An exploration of school strategies enabling teachers in mainstream schools to support

learners with Asperger's Syndrome

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Full thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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November 2021

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Abstract

Background: Having good educational policies that are in-line with international inclusive standards is a positive step in addressing previous educational inequalities in South Africa. The Department of Education's White Paper 6 policy document of 2001 states that by 2021 most mainstream (primary) schools, would operate as Full-Service schools, that will be equipped and supported to meet the diverse needs of all learners. In addition, great emphasis is placed on the pivotal role the mainstream classroom teacher will play in the inclusion process. **Aim:** The purpose of this study was to explore school strategies that will enable teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) as prior to the completion of this thesis it was unclear which strategies were used in order to support these learners. **Method:** The study employed a qualitative methodology with an interpretative approach. 20 participants selected from six accessible primary (one pilot Full-Service school) and secondary schools (with some learners diagnosed with AS, as well as learners who were high on the spectrum) in the Metro South District of the Western Cape in South Africa. A special needs school was also included in the study to gauge what strategies are being used, and how best they can support mainstream school teachers. The participants comprised of 13 teachers, two principals, four learning support staff as well as a stakeholder involved in the facilitation of special needs education. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in English and each session lasted between 30-45 minutes. These sessions were audio recorded and the raw data transcribed and coded into themes and sub-themes. All ethical principles were adhered to throughout the study. **Results:** There was some form of classroom strategies practised at some mainstream schools, however most of these strategies were often not directly related to the inclusion of learners with AS. **Conclusion:** Whilst participants displayed some positivity about the inclusion of learners with AS, they still had some concerns and reservations as they felt ill equipped to teach learners with AS.

Keywords

Asperger's Syndrome

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Disability

Inclusion

Inclusive classrooms

Learning difficulties

Learning styles

Learning strategies

Teaching strategies

Special education

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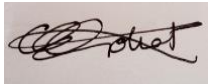
Abbreviations

AS	–	Asperger's Syndrome
ASD	–	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CBO	–	Community Based Organisations
CRC	–	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DBE	–	Department of Basic Education
DBST	–	District Based Support Teams
DoE	–	Department of Education
DSM-IV	–	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition
DSM-V	–	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition
EFA	–	Education for All
EU	–	European Union
IDEA	–	The Individuals with Disabilities Act
IE	–	Inclusive Education
NIH	–	National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
HMIE	–	Her Majesty's Inspectorate Education
HRBA	–	Human Rights Based Approach
NCSE	–	National Council for Special Education
SSA	–	Sub-Saharan Africa
UDHR	–	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNESCO	–	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	–	United Nations Children's Fund
UK	–	United Kingdom
WHO	–	World Health Organisation

Declaration

I, Charlene Goliath hereby declare that, "*An exploration of school strategies enabling teachers in mainstream schools to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome",* is my own work in its entirety, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other University, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Name: Charlene Goliath

Date: November 2021

Acknowledgements

It is only by the Grace of God, that my studies have finally come to fruition. When I embarked on this journey, all I saw at the beginning was a massive mountain looming in front of me and there were many days that I doubted myself. However, I soon realised that I serve a God of the impossible, who could move mountains and the completion of my thesis is proof of that. God placed amazing people alongside me to make this a reality. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people:

- Charles and Marina Goliath (Mom & Dad), even though you were not physically with me during this time, I always reflected on your words of wisdom when going through some challenging situations. I thank God for blessing me with such amazing parents. Therefore, this Master's Degree is in honour of both of you. You will always remain a massive influence in my life. I love and miss you both!

- Daba family (Musa, Levidia and Jessie) – How will I ever be able to express what you meant to me during this time. Your support and sacrifices were never ending, you stood strong and firmly alongside me during some challenging times. Your prayers, and support in different ways are much appreciated. I love and appreciate you all! May God continue to bless you!

- Alexander family (Brian, Clare and Briony) – Thank you for all the encouragement and keeping me accountable, and for always keeping me in your prayers. Briony, thank you for your open-door policy and allowing me to complete this journey in Johannesburg. God bless you all!

- Goliath family (Roderick, Paddy, Chelsea and Dylan) – Thank you for all your encouragement and advice. For allowing me to stay with you while I was busy with

my data collection. I appreciate your interests you always showed and enquiring about how I was doing. Stay blessed!

- Pietersen family (Glynnis, Roland, Luke and Chiara) – Thank you for always enquiring about my progress and keeping me in your prayers. This is greatly appreciated. God bless you all!

- Prof. Roman (my supervisor) – Wow! Where do I start, firstly, thank you for always going the extra mile, this is a very rare quality these days. Secondly, thank you for always being our cheerleader, there were days that I just felt like giving up, but an inspirational or motivational message from you from time to time, was just what I needed to keep me going. Thirdly, those writing retreats was unbelievable and absolutely so rewarding for me. God bless you, and may all your endeavours go from strength to strength.

- Participants – I would like to acknowledge each and every participant, who so generously gave of their time to participate in this study. I appreciate your sacrifice and candour during our interviews. There would not have been a thesis if it was not for all of you. I realise that for many of you, that the struggle is real, however it is my wish and prayer that each one of you will continue to find the strength and continue to make that difference and feed into the lives of your learners. THANK YOU!

- To the respective principals of the various schools who allowed me access to your schools and staff, thank you, it is greatly appreciated.

- Faculty of Community and Health Sciences (UWC), Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (UWC) and WCED, thank you for affording me the opportunity to explore this study, and have access to schools.

- To my extended family and friends who always showed an interest in my studies, I appreciate the messages received from time to time.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Asperger's Syndrome (AS), is considered a developmental disorder, that impacts the behaviours of a person on a social level (Tougher, 2012). Furthermore, learners diagnosed with AS often presents with high intelligence and no speech delay. However, what is important to point out is that although two children might be diagnosed with AS, in all probability their symptoms might not present in the same way (Wall, 2010). Children who are deficient in social skills lack behaviour that is required to interact with others, based on social norms. This deficit could have an indelible impact on both their academic as well as their social development (Rao, Beidel & Murray, 2008), thus, it is imperative to have the correct strategies and techniques in place in an inclusive classroom to support these learners. Unfortunately, for many learners diagnosed with AS, the education system has predominantly been one of exclusion and segregation (Peters, 2004). It is important to add at this juncture, that although AS is still a term generally being used, since 2013 (DSM-V), has now classified it under the umbrella of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Anderson, 2015).

Wall (2010), mentions that learners on the autism spectrum need some form of accommodations made to the curriculum to address some of their challenges that they might experience. Some of these challenges are mostly around social, sensory and motor challenges. If these challenges are adequately addressed, it could allow for a better experience of inclusion in the mainstream classroom for the learner. For this to happen, it is essential that stakeholders and professionals in education, as well as parents, have some understanding of the world that

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the learner is experiencing on a daily basis. Spies-Van Wyk (2013) mentions, that despite the fact that there are more learners with AS included in mainstream schools, it still found that teachers had very little knowledge of the characteristics of AS and how to support these learners in the mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, once this understanding is obtained, methods to support the learner can be explored to ensure that these learners have an inclusive experience in mainstream schools (Wall, 2010).

Inclusive education, no doubt has been described in many different ways, however, according to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2016), inclusive education, can be defined as follows:

- A fundamental right to Education.

- A principle that values learners' wellbeing, dignity, autonomy and contribution to society.

- A continuing process to eliminate barriers to education and to promote reform in culture, policy and practice in schools to include all learners.

Schuelka (2018) mentions that measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond merely just counting learners, but rather, to evaluate, access and include measures of educational quality outcomes and experiences for learners. Furthermore, although the concepts of inclusion and integration is often used interchangeably in relation to learners with disabilities in mainstream education (Jahnukainen, 2014), it is important to highlight that there is a difference between these two terms. For example, integration programmes are aimed at placing learners with disabilities in existing classrooms and school structures that they had to

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fit into, whereas, inclusion goes beyond disability to include all forms of diversity. Rouse (2008) mentions that although there is widespread support for inclusion at a philosophical level, there are often concerns that the implementation can be challenging.

South Africa, like many international countries, has undergone many changes in relation to inclusive education. One such change is that it moved from a medical model to a rights discourse (Naicker, 1999). For instance, based on the medical model, a physical disability was often considered as an underlying medical pathology for the child's disability. Thus, the disability was viewed from within the child, rather than any possible external barriers. Based on this, the underlying pathology was often treated in a medical way (Berghs, Atkin & Graham, 2016) rather than addressing barriers (resources, additional assistance or structural barriers) which could be the root cause for hampering the child's learning abilities. What this meant, was that because the learning disability was seen as the most important aspect of the learner, many learners with AS would either find themselves in a special needs class, or a special needs school, whether or not they had the ability to be included. In comparison the Human Rights Based Model, with regards inclusion in education, and specifically based on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), as well as mandatory international legislation on inclusion, it deemed that every child has the right to a basic education, whereby governments are mandated to provide access to education, whether the child is abled or disabled, by removing all possible barriers for the learner. Therefore, according to Engelbrecht et al (2015), since 1994, the newly democratic South Africa also had expectations as well as the political will to change education by adjusting legislation and policies. The adoption of the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) policy document in addressing learners with special needs education was a positive step towards a Human Rights Model. One of the aims of the new policy was to address the inequalities of the apartheid era (Department of Education, 2001).

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However, there are two main aspects relevant to the current study as mentioned in The White Paper 6. Firstly, that learners have access to the necessary support, which includes various educational structures, systems and learning methodologies that need to be addressed and secondly, the role of classroom teachers to achieve their goal of inclusive education, which includes the need to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers. The White Paper 6 also mentions that one of the objectives is to convert most mainstream public (primary) schools nationally into Full-Service schools by 2021. Full-Service schools based on the White Paper 6 (2001) are mainstream schools that will be equipped and supported to provide for the diverse learning needs of all learners, thus the main objective is to create inclusive mainstream classrooms. Moreover, various professionals in education, in terms of manpower, resources will be needed to assist the school systems and teachers in terms of implementing inclusivity.

Furthermore, in order to successfully implement inclusion, it is important for teachers to have adequate training, sufficient support and positive attitudes, which according to Osborne and Reed (2011), promotes learners' social behaviours and them having a sense of belonging at school. Hodgson and Khumalo (2016) highlights that despite the requirements in the Education White Paper 6 for mainstream schools to reasonably accommodate and include learners with disabilities, for many, this may not be practical or realistic due to the great divide between policy and reality. This results from the disparities between the lower socio-economic and higher economic communities caused by the apartheid era. Roberts (2007) supports this view and states that an area of considerable concern with regards inclusive education in South Africa is that most of the information and research on mainstreaming learners with autism is based on research from the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, and to further expound on the previous statement, although AS is regarded as a universal disability and any

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research and information conducted as extremely valuable, it is how the various countries, particularly South Africa, uses the theoretical information and how this is translated into a practical framework for South African schools and learners. First world countries like the UK and US, in terms of inclusion of learners with disabilities has evolved considerably over the decades and many developing countries are lagging behind, especially in relation to expertise, manpower, resources and funding. Therefore, it is important to explore school strategies, based on international and national research studies, that will enable teachers in mainstream schools to support learners with AS, but that is relevant to the South African context and child. In many instances, South Africa has unskilled teachers, large class sizes, inflexible curricula, unsuitable teaching methods, lack of educational resources and lack of support to schools (McConkey & Bradley, 2010). In an attempt to gain a broader understanding and provide recommendations, the aim of the study was to explore teaching strategies currently being used to support learners with AS in a mainstream school environment.
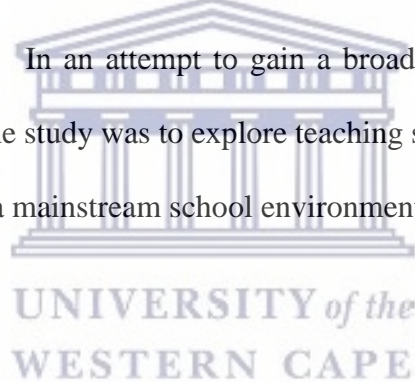
1.2 Motivation for Study

Every child regardless of disability, culture, religious persuasion, social or economic barriers has the basic right to a quality education. According to the Department of Education's White Paper 6 on inclusive education, there is an educational shift to have as many primary and eventually secondary schools as Full-Service schools by 2021. Even though this was a step in addressing learning difficulties according to international policies on inclusive education, the dilemma often is not the theoretical aspects but the implementation thereof. In addition, based on a research study by Roberts (2007), one of the recommendations for future research was, "to evaluate to what extent the curriculum and environment needs to be modified to cater for learners with AS and whether this would be feasible." This, definitely piqued my interest to

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explore how prepared schools and teachers are, and what specific strategies are in place to include learners specifically with AS into the mainstream classrooms.

1.3 Problem Statement

The Department of Education's White Paper 6 was developed to address the imbalances in the South African education system (Department of Education, 2001). Roberts (2007), mentions that South African researchers rely heavily on first world countries for information about mainstreaming learners with autism spectrum disorder. This approach could be problematic, as mentioned before first world countries are considerably more advanced in their progress around inclusive education. Therefore, although it is useful to be able to use information from other countries, it is crucial to align the information with the needs of learners, availability of finances, manpower, relevant resources within a South African context for successful implementation.

Furthermore, The White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), also states that classroom teachers will be seen as playing a pivotal role in the success of inclusive education. For this to be adequately achieved, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners in an inclusive environment. Whilst this is a move in the right direction, little is known from a research perspective about specific school practices that can be implemented to include learners with AS in mainstream schools in South Africa. Thus, a gap exists in research for understanding what teaching strategies are being used and if these teaching strategies are adequate for both teachers and learners in an inclusive environment. Based on previous research by Roberts (2007) and recommendations for future studies around the extent the curriculum and environment need to cater for learners with AS, this study will

therefore explore existing school practices that will enable teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classes.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The Rights Based Model was used as a theoretical framework in this study. The Rights Based Model is based on international human rights standards. It is operationally directed at promoting and protecting human rights, seeks to analyse inequalities and endeavours to redress discriminatory practices (Aurora, 2016). Furthermore, the Rights Based Approach to education policies and programming, places a particular focus on assessing the capacity of both rights holders, especially learners with AS to claim their rights and governments and public authorities to fulfil their obligations (Aurora, 2016).
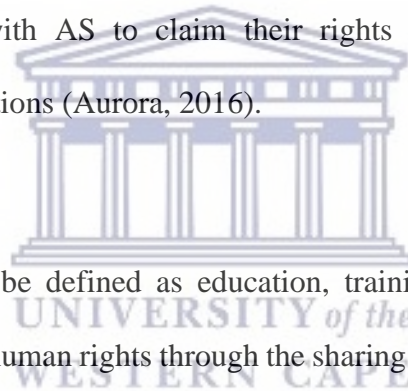
Human Rights education can be defined as education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights through the sharing of knowledge, imparting skills and moulding of attitudes to prompt action directed at strengthening respect for human rights (Human Rights Education in Primary & Secondary Systems, 2012). This definition has been formally adopted and recognized since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It further aims to promote that through the processes of education that the curriculum, materials, methods and training are conducive to learning for all. The Human Rights Model is also rooted in the recognition of the inherent dignity and equal worth of all human beings regardless of their social background, gender, age, religion, health status or any other status (Human Rights Based Approach to Education for all, 2007). Therefore, based on the Department of Education's White Paper 6 on including learners with special needs, the system should be ready

to accommodate these learners, with all the necessary resources available and to remove all barriers to meaningful learning.

1.5 Research Question

The research focus is to explore school practices enabling teachers to support learners with AS. The research questions for this study were:

1. What teaching strategies and practices were being used in mainstream classrooms to enable teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome?

2. What additional adaptations or modifications, if any, as well as resources were needed to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome in an inclusive classroom?

3. What barriers impeded the inclusion of learners with Asperger's Syndrome into an inclusive environment?

4. What role can facilitators (namely, special needs educators, educational psychologists) play to equip teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome into a mainstream environment?

1.6 Aims and Objectives

1.6.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to explore school practices that would enable teachers to support learners with AS into mainstream classrooms.

1.6.2. Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1.   Explore what teaching strategies or practices were being used in mainstream classrooms to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome.

2.   Explore what additional adaptations or modifications, if any, as well as resources were needed to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome in an inclusive classroom.

3.   Explore what barriers impeded the inclusion of learners with Asperger's Syndrome into an inclusive environment.

4.   Explore, the role of the facilitators to equip teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome into mainstream classrooms.

1.7 Research Methodology

The methodology for this study was a qualitative exploratory approach, which allowed for a more in-depth exploration with regards current school practices around the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties. A purposive and homogenous sampling was utilised in this study because the focus was on teachers, principals and stakeholders in education as it explored school strategies to support learners with AS in the mainstream classrooms. Twenty participants from six different schools (of which one was a pilot Full-Service school) consented to participating in this study. They comprised of 13 teachers, two principals, four learning support staff (occupational therapist, educational psychologist and learning support teachers) and one stakeholder who was involved in the facilitation of special needs education in the Western Cape. For the data collection, a semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews

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were conducted. During the interviews, which were conducted at the various schools an audio recording was made to record the information. Thereafter, the raw data was transcribed and sent to participants for verification. The data was then analysed and the information that emerged translated into themes and sub-themes.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The outcome of this research study could be beneficial to various stakeholders, schools and teachers who are involved in the process of inclusive education. Firstly, it could assist the Department of Education in the Western Cape, to gauge their progress in the curriculum and environmental changes, in order mainstream schools, to include learners with learning difficulties. Secondly, it might be beneficial for teachers and the school communities, to be more informed about the inclusion of learners specifically with AS into mainstream schools. This will allow them to be more prepared for the inclusion of learners who have learning difficulties, especially learners with AS who will probably need support in relation to their social, communication, cognition, sensory and motor challenges they might have. Thirdly, parents and communities will be able to participate and support their children during these challenges with regards inclusion. Fourthly, if the above three aspects are addressed it might lead to a smoother transition for learners as they enter mainstream classrooms. Lastly, the research project lends itself to on-going research and debates around inclusive education.

1.9 Definition of Terms and Concepts

Asperger's Syndrome: Asperger Syndrome is a neurodevelopmental disorder within the large family of autism spectrum, with impairments in socialization, communication, cognition and sensation (Hosseini, 2021).

Autism Spectrum Disorder: A broad continuum of cognitive and neuro-behavioural conditions that typically include impairments in socialization and communication (Salend, 2005).

Inclusion: Inclusion involves the right to education for all learners, addressing their diverse needs, regardless of their abilities or disabilities in a mainstream classroom (Haug, 2017).

Learning Difficulties: A general term for academic problems which involve significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities (Lenhard & Lenhard, 2013).

Learning Strategies: An individual's approach to a task. It includes how a person thinks and acts while executing tasks and its outcomes (Schumaker & Deschler, 2006).

Special Education: Delivering and monitoring specially designed and co-ordinated research based instructional and assessment practices to service to students with learning, behavioural,

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emotional, physical, health or sensory disabilities (Salend, 2005).

1.10 Outline of Chapters

Chapter One: The introduction of the study provides an overview of the thesis, focussing on what motivated this study, the aims and objectives of the study as well as the methodology used.

Chapter Two This chapter focusses on the theoretical framework namely the Human Rights Based Approach, which guides this study. Some of the global perspectives on inclusion (USA, UK & BRICS) will be discussed. The ideas of inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Africa in relation to the White Paper 6 policy document and establishment of Full-Service schools is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three The literature review provides an overview of existing literature related to inclusive education. This chapter comprises of a discussion about autism and Asperger's Syndrome. In particular, it addresses some of the challenges that learner with these conditions experience. Teachers' perspectives on inclusion as well as strategies to include

learners with Asperger's Syndrome are highlighted in this chapter too.

Chapter Four	The methodological aspects of the study will be discussed in this chapter. It outlines the research question, aims and objectives of the study, as well as the research methodology and approach used in the study. It describes the data collection tools, the data collection process, individual interview sessions and data analysis. Aspects about self-reflexivity, trustworthiness and ethical considerations (permission to conduct the study, informed consent, confidentiality and the right to anonymity) is also described.
Chapter Five	In this chapter, the findings of the data will be presented and discussed (participants' profile, themes and sub-themes) in relation to strategies to enable learners with AS to be fully supported in an inclusive environment.
Chapter Six	This is chapter will summarise and conclude this research study. It discussed the data findings in relation to the aims and objectives of the study. It will also highlight the limitations of the study and provide recommendations to policy makers with regards inclusive education and findings based on the study. Recommendations for future research will also be provided.

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CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework used to conceptualise this study. In this chapter, an overview of inclusive education (IE), the Human Rights Based Model and various global perspectives, specifically, in first world countries such as the USA and United Kingdom will be discussed. Furthermore, policies about inclusive education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa (SA) in relation to the White Paper 6 will also be discussed.

2.2 Inclusive Education

Separate education, according to Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2011), was a practise that existed for most of the 20th century because it was believed that it would be better for learners with special needs if they were taught separately. Therefore, in many countries this was the norm for children with disabilities who were often excluded from the mainstream education system. Mc Conkey and Bradley (2010) attributes this oversight to the way the education system and policies were designed by governments globally with regards special needs and inclusion, which could be based on the socio-economic or political context of the country, however specifically in S.A. it was also based on racial divides.

In an attempt to remedy the situation, many countries thought that a viable solution would be to provide special schools for the different needs of learners. However, based on previous research and experiences, this approach meant that many learners with disabilities, more specifically, learners with disabilities in less affluent countries, would have limited or no access

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to adequate education. In addition, although the inclusion of learners with special needs into a mainstream environment is mandatory and ideally what many countries strive for, however, as is also stipulated in the White Paper 6 (2001), it mentions that learners' inclusion would depend largely on the intensity of the support that is needed. Thus, for learners who require more intense support would still require some form of basic education, which is often limited due to a lack of finances, resources and that the location of these schools often far to travel to (Peters, 2002). Therefore, despite the fact that education reform is generally seen as a key component for achieving social integration and cohesion, special educational needs is often still embedded in the whole notion of social class, gender and race (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010).
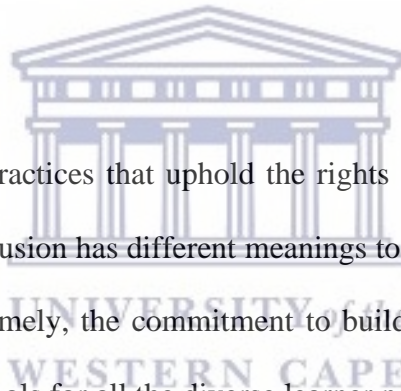
IE is defined as policies and practices that uphold the rights of learners with disabilities or special needs. Even though inclusion has different meanings to different individuals, there are still some common aspects, namely, the commitment to building a more just and equitable society, and to mainstream schools for all the diverse learner needs (Dyson, 2001). Kaplan et al (2011) further refers to IE as not only the process that will ensure that all children, regardless of impairments should have access to an education within their community, but that it will allow them to be active participants within their education system. This is why, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) together with other United Nations (UN) Agencies, as well as a number of international and national non-governmental organisations, have been working towards achieving these objectives around inclusion (UNESCO, 2005).

SA like many other international countries is mandated to have an IE policy for all learners. Rouse (2008), mentions that although theoretically there is great support for IE, implementation thereof is challenging. The following quote so succinctly states, what it means to have a right to education:

> 'That children and young people of the world, with their individual strengths and weaknesses, with their hopes and expectations, have the right to education. It is not our education systems that have a right to certain types of children. Therefore, it is the school system of a country that must be adjusted to meet the needs of all children.'
>
> (Lindqvist, 1994, as cited in Chowdhury, 2011, pg.1)

Additionally, it is mandated, that if a learner, especially with AS, who are often classified as high functioning academically, seeks to be educated in an inclusive mainstream environment, that the necessary training of teachers to recognise the characteristics of such a learner, teaching strategies, resources as well as the entire school community should be on board in order to make these accommodations for the learner. However, it is about the learner's choice, as some learners with AS often opt and feel more comfortable in a Special Needs environment.

Based on the information presented with regards IE, the theoretical framework for this study was a Rights Based Model. The Rights Based Model hinges on international human rights standards but it is also directed at promoting and protecting human rights, specifically, about IE. Furthermore, a Rights Based Approach to education policies and programming, places a particular focus on accessing the capacity of both rights holders, especially learners with AS, to claim their rights and governments and public authorities to fulfil their obligations (UNESCO, 2007).

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2.3 Human Rights Based Model

A Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) is a conceptual framework that serves to enhance the human rights in all areas of programme development, as well as the implementation thereof. The core of the HRBA framework is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that was adopted in 1948 (UNICEF, Finland, 2015). Therefore, the HRBA standards and principles is embedded in the UDHR guidelines together with other international rights instruments (HRBA, 2004).

In the UDHR document, Article 2 mentions that, "everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set out in this Declaration, without any distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, national or social origins." In addition to this, specifically around the area of education, Article 26 in the document firstly mentions, "that everyone has the right to education, and that it should be free for at least in the elementary and fundamental stages." Secondly, it asserts, "that education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2016). Although the UDHR is core for guiding the implementation guidelines and standards, this cannot be achieved without the participation of various other international human rights organisations. Hence, there are two objectives that guides the HRBA and they are:

> (i) To empower people to claim and exercise their rights

> (ii) To strengthen the capacity of those who are responsible, for example, governments, in protecting and respecting the rights of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in communities (UNICEF, Finland, 2015).

Coupled with this, another role of the HRBA is to analyse the inequalities and to redress the discriminatory practices and unjust distribution of power that often impedes progress (UNICEF, 2011). It is for this reason that the HRBA principles guides programming in all sectors, for example health, education, governance, nutrition and water and sanitation (HRBA, 2004). The HRBA principles are set out in figure 2.1. below:

Figure 2.1. Human Rights-Based Approach Principles (HRBA, 2004)

UNIVERSALITY AND INALIENABILITY
Human rights are universal and inalienable. All people everywhere in the world are entitled to them. The human person, in whom they inhere cannot voluntarily give them up. Nor can others take them away from him or her. As stated in Article 1 of the UDHR, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

INDIVISIBILITY
Human rights are indivisible. Whether of a civil, cultural, economic, political or social nature, they are all inherent to the dignity of every human person. Consequently, they all have equal status as rights, and cannot be ranked, a priori, in a hierarchical order.

INTER-DEPENDENCE AND INTER-RELATEDNESS
The realization of one right often depends, wholly or in part, upon the realization of others. For instance, realization of the right to health may depend, in certain circumstances, on realization of the right to education or of the right to information.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
All individuals are equal as human beings and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each human person. All human beings are entitled to their human rights without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, ethnicity, age, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status as explained by the human rights treaty bodies.

PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION
Every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to, and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development, through which human rights and fundamental freedoms can be realized.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND RULE OF LAW
States and other duty-bearers are answerable for the observance of human rights. In this regard, they must comply with the legal norms and standards enshrined in human rights instruments. Where they fail to do so, aggrieved rights-holders are entitled to institute proceedings for appropriate redress before competent court or other adjudicator, in accordance with the rules and procedures provided by law.

The following HRBA guidelines (2004), which are quite specific and unique to this approach are:

i.   The assessment and analysis that identify the human rights claims and the corresponding human obligations of duty bearers, as well as the immediate structures and implications when these rights are not met;

ii.   Programmes that assess the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, together with duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations;

iii. The monitoring of programmes that evaluate both outcomes and processes guided by the human rights standards and principles;

iv.   Programming that is informed by the recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms.

Since 1948, the ideals of the UDHR have gained greater acceptance and quite a bit has been achieved over the decades, specifically around the human rights of IE. However, a lot more action is still needed to improve the United Nations (UN) systems in the protection and to sustain Programmes around the individual's human rights, globally (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2016).

2.4 A Human Rights-Based Approach to Inclusive Education

According to Hossain (2012), the period between 1900 and the 1970's were generally referred to as the isolation phase. This meant that learners who had some forms of disability were segregated from peers who did not have disabilities. Therefore, the commitment of the United

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Nations (UN), to human rights underpins its work in the social and humanitarian fields. This was first acknowledged in its Charter as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

2.4.1 UNESCO

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) views IE as an approach that responds positively to the diverse needs of all learners, accepting individual differences as not being a problem but more as opportunities for enriching learning. However, in order for inclusion to be implemented effectively, the various participatory countries will first have to define inclusive principles that is relevant to their demographics and have practical ideas in order to guide the transition towards policies that will address inclusion.

Furthermore, at the core of IE, is the human right to education, which was adopted in the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights in 1984. In addition to this, there are the provisions of the United Nations (1989), around the Conventions on the Rights of the child. Although, the move towards inclusion has involved many changes especially at a societal and classroom level, this has also been accompanied by the elaboration of numerous legal instruments at a national and international level (UNESCO, 2005).

It is for these reasons, that the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) was adopted in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This Declaration sets out to achieve an overview of universal educational standards that allows access to equal education. This means that countries, in essence, should be proactive in the identification of barriers that many learners experience in

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accessing equal educational opportunities, as well as identifying the resources required to address these barriers. According to UNESCO (2009), these guidelines include:

i. Reform legislation to support IE that is in line with international conventions, declarations and recommendations;

ii. Local analyses should be conducted, in order to ascertain the availability of resources and how these will be utilised in order to support inclusive education;

iii. Mobilizing activist groups on the rights of equal education;

iv. Build and have some consensus around the concepts of inclusive as well as quality education;

v. Support local capacity-building to promote development towards inclusive education;

vi. Develop school and community-based mechanisms in identifying learners who are not in school and to find ways to assist them in finding placements at a school;

vii. Assist teachers to understand their role in education and that of inclusion and diversity
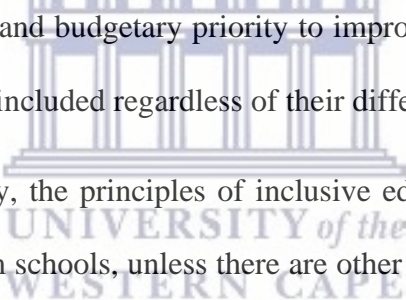
The major propulsion for IE, was mandated at the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held in Salamanca, Spain in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994).

2.4.2 Salamanca Statement

Based on the UNESCO Declaration of 1994, every child regardless of diverse needs, has a right to a quality education that is upheld in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and further affirmed by the World Declaration on Education for All. In June 1994, more than 300 participants representing 92 different governments and 25 international organizations met in order to further the objectives of these Declarations. Thus, the adoption of the Salamanca

Statement and Framework for action with regards special needs in education. Underpinning this framework, is the notion that all schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or any other conditions. In addition, it would alleviate any discriminatory practices and attitudes, and would create a more effective educational system, that would inevitably contribute to communities that are more tolerant. Therefore, if communities are tolerant, it is hoped that the different societies will also become more tolerant and engaged in the child's learning progress.

Evidently, learners will have diverse needs therefore the Salamanca Statement has mandated all participatory governments to adhere to the following:

i.   Give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems so that all children may be included regardless of their differences and learning abilities;

ii. Adopt as law and policy, the principles of inclusive education, thereby enrolling all children into mainstream schools, unless there are other extenuating reasons for doing otherwise;

iii. Governments should make a concerted effort in early identification and intervention strategies;

iv. Ensure that during the transitionary period towards inclusion, that there should be teacher education programmes, that would be both pre-service and in-service, that will be able to address the needs of learners with special needs in inclusive schools.

Additionally, UNESCO (1994) highlights that inclusive schools should be able to respond to all diverse needs of learners by incorporating the following:

i.   Accommodate for different styles as well as pace of learning;

ii.   Ensure quality education to all through an appropriate curriculum;

iii.   Various teaching strategies;

iv.   Resources that are being utilised;

v.   Partnership with organizations within different communities;

vi.   Learners with special educational needs should receive the necessary support and assistance that they may need in order to ensure a quality and effective education.

2.5 Global Perspectives on Inclusive Education

IE is defined as the provision of educational services for learners with disabilities in schools where their peers without disabilities attend in age-appropriate general education classes under the direct supervision of general class teachers (Leroy, 2010). Furthermore, IE should not only be viewed as just a place or classroom setting either, but more as a philosophy of education that includes children with disabilities into educational settings in which meaningful learning occurs (Osgood, 2005).

Furthermore, schooling communities are systems that do not function in isolation. Thus, the economic, political and social development of individual countries has a direct impact on how schools operate. This means that schools could be a reflection of continuous developments and changes that occur in society. Thus, when societies undergo fundamental changes, it often leads from a more industrial to informational, and from national to international societies (Artiles & Dyson, 2005, Fletcher & Artiles, 2005, Artiles & Bal, 2008). This could be

contributed to why over decades, that IE had such a domino effect on a global level. Moreover, it is important to clarify that the level of inclusion in a country depends on various factors such as wealth and societal norms in order for it to be effectively implemented, therefore the Human Rights philosophy is thus to firstly target transformation at a systemic and structural level (Centre for Education Policy Development, 2001).

2.5.1 The United States of America (USA)
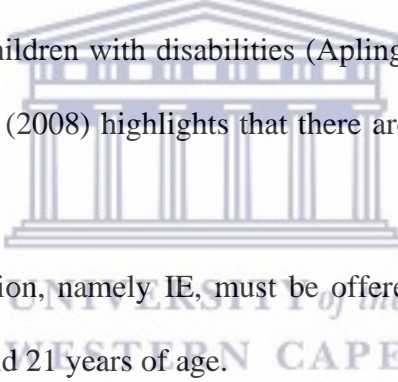
The United States of America (USA) has always been regarded as a very progressive country as well as one of diversity. Coupled with this, there has always been a long tradition steeped in research and practices around special needs education, specifically around the area of IE (Hossain, 2012). Needless to say, the USA, like many other countries had their challenges with the mainstream classroom practices to include learners into an inclusive classroom environment.
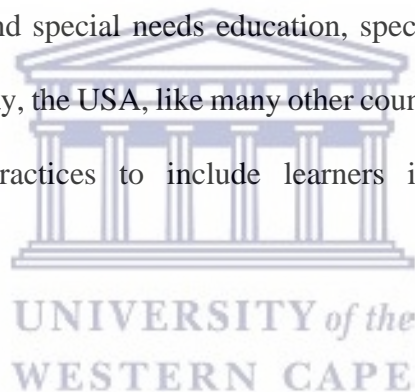
In 1975, the US government enacted the first comprehensive law, directing the public education of students with disabilities, namely The Education for All Handicapped Children's Act. This law mandated, that all children regardless of their disabilities should be educated in the general public schools (Leroy, 2010). The Act of 1975 has subsequently evolved, and is now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, which stipulates a free, appropriate public education for learners with diverse needs. According to Mc Laughlin and Jordan (2005) the educational policies in the U.S. often has a tendency toward very minimal intrusion by the government into the individual lives of children. Coupled with this, they have a long tradition of highly decentralized educational policies, which are deferred to local and

state preferences. Based on estimates by Boyle et al (2011) there are approximately 15% of U.S. children who has been identified with some form of disability. Therefore, these learners are often eligible to a Free Appropriate Education (FAPE), since 1975, when the U.S. congress mandated public special educational services for children with special needs. IDEA, as mentioned previously, was first enacted in 1975, however was revised in 2004, which mandated that each state should provide all eligible children with public education that meets their specific individual needs (Goodwin-Proctor,2010). Moreover, children with various disabilities, including learners with autism, are entitled to early intervention services and special education (Goodwin-Proctor, 2010). Another reason that the Congress passed IDEA was in response to public belief and a growing concern that states were not providing adequate public education services for children with disabilities (Apling & Jones, 2008; Jones, 1995). Furthermore, Apling and Jones (2008) highlights that there are several key requirements for IDEA, these include:

i. Free appropriate education, namely IE, must be offered to learners with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 years of age.

ii. States and school districts must identify, locate and evaluate all children with disabilities according to the severity of their disability. This will determine their eligibility and need for special education and related services.

iii. Each child with a disability, who is deemed eligible, will receive an individualized education programme (IEP) that will contain the learner's specific educational needs.

iv. Where possible, children with disabilities need to be educated with children without disabilities.

v. Procedural safeguards must be put in place for children and their families that would include the right to mediation, request for complaint or a due process hearing (right to appeal to a federal court district).

vi. Schools must collaborate with parents and learners with disabilities about the design and implementation of special education services.

Even though IDEA is enshrined in federal law that is overseen by the U.S. Department of Education, the aforementioned requirements pertain specifically to states that receive related funding for these individuals and programmes, which allowed for all states and territories in the U.S. to accept federal funding for IDEA (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2010). Added to this, the statute according to Lipkin and Okamoto also allowed for the various states to have some flexibility and discretion in how the funding is applied.

The inclusion of learners with disabilities into general education classrooms has undoubtedly taken decades to be considered an appropriate practice. However, controversies, research and legislation have shaped a collaborative relationship between general and special education (Hossain, 2012). While there has been steady progress towards more inclusive opportunities and education for learners with disabilities, it has been steeped with its many challenges, and like many countries, is a practice that is continuously evolving.

2.5.2 United Kingdom (UK)

Special Needs Education with regards to policies and legislation in England, like many first world countries, has significantly evolved over the decades. The Warnock Report (1978) was an important document which led to the Education Act in 1981. The main focus of the Warnock Report (1978) at the time, was specifically targeted at special needs education in relation to the

identification, assessment and planning for learners with special needs. However, these provisions were enshrined by mandatory statutory laws which served as protection for those learners at the time (Norwich, 2019). Subsequently, these policies and legislations have ultimately been revised into what it is now known as The Child and Family Act (CFA) which was established in 2014. This Act, makes provision for children, families and individuals with special needs or disabilities, which in essence outlines their mandatory rights. Furthermore, The Child and Family Act (2014) provides major reforms of the system in order to identify children and young people in England with Special Educational Needs (SEN), that would assess their needs, thus making certain provisions for these learners (Long & Roberts, 2019). The vision of this Act is to ensure that children with special needs or disabilities are afforded the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities, hereby, affording them the ability to achieve their goals and lead fulfilled lives (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014).
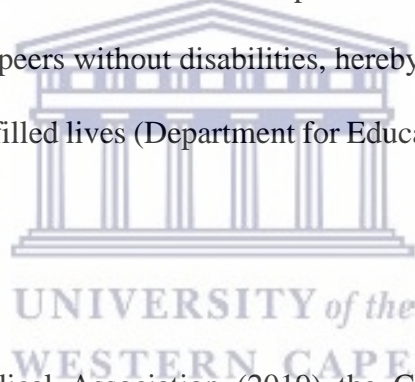
According to the British Medical Association (2019) the CFA legislation, regulates the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC). The EHC plan allows children and young people, as well as their families, to request their local authorities in England to carry out an assessment. The assessment would assist the family in obtaining support and financial aid. The implementation of these reforms began in September 2014 with a phased in approach that was completed by April 2018. More importantly, the government has also reformed the funding system for SEN, as well as additional changes to the school funding system. Added to this, is also a national formula that has been introduced to provide funding to local authorities, deemed as "high needs", which primarily is allocated for the provision of special educational needs.

Furthermore, in order to strengthen these policies, inspections by Ofsted and The Care Quality Commission with regards local support for children and young people also began in May 2016.

The Child and Families Act (2014), Section 20, states that a child or young person is deemed to have special educational needs in the following cases:

i.   Have a learning difficulty or disability that requires the provision of special educational needs.

ii.   There is a significant difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age.

iii. The individual has a disability which prevents them from making use of facilities of such a nature that is generally provided for others of the same age in a mainstream school.

The Child and Families Act (2014) further acknowledges, that the levels of support would vary considerably, but that there are two broad levels of support that are in place, namely, SEN support and Education, and Health and Care Plans. Furthermore, for children of mandatory school age, the following would be the type of support children could receive:

i.   Special learning programmes

ii.   Additional help from a teacher or assistant

iii. To work in a smaller group

iv.   Observation in class or at break

v.   Assistance for the learner to engage in class activities

vi.   Help in communicating with other children

vii.   Support with physical and personal care

The legislation, also includes a deadline which requires local authorities to deliver plans within 20 weeks of receiving a request for an EHC needs assessment.

Teaching children with autism in a mainstream environment is challenging and needs a comprehensive plan in order for the learners to become active participants within their environment. Although there are no specific national numbers of people with autism in England, Parkin (2016) estimates that there could possibly be more than half a million people with autism. This would translate to approximately 1% of the population. According to the British Medical Association, with the EHC plans in place, it is perceived that those learners who are on the autism spectrum, often benefitted from this, as approximately 28.2% of learners with an EHC plan, are often on the spectrum. Coupled with this, is a relatively new legislation that also provides new services for people with autism, namely the Care Act, 2014, which stipulates, that all staff dealing with autism assessments must have the appropriate training.

Although, these are mandatory legislations in place to significantly improve the lives of people with special needs, an article by Tickle (2018) highlighted concerns at an annual meeting with regards the number of EHC plans which are not delivered within the 20-week deadline. These concerns around these delays, is crucial, with regards the impact it may have on a child or young person's health, education, as well as their personal development. Thus, for children with autism, support is vital to ensure that they can live a full life in their respective communities. For this reason, funding made available by an EHC plan would allow a learner

with autism to continue their education in a mainstream environment, rather than a specialist school.

2.5.3 BRICS

In April 2011, South Africa joined four other developing countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India and China to form the group BRICS as it became known and would be referred to in this document. One could make the assumption that the primary reason for BRICS would be to strengthen the economies of these countries, as well as to be recognised as potentially united strong players on the global market. As previously mentioned by Lauchlan and Greig (2015), education, and specifically IE, is inextricably linked to legislation and policy development of individual countries. The extent and provision undoubtedly would mainly depend on the wealth and progress of the individual countries.
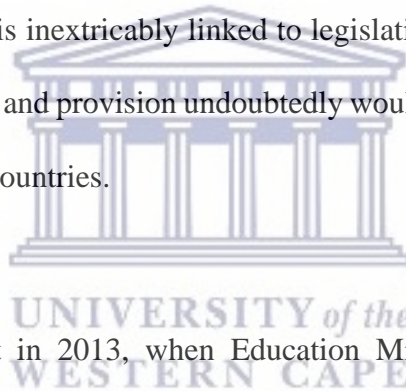
Based on a BRICS document in 2013, when Education Ministers met at the UNESCO headquarters, in order to discuss opportunities for co-operation in education, it was highlighted that these countries have the ability to change the face of education for many learners, not only among the BRICS countries but globally too. This would encompass bringing millions of learners into schools, as well as to establishing world class learning and having the ability to sharing expertise and knowledge (BRICS, 2014). Moreover, several recommendations pertaining to IE was reached. These include:

(i) Having the ability to share knowledge, governance and financing mechanisms, in order to enhance the equity as well the quality of the public schools.

(ii)   Various countries should be in a position to compare experiences in designing and implementing the national assessments of the learners' achievements.

(iii)   It would be beneficial for these countries to join forces in order to improve the quality of the data for education.

(iv)   Having to manage the rapid expansion of higher education.

(v)   Having the ability to facilitate the mobility of learners and teaching personnel specifically among the BRICS countries.

Coupled with this, The Fortaleza Declaration (BRICS, 2014) also made an important contribution in that BRICS leaders affirmed that the development agenda beyond 2015 should be, to ensure equitable, inclusive and quality education, as well as lifelong learning for all children. Even though the Fortaleza Declaration was affirmed by the Ministers of the BRICS countries, at a follow up BRICS meeting in 2018 it was ascertained, that the need for education and training was expanding but all member states were facing common challenges in promoting educational equity, that fosters a quality inclusive education (BRICS, 2018).

2.6 Inclusive Education – Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

For a considerable part of the 20th Century, a widespread notion existed and perpetuated the idea that it was in the best interest for children with special needs to be educated separately. This notion was enshrined in the Medical Model or as it was also referred to as the Deficit Model of Disability. This, subsequently, further emphasised the differences and disabilities of the individual learners (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, Armstrong, et al, 2011). Although, IE is deemed to be a global education policy which is generally accepted by many national governments, regardless of these international policies that are in place, many sub-Saharan

African countries, with regards to implementation, often still lag behind their Western counterparts (Verger, Novelli & Altinyelken, 2012).

Primarily, at the core of IE, is that all children should be afforded the chance of meaningful opportunities. Therefore, the focus of IE is not only on the process thereof, for example gender, impairment, age or ethnicity, but more importantly, that the education that the learner is receiving is appropriate and that it allows them to achieve their full potential (Mitchell, 2017; Kaplan, Miles & Howes, 2011).

Whilst human rights legislation that protects children with disabilities is in place, many SSA countries failed to develop effective educational legislation and strategies around IE (Dubin, 2019). It is estimated, that approximately 140 million of the world's children are out of school, of which the majority are girls and children with disabilities. Furthermore, 80% of these children live in Africa (Tesemma, 2011). This figure could be higher but due to the difficulties surrounding accuracy of data and lack of available data, exact figures are difficult to ascertain. As a result, many parents living in dire poverty or rural areas often do not receive access to the necessary assistance for their child. Based on statistics from the World Bank (2018), it is estimated that only ten percent of these children with disabilities receive any type of schooling. In addition, children with disabilities in SSA countries are considered more vulnerable and often three times less likely to complete primary education (World Bank, 2018).

Another reason that one could contribute to why so many children are out of school in SSA countries is, that IE, in developing countries, especially on the African continent is a concept

that is relatively new. Compared to their first world country counterparts such as the U.S. and European countries, SSA countries only entered the debate about inclusion in the early 1970's (Dubin, 2019). Even though educational reform is continuously evolving globally, in contrast the education systems in many SSA countries, are very slow in changing, especially with regards to relationships between teachers, learners as well as the subject matter (Elmore, 2004). In relation to the implementation of inclusive education in SSA countries, the practice thereof, remains relatively new. Mitchell (2017) describes IE across many SSA countries as being an idea or project that remains at the "pilot project" stage. There are many factors that one can contribute to the slow pace of IE in SSA countries, however, one aspect that continues is to have a direct impact that would undoubtedly be the ramifications of the colonial era. Dei (2005) mentions that for the majority of the post-colonial states, many have been unsuccessful in adapting their education systems to be on par with their international counterparts and adapting to recent ideas and practises. Often, the lack of decent infrastructures, coupled with large class sizes, lack of resources and inadequate sanitation are the contributing factors which discourages learners of attending and remaining in school (Tassew, Jones & Bekele, 2005).

According to Dubin (2019), there are many reasons why children with disabilities are excluded from educational opportunities, for example, stigmatisation, traditional norms, lack of financial resources, and the scarcity of specialised schools and teachers trained to meet the diverse needs of these learners.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is considered as one of the most prevalent neurodevelopmental disorders in high-income countries, however, very little is known about the condition in low-

income and middle-income regions, especially in Africa (Ruparelia, Abubaker, Badoe, Bakore, Visser, Chugani & Newton, 2014; Durkin et al, 2015). According to a review of the global prevalence of autism, Elsabbagh, Divan and Koh (2012) mention that there was no data from SSA countries, even though, this region has a population of nearly 1 billion people of which 40% are children younger than the age of 14 years old. This could be attributed to the fact that child mortality and malnutrition are considered more pertinent therefore more of a priority (Elsabbagh, et al, 2012). Another important consideration is that children with autism are generally diagnosed later in Africa (approximately eight years of age). This is four years later than their American counterparts are. Unlike in other parts of the world, in many African countries, a diagnosis for autism is often based on someone's judgement who often does not have extensive experience in autism. Another area that is concerning is that there are very few clinicians have the expertise to identify the condition. For example, in Ethiopia, with approximately 100 million inhabitants, there are about 60 psychiatrists, and only one that specialises in child psychiatry. Ethiopia also only has two clinics that focuses on child health services, and both these clinics are based in Addis Ababa (Zeliadt, 2017).

There is also limited awareness in many communities in SSA countries, especially for families living in rural areas (Abubaker, Ssewanyana, de Vries & Newton, 2016). This means that many learners are excluded from the educational system and unable to get the necessary support and care due to their impoverished situation. These findings highlight the need to create awareness about autism and what is needed in order for learners to thrive despite their limitations. For this to occur, there must be multiple levels of involvement from various stakeholders. This includes partnerships between parent-support groups, non-profit organisations, private sector,

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governments, media, international autism organisations, as well as WHO and other health funders (Abubaker et al, 2016).

Although, many SSA countries are battling with the implementation of IE, it is important to highlight that there are indeed those countries who have some systems in place to address the diverse needs of these learners. The various implementation strategies would however differ from country to country. For example, Kenya, has a legislative commitment in addressing the rights of disabled children through their Special Needs Policy. What makes this policy different from other countries in Africa, is that it includes for each section a set of strategies for achieving these policy initiatives (Dubin, 2019). Kenya's Children's Act of 2001 according to Combrinck (2008) includes disability in its prohibition of discrimination. The Kenya's Children's Act states that a child with a disability has the right to be afforded education and training free of charge or at reduced cost whenever possible.
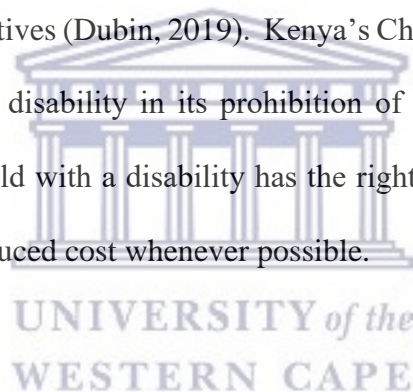
The Children's Statute of 1996 in Uganda, also makes provision for the rights of children with disabilities and guarantees them equal opportunities to education. Furthermore, the country's 1992 Education White Paper, encapsulates the commitment in promoting integration in mainstream schools. Support to mainstream schools is provided through the general school cluster system (Combrinck, 2008). However, a study by UNESCO (2017) found that in Uganda, adolescents with disabilities are twice as likely to be out of school compared to adolescents without disabilities.

According to Mpofu (2004), in Zimbabwe, there are no specific legislation for IE. However, regardless of this, there are government policies, which are consistent with the ideals of IE. These IE practices generally includes the identification, minimization as well as the elimination of any barriers in the traditional settings that would hinder the progress of a child. These settings could include schools, homes, as well as communities as a whole (Chimedza & Peters, 1999). Therefore, based on both the Zimbabwe Education Act (1996) and the Disabled Persons Act (1996) it is mandatory for learners to have access to basic or primary education, regardless of race, gender or their disability. Even though, having access to education is a requirement for all learners with disabilities by the Disabled Persons Act (1996), the irony is that it does not commit the government in providing inclusive education in any concrete way. This prevents people with disabilities from suing the government regarding issues around access that may impair their community participation (Mpofu, Mutepha, Chireshe & Kasayira, 2006). Mutepha et al, 2007, mentions that because of the absence of any mandatory order that stipulates the services to be provided, there is no meaningful educational services for learners with disabilities in Zimbabwe. Based on some of the above information with regards inclusive education in SSA countries, it would be fair to conclude, some steps have been taken by governments to address the inequalities in education, undoubtedly, there is still a lot around policies and implementation that needs to be addressed in order for all learners with disabilities to experience a quality education. South Africa, therefore, also had to adjust their policies and legislation to address these inequalities of the past apartheid regime.

South Africa adopted the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001). The White Paper 6 aims to ensure that learners have access to the support that they need. This includes various educational structures and appropriate systems and learning methodologies. It also refers to classroom teachers who need to achieve the goal of IE. This should be achieved by improving

the knowledge and skills of teachers. Although, the adjustment in policies to include learners who are able to be included into mainstream education is a positive step, South Africa, still has a long process ahead in terms of levelling the playing field for all learners to have access to a quality education. Inclusion, and what it means in relation to South Africa will be discussed next.

2.7 Inclusive Education in South Africa

The Apartheid system in South Africa (SA) promoted inequalities along racial (Blacks, Indians, Coloureds and Whites), class, gender and ethnic divisions, which inevitably perpetuated the extreme divides that existed in education. White people's needs were prioritised in all areas, including education. This meant that more funding was allocated to schools where white people attended. As a result of the inequalities of apartheid, massive gaps existed in the education system. The gaps include the quality and level of teacher training, how the resources were allocated to various schools and the support that was delivered (Naicker, 2000). Post the Apartheid era, the new democratic government committed itself to the transformation of education, thus highlighting and stressing the key concept of education as a basic human right, as enshrined in the constitution (Engelbrecht, 2006). SA, as in many developed countries thus had to set in place various IE policies and practices which evolved over the years, in order for all learners to have equal access and to have a quality education, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The progression of the education system in SA, from a Medical Model to a more Human Rights Based Model will further be expounded on.

2.7.1 Medical Model

The Medical Model for people with disabilities has been in existence since the mid-1800's, and is a model that gradually started to replace the religious model. The reason for the move to the medical model was that there were significant advances and strides made in the field of medical science at the time, which subsequently evolved into the field of education. Furthermore, this model was also based on the view that all learning problems of individuals are primarily because of some organic disorder or disease (Zandi & Jamshidi, 2012; Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Terzi (2004) expands on this by stating that other than the term medical model, the term individual model was also often used, as the rationale behind this was that the disability was regarded as more of an individual condition. Added to this, the medical deficit model as it was referred to, also relied heavily on medical terminology in order to assess children's limitations against that of their developmental and functional abilities (Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2009). One of the criticisms against this model, was that the focus was predominantly on the individual's impairment, rather than the need of the learner (Rees, 2017).
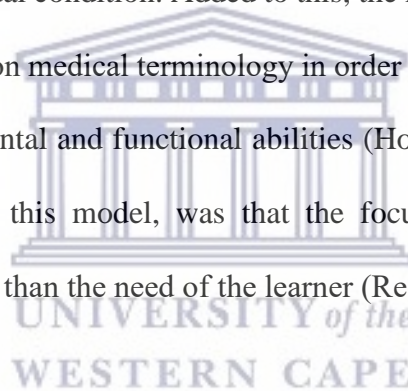
In addition, and throughout history, the barriers imposed by societies towards learners with impairments, often contributed to the marginalisation and discrimination of these people (Jensen, 2018). Moreover, this approach reinforced the notion that people with a disability are not equal to their able-bodied peers (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Thus, the model's exclusive focus would be on the limitations associated with the individual's disability, and excludes or disregards the environment that might adversely affect the person's functional abilities. Hence, the need to change or fix the disability, rather than the condition that might be contributing to the person's disability (Kasser & Lytle, 2005).
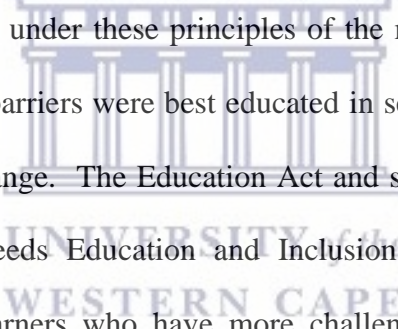
Although, the right to equal access to education has been mandatory in various Human Rights Policies, Hayes and Bulat (2017) highlights that in certain countries such as Gabon, India, Macedonia and Morocco, a child is required to have a certificate from a doctor, diagnosing their disability prior to gaining access to a school. Unfortunately, this need has the ability to limit educational opportunities, especially for low-income families who are not by the means to obtain the required certificate. Moreover, such a diagnosis also does not inform the school community as a whole of the educational needs of these learners. The Rights based inclusionists, would therefore argue, that these categories of disability and labels used to identify individuals, for example autism, are often not very neutral, objective or universal, but more seen as social constructions and assumptions about normality (Ravet, 2011). Undoubtedly, these are the assumptions according to Graham (2006), that are strongly rooted in socio-historical contexts, and become deeply embedded in the cultural minds of communities and ultimately the wider society.
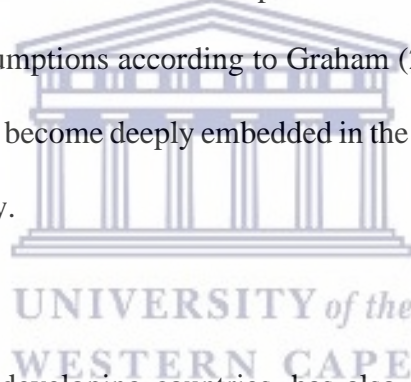
SA, like many developed and developing countries, has also evolved from a more medical discourse to one of inclusion in relation to education. However, prior to the democracy in 1994, the medical discourse was the most dominant in the education system (Meltz, Herman & Pillay, 2014). This model in effect, with its exclusive practices also resulted that many learners were prevented from access to mainstream education (Naicker, 2006). The building of special schools and the training of teachers specifically to meet the needs of these learners exacerbated this. It was for this exact reason that learners often became the object of endless testing (Terzi, 2004).

Even though the moving from a medical model to inclusion was a positive move, there were many challenges that arose whilst implementing policies and practices (Soudien & Baxter, 2006). An area that was crucial to address, was during the apartheid era, the education system was primarily structured along the lines of racial discrimination. Coupled with this, another reason in order to justify separate education, was to emphasise that it would be more beneficial for those learners, as well as for those learners without any learning difficulties. As a result of these perceptions, it directly impacted and often determined the actions and roles of teachers and professionals, and how they responded to the segregated structures of the education department (Soudien & Baxen, 2006).

Ntombela (2011) mentions that under these principles of the medical model where teachers were taught that learners with barriers were best educated in separate classrooms, are beliefs that can be very difficult to change. The Education Act and specifically the White Paper 6, with the focus on Special Needs Education and Inclusion acknowledges the fact, that unfortunately there will be learners who have more challenging needs, and may require specialised education. However, for those learners who have the ability, they should have access to an inclusive mainstream classroom, where their learning needs are being accommodated. It is for this reason that the White Paper 6, sets out clear guidelines in order to implement these policies towards equal, accessible learning for all. The shift towards the inclusion of all learners, despite their distinct educational barriers are increasingly apparent not only in South Africa, but internationally as well, albeit, that the shift in South Africa is moving very slowly (Bornman & Donohue, 2013).

Children and young people diagnosed with autism, are often labelled or classified as either being deficient or impaired. Needless to say, that such labelling often has very negative connotations and may lead to the individual being viewed in relation to their ability and potential (Gillman, Heyman & Swain, 2000). Therefore, it became imperative to address these inequalities, stigmas, attitudes by the implementation of a unified policy document in the form of the White Paper 6 was adopted in 2001 (Naicker, 2018).

2.7.2 White Paper 6

The need for IE as well as the need to strengthen existing Special Needs Schools in SA became a priority for the Department of Education (DoE) in order to address the inequalities of the previous regime. Therefore, in October 1996, the Ministry of Education firstly appointed the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS) to investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of special needs and support services in education and training in SA. The rationale behind these Commissions were predominantly to strengthen the Special Needs Schools for learners who were unable to access mainstream education. The findings of these two Commissions were as follows:

   i. Specialised education and support have predominantly been provided for a small percentage of learners with disabilities within the special schools and classes;

   ii. Specialised education and support were provided on a racial basis;

   iii. Most learners with disabilities have either fallen outside of the system or have been mainstreamed by default;

iv.   The curriculum and education system as a whole have generally failed to respond to the diverse needs of the learner population, resulting in massive numbers of dropouts, failures or those pushed out by the system.

The recommendations that followed these Commissions were that the education and training system should promote an education system that would foster the development of inclusive and supportive centres of learning that would enable all learners to be active participants in the education process, in order for them to develop and extend their potential and participate as equal members of society.
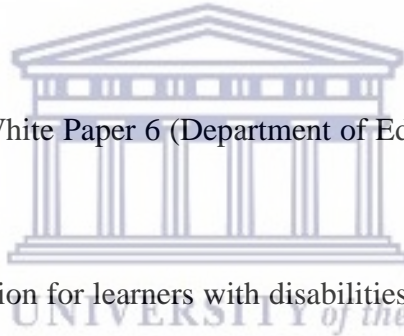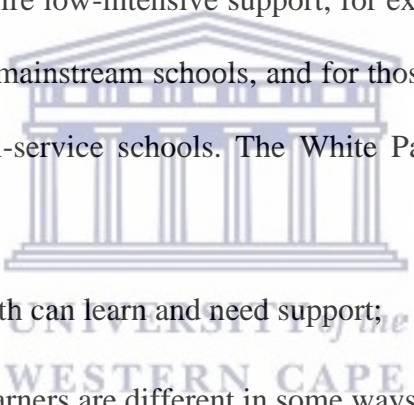
Therefore, the policies of the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) will ensure the following:

i.   The provision of education for learners with disabilities will be based on the intensity of support needed to overcome the debilitating impact of those disabilities;

ii.   The emphasises in supporting learners should be through full-service schools;

iii.   Learners with disabilities will be identified, assessed and incorporated into special, full service and ordinary schools;

iv.   Strategies and interventions will be introduced that will assist educators to cope with diverse learning and teaching needs and to ensure a smooth transition.

The White Paper 6, outlines how the education and training system must transform itself in order to contribute to establishing a caring and humane society and to accommodate for all

diverse learning needs. No doubt, there may be learners who may require more intensive and specialised forms of support to achieve their full potential, thus provision of different levels of support is needed for both learners and teachers. Although the White Paper 6 recognises the fact that educators will play a pivotal role in the implementation of an inclusive environment, it does acknowledge that the phasing in of various strategies should not merely stop there, but that it should encompass departmental, institutional, instructional as well as the curriculum, in order for the transition to be truly effective. Coupled with this, it recognises that in order for an inclusive education and training system to succeed, a wider spread of educational support services is required in order to assist those learners with learning difficulties. This would mean that for those learners who require low-intensive support, for example, learners with AS, that they will receive instruction in mainstream schools, and for those with moderate support will receive their instruction in full-service schools. The White Paper 6 regards inclusion and training as follows:

i.   All children and youth can learn and need support;

ii. It respects that all learners are different in some ways and will have different learning needs that will be equally valued;

iii. Enabling education structures, systems and learning methodologies should be in place to meet diverse learning needs;

iv. In order for inclusion to be successful, that attitudes, behaviour, teaching methodologies, curricula and the environment should be addressed in order to meet the needs of all learners;

v.   Minimise the barriers towards effective learning;

vi.   To empower learners by developing their individual strengths that will enable them to participate actively in their learning process.
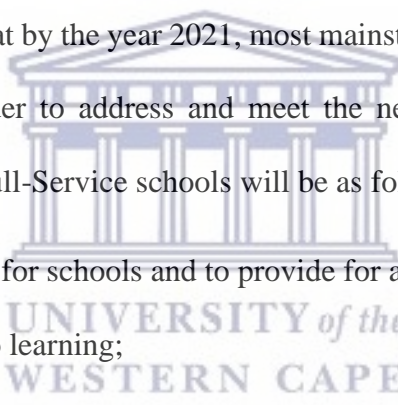
As mentioned previously, the White Paper 6 acknowledges, that the classroom educators will be the primary resource for achieving the goal of an IE and training system. In order for this to be achieved, there are criteria that needs to be met. This includes:

i.   Educators will need to improve their skills and knowledge and develop new ones;

ii.   Staff development at the school and district level will be crucial in putting in place successful and integrated educational practices;

iii.   Ongoing assessment of educators' needs through developmental appraisals, followed by structured programmes to meet these needs, will make a critical contribution to inclusion;

iv.   The role of full-service schools, would include the orientation and training in new roles, focussing on multi-level classroom instruction, co-operative learning, problem solving and the development of learners' strengths rather than focussing on their short-comings only;

v.   Education support personnel within district support services, will be orientated to train educators and that the system as a whole, in order for all learning needs to be met;

vi.   There should be good development of teaching strategies;

vii.   The approach taken should be consistent with a learner-centred approach.

The White Paper 6 also highlights, that one of the most significant barriers to learning for learners who are in Special Schools and mainstream schools is an inflexible curriculum. Some of the areas in the curriculum that can pose as barriers are, content, the language or medium of instruction, classroom management, methods used in teaching, the pace of lessons, learning materials and equipment being used, and how learning is being assessed. Furthermore, the implementation of Full-service schools in order to assist those learners with medium learning needs.

2.7.3. Full-Service Schools

The White Paper 6 identified that by the year 2021, most mainstream schools will be operating as Full-Service schools, in order to address and meet the needs of learners with learning difficulties. The focus of the Full-Service schools will be as follows:

i.   To develop capacity for schools and to provide for a full range of learning needs to address barriers to learning;

ii.   To develop flexibility in teaching practices and styles through training, capacity building and the provision of support to learners and educators at schools;

iii. That the Ministry, in collaboration with the Provincial Departments of Education, will designate and convert a number of primary schools throughout the country into what are called "full-service schools";

iv.   That these schools will be equipped and supported to provide for a greater range of learning needs;

v. Programmes developed will be monitored and evaluated and that the lessons learnt will be used to guide the extension of the model, to other primary schools as well as high schools and colleges;

vi. For staff, the support that they will receive, will include physical and material resources, as well as continuous professional development;

vii. Special attention from the district support teams will be received in order to further equip staff in the continuous evolving area of inclusive education;

viii. The establishment of District Support Teams to provide co-ordinated professional support services for schools, therefore changes to Special Schools and specialised settings, so that learners who experience mild to moderate disabilities can be adequately accommodated within the mainstream schools through appropriate support from district-based support teams, that would include special schools and specialised settings;

ix. Lastly, because of the immense human resource constraints that is experienced in the country, and the demands for justice, there is an onus on the Government to ensure that all human resources are developed to their fullest potential

According to Mittler (2000), IE is considered more of a process than a destination. Not only is inclusion regarded as a process, but it also involves, challenges, diversity and a change of mind-set and values for schools and society. Ultimately, it would be the attainment of social justice, universal human rights and equal opportunities that is being afforded to all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities (Charema, 2010).

The Salamanca Statement, which forms part of other international legislations, has set out mandatory legislations that establishes the rights of all learners to have access to a more child-centred pedagogy, evidence from SSA countries over the past 50 years, showed the persistence of a formal teacher-centred pedagogy (UNESCO, 1994; Schweisfurth, 2011). One of the reasons that could be attributed for this, is that pedagogy is often not considered as a value neutral, but more of a socially and culturally based that is steeped in their beliefs, and relationships which extend way beyond the classroom setting (Guthrie, 2011; Tabulawa, 2013; Altinyelken, 2015). Consequently, Mariga et al (2014) highlights, that the stigma and shame associated with disability still persists in many cultures and communities. Therefore, in many parts of SSA countries, children with disabilities are in a sense still regarded as objects of shame, who should be kept at home, hidden from those outside the family (Hartley et al, 2005; Jennings, 2011).
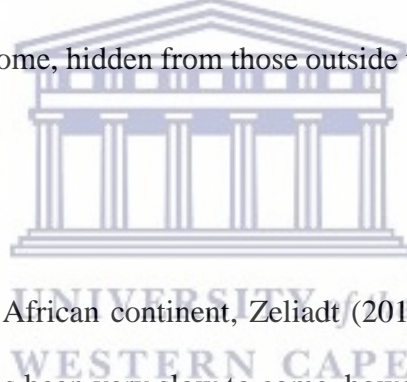
With regards to autism on the African continent, Zeliadt (2017) mentions that the help that families so desperately need, has been very slow to come, however, researchers are starting to pick up the pace, especially in tailoring diagnostic methods and treatments for the African population as well as ways to reach the rural communities faster. Furthermore, developing countries needs to involve grassroot participation in order to address the big gap of implementation of IE. This will allow for the support or buy in of the majority of teachers, parents, children and those in the community who are generally involved in education (Charema, 2010).

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter tried to explore how IE has evolved universally over decades, thus leading to mandatory International Declarations like UNESCO and the Salamanca Statements, mandating the regulation and implementation thereof. In S.A., specifically after the democratisation of the country, there was the need to address the imbalances in the education system. This led to the White Paper 6 (2001), with specific emphasis on special needs education, thereby, focussing on the conversion of many mainstream Primary Schools into Full-Service schools, thus including learners' who will require very little support into mainstream classrooms. For many learners diagnosed with AS, are eligible (if they choose to), be educated in a mainstream classroom. Therefore, based on all the mandatory international and national policies on IE, as well as having many schools as Full-Service schools, the aim of this research study is to explore what school strategies are in place that will capacitate teachers in order to assist learners with AS into a mainstream environment.
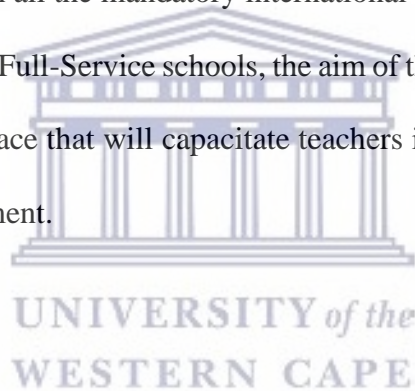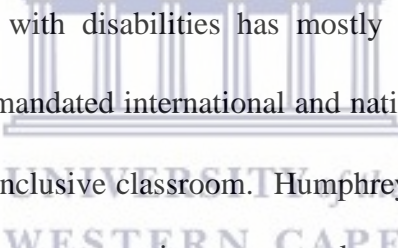
CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores a review on literature that focusses on areas around autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and Asperger's Syndrome (AS) within an inclusive classroom environment. The inclusion of these learners, as well as teachers' perspectives on inclusion, that will enable teachers to support learners in an inclusive classroom. For the purposes of this study, autism spectrum disorder will be referred to as ASD, and Asperger's Syndrome as Taboada.

3.2 Inclusive Education

Previously, educating learners with disabilities has mostly been one of segregation and exclusion. Thus, according to mandated international and national policies, these learners, if able, should be included in an inclusive classroom. Humphreys (2008), mentions that many learners with ASD are often about twenty times more vulnerable to be socially excluded in schools, compared to their peers who are without developmental delays. Over the years, there has been significant frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (1994) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 which emphasises that learners with disabilities should not be excluded from mainstream education. It emphasises that there should be proper support and accommodations made for them in order to support their educational needs and growth. Chapter 2, highlights in detail, how SA, like many first world and developing countries has undergone significant changes in relation to IE.

As mentioned before, although this was a move in a very positive direction, Roberts (2007) mentions that SA researchers rely quite heavily on first world countries for information about including learners with ASD. Therefore, there is very limited research on specific school practices to include learners with AS in SA. Spies-Van Wyk (2013) also highlights that literature based on teachers' readiness to include learners with AS in SA is often not readily available. It is for this reason that there is a significant gap in SA around research for understanding what teaching strategies are being used, and if these strategies are adequate for both teachers and learners in an inclusive environment.

3.2.1 Inclusion

In the UNESCO 1994 document, IE is defined as inclusive schools, whereby all learners, will learn together, in receiving a quality education and support through appropriate curriculum, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies and the use of resources suitable to individual needs. This would also include the school adapting to the needs of the learner, as well as a shift in how the schools are structured, but more crucially in the attitudes of all school staff. However, this does not imply that the learners with learning difficulties will not receive specialised support, in essence, this would be a necessity for these learners in order for them to be accommodated to achieve their goals (Loreman & Deppeler, 2002). These principles would include the dedication to building a more democratic and equitable society, as well as a quality education system, that allows for general education schools to accommodate for diverse learning needs (Dyson, 2001; Ainscow, 2009).

Furthermore, inclusion is about more than special needs and disabilities as it is concerned with reforms that includes and support diversity, equality and a collective sense of belonging. This encompasses regular schools and classrooms being willing to adapt and change to meet the

needs of all the learners (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). The word inclusion is widely used but the term is often clichéd when one does not have an in-depth understanding of its meaning or its underlying values Swart and Pettipher (2011). In addition, teachers and schools often use the terms integration and inclusion interchangeably but there is a distinct difference between the two terms. Integration refers to fitting into an existing system, whereas, inclusion encourages adaptation of the environment to meet the needs of an individual and support diversity.

Inclusion or IE is not only about the full participation of learners in an inclusive environment, it is based on a value system that celebrates diversity, different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, race, gender, academic achievement and disabilities (Ainscow, 2009). For this reason, many countries have struggled with bringing IE policies into practice (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Not only is a flexible curriculum important in creating schools that meet the needs of all learners, but an inclusive approach also discourages teaching that is based on criterion of averages (National Council for Special Education, 2010). The curriculum should accommodate for the different needs and abilities of all learners, for example, strategies such as flexible time frames for work completion, differentiation of tasks, flexibility for teachers, time for additional support as these are all areas that can be useful for the class teacher and the learner (UNESCO, 2005).

Including a learner in a general education classroom is more than simply providing access to the curriculum, it requires a universal design that attempts to improve accessibility to the curriculum from the bottom up, so that it is accessible to all learners, regardless of their abilities (National Council for Special Education, 2010). Another aspect that is key to a successful

inclusion practice is the need for teachers and administrators to be better prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners in the classrooms (Timmons (2009). However, preparing teachers for an inclusive classroom can be extremely complex. To maintain learners in class would not suffice because there is a need for some form of modification or adaptation to the curriculum, environment, and pedagogy for classroom implementation to affect their learning in a positive manner (Schmidt & Vrhovnik, 2015).

As was briefly mentioned before, SA, like many international countries, has evolved in relation to IE. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2014) highlights that, learners who have special needs have additional support needs. Irrespective of the origin of these needs (social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, disability or family care circumstances), the inclusive classroom should have the capacity to meet these needs. The White Paper 6, as well as the South African Schools Act (1996), stipulates that education for all children between the ages of 7 – 15 years, including learners with barriers to learning, is mandatory (DoE, 2001).

Based on the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), schools are divided into three different types, namely, Special Schools, Full-Service and Mainstream schools, that will cater for the majority of learners with low support needs, for example learners with AS. Consequently, this transformation in inclusive education practices does indeed present teachers with new opportunities and as well as challenges regarding the implementation of these policies (Bornman & Donohue, 2013).

In order to successfully implement inclusion anywhere in the world, teachers must have adequate training and sufficient support as well as positive attitudes (Frankel, Gold & Ajodhia-

Andrews, 2010). Although, inclusive education is a compulsory component in the Initial

Teacher Education (ITE) (Republic of South Africa, (RSA) 2015) programmes in SA, not all

pre-service teachers are satisfied with their courses with regards IE. Some teachers indicated

they that prefer a more practical component rather than theoretical orientation (Walton, 2017).

According to Thomas and Loxley (2001), inclusion is related to issues around equity and

collective belonging. Unless these key areas are addressed, it would merely be an issue that

will continue to be a huge challenge for SA, and in its wake, leave many, especially

disadvantaged learners behind. Hodgson and Khumalo (2016) highlights, that despite the

requirements in the Education White Paper 6 of 2001, for mainstream schools to reasonably

accommodate the inclusion of learners with disabilities, often, this is not very practical or

realistic due to the disparity between the lower socio-economic and the higher socio-economic

communities.

3.3 Autism

3.3.1 Definition

The word "autism", is derived from the Greek word "autos", which means self. Children with

ASD, are considered self-absorbed and seem to exist in a very private world, in which they

have very limited abilities to successfully communicate and interact with others (National

Institute of Health, 2020). Furthermore, ASD, is defined is a neuro-developmental syndrome

which is characterized by deficits in social and communication skills and restricted and

repetitive behaviours. May (2010) defines autism as the impairment in social interaction,

communication and imagination, that like many other disorders can affect people in different

ways. This includes individuals from every race, ethnic group and socio-economic

backgrounds. ASD a lifelong disability that impedes the daily functioning of these individuals, their developmental and educational achievements and how they socialize.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Version 5 (DSM V) states that individuals with a well-established diagnosis of ASD, AS or Pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified should be given the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (DSM-V, 2013). According to the DSM-V, the basic diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorder is:

- Persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts that is deficits in social-emotional reciprocity

- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests, or activities, as manifested by stereotyped or repetitive motor movements or speech

- The symptoms must be present in the early developmental period, but may not manifest until social demands exceed limited capacities, or may be masked by learning strategies in later life

These symptoms, causes clinically significant impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of daily functioning for the individual (Rudy, 2017).

3.3.2 Causes of Autism

Understanding the cause of ASD is ongoing but the aetiology for ASD is unfortunately not yet determined. Evidence suggests that it involves a combination of genetic, brain abnormalities and environmental factors (Schnur, 2005). Although, there is no cure for autism, the individual

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has the ability to cope with the symptoms, and that is by learning social cues which may assist with peer relations, especially in a school setting.

3.3.3 Prevalence

Abubaker et al., (2016) mentions, that globally one in every 160 persons is estimated to live with ASD. The regional estimates of prevalence for Europe and the Americas are often available, however, by contrast in many parts of the world, including Africa, and particularly South Africa, these numbers are often unavailable or pending (World Health Organization, 2014). In many South African mainstream schools, there are many learners with ASD who are either undiagnosed or unaccounted for, thus leaving them in an extremely vulnerable position. According to the Department of National Education (1997), there are various barriers which often impedes the implementation of inclusive education. These barriers, could be attributed to budget constraints, socio-economic factors, attitudes towards inclusion, inflexible curriculum as well as inadequate support services. This proves the need for greater awareness, not only for parents and teachers, but also for society in order to demystify this disorder, as children often feel extremely isolated because of their poor social skills and their obsessive interests in a singular topic (National Institute of Health, 2020).

3.4 Asperger's Syndrome

3.4.1 Definition

The term AS, was coined by a Viennese paediatrician Hans Asperger in 1940. He observed a group of boys who displayed autism-like behaviours. They had difficulties with social and communication skills but they typically had high intelligence and no speech delays. For many

professionals AS was viewed as a milder form of ASD, and the term high-functioning ASD was used to describe these individuals. Initially, AS, was classified under a separate disorder in the DSM-IV, however in 2013, when amendments were made to the DSM this changed and now it is classified under the umbrella of ASD in the DSM-V (Autism Society, 2020).

As mentioned before, AS, is defined as a complexed neurological, developmental disability, marked by impairments in socialization, communication, cognition and sensation, therefore, according to the National Institute of Health (2020) the following are often some characteristics of a child diagnosed with AS:

- Repetitive routines and rituals

- Socially and emotionally inappropriate behaviour

- Inability to interact successfully with peers

- Problems with non-verbal communication

- Clumsy and un-coordinated movements

Since AS or ASD, is considered a lifelong disorder, that can have a debilitating effect on the daily activities of a child, for example, the ability to effectively communicate and relate to their peers. The child often has great difficulty in understanding social cues and conversational language styles, and therefore often misunderstood. Therefore, learners with ASD often have different academic needs which would largely depend on whether they are verbal, or non-verbal, has a mental impairment or intellectually gifted, as well as the severity or the amount of support that is required, as outlined in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013 as cited in Holmes & Butcher, 2020). Furthermore, there is the perception that children diagnosed with ASD, are often seen

as being more aloof or disinterested in others and their surroundings, however, that the child with AS often wants to be socially more engaged and interact with others. The difficulty however, is that for the AS child they are often faced with challenges in understanding social cues, literal interpretations of other's words, as well as impairments in peer relationships (Autism Society, 2020). Therefore, for the child diagnosed with AS, ideally receiving some form of treatment or therapy to address the three core symptoms would be helpful. The core symptoms are (1) poor communication skills, (2) obsessive or repetitive routines and (3) physical clumsiness.

Felman (2017) mentions that the exact cause for AS is not known but it might be a result of a combination of genetic and environmental factors that cause changes in the brain development. Furthermore, that there are some suggestions that certain factors during pregnancy and after birth may put a child at a higher risk of an ASD diagnosis. The National Institute of Health (2020) mentions a few possible causes of AS, which are:

i. Genes

ii. A chromosomal abnormality (such as fragile x syndrome)

iii. A mother's use of prescription medicines taken during pregnancy (such as Valproic acid for seizures or mood disorder, or thalidomide for anxiety).

iv. Having been born to older parents

3.4.2 Challenges

The Human Rights Model recognises the equal worth of all human beings, regardless of their social background, gender, age, religion and status of their health (The Human Rights Model, 2007). Based on this and the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education, therefore, as mentioned before, the system should be prepared to receive and accommodate these learners with AS into the mainstream classrooms, with all the necessary resources available to make learning meaningful. Even though, AS learners generally fall on the higher end of the spectrum, undoubtedly, they will still require some accommodations made to the curriculum, as well as some of the other challenges they might face on a daily basis. Therefore, teachers, stakeholders and professionals in education, as well as parents, should be aware and explore the different methods in which to support these learners. It is imperative for them to have some understanding of the world of a child with autism and their experiences.
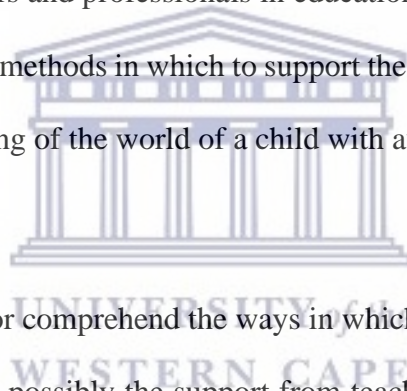
If teachers are unable to grasp or comprehend the ways in which children with autism respond to the world around them, then possibly the support from teachers could be very limited and often counter-productive to the learning process and inclusion (Wall, 2010). Wall (2010) also mentions that many mainstream teachers may find it difficult as no two learners with AS presents themselves in exactly the same way. Some of the challenges as outlined in the DSM-V, ranges from sensory, social, communication and cognitive-behavioural challenges (DSM-V, 2013). Moyes (2002), mentions, that behavioural differences are often an important part of ASD and AS, and that including learners with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, has not kept pace in providing training to the school staff. Coupled with the AS diagnosis, some children are also often diagnosed with co-morbidities such as Attention Deficit-Hyper Activity

Disorder (ADHD), anxiety, aggression and panic attacks (DSM-V, 2013). This means that mainstream teachers should be equipped to cope with these learners when they have an episode.

The prevalence of ASD is often very challenging to estimate, as very often, especially in developing countries, many children often does not get tested, thereby go undetected. According to Lai et al., (2014) and Volkmar et al., (2014), the prevalence of ASD in the United States at the time was estimated at 11.3 in 1000, however, worldwide one person out of 132 is affected by ASD. However, based on a recent study by Chiaroti and Venerosi (2020), who did a worldwide review (however excluding the African and Latin American regions), reported a high inter and intra variability across the regions. The following estimates emerged from the study, with a 0.42 and 3.13% in Europe, 0.11, and 1.53% in the Middle East, 0.08 and 9.3% in Asia and 0.87 and 1.85% in North America. Therefore, based on some of these statistics it is important for mainstream classroom teachers, and everyone involved in the education system to have some practical methodologies in place that will support teachers in making the necessary accommodations for an inclusive environment for these learners.

3.4.2.1 Sensory Challenges

Sensory Processing Theory, was a term first coined by Dr Jean Ayres in 1972, who identified those children who appeared to have challenges integrating multiple sensory stimuli from visual, auditory, tactile, taste, vestibular and proprioceptive inputs (Suarez, 2012). Furthermore, the theory was developed to explain the correlation between deficits and in interpreting sensory stimuli, from the sensation body and the environment and difficulties with academic or motor learning processes. Critz et al (2015), mentions that the identification of

sensory processing challenges in children are vital, as these are challenges that can affect, not only their behaviour, but learning as well as the way they perceive and negotiate their world.

Ozbayrak (2004), suggests that sensory challenges are neurologically based problems, which stems from the brain's inability to integrate the sensory input that it receives from the sensory systems and to turn these inputs into effective responses. The symptoms for sensory challenges may therefore be difficult to assess, as it can be found on its own or embedded within other disorders. According to Suarez (2012) if symptoms go undetected or if they are left untreated, children are often mislabelled, mismanaged or misunderstood. This contributes to why children with sensory processing challenges, often respond inappropriately to certain sensory inputs as they do not have the ability to organize a response in a fluent manner (Fernández-Andrés, Pastor-Cerezuela, Sanz-Cervera, & Tárraga-Minguez, 2015). The result of this may affect the child's ability to appropriately adapt to daily situations, namely to regulate attention, learning and social interactions.
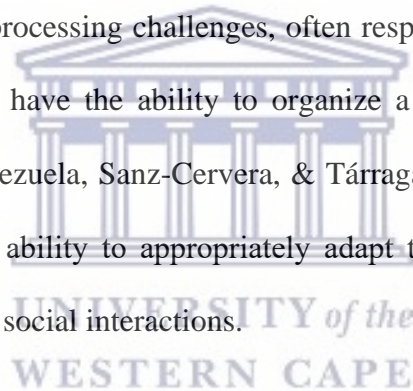
Children with AS have difficulty detecting, regulating, interpreting and responding to sensory input, which in a classroom setting, when the sensory processing is dysfunctional, the child may struggle with behaviour that is in line with the demands of the environment (Miller, Anzalone, Lane, Cermak & Osten, 2007). Very often these learners may either be hypersensitive, that is an abnormal sensitivity or over reaction to sensory stimuli, or hyposensitive, which is an abnormal sensitivity or under reaction to sensory stimuli (Stiff, 2012). Although there has been extensive research predominantly in first world countries on treatment and education of learners with AS, very often, crucial information to support teachers

are not filtered down to grassroots level, in terms of educational decision-making. For example, many treatments and approaches and projects have disseminated information, yet most have not yet provided appropriate scientific documentation of effectiveness and efficiency, that would benefit both the classroom teacher and the learner.

3.4.2.2 Social Challenges

Social skills, can be defined as having specific behaviours that normally results in positive social interactions with others (Elliott & Gresham, 1987). As early as pre-school, children with AS, display social skills deficits that will set them apart from their typically developing peers. According to Hartup (1989), social skills around childhood, have consistently been associated with positive developmental outcomes, which include peer acceptance as well as mental health and academic achievement, therefore, impaired social skills are a key factor for children diagnosed with AS. Various studies have shown, that it is imperative to assist children from a very young age with their social skills, because if left untreated, it could lead or contribute to underachievement at school (Howlin & Goode, 1998). Normally, when learners AS reach primary school level, they already have significant social and relational problems. Most of these learners, have great difficulty in initiating and maintaining friendships with same aged peers. At a secondary school level and early adolescence, their lack of social skills can often result in ridicule and or rejection by their peer group (Church, Alisanski & Amanullah, 2000).

Difficulties related to social skills and social interactions are characteristic for children diagnosed with AS. It is important to note that even though children are diagnosed with AS, the social difficulties that will manifest will differ depending on their age and the level of

functioning of the individual. Some examples of social skills deficits include having the ability to make eye contact, initiating interactions with peers and others, understanding and using non-verbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions to maintain reciprocal conversations (Bohlander, Orlich & Varley, 2012). Other examples of social skills deficits include the ability to smile, asking and responding to questions, as well as having the ability to give and acknowledge any form of compliments during a social exchange (Beidel, Turner & Morris, 2000). Therefore, especially in younger children with autism, social delays may be evident in their limited eye contact, social smiling, joint attention and pointing.

Bohlander et al (2012) asserts that social skills deficits in older children may often manifest in their difficulty in maintaining a conversation, maintaining friendships, reading non-verbal cues or body language, or having the ability in accepting another's point of view. These limited social abilities have a negative impact on them achieving normal developmental milestones and establishing satisfactory peer and family relationships because they cannot conform to social norms (Krasny, Williams, Provencal & Ozonoff, 2003; Rao, Beidel & Murray, 2008). Needless to say, learners with AS, often have low self-esteem and are prone to bullying and teasing, as they are often misunderstood (Humphrey & Symes, 2010).

Since children with AS have high levels of intelligence, they are often very aware of their social deficits. Unfortunately, these deficits are life-long, and often difficult for the learner to predict the actions of others, thus their emotional support often compromised and they have to cope with a heightened degree of stress (Holmes & Butcher, 2020). Whilst there are many interventions designed in addressing the social skills deficits of these learners, it is important

to remember that unless it is specifically geared towards the specific needs of the individual child, it would indeed be futile. This can lead to more frustration for both the teacher and the child (Rao et al, 2008).

3.4.2.3 Communication Challenges

Children with ASD have many developmental challenges that they face on a daily basis. The impairment in communication, generally forms one of the three core deficit areas to determine a diagnosis for autism (DSM-V, 2013). Although, a child with AS is now classified under ASD, the spectrum does refer to the range of the symptoms, skills and severity of the impairment the child might or might not have in order to make a diagnosis (National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020). Communication impairment is characterized by the delay or lack of communicative gestures normally used, spoken, language development and challenges in the ability to initiate or maintain a conversation. Unusual language usage such as echolalia or idiosyncratic words is very common.

Language is seen as a social act, especially language that generally occurs in a social context, for example, how to interpret a joke, how to recognize tone of speech or understand vocabulary used as well as the formulation of responses to questions and answers, which plays an important part of how interaction with others take place (Prelock & Nelson, 2012). It is for this reason that part of the difficulty for the child with AS is not having the ability in understanding what others are saying, which would include non-verbal cues, for example, hand gestures, making eye contact as well as general facial expressions. Therefore, children with AS are often quite fluent in their speech even though they are pragmatically impaired because of the way that they

interpret certain responses. Their understanding is usually quite literal. Those who are not in tune with the way the individual with AS makes sense of the world tend to misunderstand these literal responses (Rapin & Dunn, 2003).

There are many children with AS who use very sophisticated or extremely elaborate language. This could be considered a way of showing some form of self-superiority or masking the fact that they might have difficulty recognizing contextual or textual information that may have different meanings or interpretations (Vicker, 2009). Furthermore, Vicker (2009), elaborates that because of their difficulty around context, they repeat phrases that they have either heard on television or from others. This means that teachers need to accommodate for the language skills of the learner with AS in order to provide them with the necessary tools, so that they can reach their potential in a similar way to learners without AS.
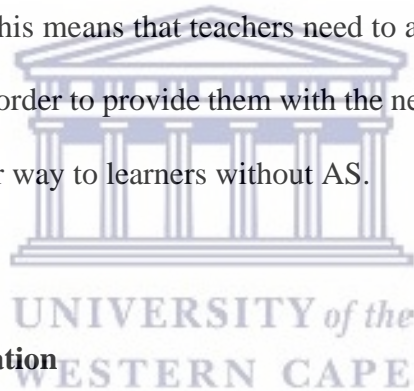
3.5 Autism in Inclusive Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) states that children, regardless of their disabilities and the support needed, have the right to access mainstream education. Likewise, The National Council for Special Education (2010) acknowledges that at the core of inclusive education is the principle that all learners with special or additional learning needs or disability belong in mainstream education

Since the numbers of learners with ASD is on the rise, it is imperative that mainstream teachers and schools have some understanding of the characteristics and challenges that these learners face on a daily basis. A Human Rights Watch Report (2015), reviewed schools in the Western

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Cape Province, and it concluded that a mere 0.1 percent of learners were identified with ASD. The reason for this low number according to De Vries (2017) could be attributed to the fact that there are so many learners who are either undiagnosed, or not in school. This percentage translated to approximately 1684 children who are diagnosed with ASD, of which 940 are attending school and the remaining 744 learners are on the waiting list. Of the 940 learners who are enrolled at school in the province, 90% attend a school for Special Needs children 83% of these learners attend schools in Metropolitan areas and 57% speak English as their primary language (Zeliadt, 2017). In a recent article by Pillay, Duncan and de Vries (2020) indicates that approximately 98% of children with ASD in the Western Cape were still in Special Schools, and only 10% were in mainstream schools. Learners with ASD are often more vulnerable, or at risk of being socially excluded at school, compared to their peers without any developmental delays therefore they are at a greater risk of not attending school regularly or dropping out of school before completing their schooling career (Humphreys, 2008).
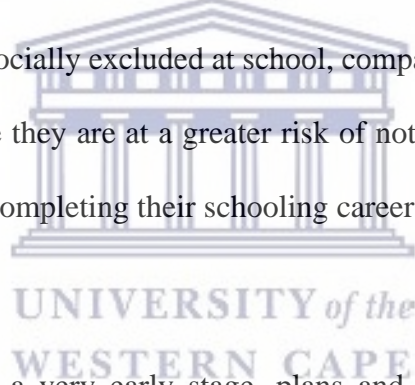
Wall (2010) asserts that from a very early stage, plans and strategies that encourage the development of interaction, communication and imagination must be implemented. Traditionally, there are three dimensions that are known as the triad of impairments for individuals with ASD. These three dimensions are (1) impairment of reciprocal social relations and interactions, (2) impairment of language and reciprocal language and (3) impairment or difficulty with social skills (Bennie, 2016). However, it is important to highlight that the extent of the impairment may vary from person to person, depending on their differences in intellectual abilities and their age (Jordaan, 2000).

Therefore, learners with ASD are often characterized by their impairments and differences which relates to their communicative, cognitive as well as their social development (Gavalda & Qinyi, 2012). Children with ASD have no physical features that would determine their condition. Therefore, many learners often go undetected in mainstream classrooms. Gavalda (2012) mentions that in order to understand the areas involved in educating these learners in mainstream schools, four focal areas need to be considered, (1) the individual's characteristics and needs, (2) teachers, (3) schools, and (4) the support services. Unfortunately, as the needs of learners vary, there is no coherent inclusion discourse that has dominated the evolution of inclusive practices at schools (Allen, 2008). This in theory sounds ideal, but it is the reality of putting these theories into practice, which can indeed be challenging. This could be the reason for confusion and inconsistencies regarding inclusive practices across provinces, schools and teachers. According to Frank (1999), within the top-down approach, there should be a paradigm shift in order to move away from a more reactive model, towards a more long-term approach, that would be more pro-active, effective and financially viable to assist these learners in mainstream schools. It is for these reasons, that it is crucial that teachers receive appropriate training, which would include both pre-service and in-service so that they can be equipped to support learners with AS (Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002).

Although learners with ASD might have similar, if not the same individual needs as their peers, they also have other very unique needs that would be specific to their group. It is therefore important to have an effective educational plan in order to support these learners. Also, mainstream teachers should have a good understanding and knowledge of the educational needs of these learners (Jordan, 2005; Hernandez et al, 2007). Coupled with this, there are four crucial areas that needs to be considered in order to have a relatively effective inclusive plan

to guide mainstream teachers. This includes knowing the characteristics of the individual, what their specific needs are, the school and classroom environment and lastly, what support services are available for teachers to equip them with the necessary skills (Gavalda, 2012). Grisman (2008) mentions that a programme for learners with ASD cannot be successful if there is not a continuous professional learning plan in place for teachers. Not only does this involve or include special needs teachers, but also mainstream class teachers, para-professionals, administrators and receptionists at schools. When all the relevant parties are trained to understand the challenges of these learners, the inclusion process may be easier for everyone involved. Furthermore, good training for staff can contribute to helping learners with their social behaviours and providing them with a sense of belonging at school (Osborne & Reed, 2011).

3.6 Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusion

According to O'Brien (2000), the key resource for a successful inclusion programme lies in the head of the teachers. The White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education (Department of Education, 2001) recognises the pivotal role that mainstream classroom teachers will have to play in order to have effective inclusive schools and classrooms. Teacher's attitudes are an important component in ensuring the successful inclusion of learners with special needs and could either enhance or impede the implementation process (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011). Croll and Moses (2000) mentions that there are some mainstream teachers who have reservations about the practicality and feasibility of inclusion in the mainstream classrooms. Thus, some of these reservations can be attributed to the teacher's perception of the severity and difficulty of learners, the teacher's own belief system and the inability to deal with these learners, as well as the insufficient capacity and support of mainstream schools, to efficiently

deal with effective practices to include these learners. Based on a survey conducted by Hay et al (2001), many teachers were of the opinion that they were unprepared and ill-equipped to work in an inclusive classroom.

IE as a theory is extremely admirable, however the challenges are often around the huge task of implementation thereof. Research shows, that teachers often have either a negative or neutral attitude towards the implementation of learners with special educational needs into the mainstream classroom, as they often feel that they are incompetent to accommodate these learners (De Boer et al, 2011). Teachers' attitudes towards the success of inclusion, would largely depend on the support being provided for them (Anderson, Klassen & Georgiou, 2007). Kraayenoord (2007), also highlights that although inclusion in mainstream schools is evident in literature, there has been little research on how teachers create and sustain inclusion in mainstream classrooms. Thus, teachers who are faced with including a learner with a disability are often reluctant, less positive and may, experience stress and anxiety because they might feel inadequate due to insufficient training (Lindsay, 2007; Anderson, 2015). Teachers reported in a Canadian study that they experienced the following challenges with working with learners who had AS: lack of understanding and finding it challenging to manage behaviour, socio-structural barriers (school policies and lack of training and resources), and difficulty creating an inclusive environment (lack of understanding from other teachers, learners and parents) (Horrocks, White & Roberts, 2008). In SA, Walton and Rusznyak (2014) mentions that one of the challenges associated with the implementation of IE would be the ineffective training of teachers to meet diverse learning needs in the mainstream classroom. Another area of concern for teachers, are the large class sizes, poorly equipped classrooms and inadequate buildings. Added to this is the leadership provided by the principal, support of management

and the backing of colleagues in staff meetings and through informal advice (Ainscow, 2005).

Teachers were also concerned about training for inclusion, appropriate curriculum for all

learners, available resources and school and classroom structures that are barriers to inclusion

(MacPherson-Court, Mc Donald & Sobsey, 2003).

In South Africa, like many international countries, IE forms the ethos of the education system

and is in line with the constitution of the country, which recognises diversity and resists

exclusion. As the number of children diagnosed with ASD increases, it is inevitable that

mainstream classroom teachers have, or will in all probability have a learner with this condition

in their class. Batten and Daly (2006) mentions that in order for inclusion to be successful, the

knowledge and attitude of the mainstream teacher is extremely important. Furthermore,

Bothma et al (2000) found that some SA primary school teachers' attitude toward inclusion

was extremely negative, which could create a barrier to its successful implementation. This

could be attributed to poor understanding of awareness of pedagogical approaches and

adaptations in teaching in an inclusive environment (Ravet, 2011). Spies-Van Wyk (2013) also

concluded in a research study that more effective ways are needed to enable teachers to support

learners with AS in mainstream classrooms in SA.

Essentially, gaps in training can leave teachers feeling extremely discouraged, this means that

learners with ASD may miss out on opportunities to reach their full potential (Allen &

Cowdery, 2005; Warnock, 2005). Having said that, it is imperative to point out that although

there are many mainstream classroom teachers whose morale is quite low because of all the

challenges they are facing around the area of inclusion, there are those teachers who are quite

positive about inclusion. For many of these teachers, having some form of experience or new

teachers to the profession contributes to the positive view and approach they have towards inclusive classrooms in teaching learners with special needs (MacPherson-Court et al, 2003).

Teachers also consider the leadership of the principal as well as the active involvement of the education department as key in providing the necessary support for teachers who are involved in the implementation of an inclusive classroom (Horne & Timmons; 2009). According to Horne and Timmons (2009), teachers feel that they need to be provided with ongoing training in special needs education when they are the ones who are involved in an inclusive classroom. Therefore, according to Avramidis and Norwich (2010), teachers are expected to change or adapt their teaching methodology in order to accommodate learners who have additional needs in an inclusive class. Furthermore, this expectation contributes to many perceptions towards inclusive classroom policies, which ultimately influences the success of inclusion if the correct processes are not being followed.
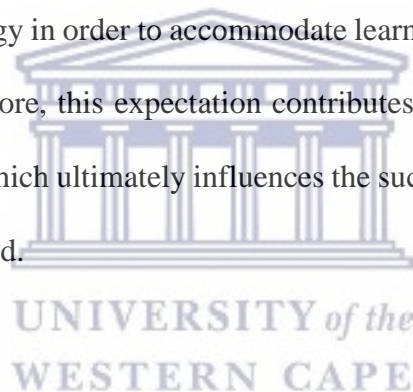
3.7 Stakeholders in Facilitation

According to the White Paper 6 (2001), mainstream classroom teachers will play a crucial role in supporting all learners. This includes learners who are experiencing barriers to learning. Although the teachers' role is pivotal in the success of inclusion, this unfortunately cannot be achieved in isolation. Teachers in an inclusive environment need formal and professional support services (Makhalemele & Nel, 2015). Key findings in O'Rourke's and Houghton (2006) and Datta's (2015) research highlights, that often when teachers are supported in order to assist learners with mild intellectual disabilities, that not only does it have a positive effect on the teacher, but the learners as well.

The introduction of inclusion in SA, aiming to transform the practice of supporting learners who experienced barriers to learning, indelibly had an immense impact on the support services to schools. In order to assist and support teachers to achieve their goals, the District Based Support Teams (DBST's) were established to provide professional support at a district level. This would include the expertise from local education institutions and various community resources. The key function of this team would be to assist education institutions and to address the barriers to learning thereby and promote effective teaching and learning. Coupled to this would be the focus on classroom and organisational support as well as curricular and institutional development, which would include management and governance, as well as administrative support. The DBST's members should comprise of a psychologist, specialised and general counsellors, therapists and other health and welfare workers employed by the Department of Education (DoE), non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and Community Based Organisations (CBO).
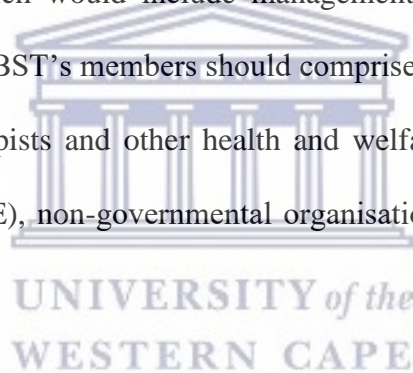
However, despite these policies that are in place, it appears that the execution and implementation of these policies still seem to be ineffective in ensuring an operational support service to teachers and learners, but more specifically learners who experience barriers to learning. Various research studies conducted in SA have shown that the education support services continue to struggle to function within an inclusive education environment (Hay, 2003; Wildeman & Mondo, 2007; Engelbrecht, 2008; Nel et al, 2014). Eloff and Kgwete (2007) also highlights that implementing inclusion without accompanying strategies for teacher support, as a concern to the success of inclusive education policies. Other concerns would be the lack of skills and competence that has been mentioned in this study (Engelbrecht et al, 2001). This

is why, knowledge of existing programmes, should be able to give practitioners and parents a broad overview of what is available, and how best to support teachers and learners (Davis, 2001). There are still many challenges that continues in relation to inclusive education in SA, which should be addressed in order to provide quality and effective learning support services (Mashau, Steyn, Van der Walt, & Wolhuter, 2008).

3.8 Strategies to Include Learners with Asperger's Syndrome

For learners with AS, who are able to be included into the mainstream classroom, it is definitely not a very easy process for either the school or the classroom teacher due to the accommodations and modifications that are needed (Tougher, 2012). Betts et al (2007) states that the AS learner will definitely need special accommodations so that they will feel comfortable and safe in an inclusive classroom. Zeppetella (2009), highlights ten strategies that would aid or guide the mainstream teacher in how to assist the learner with AS into and inclusive environment. The strategies are as follows:
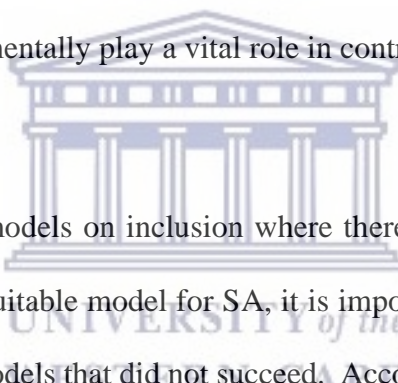
   i.   Having a plan for transitions

   ii.   Creating a plan when the learner has a meltdown

   iii.   Make use of visuals where possible

   iv.   Allow for the use of computer to write up assignments

   v.   Strategic positioning of the learner in the classroom

   vi.   Find strategies to help the learner to deal with stress

   vii.   Reduce the sensory input

   viii.   For the teacher to break down assignments into manageable parts

ix.   Have a Buddy system.

The above practices were suggested as they help children with AS in developing the necessary skills to be successful socially as well as academically. It would therefore be beneficial for the school, teacher and learner if some of these approaches were used in the mainstream classroom to assist the learner within an inclusive environment.

IE is an ongoing debate and continues to evolve over the years. The White Paper 6 on Special Needs and Education (Department of Education, 2001) emphasises the rights of learners who are able to be included in the mainstream school with the necessary support, and mainstream classroom teachers, will fundamentally play a vital role in contributing to the success thereof.

There are many international models on inclusion where there are many positive outcomes, however, when deciding on a suitable model for SA, it is important to tread with caution and consider the ramifications of models that did not succeed. According to research conducted in South Africa by Spies-Van Wyk (2013), it is imperative to find effective ways or models, which is relevant to the SA context that will enable mainstream teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms. A review of literature by Nappy Run (2019), also highlights that in SA there are approximately 600 000 disabled learners who may never have been to school. In addition to this Yates (2020) mentions that SA has approximately 1179 public and independent special needs schools, however that not all children (including learners with severe disabilities) have access to their right to a basic education. Learners on the waiting list, often have to wait an average of three years to be accommodated at a school. Unfortunately for these learners,

they have to wait at home and have absolutely no access to any form of education or support (De Vries, 2017).

This furthermore highlights the necessity for various ways to be explored in order to support teachers with the challenges of inclusive classrooms, so that these learners can be included effectively and not just integrated into the mainstream environment. (Frith, 2004; Eloff, 2007). Inclusivity is imperative because people with ASD are people first, therefor they deserve the same equal access to education as people who do not have ASD (WHO, 2009).

3.9 Conclusion

ASD diagnoses are increasing and there is a need for awareness, training, support and inclusivity. Therefore, this chapter highlighted the challenges experienced by learners and teachers as well as how an inclusive environment can benefit a learner with AS.

CHAPTER FOUR
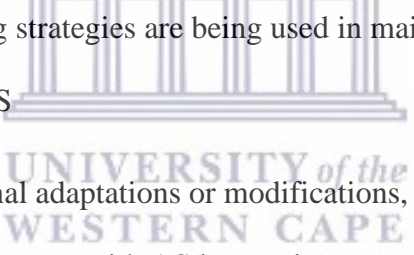
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Research, plays an integral role in how policymakers are guided towards changes and implementation. This chapter provides a detailed discussion about the methodology of this study.

4.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study, was, to explore the school strategies that will enable teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms. The objectives therefore focussed on:

- Exploring what teaching strategies are being used in mainstream classrooms to support learners with AS

- Exploring what additional adaptations or modifications, if any, as well as resources are needed to support learners with AS in a mainstream classroom.

- Exploring, what barriers might impede (if any) the inclusion of learners with AS into a mainstream environment.

- Exploring, the role of facilitators to equip teachers to support learners with AS into mainstream classrooms.

4.3 Research Question

According to Agee (2009), qualitative research articulates what a researcher wants to know about a certain topic. Therefore, in qualitative studies, the ongoing process of questioning forms an integral part for the researcher in understanding the perspectives of others. Another

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important aspect is that it allowed the researcher to critically understand the environment for education services, and thereby help to make sense in understanding the gap which exists between policy and practice (DeJaeghere, Morrow, Richardson, Schowengerdt, Hinton & Muñoz-Boudet, 2020). The research question for this study was, "to explore school strategies that will enable teachers to support learners with AS." However, encapsulated within this research question are four sub-questions, which are:

i.   What teaching strategies are being used in mainstream classrooms to enable teachers to support learners with AS?

ii.   What additional adaptations or modifications, if any, as well as resources are needed to support learners with AS in a mainstream classroom?

iii. What barriers might impede the inclusion of learners with AS into a mainstream environment?

iv.   What role can facilitators play to equip teachers to support learners with AS into a mainstream environment?
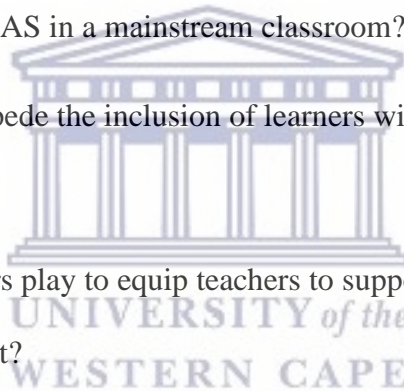
4.4 Research Methodology

The methodology for this study was a qualitative, exploratory approach, as this allowed the researcher to have a more in-depth exploration about current school practices and strategies around inclusion of learners with learning difficulties, especially learners with AS. Due to the nature of the research study, a purposive and homogenous sampling technique was used (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2013).   What this technique implies, is that the participants were purposefully chosen as the focus was specifically on teachers, principals and stakeholders in education in order to explore school practices to support learners with AS in mainstream

classrooms. Furthermore, using a purposive, homogenous sample, also allowed for the flexibility of choosing participants who were willing to provide information based on their specific knowledge and experiences with regards the topic (Bernard, 2002). There were 20 participants from six different schools, one of which was a pilot Full-Service School. The participants comprised of 13 teachers, two principals from both primary and high schools in both high and low socio-economic communities, four learning support staff (which included an occupational therapist, learning support teacher, special needs teacher and educational psychologist), lastly, one stakeholder who is involved in the facilitation of special needs education in the Western Cape. This study made use of semi-structured, individual, face-to-face interviews, as it allowed for better understanding and immediate clarification of responses about current school practices to support learners with AS in an inclusive environment as well as participants thoughts, values, prejudices and feelings (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). Saunders et al, (2012) argues that the purpose of exploratory research is not intended to provide conclusive evidence; it helps researchers to have a better understanding of the problem and it is more flexible compared to other research methodologies. Exploratory research is also a continuous process that needs improvement. Therefore, this was important for this study because literature related to the topic of inclusion of learners with AS in mainstream schools is sparse.

4.5 Research Approach

The research approach that lends itself to this explorative study was the interpretivism approach. The interpretive approach makes the assumption that the different participants will have different opinions on the subject, but that these differences may be indicative of different value positions and ideologies. Understanding this difference was crucial to understanding the

research topic as it allowed for a deeper understanding of the complexities of including learners with AS in mainstream school (Potter, 2014). This allowed one to capture the essence of the different perspectives and views with regards to the current school strategies being used to include learners with AS into the mainstream environment (Al Riyami, 2015). The interpretivists approach also allowed the researcher to conduct research in the participants' natural setting; in this case, it was the six different schools which included (three primary, which included a pilot Full-Service school, three secondary schools, as well as a Special Needs School) (Creswell, 2007). Tuli (2010) mentions that by using this approach, it allowed the researcher to obtain personal contact with the individuals being studied, thereby obtain an insider's viewpoint. The interpretative approach does not merely focus on isolating and controlling variables, but rather on harnessing and extending the power of ordinary language and expression to help understand and make sense of the topic (Terreblanche, Durrheim & Kelly, 2014).
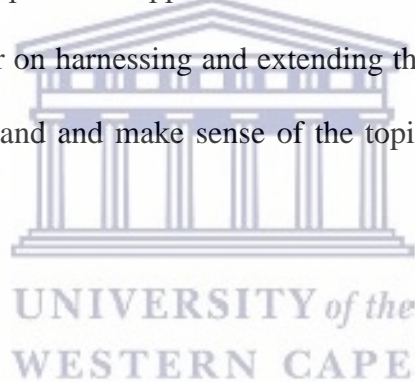
4.6 Participants

In order for IE to be effective, it requires major shifts from old to new educational paradigms (Mitchell, 2005), as well teachers' perceptions in relation to inclusion. Although, the White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) policy document highlights that classroom teachers will play a pivotal role with the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties, Safran (2001) mentions that especially with learners with AS, all school personnel should have some knowledge with regards the characteristics of these learners.

AS is seen as a lifelong developmental disability, and some characteristics such as anxiety, difficulty with social understanding and communication, might manifest at both primary and secondary school levels for some learners. The decision to include teachers from both primary and secondary schools was crucial, in order to have a general overview of teaching strategies, learners' progress and to ascertain the continuity for learners during the various stages in their transition.

The sample for this study was therefore a purposeful, homogenous one, as the focus was on teachers, principals and various stakeholders in education, with the explicit aim to explore school strategies to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome. The sample focussed primarily on schools in the Metro South District, Western Cape. At the special needs school there were two participants (one classroom teacher and an Occupational Therapist). Lastly, one stakeholder who is in the facilitation of inclusive education in the Western Cape. The schools were chosen from a list of primary and secondary schools within the Metro South District. Most of the identified schools, had learners with AS or who were high on the spectrum.

4.7 Data Collection

4.7.1 Data Collection Tools

The data was collected by using, a semi-structured interview schedule, as qualitative research interviews are less concerned with generalising and more focused on trustworthy and authentic representations of the participants' perspectives on the topic (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The interviews also allowed for a friendlier and a mutual exploration around the topic of inclusion. Laverty (2018) mentions that these conversations provide immediate responses and

opportunities for the researcher to get more clarification. This allows for meaningful information about how participants really felt about the inclusion of learners with AS into mainstream classrooms.

The interview schedule contained questions that were semi-structured. This means that it had an outline but it allowed for flexibility to probe deeper into certain questions (Laverty, 2018). A profile was designed with the characteristics of a learner with AS (Annexure G). This profile was verified by a specialist (clinical psychologist) before it was presented to the participants, as part of the interview, to gauge their responses with regards inclusion of an AS learner who displays some of these characteristics. An interview schedule of six open-ended questions, with probes, were used to interview teachers. Questions included: *what teaching strategies are currently being used in mainstream classrooms, in order to support learners with AS?* (Annexure C). For the two principals, one from a primary school and the other from a secondary school, five open-ended questions were used (Annexure D), an example of a question was, *do you think your teachers are well prepared with new skills and knowledge to embrace the new teaching strategies needed to support students with AS?* Three open-ended questions were used with the stakeholder who facilitates inclusive education in the Western Cape (Annexure E), for example, *having policies on paper are often very commendable but in terms of implementation can be extremely challenging, what do you anticipate (if any) some challenges might be in mainstream education, and how does the Department propose to deal with it?* and four open-ended were used with the stakeholders from the psycho-social support stream questions (Annexure "F"), an example of a questions was, *what role, have or can your organisation play in the facilitation of preparing schools and teachers to be better equipped to meet the needs of learners with AS?*

4.7.2 Data Collection Process

The principals of the identified schools, (which were chosen from a list of primary and secondary schools in the South Metro District) were contacted, and a meeting was arranged to explain the purpose of the research, and to have access to staff. Participants, who were identified by their principal for possible participation, were briefed about the aims and objectives of the study. After this briefing, they were invited to participate in the study.

On the day of the interview, the details pertaining to the study was explained to the participants (Annexure A) as well as the consent process (Annexure B). Participants provided consent for the interviews to be audio recorded. Furthermore, it was explained that all the information and recordings would remain completely anonymous. When this process was complete, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in English with the participants who provided written consent to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted at the various schools, during office hours, to make it more accessible for the participants.

4.7.3 Individual Interview Sessions

Creswell (2007) asserts the importance of good qualitative questions, as it invites a process of exploration and discovery, and can be a significant tool that often shapes a study design as well as the analysis. DeJaeghere et al (2020) mentions that using the method of individual interviews allows one to gather information about people's lives, experiences, opinions, feelings and their knowledge with regards a certain topic. The rationale thus was that it had the ability to provide rich information and it allowed the researcher to probe for additional information in relation to the topic. The one-on-one interviews were conducted at the seven

different schools, during school hours, which included the teachers, principals as well as the learning support staff. In addition, the interview with the one stakeholder was conducted at the offices of where the person is employed. This allowed participants to be comfortable in their space thereby making sharing their thoughts and ideas easier (DeJaeghere et al, 2020). The interview schedule was semi-structured so that, as mentioned before, it allowed to probe further as well as for any clarifications. This allowed participants to feel more at ease with the process. The data collection was conducted over a two-week period, and the individual sessions lasted between 30-45 minutes.

4.7.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data, especially with individual interviews, can provide textual and verbal data that can be analysed by coding and placing the codes into themes and sub themes (Laverty, 2018). Since the aim of this study was to explore school teaching strategies in mainstream classrooms in order to include and assist learners with AS a thematic analysis approach was used in order to make sense of the data. The rationale for using thematic analysis, was that it aims to identify patterns within the data and created from these patterns, various categories for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2012). The following procedures were followed:

- Organize all the interviews that was recorded and collected by numbering each participant.

- The data was transcribed verbatim and the information was converted into text data.

- The general data was explored and then coded and the information was then classified into the various themes for analysis.

- The findings of the study will be presented in a table, discussing in detail some of the major themes, as well as using some of the quotes from some of the participants in Chapter Five.

4.8 Self-Reflexivity

Alvesson and Skoldburg (2000) describes reflexivity as an awareness strategy that encourages reflection about how the researcher felt throughout the research process and how the researcher and participant affected each other. This information was journalised. The focus is also on the interpretation and reflection of information. As a teacher, it can be extremely challenging when I do not have the necessary support. It is with this knowledge that it was important to be quite mindful that participants might mention information that I could strongly relate to.

4.9 Bias and objectivity

For this reason, it was important for me to remain completely objective during the interviews. To assist with this process, the protocols were adhered to: (1) explain the motivation for the study and not to have any preconceived ideas or pre-empt what participants might say, (2) an interview schedule was used to ensure objectivity and to allow the participants to express themselves and (3) for the study to have more credibility, the interviews were recorded.

4.10 Trustworthiness

According to Veal (2011), a thorough reporting of the process and the results of qualitative data collection and analysis is important in justifying and assuring that trustworthiness exists in the study. To evaluate and establish quality and validity in this study, this research endeavoured to lend itself to what Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlights as four extremely

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important areas in research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Macnee and McCabe (2008) defines credibility as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Therefore, in order for this study to be credible, the following processes were followed: during the data collection process, an audio-recording was made, and permission was requested from the various participants. This information, was then transcribed verbatim and was returned to the individual participants to verify the content and if it was a true reflection of what they were trying to convey. This information was then transcribed and recurring themes emerged which made sense of the data collected. This process allowed the participants to make any changes to the transcripts. To make the study dependable, Creswell (2009) mentions the importance of the member checking process, whereby the themes that was collected should be taken back to the participants to offer them an opportunity to provide context and or possibly an alternate interpretation of why they acted or responded in a particular way. This information was emailed to the individual participants, who in turn returned their responses via email. In relation to confirmability of the data, the interpretations and findings are based on the experiences of the participants who were interviewed. Furthermore, it also allowed the participants to evaluate the findings as well as the interpretation and recommendation of the study, thus ensuring that they are supported by the data received from the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Transferability refers to the results of the qualitative research that can be transferred other respondents, Macnee and McCabe (2008). Therefore, the selection of the participants was considered purposefully, in order to guarantee thorough data collection and interpretation, so that the findings of this research could be transferable in terms of any relevant research related

to similar studies. In order for this study to be confirmed, thorough documentation of the entire process was recorded, prepared and organised, and then lastly how the study will be reported.

Bowen (2009) mentions, that an audit trail often offers visible evidence from the process and product, that the researcher did not simply find what was set out to find or a figment of the imagination.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape (Reference No. HS19/4/12) in order to conduct the research. Once permission was granted, permission was requested from the Western Cape Education Department to conduct the research within the identified mainstream public primary and secondary schools in the South Metropole District in Cape Town, Western Cape Province of SA. In addition, permission was also requested from the Metropole South District to have access to the various identified schools. They were informed that their participation was completely voluntary and that no harmful procedures will be done in the study. Issues related to anonymity and confidentiality were discussed. Those who agreed to participate were required to sign a consent to guarantee confidentiality (Annexure B). Furthermore, when the raw data was transcribed and results were published, pseudonym names were used for further anonymity. After the data was transcribed, it was stored on a computer of which a password is required and only accessible to the researcher and supervisor. The data will however be deleted from all devices after the allocated storage time has lapsed. Participants were also made aware that interviews will be recorded and permission for this was obtained from the participants. The interviews were conducted at the various schools, the aim was to create a

safe, informal setting where participants would be able to express themselves freely. Although the research did not involve any harmful practices, support deemed necessary was available at all times.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed account of the methodology used in this study. It described the participants, data collection process, data analysis and ethical considerations. The next chapter will discuss the results of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on presenting and discussing the findings on school strategies that will enable teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms. This chapter will describe in detail some of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data that was collected in the Metro South District of the Western Cape.

5.2 Demographic Data of Participants

The sample included participants in the Metro South District, Western Cape, from primary (which included a pilot Full-Service school), secondary mainstream schools, as well as a special needs school. They comprised of 20 participants, 10 participants from primary schools, in both high and low socio-economic areas. Included at the primary schools was one learning support teacher, and one principal. Seven participants at secondary schools in different socio-economic areas, which comprised of five teachers, one principal and one resident educational psychologist at one of the schools. Two participants from a Special Needs school which included one classroom teacher and an Occupational therapist, and a stakeholder who is involved in the facilitation of Special Needs Education in the Western Cape. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, which lasted between 30 – 45 minutes each. The demographic data of participants is presented in Table 5.2.1.

Table 5.2.1: Participants' profile (Metro South District – Western Cape)

	Participants	**Grades**
Primary Schools 3 different schools of which one included a pilot Full-Service school	Teachers	Grade: 1 (3) Grade: 2 (1) Grade: 3 (2) Grade: 5 (1) <u>Grade: 6 (1)</u> = 8
	Learning Support	Learning Support: (1)
	Principal	Principal: 1
		Total: 10 Participants (10 Females)
Secondary Schools 3 different schools	Teachers	Grades: 8 – 12 (5)
	Learning Support	Educational Psychologist (1)
	Principal	Principal: (1)
		Total: 7 Participants (3 Females & 2 Males)
Special Needs School	Teacher	Grade: 1 (1)
	Learning Support	Occupational Therapist (1)
		Total: 2 Participants (2 Females)
Stakeholders	Stakeholder involved in the facilitation of Special Needs Education in the Western Cape.	Stakeholder: 1 **Total: 1 Participant (1 Female)**

- The six schools from both high and low socio-economic communities.

- Teacher classroom experience ranged between 5-30 years.

5.3 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The results of the study emerged from data collected that was in the form of an audio recording during the interviews conducted at the various schools. These audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and then sent to the participants to verify. In order to make sense of the data, the results were divided into various themes and sub-themes. Three main themes emerged from the data. The first main theme, *Inclusion of learners with AS in mainstream classrooms* had three sub-themes (Integration vs Inclusion, Knowledge of AS and training, and Teaching strategies). The second main theme that emerged was *Barriers to inclusion of learners with AS, it had* had five sub-themes (Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, inflexible curriculum, over-crowded classroom sizes, lack of funding and being under-staffed). The third main theme was *Teachers' experiences and morale*, it had had one sub-themes, frustration (pace of curriculum, excessive workload and classroom sizes).
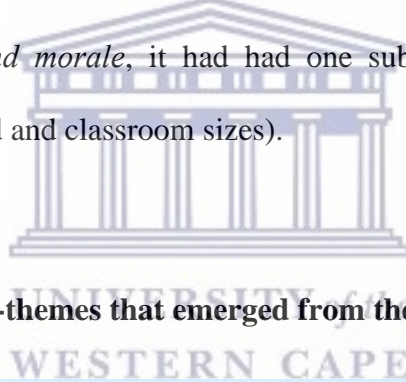
Table 5.3.1: Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collected

	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Inclusion of learners with AS in mainstream classrooms	• Integration vs Inclusion • Knowledge of AS & Training • Teachers' strategies
2	Barriers to inclusion of learners with AS	Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion • Inflexible curriculum • Large class sizes • Lack of funding • Under-staffed
3	Teachers' experiences and morale	• Frustration (Pace of curriculum, excessive workload and class size)

5.3.2 Theme 1: Inclusion of Learners with AS in Mainstream Classrooms

Since the focus of this study was to explore school strategies in order for learners with AS to be included into the mainstream classroom, it was imperative to have a clear understanding about the issue of inclusive education or inclusion. Schuelka (2018) highlights that in order for successful inclusion practices to take place, transformation and change is required of both the school itself as well as the school system. However, most of the reform is primarily focussed on the design or policy rather than on the resources available.
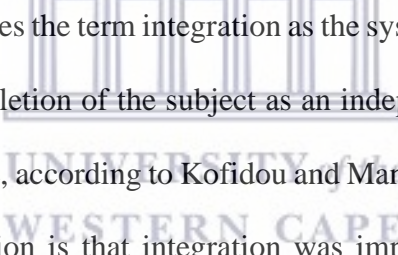
Furthermore, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2016), views inclusion as follows:

- A fundamental right to education;

- A principle that values students' wellbeing, dignity, autonomy and contribution to society, as well as;

- A continuing process to eliminate barriers to education and promote reform in the culture, policy and practice in schools to include all students.

Based on the above information, the general response from the participants were quite positive with regards to the inclusion of learners with AS into their mainstream classrooms. However, although some positivity, there was also a sense of that they are ill-prepared for the additional tasks because of their already heavy workload. Some of the participants, also indicated, that without the necessary training, resources and manpower, then it will just be another futile exercise.

5.3.2.1 Sub-Theme: Integration Vs Inclusion

Although there were no specific questions related to integration during the interviews, it became quite evident based on some participants' responses that integration was being interpreted as using inclusive practices. Many of the participants related various strategies, that either integrated the learner into their existing classroom setup, rather than the classroom and school, accommodating the learner's unique learning abilities in an inclusive environment. Sanagi (2011), mentions that changing the school and learning environment to include the special educational needs of learners can be expressed as a process by which the special provision that has become effective are transformed into regular provisions, for learners. Thus, this process corresponds and aligns with the concept of inclusive education.

Zoniou-Sideri (2011), also defines the term integration as the systematic placement of someone in something else and the completion of the subject as an independent, that forms an integral part of a larger whole. Therefore, according to Kofidou and Mantzikos (2017), a key difference between inclusion and integration is that integration was implemented as a practice in the absence of a theoretical context and thus a big reason for its failure, whereas inclusion involves providing education for all learners, despite their apparent differences (Florian, 2008). A key difference between inclusion and integration according to Harman (2009), would be in the language being used, for example, if they talk about extra adaptations or services to help fit the learner into the classroom, then that is integration. Furthermore, if the IEP focuses on strategies to help a child fit into a classroom, then it is integration. However, Harman (2009) also describes inclusive schools and classrooms when school staff emphasize how the classroom as well as the school will be changed to support the success of a child.

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As mentioned above, that during the interviews, it became quite apparent how some of the participants perceived the inclusion of learners into their mainstream classrooms. It became very clear from some of their responses that they were referring to the integration of learners rather than the inclusion. Below are some of the responses of participants:

"I would not call it an inclusive school, but we do have an inclusivity policy." Moreover, *"at this stage at our school, we not adapting the curriculum as such, and I haven't had the need to do that with the cases that I've dealt with, because academically they were functioning. ... but inclusive in a sense that for children with Asperger's and Remedial problems, we do accommodate them to a point."* Furthermore, *"We would love to have a remedial – we won't call it that, but a full-time remedial side to our school, where you could have small classes with more teachers and facilitators working with the children individually, erm where they not disappearing into a class of 30-34".* (Participant #13).

"We are forced to put a group of leaners with barriers in one group, because they work at a different pace than the others." (Participant #02).
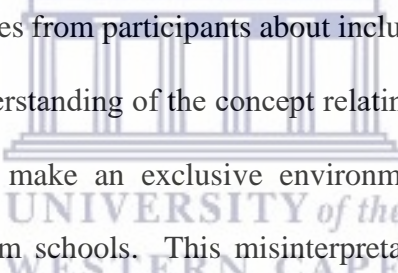
"They want integration, they want to support the child in the class, but even though they say so, the learning support teacher cannot get into every class and work alongside that teacher in that class, with all the groups." (Participant #03)

"A specialist room, that – er – it's not a conventional classroom – in terms of – when I say conventional classroom, a conventional classroom might have like as I said 30-40 benches, because of the requirement. You probably have a classroom with fewer benches because you still have to maintain the structure of the school, but it must be set out in such a way, so that the child can express itself in a different way". Furthermore, *"No-no-I don't think – when I said not in the mainstream classroom – what it would be like – say, for example – say like E-*

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Learning in a normal environment or a normal class, the teacher would be teaching Life Science, so the child does Life Science but in a classroom environment he or she is unable to cope, because there are so many students, but in that particular class where they sitting, they will electronically be able to watch the teacher, teaching Life Science, while they are being supervised by someone". (Participant #06)

"We do modify the assessments and differentiate the curriculum for learners in our class who maybe ... say like if they visually impaired." (Participant #09)

"Yes, each child has a profile which is kept in there. It has all the documentation reports." *(#15).*
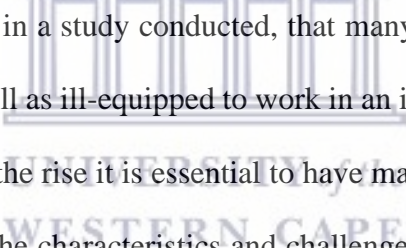
These were some of the responses from participants about inclusion. However, Sanagi (2016), mentions that teachers' misunderstanding of the concept relating to inclusion, will not lead to good practices, rather, it will make an exclusive environment for learners with special educational needs in mainstream schools. This misinterpretation by teachers with regards inclusion can be quite a setback, if, as stated in the White Paper 6 (2001), that classroom teachers will play a pivotal role in the process of inclusion and including all learners into their respective classrooms. In essence, having different "remedial" or "specialist" rooms inevitably would be perpetuating the system of exclusion rather than inclusion.

When some participants mentioned having special rooms and to have a special needs unit at their schools, somehow this sounded more like reverting to the Medical Model, rather than inclusive education.

5.3.2.2 Sub-Theme: Knowledge and Training

The Department of Basic Education (DBE), with their White Paper 6 policy document of 2001, as well as their Action Plan to 2014: Towards the Realisation of Schooling 2025, is somehow committed in transforming the education system. Thus, the DBE in their policy documents, recognises, that learners with learning difficulties who have the ability should be included into the mainstream classrooms. For the past few years, they have invested a considerable amount of funding in training some teachers in being Scribes and Readers for those learners who had difficulties in those areas. Once again, as much as this is a step in the right direction, in essence, this is still not being considered as good inclusive practice,

Hay et al (2001) mentions, that in a study conducted, that many teachers were of the opinion that they were unprepared as well as ill-equipped to work in an inclusive classroom. Since the numbers of ASD learners is on the rise it is essential to have mainstream teachers and schools who have an understanding of the characteristics and challenges that these learners face on a daily basis. This indeed begs the question, if ASD cases are increasing, then why is this percentage so low? De Vries (2017) mentions that a possible reason for this low number could be attributed to the fact that there are many learners who are either undiagnosed or not attending school. Therefore, for schools and classrooms teachers, it would be imperative to have some understanding of the symptoms and characteristics of a learner with AS in order to make the necessary accommodations for them to be included.

One of the questions during the interviews in order to gauge participants' knowledge and understanding with regards AS, was *"what do you as a teacher know of Asperger's Syndrome and some of the characteristics of a learner with i*t?" There were a few participants who had some insight around the condition; however, these were some of the responses to the question:

"Erm, I don't know much, there are things that I remember from doing modules and that is they or that they find it difficult to read social cues." (Participant #01)

"Absolutely no idea – absolutely no idea." (Participant #05).

"Well, I've picked up, erm, they can be (pause) erm – irritable, if they hear specific sounds. And then also social behaviour erm whether it's to look for attention or if they just awkward." (Participant #20).

"it's on the autism spectrum, if I'm correct. I'm not sure, and that a child with Asperger's syndrome would display some social issues, I think, they would need a lot of routine, erm-erm … Let me just think, erm, literal things, like taking things literally and not really understand sarcasm." (Participant #09).

"So, you have, where you have staff members that are ignorant and don't understand, and teach these children and have major behavioural challenges." (Participant #03).

It is said that mainstream classroom teachers play a major role in the successful process or implementation of learners with special needs. Therefore, if they do not have a clear understanding or knowledge of the characteristics of these learners, then, ultimately, they will be unable to have effective classroom strategies to include the learner. This means that the learner will most likely not feel accepted and safe.

Training, of teachers in order to be able to assist learners with learning difficulties is key. Based on previous research, it highlights that for many teachers who are often faced with including a learner with a disability, they may often feel less positive and might experience stress and anxiety because they might feel inadequate because of the amount of training, if any, they received around AS (Lindsay, 2007; Anderson, 2015). Horne and Timmons (2009), mentions that normally teachers feel that they need to be provided with ongoing training in special needs when they are involved in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, for the more experienced teachers, who are now teaching inclusive classrooms, they often have very little or no training in special education, therefore, many may lack the necessary expertise to successfully meet the needs of all their learners (Tougher, 2012). Forlin (2001) adds that approximately 70% of classroom teachers have not received any formal training in either special education or inclusive education. In this study, all 20 participants in some way indicated that a lack of training was definitely seen as a barrier to include learners with AS into the mainstream classroom. Many had little to no training. Some of the aforementioned statements are echoed in the comments from some of the participants with regards training:

"I don't feel, I had sufficient… I don't feel I had any training actually. I attended one workshop on Autism and I put my name down to attend every term." (Participant #01)

"We lack resources and training." (Participant #03)

"I don't think any teacher is trained enough in the spectrum. I also don't – I went to a workshop – it was now two weeks ago – they work at such a fast pace, because they know all the information, that they lack to see that I learn differently – I learn when I'm involved." (Participant #04).

"We can't expect ordinary and when I say ordinary, mainstream educators to now fulfil that role without the necessary training, without the necessary exposure – but this becomes our daily reality – this is what we are dealing with on a daily basis and we find a way, and unfortunately those learners will slip through the cracks." (Participant #05).

"Let the staff also be trained in these kinds of situations. The training that we do erm at the moment, very much of what you do, you know, you also responsible for your own development." (Participant #08).

"... it is fine to include them, but then you really need to skill up the teachers to deal with children that has or display these symptoms, because you sit in a classroom with 45 children with various levels ...." (Participant #10).

I think the training of teachers is key." (Participant #11)

"It has not been part of their pre-service training, so that forces us also to do a lot of in-service teacher's training (Participant #17).

Participant #08 alluded to the fact "*you responsible for your own development*", which indicates that there are those individuals, who take responsibility for their own personal growth, however, this should not exonerate the DBE from their responsibility to fully equip and support their teachers and learners, in order to make inclusion meaningful. Participant #17, also mentioned that there are special needs online courses available for teachers, which consist of five modules. It is definitely good to have this information available, however, based on some of the participants responses with regards their morale and overloaded administration and classroom schedules, it is highly unlikely that this will make an impact in addressing the many shortcomings that exists at schools, especially if these modules have no incentive for teachers to want to do it.

Therefore, if teachers' knowledge about AS is limited, or they do not fully understand the content around AS, or have on-going training on how to support these learners in a mainstream classroom, then it would definitely impact on the inclusion process and undoubtedly leave both the teacher and learner extremely frustrated. What was also evident from the interviews was that when teachers go for training, normally, they either volunteer or selected to attend these workshops. Since only one or two teachers attend a workshop, the onus is then on them to return to their respective schools and re-train their colleagues. Often, the translation in communicating key information gets lost. Participant #03 emphasises this point by stating, "*Then you will have workshops, then you will have selective workshops but they will expect you to send a staff member or two who must come back and disseminate the information to the rest of the staff, and therein the translation gets lost as well.*"

5.3.2.3 Sub-Theme: Teachers' Strategies

From the interviews conducted for this study, it indicated, in relation to classroom teachers at mainstream schools, that some form of classroom strategies, are in place to assist learners with special needs. However, it must be pointed out, that many of these classroom strategies did not necessarily include or pertain to learners with AS or autism per se. Even though, learners with AS may display different characteristics from one another and teachers may have different teaching styles, it is crucial for schools to have mandatory procedures and policies in place to address how learners with learning difficulties will be included into the mainstream classroom.

Barnhill (2001), mentions that a learner with AS mostly has impairments with social relationships, verbal and non-verbal communication as well as by repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests and activities. Even though, the AS learner might have a high academic acumen, if the aforementioned impairments are not addressed, it may impact on their academic progress. As participant #11 mentioned *"… the irony is that often these children will not have a problem with math or science, however, sometimes they battle with the amount of repetitive work."* What was also evident from the interviews and data, was that there were quite a few participants who had learners in their class, who was possibly higher on the autism spectrum, and who needed quite a lot of assistance.   These were some of the classroom strategies that some participants mentioned:

"… allow them to use technology." (Participant #05)

Also, to *"… build a relationship of trust. Have a buddy system. To make sure that the child is aware, where the toilet is, what sounds are going to come, like the intercom just came on while we were speaking."* (Participant #09), and to,

"Give them time for a transition. Re-phrase the question or be willing to change the topic." (Participant #11).

"… He needed to be close to a window and an open door. We also had in the past, given them three cards, green, orange and red ones, and they would be quietly put which one they feel at that moment." (Participant #13)

With regards to a learner who had auditory sensitivity, "*if the kids sniffed, like if they had colds, the child could not stand it erm it was unbearable for him. … I made sure always that there was toilet paper, if they did not have tissues."* (Participant #20).

Therefore, if these inclusive processes are not practically addressed, then as Bagree and Lewis (2013) highlights, that often because teachers are ill-equipped, trained or supported in order to teach and include learners with learning difficulties, very often it leads to these learners being marginalized from various educational opportunities.

5.4 Theme 2: Barriers to Inclusion of Learners with AS

According to Avramidis and Norwich (2010), teachers are expected to alter their teaching methods to accommodate learners with additional needs in an inclusive class. It is because of this expectation that contributes to different perceptions towards inclusive policies, which ultimately impacts on the success of good inclusive practices. Based on this study, it was evident that there are fundamental changes that need to be made in order for inclusion to be effective at both Full-Service and mainstream schools to work. These are teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, inflexible curriculum, large class sizes, funding and resources with specific reference to human resources, which will be discussed briefly.
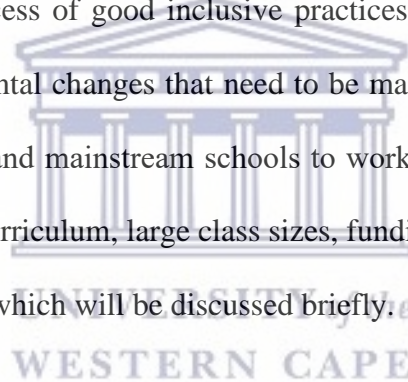
5.4.1 Sub-Theme: Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion

Bornman and Donohue (2013), describes teachers as fundamentally being the driving force in the successful execution of education policy. Furthermore, depending on teachers' attitudes toward inclusive policies, they are in a position to either promote or hinder the success of inclusion (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2007). Mittler (1995) suggests, that negative attitudes from teachers, parent and politicians are considered one of the biggest barriers to inclusive education. It is important, to define attitude, in order to understand exactly what it means. Eagly and Chaiken (2007) defines an attitude as a tendency or latent property of the person that gives rise

to judgements as well as to many other types of responses, such as emotions and overt behaviours.

According to the data collected many of the participants had quite a positive view with regards inclusion. These were some responses:

"I feel that it is very important to include everybody – erm – the only thing about that is, I feel that the teachers need to be trained". In addition, *"I also feel that schools should be inclusive, because there are parents who can't afford to send, their children to special schools. There's a long waiting list, and they need to be referred and they don't know the process" (Participant #01).*

Well, to be honest, I would include everybody in my class, if the class size were smaller" (Participant #09).

"So, I think in the majority of mainstream schools, it can work. You just need to know that you have one or two educators that are mouldable and are willing to-to take the gap, and try something and accommodate the child" (Participant #11).

"Personally, I'm of the opinion that they need to be included. So, yes it will be very challenging and of course it depends on the individual and their specific needs and where their individuality occurs, because they don't have all the symptoms" (Participant #15).

On the other hand, there were also some participants, who were of a different view with regards inclusion, and these were some of their concerns:

"I, want to choose my words. I feel it's extremely detrimental for those kids to be in the government school, to the point where I wish, I could be an advocate for them. Erm, it's so

quick to get – the government system does not allow – already don't allow space for a lot of growth in kids, because we following such a strict routine. If this was a true Full-Service school, then a Full-Service school must have all the helpful hands that goes with a Full-Service school, not just ... We have a therapist and speech therapist and those people coming in – but they come in and do their test and when they done, they leave. They use to be at the school daily, so I don't know if it is still seen as a Full-Service school, but a lot of things have fallen away." (Participant #4)

"We, barely survive on the training that we get from the WCED, to just focus on mainstream education. So, I don't see where or how we can still focus on those basic-basic-basic needs." (Participant #05).

"Erm, the extreme rigidity. The need for the environment to be adapted to them. Which we can do in a smaller classroom, but in a mainstream class when the teacher's got 45 kids already, it's very – it's very hard to be ... yah. I mean it's going to be unpredictable; it's going to change and you kind of inconvenience everybody else for the sake of it ... one child." (Participant #12)

Another area that could possibly hinder the progress of including learners would be the language that some of the participants used, when referring to learners with AS, as well as some of the strategies used to bring about awareness to their peers. In essence, this would be the ideal scenario to be able to work on the strengths of the learners with AS to bring about an awareness of their daily challenges, rather than trying to minimize the learner's condition. These are a few excerpts from some participants:

"Now, we look at different ways of how we can include all of them – yes to accommodate all of them." (Participant #7)

The following comment was made in relation to a learner with Asperger's who was diagnosed and had a very blunt approach:

"That was just how it was, cos there was no grey area, so I found that with the class – but then, I've always applied it with everything else as well, that I would send that person on a message somewhere, or send them somewhere, then I would speak to the class about it, because, they understand. They can be incredibly empathetic. You don't have to say the child's got Asperger's, just say they see things slightly differently." (Participant #13). In essence, what this response somehow alluded to was that the classroom assistant, in a sense will be taking over the role of the classroom teacher, in assisting them with the learning difficulties.

This response was made in reference to the class assistants in class*:*

"... and they are often the ones we use to deal with the children with problems." (Participant #14)

"Okay, erm, my one little girl – er – er – the very slow one, erm – in – it took her about two-two terms before she even spoke one word in my class. I – erm – speak to her. I ask questions and she'll look down. Er, she does not even make eye contact and then I-I thought okay, you are a normal child in my class. I'm going to ask you questions, but I got to get you to answer me". (Participant #18)

Another response with regards another learner, *"This year, what I did, and also a previous year, I had a boy – erm – that was on the spectrum. I spoke to the class alone, when ... I would send the child out on an errand and I would speak to them – er ... and let them know that he is different and the type of reactions he had when they do something or say something to him – er – and that they must just be mindful of that and that did help I must say." (Participant #20).*

It is important to point out that from the above excerpts that these were participants from both primary and secondary schools, in the language being used and ways in highlighting Asperger's syndrome to their peers. Teachers' attitudes whether it be positive or negative can have an indelible impact on the education for the learner who is on the spectrum (McGregor & Campbell, 2001). It also evident from the data that many teachers solely discussed the challenges of the learners, forgetting the strengths of some of these learners with AS, and how to use these strengths to their advantage in the mainstream classroom. For example, rather than sending the learner on an errand, if the learner has the ability, ask the learner to explain to the rest of the class what he or she experiences on a daily basis.

5.4.2 Sub-Theme: Inflexible Curriculum

According to Motitswe (2012), the curriculum and teaching methods used by teachers play a central role, in order for them to achieve effective teaching practices in an inclusive classroom. Furthermore, having a rigid and inflexible curriculum that does not allow for individual differences, including other negative aspects such as lack of relevance of subject content, appropriate resources and inflexible styles of teaching and classroom management, and inappropriate ways of assessing learning, can often lead to a breakdown of effective learning for learners with learning difficulties. In terms of assessment, Landsberg et al, (2005), asserts that the teacher should not be engaged in the assessment of the learner, but the focus should at all times be on assessment for learning.

Although many participants mentioned that their curriculum was not an inclusive one, it was clear that teachers were using assessment methods which may not have been relevant to the

learner with AS. Below are some excerpts from some participants' with regards the current CAPS Curriculum.

**"*In a sense that our curriculum drives you, you have these different levels of learners and I don't think we spend nearly enough time because we have not seen progress on their level." (Participant #02)*

"At the end of the day, you have to deliver the curriculum- you don't get curriculum support for all this, and I think the whole idea for this was firstly, to save money but then they took away the skills – that those needs – special needs." (Participant #05).

"We need to go broader, because if we going full steam ahead with this, then the curriculum will also need to be changed, because the curriculum is so set on things that need to be done or a certain time limit and whatever." (Participant #10).

"I think for most teachers the freedom to be able to interpret the curriculum without actually compromising their standards. Erm, for me that would help the most to actually help these learners in a mainstream environment." (Participant #11).

"Erm, so at the moment we have a bit of a problem with the erm … The Department is not wanting us to erm, they don't want the Curriculum to be diluted. So, straddling the curriculum would be one way of – of allowing the child to work on a different level, but at the moment the reporting system does not allow for that." (Participant #16).

"... I went to a workshop two weeks ago, where they were talking about the overloaded curriculum, the excessive assessments that need to be done. I think there is an acknowledgement that something needs to be done about that, because it creates special needs in a way, because children can't keep up with the pace and the teacher's rushing to complete CAPS in the allocated time ...." (Participant #17)

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"No, erm, because that is one of, sort of the biggest complaints I hear and just in terms of how much more one is expected to get through as a teacher in terms of just the admin and the content and of all that. I hear that often, I've got to get through so much that there is not even time, in their opinion. Furthermore, the participant's thoughts on Full-Service Schools, *"Erm! Aaaah! Okay – sort of – erm, informal discussion with the Learning Support, is that erm they are overwhelmed. The Department promised lots of resources, which is not forthcoming, so it's hard and difficult."* (Participant #19)

Based on some of the responses with regards the current Curriculum, it is quite evident that if changes are not made to curriculum, in order to make it an inclusive curriculum, so that all learners with learning difficulties may be included, especially learners with AS, then regardless of the sentimentality around levelling the playing field for all learners, it will continue to exclude many learners. Thus, perpetuating exclusion and integration rather than inclusion.
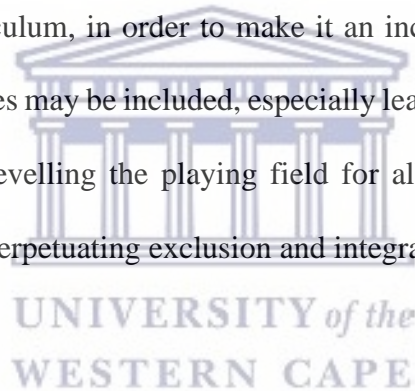
5.4.3. Sub-Theme: Overcrowded Classroom Sizes

Overcrowded classrooms are not unique to the SA national education system but it is a challenge that many westernized countries also experience. However, with specific reference SA, West and Meier (2020) mentions that a possible reason for having overcrowded classrooms could be contributed to a shortage of teachers, a lack of school infra-structure as well as the high number of poorly resourced schools. Based on previous studies, the average national learner-to-teacher ratio is about 33:1, but, in some classes in SA, this figure could be as high as 50:1 (DBE, 2014).

According to Van Wyk (2008) having over-crowded classrooms could impact on poor learning conditions because of a lack of space, fresh air and high noise levels that could lead to a lack of attention and create stress within learners. Therefore, if this is the daily reality for a learner with AS, then it could have a detrimental effect on not only their academic progress, but emotionally as well, especially if the learner is hyper-sensitive to extreme noise levels. Furthermore, if the teacher is not aware of the leaner's sensory difficulties or needs, then this can so often be misinterpreted by the teacher as the learner being defiant or having behavioural issues.

Participant #13 expressed an experience related to a learner in her class who felt extremely frustrated. The reason why the participant highlighted this scenario was that because of the big class sizes, and very often the teacher not having the capacity to deal with all the learners, as well as giving the extra attention to this particular learner needs, then a scenario as mentioned below, can be quite detrimental to learning. Another reason that was highlighted with regards to class size, was that the classes can be extremely noisy, which might impact on the learner with AS. This was what was said: *"… he was almost perfectly fine at school, but when he got home, the wheels came off completely. He would throw tantrums, scream and shout and cry for hours. He tried so hard to keep it all in at school, that when he got home and it was his safe place, he would just let it all out. His poor mother was in a state. … it was his safe place, but trying to keep it together here was just too much for him."* This is but one example of the daily complexities that many teachers encounter, thus it is so important, to have knowledgeable, skilled and well-capacitated classroom teachers, in order for learners to indeed consider school and their respective classroom as a safe environment to express themselves.

Some of the other comments with regards classroom sizes as a barrier are as follows:

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"You need to have smaller classes." (Participant #03)

"... but our – the size of classes and the way that it is structured, does not allow for that, so that becomes a challenge as such, especially when you – we have a requirement, your ratio needs to be 38:1...." (Participant #6)

"As a matter of fact, they sitting amongst children like I said earlier, 45 in the class. It's a huge class and therefore I cannot give all my attention to him." (Participant #10)

"The class sizes are big." (Participant #17)

Bailey (2018) mentions that although learners with special needs may be placed into a mainstream classroom, the fact is that their differences and difficulties remain. This creates a huge gap because if the school communities and teachers are not equipped to deal with some of these learning difficulties and have smaller classrooms, then it will definitely impede the progress of inclusion. Participant #09 explains the benefit of smaller class sizes to include these learners with AS, *"Erm, because then you can give them what they need. I think that is the most important thing. It's not about us as a teacher, it's what they need."*

5.4.4 Sub-Theme: Funding

It would be a fair statement to make, that regardless of having the best national policies in place, if the necessary funding needed is not available for implementation, then the process is already off to a bad start. In South Africa, Makoelle and Burmistrova (2020) highlights that in relation to how the disbursements of funds were allocated was based on the funding model, whereby the National Treasury allocated funds to provincial governments based on a method that took into account various socio-economic factors which in turn perpetuated the disparities between the rich and the poor provinces. Participant #17 mentioned, *"what has been a*

challenge is that the National Department has not provided additional funding for us to convert these schools from Full-Service Schools, or from ordinary schools to Full-Service Schools". Furthermore, what also puts a strain on the Western Cape Province's budget, *"...We have a large influx of learners from other Provinces. So, although we planned how we would roll-out support – erm, whatever we planned, more and more children with moderate to high levels of support are coming into the province, because the support is not available in the province that they come from."* It is because of this that many mainstream schools will experience the knock-on effects of working with an extremely limited budget, for example, a lack in having the necessary resources and what has been highlighted several times by some participants', is the lack of manpower or being understaffed. Below are some of the comments that some participants made with regards the lack of funding:

Participant #09, mentioned*, "...definitely funding. Money for the big things, like a facilitator for the child, for example, or maybe an assistant educator within each grade."* Another response was *"Manpower! We need more facilitators. When I look at the Model C schools, their parents are by the means to pay for people to support their child and at our school, parents are not and the school itself, we not, due to a lack of funding." (Participant #03)*

A response from a participant in higher quintile school, *"We've got OT''s coming in and things like that, but it's all extra that's got to be paid. We've got an extra Remedial Teacher, but it's privately paid…" (Participant #13)*

Participant #07, commented on some of the perpetuating realities of many mainstream public schools, she said: *"I still want to make the statement that I made at the beginning of the interview, that schools have not transformed and I can qualify that. What is happening in your former ex-Model C schools, if you don't have money – right! – then you remain there ... and if*

you also look at the conditions of certain schools, I mean ... I'm sure the Government is aware what is happening in certain schools, but they so reluctant ..."

This is a response from a participant with regards Full-Service Schools:

"If this was a true Full-Service School, then a Full-Service School must have all the helpful hands that goes with a full-service school, not just ..." (Participant #4).

It was evident from this study that there are vast needs but limited budgets. As a result, learners will be at a disadvantage. More often than not, the learners to be most affected would be the learners who have learning difficulties and need additional help to be included into the mainstream classroom. In the words of participant #05, "*They've taken away some of the funding, they've taken away some of the staff, but they expect the same outcomes."*

5.5 Theme 3: Teachers' Experiences and Morale

Teachers' morale according to Senechal et al (2016), can be defined as a process and a state of mind, which would include characteristics such as well-being, satisfaction, energy levels, enthusiasm and hope. Based on some literature with regards the morale of teachers, Liebenberg (2017), mentions, that teaching in South Africa currently, is becoming more demanding for various reasons and that the expectations and demands placed on teachers appears to be increasing.

Therefore, to say that teachers are extremely frustrated with the current educational climate in SA would be an understatement. However, despite the many challenges and frustrations with regards the education system, most participants whether it was a teacher, principal, support staff or stakeholder, in some way, indicated that major changes are needed in order for

inclusivity to become more practical and relevant in the mainstream classroom. The excerpts below provide insight into teacher's experiences and thoughts with regards their daily challenges in the mainstream classroom:

"So, you go home, you feel drained, exhausted and you like, what am I doing wrong, what can I do better – right – so you switch your lesson plans and you try whatever you can." Furthermore, *"... but I know other teachers had cried when they leave school every day, badly, cos it's very difficult times, because their learners were maybe more severe than the learners I had." (Participant #01).*

The class sizes and there is such a varying range of learning barriers within one classroom. So, erm – we have like our – the requirements from the Education Department, is very low, so you might have a functioning child in group two but they also need a lot of individual attention because they just about making it." (Participant #02)
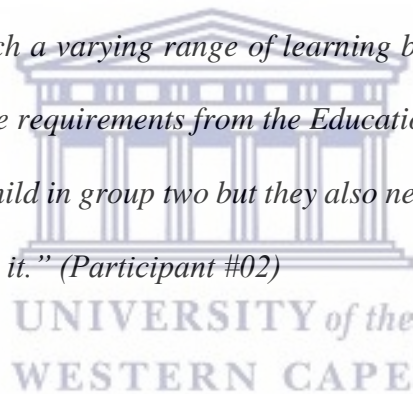
Participant #07 made this comment in relation to teacher absenteeism, she said: *"Erm – I, just heard some news yesterday, the principal said, there are schools, they have a break of about an hour, and I thought how is this possible – because there are so many educators absent. You see – er – it all impacts on – er ... if an educator is absent – that impacts on the results. It is not always the learners we need to look at the whole system."*

"What I find difficult, is the erm, is individual ... Like sort of their individual educational programme. That's what I personally struggle with. So, erm if there were to be a child with Asperger's in my class, I would hope that I would have a smaller class size. Erm, because then you can give them what they need." (Participant #9)

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This comment was made in relation to district meetings that the participant attended:

"... when I go to the meetings, and I go with District staff with all ... and there lots of schools there from Mitchells Plain and those areas. Those people are pulling their hair out. They really are left out in the cold. They've got no support. They just trying to survive. These kids come to school, erm, there's no parental support, there's no departmental support, because there's just no money to pay for this. So, the kids are just put through the system and then they get to High School and then the wheels come off and that is one of our biggest problems in this country." (Participant #13).

From some of these comments, one can somehow understand the frustrations that teachers are experiencing on a daily basis. If some of these barriers are not addressed, then South Africa, will be going around in circles for decades to come, in order to have good inclusive practices that will truly benefit all learners regardless of their challenges.

5.6 Summary of Chapter

In summary, the aim of this study, was to explore school strategies that will enable teachers in mainstream schools to support learners with AS. Therefore, based on the data and themes that emerged, the first theme, 'inclusion of learners with AS in mainstream classrooms' the data indicates, that generally the participants had quite a positive attitude towards inclusion. However, a few participants had some reservations on the inclusion of these learners. This was mostly based on the barriers that schools were experiencing. It was evident that, although the terms integration and inclusion is often used interchangeably, there is clearly a big difference

between these terms.   Many of the participants, especially at mainstream schools, often misinterpreted these two terms. This means that what they perceive as being inclusive practices in their classrooms was more the integration of learners.

Furthermore, although some participants had some knowledge about AS, overall, the knowledge was very limited. Participants pointed out that in order for inclusion to progress, knowledge and training about AS is key. The second theme showed that barriers that impede the inclusion of learners with AS include, the inflexible fast pace curriculum, over-crowded classrooms, being under-staffed and lack of funding. These barriers contribute to the third theme and that is teachers' experiences and morale. Teachers' felt that if these barriers are not addressed, then having Full-Service schools that is not supportive of teachers and learners, will not address the many inequalities and learning needs that many learners are currently experiencing.
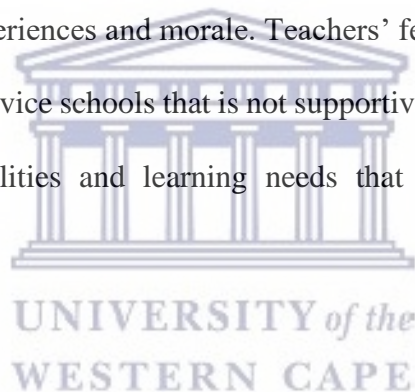
Lastly, the data showed that there were some teachers at mainstream schools, who have some strategies in place in order to assist learners with AS or ASD, for example, the buddy system, visual planning or cues for unforeseen events and getting parents involved. However, it was clear from the strategies that some participants mentioned that the primary focus is on the academics and not necessarily on the social, communication, cognition and sensory challenges of the learner. This omission could be attributed to what was highlighted from the analyses, which is the lack of knowledge and training many mainstream teachers had with regards AS, therefore not making them skilled enough to include these learners, so that they can achieve a quality education. As mentioned before, there were some classroom strategies mentioned by

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participants, that were for learners with learning difficulties, but it did not necessarily apply to learners with AS or autism. Evidently, the DBE has invested quite a bit of money in training teachers or parents to become scribes or readers for those learners who needed this accommodation.

Mainstream classroom teachers according to the White Paper 6 Policy Document (2001) will be the driving force in the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties. However, in order to achieve this, various stakeholders in education, which would include District Based Support Teams, as well as principals will be required, in order for the implementation of inclusion to be successful, as one of the participants mentioned, (*first and foremost you need to have an informed principal, informed SNT and trained educators to make sure we are able to identify some of these learners and some of these challenges, #05),* to capacitate these teachers, in order to advance the process of inclusive education.
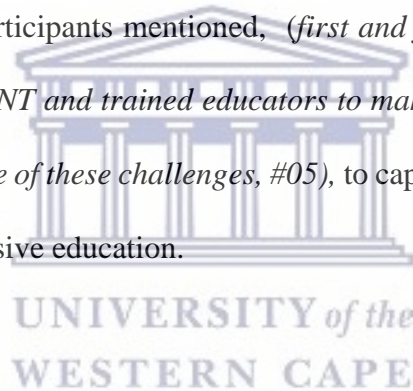
5.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this chapter was to discuss the themes and sub-themes, which emerged from the data that was collected about the school strategies being used at mainstream schools to support learners with AS in an inclusive classroom. Although, the data collected indicated that in the mainstream schools that there are some strategies in place for learners with learning difficulties, the data also shows that most of these strategies are not specifically geared towards the learner with AS. The participants indicated some strategies for learners with AS but the focus should not merely be on the academics, it should focus on the social, communication, sensory and motor challenges too.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is firstly, to summarise and conclude this research study. Secondly, to highlight the limitations of the study. Thirdly, to make recommendations to policy makers with regards inclusive education, and the possible implications for South African mainstream public classrooms, if some of these barriers as previously discussed is not being addressed. Fourthly, to suggest possible areas for future research. Lastly, to integrate the data gathered, and provide conclusions based on the objectives of the study.

6.2 Summary of Research Findings

The aim of this study was to explore the school strategies being used that will enable teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms. What emerged from the data analysis are as follows:

6.2.1 Theme 1: Inclusion of Learners with AS Into Mainstream Classrooms (Integration Vs Inclusion, Knowledge of AS and Training, Teachers' Strategies)

The data revealed that whilst most participants had a positive view about inclusion, some had reservations. However, most of their reservations were based on the existing barriers that needed to be addressed in order for Full-service schools, or inclusion to be successful. The mainstream schools and the pilot Full-service school had some strategies in place, but many strategies were not specifically focused on the learner with AS. Also, the teachers who had strategies for learners with AS in place focused primarily on the academics and not on the

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social, sensory and motor challenges the learner might have. It was also evident from the data that the few participants in the mainstream schools as well as the Full-Service school who indicated that they had learners with autism, had learners who were higher on the spectrum and need considerable support in an inclusive environment. A lack of knowledge and training about AS was also evident as well as misinterpretation of terms integration and inclusion.

6.2.2 Theme 2: Barriers to Inclusion of Learners with AS (Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusion, Inflexible Curriculum, Overcrowded Classrooms, Lack of Financial Support, Understaffed)

One of the questions during the interviews was 'What do you think some barriers might be that may impede the inclusion of learners with AS into an effective mainstream classroom?'   the data showed that of the 20 participants who were interviewed, all indicated that the above barriers will have a significant impact in the progression of, Full-Service schools and or inclusion in SA. Some even mentioned that they were doubtful if the practicalities around inclusion would work if the barriers were not going to be addressed.

6.2.3 Theme 3: Teachers' Experiences and Morale (Frustrations around the Pace of the Curriculum, Excessive Workload and Overloaded Classroom Sizes).

The third theme indicated that at the mainstream schools, especially in the low-socio communities and the pilot Full-Service school, the low morale of some teachers as well as the frustrations of teaching in overloaded classrooms, a fast-paced inflexible curriculum that is not benefitting learners with learning difficulties. It was also evident that parents of learners with AS or ASD should be more engaged and involved with the learning of their child.

6.3 Summary of Chapter

This section provides an overview of how this research study (based on its aims and objectives), shows a link to the Human Rights Based theory, policies related to inclusion, the literature on autism and AS and barriers to inclusion, the methodology used to collect the data and the results.

The research approach that was opted for this qualitative explorative study, was one of interpretivism. The reason for this was, that as the aim of the study was to explore school strategies that will enable teachers to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms, as well as that the participants would have different opinions with regards IE and the barriers that might impede the progress thereof.

The objectives for the study were:

- Explore what strategies are being used in mainstream classrooms to support learners with AS.

- Explore what additional adaptations and modifications, if any, as well as resources are needed to support learners with AS in mainstream classrooms.

- Explore, what barriers might impede (if any) the inclusion of learners with AS into a mainstream environment.

- Explore, the role of facilitators to equip teachers to support learners with AS into mainstream classrooms.

Abubaker et al (2016), mentions that globally one in every 160 persons is estimated to live with ASD. In SA, many children of school going age, especially in the low socio-economic

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communities or rural areas who often go undiagnosed. Therefore, based on this information and responses from some participants, it is clear that there are many learners that could be on the spectrum, but due to lengthy delays often are not diagnosed. This could be because parents are unable to afford to do it privately. In addition, teachers are ill equipped to recognise the condition because of knowledge or lack of training and therefore unable provide adequate support to these learners in the mainstream classrooms. This can then contribute to their low morale and frustrations. Therefore, additional adaptations and modifications are needed to support these learners and teachers.

Inclusive education according to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), defines inclusion whereby schools will teach all learners together, thus ensuring that all will be receiving quality support through an appropriate curriculum, organisational arrangements, teaching strategies and the use of resources suitable to the individual's needs. Engelbrecht et al (2016), mentions, that the vision of a truly inclusive education system in SA has been difficult to achieve and thus the results regarding implementation of IE remains questionable. Even though many of the participants had a positive approach regarding the inclusion of learners with AS, many of them were sceptical about the successful implementation of Full-Service schools. Some participants from the pilot school indicated that at the beginning things were going well, however, subsequently the support became less and less. Walton et al (2014) indicates that although Full-service schools were off to a slow start in 2010, there are at least 510 schools nationally that has been established. This is good, however, what is important is the quality of the services that the school and districts are providing rather than the quantity of schools which is not being effective in the progression of IE. The question one could ask is how can these Full-Service schools be "inclusive" if firstly, the national curriculum is not an inclusive one?

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Secondly, based on the data analysis, there should also be clear guidelines and education about the difference between inclusion and integration. Kofidou and Matzikos (2017) mentions that a key difference between inclusion and integration was that integration was implemented as a practice in the absence of a theoretical context, and thus a big reason for its failure, whereas inclusion involves providing education for all learners despite their apparent differences. Misunderstanding the difference could be a major setback for inclusion if mainstream classroom teachers who play a key role in the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties, cannot differentiate between the two, because their lesson planning and strategies will not be in-line with inclusive policies.

Another objective was to explore the teaching strategies. Whilst a few strategies exist, most of them are not appropriate for learners with AS. In addition, there is no consistency in the strategies, especially when the learner progresses to high school.

Although, there are a few strategies in place, it does not necessarily pertain to learners with AS. However, for the few participants who mentioned some strategies, what the data also showed that there is no consistency, especially when the learner progresses to high school.

The data analysis showed a few barriers that participants mentioned that will make inclusion difficult. One of the barriers was the overcrowded classrooms that they have to work with on a daily basis. In SA, West and Meier (2020) mentions that a possible reason for having overcrowded classrooms could be contributed to a shortage of teachers, a lack of school infra-structure as well as the high number of poorly resourced schools. Van Wyk (2008) mentions that having over-crowded classrooms could impact on poor learning conditions because of a

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lack of space, fresh air and high noise levels that could lead to a lack of attention and create stress within learners. Therefore, if this is a daily scenario in a mainstream classroom, then for a learner with AS, it could have a detrimental effect, not only on their academic progress but emotionally as well, especially if the learner is hyper-sensitive to extreme noise levels, and this is not being accommodated on the curriculum or lesson plans. In addition, a lack of funding is at the core of these barriers. Participants highlighted that at the high socio-economic schools there were additional staff or facilitators in each class. In lower socio-economic community school, some of them had a facilitator once a week. The role of the facilitator is the fourth objective, and although participants highlighted that this will be a useful resource, based on some of the feedback from some participants, the question that one should consider is what role these facilitators would play with regards the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties? In addition to this, how well trained, knowledgeable and equipped will they be to meet the needs of these learners?

In conclusion, based on the above information and data it is clear that the aims and objectives of this study was achieved in relation to the strategies being used by schools to support learners with AS in an inclusive environment.

6.4 Limitations to the Study

One of the objectives of a qualitative methodology is to produce in-depth information in order to make sense of the data being analysed (Almeida, Faria & Queiros, 2017). The tool used for data collection was semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews, which was conducted at the various schools. The interviews allowed me flexibility to ask for clarity or for the participant to expand on a particular topic this allowed for rich information. However, this type of research has its drawbacks. For example, after the 20 interviews, which lasted between 30 –

45 minutes, each one had to be transcribed verbatim. There were some interviews where the tone of some participants was not very audible in certain places, which often could be contributed to some external noise. However, even though the interviews took longer to transcribe, it did not impact on the quality or validity of the final transcripts. A second limitation, was that even though this was a purposive homogenous sample, the possibility of potential bias of the principal choosing the participants, was always going to be a factor in relation to the study. For example, the principal could either nominate a participant merely on the availability of the person, and not necessarily having direct experience with learners with AS in a classroom setting, as well as a participant who the principal might feel will give a certain view about the school that they might deem as useful to the researcher. Furthermore, a third limitation was that although every effort was made to have a quiet area to conduct the interviews, this was not always possible, and one had to contend with a few interruptions during some of the interviews.
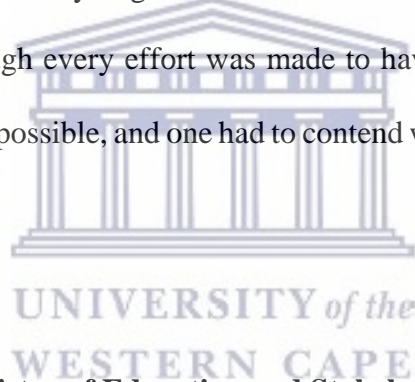
6.5 Recommendations to Ministry of Education and Stakeholders in Education

When the DBE embarked on the White Paper 6 Policy Document in 2001, the focus was to have most mainstream (primary) public schools converted into Full-Service Schools by 2021, in order to include learners (who are able) with learning difficulties into the inclusive classroom. Learners with AS, definitely qualify to be included in the mainstream classrooms, however what emerged from the study, was that there are many barriers that would impede their inclusion.

It is 2021 and the challenges that teachers and schools faced before, is continuing. One participant mentioned that over the 20 years very little has changed and that they still face the same challenges at schools as they did before. It is important to note that if teachers are unable to grasp or comprehend the ways in which children with autism respond to the world around them, the support from teachers could be limited and often counter-productive to the learning process of inclusion (Wall, 2010). Therefore, teachers' attitudes according to Anderson et al (2007), towards inclusion, depends heavily on the support that is being provided. Based on the data analysis of this study and challenges highlighted by participants, the following recommendations should be addressed in order for inclusion to be effective and to truly include and engage all learners:

- Training and education to dispel any misconceptions about the differences between integration and inclusion.

Training and education are key, and many of the participants mentioned that part of their frustrations on a daily basis, was the fact that they felt they were ill-equipped to teach learners with AS. They, did not have the necessary knowledge and training, or even as some said the time, contributed to their oversized classrooms.

- Ongoing training with regards an inclusive curriculum and an awareness of ASD to modify lessons and use the correct resources to include these learners, especially with regards their social, communication, cognition, sensory and motor challenges they might have.

Many participants mentioned that ongoing training is important for them to prepare them adequately for inclusion. There were some participants who mentioned that having a

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once-off workshop is not necessarily equip them, but moreover for these training sessions to be of a more practical nature.

- Focus on Colleges and Universities to have mandatory practical courses at Special Needs Schools and facilities, rather than a theoretical module in relation to special needs training.

Most of the participants mentioned that when they were at a Training College or University, often they only had one module on special needs education. Added to this, quite a few of the participants have been teaching for many years, and were not necessarily trained in special needs education.

- Employ trained and educated staff familiar with classroom practices and special needs education as classroom facilitators or teaching assistants. Do not place ill equipped facilitators for the classroom teacher to train as this will be an added responsibility in an already challenging environment

Although most participants indicated that having an additional person in the classroom to assist, for example a facilitator would be helpful, it will be important for that person to be knowledgeable with regards special education in order to make a real contribution in the inclusive classroom.

- Working with and getting the various communities on board. The communities, consists of, parents, learners, teachers and community leaders, and if they do not feel valued or respected, then it does not matter how well thought through the policy is in theory, but when it comes to the implementation thereof, then it might be a challenge.

Some participants also mentioned the importance of working and getting the people on board, especially if one wants to bring about changes that will affect their children. In addition, parents have an important role in the education of their child.

- . Continuity – having some continuity especially for the learner with AS is key, therefore the progression and transition of learners with AS from grade to grade and eventually secondary school, was not always easy to gauge. Even though some mainstream schools had some strategies, it often was not very consistent and not actual school policies in place in dealing with learners with AS.

Therefore, in order to deal with these disparities at a school level, what is ideally needed would be a tiered approach from the Basic Education Department, and all other stakeholders and service providers to implement structured skills training programmes to assist teachers, schools as well as parents, to make some realistic and practical accommodations in order to assist these learners.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the outcomes of this study, the following recommendations for future research is presented:

- Explore services at Full-Service schools in both low and high socio-economic communities (post 2021 deadline) to ascertain the progress that has been made and what the barriers are (if any) with regards inclusion.

- Explore teachers' understanding of integration versus inclusion.

- What does an inclusive curriculum entail in the South African context?

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- What is the role of the facilitator or teaching assistant in an inclusive classroom?

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided a summary of the study and it answered the aims and objectives of this study. It also provided an overview of some of the limitations and made recommendations to address some of the barriers to inclusion. Suggestions for further research studies was also presented. In conclusion, it is important to note that if some of these barriers are not addressed, then the irony is that the education system is leaving the exact learners who are to be included behind, as the educational system does not adequately address or meet their needs.

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ANNEXURE A: INFORMATION SHEET

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11ᵗʰ July 2019

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: *An exploration of school strategies enabling teachers in mainstream schools to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome*

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Children, Families and Society, Faculty of Community and Health Sciences, University of the Western Cape (UWC). We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you, as a mainstream classroom teacher are either currently facing this challenge or will deal with it at some time, and will thus be able to give important information or perspective of classroom experiences. The purpose of this research project is to explore school and classroom strategies to enable teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome.

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

You will be asked to participate in an interview. You will be asked a few questions with regards teaching strategies in mainstream classrooms to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome, and if any changes can be made. The interview will last for approximately one hour, but should you have any additional questions or information you would like to add, then you may do so. The interview will also take place at your school/office during working hours. Please note that participating in this study is voluntary. All information will be kept private and confidential.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

To ensure your confidentiality, the researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, a consent form will be signed, and when data will be transcribed it will be stored on computer (with a password). In addition to this in the final thesis pseudonym names will be used for further anonymity.

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What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study. You might have very strong views or opinions about some of the questions that might be asked, which may be stressful. However, we will try to 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.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher learn more about current teaching strategies in mainstream schools to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of inclusive education, so that not only will schools, but parents and communities will be able to play a pivotal role in preparing children for an inclusive environment and their basic human rights are being met.

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.

This research is being conducted by *Charlene Goliath* from the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Children, Families and Society, Faculty of Community and Health Sciences, University of the Western Cape (UWC) at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact **Charlene** at: 0729038386. 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:

Head of Department:

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences:

Prof Anthea Rhode

University of the Western Cape

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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Senate Research Committee and Ethics Committee.

HSSREC (Research Development)

Telephone No: 021-9594111   Email: research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

ANNEXURE B: CONSENT FORM

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CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: **An exploration of school strategies enabling teachers in mainstream schools to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome**

The study was described to me in 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………………………

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ANNEXURE C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TEACHERS

Participant: _____   **Grade:** _____

School: _____   **Date:** _____

Time of interview: _____

1. What do you as a teacher know about Asperger's Syndrome and some of the characteristics of a learner with it?

2. How do you feel about the inclusion of learners with Asperger's Syndrome into the mainstream classroom and why do you feel this way?

3. What teaching strategies are currently being used in the mainstream classroom in order to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome? Do you feel that it enables you as a teacher to support these learners?

4. What in your view are additional adaptations or modifications, if any, as well as resources that are needed to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome in a mainstream classroom?

5. What do you think some barriers might be that may impede the inclusion of learners with Asperger's Syndrome into an effective mainstream environment?

ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PRINCIPALS

Participant: _____   **Date:** _____

School: _____   **Time of interview:** _____

Time of interview: _____

1. How do you as a principal feel about the proposed changes that will be implemented to include learners with Asperger's Syndrome into mainstream classrooms?

2. What type of training or additional skills courses did you do to prepare you for the new changes and to enable staff with knowledge regarding mainstream education?

3. Do you think your teachers are well prepared with new skills and knowledge to embrace the new teaching strategies needed to support students with Asperger's Syndrome?

4. What additional changes and resources do you think your school might need to equip your teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome?

5. What do you anticipate (if any) some challenges or barriers might be to include learners with Asperger's Syndrome to your school, and how do you as the principal propose to deal with it?

ANNEXURE E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAKEHOLDER INVOLVED IN THE FACILITATION OF SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION – WESTERN CAPE

Participant: _____   **Date:** _____

Place of interview: _____   **Time of interview:** _____

1. How far is the WCED in relation to meeting the 2021 deadline to have most schools as inclusive schools?

2. What programmes are in place to facilitate that classroom teachers are well equipped in terms of skills, knowledge and teaching strategies to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome?

3. Having policies on paper are often very commendable but in terms of implementation can be extremely challenging, what, do you anticipate (if any) some challenges might be in mainstream education, and how does the Department propose to deal with it?

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ANNEXURE F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAKEHOLDERS FROM THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT STREAM

Participant: _____   Date: _____

Place of interview: _____   Time of interview: _____

1. What in your view is most important to equip teachers to support learners with Asperger's Syndrome in mainstream classrooms?

2. What adaptions or modifications to current teaching strategies, if any, do you think is needed for the integration of learners with Asperger's Syndrome into a mainstream environment?

3. What role, have or can your organisation play in the facilitation of preparing schools and teachers to be better equipped to meet the needs of learners with Asperger's Syndrome?

4. What do you anticipate (if any) some of the challenges might be to include students with Asperger's Syndrome into mainstream classrooms?
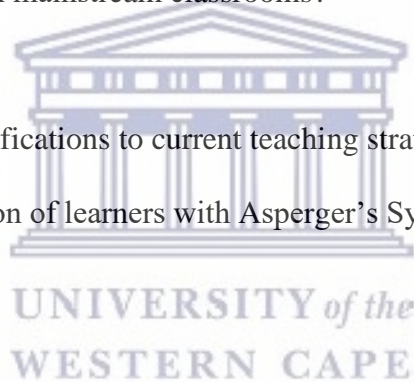
ANNEXURE G: PROFILE OF CHILD WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME

Social Challenges

- Lack of understanding social cues
- Literal interpretation of others' words
- Serious impairments in peer relationships
- Difficulty engaging in reciprocal conversation
- Tendency to speak bluntly without regard for impact of words on others
- Universal application of social rules to all situations
- Focus on single topic of interest that may not be of interest to others.

Communication Challenges

- Difficulty understanding social nuances such as sarcasm
- Echolalia – may repeat last words heard without regard for meaning
- Poor judge of personal space, may stand too close to other students
- Abnormal inflection and eye contact
- Inappropriate facial expressions or gestures
- Difficulty interpreting others nonverbal communication cues

Cognition Challenges

- Poor problem solving and organizational skills
- Concrete, literal thinking.
- Difficulty differentiating relevant and irrelevant information
- Obsessive and narrowly defined interests
- Difficulty generalizing and applying learned knowledge and skills across different situations, setting and people.

Sensory and Motor Challenges

- Over or under-sensitivity to different sensory stimuli, including pain.
- Difficulty with fine-motor skills, such as handwriting

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(Daya International – Organization for Autism Research, 2016 - reprint).