDs	125



6.2.5.3. Theme 3: Challenges of the inclusion processes	126
6.2.5.4. Theme 4: Means for ensuring inclusion in a classroom	127
6.2.5.5. Theme 5: Obstacles affecting the inclusion process	127
6.2.5.6. Theme 6: Strategies employed by teachers to enhance parental involvement	128
6.2.5.7. Theme 7: Social Work services in schools	129
6.2.6. Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations	129
6.3. Recommendations	130
6.3.1. Recommendations to the National Department of Education and policy makers	132
6.3.2. Recommendations to schools and teachers	134
6.3.3. Recommendations for future research	135
6.5. Conclusion	136



REFERENCES

A – Z

140



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WESTERN CAPE

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Semi-structured Interview Guide	164
APPENDIX B: Consent Form	166
APPENDIX C: Information Sheet	167
APPENDIX D: Research Approval Letter from the WCDE	170
APPENDIX E: Ethics Clearance Letter: University of the Western Cape	17

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Prevalence of Learning Difficulties of South African Child Population	3
Table 5.1: Demographic data of participants	79
Table 5.2: Themes and Sub-themes	81



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Graphical Representation of Microsystem	24
Figure 2.2: Graphical Representation of Mesosystem	27
Figure 2.3: Graphical Representation of Exosystem	29
Figure 2.4: Graphical Representation of Macrosystem	31
Figure 2.5: Graphical Representation of Chronosystem	33

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and Rationale of the Study

Learning Difficulties (LDs) can be characterised by major difficulties in school accomplishment and many other aspects of education such as reading, writing and arithmetic. These may occur concurrently with other disorders impacting attention, language skills and behaviour (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Ekenedilichukwu (2011) states that, “learning difficulties are disorders that affect people's ability to learn, interpret what they hear or see, or process information. There are many ways that learning disabilities can show up: in writing, reading, speaking, hearing, learning, or difficulties with attention” (p. 9). Children with LDs under-perform in school as a result of difficulties associated with vision or hearing, serious behavioural, psychological or emotional problems (DSF Literacy Services, 2017). Some of the identifiable types of LDs include *Dyslexia*, learning difficulties associated with reading, *Dyscalculia*, learning difficulties associated with Arithmetic or Math, *Dysgraphia*, learning difficulties associated with challenges in written expressions, *Auditory Processing Deficit*, difficulties in processing sound information, and *Visual Processing Deficit*, associated with difficulties in interpreting visual information or difficulties in distinguishing between different items (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Dyslexia, dysgraphia and dyscalculia are known as specific learning difficulties (DFS Literacy & Clinical Services, 2014). The level of pre and postnatal brain development as well as environmental effects have an influence in the accumulation of learning difficulties (Good Therapy, 2019). According to Ekenedilichukwu (2011) “there are many causes of learning difficulties, some can be identified and some can't

be. Sometimes there may be errors in the development of the fetal brain caused by genetic factors. Drug and alcohol use during pregnancy may be a factor” (p. 9).

The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy states that, “often learners are faced with challenges in the learning process that are a result of a broad range of experiences in the classroom, at school, at home, in the community, and/or as a result of health conditions or disability” (Department of Education (DoE), 2014, p. 12). The Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DoE, 2010), identifies “disability, language and communication, lack of parental recognition and involvement, socioeconomic factors and attitudes” as barriers to learning (p. 12). According to Nel and Grosser (2016), Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) suggests the use of the concepts ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ barriers to learning to indicate that ‘barriers to learning’ are caused by a variety of factors. Rodrigues-Henriques and Madeira (2017) reveal that, barriers to learning can be caused by factors that arise within the learner, intrinsic factors, and those that arise from the surrounding environment, extrinsic factors. Rodrigues-Henriques and Madeira further mention that, intrinsic barriers can be classified into different categories: emotional and behavioural barriers, physical impairments, and chronic illness and disease. Extrinsic barriers can also be differentiated into different categories: societal factors, curricular matters, and societal attitudes and prejudice. Additionally, Krishnarathi (2016) reveals that, intrinsic elements that cause barriers to learning include physiological, genetic and developmental factors; extrinsic elements include educational and environmental factors.

Based on the above description it is evident that both *learning difficulties* and *barriers to learning* are caused by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The department of Basic Education in South Africa makes use of the concept of barriers to learning completely. The Department of basic Education mentions that, “barriers to learning can be located within the learner, within the centre of learning, within the education system and within the broader social, economic and

political context” (DoE, n.d, p. 2). Barriers to learning have to do with difficulties that may hinder a child from learning. These difficulties may include emotional and health barriers, financial struggles, cultural and societal conditions, obstacles within the schooling system, language of instruction and the lack of parental involvement (Child Psych, 2016). However, for the purpose of this study the concept of learning difficulties (LDs) will be used throughout.

Nel and Grosser (2016, p. 88) provide a demographic classification for the prevalence of Learning Difficulties for the South African child population, and this is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1.1: Prevalence of Learning Difficulties of South African Child Population

Gender	Age	Population Groups	Provinces
Males = 36 491	0-4 = 9 494	Black = 56 124	Western Cape = 5 999
	5-9 = 17 708	Coloured = 5 741	Eastern Cape = 10 679
Females = 32 058	11-14 = 25 434	Indian/Asian = 9 99	Northern cape = 1 087
	15-17 = 15 914	White = 5 685	Free State = 4 682
			Kwa-Zulu Natal = 16550
			North West = 4900
			Gauteng = 9620
			Mpumalanga = 4870
			Limpopo = 10164
			TOTAL= 68550

Table 1.1 above, indicates that Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) has the highest number of children with LDs (16550) as compared to other provinces. Jackson (2010) states that in KZN, “Barriers to learning are pervasive, with high levels of poverty, social marginalization and HIV and AIDS

prevalence. There is still strong evidence of human rights violations with widespread neglect of school children in the family setting” (p. 9). The Eastern Cape province is the second province with a huge number of learners with LDs (10679). Ncanywa (2015) indicates that, the Eastern Cape province is characterised by high levels of poverty, due to high levels of unemployment, this leads to many learners going to school hungry. The poverty levels in Eastern Cape led the Department of Education in the province to categorise 95% of schools of the province as quintile 1 and 3 and these are schools that are described as no fee paying schools. Additionally, many learners in the Eastern Cape walk longer distances to school as most schools are situated far away from where people live. This results into the learning of children in the province being severely affected.

Table 1.1 further indicates that there are more male children with LDs than females. Abdullar (2018) mentions that, it is common that boys experience most of the common mental developmental disorders than girls. In schools, teachers would recommend more male learners than female learners for extra support classes. Abdullar (2018) further mentions that, boys with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) tend to show extreme signs of being hyperactive, impulsive and violent than girls. Therefore, this means that it is easy to identify more boys who experience learning difficulties than it is for girls.

In order to address and meet educational needs of learners with LDs within mainstream schools, a system of education called inclusive education had to be introduced. Many countries on the African continent have put in place policies aimed to guide and ensure the full practice of inclusive education (Ngwenya, Grobbelaar-du Plessis, Combrinck & Kamga, 2013). Inclusive Education (IE) is a system of education in which all children are accepted and educated in the same schools despite their diverse educational needs. Inclusive schools are able to cater and meet the educational needs of those learners who experience LDs so that they are able to receive quality education and be able to participate in all the school activities together with their peers

who do not experience LDs (Inclusive Education Canada, 2020). Kanjere and Mafumo (2017) state that, “inclusive education refers to the education system whereby learners with learning barriers attend the same classes with learners who do not experience learning barriers” (pp. 8733). At the same time, Murungi (2015) reveals that, “inclusive education therefore requires that the framework within which education is delivered is broad enough to accommodate equally the needs and circumstances of every learner in society equally” (p. 3166). According to Ngwenya et al., (2013), up to this far this system has not fully been implemented and children with learning difficulties in mainstream schools are not fully benefiting from the teaching and learning process. For South Africa, the first policy that was introduced to address inclusive education is the *‘Education White Paper 6: Building an inclusive education and training system’*. The DoE (2001) states that, the Education White Paper 6 emphasise the commitment of the National Department of Education in ensuring that children who experience barriers to learning and those who have been forced to drop out of school due to the inability of the schooling system to meet their special educational needs; gain access to educational opportunities. The DoE (2001) further mentions that, this policy describes inclusion through the following three elements:

- Inclusion is about recognising and respecting the differences among all learners and building on the similarities.
- Inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners.

- Inclusion focuses on overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs. The focus is on the adaptation of and support systems available in the classroom (p.17).

The second policy that was introduced on inclusive education in South Africa is the '*Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)*'. The purpose of the SIAS policy as stated by the DoE (2014) "is to provide a policy framework for the standardisation of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school" (p. 10). According to Murungi (2015), the SIAS policy provides guidelines on the steps to be followed once a learner has been identified as requiring certain educational support needs and based on those identified needs the learner could either be placed in a mainstream school, a full service school or a special school.

The process of implementing inclusive education policies in South Africa is not moving forward as a result of unclear objectives to be followed in achieving the goals of inclusive education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). The progress is slow towards inclusivity, and this leads to inadequacy in meeting the different and complex educational needs of different learners (Maguvhe, 2015). Maguvhe (2015) further mentions that, the main role players are not performing as they should as though they are unsure of their roles within the inclusive education process. According to Mfuthwana and Dreyer (2018), the major challenges that hinder the implementation of inclusive education policies within South African schools emanate from inadequate availability of material and human resources, the lack of support from the District Based Support Teams and Institution-level Support Teams, and insufficient training of teachers. Kanjere and Mafumo (2017) mention that, the schools in South Africa have no policies that speak to the training of teachers on inclusive education, and the training of

educators regarding the implementation of this system is entirely depended to the Department of Education.

The EWP 6 and the SIAS policy speak to the importance of parental involvement where parents partner with teachers in the process of including learning with LDs (DoE, 2001; 2014). Parental involvement is a state where parents are part of their children's learning. They can initiate their involvement or teachers can invite them to take part in the schooling of their children. Parents assume a very important role by ensuring that their children receive all the necessary help and support they need so that their learning is as smooth as possible (Clinton & Hattie as cited in Ntekane, 2018). Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) mention that, the home influences about 60 to 80% of school achievements while the school sits at about 20 to 40% of influence. If parents are fully involved in their children's learning the consequences become positive for many different aspects of schooling including improved school attendance, excellent socializing manners, positive behavioural change, the ability to adapt into school environment, and improved independence and interest in learning. Rajasthan (2017), emphasise specifically that the involvement of parents in the process of inclusive education leads to good relationships between parents, children and teachers. The behaviour of all three parties improves for the better, each one of them become more satisfied by the process and gain more confidence with the process. As a result, the success of the learners and the school is improved. Rajasthan (2017) further adds that, when parents and teachers work together in assisting learners with learning difficulties they create a solid support structure for those learners. Balli (2016) contends that, the role of parental involvement is important in achieving the goals of inclusive education. Parents and teachers need to work together to create a conducive environment for the successful inclusion of learners with learning difficulties. However, Cotton and Wikelund (2001) reveal that, parents who earn low incomes are not always fully involved in their children's schools due to long working hours, parents' lack of confidence due to low educational levels, parents'

feelings of not being welcomed by teachers and school administrators, and the negative assumptions held by teachers and school administrators about the inability of parents to help in the education of their own children. The DoE (2014) emphasises the importance of parental involvement in the process of assisting learners with LDs. The DoE in this regard asserts that, in the process of screening, identification, assessment and support of learners' educational needs; teachers have to conduct the process in collaboration with parents or caregivers. This process entails capturing the areas of concern, recording of the strengths and needs of the learners, and the formulation and review of individual support plans.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The topic of this study, *teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties*, was investigated through the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological systems theory. Griffone and Phenice (2016) mention that, the bio-ecological systems theory "began with the ecology of human development and evolved as a bioecological model including a process, person, context, time (PPCT) framework" (p. 10). In this theory, Bronfenbrenner identifies five ecological systems that have an impact on the development of a child. The identifiable ecological systems that shape the core of the thinking of this theory include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner as cited in Evans, Smokowski and Cotter (2014) reveals that, "microsystems include an adolescent's family, peer network, school, and neighbourhood" (p. 48). According to the UK Essays (2018), the mesosystem affects the development of a child directly as it is the interaction between their micro settings which include their family, school and neighbourhood. The UK Essays (2018) further reveals that, the exosystem is the third system of the bio-ecological systems theory and it has influences that affect the development of a child.

According to the UK Essays the processes taking place within the exosystem do affect the child even though they are not directly part of the system. The furthest system from the developing child is the macrosystem and it is characterised by the shared cultural norms, values and principles of a particular society. The aspects of culture that form the cultural contexts of an individual include their socioeconomic status, ethnicity and even the economic status of their country (Sincero, 2012). The time factor, chronosystem, looks into the changes that have taken place in the life of a person and their context and how those changes have impacted their development (Sincero, 2012).

The bio-ecological systems theory also considers the influences of four elements of the PPCT model, which are: person, process, context and time, on the development of a child ((Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The four elements are described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) in the following way: the *person* element has to do with the physical and mental characteristics of a child, and their attitude towards life. All these factors have an impact on the manner in which the child interacts with his/her social environment. The *process* element is all about the interactions that a child has with his/her significant others. These interactions may be positive or negative and they have an impact on the development of a child. The *context* encapsulates influences that the micro, meso, exo and macro systems of the ecological environment have on the development of a child. These systems influence one another and in return affecting the development of the child who is surrounded in the centre of these systems. Finally, the *time* element is concerned with the changes that take place from all the systems of the ecological environment over periods of time. The micro, meso, exo and macro systems experience factors that bring change overtime. Those changes affect the development of the child.

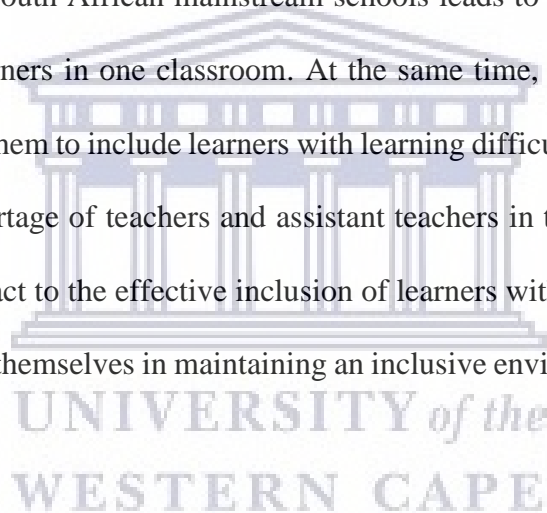
Therefore, it was fitting to consider the use of this theory in this study as the study looks into how the interaction between the ecological systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and

macrosystem, influence the educational development of a child who experiences LDs within schools. Furthermore, the application of the elements of the PPCT model, person, process, context and time, was suitable for this study as this model allowed the researcher to be mindful of the influences of the personal traits of children within society have on how learners with LDs interact with systems and settings that make up their social environment. Hence their learning and development is influenced in a manner that reflects the relationships they have with their social environment.

1.3 Problem Statement

The lack of resources in South African mainstream schools leads to teachers being burdened with high numbers of learners in one classroom. At the same time, teachers have very little support that could enable them to include learners with learning difficulties. The lack of human resources, such as the shortage of teachers and assistant teachers in township schools, which could have a positive impact to the effective inclusion of learners with LDs, makes it difficult for teachers to fully apply themselves in maintaining an inclusive environment (West & Meier, 2020).

According to West and Meier (2020), “the South African education system is characterised by a shortage of teachers and inadequate school infrastructure which is contributing to the overcrowded nature of South African classrooms” (p. 1). West and Meier (2020) further mention that, when classrooms are overcrowded didactical neglect becomes an apparent challenge that affects teaching and learning. They define didactical neglect as referring to, “the teacher’s inability to pay enough attention to each learner’s educational needs” (p. 6). This is very detrimental to the implementation of inclusive education as learners who experience LDs often need individual attention in order for their educational needs to be fulfilled.



Teachers try all they can to include learners with LDs in classrooms. However, there is a need for parental engagement in the process and this engagement would contribute positively to the success of inclusive education and learners with LDs would be able to succeed in their learning. Parental engagement is all about parents/caregivers working together with teachers in schools to advance the learning, growth, and the wellbeing of children. It is when schools take it upon themselves to support families and empower parents/caregivers with improved parenting styles that would aid the ability of parents/caregivers to support their children's learning at home. Parental engagement exists when adults (parents and teachers) in the lives of children work together and take the responsibility of ensuring that the aspects of children's growth (emotional, mental, social and physical) are nurtured (The Pennsylvania State University, 2017). The role of parents/caregivers in the inclusion process is identified as a major role by both the Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy (DoE, 2001; 2014). However, research based in South Africa as identified during the literature review for this study shows that there are no research studies that have focused on parental engagement. The minimal literature on parental involvement speaks into general parental involvement rather than parental involvement in the inclusion process of learners with LDs.

Therefore, it was important to investigate the abilities of teachers to engage parents as they try to include learners with LDs in their classrooms. This study looked into the means that teachers use to obtain parental engagement in the process of including their children with LDs. Through the interviews conducted with the teachers from two township primary schools, this study aimed to gain insight of the factors that may hinder parental engagement and how the lack of parental engagement affects the process of including learners with LDs. This knowledge may inform the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) about the daily challenges faced by teachers in township schools as they aim to engage parents in the process of including learners who experience learning difficulties. This may assist the WCED and other stakeholders, such

as Non-profit Organisations (NPOs), and school social workers on how to plan their strategies of enhancing parental engagement in schools within a disadvantaged community.

Also, the study may inform the WCED about the needed support services that need to be provided in schools so that teachers are able to effectively implement the guidelines of the Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy, so that they are able to fully include learners with LDs. Once the needs of schools are met and support is fully provided, mainstream schools may become improved inclusive schools that can fully meet the educational needs of the learners with LDs.

1.4 Research Question

The research question for this study was:

How can teachers, in collaboration with parents, assist learners with learning difficulties to cope and succeed in their schooling?

1.5 Aim and objectives of the study

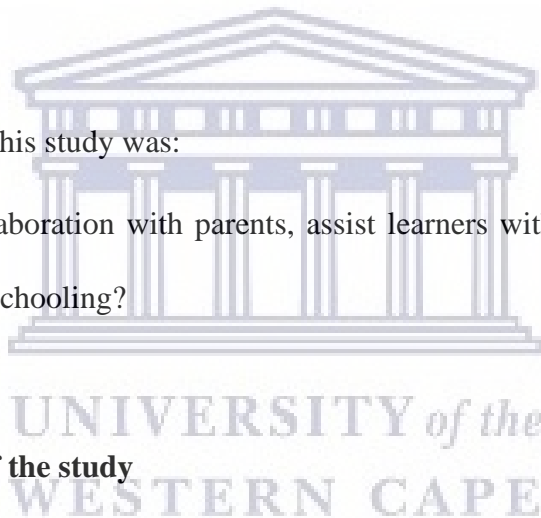
1.5.1 Aim of the Study:

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' abilities to engage parents to assist their children with learning difficulties.

1.5.2 Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study were to:

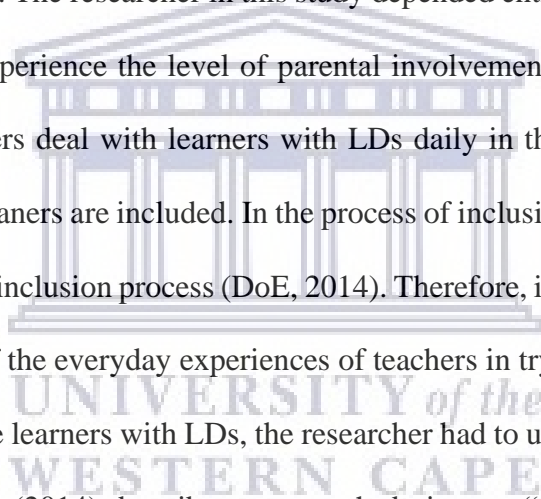
- Explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations.
- Explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children.



- Explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment.

1.6 Summary of the research approach and design

“There are two basic approaches to research, viz., *quantitative approach* and the *qualitative approach*” (Kothari, 2004, p. 5). The research approach used for this study is qualitative. During data collection, this study made use of face to face semi-structured interviews with the participants within their natural setting. Creswell (2014) states that, “*qualitative research* is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 32). The researcher in this study depended entirely to the knowledge of the participants as they experience the level of parental involvement in the education of the learners with LDs. Teachers deal with learners with LDs daily in their classrooms and they have to ensure that these learners are included. In the process of inclusion, parental involvement is essential to facilitate the inclusion process (DoE, 2014). Therefore, in order for the researcher to obtain the full picture of the everyday experiences of teachers in trying to engage parents in the inclusion process of the learners with LDs, the researcher had to use the phenomenological research design. Creswell (2014) describes a research design as, “a procedural plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically” (p. 96). The phenomenological design was adopted in this study. Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio (2019) state that, “phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual’s lived experiences within the world” (p. 90). Hence it was vital that the researcher use semi-structured interviews which allowed the researcher to engage in conversation with the study participants and gather a qualitative data to understand their lived experiences regarding the inclusion of learners with LDs, and the involvement of parents in the process.



1.7. Research methodology

1.7.1. Population and sampling

The population for this study were Grade 6 and 7 teachers in all the primary schools in Nyanga township. A population is the whole group in which the study conclusions are drawn (Bhandari, 2020). Nyanga is one of the townships within the City of Cape Town, Western Cape Province, South Africa. There are ten (10) primary schools in Nyanga township (SchoolParrot, n.d.). The characteristics of teachers who make the population of this study are teachers who have two years and more of teaching experience, and the population includes both male and female teachers who teach Grades 6 and 7 in any primary school in Nyanga. “it is often not appropriate or feasible to recruit the entire population of interest. Instead, investigators will recruit a sample from the population of interest to include in their study” (Majid, 2018, p. 3). A sample of participants was selected from the population of this study, to participants in the interview process. A sample is a small group selected from the bigger group where data is collected, and the size of the sample is always smaller than the size of the entire population (Bhandari, 2020). This was done through a process called ‘sampling’.

Therefore, ten (10) teachers who teach Grades 6 and 7 in two (2) primary schools in Nyanga were selected as a sample for this study. “Sampling is an important tool for research studies because the population of interest usually consists of too many individuals for any research project to include as participants” (Majid, 2018, p. 7). A purposive sampling strategy was used to select the sample of this study. In purposive sampling a researcher depends on his/her judgement when choosing a sample, and they use the knowledge they have of their study’s purpose when choosing a suitable sample (Vilela, 2019). Therefore, the ten (10) participants selected by the researcher to participant in the study are teachers who teach in primary schools in Nyanga, and they all teach Grades 6 and 7. They were all included in the study as they have two (2) and more years of teaching experience.

1.7.2. Data collection methods

The process of data collection for this study started with the preparation of a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher then conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. During the interviews field notes were taken. All the interviews were conducted in IsiXhosa and translated to English during the process of transcribing.

1.7.3. Data analysis

“The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). Data was analysed in this study through the use of thematic data analysis. Six steps of data analysis as identified by Creswell (2014) were applied to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews and field notes. The *first step* began directly after the stage of data collection. In this step the researcher transcribed the audio recorded interviews and typed the field notes. In the *second step* the researcher read through all the transcripts and the field notes to get a sense of the data and to ponder upon its meaning. In the *third step*, the coding process took place. This was done by re-reading all the transcripts and field notes carefully taking note of the ideas that came out. In *step four*, the grouping of similar ideas that emerged from the data was done and possible themes were generated. In *step five*, a deeper analysis of the data was conducted by providing a description of each theme through the words of the participants. During this stage themes were further analysed through the identification of sub-themes which provided clarity on the idea advanced by each theme supported by quotations from the participants. In *step six*, descriptive words were identified based on the meaning and sense emanating from the data under each theme. Those descriptive words were used as main themes and supporting descriptive words were used as sub-themes. A

chronological arrangement of themes was done in preparation of report writing. Each theme was allocated a number indicating its order of appearance and discussion in the report, and the report was written. Finally, the researcher read the report to verify that the themes correlated and that their descriptive words were suitable and made sense. Re-descriptions and rearrangements of these were done where necessary.

1.7.4. Trustworthiness of this study

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researcher applied four principles as outlined by Devault (2019) which include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

1.7.5. Ethical considerations

In order to ensure that this study was conducted ethically, the researcher allowed the participants to provide an informed consent to participate in the study by providing complete and open information about the study. The participation of all participants was ensured that it was purely voluntary. The anonymity of the participants was guaranteed and ensured through the use of pseudonyms instead of their real names. The possibility of harm that could be experienced by the participants was reduced by all means. Finally, confidentiality was ensured through keeping secret any confidential information associated with the participants.

1.8 Significance of this study

The study on teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties, will bring new knowledge on the inclusion of learners who experience learning difficulties caused by factors that cannot be easily identified from their physical appearances. The literature review conducted for this study has shown that many studies conducted in South Africa on inclusive education are mainly focused on the inclusion of learners with physical disabilities. The current study focused on the involvement of parents in

the inclusion of their children who experience LDs which are a result of the causes that might not be easily seen through the naked eye. However, the difficulties of these learners can be identified by teachers in classrooms. In order for these learners to be identified, teachers have to assess their difficulties within classrooms and plan interventions to meet the educational needs of these learners. In the process of implementing their interventions, teachers have to work collaboratively with parents/caregivers in order for the inclusion of learners with LDs could be a success (DoE, 2014).

This study discovered the means that the teachers use to obtain the involvement of parents in assisting learners who experience LDs and produce new insight about the struggles that teachers face in engaging parents in the process of assisting learners with LDs in schools within a low socio-economic community. Therefore, the WCED will be informed about the effects that the lack of/poor parental engagement in the implementation of inclusive education has on the success of achieving inclusive school environment and the inclusion of learners with LDs in schools in a disadvantaged community. Additionally, this study outlined the challenges that teachers experience daily in their quest to include learners with LDs. This knowledge will inform the WCED about the needed support services that need to be provided for these schools so that inclusive education is achieved effectively. Furthermore, as the SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) emphasises the role of parents/caregivers in the process of implementing inclusive education, the knowledge brought by this study, about parental engagement in this process, will inform the WCED, school social workers within the WCED and other stakeholders such as Non-profit Organisations (NPOs) working with schools on how to tailor their strategies to strengthen parental engagement.

1.9 Definition of terms and concepts

Learner: “Any person receiving education or obliged to receive education” (DoE, 1996).

Learning difficulties (LDs): Challenges experienced by certain learners in schools who suffer from serious or mild learning disabilities where they struggle to process and recall information that has been taught to them. These are challenges that may be seen in math, reading and writing (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; DoE, 2014).

Barriers to learning: These are all the external and internal factors that cause learning to be difficult for some learners in schools. Some of these factors include poverty, difficult family circumstances, being challenged by the language of instruction, violence in communities, and substance abuse. Some children have biological conditions that make their learning difficult (GenesisAdmin, 2014).

Teacher: A qualified person who teaches or educates learners at school (DoE, 1996).

Parent: A legal guardian or any adult who is a care-giver to the child which may include grandparents, stepparents, siblings, aunts, uncles or foster parents (Michigan Department of Education, 2011).

Teacher-parent collaboration: A working relationship between teachers and parents which is aimed at enhancing support provided to learners so that they can learn both at school and at home. It is the result of the partnership which schools have with families and communities (Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012).

Parental engagement: “Is parents and teachers sharing a responsibility to help their children learn and meet educational goals. Parent engagement happens when teachers involve parents in school meetings or events, and parents volunteer their support at home and at school” (Waterford, 2019).

Parental involvement: “Parent involvement is when parents participate in school events or activities, and teachers provide learning resources or information about their student’s grades” (Waterford, 2019).

Inclusive education: A form of providing educational needs or services which are aimed at providing equal education to all learners in the same learning institutions taking into account their differences in abilities, backgrounds and other characteristics that can hinder the learning of some of the learners (DoE, 2001).

Mainstream school: A school providing educational services to learners who are not physically or mentally disabled, and it is not a special school (DoE, 2001).

Special school: A school which has resources that are used in providing extra educational and other services to learners who are physically or mentally disabled (DoE, 2014).

1.10 Outline of chapters

In **Chapter One** the background and the rationale of this study was provided. A brief introduction of the theoretical framework, problem statement, research question, aim and objectives of the study and the research methodology was explained. The significance of the study explained and finally, the definition of key terms is provided.

Chapter Two offers an extensive discussion of Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory and its application to this study is provided.

Chapter Three is a literature review where topics which include: learners with learning difficulties, inclusive education in South Africa, parental involvement versus parental engagement, and the role of school social workers in enhancing inclusive school environment are discussed.

In **Chapter Four**, research methods, research design, population, sampling, data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethics consideration for this study have been discussed.

Chapter Five provides a presentation of the research results and a discussion of the main findings of this study.

In **Chapter Six**, the overall conclusion for the study and recommendations have been provided.

The following chapter, *Chapter Two*, provides a discussion of the theoretical framework for this study.



CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher provides an extensive discussion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. This theory focuses on the social structures that impact the development of a child and these structures are divided into five ecological systems. These systems include the micro, meso, exo, macro and chronosystems. Each ecological system is connected with the other systems and their connections influence the development of the developing person who either directly or indirectly participates in each system. Bronfenbrenner further developed the ecological systems theory to include the biological factors that influence development. The theory then became known as the bio-ecological systems theory. The bio-ecological systems theory considers the impact of four elements of the *person-process-context-time* (PPCT) model. The four elements of the PPCT model include: process, person, context and time and they affect the development of the developing person. Therefore, in this study, the developing person is the child in school (learner) whose educational development is influenced by the activities that take place within each system of the ecological system.

2.2 The Ecological Systems Theory

When contemplating the functioning of a person it is very important to consider the nature of impact their social environment has had on their development. The social environment surrounding an individual consists of systems which are interconnected and build from one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The ecological systems theory originates from the idea held by Bronfenbrenner that the development of a child is solely impacted by the context in which the child is being raised in as this is the primary environment which he/she is always in

interaction. From Kurt Lewis's formula of human behaviour which stated that a person's behaviour is the result of the interaction between the person and the environment. Bronfenbrenner remade this formula and devised that development is the outcome of the interaction of the person and his/her environment overtime (Härkönen, 2007). Therefore, Bronfenbrenner initially alluded to four main systems of a child's context. The first system is the *microsystem*. This system is made up of the individual's micro settings which include the family, school and neighbourhood. These settings are those that the developing person is directly involved and interacts with on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The second system is the *mesosystem*. This system is the result of the interaction between two or more micro settings of the developing person. For example, the school in which the child is directly involved interacts with the child's family which is also a micro setting of the child as he/she is directly involved. The interaction of these two settings results into the child's mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The *exosystem* is the third system of the ecosystem. This is the system that emanates as a result of the interaction between two micro settings which one of those the developing person is directly involved and the other one is indirectly involved. For example, the impact that the parent's work place has on the child's family affects the child as a developing person. Therefore, whatever happens at the parent's work place affects the child even though the child is not involved in that setting (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The *macrosystem* is defined as the outermost system of the ecosystem. This system could simply be associated with culture and belief systems that a particular community derives its values and principles from. These values and principles determine the behaviour of the developing person from a personal level even though they are held by the larger community (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner then added a fifth system, *chronosystem*, which payed more attention to the influences of time, within and outside the developing person (Krishnan, 2010). The nature of each system is shaped by the context in which the developing persons originates from and the

social environment offers the developing person multiple opportunities to grow (Swick & Williams, 2006).

2.2.1 Microsystem

It is important to understand the influence of the significant others, microsystems, in a person's life. Bronfenbrenner (1994) states that:

“A microsystem is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and actively in the immediate environment”. (p. 39)

The interaction of the child with all the settings within this microsystem is always a bi-directional one. The behaviour of the learner would be influenced by anyone of the settings, for example, the family, peers, day care centre, school and the neighbourhood. The learner would in turn influence the behaviour or the functioning of those settings. Within the microsystem the processes of personal development occur and these are influenced by the settings within the social environment which the learner is in direct contact (Krishnan, 2010). Those processes of personal development are known as proximal processes. These processes produce a bi-directional interaction between the learner and the social environment whereby a learner's development is influenced by the social environment, and at the same time the social environment is influenced by the learner. The resulting response is then in turn experienced by the same environment which projected those lessons (Cunningham & Rosenbaum, 2015). The learner learns for the first time how to survive in life from the family, the family could be any significant others living with the learner, and this makes the family the very first micro setting of the learner. Within the family setting, the learner experiences and develops caring relations

with parents and other caregivers and this shapes the temperament of the learner to be positive (Swick & Williams, 2006). Some of a learner's micro settings include the organised out-of-school activities such as sports clubs, academic clubs, after-school care projects, and faith-based youth groups. These activities contribute to the physical, psychological and social development of a learner (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017).

Figure 2.1 below indicates some of the most important micro settings surrounding a learner which include the home, school, church, neighbourhood and day care centre. The double arrow solid lines, in Figure 2.1, indicate that the learner is directly interacting or involved with all the settings, hence they create the learner's microsystem.

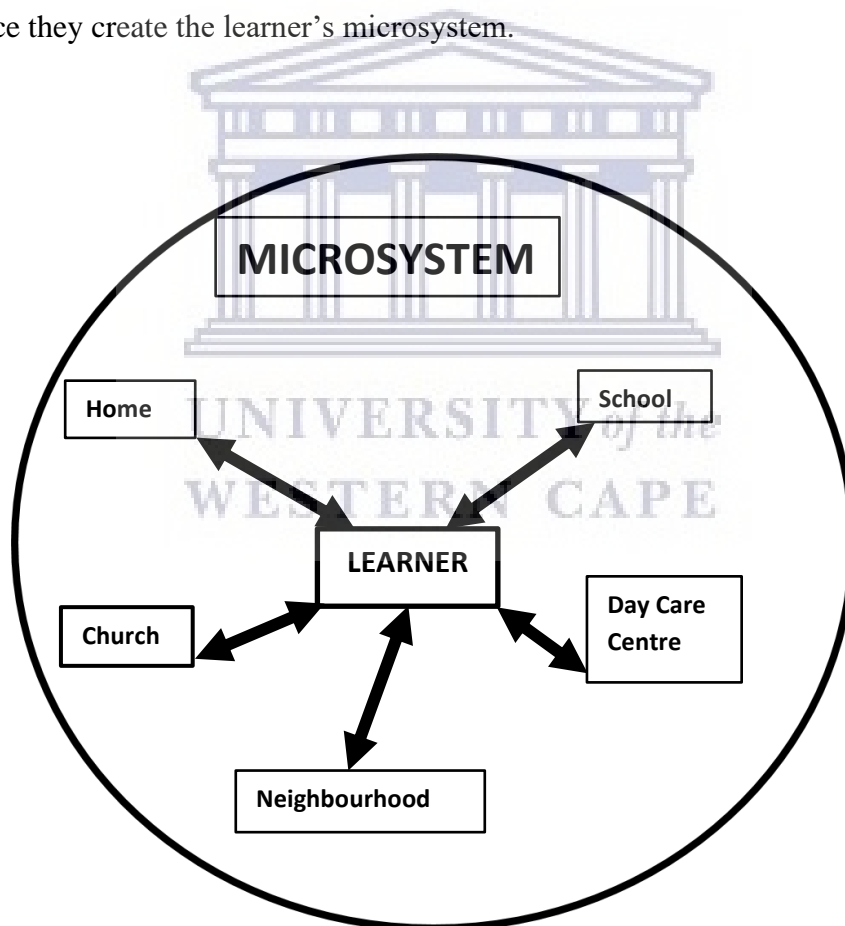
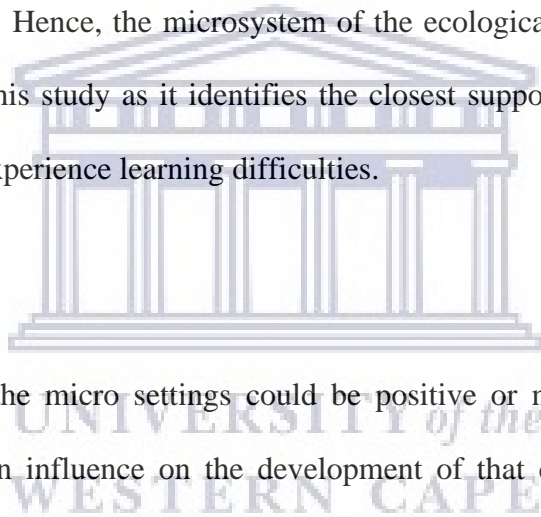


Figure 2.1: Graphical Representation of Microsystem (Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

Amongst the micro settings identified in Figure 2.1 above, is the school and the home. The developing person (learner) is part or involved in both of these settings. For this study, the developing person is referred to as the 'learner'. This study focusses on the support that learners with learning difficulties receive, so that they can succeed in their learning. The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy (DoE, 2001) states that, for these learners to be able to succeed in their learning they should be supported by their teachers at school and by their parents/caregivers at home. Both the teachers and parents/caregivers are part of the learners' microsystem. Therefore, the support that learners with learning difficulties require in order for them to be included in mainstream schools should begin at the micro level of their ecological system. Hence, the microsystem of the ecological systems theory is very important to consider in this study as it identifies the closest support structures, family and school, for learners who experience learning difficulties.

2.2.2 Mesosystem

The interaction between the micro settings could be positive or negative. Their status of interaction together has an influence on the development of that developing person. This interaction creates a mesosystem of the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1994) defines the mesosystem as "the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person, for example, the relations between home and school, school and workplace (p. 40)." It is the result of the connections that occur between the micro settings of the developing person. For example, the teacher and the parent might be in constant communication and this might contribute positively to the academic development of the learner. The learner is part of the home where there are his/her parents, and also he/she is part of the school where there are teachers and peers. These are therefore the micro settings of the learner but their interaction and the influences which result from that interaction, produces the



learner's mesosystem. There might be a lack of interaction or the two micro settings might be in opposing views resulting in negative influences to the child. Despite this, the consequences of the interaction will affect the child, which could result in the formation of a relationship between the two micro settings (Härkönen, 2007).

The learner's micro settings can influence one another as all contain the learner as the developing person. For example, the way in which the learner is raised and disciplined at home will definitely affect the functioning at school as the learner would exhibit behaviours that are synonymous to the functioning of their home. At the same time, the learner's behaviour which is influenced by their home can also affect the peers who meet with them in the outside playground. Therefore, the functioning of one setting is bound to influence the functioning of the other by the connection they have through the learner (Krishnan, 2010). There are processes that take place within the mesosystem. These processes are the result of the interactions that take place between a number of micro settings in which the developing person is a full participant (Ettedal & Mahoney, 2017). In the mesosystem, distal processes occur. These are processes that take place as a result of the interaction between two or more micro settings of the learner and have an effect on how the learner develops. For example, when the church and the community work together to make the community a better place to live for all and to uphold positive values. This will then result in a community which is supportive of its children. Therefore, the developing person or the learner benefits positively from those distal processes (Krishnan, 2010). The developing person might not be directly involved in the interactions that occur but other people within his/her microsystem, and the result of those interactions affects his/her development (Bailey & Im-Bolter, 2018). The mesosystem is all about being in community with one another. This system promotes the human relations where people continue and remain connected and help one other in times of need. This in turn contributes positively

in the development of children in society as not only their biological parents would be responsible for their wellbeing but the entire community of adults would take responsibility for all children in their community (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Figure 2.2 below is a graphical representation of some of the major micro settings that surrounds a learner, and their interaction result into the mesosystem of the learner. The double arrow lines in figure 2.2 indicate that all the micro settings of the learner interact with one another. The learner is directly involved with all the settings within his/her microsystem.

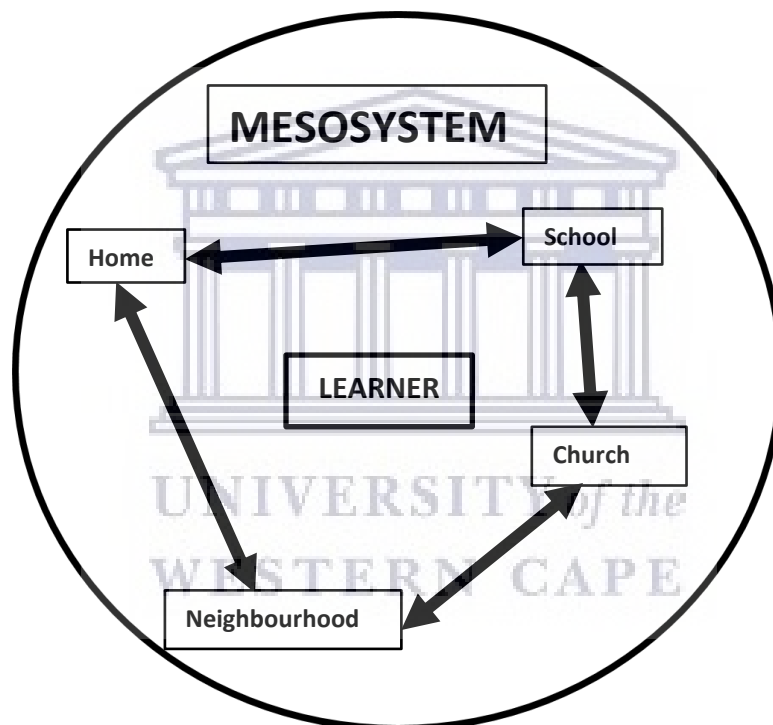


Figure 2.2: Graphical Representation of Mesosystem (Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

In this study, the nature of the relationship between teachers (school) and parents (home) has been established, and this study offers insight into how this relationship contributes to the success or failures of those learners who experience difficulties in their learning.

2.2.3 Exosystem

This system influences the developing person even though it might be seen as though it is at a distance from that person. Bronfenbrenner (1994) explains this system as:

“comprising the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives, for example, for a child, the relations between the home and parent’s workplace; for a parent, the relations between the school and the neighbourhood peer group”. (p. 40)

This system has a great impact on those who are in contact with the learner, and its impact affects the proximal processes that occur at the micro level of the learner, hence the development is influenced (Krishnan, 2010). Additionally, Krishnan (2010) mentions that, the learner is not directly involved in his/her parent’s workplace but the decisions and employment policies made in this environment would affect the parent, which is the part of the learner’s micro setting. Those effects would affect the functioning of the home and the proximal processes in this setting, which will then influence the learner’s development. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) contends that, if the parent has a hectic work schedule and is unable to attend to such things as school meetings where there are opportunities to interact with the learner’s teacher, then the processes of the parent’s work place have an impact on the development of the learner even though the learner is not directly involved in that setting. This compromises the relationship, which the parent could have with the teacher. Eventually the learner’s academic development could then be affected. Swick and Williams (2006) reveal that, the learner might not physically participate in the processes of the parent’s workplace because they are far from it, but its effects are always felt directly by the learner as the home of the learner and its proximal processes is influenced by what occurs in that exo setting. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017) mention that, the exosystem is made up of the learner’s micro settings and

settings in which he/she is not directly involved. As it contains the learner's micro setting it therefore projects effects which can be directly experienced by the learner. This system mostly affects the development of the learner through other people who are closely involved with the learner, for example, parents and teachers.

In Figure 2.3 below, the double arrow solid lines indicate that there is an interaction between the settings and the broken line indicates that there is no direct interaction between the settings.

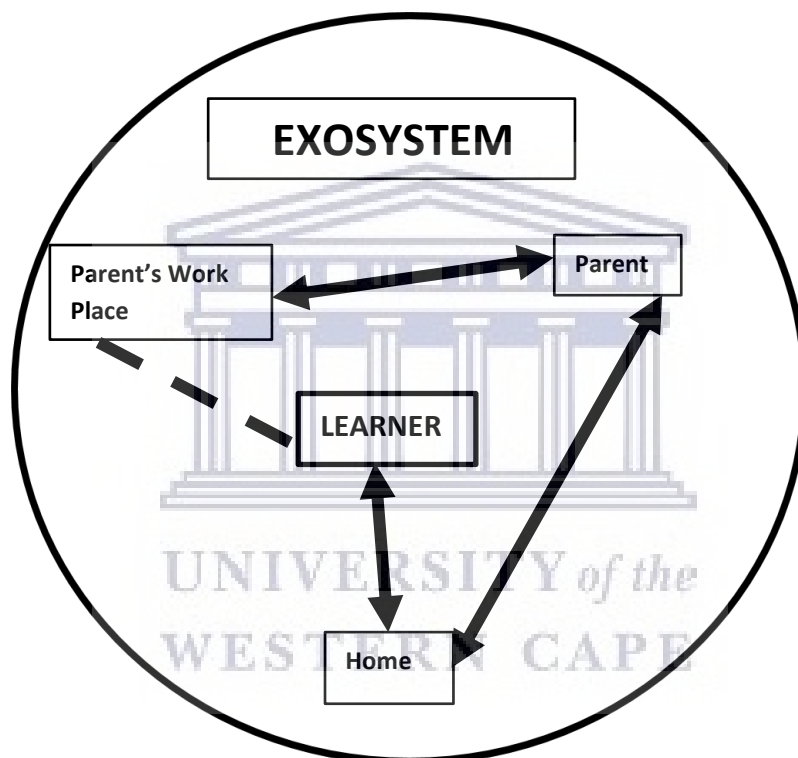


Figure 2.3: Graphical Representation of Exosystem (Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

In order to identify and explain the influences of this system, this study explored the knowledge of the teachers regarding the hindrances that restrict parents from being fully involved in their children's education.

2.2.4 Macrosystem

The ecological systems theory looks into the larger societal and community levels of influence on the developing person. The theory moves away from the exosystem of influence to the macrosystem, which is all about the shared characteristics of the social and physical environment from which a person comes from (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). According to Bronfenbrenner (1994)

“The macrosystem consists of the overarching pattern of micro, meso, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture, with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life styles, opportunity, structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems”. (p. 40)

The macrosystem has a great influence on the other systems of the ecological system through its characterisation of cultural beliefs, instabilities in politics and socioeconomic statuses, policies, laws, and change of geographical locations. All of these aspects of the broader society have a huge influence on a learner’s development (Krishnan, 2010). This system can be described as a lens through which the future and life chances of a learner can be viewed or predicted. The cultural, religious and socioeconomic context from which a diverse group of children in society comes from determines the teachings that are utilized to mould the value system of those children. All other systems receive foundation of their processes from an up-down direction where the most upper system is the macrosystem (Ettetal & Mahoney, 2017).

Figure 2.4 below depicts the South African National Department of Education and the policies formulated at that level which influence the policies formulated and implemented by the subsequent departments of education. Therefore, the National Department of Education is the macrosystem of the learner in school as the learner is not directly involved with the processes

at that level, but those processes influence the processes of the learner’s micro setting, which is the school. The double arrow solid lines in Figure 2.4 indicate the up-down movement of influence between the departments of education. The learner is at the receiving end of this influence. The broken line indicates that the learner is not directly involved with the processes of the National Department of Education.

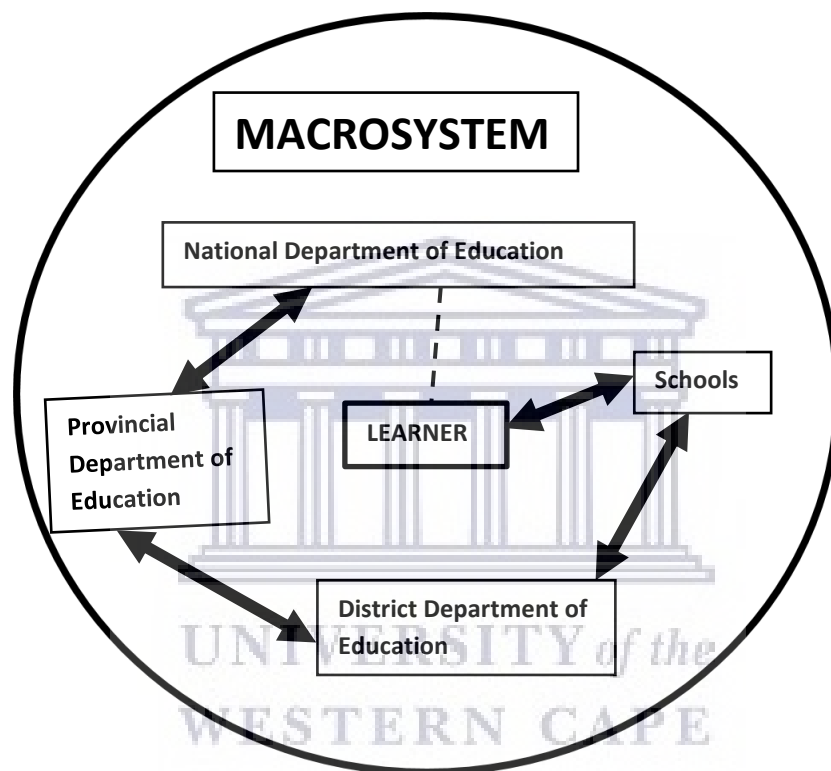


Figure 2.4: Graphical Representation of macrosystem (Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

2.2.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem is concerned with the processes that effect change to an individual and their social and physical environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (1994) state that:

“a chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also of the environment in which that person lives, for example, changes over the life course in the family structure, socioeconomic status,

employment, place of residence, or the degree of hecticness and ability in everyday life". (p. 40)

The chronosystem looks into the evolution and development in all the other systems over the course of time. The changes that have had an impact in the lives of people and their environment have an influence on the development of children (Härkönen, 2007). This system encapsulates all the historical changes within families and communities. Families and communities might have gone through an event or crises that had a great effect on their lives during a certain period of time and this experience would have had disruptions in the functioning of their lives, hence the development of children in that community would have been affected (Swick & Williams, 2006).

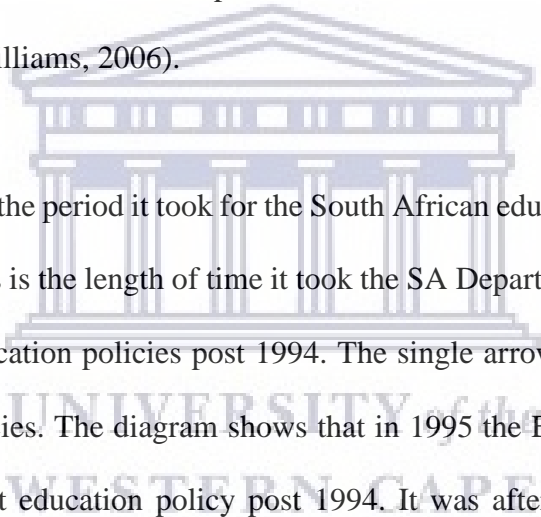


Figure 2.5 below indicates the period it took for the South African education system to develop and become inclusive. This is the length of time it took the SA Department of Basic Education to formulate inclusive education policies post 1994. The single arrow lines indicate the time passed between three policies. The diagram shows that in 1995 the Education White Paper 1 was introduced as the first education policy post 1994. It was after six years that the first inclusive education policy was introduced, Education White Paper 6. This policy was aimed at defining inclusive education and its principles. The diagram further shows that a period of thirteen years had lapsed before a policy, which provided guidelines on ‘How?’ inclusive education should be implemented. The double arrow lines indicate that the school is the main setting that has to implement these policies, hence affecting the learner in school. The development of these education policies over time have seen the evolution of service provision to learners by schools in South Africa. From Figure 2.5, it could be understood that the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa is still a new phenomenon as it is still four years since the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy, which

provides guideline on how inclusive education should be implemented. Therefore, a learner with LDs is still in the centre and affected by the development of these inclusive education policies and their implementation.

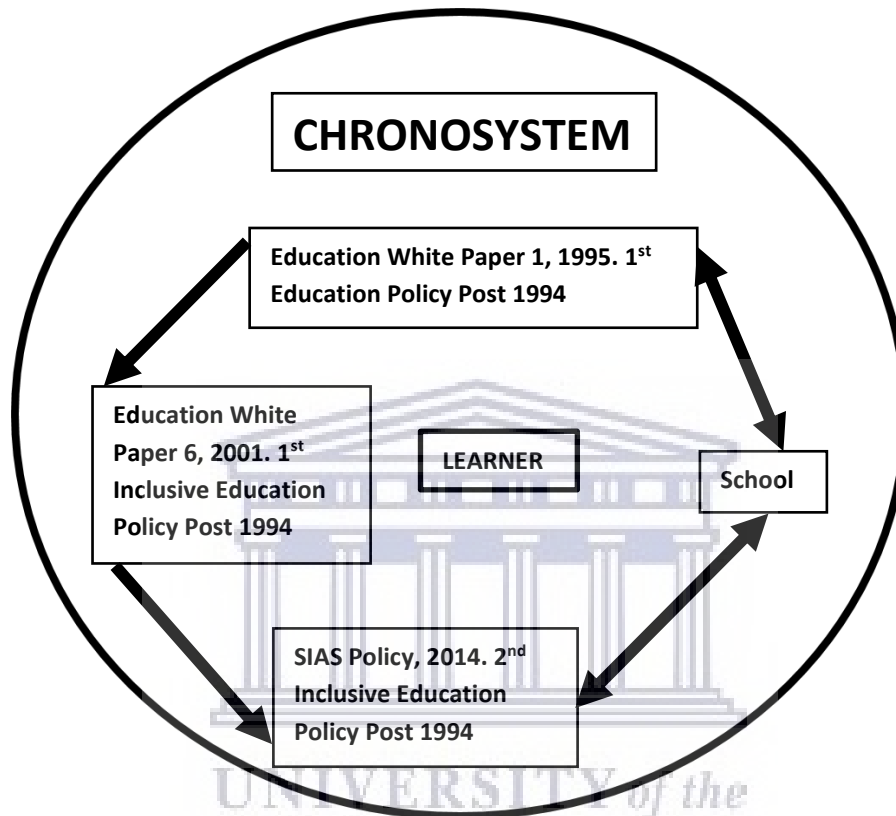


Figure 2.5: Graphical Representation of Chronosystem (Adapted from: Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

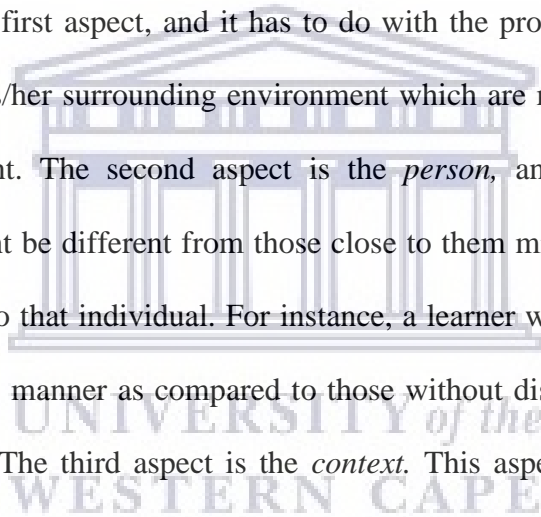
In this study, the advancement of policies over the years that aimed to address the social issue of learners with LDs and inclusive education in mainstream schools have been explored.

2.3 The Bio-ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory has evolved to be known as the bio-ecological systems theory. This change emanates from the consideration by Bronfenbrenner that as the child grows, his/her physical and mental development leads to more complex interactions and relations with his/her social environments creating a two-way interaction of influence. This therefore, calls

for attention to be given to how the biological characteristics of each learner contribute to how the learner relates or interacts with his/her social environment (Härkönen, 2007). According to the bio-ecological systems theory, an individual's life is influenced from different levels of the social environment. These include the micro, meso, exo and the macro levels. The fifth level, chrono level, considers the influence of time. This level brings changes to the biological aspects and the physical environment of the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The bio-ecological systems theory has a model called the *process-person-context-time* (PPCT) model and it is made up of four interconnected aspects or elements (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006). The *process* is the first aspect, and it has to do with the processes that a developing person goes through in his/her surrounding environment which are meant to offer lessons to shape his/her development. The second aspect is the *person*, an individual's biological characteristics which might be different from those close to them might influence how other people treat and respond to that individual. For instance, a learner with a disability might be treated in a discriminatory manner as compared to those without disabilities, and this might affect their development. The third aspect is the *context*. This aspect of the bio-ecological system theory is concerned with the influences of the social and physical environment in which the developing person lives. The micro, meso, exo and the macro systems are considered in this aspect as they have an impact on the development of the learner through the processes that take place within them. This aspect also pays attention on the influences of the change in physical environment to the development of the learner overtime. Lastly, the fourth aspect is *time*. This aspect considers the effects of the changes that take place on the physical and social environment over time. Those changes do affect the development of the developing person. Therefore, the changes that take place on the learner's physical and social environment affects their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).



The four aspects of the bio-ecological systems theory, process, person, context and time, and the relevance of these aspects to this study are discussed in detail below.

2.3.1 Process

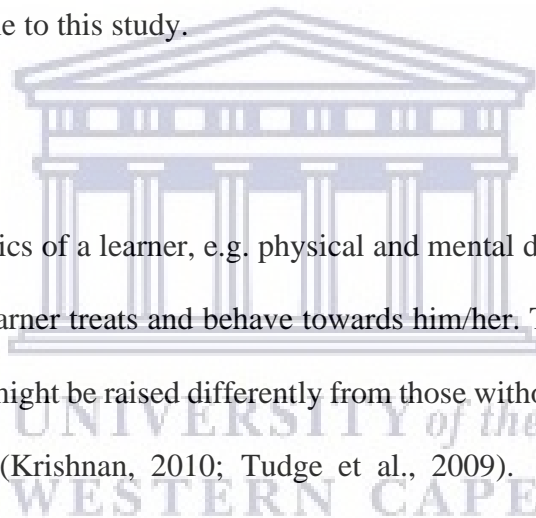
A developing person has relationships with others surrounding them in their immediate environment, the microsystem. These relationships might be with parents, teachers and peers. Also, those people surrounding the developing person might have their own relationships amongst themselves, mesosystem. Therefore, the process element of the bio-ecological systems theory considers the impact of these relationships to the development of the developing person (O'Toole, Hayes & Mhathúna, 2014). The process elements also recognise the interaction that the learner has with objects in his/her environment. The manner in which the learner interacts with those objects are likely to contribute to the development of certain skills such as playing with toys. When a learner is able to continuously play with toys, it is likely that his/her mental development is stimulated (Houston, 2017). Furthermore, Houston mentions that, the process is also about the relationships that the learner has with human beings in his/her immediate environment, i.e. the microsystem. If those relationships are positive, they then result to positive development of the learner and vice-versa.

The *process* is concerned with all the lessons that the learner receives from the immediate environment, microsystem, such as the home and the school. These lessons are applied to ensure that the developing person develops, and they are responsible for moulding the behaviour of the learner as they develop. The developing person will then interpret all those lessons they receive from their close environment; hence their behaviour is built according to those interpretations (Krishnan, 2010). The process includes multiple activities that a parent

and other adults surrounding the child or the learner regularly engage in with the learner. These may include reading books, playing games, and encouraging the learner to play with other children. All these activities allow the developing person to develop an informed understanding of his/her environment (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Therefore, this study considers the relationships that the parents (home) and teachers (school) have with one another, and how those relationships impact the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties within mainstream schools. This study further looks into how parental involvement or the lack of parental involvement, in their children's education or learning, impacts the inclusion of their children with learning difficulties. In this regard, the process element of the bio-ecological systems theory is applicable to this study.

2.3.2 Person

The biological characteristics of a learner, e.g. physical and mental disabilities, influence how people surrounding that learner treats and behave towards him/her. Therefore, it is likely that a learner with a disability might be raised differently from those without any disability and that impacts on development (Krishnan, 2010; Tudge et al., 2009). There are a number of individual characteristics that allow others surrounding a learner to respond in certain ways towards that learner. For example, some learners are shy and some are out spoken, and these characteristics influence even the manner in which the learner him/herself relates with significant others around them (Houston, 2015). A developing person may possess personal characteristics that either enhance or hinder his/her interaction with those who surround them. Those characteristics that can positively impact the interaction of the learner with his/her significant others may include: skills and abilities to do certain things, and knowledge gained overtime. At the same time, the characteristics such as physical and mental disability, and



sickness and disease may negatively impact the learner's ability to interact with his/her significant others (Bronfenbrenner et al, 2006 cited in Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Generally, individual characteristics that include a learner's gender, age, language, special education needs, physical and mental disability; do have an impact on a learner's educational experience and development (O'Toole et al., 2014). In this regard, this study analyse ways in which learners with LDs are assisted by their teachers in classrooms, and how teachers respond and meet their educational needs. Learners with LDs in mainstream classrooms have to be given individual attention, as per their individual needs, so that their educational needs are met. This is done so that they are able to participate in their classrooms equally to their peers who experience no learning difficulties. Hence, their inclusion is achieved. Inclusion is achieved through tailoring teaching methods to meet the needs of individual learners determined by their individual characteristics (DoE, 2001; 2014). Additionally, this study analyses the possibilities of change in parents' relations, through the experiences and observations of teachers, with their children when they discover that their children are impacted by LDs, and how parents respond when they have to be part of the inclusion process.

2.3.3 Context

Bronfenbrenner did not give due attention to this element of the bio-ecological systems theory in his discussion. He only provides a deep discussion of the micro, meso, exo and macro systems as the major building blocks of the context element (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner, the context considers the background of the learner where development is seen as being shaped by the kind of environment the child is being or has been raised. It looks into the influences of the micro, meso, exo and macro systems of the ecological system. These systems have an influence on the development of the learner through the processes they project

towards that learner (Krishnan, 2010). The development of a learner is influenced from all the levels of the environment, micro, meso, exo and macro, as the developing person is an active participant. Each level of the environment is connected to the other levels resulting to reciprocal processes of interaction and influence. Therefore, the processes that take place in one level affect the processes that take place within the other levels, hence affecting the development of the learner within the environment (Houston, 2015). In this study, the context in which the inclusion of learners experiencing LDs has been considered. The schools that the research has been conducted are township schools, categorised as quintile 1 or no fee schools. Inclusive education in SA is governed by policies, EWP 6 and SIAS, formulated by the National Department of Education (macro level). Those policies set out guiding principles for inclusive education for the Provincial Departments (exo level) and the Districts Departments (meso and micro level) of education. Therefore, the context in which the inclusion of learners with LDs has been considered in this study, hence the context element of the bio-ecological systems theory was applicable in this study.

2.3.4 Time

Time refers to the changes that occur within the learner or to the surrounding environment of the learner where development is influenced by those changes as they occur over long periods of time (Krishnan, 2010). Time has to do with the developments occurring within the learner as the developments of his/her environment and the events occurring overtime effect change in their lives (Tudge et al., 2009). Tudge et al., (2009) further states that, it incorporates the influences of the chronosystem, which is the influence of time on the environment within which the learner resides. Throughout the times the learner experiences physical changes on their bodies, changes in their social and physical environment and the occurrence of different life events which affect their life situations such as the death of a parent. Bronfenbrenner cited in

Rosa and Tudge (2013) contends that, the time element focuses on the periods of continuation and discontinuation of proximal and distal processes within the ecological system. These periods of proximal and distal processes have timeframes and durations at which they occur. They then therefore affect the person's biological development and they effect change on the social and physical environment in which the person lives. In this regard, this study provides an analysis of the development of education policies in South Africa throughout the years following the attainment of democracy, and the impact that those policy developments brought for inclusive education. This policy analysis provides an understanding of the time taken by the South African democratic government to formulate inclusive education policies post 1994. Therefore, this study has looked into a transition process on inclusive education policies between two different time periods, pre-1994 and post-1994, in South Africa.

2.4 Summary of this chapter

The ecological systems theory has evolved and now is known as the bio-ecological systems theory. The five main ecological systems, micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono, are still part of this re-worked theory. These systems are linked together and the activities that take place in one system have an influence on the activities that occur in other systems. This results in the developing person being affect by all the processes that take place within the entire ecological system. Bronfenbrenner included the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model, as part of the bio-ecological systems theory. This model intensified the development of this theory to consider the role that the biological factors on the child's development and how they relate to their physical and social environment. Therefore, in this study, the five ecological systems, micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono, are applied to understand their role in the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties. Additionally, the PPCT model and its elements, process, person, context and time, have been applied to understand how the biological characteristics of

children with learning difficulties affect their relationships with their significant others and also how their inclusion in education is affected by their biological factors.

The following chapter, *Chapter Three*, is a Literature Review for this study.



CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, a review of the literature has been conducted. Topics relating to learning difficulties and inclusive education are discussed. These topics include ‘learners with learning difficulties’ under which the description of four specific learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and ADHD have been provided based on the literature. ‘Inclusive education in South Africa’ is a second topic discussed. Under this topic, literature defining inclusive education and the literature analysing the two most important inclusive education policies, *Education White Paper 6* and *SIAS* policy, introduced in South Africa has been reviewed. The challenges experienced by South African schools to implement these policies and to maintain inclusive school environment have been analysed. The third topic in this chapter is ‘parental involvement’. Under this topic, literature defining and analysing the importance of parental involvement in their children’s education has been reviewed. Additionally, the factors that hinder parental involvement in South Africa has been analysed. The fifth topic is ‘Parental engagement’. Under this topic the researcher has reviewed a literature that defines parental engagement and how it relates to parental involvement. Finally, the sixth topic is ‘the role of school social workers in enhancing inclusive education’. In this section, the role that school social workers assume in ensuring that schools are inclusive and that children with special educational needs are well supported in their schools is discussed.

3.2 Learners with Learning Difficulties

Learning Difficulties are conditions that result to learning challenges or problems in a mainstream classroom. These conditions interfere with a learner's development of academic skills, mathematics, memory, attention and the development of organisational skills (Touch-type Read and Spell, n.d.). Teachers describe learners with learning difficulties as those who are unable to focus for a prolonged period of time as they possess a compromised hearing and functioning of their eyes. These learners are found to be restless in class and often distract the functioning of the whole classroom, and they do not put effort into their schoolwork, as they appear to be less interested in their school responsibilities (Mohamed & Laher, 2012). A case study conducted in America reveals a story of a seventeen-year-old who is constantly retained in grade eight as he does not reach a level where he could meet the benchmark levels for the grade, he does not seem to cope with the speed at which the classroom teaching is normally conducted, and his performance remains below par. In the same study, the authors highlighted that learners with learning difficulties fail to meet the basic requirements of the education system such as the appropriate age for a grade and they do not perform as expected when they are engaged in grade specific proficiency tests (Compton-Lilly, 2013). These learners lack abilities to structure their written work as there would be no logical flow of facts, and there would be no quality in what they write as compared to their peers who experience no learning difficulties (Rodriguez, Grunke, Castro, Garcia & Garcia, 2015). Most of these learners have writing and reading problems. They experience challenges in developing their skills to pronounce words, the ability to structure sentences, the ability to develop their vocabulary, and the ability to name objects in a reasonable pace (Costa, Edwards & Hooper, 2015). Learning Difficulties are grouped into different 'Specific Learning Difficulties'. These include dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorders (ADHD) (Touch-type Read and Spell, n.d.).

3.2.1 Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a mental disorder and is shown specially through children's difficulties in developing their reading and writing skills (Cidrim & Madeira, 2017). Dyslexic children experience difficulties in forming progressive mental pictures from a written text. They have challenges in developing ideas from a written material as they read. As a result, dyslexic children find it difficult to read with understanding any written text that has no illustrations (Gyarmathy, n.d). Dyslexic children have difficulties in processing and making meaning of sound and visual information. Their short-term memory is ineffective, resulting to them being unable to recall information they just learnt (Hammond & Hercules, 2000). Children with dyslexia have difficulties in processing information that they see and hear. They could also have challenges with spoken and written language, and they may lack concentration (Communication, Learning and Autism Support Service (CLASS), 2016). Learners with dyslexia normally experience difficulties in spelling, writing and the pronunciation of words. At serious levels, these children may require special education, or special educational support in mainstream classrooms (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

3.2.2 Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a specific learning difficulty seen through poor handwriting. Children with dysgraphia also have poor spelling, grammar and punctuation skills. Their written work lacks clarity and organisation, and their writing process is very slow. It shows itself through difficulties experienced in spelling, bad handwriting, and challenges in putting ideas in a written form. It can be noticed for the first time when a child learns to write (Chung & Patel, 2015). According to The Understood Team (2020), the handwriting of a child with dysgraphia is poorer as compared to other children of the same age or in the same school grade. These

children appear to be reluctant to attempt any writing as they fail to express themselves in writing.

3.2.3 Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a disability to solve problems related to numbers. It results from a brain damage that causes an inability to comprehend and make sense of concepts of mathematics. Children with dyscalculia are unable to learn the basics of mathematics (Nfon, 2016). Dyscalculic children struggle to understand numbers and their significance. From a young age, these children will show signs that they are challenged by simple mathematical tasks such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They continue to be unable to apply principles of mathematics in solving problems (Khing, 2016). The Dyslexia Scotland (2018) reveals that, children with dyscalculia have difficulties in recognising mathematics symbols such: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division symbols. They also fail to use these symbols correctly. Mat (2014) mentions that, dyscalculic children might struggle to subtract small numbers from big numbers as they are unable to differentiate between the value of numbers. At times, they would write answers of subtraction or addition problems from back to front resulting to incorrect answers.

3.2.4 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is identified as the lack of ability to pay attention, constant moving around, and thoughtlessness before actions (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ADHD is caused by both genetic and environmental factors. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2016), some of the environmental factors that can cause ADHD include: smoking, use of drugs and consumption of alcohol during pregnancy, exposure to environmental toxins during

childhood, low birth weight and brain injuries at birth. Pickett (2016) states that, children with ADHD normally make careless mistakes as they lack attention, they are unable to sit still in a seat and play with their hands or feet as they suffer from hyperactivity and impulsiveness. The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry and American Psychiatric Association (2013) reveal that, this condition can interfere with a child's performance in school. A child with ADHD can struggle to develop and maintain relationships with other children. These children normally are at risk of having disciplinary problems and are at a high risk of dropping out of school.

3.3 Inclusive education in South Africa

Inclusive education is about recognising the fact that all children are able to learn and that they all need some kind of educational support. It is about the acceptance of the diversities in learning needs of children in school, and the valuing of such needs equally (DoE, 2001). The DoE further states that, inclusive education is all about capacitating the structures and systems of education with resources to meet the different needs of all learners, and tailoring the teaching methods to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners. Inclusive education is also about supporting the strengths of individual learners and grant them opportunities to participate fully in the learning process. Nandini and Taj (2014) mention that, inclusive education is about educating learners with special needs within the same classrooms with their peers who do not experience any barriers. It aims to mitigate the separation of learners but to educate them in the same schools and classrooms despite their different learning abilities. Rastogi and Kumar (2016) adds that, inclusive education is an education system that seeks to promote the acceptance of diverse learning abilities of all learners and afford them an education system that would take the responsibility to meet their diverse needs.

According to Bridge (2014), the South African Department of Basic Education formulated the *Education White Paper 6 on Special Education Needs: Building an Inclusive Education System and Training (2001)* with the aim of abolishing the separation of education systems where children with special educational needs were being educated in special schools. Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) was formulated to promote the access of mainstream schools by children with special needs and even those with disabilities. Hence, promoting inclusive education to eliminate discrimination and to promote equal education for all. According to Inclusive Education South Africa (IESA) (2018), the structure of the Education White Paper 6 was founded on a very wide foundation as it had to address a great variety of needs of those learners experiencing barriers to learning. IESA mentions that this policy advocated for change based on the belief that all children, youth and adults have the ability to learn when a conducive environment is created and when they are provided with needed support.

According to Right to Education of Children with Disabilities Campaign (R2ECWD) (2016), the Education White Paper 6 was aimed at resolving the ramifications of the apartheid era where only a small percentage of children with disabilities received special education. Specialised education was offered to white disabled children and marginalising those from other racial groups leaving them without any access to education. The Education White Paper 6 came to advance the complete inclusion of all children who need specialised education and support, and to ensure that the education system is able to meet the different needs of learners in schools. According to the DoE (2015), the Education White Paper 6 was meant to further develop the education system by eliminating differential educational systems used during the Apartheid era which were separated into: special education and mainstream education. These two systems were merged into one system that embraced equity and equality. The DoE further states that, this policy was developed to promote the rights of all learners to education and the

acceptance of these rights. The Education White paper 6 was also aimed at advancing the education system by eliminating barriers that hinder the learning and participation of children, parents and communities in the education system. The policy outlined guidelines for responding effectively to the needs and the provision of effective support for all these stakeholders.

The Department of Basic Education together with Provincial Departments of Education engaged in consultations to formulate and introduce another policy framework called the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) since 2008 (DoE, 2015). This policy was issued by the Department of Basic Education in 2014 with the aim to provide a structure in which the process of screening, identifying, assessing and supporting all learners with special educational needs are able to participate and be included in schools (IESA, 2019). The SIAS policy was formulated to provide a structure to guide the steps to be taken in the process of identifying, assessing and intervention planning for learners who might need extra educational support to facilitate their participation and inclusion in school (DoE, 2014). Its further aim is to enhance access to quality education for those learners identified to be experiencing barriers to learning which might include family circumstances, challenges with language, learning difficulties, disabilities and those children who are supposed to be attending school but are unable to do so due to various barriers or disability (DoE, 2014). To implement the inclusion guidelines set out in the SIAS policy, teachers and parents have to assume a pivotal role and have to work collaboratively to achieve the goal of creating an inclusion environment for those learners whose learning is affected by the presence of barriers to learning (DoE, 2014).

The SIAS policy identifies the roles that teachers and parents should assume in the process of creating an inclusive environment in schools. According to the SIAS policy, the role that teachers assume in creating an inclusive environment is very important. Teachers need to

possess a comprehensive knowledge about inclusive education, and about the different needs of learners who experience barriers to learning and those with disabilities. They should ensure that programmes and tangible resources are available and accessible to those learners who need them (DoE, 2014). According to Tyagi (2016), the role of teachers in inclusive education include identifying children who need special education, making the necessary adjustments to the curriculum to be suitable for the learning abilities of the learners with special needs, and adjusting the examination methods to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs.

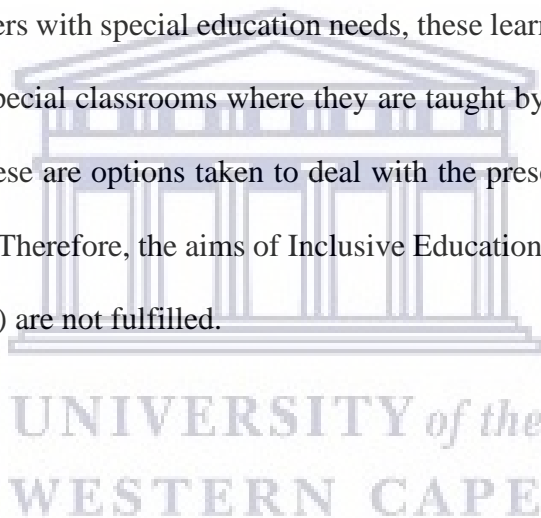
Rastogi and Kumar (2016) mention that, in order for inclusion to be successful in classrooms, teachers need to have the skills to identify the needs of each individual learner and be able to meet those needs by employing teaching methods that would enhance the participation of all learners in their classrooms including those with special needs. The DoE (2014) reveal that, it is the responsibility of teachers to be case managers in the process of providing support to all the learners who need support and they should ensure that the guidelines outlined in the SIAS policy are properly followed. In the same breath, parents or caregivers should be part of the identification and assessment process and should work in partnership with the teachers. Parents have the right to contact their children's teachers to enquire about the progress of their children, and if any decision is to be taken to place a child in a special school or in any educational programme, they should obtain full information about such schools or programmes so that they are able to make informed decisions (DoE, 2014). The onus is on parents to make sure that partnerships are made between themselves and their children's teachers so that they are able to ensure that the support plans set out within the individual support plans are implemented effectively (DoE, 2014).

3.3.1 Challenges to implement inclusive education in South African schools

There are many factors that affect the ability of teachers in South African schools to implement inclusive education in their classrooms. The far most challenge is the lack of clarity about how schools are expected to fulfil the goals of the Education White Paper 6 (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Furthermore, Donohue and Bornman (2014) add that, the Department of Basic Education in South Africa needs to provide the clarity of these goals and should enforce the means in which they should be practiced to fulfil them. This is very important as it would result into an effective implementation of inclusion guidelines and principles as outlined by the Education White Paper 6. Edewumi and Mosito (2019) discovered that, there are many barriers hindering the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. These include the lack of support to the schools from the districts. Many teachers are not trained enough to deal with and support learners with special needs. Inclusion becomes a burden for teachers as they also have to attend to the emotional needs of these learners as many of them experience challenges from their families that affect their emotional wellbeing. Teachers in this regard have to abandon their classroom duties to attend to these emotional issues as they affect the learning of these learners in classrooms. Furthermore, Adewumi and Mosito (2019) reveal that, the lack of resources in many disadvantaged schools, mostly those classified as quintile one and two, around South Africa is another factor that negatively affects the implementation of inclusive education policies.

Teachers in many schools have to teach in overcrowded classrooms with minimal teaching and learning resources. At the same time, in these schools there is a shortage of teachers. Mahlo (2017) reveal that, teachers in South African schools are required to teach a maximum of 40 learners per classroom. This affects the teaching and learning negatively already, therefore making it difficult to apply and practice inclusive teaching under such circumstances. The

stress that is caused by overcrowded classrooms result in teachers with a negative attitude towards learners with special needs as it is even hard to identify their barriers and needs. Thus, making it impossible to provide those learners with additional support they require. Brown (2015) contends that, in South Africa, there are schools that are under resourced than others and these schools are those in disadvantaged communities serving disadvantaged learners of South Africa. Brown (2015) further states that, schools in disadvantaged communities lack funds to make necessary resources available as many learners require additional learning material and this negatively impacts the process of inclusion. Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit and van Deventer (2016) reveal that, due to the inability of schools and teachers to provide the additional support to learners with special education needs, these learners are either referred to special schools or put in special classrooms where they are taught by a Learners with Special Needs (LSN) Teacher. These are options taken to deal with the presence of the learners with special educational needs. Therefore, the aims of Inclusive Education as outlined in Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) are not fulfilled.



3.4 Parental involvement

The levels of parental involvement in schools can be classified into three main profiles, i.e. high, medium and low levels of involvement. These profiles of parental involvement yield differing levels of academic achievement by learners in schools, with the highest profile resulting into the highest academic achievement (Lara & Sanacostti, 2019). It is the responsibility of parents to be involved in the education of their children. They should not allow factors such as their low levels of education, income, race and religion to prevent themselves from being involved in the education of their children (National Education Collaboration Trust, 2016). Parents can be involved in the education of their children by helping them to do better in their school work, encouraging them to value education, ensuring that children have time

and space for studying while at home and regularly check that homework is completed (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Schools with full parental involvement normally record excellent performances for both academic and extra-mural activities (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014).

The practice of parental involvement in schools and with the education of children enhances a partnership between the most important micro settings of learners. The school and the home are micro settings of learners in schools and their interaction creates a solid mesosystem, as described by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (Brownlee, 2015). For inclusive education, parental involvement leads to the successful implementation of inclusive programmes in schools. The attitude of learners, teachers and even parents themselves improves for the better resulting into better collaborations and effective inclusive school environment. When parents are involved in the inclusion process, there is an opportunity for parents and teachers to build a strong support structure for learners with special needs as they work in full collaboration (Monika, 2017).

According to Stephinah (2014), after so many years since South Africa obtained democracy, the involvement of black parents in the education of their children is still cause for concern. Stephinah (2014) further states that black parents in South Africa still do not assume a significant role in supporting their children's educational needs, they do not assist them fully with school activities and they are not involved in their schools. Matshe (2014) reveal that in South Africa there are many factors that hinder parental involvement. These include: parental illiteracy, poverty due to unemployment, and ineffective communication methods, such as letters, used by schools which do not allow parents to meet face-to-face with teachers. Parents in South Africa do not have time to visit their children's schools due to socio-economic status of their families, and they lack skills to assist their children at home with school activities as

they are not well educated themselves. Munje and Mncube (2018) mention that many children in South Africa are raised by their grandparents who support their families with their social grants. Therefore, the day to day focus of grandparents in these families is mainly on the maintenance of the livelihoods of their grandchildren than their education. At the same time, grandparents are unable to assist their grandchildren with school activities and they are unable to monitor their school work at home due to illiteracy. Furthermore, Munje and Mncube (2018) mention that, if children live with their biological parents its either the parents work within the informal sectors where their occupations consume most of their time, hence the inability to be involved in any education matters of their children. Therefore, poverty is the one of the main issues that affects the ability of parents from disadvantaged communities to be involved in their children's education as the priority of these parents is to provide the day to day needs of their families (Munje & Mncube, 2018).

3.5 Parental engagement

Parental engagement is defined by Fox and Olsen (2014) and Emerson, Fear, Fox, and Sanders (2012), as a collaboration between schools, families and communities were all the parties assume a major role in the education of a child and in ensuring the child's welfare. It has two elements which include: 'family-led learning and family-school partnerships'. In the process families are supported and trained by the schools so that they are able to engage in their children's education. The Hanover Research (2014), Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) identify six factors that foster school-family/school-community engagement strategies that enhance partnership between families and schools and between schools and the entire community, hence strengthening parental engagement. The first factor is *parenting* where families are provided with parenting skills training so that they are able to create conditions at home that would support their children's learning, and at the same

time allowing schools to understand family circumstances. *Communicating* is the second factor, it is all about a bidirectional interaction where schools send messages, through different methods, about school activities to the families and families to the schools about their children's educational developments and challenges. A third factor is *volunteering*, which is a factor that encompasses the opportunities offered to parents/caregivers to participate and assist schools when there are learning activities and programmes inside or outside the schools. The fourth factor is *learning at home*, which is when teachers empower parents with ideas that they can implement at home to foster learning in relation to the school curriculum. The fifth factor is *decision making*, this is all about encouraging parents/caregivers to be part of school leadership such as the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) where they can be able to participate in decision making in their children's schools. The final factor is *collaborating with the community*, this factor is about schools making use of resources within communities for the benefit of families, learners and the schools.

Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) mention that, with the engagement of parents, schools become better institutions where the success of learners is guaranteed and both teachers and parents become satisfied. Teachers are able to work together with parents to improve educational programmes that the schools offer their children and this results into a smooth teaching and learning process. The State of Queensland Department of Education (2020) mentions that, parental engagement is present when there is a good relationship between parents/caregivers and teachers and this relationship should be characterised by shared goals for enhancing learning development and achievement of learners in schools. It does not just end with parents/caregivers volunteering in school activities, but it goes deeper into participating in decision making regarding suitable educational programmes that schools implement to improve academic achievements of their children. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(2012) adds that, parental engagement is the partnership and collaboration between parents/caregiver and teachers that emphasizes leaning and development of children at school, home and in communities. Additionally, Balli (2016) contends that, for inclusive education to be successful, parents and teachers should work together in planning and implementing means to create an inclusive school environment where children with special needs would feel welcomed, accepted and supported.

Therefore, the literature indicates that both parental involvement and parental engagement have to do with the partnership that exist between schools and families where similar goals of educating, developing and nurturing a child are shared. Research studies on both parental involvement and parental engagement allude to the same six factors that foster school-family partnership. These factors are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. These six factors are said to be important in strengthening parental involvement/engagement (Fox & Olsen, 2014; Hanover Research, 2014; The State of Queensland Department of Education, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012; Emerson et al., 2012).

3.6 The Role of school social workers in enhancing inclusive education

School social workers work in conjunction with teachers and parents so that children with special educational needs are identified and assessed on time so that they can all plan and implement interventions that would contribute in preparing the school environment to become more inclusive for children with learning difficulties (Balli, 2016). They use their skills to train and educate teachers and parents about the impact that mental health, behaviour and other ecological factors such as: family, classroom, school and curriculum and community have on learning. School social workers furthermore can advocate for a safe and successful learning

environment by mediating collaborations between the schools and other stakeholders who represent the larger community (Usaj, Shine & Mandlawitz, 2012). They work in multidisciplinary teams with other professionals, such as teachers and educational psychologists, to provide their support to learners with learning difficulties. They provide psycho-social support to individual learners and in groups. School social workers also empower teachers with knowledge regarding inclusive education through workshops as they possess good knowledge of laws and policies for the protection of the rights of children (van Sittert & Wilson, 2018).

The school social workers can lead collaborative teams aimed at resolving problems emanating from the schooling systems that disadvantage some learners especially those experiencing barriers to learning. Their collaboration is mostly with school educators and administrators, families and NGOs/NPOs in communities to enhance the availability of resources and support that can improve the learning process of all children with a special focus on those who are academically challenged. They communicate with parents on behalf of the schools to educate them about the importance of being fully involved in their children's education, and they would provide parenting skills training where necessary (Usaj et al., 2012). They are professionals who are able to have a better understanding of how to go out into communities to engage parents and other stakeholders on issues concerning children's academic achievement, school safety, school attendance, and social and emotional behaviour. They are employed to address matters concerning intrinsic and extrinsic learning barriers. School social workers assume the role of arbitrators between learners in schools and their social environments including parents, schoolmates, peers and institutions that control financial matters for learners in order to create improved relationships and better conflict resolution, to make their social functioning better (Damyanov, 2010).

3.7 Summary of this chapter

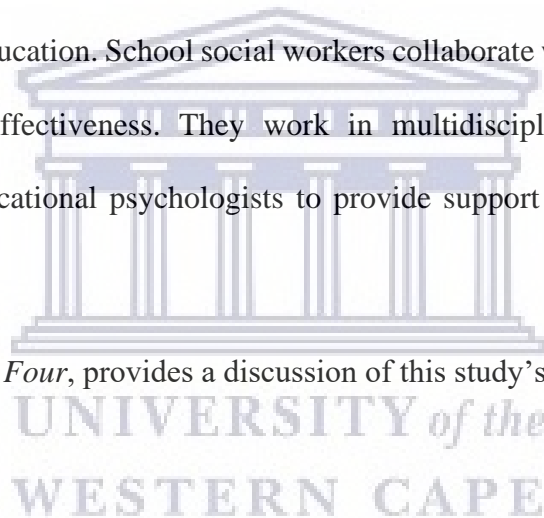
The literature review has provided a description of characteristics that make it possible for teachers to identify learners with learning difficulties. It is revealed by the literature that these learners mostly exhibit difficulties in their reading and writing. There are other characteristics that have to do with behaviour where some children would be showing signs of short attention span and hyperactivity. There are four identifiable specific learning difficulties which include: dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Dyslexia is revealed to be associated with poor development of reading skills, and dyslexic children find it difficult to read written text with understanding. Dysgraphia is associated with poor development of the handwriting, spelling, grammar and punctuation. Dyscalculia is associated with problems of understanding numbers. As a result, learners with dyscalculia struggle to understand mathematical concepts. Finally, ADHD is a learning difficulty associated with the lack of attention, poor concentration and restlessness.

Inclusive education in South Africa is guided by the principles of the Education White Paper 6 and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy. The Education White Paper 6 provides guidelines for the provision of equal education and elimination of discrimination. The SIAS policy provides guidelines and structure for the identification, assessment, planning and implementation of interventions. It also clarifies roles of teachers and parents. The literature revealed that there are challenges in South Africa in implementing inclusive education policies. These include lack of clarity of the goals of the Education White Paper 6 and the objectives to achieve those goals. Schools lack support from the district offices to facilitate the process of inclusion. Teachers are not trained enough to practice inclusion. The lack of resources in schools and overcrowded classrooms in disadvantaged schools hinder the inclusion process.

The literature revealed that parental involvement has a positive impact on academic and extra-mural activities in schools. It improves opportunities for collaborations between teachers and parents. The involvement of parents in their children's education enhances inclusion as parents are able to ensure that the goals identified in the individual support plans are implemented effectively. The existence of parental involvement in South African schools, especially those in disadvantaged communities is negatively affected by poverty. Additionally, illiteracy affects the ability of parents to be involved in their children's education as they are unable to help them with their school activities such as homework while at home.

Finally, the literature reviewed indicated the role of school social workers in the process of implementing inclusive education. School social workers collaborate with parents and teachers in this process for its effectiveness. They work in multidisciplinary teams with other professionals such as educational psychologists to provide support for learners with special educational needs.

The next chapter, *Chapter Four*, provides a discussion of this study's methodology.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study used qualitative methodology with a phenomenological inquiry as a research design to explore the abilities of teachers to engage parents of learners in the process of assisting children with learning difficulties. The aspects of research methodology of the current study covered in this chapter include: the research question, the research approach/design, the population and sampling, the research setting, the data collection methods, the pilot study, data analysis process, rigor and trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

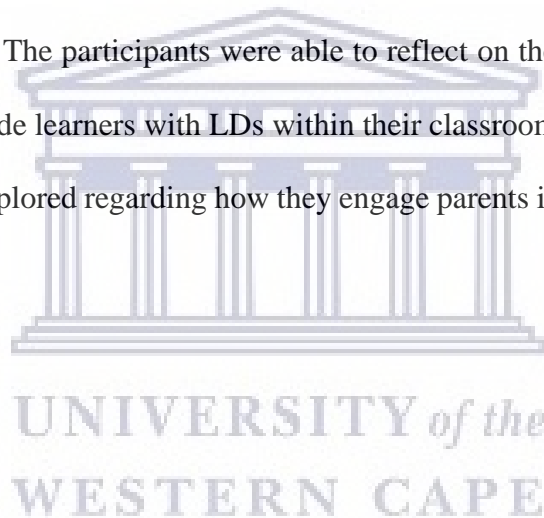
4.2 Research question

It is important to develop a research question as it puts in place the boundaries for a study. A research question opens up a guide into which research methodologies should be used to conduct the research (Khodabux, 2015). This study is a qualitative study and it investigated how teachers' collaboration with parents can assist learners with learning difficulties so that they can cope and succeed in their learning. The following was the research question for this study:

- How can teachers, in collaboration with parents, assist learners with learning difficulties to cope and succeed in their schooling?

4.3 Research approach

In this study, a qualitative research approach was used to gather the knowledge regarding the strategies that teachers in primary schools use to enhance parental involvement in the process of assisting learners with LDs. Qualitative research aims to describe continuous processes, its purpose is controlled by questions and its theories are developed as the research process continues (Tewksbury, 2009). Tewksbury further mentions that, the methods of qualitative research give more attention into analysing and in giving the audience a holistic insight of the context, the environment and the concepts. In the current study, this approach was suitable and it allowed the researcher to engage with the participants in a comprehensive manner within their own natural settings. The participants were able to reflect on their everyday experiences of how they strive to include learners with LDs within their classrooms. Also, the experiences of the participants were explored regarding how they engage parents in the process of assisting learners with LDs.



4.4 Research design

A research design can be defined as a strategy or a procedure for a specific research project. It identifies or specifies the purpose of the study, participants, sample size, setting, tools, the kind of data required to answer the research question, and how data analysis should be carried out (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). In this study a phenomenological research design was employed. Phenomenological design is described as “a design of enquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2014, p.12). Therefore, this design was suitable for this study as the study seek to understand the practices and experiences of primary school teachers as they aim to maintain the inclusion of learners

with LDs within their classrooms. This study aimed to discover the everyday practices of the participants in applying inclusive education guidelines, and allowed the participants to provide descriptions of their own everyday experiences in classrooms in their own words.

4.5 Research methodology

4.5.1 Research setting

Data for this study was collected in primary schools in the Nyanga township located in the Metro South area in the City of Cape Town, which is one of the municipalities in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. The term “township” originates from the apartheid era. In the 1950’s, the apartheid system introduced a segregation law called the Group Areas Act, which saw the black and coloured residents of Cape Town being removed from their original communities in the city centre (City of Cape Town, 2018). During this time, people were forcibly removed and placed in areas outside and far removed from Cape Town Central Business District (CBD) to areas which became popularly known as townships (City of Cape Town, 2018). The Townships of Cape Town are areas that were formed due to the separation laws of the Apartheid system and these areas are characterised by poverty (Cape Town Attractions Center, 2019). Some of the most popular townships in the City of Cape Town include: Atlantis, Delft, Khayelitsha, Langa, Mfuleni, Nyanga, Philippi, Guguletu, and Crossroads (Western Cape, 2008/09). This study was based in Nyanga township.

According to the SA-Venues (2020), Nyanga township is a poor community where most residents live in shacks in informal settlements. Stats SA (2013) indicated that in 2011, seventy-four percent of households in Nyanga township had an income of about R3200 per month, and sixty-seven percent of households lived in informal settlements. For this study, data was

collected in public primary schools in the Nyanga township. Craddock (2018) mentions that, primary schooling in South Africa is divided into two phases: the foundation and intermediate phase. The foundation phase starts from grade R to grade 3, and the intermediate phase starts from grade 4 to grade 6. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) (2013) indicated that public schools in South Africa are divided into five groups which are referred to as quintiles. A school is classified into a certain quintile when based on the level of poverty of the community in which a school is situated. Quintile one schools are found in very poor communities. Additionally, the WCED reveals that, quintile one, two and three schools are no-fee schools while quintile four and five are schools in which school fees are required. van Dyk and White (2019) reveal that, based on the National Norms and Standards for School Funding, the ranking of schools into quintiles “is based on the unemployment rate and literacy rate of the community in which the school is located, with a Quintile 1 ranking indicating a poor/impoverished school, and a Quintile 5 ranking indicating a wealthy/affluent school” (p.1).

Similarly, Hall and Giese cited in Ogbonnaya and Awuah (2019) mention that, categorising schools into different quintiles depends on the income, unemployment and the education levels of households in communities in which the schools are located. Schools in poor communities are ranked as quintile one and schools in affluent communities are ranked as quintile five. All the schools that were selected for this study fall under quintile one, and this means that they are ‘no fee paying’ schools. The City of Cape Town (2016) mentions that, between 2014 and 2015 there were 46.2% of no fee schools in the City of Cape Town (City of Cape Town, 2016).

4.5.2 Population and sampling

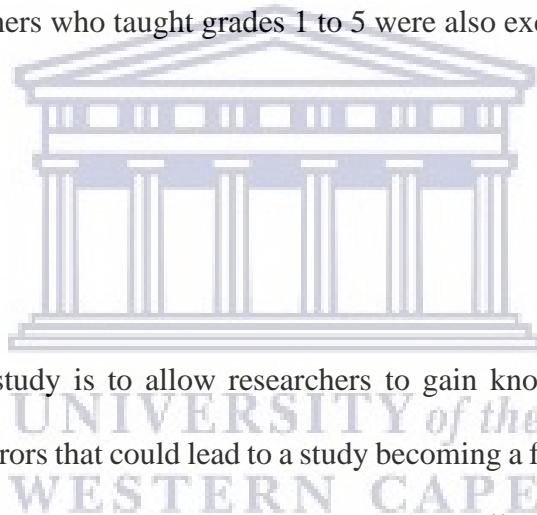
Polit and Hungler (1999) mention that “a population is the totality of all subjects that conform to a set of specifications, comprising the entire group of persons that is of interest to the researcher and to whom the research results can be generalized” (p. 43). Population is a wider pool where the sample is extracted which can be used to collect data, which later can be generalised to represent the entire population. The population need to possess all the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the study so that a sample can be selected to stand firmly in representing the whole population (Blanche et al., 2006). Therefore, the population of this study are all the mainstream primary school teachers. The mainstream schools which comprise the population of this study are those of the Cape Flats in Cape Town. The population included male and female teachers.

Sampling is a process of choosing a group of individuals for the purpose of studying or gaining insight of their personal experiences regarding a certain phenomenon as described in their own words (Blanche et al., 2006). Blanche et al., (2006) further adds that sampling “is the selection of research participants from an entire population, and involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours, and social processes to observe” (p. 49). To this end, ten teachers who taught across two mainstream primary schools in the Cape Flats were purposively selected to participate in this study. Hence, the sampling for this study was purposive sampling. In purposive sampling a researcher depends on his/her judgement when choosing a sample, and they use the knowledge they have of their study’s purpose when choosing a suitable sample (Vilela, 2019). Therefore, it was believed that purposive sampling would be suitable for this study as teachers in mainstream schools have high possibility to come across learners who experience different difficulties in their learning. In this study, the participants were included on the bases that they have worked as primary school teachers for two and more years. This inclusion criterion was important as it ensured that all the participants had enough experience

of working with learners in mainstream schools, and that they gained enough experience of identifying learners with LDs and implementing inclusive interventions. They were also required to be teaching Grades 6 and 7 at the time of data collection. This criterion was important in ensuring that all the participants had come across learners with LDs as these school grades are important in the education of learners. Grade 6 is the last grade in the intermediate phase and Grade 7 is the first grade in the senior phase. In these school grades, learners are expected to have gained their reading, writing and numeracy skills from the foundation phase. Additionally, both males and females were included in this study. The exclusion criteria for this study was based on the fact that teachers in schools did not possess two or more years of teaching experience. Teachers who taught grades 1 to 5 were also excluded from participating in this study.

4.5.3 Pilot study

The main aim of a pilot study is to allow researchers to gain knowledge of the suggested research methods so that errors that could lead to a study becoming a failure could be prevented (Polit & Beck cited in Lowe, 2019). According to In (2017), “a pilot study provides necessary information...for minimizing unnecessary effort from the researchers and participants, as well as the dissipation of research resources” (p. 604). A pilot testing of the current study was conducted before the actual data collection process. This was done to test whether the method and tool for data collection was suitable and effective to achieving the aim and objectives of this study. The pilot study was helpful as it ensured that the sample selected for the study was suitable and relevant for the purpose of this study. Three participants were selected to take part in the piloting of the study. These three participants were also teachers who taught grades 6 and 7 in a quintile one primary school. The interview guide was amended after the pilot study.



During the amendment of the interview guide certain questions that appeared to be duplicates were deleted and replaced with other relevant questions that seemed to be more relevant to elicit the information required to answer the research question of this study. Through piloting, the researcher gained more understanding of the processes to be followed in the main study. Piloting assisted the researcher to develop and improve their research methods which had to be applied in the execution of data collection for the main study (In, 2017).

4.6 Data collection

The aim of data collection is to record rich data that would lead to quality analysis of data that will assist a researcher to answer an initial research question(s). Data collection helps to create credible findings for a study (Kabir, 2016). Data for this study was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was prepared in advance to guide the interview process with the participants (See Appendix A). All the questions that were prepared were designed in such a way that they aid the information gathering for answering the research question for the current study. The set of question in the interview guide were in line with the objectives of the study and used the relevant literature to frame the interview questions. Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2009) further mention that, a major and first step in developing interviews in research is the development of an interview guide. It is developed based on the approach of the research study and its aim and objectives. In the current study, the prepared questions created an opportunity for conversations between the interviewer and the participants to occur smoothly, and these conversations were vital as the participants had an opportunity to express themselves in response to the questions posed by the researcher.

All participants were invited to provide informed consent and were asked to sign a consent form. Participants were briefed about the aim and objectives of the study. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants using a Dictaphone and a smartphone. The interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and were conducted in IsiXhosa. Allowing participants to communicate in the mother tongue was valuable as it made the participants feel comfortable and it allowed for the collection of rich and meaningful data. Field notes were also taken to record nonverbal responses of the participants to the questions posed. This was done so that the meanings attached to the statements made by the participants could be recorded accurately. The researcher also took the field notes to record their own observations with regards to the research setting and surroundings.

4.6.1 Preparation of participants

As soon as this study obtained ethics clearance from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) as well as permission from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), the researcher negotiated entry into the schools and the contact persons were the school principals. The principals were handed entry letters, information-sheets and approval letter from the WCED. The researcher then requested permission from the school principals to conduct an information session regarding the study for all the teachers at the schools. During this session the researcher explained for the teachers the aim, objectives, methods of data collection, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, how confidentiality would be ensured, the importance of their informed consent to participate in the study, and the methods of data analysis to be used to ensure that what is reported represents exactly what they have shared. After the information session the volunteers indicated their interest by a show of hands and a further question and answer session regarding the study was conducted, information sheets were handed, consent forms were signed by the participants and interview times arranged at the convenience of the participant.

4.6.2 Individual interview sessions

The interviews for this study were conducted in schools where the participants taught. Classrooms were used for the individual interview sessions and the interviews took place on different days as per the availability of individual participants. All the interviews were between 30-45 minutes long. After each interview field notes were written to capture the essence of the interview. Eventually, the interview notes were compared and used in the analysis of data as field notes. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. According to Blandford (2013), semi-structured interviews fall between the two ends of structured and unstructured interviews. The interview itself is controlled by the kind of information that comes out of the conversations. For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed. Blandford (2013) further states that, semi-structured interviews are types of interviews which place an emphasis on topics to be covered during the interview, and major questions are written down verbatim but can be asked or phrased differently and can be used to remind the interviewer if it happens that he/she forgets any question. These types of interviews can follow a logical flow which can be as follows: introduction, opening question, core in-depth questions and closure. Therefore, it was important that an interview guide be constructed in order to have guide that will allow the researcher to be able to conduct the interviews effectively. Zorn (2008) contends that “semi-structured interviews offer topics and questions to the interviewee but are carefully designed to elicit the interviewee’s ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the interviewee toward preconceived choices” (p. 1). These types of interviews comprise of a series of open-ended questions which are categorised according to different topics that the researcher aims to cover through the study. Open-ended questions open an opportunity for both the researcher and the participants to discuss in detail the topics under investigation (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 1998).

In this study, the logical flow of semi-structured interviews, as proposed by Blandford (2013), was applied in the following way:

- **Introduction:** The researcher started by thanking the participants for their time to participant in the study.
- **Opening question:** The researcher asked all the participants the following question as an opening question “I would like to know how many years you’ve been working as a teacher, and which grades and subjects you have taught in these years?” This question seemed to put all the participants at ease as it gave them an opportunity to reflect and talk about themselves before they can go deeper into discussing the issue being researched.
- **Core in-depth questions:** After the opening question the researcher would then start to ask questions prepared in the interview guide and the main themes covered in the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix A).
- **Closure:** After all the questions in the guide have been covered the researcher would conclude the interview by say “thank you once again for your time, we have covered all the questions, thank you”. All the participants would take an opportunity to further discuss other matters they thought they did not mention during the interview recording and they would share this extra information just after the tape recorder has been switched off. In this instance the researcher would allow the participants to share while being extra attentive to what is being said.

4.7 Data analysis

In qualitative research the analysis of data includes identifying, checking, evaluating and clarifying the patterns and themes that have emerged from the data (Ngulube, 2015). Data

analysis involves reducing a raw data into themes by continuously inspecting and linking different materials. It results into the findings of the research (Flick, 2013). It is a procedure used to breaking data into its components to identify its form and meaning. Without analysing data researchers would be unable to find the real meaning of the whole data set (Dey, 2005). Therefore, the six steps of thematic data analysis as identified by Creswell (2014, p. 185) were followed and these steps are as follows:

Step 1- Organizing and preparing data for analysis: During this stage the researcher transcribed all the interviews verbatim into a word processing programme. The interviews were then translated into English and back into isiXhosa for the purpose of accuracy.

Step 2- Read through all the data: This is the stage where the researcher read through the transcripts and field notes with the purpose of familiarising himself with the data so that meaning and sense-making of the information could be identified.

Step 3- Coding the data: The researcher started to sort the data into categories by labelling similar narratives in those categories with terms that represent the meanings attached to the words articulated by the participants.

Step 4- Generate a Description and Themes: The researcher developed a general description of the themes, the participants and their context based on the setting of the research and themes were identified for the purpose of analysis.

Step 5- Interrelate Themes: The themes were presented in a chronological order supported by sub-themes and verified by quotes from the participants.

Step 6- Interpretation: In this stage the researcher wrote a personal interpretation of the findings based on the similarities and differences that were identified between the findings of this study and the literature review. A report was produced to present the findings of this study.

At the end of data analysis, a long paragraph was written to express the essence of the participants' differing and similar experiences and identified the context in which all these experiences emerged. Then a reflection was written about the similarities or differences that have emerged from the description in comparison to what the literature has shown.

4.8. Rigour and trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the establishment of validity and reliability of qualitative research. "Qualitative research is trustworthy, when it accurately represents the experience of the study participant" (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999, p. 333). The information that is reported on the research findings should be a true reflection of the participants' feelings, thoughts and words. When the participants are presented with the research findings should be able to agree or testify that what has been reported represents what they revealed during the data collection. This would mean that findings should not be manipulated in any case for any reason to reflect what the researcher wants people to believe. This relates to the credibility of the research (Streubert et al., 1999). The four elements of ensuring trustworthiness as proposed by Gumba's model (1981) has been adopted in this study. These include: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.8.1 Credibility

Qualitative studies are credible when the descriptions of people's experiences become relevant to other people from other settings that share similar characteristics with the settings in which data was collected (Krefting, 1991). In the current study, a rich and thick description of the research setting has been provided to ensure clarity about the types of contexts which are applicable to the findings of this study. This means that the findings of this study should reflect the reality experienced by the described study population. Shenton (2004) states that, to ensure

that a study is as credible as possible, potential participants should be given an opportunity to choose to participate or not to participate in the study. Potential participants should be provided with adequate information about the study so that they are able to make decisions if they want to participate or they do not want to participate. Therefore, participation in a study should be purely voluntary and based on informed consent. Thus, for this study, before data collection could commence potential participants were informed about the aim and objectives of the study. They were given the study's information sheets so that they could engage further and deliberate on their interests to participate in the study. This resulted in participation of individuals who were well informed and willing to participate in the study. Additionally, Shenton (2004) mentions that it is important for researchers to apply "iterative questioning" so that they could ensure that their studies are credible. This is a form of questioning where researchers would use probing methods during their interviews so that they are able to clarify any misunderstandings they could have during interviews with the participants. Therefore, in this study, the researcher constantly explored responses made by the participants about the questions, especially if the researcher felt that he did not completely understand the meanings behind the responses made by participants. This minimised the possibility of questions regarding the meanings of responses that could arise during data analysis.

4.8.2 Transferability

A study's findings should be applicable to other contexts which have resemblances of the context in which the study was conducted (Krefting, 1991). Readers of the research report must be able to decide, after obtaining an understanding of the context, whether they could fully transfer the findings of the study to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). For this study, the researcher provided a complete description of the context of the study. Even though the study was conducted in primary schools in the Nyanga township, the characteristics of the community and that of the schools were provided. In this study, the primary schools in which

the research was conducted were described as quintile 1 schools. These categories of schools are found in many different disadvantaged communities across the Western Cape and around South Africa. This then results to a possibility that the findings could be transferred to other primary schools which are township schools categorised as quintile 1 schools in the Western Cape and even South Africa at large. Additionally, Shenton (2004) contends that, proper description of a study's phenomenon is provided so that readers of the research report could gain a comprehensive understanding of what was being studied. This would allow them to be able to find ways in which the phenomenon is related to their own experiences within their own settings. Therefore, it was vital for the researcher in the current study to discuss the phenomenon of this study in detail and clarify its characteristics so that readers of the report from other contexts could be able to apply in their own situations.

4.8.3 Dependability

In order for a study to be dependable there should be clear and detailed descriptions of the methods used to collect data. This is for the purpose of enabling other researchers to replicate the study within the same context. When this is done the results and findings should reflect those of the previous study. Therefore, a research design of a study should be clarified in such a way that it could be used as a model for other studies that could be conducted in future (Shenton, 2004). In the current study, the researcher provided an outline of the study's methodology. The suitability of qualitative approach and phenomenological design was described in detail. The research method and tool that were used to collect data, semi-structured interviews and the interview guide, were described and their suitability for a qualitative study.

4.8.4 Confirmability

The findings of a study should be presented and described in a manner which could be checked by other researchers. The interpretation made by a researcher from their study's findings reflect the information obtained from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The findings and its interpretations should be free from bias. They should show neutrality where they reflect the thoughts of the participants only (Krefting, 1991). The presentation and discussion of findings for this study were confirmed through the use of direct quotes from the words of the participants. This was done to confirm that what was being reported was entirely a reflection of the meanings described by the participants.

4.9 Ethical considerations

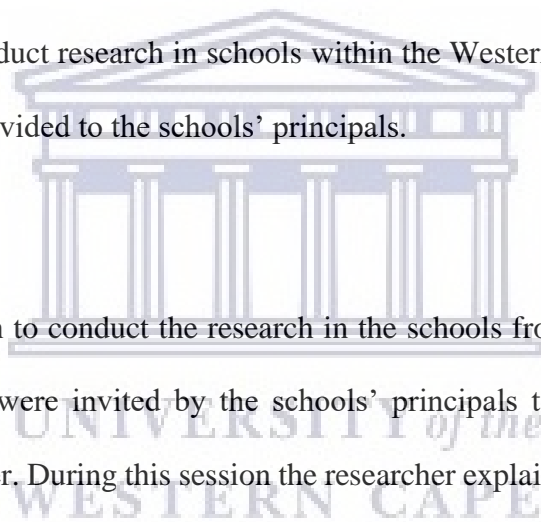
“Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors” (Vilma, 2018, p. 40). The current study obtained ethics clearance from the UWC Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC). Additionally, Vilma (2018) states that, “the essential ethical considerations in social research ethics remains professional competence, integrity, professional and scientific responsibility, respect for research participants' rights, dignity and diversity, and social responsibility of social researchers / scientists” (p. 40). Therefore, the following ethical aspects were considered in the execution of this study to ensure that the participants and all other stakeholders were protected from possible harm.

4.9.1 Permission to conduct the study

For this study, the researcher firstly obtained ethics clearance from the University of the Western Cape (UWC) HSSREC, and a clearance certificate was issued. Secondly, the researcher applied for permission to conduct research in schools within the Western Cape from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and the WCED granted the permission and issued the researcher with a letter stating the conditions of the permission. Thirdly, the researcher negotiated entry with the schools' principals and presented all the necessary documents about the study. These included the information sheet which outlined the purpose, aim and objectives of the study. Also, the clearance letter from the UWC ethics committee, the letter of permission to conduct research in schools within the Western Cape from the WCED, and consent form were provided to the schools' principals.

4.9.2 Informed consent

After obtaining permission to conduct the research in the schools from the school principals, the potential participants were invited by the schools' principals to a presentation session conducted by the researcher. During this session the researcher explained the purpose, aim and objectives of the study. This session was conducted to allow the potential participants to have knowledge about the study and to be able to make informed decisions about their participation in the study. After the session volunteers came forward and they were provided with documents about the study which included the information sheet and the consent form. Paul and Bandyopadhyay (2018) mention that, "there is an "informed consent form" or proforma, as well as a participant's information sheet. The purpose is to let the participant know the details of the research work-its purpose, principle, and methods" (p. 46). Before interviews could commence, each participant arranged a suitable and convenient time and venue with the



researcher, and on the day of each interview the participants gave back to the research their signed consent forms.

4.9.3 Voluntary participation

Participants in this study were well informed about the purpose, aim and objectives of the study prior to them participating, and their participation was voluntary. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study without any consequences should they feel that they were at risk or uncomfortable. According to Trochim (2020), in order to ensure that voluntary participation is maintained people should not be forced or pressured to take part in a study. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2020) mentions that, researchers should notify potential participants that they have a right not to take part in the study or if they decided to take part they still have a right to pull out their participation in the middle of the research process. Therefore, for the current study all the participants completed the research process and their decisions to take part in the study was voluntary as they were provided with information about the study. The participants were informed about their rights as participants in this study.

4.9.4 Confidentiality and the right to anonymity

The researcher ensured that confidentiality of the participants was maintained during this study. Confidentiality according to Paul et al. (2018) means that, "...what so ever information the researcher might have received during the course of his studies through interview or observation regarding the confidential aspects of any participant must be kept strictly secret..." (p. 46). The researcher in this study ensured that the real names of the participants were kept secret by using pseudonyms. The name of the schools in which they work were not revealed and any reference made to a school was made through the use of a number, e.g. school number 1 or school number 2 etc.

4.10 Limitations of the study

One very major limitation to this study was the presence of a number of concepts used by different researchers. These concepts which include: learning difficulties, learning disabilities and barriers to learning, parental engagement and parental involvement are used interchangeably by most international researchers. A huge pool of research studies, especially those based in the international contexts, often define these terms, and use them interchangeably. More so, the definition of these terms is often closely linked and very similar. This has added a layer of complexity in this study as it was initially difficult to differentiate between these concepts. However, the concept of learning disabilities is mostly used over learning difficulties. As a result, the researcher in this study found himself using these concepts interchangeably and this created a confusion on what exactly is the main concept of focus for the study.

Furthermore, this study explored the perspectives and the experiences of teachers regarding the involvement of parents in the process of including learners with learning difficulties. The limitation of this study was its one-sided perspective in describing factors affecting the lack of parental involvement in their children's education.

4.11 Self-reflexivity

Initially, when the idea to conduct this study came to my mind I had a question I wanted to be answered. This question was 'how learners with learning difficulties are assisted in schools so that they can succeed in their learning?' I wanted to understand what is it that is done by schools in townships to ensure that these learners are provided with their special needs. However, through obtaining the understanding of inclusive education policies I came to realise that the implementation of these policies is not only vested on the shoulders of teachers alone but

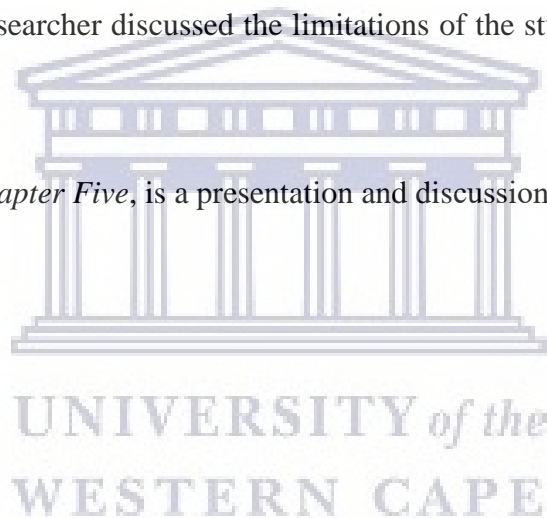
parents and caregivers should be working together with teachers in ensuring that their children are well included, and that inclusive education is implemented effectively. Hence, I had to look into the ‘abilities of teachers to engage parents in this process’. Many questions continued to flood my mind about this issue such as ‘what are the consequences of having or not having parental involvement in their children’s learning?’, ‘what are the challenges experienced by teachers in classrooms when including learners with learning difficulties?’ For me to obtain a clear picture of what is happening in schools especially in consideration of inclusive education, I decided to speak with teachers to understand their daily experiences, and most importantly their everyday practices towards the implementation of inclusive education policies. When I completed the data collection process I was then able to say to myself ‘I fully understand the realities in township schools and the experiences and challenges of teachers. When I interacted with the teachers during the interviews and after the interviews have been concluded, I realised that these interviews provided therapy for the participants as they had an opportunity to speak about their daily realities. I regard this study as a therapy for the participants because I could tell that they appreciated every moment of being listened to as they shared their heart-felt experiences regarding their daily struggles in their quest to implement inclusive education.

4.12 Summary of this chapter

In this chapter the chosen research design, phenomenological design, and the research approach, qualitative approach was described. The population and sampling, type of sampling which is purposeful sampling, the research setting and pilot study were defined using the literature. The qualitative data collection method, semi-structured interviews, used during the data collection phase was also clarified. Semi-structured interviews were most appropriate to gather information that assisted in answering the research question and to fulfil the aim and

objectives of this study. Through this method the researcher was able to elicit the information from the participants that enabled the researcher to understand the essence of the participants' perspective regarding the inclusion of children with learning LDs in mainstream schools, and the teacher' abilities to engage parents in their quest to assist those learners who experience difficulties in their learning. The means of data analysis including the application of six steps of qualitative thematic analysis as identified by Creswell (2014) have been defined. The researcher further discussed rigor and trustworthiness, principles of ethics consideration that were considered in this study have been discussed separately and these include: permission to conduct research, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the right to anonymity. Finally, the researcher discussed the limitations of the study and provided a self-reflexivity.

The following chapter, *Chapter Five*, is a presentation and discussion of this study's findings.



CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This study was an investigation into teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties. The data was collected through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Ten (10) participants who teach in mainstream primary schools were interviewed. Therefore, in this chapter the results of the thematic data analysis are presented and findings discussed. The objectives which guided the achievement of the aim of this study were as follows:

- Explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations.
- Explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children.
- Explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment

5.2 Demographic data of participants

The following table provides a profile of the participants. These characteristics include gender, years of teaching experience, grade teaching, and school subjects. Ten (10) participants who work as teachers in two primary schools in the Nyanga township in the City of Cape Town were interviewed through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 5.1: Demographic data of participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	Teaching Experience (Years)	Grade (teaching)	School Subject(s)
Mr. Peter	Male	24	7	isiXhosa, Social Sciences & Technology
Miss Bridget	Female	21	6	Natural Sciences & English
Miss Angelina	Female	22	7	English
Miss Pricilla	Female	23	6	Social Sciences
Miss Edna	Female	18	6	Maths, Life Orientation & Languages
Miss Cecelia	Female	20	7	Natural Science & English
Miss Patricia	Female	22	7	Maths, Science & Languages
Miss Eunice	Female	22	7	Maths, Life Orientation & Languages
Mr. John	Male	23	6	Languages
Mr. George	Male	21	6	Maths, Science & Languages

5.2.1 Gender

The demographic table (Table 5.1) of the participants indicate that there were more female participants (n=7) than male participants (n=3) in this study. At the first school, School Number One, where the interviews were conducted there was only one male participant out of five (5) participants. The second school, School Number Two, had two (2) male participants out of five (5) participants.

5.2.2 Teaching Experience

The demographic information indicates that one participant has taught for twenty-four years, two participants have twenty-three years teaching experience, three participants have taught for twenty-two years, two participants have taught for twenty-one years, one has taught for twenty years and one has taught for eighteen years. Therefore, the average years of teaching experience of the participants in this study during the time of data collection is twenty-two years.

5.2.3 School Grade

The participants interviewed for this research study were teachers who taught Grade 7 and Grade 6. Five participants taught Grade 7 and five participants taught Grade 6.

5.2.4 School Subjects of Specialty

Seven participants had languages, English and isiXhosa, amongst their subjects of specialty. Four participants had Mathematics as one of their subjects of specialty. Two participants had Science amongst their subjects of specialty. Two of the participants taught Social Sciences as their subject of specialty. Two participants taught Natural Sciences as one of their subjects of specialty. It was two participants who mentioned Life Orientation as one of their subjects of specialty. One participant mentioned Technology as one of their subjects of specialty. Seven participants had more than one subjects of specialty.

5.3 Presentation and discussion of findings

A number of themes and sub-themes which provide a solid background and a holistic understanding into the topic of 'teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties' have been outlined, defined and described based on the lived experiences of the participants of this study. The findings of this study are discussed under each main theme which has sub-themes. The discussion is done with the integration of the literature and after a complete discussion under each main theme, the bio-ecological systems theory is incorporated into the discussion to encapsulate the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework which underpinned this study. Table 5.2 below provides these themes and sub-themes.

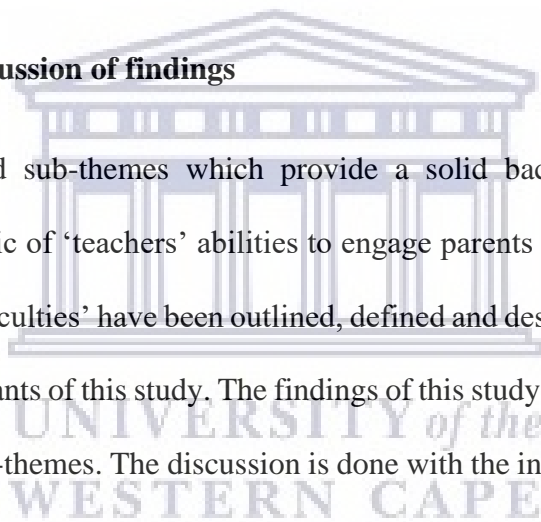


Table 5.2: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Identifying Children with Learning Difficulties	Sub-theme 1.1: Writing skills Sub-theme 1.2: Reading skills Sub-theme 1.3: Disruptive behaviour
Theme 2: Possible Causal Factors of Learning Difficulties	Sub-theme 2.1: Poor educational foundation, Sub-theme 2.2: Consumption of alcohol by mothers during pregnancy
Theme 3: Challenge of implementing inclusive education	Sub-theme 3.1: Time consuming process
Theme 4: Means for ensuring inclusion in a classroom	Sub-theme 4.1: Allocation of suitable tasks Sub-theme 4.2: Giving individualised attention
Theme 5: Obstacles affecting the inclusion process	Sub-theme 5.1: Parents' denial Sub-theme 5.2: Lack of human resources Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of parental involvement and cooperation
Theme 6: Strategies employed by teachers to enhance parental involvement	Sub-theme 6.1: Parents' meetings Sub-theme 6.2: Written and telephonic communications
Theme 7: Social Work services in schools	Sub-theme 7.1: Current challenges with Social Work Services in township schools Sub-theme: Social Workers can provide counselling and refer learners Sub-theme 7.3: Social Workers can focus on the home circumstances of learners

5.3.1 THEME 1: IDENTIFYING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The findings of this study show that learners with learning difficulties (LDs) are observed through the problems they experience with writing, reading and attention. Lopes and Crenite (2013) reveal that, learning difficulties can be identifiable through the recognition of serious problems in listening, speaking, reading, writing and analytical skills. According to Büttner

and Shamir (2011), the most important skills that any person in society needs to develop include reading, writing and calculation skills. These are skills that have to be developed in school. A large number of learners find it difficult to develop their reading, writing and mathematical skills and this is a problem that needs not be ignored. The findings of this study indicate that children with LDs are found to be disruptive in classrooms as their attention span is too short and they are said to be quick to lose interest in classroom activities. Lopes and Crenite (2013) mention that, most of the time LDs are identified during the school years of a child and children's experiences of LDs lead them to become unruly due to the fact that most of the time schools regard these problems as emanating from inattentiveness of learners.

Therefore, writing skills, reading skills and destructive behaviour are characteristics of learners with LDs and can be classified according to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as the characteristics influenced by their biological factors. These characteristics have an impact on their learning, hence affecting their interaction with their social environments such as the school and the home (Allen & Marotz, 2010). The following three sub-themes: *Sub-theme 1.1: Writing skills*, *Sub-theme 1.2: Reading skills* and *Sub-theme 1.3: Disruptive behaviour*, provide a discussion of the main findings of the above-mentioned theme: *Theme 1: Identifying children with Learning Difficulties*.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Writing skills

The findings of this study show that learners with LDs exhibit signs of being challenged in their writing. The written work of learners who exhibit symptoms of LDs has been described by the participants as difficult to understand as they would confuse vowels and consonants. As a result, what they will eventually write would be difficult to comprehend. The following two quotes from the participants explain this further.

“...they will confuse vowels or alphabets just something that is not together... but mostly it’s when they are writing, they write something that doesn’t come together.” (Mr Peter)

“...when you read what they have written you’ll realise that it’s difficult to understand what they have written...” (Miss Bridget)

Rodriguez, Grunke, González-Castro, Garcia and Álvarez-Garcia (2015) in their study also found that, the difficulties of children with dysgraphia is to produce written work and this comes from their inability to write words correctly. Brown (2019) further substantiate this finding by reporting that, the written work of a child with dysgraphia is very difficult to read especially when they have to write on their own. Moreover, Brown (2019) shares that when learners with LDs copy from any source they might be able to write, however there would be many spelling errors. According to the National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASSET) (2018) children with learning difficulties lack the ability to link sounds of the letters used to form words with the letters themselves. Additionally, they may lack the ability to recognise words and remembering them, and they may also lack the ability to identify words from the surrounding text.

Additionally, the findings of this study reveal that, sometimes learners with LDs would struggle to write words even when they are asked to copy them from the board. The participants described these learners as being unable to take what they see from the board and write it correctly as they see it. Most of the time learners with LDs would even take long to finish their written tasks. The following two quotes provide a clarification of this description.

“...they cannot copy from the board even if it’s corrections, you ask them to write and copy exactly what is from the board they cannot copy anything from the board.” (Miss Angelina)

“...another one will be slow in writing, as these learners do not only have challenges in reading and writing, but also struggle with comprehending information.” (Miss Cecilia)

These findings are supported by Brown (2019) when saying that, the indications of learners with dysgraphia “include illegible writing, significant spelling difficulties and struggle to copy written words” (p. 4). At the same time, Miller (2016) reveals that, children with dysgraphia have vague, crooked and uneven handwriting. Most of the time, their handwriting has varying shapes with the mixture of upper and lower cases or even the mixture of cursives and print styles. They would be very slow when writing or copying information. Team (2019) mentions that, children with dysgraphia have trouble in forming letters which is the main reason they have poor spelling skills. They may be slow in their writing process and this affects how they express themselves in writing.

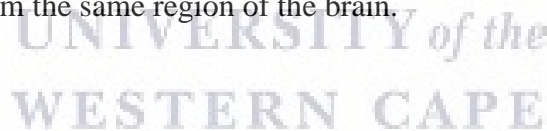
5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Reading skills

The findings of this study reveal that, some learners with LDs are struggling to articulate words and sentences as they see them on written material. They would fail to attempt to read any written pieces. The reading skills of these learners have been described by the participants as poor. Their reading does not flow as they would struggle to read words within sentences comprehensibly to create sensible stories and conversations. This is described by the following quotes from some of the participants in this study.

“...when we do orals and you ask them to read the learner will stand there forever unable to read.” (Mr. Peter)

“Even if you ask them to read, they would read one or two letters, they can’t read the full sentence, they read words one each at a time...” (Miss Bridget)

These findings are consistent with the findings by TeensHealth (n.d) when stating that, the main problem with reading difficulties (dyslexia) is trouble to recognise basic sounds of speech. Therefore, children with reading difficulties will struggle to connect letters with their sounds and to combine sounds to create words. The Understood Team (2020) mentions that, those with dyslexia are unable to read smoothly, they read slowly and make a number of mistakes while they are reading. Nijakowska (n.d) reveals that children with reading difficulties (dyslexia) experience “reading difficulties which are caused by slow and/or inaccurate word-recognition resulting from problems in segmenting words into sounds and problems in smooth conversion of letters into sounds” (p. 7). Nijakowska further states that, “dyslexic learners can be slow readers, or they can read inaccurately, or their reading can be both slow and inaccurate” (p. 7). Angelelli, Marinelli and Zoccolotti (2010) indicate that, children with writing difficulties (dysgraphia) were found to be similarly challenged to identify the words they spelt incorrectly, which is an indication that at the same time as they experience writing difficulties they experience reading difficulties (dyslexia) which could be an indication that both dysgraphia and dyslexia originates from the same region of the brain.



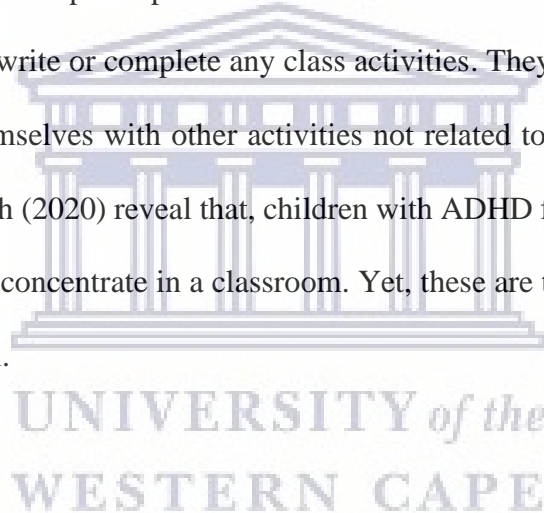
5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Disruptive behaviours

The participants stated that, the classroom becomes very boring for most of learners with LDs, as a result they will resort to occupying themselves by playing around with their peers and even going in and out of the classroom while the teacher is busy teaching. Most of the time, they will play around the classroom paying no attention to what the teacher is doing and they would not be participating in learning tasks. This behaviour has been described through the following quotes.

“...you would be giving instructions in class and notice that they are talking disturbing those who are writing...” (Miss Bridget)

“...they get bored and there’s another one next to them trying to concentrate, so they’ll end up disturbing those next to them and others will want to react and then there’ll be a chaos in the classroom.” (Miss Pricilla)

The findings of this study are supported by Felimban (2013) and Mohamed and Laher (2012) when saying that, a big number of children with learning difficulties would show signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and will normally not pay attention in class. They would disturb the functioning of the classroom as they are always talkative. This behaviour interferes with their participation in classroom activities as they would not write when they are required to write or complete any class activities. They would continue playing with others or engage themselves with other activities not related to what is being done in a classroom. Segal and Smith (2020) reveal that, children with ADHD find it difficult to sit still, to listen attentively and to concentrate in a classroom. Yet, these are the skills they need to go through their day at school.



The findings as per *Theme 1: Identifying children with Learning Difficulties*, has outlined the characteristics of learners with LDs. Therefore, from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory these are characteristics that have to do with the *person* element of the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model. The *person* element acknowledges that the child’s biological characteristics such as their physical and mental nature do affect the interaction between them and their significant others within their social environment which comprise their home, school and neighbourhood (Bronfenbrenner et al., 2006). Therefore, poor writing skills, poor reading skills and disruptive behaviour are characteristics of individual learners (person) with LDs as individual persons and can be classified according to

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as the characteristics influenced by the biological nature specific to them as individuals. These characteristics have an impact on their learning as they affect their interaction with other people within their social environment (the *process* element of the PPCT model) such as teachers and parents, in return affecting their learning and development (Allen & Marotz, 2010).

The bidirectional interactions between the person, other people within their social environment and with the physical environment itself, are referred to by Bronfenbrenner as the proximal processes. Taylor and Gebre (2016) reveal that, "examples of proximal processes include parent-child activities, teacher-child interactions, and instruction and participation in educational activities. In teacher-student relations, proximal processes may involve instructional time and the creation of relations that promote student discovery and competence" (p. 206). Tudge, Merçon-Vargas, Liang and Payir (2017) articulate that, "in the case of a child who is struggling with the demands of school, engagement in positive activities, and interactions with teachers and peers will reduce the likelihood of school failure. These proximal processes serve as a means to protect this child from the negative consequences of those early struggles" (p. 47). Therefore, a learner's (person) biological characteristics can affect how teachers in classrooms interact (process) with that learner who experience these difficulties. Depending on whether the interactions (process) are positive or negative, the learner's educational development would be affected accordingly. Therefore, the person characteristics affect the process of interaction between a learner with LDs and their teachers within classrooms.

5.3.2 THEME 2: POSSIBLE CAUSAL FACTORS OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

It was beyond the scope of this study to pin-point and discuss the causal factors for learning difficulties in children. However, the participants in this study offered their opinions about what they think could be the possible factors that result in some learners' experiences with difficulties in their learning. The findings thus indicate that one of the causal factors of LDs is the lack of a proper foundation in education. Another possible causal factor for LDs that emerged from this study are the possible effects of alcohol consumption by pregnant mothers. These possible factors are described by the following two sub-themes: *Sub-theme 2.1: Poor educational foundation* and *Sub-theme 2.2: Consumption of alcohol by mothers during pregnancy*.

5.3.2.1. Sub-theme 2.1: Poor educational foundation

The findings of this study show that there are learners who migrate to schools in the Western Cape from other Provinces, like the Eastern Cape, to continue with their education. The participants revealed that parents will claim that their children completed their schooling in the foundation phase, whilst they never even started school. This creates additional challenges for the teachers as these learners will experience difficulties in their learning as there is no educational foundation. This is clarified through the following statement made by one of the participants:

“...children from the Eastern Cape will be brought to Cape Town while never had started school and we'll be told that they were doing maybe Grade 5, 6, 7 or whatever Grade but all to find out some haven't started even with grade 1, 2 or 3.” (Mr Peter)

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings by Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2013) who indicate that, a child needs to develop his/her learning abilities well in advance during the

early years of life. These years are important for the child to develop mentally and gain reading and writing skills which become useful for his/her entire educational career. If this early development is lacking, the child is then at risk of experiencing learning difficulties as he/she grows up. According to UNICEF (2014), the education system needs to ensure that the success of children in primary school is taken seriously as it guarantees their success further in their educational careers.

The findings of this study have revealed that the issue of language, from Grade 4 onwards, makes it difficult for some learners to comprehend the majority of their school subjects. The participants mentioned that in Grade 4 learners in schools are introduced to English as a medium of instruction which becomes a challenge on top of increased workload. This is due to the fact that learners are expected to take more school subjects than in the foundation phase. The ability of some learners to learn will be slowed down, resulting in them not coping with the expected workload and the need to be competent in the English language as a medium of instruction. The following statement by one of the participants clarifies this phenomenon:

“...in Grade 1 to Grade 3 there are only four learning areas which are taught in isiXhosa but when they get to Grade 4 and up they get about ten learning areas which are all taught in English and the only thing they are taught in isiXhosa is their Home Language, and all this gets them with not enough foundation, so that makes them slow learners...”
(Miss Cecilia)

The findings of this study are similar with the findings by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2016) which indicates that, “the common practice in South Africa appears to be the use of local languages through Grade 3, with a transition to English in Grade 4. This is a common policy choice across Africa” (p. 114). UNICEF further states that, “the rush to English in lower grades, described above, only widens the learning gap, since it further decreases the child’s learning time in a language he or she speaks” (p. 114). Furthermore, Manyike and

Lemmer (2014) states that, in South Africa most learners who are not taught in their home languages perform poorly in their studies.

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Consumption of alcohol by mothers during pregnancy

The participants in this study made assumptions of the possibility that alcohol related syndromes might be the cause of LDs in some learners. The participants said that parents who drink while they are pregnant put their unborn babies at risk of being affected by alcohol and end up having developmental problems which can include poor brain development. The underdeveloped brain is assumed to be the possible cause of LDs in some learners. Two participants have been quoted as follows in this regard:

“...sometimes you’ll find out that the parent was drinking while they were pregnant then the child gets affected as a result...” (Miss Bridget)

“...a parent maybe was drinking when they were pregnant then a child would have those diseases related to alcohol.” (Miss Angelina)

These assumptions made by the participants in this study are consistent with the findings by Urban, Olivier, Viljoen, Lombard, Louw, Drotsky, Temmerman and Chersich (2015) when they discovered that there are high levels of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) in most of black communities in South Africa. They mentioned that there is a low rate of diagnosis of FAS and FASD due to the lack of awareness of the symptoms because the physical symptoms are mostly difficult to observe, and mental symptoms are also difficult to identify. Whitehurst (2011) further supports the findings of this study by stating that amongst the symptoms of alcohol related disorders, are mental, emotional and behavioural challenges. When children have mental challenges, they tend to struggle to

learn in the traditional ways of teaching and due to the subtleness of the characteristics of their deficits, they are normally left unassisted as they are seen as if they are normal children. Finally, Rangmar, Sandberg, Aronson and Fahlke (2015) also agrees with these findings by mentioning that children with FASD have mental disabilities which include brain damage, poor memory and affected social functioning.

Even though it has been assumed by the participants in this study that drinking alcohol during pregnancy could be one of the causes for LDs in children, there is no medical evidence to prove these assumptions for this study. Therefore, this is an area that requires further investigation through other studies as this is a topic beyond the scope of the current study.

Regardless, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory recognises the interactive processes that occur between a developing person and the significant others within their immediate social environment, such as the parents and teachers. The Bio-ecological systems theory refers to these processes as proximal processes (Krishnan, 2010). It was perceived by the participants in this study that, when pregnant mothers consume alcohol during their pregnancy, it is one of the ways in which they interact with their unborn babies and influence the development of their children prenatally. After-birth, the proximal processes continue, and the development of a child also continues. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) state that:

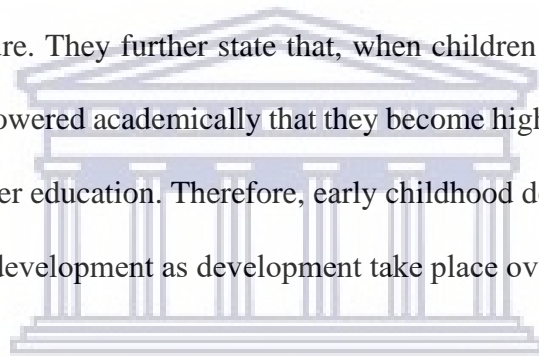
As children grow older, their developmental capacities increase both in level and range; therefore, to continue to be effective, the corresponding proximal processes must also become more extensive and complex to provide for the future realization of evolving potentials (p. 797).

Therefore, children's development is influenced by their parents before birth, and they continue to develop after birth as they learn from their parents at home. They grow to interact with other

people within the microsystem such as pre-school and basic education teachers where they learn other skills to prepare them for their educational development.

Additionally, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory acknowledges the effects of the *time* element of the PPCT model. The time is very important in the development of a child. It emerged from this study that when a child receives a solid educational foundation early in their school career, their social and educational development become better as they progress in their lives. Early childhood development prepares a child to learn better and minimise chances of learning difficulties as they grow. Garcia and Benero (2011) mention that, children need to develop their reading skills by the third grade so that they are able to learn and develop academically as they mature. They further state that, when children are able to read from an early age they will be empowered academically that they become high achievers when they get to high school and in further education. Therefore, early childhood development is the core of a child's future academic development as development take place over periods of time.

Moreover, the findings of this study show that the time of the exposure of a child to alcohol, before birth, causes issues in the development of their brain hence affecting their social and educational development long after they are born. According to Mardia, Bookstein and Kent (2013) "Babies in their mothers' wombs are vulnerable to chemical as well as physical challenges. One of the exposures that can particularly harm them is alcohol; and the organ that alcohol harms most seriously is the growing brain". (p. 12). Mardia et al., (2013) further state that, foetal alcohol syndrome is not diagnosed in small babies until the stage where signs of developmental problems become noticeable at around the age of seven or sometimes much later in their childhood. As the child grows changes take place and the effects of their exposure



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to alcohol present themselves as time lapses. Therefore, the development of a child is affected by different factors during different stages in life.

5.3.3 THEME 3: CHALLENGE OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The findings of this study reveal that teachers in mainstream schools have to provide constant support for those learners with learning difficulties to ensure that they are fully included. The findings revealed that teachers would need to plan their lessons for two different groups within their classrooms so that they are able to provide suitable tasks that would be manageable for learners who experience difficulties in their learning. This theme is described through *sub-theme 3.1: Time Consuming Process*.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Time consuming process

The findings of this study indicate that the process of inclusion is very time consuming. The participants mentioned that they have to prepare multiple lesson plans in order to be able to meet the diverse needs of the learners in their classrooms. The participants further mentioned that when they have to administer lessons and tasks they would still have to ensure that those learners who have learning difficulties get the assistance and special attention they need. This therefore means that time that would be normally spent in covering the prescribed syllabus would be consumed by the process of inclusion. Therefore, planning lessons for an inclusive classroom takes more time from the teachers. This is clarified by the following quotes:

“...sometimes you have to have your planning to accommodate those learners because you have to plan for both, so you have to do double planning for those with learning difficulties and those who are doing well.” (Miss Angelina)

“You as a teacher if you want to help them you have to in your planning plan according to the different groups you have in your classroom, because those with no challenges want to move forward and you’ll be stuck in one place because you’ve planned for a single group”. (Miss Pricilla)

The findings of this study are supported by the statement made by Gryphon House (2018) when revealing that alterations are made to the lesson plans or the classroom to meet the diverse needs of all learners within classrooms. This is done by creating different activities so that all learners in a classroom can be able to take part. Furthermore, Mariga, McConkey and Myezwa (2014) support the findings of this study by stating that, when teachers plan their lessons they think about the goals they want to achieve for the entire classroom and for individual learners who require special education. Classroom activities are tailored in such a way that learners with LDs are given activities that are suitable for their capabilities. Therefore, this allows all learners in a classroom an opportunity to participate in teaching and learning.

Moreover, the participants in this study mentioned that as teachers they will have to keep on repeating what they have already taught. This is due to the fact that those learners who experience learning difficulties would be left behind, especially if the teacher moves fast in his/her teaching. The following quotes from some of the participants clarify further:

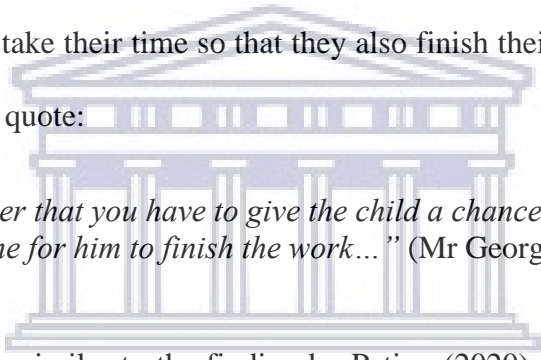
“...I teach the whole class but I must know I will spend more time explaining to them what they have to do... because we must spend more time on them that takes much more of our time in a classroom”. (Miss Bridget)

“...you have to keep on going back and you can’t move on fast and leave them behind...” (Mr John)

These findings are supported by Marirga et al., (2014) when mentioning that teachers need to understand that learners with LDs learn in small pieces at a time. Cicerchia (2020) further

supports these findings and states that learners with LDs receive and respond to information in a very slow speed. These learners are constantly left behind in a classroom. Therefore, they need more time to learn new information and teachers need to repeat their lessons or even adopt suitable teaching methods to ensure that a learner with LDs in a classroom learns effectively.

Furthermore, the participants in this study mentioned that it takes time for them as teachers to finish what they have planned for their lessons because learners with LDs will need more time to finish their tasks especially those tasks which require them to write. The participants stated that these learners tend to write slower than those with no learning difficulties, and teachers will have to allow them to take their time so that they also finish their class activities. This is explained by the following quote:



“...and then after that you have to give the child a chance to write and also it takes time for him to finish the work...” (Mr George)

The finding of this study is similar to the finding by Patino (2020) who reveal that children with writing difficulties are affected academically as they tend to be slow in their writing. As a result, they are always behind in their school work. They may get demotivated and avoid any task that requires them to write. Hamman (2018) further supports this by mentioning that children with writing difficulties may struggle to form letters, as well as putting appropriate spaces between words and punctuation. They may be seen as untidy and lazy writers due to their slow writing pace.

Therefore, the process of inclusion of learners with LDs take place in classrooms. According to Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory the classroom is the microsystem of learners. Learners with LDs experience social associations with their teachers and peers. These

associations influence the functioning of the classroom and the processes that take place within a classroom. Learning difficulties are one of the psychosocial factors that influence the interaction of teachers and learners with LDs within classrooms (Capurso, 2015). Additionally, Capurso (2015) states that, “teachers and pupils do actively change the classroom context in which they take part” (p. 36). Hence, the findings of this study show that the inclusion process of learners with LDs is time consuming, this is due to that teachers need to change their interaction and strategies to be suitable for the learning and development of learners with LDs. Consequently, the *process* element of the PPCT model as proposed by Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory do speak into the inclusion process of learners with LDs. This process element recognises the interaction between two or more people within a microsystem. The inclusion process is the result of the manner in which teachers interact with learners with LDs to maximise their learning and development. In classrooms teachers and learners interact with one another and the level of that interaction determines the quality of teaching and learning (Capurso, 2015). The nature of the interaction between teachers and learners is affected by the *person* elements, as proposed by the PPCT model, of each learner which may include “gender, age, health, intelligence and behaviour” (Taylor & Gebre, 2016, p. 206). In order for teachers to be able to meet the individual needs of all learners with LDs within their classrooms they need to consider the individual needs and capabilities of their learners. When they have this knowledge, they are able to plan and implement individual support plans (Taylor & Gebre) As the inclusion process of learners with LDs in classrooms is time consuming.

5.3.4 THEME 4: MEANS FOR ENSURING INCLUSION IN A CLASSROOM

The findings of this study reveal ways teachers utilise to ensure that learners with LDs are well included. As the teachers who participated in this study taught Grade 6 and 7, at times they

have to allocate tasks and activities to learners who experience LDs that are at the level of the former grades. There are times where teachers would have to provide individual attention to those learners who experience LDs so that they can also be assisted effectively in order for them to benefit from the teaching process. The sub-themes that clarify this theme include: *Sub-theme 4.1: Allocation of Suitable Tasks and Sub-theme 4.2: Giving Individualised Attention.*

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1 Allocation of suitable tasks

The participants in this study mentioned that as teachers they have to be attentive to the abilities of all learners in their classrooms so that they are able to include them effectively. When they see that certain learners cannot cope with the work given to the rest of the class, they give them work or activities which they think would be manageable for them. The following quotes clarify this further:

“...you give them activities you think the learners would be able to manage.” (Miss Angelina)

“...you need to separate them so that you can give those who are challenged tasks which are suitable for their abilities...” (Miss Pricilla)

The findings of this study are supported by Thakur (2014) when stating that differentiation in an inclusive classroom is a method of teaching and learning aimed at meeting the needs of learners with learning difficulties. It helps those learners with LDs to reach their maximum potential. Teachers normally apply different ways to teach content, use different styles to interact with their learners and set different goals for their learners. Spangenberg (2013) discovered that differentiation in teaching in a school meets the educational needs of all learners within classrooms as it puts into consideration the diversity that exist in learning styles of learners. The application of this teaching methods leads into better school achievement.

The participants in this study mentioned that normally they resort to giving learners with LDs work from the previous grades so that they are able to be engaged in activities suitable for their capacities. This is done to ensure that learners with LDs are not neglected and at the same time they do not leave the school having gained nothing. The following quotes provide an explanation in this regard.

“...I try to give them the work that is even suitable for the lower classes such as Grade 3 or 4... We would try to make it simple for them...” (Mr Peter)

“...these ones you give them their own work which is easy so that by the time others finish they can be able to finish so that they can also say I’ve done some thing or at least I know a certain thing...” (Miss Bridget)

“...a child would be in Grade 4 but you’ll notice that you need to do the work from Grade 1, because you are trying to bridge that gap...” (Miss Cecilia)

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings by Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor and Walker-Dalhouse (2012) where they discovered that adaptive or differentiated learning is a form of teaching used by teachers who have identified the different needs of their learners. It has been found to be effective in meeting the diverse needs of learners in classrooms. They further mention that most of the time teachers would have to alter their instructions on the spot and provide activities that consider the abilities of some learners in a classroom. This form of teaching is used to make sure that all learners who experience LDs in classrooms are included through the administering of suitable tasks based on their diverse needs.

5.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Giving individualised attention

In their quest to assist learners with learning difficulties the participants mentioned that they would give one-on-one attention to those learners who are struggling academically. This individualised attention may start out from group work where the teacher will group all those learners who experience LDs and further assist them. These findings are similar to the findings discussed in *Theme 3, under Sub-theme 3.1* above where it emanated that the process of providing these one-on-one sessions result into more time being spent in ensuring inclusion. This therefore, proves that inclusion tends to be a time-consuming process. This process was described through the following words from some of the participants.

“...you take all those who are challenged and put them together, and sit with them separately in their own group and what you’ll do you go back to the activities you’ve done before...” (Miss Bridget)

“...when you do group work you make sure that you polish those areas which you’ve noticed are the problem and give them an opportunity to write words and if you notice that they are still confusing and mixing-up the vowels then you show them individually...” (Miss Eunice)

Osewalt (2019) supports the findings of this study by mentioning that individualised attention is aimed at meeting educational needs of each learner. The purpose is to address a specific need at a given time. Some learners with LDs require that teachers teach them separately so that they can be able to gain an understanding of the content of a school subject. Willis (2020) adds that teaching is the process whereby teachers acknowledge that their learners possess different learning capabilities. Classrooms comprise of a variety of learners including those with learning difficulties. Therefore, it is important that teachers do not expect individual learners to learn effectively from the same teaching method. Teachers within inclusive classrooms have to utilise a variety of teaching methods to meet the needs of their learners.

The participants in this study mentioned that the individual learners who seem to need extra educational support, will be identified and given the special attention they need. Also, through one-on-one application, the participants mentioned that they are able to know the specific needs of each learner and that helps them to plan their interventions. The participants mentioned that learners improve from these individualised interventions. The following quote provide an explanation to these findings.

“...one-on-one will help you because that’s when you are able to see their specific challenges and sometimes you’ll notice that one child has always been challenged for the entire year but after you’ve done the one-on-ones you’ll notice that they bring out their potential, they start to write properly...” (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study are supported by Vasudevan (2017) when stating that, the provision of individualised learning is very effective in the education of learners with learning difficulties as it makes use of tailored teaching strategies and material to meet the needs and capabilities of specific learners. Vasudevan (2016) further mentions that the most commonly used form of individualised learning is tutoring which is used both at school and at home. Similarly, Bahçeci and Gürol (2016) discovered in their study that the academic performance of learners who received individualised learning improved as compared to those learners who did not receive individualised learning. According to Krishnakumar, Sukumaran, Jisha and Nair (2011) individualized learning is best implemented within the normal school curriculum so that learners with learning difficulties can be fully included. This is so that they are taught exactly the same subjects as their peers who do not have learning difficulties and it allows them to gain the same knowledge and skills. Krishnakumar et al., (2011) further discovered that individualized learning can improve the academic performance of those learners who experience learning difficulties, especially if it means that inclusion is done through the application of the same school curriculum ensuring full inclusion of those learners.

Therefore, to analyse the findings of this study through the lens of bio-ecological systems theory, regarding the means used by teachers to include learners with LDs, it is important to consider the context in which inclusion takes place. The bio-ecological systems theory recognises the influence of the environment (context) in which proximal processes take place. This study was conducted in schools in Nyanga township, which is one of the disadvantaged areas in the City of Cape Town. Based on the findings of this study, one of the factors that negatively affect the effective implementation of inclusive education is the lack of parental involvement. This means that the two microsystems, school and home, are not working together in strengthening inclusion. Therefore, inclusion of learners with LDs does not take place at the mesosystem. According to Taylor and Gebre (2016), mesosystem is the coordination of the microsystems. The manner in which these microsystems are joined together results into a partnership which is able to guide the development of a child. However, as the findings of this study show, the inclusion of learners with LDs solely takes place in a classroom context which is the microsystem. This is where teachers interact with those learners with LDs in the process of inclusion. Teachers continuously apply their strategies in classrooms to ensure that the process of inclusion is effective. “Effective interactions are those that take place regularly and over an extended period of time. The interactions are labelled *proximal processes* (Taylor & Gebre, 2016, p. 206)”. In classrooms, these processes occur when teachers take time to provide instructions to their learners and building positive working relationships with learners so that classroom environments are conducive for inclusion (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Teachers in classrooms use different methods to assist learners with LDs. They may tailor their teaching styles or apply learner specific methods to meet specific needs of each learner (Zainuddin, Halim & Zainuddin, 2018).

5.3.5 THEME 5: OBSTACLES AFFECTING THE INCLUSION PROCESS

The findings of this study revealed that parents of learners with LDs do not co-operate with teachers in their quest to assist learners with learning difficulties. The main problem is that many parents do not want to admit and accept that their children experience learning difficulties. Furthermore, the findings of this study show the unavailability of services provided by Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) teachers for Grade 6 and 7. This Theme is divided into three sub-themes which are as follows: *Sub-theme 5.1: Parents' Denial*, *Sub-theme 5.2: Lack of Human Resources* and *Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of Parental involvement and Cooperation*.

5.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Parents' denial

The participants in this study revealed that the lack of acceptance by parents of the reality that their children are experiencing LDs is an obstacle that hinders the process of intervening effectively to assist learners with LDs. When parents are informed by teachers about the difficulties that their children experience in school, parents choose to ignore that information and expect teachers to solve the problem on their own. This result in parents not doing anything to assist or work with teachers so that a plan to assist these children could be formulated. This then become a burden of teachers alone. The following are the words quoted from the conversations with the participants to provide an explanation to this finding.

"...they can't help them because they themselves haven't accepted it, when they send the child to school they think that the child will be cured." (Miss Angelina)

"...we do have challenges like those created by parents who don't want to admit that a child has those challenges." (Miss Bridget)

“...Some of them will know that their children have a problem but they refuse to accept that reality.” (Mr John)

Furthermore, the participants revealed that sometimes parents will take the information of their children’s LDs as a way of labelling and discrimination against their children. Parents would treat the possibility of having a child with LDs as a stigma towards themselves. As a result, they will not pay attention to the calls by teachers to work together to assist the child. This is described through the following quotes:

“These parents don’t even want to listen when we tell them that a child has a learning challenge and they always make us feel as if we are discriminating against their children...” (Mr George)

“...to them it’s like their children are being discriminated against and they always say that they never had a stupid child, so they just don’t want to accept it.” (Miss Patricia)

The findings of this study are similar to the findings by Logsdon (2020) who reveals that parents would have excuses to explain the learning difficulties experienced by their children as they refuse to accept that there are difficulties experienced by their children. They blame the teachers or children would be labelled as lazy which is seen as resulting in their poor academic performances. Chandramuki, Venkatakrisnashastry and Vranda (2012) also discovered that parents who discover their children’s learning difficulty ignore the effects of those difficulties on their children’s academic performances. They become worried, blame themselves, become depressed and loose hope. Parents develop negative attitudes towards their children and will continue to expect children to perform better at school despite knowing that there are learning difficulties experienced by their children. Fernández-Alcántara, Correa-Delgado, Muñoz, Salvatierra, Fuentes-Hélices and Laynez-Rubio (2017) also discovered that parents would

regard themselves as bad parents especially when they are unable to help their children with school work while their children are facing difficulties

5.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Lack of human resources

The participants in this study mentioned that currently teachers for Learners with Special Education Needs (LSEN) are not in schools on a full-time basis. This makes it difficult for those learners who need their services to receive those services fully. They stated that there is a need for at least one LSEN teacher to be resident in each school so that they can be able to have their focus on learners with learning difficulties of each school. This gap is described by the following statement from one of the participants:

“...if we could have an LSEN teacher based here at school because the one we have we are sharing with other schools...” (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study concurred with the findings of Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht and Nel (2016) which revealed that learner support teachers (LSTs) from the District Offices visit schools only one day per week and are normally responsible for a maximum of five schools per district. The College South Africa (2015) discovered that in South Africa teachers for learners with special educational needs (LSEN) are mostly found in special education schools and these schools are very expensive even though they are public schools. Alternatively, children who require the services of LSEN teachers could access those services from private schools which also charge expensive school fees. These schools charge these fees so that they are able to employ highly trained LSEN teachers. Additionally, findings by Adewumi and Mosito (2019) show that one of the obstacles to successful implementation of inclusive education in South African schools is that it is mostly carried out by teachers who are not trained as special education teachers.

The participants in this study further mentioned that as teachers they are struggling to meet the diverse needs of learners in their classrooms as they work alone. They have to focus on those learners with LDs and at the same time ensure that the other group of learners who have no learning difficulties are not neglected in the process. This proves to be difficult to do as there are no assistant teachers to provide support. They mentioned that the availability of the assistant teachers would intensify the process of inclusion. This is explained through the following statements by two participants in this study.

“The assistant teachers are needed because meanwhile I give special attention to those struggling learners my time is moving and the other group in class is also neglected, so if we could have assistant teachers here at school things would be better because when you do all this on your own there’s somewhere where it’s not happening properly because our time is very limited...” (Miss Pricilla)

“... while you are busy focusing on them you are neglecting the entire group because we don’t have the assistant teachers who would make sure that while you are paying attention to these few, would focus on the rest of the classroom...” (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study are supported by Cassim and Moen (2020) who state that the role of teaching assistants (TAs) is a very important one as teachers utilise TAs to meet specific needs within their classrooms. With the presence of teaching assistants in classrooms, teachers have more time to conduct individualised teaching and focus more on those learners who required extra educational support. Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett (2010) discovered that, in some cases, teaching assistants may be fully responsible for assisting learners who experience learning difficulties and in need of educational support while the class teacher would be responsible for conducting lessons for the entire classroom. According to The Open University (2020) teaching assistants normally work with small groups of learners who require extra educational support within classrooms and outside the classrooms. They assist

class teachers by attending to the learners with learning difficulties whom teachers are unable to give special attention.

5.3.5.3 Sub-theme 5.3: Lack of parental involvement and cooperation

The findings of this study indicate that the lack of parental involvement is a major obstacle to the inclusion of children with LDs. The participants in this study revealed that there is always poor attendance of parents' meetings. These meetings are always attended by few of the parents and this contributes negatively towards teacher-parent relations and there never an opportunity for these two parties to discuss issues concerning learners. The participants in this study further revealed that parents of learners with LDs are the ones who would not attend these meetings and this makes it difficult for the teachers to have constructive plans involving parents on how learners with LDs could be assisted through the collaboration of both parties. The following quotes from the participants provide an explanation of this finding.

"...when we call them to come here at school to monitor academic progress those who respond are the parents of those children with no challenges, those whom you really want to see will never come, so they just dump their children here at school." (Mr. Peter)

"Parents don't play their role; we would call them for parents' meetings but it would be very few of them who would come..." (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study are supported by the findings of Mavuso (2020) who conducted an evaluation study on the process followed by teachers in assessing the needs of learners with LDs. In her study Mavuso discovered that the Support Needs Assessment Form 1 (SNA1) completed by teachers and which required signatures of parents did not have those signatures to indicate that parents were involved in the process. This resulted to a conclusion that parents were not attending meetings with teachers as required and therefore there was a lack of parental

involvement in the process of inclusion. Monika (2018) contends that parental involvement is very important as parents need to constantly be in contact with their children's teachers and other education practitioners such as school counsellors to gain information of their children's development within classrooms. Interventions that need to be implemented for the purpose of meeting the needs of children should be planned and implemented with complete involvement of parents.

The participants in this study furthermore mentioned that parents are very reluctant to assume their role. When teachers suggest that parents would need to help their children at home so that there could be more ways to help the children, parents would refuse saying that they are not educated and they are not getting paid to do the job of teachers. The participants further mentioned that, parents would suggest that teachers must do their job and help their children deal with the problems they experience. This results to teachers being unable to ensure a holistic approach in the process of assisting learners with LDs as parents would not contribute in that process especially when learners are at home. The participants have described this through the following statements:

“You do means to try and involve parents and they'll tell us that they are not educated to deal with such children...” (Miss Bridget)

“...one other parent once said I send my child to you to help him so am not a teacher, I won't be able to send my child to you and yet I have to do your job...” (Miss Edna)

The findings of this study are supported by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) who reveal that it could be expected that when children experience LDs parents would be keen to be involved in their education. However, at times this is not the case as there could be disagreements between the teachers and parents about the difficulties experienced by children. Hornby and Lafaele (2011)

further states that parents might not accept the fact that their children are struggling at school and need assistance, as a result they would still expect their children to do well at school despite being told that there are learning difficulties. This then leads to more disagreements between teachers and parents about the role that parents should assume in helping their children at home. Jacobs and Govender (2020) adds that one of the barriers in achieving inclusivity in South African schools is the lack of community and parental involvement. Communities and families are not knowledgeable about inclusive education and they are still resisting to accept that learning difficulties exist. As a result, children with LDs do not receive the help they need from communities and families.

Therefore, the bio-ecological systems theory emphasizes the importance of the role played by the interaction of two or more microsystems of the child in their development. A learner with learning difficulties needs the partnership of their school and their home where teachers and parents would work together in providing their support. The SIAS policy (DoE, 2014) states that:

When a learner has been identified through the initial screening as being vulnerable or at risk, it is the responsibility of the teacher to assume the role of a case manager, driving and coordinating the support process. The parent/caregiver and the learner must be involved throughout in the decision-making process of the SIAS (p. 24).

The Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) mentions that, for the implementation of inclusive education:

Partnerships will be established with parents so that they can, armed with information, counselling and skills, participate more effectively in the planning and implementation of inclusion activities, and so that they can play a more active role in the learning and teaching of their own children, despite limitations due to disabilities or chronic illnesses (p. 50).

In this regard, there is a need for a strengthened collaboration between the school and the home in the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties. The school and the home are the

micro settings of learners and their collaboration could result to the effective intervention processes for assisting learners with learning difficulties. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory refers to the interaction of two or more micro settings of an individual as their mesosystem. Houston (2017) mentions that:

The meso-system charts the combined influence of each of the child's micro-systems on her development. What is more, it represents those activities and roles that overlap across the range of micro-systems... Yet again, the meso-system might signify weak or tenuous relationships or even an absence of connection (p. 4)

The findings of the current study reveal that the interaction between teachers and parents is very weak, hence the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties is not so successful.



5.3.6 THEME 6: STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY TEACHERS TO ENHANCE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The findings of this study show many initiatives that teachers would take in trying to engage parents in their children's learning. They write letters to the parents, make phone calls and even send invitations with the learners to invite parents to school to discuss their children's academic progress. However, all these means would normally yield no results as many parents would not heed all those calls and invitations. These findings are discussed in detail in the next two Sub-sections: *Sub-theme 6.1: Parents' meetings and Sub-theme 6.2: Written and telephone communications, below.*

5.3.6.1 Sub-theme 6.1: Parents meetings

The participants in this study revealed that parent meetings are held at the beginning of each year to allow teachers and parents to meet and for the parents to get to know the teachers. This

is done with the hope that good working relations will be built to make future contact and communication possible. Other meetings would be called to monitor the progress of learners with parents and an opportunity for teachers to highlight any challenges that some learners might have shown during the course of a specific school term. Some of the participants described the purpose of these meetings in the following way.

“...we have the first meeting, the first meeting is the most important meeting, because it’s the first meeting that’s where you get to know the teacher of the child...” (Miss Bridget)

“We call meetings and show them the books and ask them if they do see that the child has a challenge...” (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study are supported by Ranjan (2018) who states that meetings between teachers and parents help the two parties to communicate their knowledge of the child with each other. The information shared during these meetings help both the teacher and the parent to be able to identify areas that need special attention that can hinder the learning of a child. Both parties are able to plan and implement interventions for assisting the learning of the child. Ranjan (2018) adds that parents and teachers use their meetings to discuss social aspects of the child that affect his/her learning. Overall, teacher-parent meetings are a great opportunity to build the necessary partnership that will contribute in meeting the educational needs of a child.

Brackett and Brackett (2020) further support the findings of this study and mention that parent-teacher meetings are vital as teachers get an opportunity to inform parents about the strengths of their children at school. Teachers share areas where parents need to help so that their children’s performance at school could be developed further. They further mention that these meetings should be used to build strong working relations between parents and teachers which

would contribute to the academic achievement of children. Additionally, Lemmer (2012) reiterates that teacher-parent meetings are vital events where teachers and parents can build partnerships for working collaboratively. Parents are informed about areas in which their children face difficulties in their learning and teachers can initiate parental involvement to address those difficulties. Teachers get a chance to praise outstanding academic performances and social behaviours of their learners in front of the parents. Therefore, this is a tool that should be reinforced and practiced regularly.

5.3.6.2 Sub-theme 6.2: Written and telephonic communications

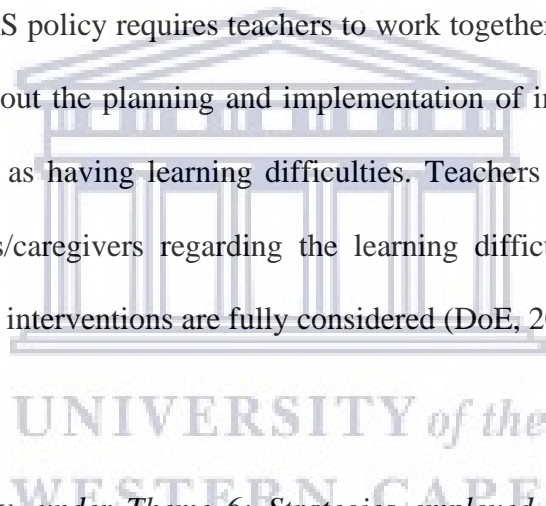
The participants in this study revealed that as teachers they would provide information about the progress of learners by writing letters to their parents. An invitation to the school will be made for the purpose of finding ways to assist learners who experience learning difficulties. If these calls are not honoured by some parents, then the teachers would make phone calls to do further follow-ups and to negotiate meeting times. However, parents would not show a willingness to meet and would offer apologies related to work responsibilities. Two participants in this study described this in the following way.

“What we do we write letters to the parent, after exams we write letters to every parent of children who did not do well... but if the parent didn't come we do follow up with phone and tell them that they are needed at school and they will say that no Miss I'm working I don't have any chance to come to school...” (Miss Bridget)

“I write a letter, I call, and I also have a WhatsApp group where I would say check the homework... but children will come back and say: my mother forgot or she said she was lazy to help me...” (Miss Edna)

These findings are consistent with what is mentioned by Waterford (2019) who contends that it is very effective to communicate with parents through written letters as this immediately makes parents feel well informed about the activities taking place in school. This form of

communication creates an impression that teachers respect parents and it is a good source of information to remind parents of any events that still needs to be attended to. Teachers are able to create a filing system where they keep records of communications between the school and parents. Additionally, Kraft and Dougherty (2013) reveal that making phone calls to parents “...provide parents with detailed information about their child’s academic progress and behavior that has not been filtered by students. Students may then become more accountable at home for their actions and efforts in school” (p. 27). However, Olmstead (2013) mentions that, one of the barriers to communication between teachers and parents are busy schedules where parents would be working and would not have time to go to school to meet with teachers. With this in mind, the SIAS policy requires teachers to work together with parents/caregivers in the decision making about the planning and implementation of interventions for learners who have been identified as having learning difficulties. Teachers have to ensure that the knowledge of the parents/caregivers regarding the learning difficulties experienced by a learner, and their views on interventions are fully considered (DoE, 2014).



The findings of this study, *under Theme 6: Strategies employed by teachers to enhance Parental Involvement*, indicate that, township school teachers experience a lack of parental involvement in the education of learners. Teachers in township schools often try different activities to strengthen the involvement of parents, especially parents of learners with learning difficulties. However, their means normally would not yield any positive results as most parents would not respond to any form of strategies to engage them in assisting their children. Consequently, this results into weak interactions between schools and homes which are both microsystems of learners, hence the learners’ *mesosystem* is very weak. This makes it difficult for teachers to plan and intervene effectively when a learner has been identified as in need of educational support. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) the processes that take place in one

microsystem affect processes in another as long as the developing person is involved in both. In this regard, the lack of parental involvement in a child's education, especially one with LDs, will affect how teachers at school respond and meet the needs of that particular learner. This then goes back to the *process* element of the PPCT model. The process which teachers follow in a classroom to assist and meet the educational needs of a learner with LDs would be very affected by the relationship between the teachers and the parents. Therefore, the influence of the mesosystem of a learner with LDs is very important in their educational development.

5.3.7 THEME 7: SOCIAL WORK SERVICES IN SCHOOLS

The findings of this study show that there are challenges in accessing the services of school social workers. Also, this study discovered the role that school social workers can assume within township schools may aid the inclusion process. These have been divided into three sub-themes which are: *Sub-theme 7.1: Current challenges with Social Work services in township schools*, *Sub-theme 7.2: Social Workers can provide counsellors and refer learners*, and *Sub-theme 7.3: Social Workers can focus on the home circumstances of learners*.

5.3.7.1 Sub-theme 7.1: Current challenges with Social Work services in township Schools

The participants in this study revealed that one school social worker usually serves a number of schools within a district. This leads to ineffectiveness of their service provision in those schools. The numbers of children who need these services are huge, thus making it impossible for all of them to receive services from a school social worker. At the same time, the school social workers are unable to carry the workload as they normally have to attend to a big number of cases. The following quotes from two of the participants in this study provide a description in this regard:

“...currently what is happening is that we have one social worker for a number of schools and that doesn't make any difference because they also become overwhelmed, there are too many of these children...”
(Miss Bridget)

“Even if it's one social worker based in one school would be better because if a social worker has to work with a number of schools that leads to him/her failing to handle the workload...” (Miss Edna)

The findings of this study are supported by reports of an online article by Petersen (2016) who states that in 2016 the Department of Basic Education provided six school social workers for the entire area of the Metro Central in the City of Cape Town. The six school social workers served more than 200 schools and one school social worker was responsible for serving between thirty to thirty-five schools. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2010) school social workers are often responsible for a number of schools which then require them to move in between communities. Vergottini and Weyers (2020) add that, considering the seriousness of the social issues faced by learners in South African schools, the only services that can meet the needs of learners in schools are services that can only be provided by school social workers. However, at the moment those needs are not adequately met as the number of school social workers cannot be able to service all learners in need of their services.

5.3.7.2 Sub-theme 7.2: Social Workers can provide counselling and refer learners

The findings of this study indicate that some learners with LDs exhibit signs that they are experiencing social problems in their lives and the teachers are unable to find time to attend those emotional struggles. A school social worker in this regard would be the first point of referral where they can investigate the factors leading to the learners' challenges. They can also link learners with other resource centres where they can assess services to meet their social

needs. This would also assist teachers not to neglect their duties in classrooms by focusing on individual learners with emotional challenges. The following two quotes from two of the participants in this study provide an explanation for this finding.

“...if there is a social worker you will be able to make a request that the social worker investigates what you notice, and most children become more open to social workers because most of the time they are reluctant to open up to the teachers...” (Miss Pricilla)

“It’s them who can refer these children because us as teachers we can’t even tell what is the real problem with the child... So, a social worker would be able to refer these children to relevant professionals who know better about these problems or refer them to psychologists to diagnose the problem...” (Miss Cecilia)

The findings of this study are similar to the findings of van Sittert and Wilson (2018) who discovered that school social workers assume a major role in supporting learners at individual level and on group level. They provide psychosocial support for learners who face learning difficulties resulting from emotional factors. van Sittert and Wilson (2018) add that, school social workers work in teams with other professionals to further strengthen the support they provide for learners. Vergottini (2019) reveals in her PhD dissertation that, school social workers use their skills and strategies in providing psychotherapy to individual learners and their families. They can help learners deal with social challenges they experience within the school which can affect their learning. They use groups to offer educational programmes to assist learners and their parents to gain knowledge of certain social issues. Finally, Vergottini (2019) adds that school social workers can facilitate referrals of learners to needed resources and services outside the school.

5.3.7.3 Sub-theme 7.3: Social Workers can focus on the home circumstances of learners

The findings of this study show that many children are not necessary suffering from learning disabilities. However, their home circumstances affect their learning abilities in school. Some are not taken care of well from their families. Some come from child headed families where they are parents themselves. Therefore, school social workers would assume a vital role in addressing this kind of issues. This is described by the following quotes from some of the participants in this study.

“...there are cases where it might not be academic but like family problems that the child experience and sometimes you’ll find out that these kids they are mothers; they are fathers there are no parents...”
(Mr John)

“Others you will notice that they are reserved because of the background from home, parents are drinking over the weekend they are not sleeping, all of those things. They come to school with dirty uniform because no one cared about that...” (Miss Angelina)

The findings of this study are supported by an online article on PhD Essay (2020) which states that, learners from disadvantaged communities face a variety of social issues that cause learning difficulties. The issues they face in their lives lead to them not to take schooling as important as they would normally focus on dealing with those other social challenges they are facing. Therefore, their academic performances become severely and negatively affected. In this regard, Lakshmi (2014) identify a number of ways in which school social workers can intervene which include working with parents to gain an understanding on how to meet the needs of their children. They can advocate for families in schools so that schools are able to understand the effects of family circumstances on the learning of children.

The participants in this study articulated that as teachers they are unable to know and understand those social challenges that affect learners. This is where school social workers can help by conducting home visits to assess family circumstances to foster interventions. The following statements made by two participants in this study clarify this finding.

“...sometimes the reason that one child doesn't do well there's a problem back at home, then a social worker would be able to intervene from there, they will go and check what is happening at home and come back to give a report.” (Miss Bridget)

“...There are many things that are happening in these children's families that contribute to their failures in school. So, a social worker is able to conduct a full investigation about what is happening within the child's home environment...” (Miss Pricilla)

The findings of this study are synonymous with findings by White (2020) who mentions that, school social workers assist teachers and parents to recognise obstacles that cause learning difficulties in children. They work with learners who experience barriers that interfere with their learning and help them access resources that will help them mitigate the effects of those barriers. They work as a link between the school and the home to strengthen communication so that learners in need of support could be helped effectively from both sides. The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) (2015) reveal that the role of school social workers is to “focus on the student in the school environment and work collaboratively with principals and teachers to minimise the impacts of personal, family and school difficulties and, where possible, remove the barriers to learning” (p. 2). Additionally, The New York State School Social Worker's Association (NYSSSWA) (2016) mentions that, school social workers are able to identify all kinds of factors that affect the learning of children in schools. They are able to plan and implement intervention programmes to meet the needs of learners.

In consideration of the role of school social workers in the implementation of inclusive education, both the Education White Paper 6 and the SIAS policy have not provided a clear description of how the services of school social workers could be integrated within schools and their role in the implementation of inclusive education. The SIAS policy identifies the role of social workers and their services from an outside position, in communities, not as services that could be provided within the system of inclusive education (DoE, 2014). According to van Sittert and Wilson (2018), challenges do exist with school social work in South Africa and these include “...the fact that there are no guidelines regarding school social workers’ roles and responsibilities and that some school social workers in some provinces do not receive any support or guidance” (p. 17). As a result, van Sittert and Wilson (2018) recommended that the department of basic education needs to focus on policy development to guide the practice of school social work in South Africa. Therefore, the lack of a policy framework from the national level, that provides clear guidelines and the integration of social work services within the inclusive education system affects the implementation of inclusive education in township schools. Social workers would assist in a number of aspects, such as: the counselling and referral of learners with learning difficulties; the assessment of home circumstances, planning and implementation of interventions for all learners identified as being at risk of experiencing learning difficulties.

The National Department of Education is the *macrosystem* of all learners in schools. The policies developed at that level influence how their learning is structured by the Districts within the Provinces. Houston (2017) refers to the macrosystem as:

The enveloping, overarching sphere embracing culture primarily but also the polity and economy. It is the arena where social and political policy is formed... The macrosystem has a discernible influence on life options, choices and outcomes. Therefore, social policy must support and resource the carer if children are to succeed in meeting their potential. (p. 4)

While learners in schools are not directly involved in the development of policies by the Provincial and the District Departments of Education (the *exosystem*), those policies do affect how educational services are provided within their schools. Houston (2017) states that regarding the *exosystem*:

The person may not be a part of this system but nevertheless is affected by its influence... This system is therefore more distant from the subject and often takes on an institutional form that indirectly has a knock-on effect for the micro and meso-systems. (p. 4)

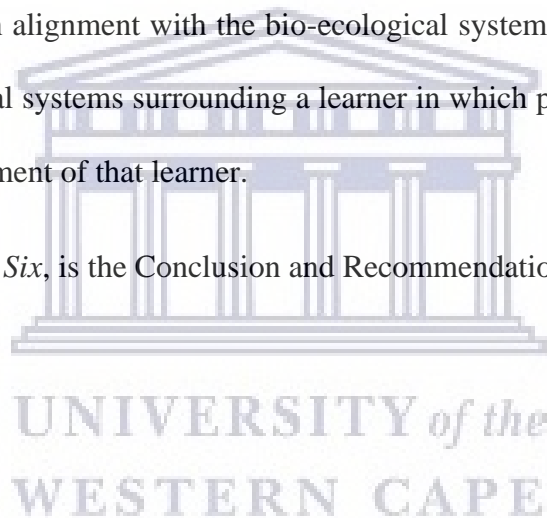
Houston (2017) mentions that, changes over time impact the events that take place within all other system of the ecology, and according to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological system theory, this is known as the *Chronosystem*. However, the implementation of inclusive education is not free from challenges as there are vital resources that are still lacking that could facilitate its implementation. Hence, this study, has looked into the role of school social work as a profession in this process and the current challenges that are still present within this practice. This study found that those challenges within the sector of school social work may have an impact on the implementation of inclusive education. Hence, there is a need for the National Department of Basic Education in South Africa to formulate a policy that will outline the role of school social work within the inclusive education system.

5.4 Summary of this chapter

The findings of this study were provided in this chapter. The seven main themes were derived from the responses of all the ten participants which were obtained during the semi-structured in-depth interviews. Each main theme was explained in such a way that it encapsulated the essence of the participants' lived experiences regarding the phenomena of identifying children with learning difficulties, engaging parents in the process of assisting their children with learning difficulties, means to assist learners with learning difficulties, challenges that hinder

the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties, and the role that could be assumed by school social workers in strengthening parental involvement in their children's education. All these aspects were described through the words articulated by the participants during the semi-structured in-depth interviews which were conducted with the purpose of fulfilling the objectives of this research study which included: to explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations, to explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children, and to explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment. The findings were discussed in alignment with the bio-ecological systems theory which provided an explanation of the social systems surrounding a learner in which proximal processes occur and influence the development of that learner.

The next chapter, *Chapter Six*, is the Conclusion and Recommendations for this study.



CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' abilities to engage parents to assist their children with learning difficulties. The study was conducted through the use of qualitative research approach. The findings are presented and discussed in chapter five through the application of Bronfenbrenner' bio-ecological systems theory. The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations.
- Explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children.
- Explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. There were seven themes that emerged from thematic data analysis. In chapter five a synthesis of the findings was conducted. The literature control, together with the bio-ecological systems theory, was applied in the process of synthesising findings.

6.2 Summary of the study

A brief summary of all the chapters in this study is provided below.

6.2.1 Chapter One: Introduction of the study

In chapter one, the background and the rationale of the study was provided. In this chapter a brief discussion of the theoretical framework and the problem statement was offered. The research question, aim and objectives, research approach and design of the study was introduced. Furthermore, the research methodology of the study was revealed were aspects including: population and sampling, data collection and analysis methods, trustworthiness and ethical considerations were discussed. Finally, the significance of the study and a definition of key terms was provided.

6.2.2 Chapter Two: Theoretical framework

In chapter two, an in-depth discussion of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory was provided. The relevance and the applicability of this theory into this study was explained.

6.2.3 Chapter Three: Literature review

In Chapter three, a review of the literature relating to inclusive Education in South Africa, the definition of inclusive education, the definition of learning difficulties and parental engagement. An analysis of inclusive education policies within the South African context and their guiding principles for implementing inclusive education was conducted.

6.2.4 Chapter Four: Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach. A phenomenological design was followed to gather information of the lived experiences of teachers in their quest to engage parents in the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with ten teachers from two primary schools in Nyanga township.

6.2.5 Chapter Five: Presentation and discussion of the findings

The findings of this study had shown that the lack of human resources is one of the major factors that brings about challenges for effective inclusion of learners with learning difficulties. Township schools do not have assistant teachers who can aid teachers in classrooms in this process. This study further found that, the means employed by teachers in their classrooms towards inclusion normally make the inclusion process very time consuming and as a result making it impossible to achieve inclusion. Therefore, there is a need for schools to be provided with additional support staff such as assistant teachers and LSEN teachers to improve the ability of township schools in meeting the special needs of those learners with Learning Difficulties.

Additionally, the lack of parental involvement in their children's learning has been discovered through this study as another main factor that hinders the inclusion process. This study discovered that parents do not cooperate with teachers especially when they are needed to assist their children who experience LDs. Teachers are failing to engage parents regarding the difficulties they observe about learners in classrooms as parents would not always be present during teacher-parent meetings. Therefore, this makes it difficult for teachers to plan any interventions for assisting these learners. This study found that, when parents are informed that

their children might be experiencing learning difficulties they find it hard to accept that reality. This leads to parents' denial about the struggles experienced by their children. The denial leads to parents' lack of involvement and as a result teachers are unable to engage them in the process of assisting their children.

Therefore, this study discovered that there is a need to empower communities and families about learning difficulties. In this regard, some of the recommendations made by the researcher is that there is a need for a programme that will be aimed at educating parents about learning difficulties. Another programme, is needed, that will provide parents/caregivers with psychosocial support so that they can be able to deal with their emotional struggles caused by the knowledge of their children's learning difficulties. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that there is a need to provide schools with more school social workers. Social workers have been said that they can assume a role in strengthening the cooperation and involvement of families with schools. However, currently the services of school social workers are not very effective as they are not readily available in township schools.

The following is a summary of the themes that emerged in this study.

6.2.5.1 Theme 1: Identifying Children with LDs

Under this theme, this study found that teachers in schools are able to identify learners with learning difficulties (LDs) within their classrooms. One of the characteristics that could be identified have to do with the writing skills of these learners. The participants in this study described that learners with LDs are normally experiencing difficulties when they are required to engage in written activities. The participants in this study referred to the struggles of learners with LDs to write words correctly as they would write words from back to front

resulting in meaningless written pieces. The findings of this study made a connection between difficulties in writing and reading of learners with LDs and the poor development in the language of instruction, English. The participants argued that most learners experience difficulties in their learning due to underdeveloped skills in the English language as it is the medium of instruction. This, according to the participants, is as a result of learners only being introduced to English language as a medium of instruction in *Grade 4* and this poses a challenge for many learners.

Furthermore, this study discovered that classroom activities and learning become disturbed as learners who experience LDs would reach a point where they show signs of frustration and boredom. As a result, they will try to ease these experiences by engaging in destructive behaviours such as playing around the class, going in and out of class and talking with their peers. All these become disturbances to the smooth functioning of the classrooms.



6.2.5.2 Theme 2: Possible Causal Factors of Learning Difficulties

In this theme, it was found that the lack of Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) for many children is a biggest contributor leading to LDs in children. The participants in this study stated that, if some children had not been exposed to ECDE they have missed the necessary brain development and an opportunity to develop their reading and writing skills. This put some learners at risk of being unable to cope with the demands of education once they begin with schooling.

The findings of this study further indicate that there is no in-depth knowledge about the causes leading to LDs. What is shown by this study is that teachers have their own opinions as to what they think might be the causes of LDs. These include the possibility of the effects of alcohol on the development of an unborn baby when a pregnant mother consume alcohol during this time. The participants in this study mentioned that there is a possibility that some learners have syndromes such as Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and this might be the cause to them experiencing difficulties in their learning. However, this study did not go far in its investigation about the effects of alcohol consumption to unborn babies by pregnant mothers.

6.2.5.3 Theme 3: Challenges of implementing inclusion education

It has been discovered through this theme that, the process of inclusion is very time consuming for the teachers in schools. This is due to the need for teachers to do double planning for the diverse groups in their classrooms so that inclusion becomes possible. However, this becomes a challenge as teachers would carry out their lessons on their own whilst focusing on meeting the needs of the different groups in their classrooms. This then consumes a lot of time in classrooms as teachers do not have assistant teachers to help them in carrying out the task of inclusion.

6.2.5.4 Theme 4: Means for ensuring inclusion in a classroom

The findings of this study under this theme indicate that, in order to ensure that learners with LDs are included, teachers employ a variety of means such as individualised attention and suitable tasks/activities to enhance the learning of all learners. Teachers administer differentiated tasks and activities for learners in their classrooms to ensure that even those who do not cope with some activities can have an opportunity to be engaged in tasks that could be manageable to them. This requires them as teachers to plan these tasks according to the knowledge they have about their learners' capacities. This becomes time consuming to plan for and to implement, as there are no assistant teachers to help in this regard. This study further revealed that the provision of individualised attention does improve the academic success for learners who have been discovered to experience LDs. The teachers acknowledged that learners with LDs who have been given individualised attention improve in their learning and development as they are able progress through the school grades.

6.2.5.5 Theme 5: Obstacles affecting the inclusion process

It has been discovered from this theme that, the lack of parental involvement in township schools is also a major contributing factor to the poor success of inclusive education. It was revealed that parents' lack of involvement in their children's education, which mostly emanates from their refusal to accept that their children might be having learning difficulties, makes it difficult for teachers to deal with the needs of these learners without the full cooperation and assistance from the parents.

Furthermore, this study found that, the main challenge into obtaining maximum inclusion or the implementation of inclusive education in township schools include the lack of human resources. The issue of the lack of human resources whereby schools do not have enough special educational needs teachers especially focusing on Grade 6 and 7. It has been discovered through this study that, even the LSEN teachers, who are assigned to schools are overloaded as they have to focus on a number of schools within their districts. Therefore, this makes it impossible to fully assist those learners in need of their services. The findings showed that, LSEN teachers do not spend all the days of the week in one school leading to inadequate provision and meeting of the special educational needs of most learners.

6.2.5.6 Theme 6: Strategies employed by teachers to enhance parental involvement

The findings of this theme indicate that, there are different means that teachers and schools utilise to encourage parental involvement. It was discovered that, parents would not attend parental meetings which are the main form of teacher-parent contact for the purposes of informing and discussing improvements and possible challenges observed by both teachers and parents. This limits the chances for the teachers to have any positive discussions with parents especially those parents of children who experience difficulties in their learning.

Additionally, this study found that teachers would write letters and use phone calls to try to connect with parents. However, these means are proving to be ineffective due to the fact that, even with the use of such means parents still do

not take time to meet with teachers. This study found that, parents would say they have no time to come to school due to commitments such as work. The study indicates that, children with learning difficulties are the ones who are negatively affected as their needs are normally not fully met. It further revealed that, teachers are not able to fully make proper follow-ups to deal with the lack of parental involvement as they are occupied by other responsibilities as per their mandate from the education department.

6.2.5.7 Theme 7: Social Worker services in schools

The findings of this study, under this theme, indicate that school social workers are not readily available to offer their services for schools. More school social workers are needed to offer their services and support for educational staff in schools. School social workers would assume duties like visiting families, providing counselling services for learners, linking those learners who require special educational resources with other organisations which can provide them with services for meeting their needs. The findings of the study indicate that all these duties would be well executed if school social workers could be readily available in schools. The school social workers could therefore assist to improve the abilities of teachers to engage parents to assist learners with learning difficulties.

6.2.6 Chapter Six: Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter six is the final chapter of this study and it provides an overall conclusion of the study. The recommendation to relevant stakeholders are presented.

6.3 Recommendations

Across South Africa (SA), there is an estimation of 68550 learners in schools who experience learning difficulties (Nel & Grosser, 2016, pp. 88-89). The SA democratic government introduced the first policy recognising the presence of this issue and the need for inclusive education to be introduced. *The Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education*, was introduced in 2001. This policy defined inclusive education. The Department of Education (2001) describes inclusion as follows:

- Inclusion is about recognising and respecting the differences among all learners and building on the similarities.
- Inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners.
- Inclusion focuses on overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs. The focus is on the adaptation of and support systems available in the classroom. (p. 17)

Therefore, there is a need for schools in disadvantaged communities to be well resourced so that they are able to fully implement inclusive education. Teachers in schools need to be equipped with skills so that they can effectively meet the special educational needs of those learners who experience learning difficulties.

Furthermore, in 2014, the Department of Education introduced the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy which prescribed the principles for the implementation

of inclusive education. According to the SIAS policy, after an assessment has been conducted and evidence found that a learner needs special education support, the following support services should be made available:

- Specialist support staff
- Assistive devices, specialised equipment and teaching and learning support materials
- Curriculum differentiation to meet the individual needs of learners (DoE, 2014, p. 8)

Additionally, it is important that teachers, parents and learners themselves work together in order to ensure that inclusion occurs effectively (DoE, 2014). However, the current nature of inclusive education in township schools in South Africa as per the findings of this study, provides evidence that the achievement of a complete and effective inclusion is hindered by a number of factors. These factors include the lack of human resources in schools, the lack of parental involvement, the lack of ECD education for many learners, and the late introduction of English language as the medium of instruction in township schools.

Therefore, in consideration of these factors, the following recommendations are put forward which could be implemented towards improving inclusive education for township schools in South Africa:

6.3.1 Recommendations to the National Department of Education and policy makers

- In cases where English is the medium of instruction, it should be introduced early in the foundation phase as one of the learning areas to ensure that learners develop their skills so that language does not become a barrier to their learning.
- Classrooms should have assistant teachers who will be able to give attention to those learners who seem to be tired of classrooms activities and occupy them with activities that will ease their boredom. This would allow the rest of classroom activities to proceed without disturbances. This would help those learners with learning difficulties to be able to be constantly given the attention they need and also have an opportunity to be engaged with planned and constructive activities that will take their minds away from what makes them bored in a classroom. This would eliminate destructive behaviour that usually emanate from boredom.
- Each teacher in a classroom should be working with at least one assistant teacher so that they can have more support to effectively implement inclusion.
- Early childhood education (ECD) should be encouraged for all children. Parents/caregivers in communities should be educated about the importance of ECD education.
- Grade R teachers should be equipped with skills to prepare children in this Grade for their school careers. Children enrolled for Grade R should be

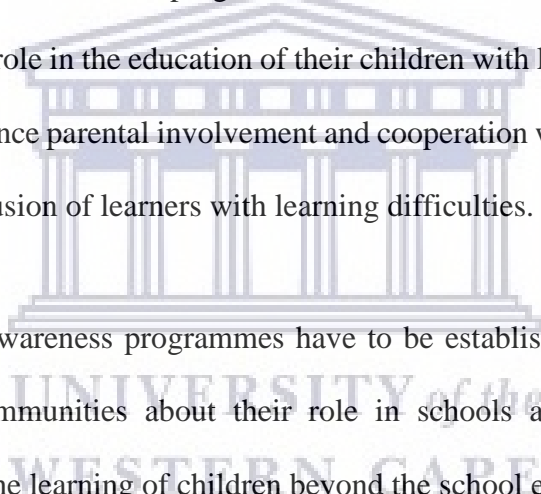
introduced to English language by reading books to them in English and educational stories to be told in classrooms as part of the curriculum.

- The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) needs to develop a programme that will be aimed at educating communities about the effects of alcohol consumption by pregnant mothers. This kind of a programme should be able to make links between alcohol consumption during pregnancy and LDs. Communities should be made aware of the causes of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome and other alcohol related syndromes that can negatively affect the development of a child. The WCED can collaborate with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and run community workshops to facilitate such a programme.
- Programmes that will provide parents of learners with learning difficulties with psychosocial support are needed, so that parents can effectively deal with any emotional challenges emanating from having a child with learning difficulties.
- Each school should have at least two resident LSEN teachers, one for the senior phase classes and one for the foundation phase classes so that more time could be provided for the focus on learners with special educational needs.
- There is a need for a policy that will clearly outline the strategy of the Western Education Department (WED) for integrating the social welfare sector into the inclusive education system, and what should be the role of social workers in addressing challenges faced by schools in the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties.

- Social workers should be made available in schools and they should work hand in hand with teachers in assessing, planning and implementation of interventions for learners identified to be at risk. The role of school social workers should be more of liaison between schools, families and communities.

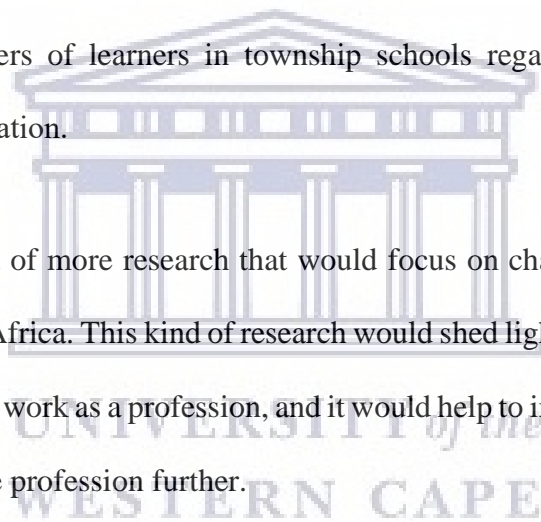
6.3.2 Recommendations to schools and teachers

- A programme should be established, and it should be aimed at educating parents/caregivers about learning difficulties in children and about the needs of children with LDs. This programme could also be aimed at educating parents about their role in the education of their children with learning difficulties. This would enhance parental involvement and cooperation with schools and teachers for the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties.
- On-going awareness programmes have to be established and implemented to educate communities about their role in schools and the parental role in extending the learning of children beyond the school environment.
- Schools need to strengthen the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and utilise their knowledge of the communities when there are challenges concerning parents' cooperation with teachers in dealing with any educational issues faced by learners.



6.3.3 Recommendations for future research

- Future research studies should focus on exploring causal factors of learning difficulties and the findings of such studies should be used to inform education practitioners, teachers and communities about those causal factors.
- A research study which will investigate the effects of alcohol consumption by pregnant mothers to unborn babies is needed.
- There is a need for a research study that will investigate the knowledge of parents/caregivers of learners in township schools regarding their role in their children's education.
- There is a need of more research that would focus on challenges of school social work in South Africa. This kind of research would shed light about the effectiveness of school social work as a profession, and it would help to improve service provision and develop the profession further.
- Future research needs to be focussed on the understanding of parents/caregivers, within townships of South Africa, of their role and the importance of their involvement in their children's education. Therefore, the perspectives of parents/caregivers need to be obtained in order to fully understand the factors that hinder the parents/caregivers from being involved in the education of their children.



- Furthermore, the scope of this study could not explore the possibility that Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) could be one of the causal factors of learning difficulties. Therefore, this calls for further research that can explore these possibilities.

6.4 Conclusion

The following three objectives were the initial objectives to be achieved through this study and were sufficiently achieved:

***Objective One:** Explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations.*

This study advanced the knowledge that there is a lack of teacher-parent collaborations. This is due to the lack of parental involvement in the education and development of their children. The role that could be played by these collaborations were described based on what could be happening when parents work together with teachers. These include planning and implementing strategies to assist those learners who have been identified as having LDs. Also, the participants in this study referred to the role that could be assumed by parents in the process of inclusion. This include ensuring that children are assisted at home with homework. However, as the findings of this study indicated, the involvement of parents is lacking, this therefore made the discussion about the role that could be played by teachers-parent collaborations in this process impossible. Therefore, even though it was difficult to explore the experiences of teachers about the ways in which learners with LDs could be assisted through teacher-parent collaboration, this study did achieve ***Objective One:** Explore the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding the ways in which learners with learning difficulties can be assisted through teacher-parent collaborations.* The participants in this

study provided their insight on how parents can assist their children with Learning Difficulties. Based on the findings of this study, there is a need to educate community members in SA townships about the importance of taking part in their children's education and the importance of maintaining contact with schools and teachers.

***Objective Two:** Explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children.*

Through this study, it has been discovered that teachers in township schools are facing challenges in obtaining the involvement and cooperation of parents. When parents are requested to meet and engage with teachers regarding difficulties that are faced by their children, such as LDs, most parents would not heed those requests. This study revealed that parents' meetings are one of the means that are utilised by schools to inform and engage parents about the progress of learners, learning difficulties faced by learners; and on findings solutions to problems that might exist concerning the learning of their children. However, these meetings are failing to serve their purpose as many parents would not attend them and teachers would not have that opportunity to engage with them as they would have wanted. This therefore results to parents not being well involved in the process of finding solutions to those difficulties that their children experience. This then leaves teachers to struggle on their own without the involvement of parents in the learning and development of their children.

Additionally, the use of written and telephonic communication by teachers has not yielded any positive results. Teachers would resort to these means of communication when they realise that parents do not attend parental meetings. However, this still does not contribute positively towards obtaining parental involvement. As teachers do not have any other means, besides the ones that are not yielding the desired outcomes, to fully obtain the cooperation of parents in dealing with challenges experienced by some of the learners, they therefore unable to engage

parents on any matters concerning the education of their children. This therefore deprives teachers of the opportunities to engage parents, hence parental involvement in their children's education and development is still seen as non-existent. Through these findings, this study has fully achieved ***Objective Two: Explore challenges experienced by teachers in the process of involving parents in the learning and development of their children.*** Therefore, it was made clear through this study that teachers in schools are not able to collaborate with parents within the process of inclusion despite their many means to engage with parents in the process.

Objective Three: Explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment.

The findings of this study indicate that, teachers in mainstream schools utilise a variety of means to include learners with LDs within their classrooms. These include the administering of suitable tasks which are seen by teachers as to be manageable for those learners who are struggling to cope in managing their Grade level tasks and activities. Furthermore, teachers would give individual attention to those learners who need special attention. However, the participants in this study stated that, all these means become impossible to maintain as the whole process of inclusion proves to be time consuming. When they are planning their lessons, they have to plan according to the diverse needs of their learners and this takes more of their time. Therefore, maintaining inclusion becomes difficult due to the lack of human resources such as assistant teachers and LSEN teachers who can aid throughout this process.

Additionally, the findings of this study indicate that, the lack of parental involvement is a main contributing factor to these challenges. The lack of parental involvement has been attributed to the denial of parents when they are informed that there is a possibility that their children might be experiencing learning difficulties. This denial then leads to parents not taking any part in

the process of assisting their children in their learning. Therefore, the teachers are struggling to maintain inclusion especially if parents are not working hand in hand with them in ensuring that inclusion is strengthened and maintained. With all this being said, this study managed to achieve **Objective Three:** *Explore the experiences and challenges of teachers in maintaining an inclusive education environment.* This study has discovered that there is a need for the improvement of resources especially human resources to facilitate the process of maintaining inclusive education environment in classrooms within township schools.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



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SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Characteristics of Learners with learning difficulties

- In your experience how would you describe a learner that is experiencing learning difficulties?
- What do you think are the common causes of learning difficulties in children?
- What challenges posed by learners with learning difficulties in a classroom?
- How do you as a teacher handle or manage those challenges so that the teaching process do continue with minimal disruptions?
- In you experience how other learners in class are affected by the presence of learners with learning difficulties?

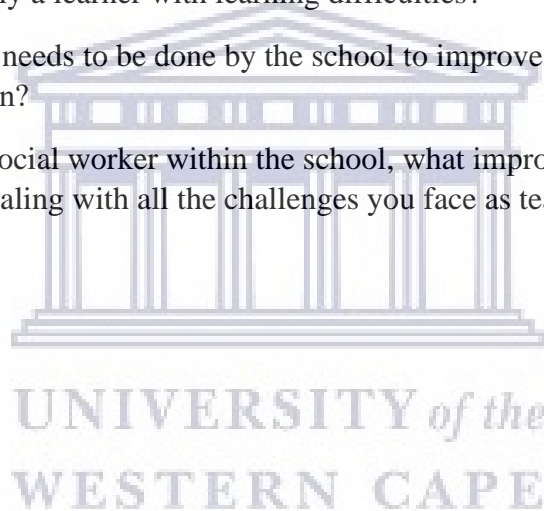
Challenges in implementing inclusive education

- How do you ensure that a learner with learning difficulties is also benefiting from the teaching process?
- In trying to include a learner with learning difficulties, what are the challenges you experience?
- To what extent do you think a mainstream school is equipped to provide proper assistance to learners with learning difficulties?
- What resources do you think are needed in your school so that learners with learning difficulties are easily assisted?

- Which factors generally make it difficult for you to assist learners with learning difficulties?

Challenges in teacher-parent collaboration

- What role do parents play in the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties?
- How do you as teacher ensure that parents are involved in the process of assisting learners with learning difficulties?
- How do you think parents' involvement in their children's education impacts the success of the children in school?
- What challenges do you experience when trying to involve parents in a learner's education, especially a learner with learning difficulties?
- What do you think needs to be done by the school to improve parental involvement in children's education?
- I there could be a social worker within the school, what improvements do you think could be seen in dealing with all the challenges you face as teachers?



APPENDIX B



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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: An investigation into teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

APPENDIX C



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INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: An investigation into teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by the Department of Child and Family Studies (CFS) at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because as a teacher you have a better knowledge regarding children with learning difficulties in schools. The purpose of this research project is to understand the challenges experienced by teachers in mainstream schools in their quest to assist learners who are struggling with learning and what teachers think needs to be done to provide support for teachers. The study seeks to identify resources needed in schools which will enable teachers in providing support to those learners who are struggling in their learning.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in an interview which will take 30-45 minutes. The interview will be recorded and it will be based on a number of questions which will form the basis of the research. The questions that will be asked will be aimed at obtaining your knowledge of the Characteristics of learners with learning difficulties, Challenges in implementing inclusive education and Challenges in maintain teacher-parent collaboration.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, your name will not be mentioned or recorded in the interview. A false name will be used to identify you as a participant. The name of your school will not be

identified to further ensure that no linking could be possible to your participation. A special key will be used to identify your school and you and these will be known to the researchers only.

To ensure your confidentiality, the information you provided will be stored in a password protected computer system which will be accessed by the researchers only and no one else will have an authority to obtain that information.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected.

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the challenges experienced by teachers in trying to assist learners with learning difficulties. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the needs of the schools so that they are able to provide needed support to those learners who are educationally challenged.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Mr M.C. MTONJENI in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Mr M.C. MTONJENI at: 072 5901465 OR e-mail: 3212505@myuwc.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Research Ethics Committee. Registration no: HS/17/8/20



APPENDIX D

WCED RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

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Fax: 0865902282
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000
wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20171130–7513

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mr Mlamli Mtonjeni
48 Thomas Street
Delft South
7100

Dear Mr Mlamli Mtonjeni

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: AN INVESTIGATION INTO TEACHERS' ABILITIES TO ENGAGE PARENTS OF LEARNERS TO ASSIST THEIR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **05 February 2018 till 23 February 2018**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services
Western Cape Education Department
Private Bag X9114
CAPE TOWN
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

Directorate: Research

DATE: 01 December 2017

APPENDIX E

ETHICS CLEARANCE LETTER: University of the Western Cape



**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION**

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26 October 2017

Mr MC Mtonjeni
Social Work
Faculty of Community and Health Science

Ethics Reference Number: HS17/8/20

Project Title: An investigation into teachers' abilities to engage parents of learners to assist their children with learning difficulties.

Approval Period: 24 October 2017 – 24 October 2018

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project. Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal. The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape
PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049