

Article

South African Teachers' Application of Inclusive Education Policies and Their Impact on Learners with Learning Disabilities: Implications for Teacher Education

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Abstract: Global inclusive education policies compel teachers worldwide to accommodate all learners in the teaching and learning environment, including learners with learning disabilities. This study aimed to investigate the application of inclusive education policies in South African mainstream educational institutions. The study further aimed to promote the acceptance and recognition of all learners with disabilities. The study employed a qualitative research approach and phenomenological design. In-depth interviews were used to generate the data, which were further transcribed and analyzed thematically. Ten teachers from five different mainstream schools were purposively selected to participate in the study. The findings revealed that South African teachers have adequate theoretical knowledge regarding inclusive education policies, with limited self-efficacy to apply such knowledge in inclusive teaching and learning environments. The study suggests the re-enforcement of the application of inclusive education policies through collaboration between special schools as resource centers, inclusive full-service schools, and mainstream educational institutions. The study argues that there should be continuous professional development for teachers in the field of inclusive education. The study's findings will serve as a springboard for future research surrounding the same topic and to conscientize educational practitioners on the need to accommodate learners with learning disabilities in mainstream educational institutions.



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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental right for all individuals, a principle enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [1] and safeguarded by numerous international agreements. These include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) [2], the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) [3], and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [4]. Concerning individuals with disabilities, Articles 3 and 24 of the CRPD stipulate that nobody should be discriminated against and all should receive equal opportunities and be recognized for their right to education [3]. Similarly, Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals emphasizes the necessity for states to establish an inclusive education system accessible to all, across all levels, promoting lifelong learning [4]. The Salamanca Statement [5] underscores children's right to education as it asserts that all children ought to receive education in mainstream schools unless justified by compelling reasons, advancing the concept of inclusive education as the primary method to attain equitable learning opportunities within an environment devoid of discrimination [6]. This statement also places responsibilities on governments globally to uphold these principles.

Since 1994, South Africa has ratified several international treaties, such as the CRC [2] and CRPD [3], which obligate the state to advocate for an education system that embraces

inclusivity and promotes the right to inclusive basic education. The South African Constitution forms the foundation of South Africa's inclusive approach to education because it highlights education for all [7]. The government of South Africa pays special attention to addressing the irregularities and discriminatory practices against minority groups (such as the segregation of learners with disabilities to attend special schools) [8]. Inclusive education focuses on identifying and addressing the exclusionary practices and pressures experienced by the most marginalized [9]. Inclusion, in the context of this study, refers to the placement of learners with disabilities or who need special educational support in general education or mainstream classrooms [10]. Teachers in mainstream schools should be empowered to accommodate both learners with and without disabilities in the same classrooms.

National policies, such as the South African Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) [11], the Guidelines for Responding to Learner Diversity in the Classroom through Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Grade R-12 [12], and the Policy on Screening, Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) [13], serve as instruments to guide teachers' practices. The South African EWP6 [11] acknowledges that all learners are different in one way or another and that their differences are equally valued. The CAPS is a South African comprehensive policy framework that outlines the national curriculum and assessment standards for primary and secondary education, also providing detailed guidelines on what learners should know and be able to do at each grade level, as well as guidelines for teachers regarding inclusive teaching strategies and assessment [12].

The SIAS presents a framework designed to aid teachers, district-based support teams (DBSTs), school-based support teams (SBSTs), parents, and schools in facilitating the improved participation of learners within the educational setting [13]. The SIAS strategy furnishes directives for early identification and support, discerning the scope and nature of the assistance required, and identifies optimal learning environments for the provision of support. Additionally, it outlines the crucial roles of teachers and parents in implementing the strategy [13]. However, in South Africa, even with the implementation of international treaties, as well as national inclusive education guidelines and policies, 70% of learners with disabilities are still being segregated in separate classrooms or schools [14] and have limited opportunities to engage with peers without disabilities [15]. To address this injustice to learners with disabilities, teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to apply inclusive education policies, particularly in mainstream school setups. Knowledge of inclusive education policies and their application, combined with knowledge of specific learning disabilities, could produce a comprehensive understanding of human behavior.

This study is underpinned by the theory of planned behavior (TPB) [16]. The TPB [16,17] describes the determinant factors that influence certain behaviors depending on one's intentions, which are further determined by three factors, namely attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of this study, teachers' intentions to apply inclusive education policies in classroom setups are determined by their attitudes towards learners with disabilities. Factors that serve as subjective norms—for example, changes in the education system and the presence of learners with disabilities in mainstream schools—also serve as propellers for teachers' intentions to apply inclusive education policies in their teaching and learning. Concurrently, perceived behavioral control comprises teachers' feelings, abilities, and effectiveness in the application of inclusive education policies, and how such policies impact learners with disabilities [17]. This study aimed to investigate teachers' application of inclusive education policies and the impact thereof on learners with disabilities. To achieve this aim, the study sought to explore teachers' understanding of inclusive education policies, investigate the inclusion and support of learners with disabilities in terms of inclusive education policies, and establish strategies that can enhance the application of inclusive education policies in mainstream schools. We envision that the findings of this research can inform the development and refinement of inclusive education policies in South Africa and other countries globally. Policymakers can use this information to create more effective policies that promote the inclusion and success of learners with disabilities.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Setting

The study was conducted within five different mainstream high schools in Polokwane, situated in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The types of schools comprised both public and private schools in suburban areas. Public schools in this instance were those classified as quintiles 1 to 3, which refer to schools that do not charge tuition fees and admit mostly learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds [18].

2.2. Research Design

A qualitative research approach was employed to explore teachers' application of inclusive education policies and the effects that they have on learners with disabilities. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to allow the participants to share their lived experiences through in-depth interviews [19]. The phenomenological research design offered an opportunity to discover what the participants had in common regarding the phenomenon under investigation [19], namely teachers. Researcher reflexivity was employed to ensure that bias and the misrepresentation of the results were avoided.

2.3. Population and Sampling

The study population consisted of teachers who were available and willing to participate and share their views regarding the application of inclusive education policies to support learners with disabilities. The implementation of inclusive education policies in mainstream schools is mandatory to include all learners with special educational needs without reservation. This constituted the reason that the researchers employed purposive non-probability sampling to select 10 teachers who met the inclusion criteria. The participants had to be learner support teachers (LSTs) who had acquired qualifications in inclusive education or be part of the school-based support teams (SBSTs) of the selected mainstream schools.

2.4. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection using an interview script. The questions in the interview script included 'What strategies can be put in place to enhance the application of inclusive education policies in mainstream schools?' and 'How do you view the possibility for learners with various disabilities to be accommodated in mainstream classrooms?' A semi-structured interview format is more flexible and informal and offers both the researcher and the participants an opportunity to engage in a meaningful discussion; it is more likely to yield information that the researchers had not planned to ask for [20]. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author. This aided the researcher in familiarizing herself with the data and obtaining an accurate record of the conversations to refer to during data analysis. Each interview session was supposed to last a maximum of 35 min. To enhance the trustworthiness [20,21], the transcriptions were checked by a research assistant who was unfamiliar with the study's aims.

2.5. Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used in the current study to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Content analysis involves descriptions and interpretations of the available data that emerge from participants' lived experiences [22]. This was carried out through various phases: (i) the preparation phase, which constituted the collection of data for content analysis and familiarization with the data; (ii) the organization phase, which involved the categorization, abstraction, and interpretation of the data, as well as ensuring their representativeness; and (iii) the reporting phase, which entailed reporting the results or reporting the process of analyzing the data [23].

During the data analysis, the researchers organized the content into different categories and themes at various levels. In other words, text from individual interviews was sorted and

divided into meaningful units and condensed into codes, which the researchers ultimately compared and interpreted to identify similarities and differences. Finally, through reflection and discussion, the researchers formulated various themes that unified the content in the subthemes [22,23]. The researchers worked inductively to identify the general patterns and relative importance of the themes and counted the number of times that a particular theme emerged.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval and permission were obtained from the relevant institution. Participants received an informed consent letter detailing the expectations for their research participation, including the study's purpose, confidentiality measures, and data usage. They were also informed about their voluntary participation and their right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Written consent was obtained. The participants' identities remained confidential by implementing pseudonyms.

3. Results

Ten teachers with an equal distribution in gender participated in the study. All of them had qualifications in inclusive education. The participants had a mean of 15 years and three months of teaching experience (ranging from five to 24 years). Table 1 illustrates the biographical information of the participants.

Table 1. Participants' demographic data.

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Position at Work	Years of Teaching Experience	Inclusive Education Qualification
P1	Male	34	LST *	8	Advanced Certificate in Inclusive Education
P2	Male	44	SBST **	16	Postgraduate Diploma in Inclusive Education
P3	Female	40	LST *	12	Postgraduate Diploma in Inclusive Education
P4	Male	51	SBST **	24	Higher Certificate in Inclusive Education
P5	Female	43	LST *	20	Higher Certificate in Inclusive Education
P6	Female	35	LST *	15	Postgraduate Diploma in Inclusive Education
P7	Male	27	LST *	5	Honors in Inclusive Education
P8	Female	30	SBST **	9	Advanced Certificate in Inclusive Education
P9	Male	55	LST *	24	MEd in Inclusive Education
P10	Female	46	SBST **	20	Postgraduate Diploma in Inclusive Education

Note: LST *—learner support teacher; SBST **—school-based support team.

The analyzed data revealed four main themes: the need for continuous professional development, intervention by district-based support teams (DBSTs), the application of inclusive education policies through inclusive teaching strategies, and teachers' uncertainties about including learners with and without disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

3.1. Continuing Teacher Professional Development

The teachers reported that workshops were conducted by SBSTs on the application of inclusive education policies; however, they found these workshops to be inadequate. While the teachers appeared to understand inclusive education policies, they still experienced challenges in applying them. They emphasized the need for more extensive in-service training on these policies and their practical implementation. The teachers shared the

same sentiments about the need for more in-service training or continuous professional development. They explained these as follows.

‘I am not sure if I can be able to identify or handle learners with [learning] disabilities because it has been long since we have attended a workshop about inclusive education and the implementation of its policies.’ (Participant 2)

‘The Department of Basic Education, which plays a critical role in shaping the education system and ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to receive a quality basic education, must take teachers to workshops, inductions or in-service training so that they can get proper education on how to assist the learners with special educational needs.’ (Participant 4)

‘The starting point is that the Department of Education must develop the School Management Teams and once they are equipped with that kind of knowledge, they will come down to the teachers and staff to develop those teachers. Secondly, there must be a team or committee that should always liaise with the Department of Education itself and give them feedback or writing reports or progress on what is happening in the school pertaining to the application of inclusive education policies.’ (Participant 7)

3.2. Role of District-Based Support Teams

Although most of the mainstream educational institutions in the Limpopo Province of South Africa seek to apply inclusive education policies through the support of DBSTs, the level and nature of support provided to learners with specific learning disabilities need improvement. One participant proclaimed,

‘Our school is sometimes visited by the district-based support team, but in most cases, they take long to attend to our request for support. The school-based support team always shifts the blame to the district-based officials who do not visit our school on regular basis.’ (Participant 1)

The same sentiments were shared by other participants, who stated the following.

‘Yes, we are doing our best to apply the inclusive education policies, but the information that is contained in the Education White Paper 6 and the Guidelines for Responding to Learners Diversity, I mean the CAPS one, is too overwhelming to us as teachers. We struggle to give enough support to learners with learning disabilities as stipulated in these policy documents. I think we need regular support from the district officials.’ (Participant 3)

‘Well, sometimes we come together as a school-based support team and look at the problems that the learners are facing and try to work on them in an attempt to help them, but we really need the intervention of the DBST. When I have understood the problem that the learner is experiencing, I consult with other educators and see how we can help one another because we cannot have the same ideas with regard to supporting our learners with learning disabilities.’ (Participant 5)

3.3. Inclusive Education Teaching Strategies

Some teachers (Participants 6 and 9) indicated that they were doing everything possible regarding the application of inclusive education policies and inclusive teaching strategies to accommodate learners with various learning disabilities. These learners included those with reading and spelling problems (dyslexia), learners with writing difficulties (dysgraphia), and those who achieved below average. Participants in three selected public schools proclaimed that they applied teaching strategies, such as the flexible grouping of learners, differentiation of the learning content, designing down teaching methodologies, and the application of varied assessment strategies. These teaching strategies were explained by the participants as follows.

‘In the classroom situation, I usually group learners and assign a group leader in each group in order to accommodate those with specific learning disabilities. In fact, I give them varying types of assessment. We usually give them remedial work and adapt the learning content so that all learning styles can be accommodated, you know, some learners find it very difficult to grasp the learning content.’ (Participant 6)

On the contrary, another participant bemoaned,

‘I, personally find it difficult to identify and develop strategies to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs. Sometimes you find that the classroom is overcrowded; I just use that old method. There is no individual attention and like I said, most of us don’t know how to identify and give proper support to learners with special educational needs.’ (Participant 8)

The above was substantiated by Participant 9, who indicated that although it may be challenging to apply some of the inclusive education policies in the teaching and learning environment, she was able at least to apply inclusive teaching strategies to accommodate all learners, including those living with specific learning disabilities. These included ensuring collaborative learning among learners with and without disabilities, peer tutoring, the flexible grouping of learners, designing down, and scaffolding. The verbatim excerpt below reflects the views of Participant 9.

‘I know that the learners in my class are not the same. We have those who are gifted and those who are not gifted, so when I assess, I take that into consideration by making sure there is collaborative learning, designing down and scaffolding my teaching and learning activities. Sometimes I group them integrating their different intelligences and ensure that they help one another.’ (Participant 9)

3.4. Inclusion of Learners in Mainstream Classrooms

Although the teachers had received some training regarding inclusive education policies and support for learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, they were still not confident in terms of accepting and offering support for learners who needed medium to high levels of support. These include, for example, learners with visual impairments and auditory impairments, those with epilepsy, and learners with neurological disabilities. Teachers do not possess enough confidence in working with these learners and therefore recommend that such learners be placed in special schools. The participants complained about their uncertainty in accommodating learners who need medium to high levels of support within mainstream educational institutions.

‘Definitely for a learner with, for example, visual impairments; who has epilepsy; they must just be admitted to special schools. They cannot be integrated with those that are without disabilities’ (Participant 5)

The above feeling was substantiated by other two participants, who explained as follows.

‘I think the Department of Basic Education [fundamental or elementary education] must supply us with resources in terms of manpower or teachers with expertise, the right equipment, and facilities for these learners with diverse educational needs because it is a challenge. I think they must just be admitted into special schools.’ (Participant 10)

‘No, I don’t think it will be possible. Like I said, we don’t have equipment for such learners, so it’s going to be difficult for a teacher to provide such learners with eh..., let me say accommodation. It will be difficult for them.’ (Participant 6)

4. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate teachers’ application of inclusive education policies and their impact on learners with learning disabilities. This discussion will follow the four main themes derived from the analyzed data, namely the need for continuous professional

development, intervention by district-based support teams (DBSTs), the application of inclusive education policies through inclusive teaching strategies, and teachers' uncertainties about including learners with and without disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

The first theme revealed teachers' inadequate knowledge and skills in applying inclusive education policies and their need for continuing professional development. Many teachers in South Africa are still facing the challenge of being inadequately trained on the inclusion process regarding learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms [24]. Since the introduction of inclusive education policies, including the EWP6 in 2001 [11] and the SIAS policy in 2014 [13], teachers have continued to struggle in applying these policies in their mainstream educational institutions. This places learners with disabilities at a disadvantage since they tend to be deprived of equal learning opportunities with those without disabilities.

The TPB [17] advocates for teachers' preparedness and intention to support learners with disabilities and to apply inclusive education policies in mainstream school settings. Various aspects of their attitudes, norms, and perceptions regarding behavioral control influence teachers' intentions to implement inclusive teaching practices [25]. For example, teachers' attitudes greatly influence their intentions to apply inclusive education policies, before the influences from external forces, such as subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, that could further influence their behavioral intentions. Hence, Yan and Sin [6] proposed that offering teachers suitable professional development opportunities may play a vital role in promoting teachers' implementation of inclusion policies. Similarly, research in African countries, such as Ghana, has found that the application of inclusive education policies is channeled towards the generalized development of a well-informed and trained human resource team for the quality delivery of inclusive education throughout the country [24]. The Ugandan Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit (BMAU) Briefing Paper (13/18) of May 2018 also has reported that many teachers still find it challenging to assist learners in an inclusive school due to limited in-service training [26]. However, in a study by Woodcock et al. [27], it was found that although teachers had a conceptual understanding of inclusive education, their teaching practices varied. These authors believe that only informing teachers about the principles of inclusive education may have a limited influence on their actual implementation [27]. More support is needed to help teachers to apply the concept of inclusive education in practice.

Following the outcomes regarding the first theme, possible topics were identified for inclusion in continuous professional development programs. These include (a) the identification of diverse learners with special educational needs (i.e., visual or hearing disabilities; epilepsy; autism spectrum disorder; cognitive disabilities and learning disabilities) and (b) the support of diverse learners with special education support needs as highlighted in various inclusive policies (such as the White Paper 6 and SIAS). This support could include inclusive teaching and assessment strategies and assistive technology for learners with special educational needs, including those with learning disabilities. Problem-centered learning must be employed in continuous professional programs so that teachers can practice the practical implementation of these strategies during their training. The latter links to one of the six adult learning principles (andragogy) introduced by Knowles [28,29] and identified by El-Amin [30] as a preferred instructional technique for adult learners. Further research on the training needs of teachers in continuous professional programs on the implementation of inclusive education policies is proposed.

The second theme related to DBSTs highlighted that although teachers are doing their best to apply inclusive education policies, the support that they receive from the DBSTs is inadequate. The same sentiments were revealed in the study conducted in Kenya by Ireri et al. [31], who found that the barriers that hinder the application of inclusive education policies include, but are not limited to, inadequacies in policy and legal support, a lack of resources and facilities, inadequate generalized staff, inflexible curricula, and a lack of supportive leadership. According to the EWP 6 [11], the primary role of the DBST is to aid learners, teachers, and the overall system in meeting a diverse array of learning needs

comprehensively. To effectively build a supportive training and education system that fosters inclusivity, the DBST should be the foundation of the system. From this research, it seems that this support from the DBST is lacking, and it is recommended for further studies to determine why DSBTs are not supporting SBSTs.

The goal of inclusive education development is to make it easier for teachers in mainstream educational institutions to deliver quality education to all learners, including those with special educational needs [32]. In the same vein, Sumayang et al. [33] suggested that inclusive education seeks to maximize the potential of learners with disabilities towards holistic development, depending on teachers' abilities to instill good values, impart information, and prepare learners with disabilities to face challenges in life. In South Africa, the application of inclusive education policies and the recognition of learners with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions still raise concerns, particularly in instances where teachers exhibit incompetencies in supporting learners with diverse educational needs [34]. Drawing from various education systems worldwide, the contemporary South African education system is not an anomaly regarding the application of inclusive education policies, especially in mainstream educational institutions.

Concerning inclusive education strategies (Theme 3), it was found that, despite inadequate support from DBSTs, teachers try to apply inclusive teaching and learning strategies, such as peer tutoring, flexible grouping, and curriculum differentiation. Considering inclusive education practices internationally, it is posited that inclusive education has the purpose of ensuring that all learners, regardless of age and learning ability, have the right to be provided with meaningful and high-quality educational opportunities alongside their peers [35]. The concept of inclusive education relates to social inclusion and individuals' ability to be generalized as citizens and to act as such [35]. Article 24 of the CRPD [3] indicates that State Parties should enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. The CRPD upholds that all rights apply to all children without discrimination on any grounds, including disability. The UN Convention (Article 24) [3] echoed that persons with disabilities should be able to access inclusive, quality, and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live.

Theme 4, referring to learners with and without disabilities in mainstream classrooms, revealed teachers' uncertainty in managing diverse learners in the same mainstream classrooms. They suggested the non-integration of learners with and without disabilities in mainstream educational institutions. Since the endorsement of the World Declaration on Education for All by the Jomtien Conference of 1990 in Thailand, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of 1994 in Spain [5], and the Dakar Framework of Action 2000 in Senegal [36], there has been a significant shift in the ways in which education systems around the world are generalized and managed. Internationally, countries such as Canada, Colombia, Comoros, and Croatia have inclusive education policies that advocate for equal opportunities for learners with intellectual developmental disabilities to receive a public mainstream education with their peers in inclusive setups [37]. Similarly, the inclusive education policy of New Brunswick prohibits segregated programs and non-integrated classroom setups [38]. In Ontario (Canada), some programs are designed to support the integration of learners with disabilities into regular classrooms, although teachers are still finding it difficult to apply inclusion education policies in mainstream education setups [39]. It was reported in Canada that professional training on inclusive education is considered fundamental, since teachers feel that they do not possess adequate and important expertise in instructing learners with diverse educational needs in an inclusive education setting [37–39].

According to the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities [40], there is a standard that must be followed internationally by people who develop policies for persons with disabilities—the rules that uphold the adoption of inclusive education [15]. The same sentiments were shared by Gulyani [41] and Bui

et al. [42], who affirmed that when teachers have positive attitudes and relate well with all learners, including those with learning disabilities, the application of inclusive education policies becomes effective. Meanwhile, South African teachers have been attempting to apply inclusive education policies to meet the requirements set out by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) [11,13]; however, they still consider that learners with disabilities should be admitted to special schools. This research study was generalized to highlight the discrepancies visible in the education community regarding the application of inclusive education policies and how this affects learners with learning disabilities.

4.1. Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and the limitations of this study should be taken into consideration. The participants targeted in the current study comprised those with specific qualifications in inclusive education; hence, they were perceived as information-rich informants. Only five different schools in Polokwane, situated in Limpopo Province, South Africa, were selected to provide the participants for this study, which implies that the findings may not be generalized to or representative of other schools that were not sampled.

This empirical study only employed a qualitative research approach and design to explore teachers' understanding of inclusive education policies, investigate the inclusion and support of learners with learning disabilities, and establish strategies that can enhance the application of inclusive education policies. This might have limited the data gathering scope for the current study. Mixed-method designs could have yielded richer data that could have been used to analyze and corroborate the findings of this study. The findings could have further been triangulated to verify their credibility, dependability, and transferability and even to identify more gaps that could serve as a springboard for future research projects in the same field of study.

4.2. Implications or Recommendations

The current study recommends that special schools, as resource centers, contribute to in-service training sessions, together with inclusive full-service schools, to educate mainstream teachers on inclusive teaching strategies and to supply the necessary resources. The resources needed may include, but are not limited to, Braille and mobility accessories, audiovisual equipment (vocal recording and visual aids), technology devices such as touch screens and laptops, and alternative and augmentative communication devices. DBSTs should also introduce South African Sign Language into the school curricula to close the gap that exists between teachers in mainstream schools and learners with auditory learning disabilities. The DBE should dedicate more effort to the establishment of SBSTs in mainstream schools in collaboration with DBSTs to alleviate segregation and enhance the acceptance of learner diversity.

Regarding the application of inclusive education policies and the recognition of learners with disabilities, the findings of this study indicate that since the introduction of inclusive education in South Africa during the past three decades, teachers have always shown feelings of unpreparedness and inadequacy. The present South African education system requires the restructuring and transformation of the curriculum, as well as the changing of attitudes among teachers to positively embrace and accommodate the diverse learner populations in their mainstream educational institutions. This implies that all learners must be allowed to access equitable, quality education, regardless of their abilities and disabilities.

The findings of the current study reveal that although some teachers are inadequately trained in the application of inclusive education policies, their passion and positive attitudes towards the recognition and accommodation of learners with learning disabilities are applaudable. Suggestions for the content of continuous professional development programs include the identification of diverse learners with special educational needs and the support of diverse learners with special education support needs by employing inclusive teaching and assessment strategies. The implication is that learners with diverse and specific learning

disabilities will receive better services and enhanced support in the future, especially those in mainstream educational institutions.

5. Considerations for Future Research

The current study investigated teachers' application of inclusive education policies and their effects on learners with learning disabilities, with a focus on mainstream educational institutions. The findings revealed inadequate teacher in-service training, minimal support received from DBSTs, and teachers' enthusiasm to apply inclusive education policies and teaching strategies in their classrooms. It is recommended that future researchers investigate the level of training that teachers have in the field of inclusive education to ascertain their proficiency in supporting learners with learning disabilities. Further research may also be conducted to determine whether mainstream educational institutions are well-versed in the establishment of fully supportive school-based support teams and DBSTs.

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