



## Active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration are needed to enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education at full-service schools

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**Abstract**— This study outlines the aftermaths of active participation, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education at full-service schools. It also discusses the maximum support schools need to cater to the needs of learners with learning barriers. It employed a qualitative approach, where teachers from full-service schools were interviewed. Senior Education Specialists were also engaged in the study as they are the cornerstones in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools. Data were analysed by content analysis. This study found active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration as factors that could enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools.

**Keywords:** Collaboration, Full-service schools, Inclusive education, Learning barriers, Special education needs

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### I. INTRODUCTION

THE dawn of democratic South Africa brought about the recognition and embracing of diversity, including recognising learners with learning barriers (Smit, Preston, & Hay, 2020). New school policies were developed to redress past injustices (Francis, 2023). Some of the key roles of Democratic South Africa include ensuring that all learners' differences are embraced and celebrated in an inclusive school setting (Bila, 2019). Accommodating and embracing the existence of learners with learning barriers is essential for creating an inclusive educational space that supports the diverse needs of all learners (Skae, Brown, & Wilmot, 2020). While collaborative partnerships are vital to the education of every learner enrolled in school programmes (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012), learners with additional educational, social, emotional, or physical needs may benefit from the inclusion of external support workers involved in their development, (Prior, Roberts, Rodger, Williams, & Sutherland, 2011).

The engagement of the larger community in a mutual manner in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education was emphasised by former Northwest Education MEC Matsemela when launching the “Ngwana Sejo Wa Tlhakanelwa” campaign at Victory Church near Mafikeng on Thursday, 05 September 2019. The primary purpose of the campaign was to mobilise all education stakeholders to help restore schools to be centres of inclusivity. The term “Ngwana Sejo wa Tlhakanelwa” simply means that it takes a village to raise a child. The campaign aims to engage all our esteemed stakeholders and partners in education to help us raise and educate an African child (Morelle, 2023). “Working together towards a common goal” can be challenging yet advantageous. Because of this, we must choose the appropriate and applicable term to define such an act of active partnership and intersectoral collaboration. Several researchers concurred that working with all stakeholders collaboratively results in the successful implementation of inclusive education, thus enhancing

successful inclusive education in full-service schools (Morelle, 2023; Wood & Sue, 2019). Working together and embracing the common set goals results in positivism to reach your objectives.

Since 1994, South Africa's education sector has undergone a far-reaching transformation. This study explores the merits of different stakeholders' active partnership and collaboration engagement in identifying learners with learning barriers. Initially, all the departments were working in isolation, which resulted in learners' learning barriers being ignored deliberately or unintentionally. The working together of different departments, social partners, and stakeholders to refine the active participation and collaboration engagement is significant.

Having a common goal was instrumental in forming collaborative relationships with all stakeholders and identifying learners with learning barriers. Therefore, shared governance initiatives have been accompanied by endorsements of collaboration to achieve improvement. Consequently, the call for collaboration has also been a pervasive theme within the reform rhetoric (Douglas, Ansell, Parker, Sørensen, Hart, & Torfing, 2020). Every learner is unique; therefore, each learner needs to be treated individually, so diversity needs to be addressed. Thus, calls for active participation and collaborative engagement to support learners identified with learning barriers. Teaching learners with diverse needs can be a challenge to most teachers, especially novice teachers (Mahlo, 2017).

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education came from the challenge of the disparity experienced before 1994 (Ohmer, Mendenhall, Mohr Carney, & Adams, 2022). Several researchers have been evident and concurred with the notion that active partnership and collaborative engagement, intersectoral collaboration in enhancing successful implementation of inclusive education is essential in addressing diversity in learners with learning barriers (Nazir, Wenzler, Reifsnnyder, & Feifer, 2021; Bernardo, Sobkowich,

Forrest, Stewart, D'Agostino, Gutierrez & Gillis, 2021; Hook, Carroll, Louis, Prom, Stanton, Bogdanov, Chiliza, Freier, Rukundo, Ghebrehiwet, Borba, Fricchione, & Henderson, 2021).

Enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education is a shared responsibility that needs equal efforts from all stakeholders. It is, therefore, pivotal for all stakeholders to partake actively in the process to enhance successful inclusion.

#### **Striving for successful inclusive education**

The aim of establishing IE was to create a learning space where all learners, regardless of their differences or backgrounds, are valued and supported (Bila, 2019). To ensure the implementation of inclusive education, the Department of Education developed strategies and collaborated with different stakeholders, educators, policymakers, families, and communities (Brown & Buthelezi, 2020).

Since the implementation of inclusive education some years ago, there is no doubt that there is research evidence to support this. Still, there is a need for further development to enhance successful inclusive education. There has been exclusion of diverse learners' groups and disadvantaged communities has been a problem in educational institutions around the world, such as those with disabilities, individuals of various ethnic backgrounds, and individuals with lower socioeconomic positions (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

Inclusive education, the practice of addressing the diverse needs of all learners in mainstream classrooms, is recognised by international standards as key to enabling children with disabilities to realise their right to full participation in the community, as per the United Nations' *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* ([UN General Assembly, 2007](#)). Ministries and Departments of Education across sub-Saharan Africa strive to promote inclusive education, through education policies ([Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education, 2015](#); [South Africa Federal Ministry of Education, 2015](#)) and action plans ([Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2020](#); [United Republic of Tanzania Ministry of Education, 2017](#)), although only 42% of Sub-Saharan African countries have IE policies ([UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020](#)).

#### **Lack of teachers' training**

Lack of professional training in dealing with students with disability is one of the obstacles that hinders active partnership to success in education. Teachers may encounter difficulties establishing inclusive learning environments and delivering appropriate support if they have limited fundamental understanding. Inclusive education is a goal and a commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of their unique needs, can learn, grow, and thrive in a diverse classroom. However, as we explore the world of inclusive practices, it becomes evident that there are challenges to overcome and innovative solutions to celebrate (Freeman-Green, Williamson, & Cornelius, 2023).

#### **Lack of parental involvement and knowledge**

Developing an inclusive system goes beyond school organisation and involves the active engagement of key actors, such as parents and community stakeholders, in education-related processes. The lack of parental involvement resulted from not being involved in the entire process of identifying the child. Parental involvement is critical as the parents decide what action to take, i.e., learners' applications for concession and accommodation and application for placement. Collaboration assumes that education is a shared responsibility between all stakeholders and families. Parents play an important, often irreplaceable part in their children's progress in school. In many homes in South Africa, there is no culture of learning or even reading (Lomofsky et al., 2001).

Lack of parental involvement is aggravated by parents being not involved from the stage where the learners were identified as having learning barriers. In fact, in the initial stage of admission of the learners, parents must be available to assist in completing the learner's profile. Thus, parents should be encouraged to know about any form of development and challenges experienced by their learners. Learners are to participate more in their school activities when motivated and

encouraged by their parents, thus boosting their morale and self-esteem and deriving positive behaviours and self-respect.

#### **Availabilities and utilisation of assistive technologies**

To successfully utilize assistive technologies, various stakeholders should be available to enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education. This is where stakeholders, health workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, and learning support officials must form active partnerships that will result in sectoral partnerships to enhance the successful inclusion of learners with learning barriers. The availability and involvement of therapists in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive schools is very significant. Therapists in this study include speech therapists, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists, who play a major role in implementing inclusive education in special schools. It is, therefore, pivotal for all personnel and stakeholders to work harmoniously and in partnership to enhance the successful inclusion of learners with learning barriers in inclusive classrooms.

#### **Knowledge and implementation of policies**

For the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the Northwest province to establish an inclusive education and training system, the policies and legislation for general, further, and higher education training need to be reviewed and aligned with the White Paper 6. The implementation will require all advisory bodies to advise on implementing the policy in White Paper 6. Admission policy plays a major role in the admission of learners with visual impairment, as is further explained in White Paper 6 (Education Department 2001, p. 27) that admission policy will be revised so that learners who are accommodated outside of special schools and specialised settings can be accommodated within designated full-service or other schools and settings. Age grade norms will be revised to accommodate those learners requiring a departure from these norms due to their learning needs.

Schools must also have assessment policies as these play a pivotal role in including learners with visual impairment in inclusive/mainstream schools. "The teacher should be able to make appropriate use of different assessment practices, with particular emphasis on competence-based assessment and formative use of assessment" (Department of Education, 1998, p. 69). During assessment, learners with visual impairment can be accommodated, for instance, by giving them more time to complete given tasks. It should be borne in mind that they cannot be assessed in the same manner as those without visual impairment, as their needs are different. Tasks should be modified to be accessible to visual-impaired learners; this can only be possible if the teacher is acquainted with all assessment methods and criteria. Various means of assessment can be employed in the schools. For instance, tasks can be read orally so learners with visual impairment can answer or write down their answers using Braille.

#### **Objective of the study**

The study explores different stakeholders' collaboration engagement in identifying learners with learning barriers. It determines factors hindering active partnership and collaboration engagement of different stakeholders in identifying learners with learning barriers.

### **III. METHODS**

#### **Research design**

A research design is a "plan or a blueprint of how one intends to conduct the research" Charan & Biswas, (2013). The research design focuses on the end-product and what the researcher aims to achieve at the end of the study.

#### **Research paradigm**

Paradigms are central to research design because they impact the nature of the research question, that is, what is to be studied. In designing the research study, the principle of coherence can be preserved by ensuring that the research question and methods used fit logically within the paradigm (Chafe, 2024). The paradigm of a study provides the frame and the structure of the study and guides the

researcher's actions.

This study was based on the interpretive paradigm. According to Chafe (2024), the interpretive paradigm is "the way of studying human experience through empathetic identification with the individual." Thus, it is essential to understand the experience from the participant's perception. The interpretive paradigm functions on the assumption that there are no fixed realities; rather, people make individual, subjective meanings of the world as they interact with it. These meanings are influenced by an individual's cultural, historical, and political background (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2005; Niewenhuis, 2007). The researchers seek to understand social members' experiences and perceptions of their situation from their unique contexts and backgrounds. For the interpretive researcher, cause and effect are mutually interdependent; any event or action is explainable regarding multiple interaction factors, events, and processes (Henning, 2005).

#### Data collection instrument

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants. In enhancing active partnership and community collaboration, the study employed a qualitative method, where teachers from full-service schools were interviewed. Senior education specialists were also engaged in the study as they are the cornerstones in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools. The semi-structured interviews were conducted for thirty minutes per participant. Participants provide the researcher with rich qualitative data about their life experiences using semi-structured interviews.

#### Participants

Participants in this study involved teachers at a secondary school in Matlosana's local education office. Senior Education Specialists (SES) were participants because they provided support services and development to the schools. The sample comprised four participants, including two SES, and two teachers. There were two females and two males.

#### Research site

This research site included three primary schools in Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, two of which were situated in the township and one in the well-developed town in the Klerksdorp area. All three of these schools were categorised as inclusive, "full-service schools" by the Department of Basic Education. Such schools are ordinary institutions that are equipped to address the barriers to learning that learners may experience within an inclusive educational setting. Senior Education Specialists (SES) were also engaged in the study as they are the cornerstones in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools.

#### Data analysis

Data analysis aims to convert the information gathered to answer the research question (Human, 2010). The data analysis is "ongoing and occurs throughout the research process." Merriam (1998, p. 162) proceeds by suggesting that "without ongoing analysis the data can be unfocused, repetitious and overwhelming." Thus, it is the process in which the researcher brings order, structure, and meaning to the gathered data. Qualitative data analysis is the non-numeric assessment of observation made through participant observation, content analysis, in-depth interviews, and other qualitative research techniques (Babbie, 2007). Data analysis strategies will be carefully considered to ensure the design is consistent, as the researcher will match the analysis to a particular type of data to the research's purpose and paradigm (Durrheim, 1999).

#### Ethical considerations

This study is not only obliged to adhere to the ethical policy of the University of the Free State but was also granted permission by the Department of Basic Education. The names of the participants are changed to protect their identity. This study adhered to the ethical principles of the research. For example, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research, expected duration, and procedures, their rights to decline to participate, and to withdraw from the research

once participation had begun. In qualitative research, informed consent is critical due to the personal and in-depth nature of the data to be collected. The Health Profession Council of South Africa's (HPCSA) Code of Ethical Conduct (2008) defines anonymised data as data from which the information receiver cannot identify the client. In any qualitative study, the ethical issue regarding the protection of participants is of greater concern. The researcher will address concerns regarding privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants will be informed that their names will not be mentioned; pseudonyms will be used. Participants in this study will be asked to give their consent to participate in the research. Parents of learners with visual impairment will be given letters requesting their consent to their children's participation in the research interviews. In this study, four learners will be interviewed; two from each school will be interviewed.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools

#### Negative factors

This study found that factors hindered active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration, thus compromising the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In responding to the posed questions during interviews i.e. Is there any positive active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in your school? The teacher 1 from school 1 responded that:

*"There is not much active participation and engagement among stakeholders in our school". Parents do not attend meetings, and when they come, there are very few where some decisions cannot be taken"* (Teacher 1 school 1).

*"Parents are not actively involved in their children's school activities, resulting in parents losing interest in general school activities. Many learners need to be supported as they cannot cope with their daily activities. We must apply for concessions and accommodation, but parents are not supportive"* (Teacher 2 School 1).

*"There is no participation among our school stakeholders, and parents think teachers are making decisions on their behalf, so they are reluctant to attend the meetings. We find it challenging because we must identify learners with learning barriers, but parents are not providing us with necessary information and documents needed in the learner's profiles"* (Teacher 3 School 1).

Almost all teachers lamented that parent's participation is not satisfactory, thus retard the process learner's placement and application for concessions and accommodations.

The study also disclosed that parents are less active in school activities as they are not fully involved in each activity. Most parents disclosed that they are not given information about school activities, hence their participation being less.

Despite the disclosure of challenges that hinder the positive collaboration of different stakeholders.

#### Positive factors

The findings revealed that positive active partnerships, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration result in the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In responding to the question, i.e., What should be done to activate positive participation and engagement among stakeholders to enhance the successful implementation of inclusive education?

*"The training of parents on their roles and responsibilities in identifying learners with learning barriers and accepting and tolerating one another in working towards enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education"* (SES 1).

*"Planning together, drafting policies together, and playing each role is the key to implementing successful inclusive education. Parents need to know their role in the school, and their role is important in community engagement and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of*

inclusive education" (SES 2).

Both Senior Education Specialists concurred that training and working together in drafting policies, decision-making, and tolerating and accepting one another will be critical to enhancing the successful inclusion of learners with learning disability.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study explored factors impeding active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools. The study outlined a few factors that hindered active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools. The following were outlined as factors hindering the active partnership, community engagement, and intersectoral collaboration in enhancing the successful implementation of inclusive education in full-service schools. This study explores the collaboration engagement of different stakeholders in identifying learners with learning barriers. The second aim was to outline the merits and support of different stakeholders in active partnership and collaboration engagement in identifying learners with learning barriers.

## VI. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

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