

Inclusive Education – A Prescript to Engagement by all Stakeholders

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Abstract

Inclusive education forms a crucial part of social cohesion that underpins fairness in any society, which means equal opportunities for all. Many countries have embraced this concept as the general view is that society will undergo a positive paradigm shift if education is all encompassing since education is a microcosm of society. However, the main question that should be addressed is to what extent is education inclusive? Does it cater for diverse student population, for example, the disabled (physically and mentally), students with mild, moderate and serious learning disabilities, different genders, ethnic groups, religious affiliations, classes, etc. A mixed research methodology can determine the core roles of the different stakeholders that underpin fundamental concepts of full inclusivity. Inclusive education can be realised if different stakeholders who are directly affected are taken on board. These would be students as the focal point, as well as teachers, schools, institutions where teachers are trained, curriculum developers and the government. Students' academic needs as well as their personal growth and development must be the prescript that informs the curriculum, and this must be embedded in all education policies and practices. Students' engagement and motivation form the bedrock of inclusive education as the support of the other stakeholders culminates in this. Lack of a strong academic background and the student's home language are some of the strategies used to deny enrolment to certain students. In essence, revising current practices with a view to updating policies and the curriculum to align them with students' educational needs will increase students' engagement and will therefore lead to full integration and success.

Key words:

Inclusive education, education policies, curriculum, learning disabilities, education reform

Introduction

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to eliminate a system that prevents students from being taught in the same school and in the same class by applying inclusive education. Ainscow (1995) views inclusive education as a way of curbing discrimination in that schools have to enrol all interested students. In essence, this means that students with barriers to learning must be offered support to cope with the set curriculum and not be sent to a different institution or be given a ‘special curriculum’ which would prevent them from being included in mainstream education. To find out whether students and teachers understand what inclusive education entails, Rodrigues-Falcon et al. (2010) consulted more than 900 students and staff, and their results underscored an array of perceptions which need clarification. The findings of this consultation state that inclusive education is at times only inclusive to a certain point, as some practices include some groups and exclude others. In essence, inclusive education is a global concern because different nations are trying to carve a path to social cohesion by making equal education accessible to all. According to Hockings et al. (2012), the emphasis on inclusive education in England covers a wide spectrum with a view to strengthening the social fabric by having a diverse student demography in higher education. The emphasis is therefore on uplifting minority groups. Hockings (2010) also states that the 2010 Equality Act in England also supports inclusivity; this has compelled institutions of higher learning to review their pedagogical practices.

Although a study conducted in South Africa by Magare et al. (2010: 52) focuses on inclusive education, their definition is only based on barriers to learning, therefore they define inclusive education as ‘the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning in a regular environment regardless of their diverse personal and interpersonal needs.’ Magaba (2019: 6) focuses on structural, interpersonal and institutional miscommunication which leads to barriers manifested in ‘social-markers like class, religion, education, gender, values and norms.’ This is clarified by highlighting that in education, social-markers can have dire consequences as they tend to alienate certain groups which will lead to the education of young people being negatively affected. Although definitions of inclusive education differ slightly, the emphasis is on a system that is all-encompassing. The same principles must be enforced in higher education where lessons must be inclusive. However, studies indicate that academics have reservations about competencies in this regard, as ‘professional skills and values associated with teaching diverse students are not well understood in the sector’ (Hockings, 2012: 238). Lecturing is pinpointed as ineffective in inclusive education as academics deal with large numbers of students in lecture halls where lessons are streamlined to cover the outlined objectives within a given timeslot. In such cases, struggling students will be disadvantaged as there is no one-on-one interaction to check individual student’s understanding of the topic; therefore, there is very little individual support during lectures.

To determine whether schools experience the same challenges, a study was conducted in an underprivileged area of the Western Cape. A positive outcome was obtained; while teachers admitted to not knowing how to implement inclusive education, the researcher nonetheless picked up good practices during class observations where teachers tried by all means to engage all learners by displaying a positive attitude towards the learners (Hall, 2002). In such cases, inclusivity in lessons is done unconsciously. In other cases, teachers are aware that they lack competence in delivering inclusive education, but they are eager to learn so that they can incorporate it in their lessons (Rapmund & Moore, 2002: in Magare et al. 2010). This is true for many teachers in South Africa, since students/learners who experience barriers to learning used to be enrolled in special schools, but the system is now open to all students. In essence, this means that most teachers in mainstream schools did not get training in including this group of students in their lessons as there were few of them in mainstream classrooms, if any. In those years, students who encountered

challenges in learning were referred to remedial teachers who were the ones responsible for these students. Although such students were enrolled in mainstream schools, they were segregated because they had their own class and teacher/s. However, the status quo has generally changed; all students attend lessons in the same class and teachers have to employ methods that include everyone.

Classrooms are a microcosm of society where diversity is common; if education does not cater for some students, it means that part of society is not catered for. With the necessary support, all students are capable of reaching their full potential. This is one of the reasons that has prompted many countries to include students who were originally only allowed to enrol in special schools, in mainstream schools. South Africa is one of the countries that are promoting inclusivity in schools, as its stance is that education must not be used as a tool to marginalise, polarise and segregate. Classrooms are made up of individual students who cannot perform at the same level, but are capable of performing in their own way and at their own pace. Students also express their best in different ways, therefore, inclusive education must be a way of assimilating all the students. No good can come of giving only a certain group of students support, since such actions will only benefit one group at the expense of another. If groups of students are stereotyped as ‘different’ and pushed to the periphery, these side-lined groups will end up being unfairly marginalised by not being included in the mainstream group. Such practices do nothing but polarise classes/communities, which will have a negative impact as they often result in social disharmony. Equal education must be open to all as it is the key to enlightenment and better prospects for all.

Education methodology and its impact: The role of teachers

The synergy between the teacher’s role and students’ academic needs is pivotal as it underpins strategies that must be employed by teachers so that students can attain success. According to Coates et al. (2008 in Zepke & Leach, 2010), when teachers utilise different methods of assessments where they ask students to analyse, evaluate, differentiate, and the like, they are testing the students’ higher-order cognitive skills, which will compel them to engage more actively with the task in a more engaged manner. This is important as when such tasks are set, the focus is likely to shift from just attaining marks, to actually learning and applying that knowledge in different forms. Similar pedagogical practices may transform lessons into hives of activity as they integrate different abilities with the students exploring concepts from an array of angles. The fundamental role of teachers is to address students’ needs by tapping into their strengths and building on them, whilst also identifying areas for development in order to ensure a balanced outcome that addresses students’ varying needs. Bryson and Hand (2007) emphasise the positive impact of encouraging participation which results in improved student engagement and attainment.

It is crucial for teachers to create a positive learning environment as it can restore normality by drawing in disengaged students. Most students would greatly benefit from teachers’ application of varied, but higher-order assessments; this is likely to stretch the thinking capacity of all students. If teachers prepare lessons and utilise resources that cater for diverse abilities, then this will widen the margin for success as all students will be engaged in lessons. Teachers must demonstrate an array of strategies that will pique interest in learning for all ability groups by sourcing teaching materials that will challenge disengaged students.

Zepke and Leach (2010) explored the research literature and summed up their extensive review in ten proposals which integrate various aspects of a holistic approach. This approach addresses students’ educational needs, subsequently tabling findings that will contribute to students’ success. All ten proposals have teachers as the bedrock of students’ attainment, as the students’ individual success hinges on the positive contribution of facilitators. Schuetz (2008) views student motivation as a driving force for success, while other studies attribute students’ success to the pivotal role

played by teachers (Kuh, 2001 in Zepke & Leach, 2010). This is an indication that even though other components play an important role in meeting students' needs, teachers bring inherent qualities that assimilate salient features which help students to reach their potential.

In order to restore inclusivity, some questions which resonate with teachers' roles in an inclusive classroom include, among others:

- Do teachers encourage group work made up of students with different abilities to encourage inclusivity and peer learning?
- Is the classroom layout conducive to inclusive learning?
- Do teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses?
- Do lesson plans cater for students with different attention spans?
- Is there room for flexibility when conducting lessons if there is a need to monitor the engagement of certain students?
- Are teachers approachable and accessible to all students?
- Are tasks differentiated to include students with different abilities?
- Is there preparation to avert unnecessary disruptions in lessons?
- Is the time allocated before students are assessed on a topic fair?
- Are different strategies employed in assessing students?

By virtue of being the facilitators of inclusive education, teachers can transcend theory into practice through good pedagogical strategies. If they shirk responsibility for inclusivity in their lessons, then inclusive education will be an ideology that will not gain traction.

Students' level of engagement in lessons

Student engagement is at the core of students' success because without this, all the measures taken will be in vain. It is imperative that students are motivated to be actively involved in their education, but self-motivation must not be ignored as it can pique students' interest in their studies, which when coupled with good teaching, can help them attain success beyond their expected level. Students' level of engagement or lack thereof can stem from a number of things. Some questions that need to be addressed are:

- Are there disengaged students in class?
- If so, why are they disengaged?
- What measures are taken to engage them in lessons?
- What can be done to make them reach their full potential?
- If there are no disengaged students in a class, are the students learning at different paces and what measures are utilised to make all the students benefit equally from each lesson?
- Are there any teaching methods that benefit most if not all students in a class?
- Which assessment methods best suit all the students' learning methods?
- What can be done to make students reach their full potential?
- Are the school's intervention methods for struggling students applying the right tools to support a wide variety of students who need support?
- Does the number of students in a class play a role in how students engage in lessons?
- Are lessons teacher-centred or student-centred?
- Are all students encouraged to be actively engaged in lessons?

If it is not mandatory in a school for teachers to ensure that all students are included in inclusive education lessons, then the practice would be a façade as it will lack any basis for alienating some members of the core group.

School support systems

To students, the school is supposed to be home away from home as that is where they spend most of the days during term time, and that is why teachers act in loco parentis (in the place of parents). However, the school is sometimes not as warm and welcoming as it is supposed to be, particularly when it alienates some students. In order to make any school a place where students go for both educational and personal growth and development, some pertinent questions need to be answered. Some of these questions underscore certain areas that need to be analysed.

- Does the school offer support to students with disabilities (mental and physical), and does it cater for cultural, religious, linguistic diversity and other differences?
- Are systems in place to help integrate students who come from diverse backgrounds?
- Does the school cater for students with varied learning paces (fast, moderate and slow learners)?
- Are all teachers at the school equipped to teach inclusive classes to at least a satisfactory level?
- Is it fair to subject students to an entrance test in an inclusive school and use the results to decide who will be allowed to enrol?
- How are students with barriers to learning accommodated in classes?
- Are students' learning challenges rated for specialised support?
- How is a needs analysis done of all students?
- If there is need for support, what is the timeframe allocated for the affected students to get the required support?
- Does the school policy cater for inclusive education?
- Does the school timetable accommodate students with a short attention span as well as for fast learners (this is based on the different time schedules for lessons which range from 30 minutes to 55 minutes per lesson)?

The school is at the heart of formal education; therefore, it is important that it operates in an inclusive manner that resonates with students' needs. If the school falls short of addressing pertinent questions in inclusive education, then measures must be put in place to address any shortcomings.

The role of curriculum developers and teacher training institutions

Education policies and the setting and adoption of the curriculum are the bedrock of what students are going to learn and these can make or break students and teachers as they navigate their paths. A few questions to ponder which might underpin challenges which will have a ripple effect on curriculum developers and teacher training institutions to schools, teachers and students highlight the following:

- Does the curriculum cater for diversity?
- Are teacher training institutions preparing teachers to be competent in inclusive education?
- As all teachers are now expected to teach classes that are diverse, are all teachers trained in inclusive education to a competent level?
- What is being done to retrain teachers who are lacking in inclusive education?
- Are there resources to help schools and teachers to engage actively with inclusive education?

The curriculum underpins what students are going to learn, so if it lacks clarity, the system will yield negative results. It will also negatively affect students' academic prospects.

Practical implications of inclusive education delivery

Inclusive education is based on the premise that if the doors of learning are open for all, then all the stakeholders will work seamlessly together for the greater good of education values and practices. However, the implementation of inclusive education has exposed gaps in competencies on a scale that is unprecedented. This has raised concerns across the spectrum in countries that have adopted and implemented inclusivity in classrooms (Nel et al. 2016, Magare et al. 2010, Savolainen et al. 2012, Hockings, et al. 2012). The different studies highlight the important role that teachers play in implementing inclusive education, but if they lack competence in delivery due to lack of training, then the implementation success rate will be capped at a low rate.

In order to emphasise the pivotal role of inclusivity in education, an official document positing measures that will intercede in underpinning the synergy between education and equality was introduced in the form of 'Education White Paper 6' – Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). Its aim was to transcend the education system, hence one of the most important changes was to endorse open enrolment in mainstream schools where students who were labelled 'special needs' would be taught the same curriculum and in the same classes as all the other students. However, challenges in implementation have been a serious concern, thus more than 20 years after the adoption of 'Education White Paper 6,' studies are still being conducted to try and uncover the trends that hinder progress in inclusivity in the classroom. To gauge teachers' perceptions on how confident they are in dealing successfully with inclusivity, the SACIE scale (SACIE - Sentiments, Attitudes and Concerns about Inclusive Education) has been used to understand the underlying issues that affect implementation (Loreman et al. 2007, in Savolainen et al. 2012). The SACIE scale is ideal for collecting large data, as participants can answer questions posed in terms of one of the four tabulated responses, 'strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.' Analysis of responses from the scale can quickly indicate whether certain pedagogical practices resonate with teachers' perceptions of actual inclusive education implementation in the classroom or not.

A classroom that is inclusive covers diversity in terms of culture, beliefs, background, learning speed and disabilities (deaf students, students with vision problems, ADHD students, autistic students, students with physical disabilities, etc.). In essence, teachers are likely to have a class that will be diverse in one way or another, and will require time and support to maximise the potential of every student. This resonates with Nel et al. (2016) when they define inclusive education as an 'evolutionary process.' Giving support to teachers is pivotal as it is the bedrock that will ensure a positive outcome for students. Interestingly, Nel et al. (2016) highlight the lack of support, as do Walton et al. (2014) when stating that policies are available, for example, 'Education White Paper 6' (Department of Education, 2001), but there is no clarity on implementation. This can alienate some students, especially considering that teachers in mainstream schools were thrust into, diverse classrooms without prior training to ensure good practice.

For many years during apartheid, South Africa was segregated along racial lines, and the element of separation was evident in the education system where race and language were used to separate students. This was termed 'Separate but equal' (Department of Education, 1967). This bad precedent, which was signed into policy many years ago, was replicated from a different angle when disability was used to segregate students for many years, hence there is now pressure to correct 'separate education.' Prejudice and segregation will adversely affect education, therefore it is imperative for different cultures to be integrated in the education spectrum to ensure that future generations are spared the social inequality and divide (Magaba, 2019). In view of practicality of

implementation, Engelbrecht et al. (2012) posit that about 65% of teachers have not had any training to conduct inclusive education in mainstream schools, therefore, students with disabilities are still marginalised. Teachers often try to reach all students in a lesson, but timetabling constrains them as CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement) clearly stipulates the time-frames that should be spent on activities (Department of Education - 2011). For many subject teachers, this is a particular challenge as they have to leave the class at the end of the lesson, regardless of whether they managed to reach all students or not.

Another angle of the implementation challenges is the retention policy which emphasises the age cohort, meaning that students will be progressed to the next grade if they have already been retained in the phase once. This compounds the delivery of inclusive education as such students might be too far behind in knowledge for their grade. As mentioned earlier, in the greater scheme of things, classes are diverse because the students in any class are different from each other in one way or another, so inclusivity has always been a part of teaching. The premise from this is that teachers should have had training and experience in including all the students in lesson planning and delivery. In essence, what has been tabled by the Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) merely extended the margin to include students who were originally excluded from mainstream education. Walton and Rusznyak (2016) are of the view that teacher training institutions do offer pre-service teachers skills in inclusive education, but it is often perceived as a course on its own as it is not included in the general education course. Such a perception is not a positive attribute as it alludes to the ‘otherness’ of inclusive education (Bernstein, 2010: 10, in Walton & Rusznyak, 2016). Inclusivity in education will benefit from a clear delivery processes that will have a structured curriculum that assimilates theoretical concepts and practice. Hockings et al. (2008b) forewarns of leaning too much on supporting struggling students at the expense of the more academically able students by not stretching their knowledge through activities that will engage them and pique their interest. If teachers fail in this, it will alienate the more academically gifted students and will in turn put inclusivity in jeopardy through oversight. As stated by Hall (2002), prior knowledge must be recognised so that all students feel welcome and supported in an educational setting.

Integration of the different stakeholders

The upper echelons of education must know what inclusive education entails in principle, and not just know what the curriculum states, as failure to understand implementation can result in poor support. Provincial support teams have the role of coordinating the implementation of teaching and learning in the province in accordance with the policy framework, thereby ensuring that support and guidance go through to the District Based Support Teams (DBST) and reach schools. Failure to oversee this is likely to result in the fragmentation of the policy framework and the uncoordinated implementation of inclusive education. At the upper echelon of the structure is the national department of education where the team oversees the management of the national policy. If there is lack of clarity from top management, the ripple effect of this will trickle down to institutions and will negatively affect students.

The principals are at the helm of institutions where they are supported by the school management teams/institutional level support Teams (ILSTs) and the school governing body for governance related matters. The role of the SMT/ILSTs is to support teachers to ensure effective teaching that includes all students in different lessons. The teacher is the bedrock of inclusive education as he/she is the one responsible for the implementation process, while the students as the receivers of education are the ones who will benefit from or be disadvantaged by the planning and delivery of lessons. It is imperative that implementation of inclusive education runs seamlessly at the institutional level because the results are far-reaching.

Interestingly, there is currently a great deal of exclusion in education; there are schools for girls/boys, schools for particular churches where membership of the church plays a role, for example. If inclusive education is not just a concept, but is practised in principle, then why are there institutions that are obviously exclusive? Education White Paper 6 was introduced to address all levels of exclusion in education, but it is viewed as unclear on certain issues, hence teachers struggle in its implementation (Bornman, 2014: 1 in Nel et al. 2016). The level of oversight on covering the entire spectrum indicates that the concept is good, but is not matched by reality. The problem is compounded by the scarcity of relevant resources to support effective implementation of inclusion. Systemic support from top-down structures should be tailored in such a way that those who manage the implementation of inclusive education should have in-depth knowledge of the processes that will boost effective learning and teaching in a diverse classroom. The positive synergy between the different structures will drive the process to attain effective pedagogical practices which will result in students' engagement in lessons and their ultimate success. Outside help from the health system, social services, psychologists, and the like will add complementary skills and expertise to support teachers in conducting inclusive lessons (Department of Education, 2005). The integration of all stakeholders is pivotal as cooperation among the different structures will ensure that no group of students will be alienated, disadvantaged, stereotyped or marginalised.

Research methods and design

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gauge the level of participation of teachers/academics and students in inclusive education. Methods employed to obtain data varied, including, structured and unstructured interviews, observations, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Data was collected from three schools and from two higher education institutions to get a bigger picture showing whether the concept was applied more on one side of the spectrum than on the other. Different groups of students and facilitators were all asked the same questions.

Participants

The study focused primarily on two main groups, namely, teachers and students. Education officials and academics who lecture students training to be teachers were engaged so that the study would cover various angles. Questions for the two primary groups dealt with whether schools fully support teachers in applying inclusive education and to what extent they offer support in cases where there were challenges in the implementation of this process. Students were interviewed to determine whether they understood what inclusive education is and to gauge whether they felt that all students are supported in a diverse class.

Research questions

Questions posed to facilitators (this means teachers in a school and lecturers at a university):

- What is your definition of inclusive education?
- Do you feel that you are adequately equipped to teach an inclusive class?
- What are the reasons behind your answer?
- What do you think can be done to improve facilitators' competencies in inclusive education?
- What methods have you applied in supporting students who have barriers to learning?
- How successful have these been?
- What do you think can be done to get more facilitators to actively conduct lessons which are in line with inclusive education?

Questions posed to students:

- What is your definition of inclusive education?

- Do you feel inclusive education is applied in your lessons?
- What is/are the reason/s behind your answer?
- What do you think facilitators can do to include all students?
- What methods do you think can be applied to support students who are struggling in a diverse class?

Focus group recorded discussions (9 teachers – 5 females 4 males; referred to as teacher x1 to teacher x9)

Teacher x6: *I'm frustrated. I used to think that I'm a good teacher, but I'm not so sure anymore.*

Teacher x4: *Me too. I teach big classes, some of them uh, they struggle to understand the work. Eish!*

Teacher x6: *Exactly!*

Teacher x9: *It used to be easier when we had remedial teachers to send struggling learners to, now we have to teach all of them ourselves. You have those learners who struggle to read and if they can't read, how can they write because they can't understand what's written.*

Teacher x1: *Some learners just cannot cope, but hey, if they don't pass at the end of the year, it's the teachers fault.*

Teacher x5: *You're right. You have to make a plan for them to pass with intervention assessment. Sometimes uhm, uhm, they fail the reassessment and you have uhm, to reassess the reassessment.*

Teacher x9: *Don't forget the parents who have to sign to agree that their child should repeat. They often refuse saying the child has to go to the next grade because their friends will be in the next grade.*

Teacher x2, x5, x1, x8, x3, x6, x7: *Yes, that's true (murmurs of agreement).*

Teacher x3: *Teachers in the next grade will experience the same problems and the learners will go on to another grade. It's a cycle, it is a bad cycle.*

Teacher x4: *When they get to grade 12, everybody will blame the primary school teachers. Iyoo! They are forgetting that the system doesn't allow learners to repeat a phase more than once.*

Teacher x5: *We are not trained to teach some of the learners in our classes. I once had a learner with a medical condition and he had to eat at certain times which clashed with the timetable, so he often missed out on parts of his lessons and he had learning problems.*

Teacher x9: *If I had my way, slow learners would have their own class so that you simplify activities for them which you can't do in an inclusive class because most will finish quickly and disturb the class when you're trying to help others. I understand that we can't do that because it won't be an inclusive class, but this inclusive education is giving us problems.*

Teacher x7: *I feel better because now I know that I'm not the only one struggling with this. Most of the workshops don't really help. They, they just read what you must do in class. When you come back and try to do it, it doesn't work. I wish those people could come and do those things in my class so that I can see if they can manage inclusive education with my class. Did the workshop help you guys?*

Teacher x3: *Iyoo, I read the notes and took them to class, but I was still struggling. A lot of learners understand and do well, it's those with learning problems that are failing.*

Teacher x8: *I'm thinking of going to 's class to see how she does it.*

Teacher x3: *Maybe I should come too. I really need help with those learners.*

Teacher x1: *What do you guys think of subject advisors in this matter?*

Teacher x2: *I don't think they understand how eh, some of us are struggling. They just want to check the books and want to see good lesson plans and good marks.*

Teacher x5: *I don't feel supported by anyone. I'm a qualified teacher, but hey, I don't see that helping me.*

Teacher x4: *There's never time to reach all students in a lesson. Sometimes I find out about their struggles when I mark their work.*

Teacher x6: *The issue of eh support from subject advisors is discouraging. It seems like they just come in for monitoring the work. There is no support.*

Teacher x7: *How about if we support each other by sharing tips that work with certain learners?*

Teacher x8: *That's the reason I want to go observe in there.*

Teacher x2: *I'll join you guys. Can't we ask management to organise something from the school?*

Teacher x3: *That's a good idea. We have to do something because we're stuck with our classes.*

Teacher x9: *Who is going to raise the suggestion with management?*

Teacher x8: *I nominate you (points at another teacher). We can't sit and do nothing.*

Teacher x1: *Seconded.*

Teacher x6: *At least we've come up with a support plan. Cheers everyone.*

Data analysis

To ensure validity, the researcher took notes and most of the information was recorded verbatim, a voice recorder was used after getting all the participants consent. After each interaction, all the data collected were collated and analysed concurrently. The findings were informed by data obtained from an analysis of all participants' responses which covered different education sectors and the prescripts underpinning different stakeholders.

Findings

Many teachers have not been trained to teach inclusive classrooms, and even though teachers try their best to engage all students, not all students are catered for in lessons. High enrolment in classes makes inclusive education challenging as teachers/facilitators cannot always identify students who need intervention. In some high schools, struggling students in Grade 11 are held back so that the schools can focus on the group that has the potential to help the school obtain a high pass rate for Grade 12. A similar finding has been alluded to by Metcalf (2019). Such schools do not practise inclusive education as they alienate students whom they deem to be below average, and concentrate on the students who show potential to get good grades. Although special schools have generally been reduced drastically for students who need remedial education, there is still segregation within schools where they use this as a basis. In some schools, there are classes for fast learners (at times these classes are referred to as top sets) and separate classes for slow learners (bottom sets). Language is also used to segregate students. This has caused an uproar nationally when such cases come to the fore. A typical example which drew attention happened at Laerskool Schweizer-Reneke in the North West province and at King Edward School in Matatiele in the Eastern Cape (Govender & Hosken, 2019) where the lack of proficiency in the medium of

instruction was cited as the reason for separating primary school children. Timeframes allocated for covering the curriculum constrained pedagogical practices as it did not always allow fair engagement between teacher and students. These findings attest to the disparities that are still common in education, which infers that there is no synergy between needs analysis and practical application.

Discussion

Teachers who shared their views indicated that they do their utmost to include all students in lessons, but timetable constraints force them to move at the required pace so that they are able to cover the syllabus within the allocated timeframe. This consequently disadvantages students who are not fast learners. Students feel that inclusive education is a brilliant concept that fails in rudimentary practice. Inclusive education could yield positive results if synergy between the concept, the resources and the practical work could be realised. School authorities have no voice in how the curriculum is structured since after the curriculum is passed to them, their role is that of monitoring its implementation and evaluating teachers' performance in this. According to academics who work with students who are training to be teachers, the recent batch of graduates have been trained in inclusive education, but when some of them go into schools to do their teaching practice, they are thrust into an environment that groups students according to ability. In essence, this means that in the realm of inclusivity, such schools are alienating some students based on academic ability. This defeats the purpose of cohesion in schools when education which is deemed the 'social fabric,' leads to disharmony. These contentious issues need to be addressed so that the validity of inclusive education can be brought to the fore.

Conclusion

The fundamental concept of inclusive education is to harness pedagogical strategies so that disparity can be addressed. There is a dire need for further training of teachers so that they can be equipped to impart quality education to all the students in their classes. There are gaps in the competencies of different stakeholders in the implementation process of inclusive education. The way in which the curriculum is structured marginalises some students who might learn at a different pace and also those who might benefit from other forms of assessment that are not centred primarily on good writing skills. Monitoring and evaluation without support for teachers tend to make teachers despondent as they need guidance and support to acquire the skills that will help them navigate the path to the successful delivery of inclusive education.

Recommendations

Workshops that are tailored to equip teachers with the relevant teaching skills encompassing inclusive education must be arranged. Facilitators of workshops must make follow-up visits to gauge whether the workshops are yielding the required results and to check if they need to be tweaked to be more accommodating. Collaborative teaching should be encouraged in schools as this is a form of support where teachers can learn from each other so that they may experience personal growth and professional development. Classroom approaches must be based on respect on the part of the teacher towards the students; respect on the part of the students towards the teacher and towards each other. This is a simple but crucial approach that can foster inclusion. Encouraging diversity in group work (diversity in terms of culture, learning pace, background, etc.) will ultimately assimilate different groups where the different strengths are merged, which will in turn lead to students engaging with the lesson. Interschool training in inclusive education should be encouraged to make this accessible to everyone. Teachers should also attend district and provincial developmental workshops which would help them to better understand the students' underlying learning processes that can help or hinder them from engaging with learning. School development

plans must clearly stipulate timeframes for supporting teachers and measures that will be taken to ensure the implementation of core strategies. Schools can also form networks to share good practices.

There is a dire need for intervention programmes outside the scope of education, thus, liaising with other professionals like social workers and psychologists to support students who need outside intervention can produce positive results. If such assistance is not incorporated in inclusive education, then chances are, there will be no end in sight for the challenges encountered by students and teachers in diverse classrooms. The national curriculum must be reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of all students as the ramifications of the shortfalls are far-reaching. Further research needs to be conducted with education officials (MEC's, directors, deputy directors, etc.) to unpack the government strategies for dealing with recurring problems in inclusive education.

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