

International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research
Vol. 20, No. 9, pp. 207-221, September 2021
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.9.12>
Received Jun 29, 2021; Revised Sep 19, 2021; Accepted Sep 27, 2021

Factors Impacting the Application of an Inclusive Education Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support of the Learners at Schools in South Africa

Mantheme Florina Matolo*

Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6226-7785>

Awelani M. Rambuda

Central University of Technology, Free State, South Africa
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2518-0832>

Abstract. The purpose of this research is to establish factors impacting the application of an inclusive education policy on screening, identification, assessment, and support of learners at schools in South Africa. The paradigm of the research is interpretivist because the policy is aligned to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory which attests that, for an education system to be effectively inclusive, there should be a shift from a paradigm that views barriers within a learner in isolation to a paradigm that views the barriers in a learner. There is interconnectedness of the barriers with the rest of the systems within and outside the learner. The participants were seven school principals and five members of the district-based support team, who were purposefully sampled. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit information on factors impacting the application of the policy. Data were analysed using the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants. Results reveal that the educators' character traits, internal training and development, perceived policy application, and internal and external support for learners experiencing learning barriers impact policy application. The study recommends that aspiring educators must be adequately trained about policy at training institutions. Educators must be capacitated on policy application and every school must appoint a psychometric assessor who will provide information to educators on how best to support learners with learning barriers. The psychometric assessor must coordinate with the district-based support team for external support needs in policy implementation.

* Corresponding author: *Awelani M. Rambuda, arambuda@cut.ac.za*

Keywords: barriers to learning; identification of barriers; inclusive education; policy application; screening of barriers; SIAS 2014 policy; support of learners

1. Introduction

An inclusive education system that enables access to quality education seems to be a global quest that unfortunately has not yet been achieved by many countries. Educators are believed to be key role players in rendering the application of an inclusive education policy effective or ineffective in many countries (Kurth et al., 2018). For inclusive education to be a reality in South African primary and secondary schools, educators in South Africa (SA) are required to be well capacitated regarding the implications involved in the application of policies. All schools in South Africa are expected to effectively apply the 2014 Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS) policy. Educators are expected to play the vital role of screening, identifying, and assessing barriers to learning in their daily teaching and then render support to any learner who may be experiencing barriers to learning. However, there are educators who never provide the interventions regarding learning barriers for learners who experience barriers. The disparity between inclusive education policy theories and their application may be the reason for their minimal application in schools. The researchers embarked on establishing factors which impact the application of the SIAS 2014 policy and profoundly advocate a shift towards the following approaches:

- screening of barriers, instead of screening of learners;
- identification of barriers experienced by learners, instead of identification of learners;
- assessment of the level of inclusive support needed to counteract the barriers, instead of exclusion of learners; and
- support of learners who experience barriers to learning in their own home space, instead of removing learners from their own home space because of the barriers they experience and not because of the level of support they may need in order for them to be supported.

The researchers assume that the hindering factors to SIAS 2014 policy application generally emanate from education system barriers, as well as the calibre of educators in South Africa. For this reason, an intensified external training and development of educators is advocated by the research. The educator training institutions should capacitate aspiring educators regarding application of education policies, especially inclusive education policies such as the SIAS 2014 policy rationale, principles, and how the policy is to be effectively implemented in schools. This approach for effective education policy application is also valued by researchers such as Cologon (2019) and Muhdi (2019), who claim that thorough training and capacitation of education policy implementers forms a good foundation for an effective policy application. School-based educators need to realise that their knowledge, understanding, and application of any education policy impact on the feasibility of such a policy directly or indirectly (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Damiania & Oswago, 2016; Marais & Wessels, 2020). An effective implementation of a policy is the core of the policy process (Tezera, 2019).

2. Literature Review

The South African Minister of Education, Angie Motshekga, states that education and curriculum have an important role in realising the democratic aims of the SA Constitution (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2011). This means that educators should be conversant with any SA education policy such as SIAS 2014, because it is a vessel for improving the quality of life of all citizens and unleashing the potential of each learner. To ensure that all learners can access quality education, that helps achieve the Constitutional aims of SA, the policy on SIAS was introduced in 2014 by the DBE with the purpose of providing a standardised procedure to identify, assess, and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in schools (DBE, 2014). The policy ensures understanding of educational inclusivity by compelling front-line implementers such as educators to bear in mind that their focus in addressing educational needs in their daily practice should no longer be on the nature of a learner, but rather on the nature of the barrier that prevents the learner from learning, as well as the nature of support that may be suitable to assist the learner. Educators should understand that SIAS 2014 policy is meant to enable a shift from focusing only on the support of individual learners owing to their disabilities to a broad mode of support on teaching and learning, so that effective learner participation is maximised in all schools (DBE, 2014).

Contrary to the directives of the policy, there are still some educators who are noted to be ignoring inclusive policy practices which require that learners who experience barriers to learning be supported. Such educators do not even do screening, identification, and assessment of learning barriers experienced by learners. This means that intervention regarding learning barriers for learners who experience barriers is never provided, because schools do not play their role of ensuring that every educator engages in inclusive daily classroom practice (Gallup, 2017; Mason, 2016; Viennet & Pont, 2017). Effective application of the SIAS 2014 policy is not just dependent on the competence of the District Based Support Team (DBST) at the department level, but is also dependent on the design nature of the policy, as well as the educators entrusted to implement it. Educators are expected to have a clear understanding of the concepts of diversity in their classrooms and curriculum differentiation. In support of this stance, Burns et al. (2016) argue that educators who are efficient school-based implementers should be at the forefront of ensuring that inclusive policy objectives and principles are realised in every instructional session. The importance of inclusive education policies has also been embraced internationally. For example, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [EASNIE] (2017) not only advocates the importance and practice of focusing learner achievement on all learners inclusively, but also reports that a satisfactorily inclusive achievement was noted in states that had their education policies committed to the support of learners who needed intervention on learning barriers. In Africa, Kenya and Zanzibar have also been reported as investing their efforts in education policies that are not only inclusive, but also enable both educators and learners to each partake in education processes successfully (Amran et al., 2017; Ireri et al., 2020).

Apart from the international perspective, academics seem to believe that quality education is realised when educators provide effective support to learners with barriers. It is believed that inclusive institutional practices and resources that are aimed at accommodating learners who experience barriers to learning are fundamentals of learner support for academic achievement. Furthermore, learner support is regarded as fundamental in meeting the learning needs of learners in an institution (Cologon, 2019; Elder et al., 2016; Landsberg & Matthews, 2016). In the light of this perspective, the SIAS 2014 policy is designed in such a way that it enables educators to be conversant with the support needs of learners to effectively deliver the curriculum (DBE, 2014). Adewumi and Mosito (2019) also affirm that providing support services for teaching and learning is an important strategy for building schools' capacities to recognize and address several learning difficulties. However, some researchers have discovered that application of inclusive education policies does not seem to be easy in South Africa. This may be due to the already existing uncertainties faced by some educators, who basically are not competent enough to interpret and implement curriculum policies of their own areas of specialisation (Marais & Wessels, 2020). Nel et al. (2016) report that educators in South Africa perceive inclusive education policy practices as frustrating because they do not have adequate skills and resources for supporting learners who experience barriers to learning. As if confirming the concerns of South African educators, the members of the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education have acknowledged that the journey towards effective implementation of inclusive policies seems slow (DBE, 2016). The main pointers regarding the challenges of educational inclusion in South Africa include educator workloads being too high, a lack of resources, and inadequate training of educators on how to support learners with barriers to learning in an ordinary traditional classroom setup (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). The researchers concur that educator training and competence are imperative for effective policy application. This implies that the application challenges of the SIAS policy as an inclusive education policy may also be prevalent among educators. Consequently, the study specifically addressed the following question:

- Which factors impact the application of an inclusive education policy on screening, identification, assessment, and support of the learners at schools in South Africa?

3. Theoretical Framework

The SIAS policy is based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory which was first initiated in 1979, but later developed as recently as 2006 and 2009. The SIAS inclusive education policy adopts Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem perspective, which requires educators to shift from locating barriers within the learners to locating them in all the systems which form the spheres of existence of learners, and which act as barriers to learning. The theory emphasises the importance of every individual who plays an active role in the school life of a learner to maximise support of learners who experience learning barriers. There are four levels of the bioecological model.

The first level of the model is called proximal processes. Here human development takes place when there is interaction between the person and their

environment. The interactive processes are presumed to lead to particular kinds of developmental outcomes, as well as having the power for actualising genetic potential for effective functioning (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). An example is given by Swart and Pettipher (2017), who refer to an instance of language and cultural differences between home and school. The language and culture of home may be different from that of school. This difference which is said to result in anger, shame, and low self-esteem in some parents and caregivers encourages the non-involvement of parents or caregivers and ultimately worsens the fact that they cannot assist their children with schoolwork. As a result, parents and children develop in opposite directions, with little common ground in terms of culture, language and life experiences (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). The proximal processes seem to have an implication for SIAS policy implementation in South Africa.

The implication of proximal processes for SIAS application means that the prescripts of the SIAS policy need to accommodate instances of language and cultural differences between parents and learners who experience barriers to learning. Educators also need to be aware of these instances and administer care and support for learners in a way that is not going to aggravate the situation.

The second level of the bioecological theory that is closely related to the SIAS policy is the person characteristics, which means that every person brings certain biopsychological characteristics that influence proximal processes and their developmental outcomes. The three characteristics of a person are demand characteristics, resource characteristics, and force characteristics. The demand characteristics are features or attributes that provoke or discourage reactions from the social environment. They may influence the initial interactions because of the expectations formed immediately (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). Educators in South Africa may be influenced either positively or negatively by the features and attributes of learners who experience barriers to learning in their classes to either render support or condemn them. Similarly, a learner who experiences barriers to learning may be influenced by the attributes of their educators to either open up to supportive intervention or reject any form of support rendered. Educators should be aware that learners have perceptions about them that may be facilitative or discouraging during the application of the SIAS policy. Apart from the demand characteristics of person characteristics, there are also resource characteristics. These characteristics mean that a lack of or the availability of resources influences the proximal processes. Resources such as skill, knowledge, and experiences contribute to effective interactive processes (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). The implication of resource characteristics for SIAS policy application is equally important and South African educators need to embrace their teaching experience, skill, and knowledge to facilitate effective implementation of SIAS policy. If the educators are not adequately skilled and knowledgeable in implementing SIAS policy, their efforts may be futile regarding the effective policy implementation process.

The force characteristics (also called dispositions) are forces that mobilise proximal processes and sustain their operation or conversely interfere with, limit or even prevent their occurrence (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). Force characteristics

bear implications on effective SIAS policy application because the District Based Support Team (DBST), School Management Team (SMT), School-Based Support Team (SBST), and School Governing Body (SGB) are examples of structural forces that can mobilise or immobilize processes of effective SIAS policy implementation. The unresponsive character of these structures to learners with barriers may cause educators to fail to sustain effective implementation of SIAS 2014 policy. This research evaluated the structural forces that impact on the feasibility of the SIAS 2014 policy. Having discussed the second level of the bioecological theory, the next level to be discussed is the Environmental Systems level (also called contexts or ecological level).

The four levels of environmental systems that influence a person's development are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. An environment or social context is viewed as a set of nested structures in which each nest is contained inside the next nest, forming an interrelated interaction (Bronfenbrenner in Swart & Pettipher, 2017). The nested systems are described as follows:

- In a microsystem, there is a person and activities that are intimate to them.
- In a mesosystem, there is a constant collaboration and interaction of the microsystems.
- The exosystem refers to forces that interact with those at mesosystem level to indirectly influence the activities at the microsystem level.
- The macrosystem refers to values and ideologies within the systems of a nation which may be influenced by other systems (Nel et al., 2012)

These levels of environmental systems have implications regarding implementation of SIAS policy in South Africa. Effective implementation of the policy should be found to be maintaining the sovereignty of all the social contexts of learners' existence. All forms of support and intervention for learners who experience barriers to learning should ensure that no order at any context is disrupted or destabilized while attempting to address an identified barrier to learning.

The last level of the bioecological theory is the chronosystems or time which is essential in the bioecological theory, because all the interactive processes manifest outcomes that are a result of a short period or long period of time. This means that time brings about a big developmental change when there have been long-time (macrotime) interactive processes. Similarly, short-time (microtime) interactive processes may yield a small outcome as well. The DBE needs to invest more time in initiating educators to SIAS policy and how it should be applied. Failure to train educators thoroughly and monitor policy application may mean there will not be effective implementation taking place or, worse still, that the policy may not even be implemented. Similarly, educators need to understand that some identified barriers in the learners or in their environments are a result of a long-time manifestation and therefore may require more patience to address. Inclusive education calls for a paradigm shift from a confined view of a disability as a barrier only, to a broader perspective of what type of support can be given to a learner with a disability and how that support can be delivered to counter effect

the intensity of the disability as a barrier (Department of Education, 2005). The theory of Bronfenbrenner is also known as the process-person-context-time model (Swart & Pettipher, 2017). Effective application of SIAS 2014 policy will maintain the sovereignty of all the social contexts of learners' existence. All forms of support and intervention for learners who experience barriers to learning should ensure that no order in any context is disrupted or destabilised while attempting to address an identified barrier to learning.

4. Methodology

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, which maintains that there are multiple socially constructed realities. Rather than trying to be objective, professional judgments and the perspective of researchers in interpretivism are considered in the interpretation of data (Bergin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is a view believing that the human mind and objectivity are inseparable, because they are intricately connected such that the knower and the process of knowing cannot be separated from what is known and the facts cannot be separated from values (Salkind, 2018). Accordingly, the researchers adopted a qualitative research method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection method which helps a researcher to ask participants questions that help to know more about their social settings, including their opinions and beliefs about certain phenomena (Bergin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Salkind, 2018). Purposive sampling was used to select seven school principals and five members of the DBST, who were interviewed to elicit information about the factors impacting the application of the SIAS 2014 policy at schools. Data were mechanically recorded using a cell phone recording mode during face-to-face interviews. Data collection occurred over a three-week period. Interviews were conducted during the day, but at a time and place which the participants found convenient to them. After the interviews, data collected was analysed following the steps discussed below:

Step 1: Transcription of the orally recorded interviews into a manuscript

Transcription is the process of changing qualitative research data into typed text. Transcribing collected data has advantages, which include enabling a researcher to interact and internalise the finer details of the participants' inputs (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). In the context of this research, the audio recordings of the interviews conducted with the DBST members and the school principals were transcribed by the researchers to gain thorough understanding of their inputs.

Step 2: Assigning variables codes to the transcriptions

Coding is the process of mating segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). There are many types of data coding, such as causation coding, dramaturgical coding, emotion coding, hypothesis coding, longitudinal coding, magnitude coding, pattern coding, process coding, and protocol coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Of these various forms of coding, protocol coding was selected for the analysis of the data. Protocol coding of qualitative data involves segmenting data according to pre-established, recommended, standardised, or prescribed systems (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2016a; Nieuwenhuis, 2016b). In this research, qualitative data collected during

interviews with the DBST members and school principals was coded according to the SIAS 2014 policy constructs which were earlier established.

Step 3: Analysing causes and effects of participants' inputs

Lastly, data were analysed focusing on the cause and effect of the participants' inputs.

5. Results

The main enquiry of the research at this juncture was to establish factors impacting the application of the SIAS 2014 policy at schools. The five members of the DBST were identified as T1, T2, T3, T4, and T5. T1 represents the first DBST member, T2 the second DBST member, T3 the third DBST member, T4 the fourth DBST member, and T5 the fifth DBST member. The seven school principals were identified as Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3, Principal 4, Principal 5, Principal 6, and Principal 7. The participants' inputs were later transcribed and classified according to the following factors: educators' character traits, inadequate training and development of educators, educators' inability to keep pace with expected curriculum delivery, and insufficient role of the school-based support team.

5.1 Factor 1: Influence of education system on the application of the SIAS policy

The general stance of the DBST about the educators' characteristics in relation to the ineffective SIAS 2014 policy application varies. For example, some members of the DBST stated that failure to implement the policy effectively was caused by educators' lack of passion for teaching as a career. By contrast, other members of the DBST claimed that the ineffective application of the policy emanated from the education system, not the character traits of educators. The DBST members who subscribed to the latter view also stated that, in implementing the policy, educators were demoralised by the education system. This is what T1 had to say:

Some of these educators are not passionate about their work hence you see them not helping these kids (T1).

In support of T1's opinion, T2 added:

Nothing will ever be okay about this policy as long as educators are not willing to embrace teaching as a career that is meant to bring light to those in the darkness instead of being so full of complaints about these learners (T2).

Contrary to the views of T1 and T2, T5 argued as follows:

Educators have empathy for learners, but their morale is down because they feel the system is failing them by not responding at all or in time to their requests not knowing that actually the very system through DBST has serious challenges of resources. No educator likes to see a learner suffering, but educators end up deciding not to even try to be involved with such learners because they have experience of us always not responding well to their requests, not by our choice, but often as a result of the system failing us as well by not providing us with enough resources to assist schools (T5).

Like the views of T5, T3 said the following in support:

There are teachers who really seem to be willing to be inclusive, but they are kind of hampered by our system that does not sometimes assist them to a point where our teachers just lose the interest to help their special learners (T3).

Interestingly, school principals also acknowledged that it was not the character traits of educators that were causing the poor application, but the education system itself. The principals stated that an effective policy application of the policy demanded that educators invested a great deal of time on administrative work for learners who experienced barriers to learning, more than on the actual teaching of learners of whom the majority did not experience barriers to learning. Some secondary school principals further indicated that since educators were held responsible for the poor academic performance of learners by the education system and charged for not reaching the set district academic performance targets, educators had a tendency to focus on “saving” most learners – who then were those that did not experience barriers to learning. This practice, according to the secondary school principals, was done in schools to avoid the punitive consequences of underperformance. This is what Principal 3 had to say:

Our teachers don't like the policy because it causes them a lot of paperwork for only one or two learners while they neglect the rest of coping learners (Principal 3).

Principal 1 supported Principal 3, by stating that:

The educators don't really want to be involved with the application of this policy not because they do not love learners who are vulnerable, but the actual time and processes to be followed are too much for them (Principal 1).

Having discussed the influence of the character traits of educators, the next theme to be presented and analysed is the training and development of educators.

5.2 Factor 2: Inadequate training and development of educators

Both the DBST and the school principals seemed to respond in agreement that the training and development of educators regarding the SIAS 2014 policy was inadequate, thereby hampering their effective application of the policy at schools. Similarly, the general stance of the two groups seemed to subscribe to the notion that there was inadequate training of educators by the institutions of higher learning. T1 said:

The training that educators get about the SIAS policy from institutes of higher learning is not sufficient; hence there is poor performance of such educators (T1).

Insufficient training was also raised by Principal 4, who pointed out that:

Educators ought to have been trained about inclusivity from institutions of higher learning even before they can be appointed as educators in schools, but unfortunately this is not the case (T4).

Principal 3 had the following to say:

They are not well capacitated from college on how to implement the policy (Principal 3).

In agreement, Principal 1 said that:

It is not possible for educators to implement the policy that they have not been well trained on from their training colleges (Principal 1).

The two groups further seem to agree that the poor application of SIAS in schools is linked to poor training and development of educators in terms of the number of years spent at tertiary institutions. For instance, this is what T1 said:

There is an influx of people who have teaching qualifications from one particular institute of higher learning but whose training has not been up to scratch. Such people have done education courses for only a year and then are said to be qualified educators (T1).

Principal 2 also confirmed that both novice and experienced educators in their school lack training and development on SIAS 2014 and further blamed the institutions of teacher training, as well as the DBST, by saying:

Training from tertiary about SIAS is not enough and most teachers in my school do not even have adequate training for the subjects they teach. The DBST often trains principals more than educators and as a result educators get second-hand training from principals, which is often not as effective and detailed as the first-hand training (Principal 2).

The two groups also accounted for the perceived application ability of educators on the SIAS 2014 policy as discussed below.

5.3 Factor 3: Educators' inability to keep pace with expected curriculum delivery

DBST members disclosed that, unlike primary school educators, secondary school educators were not able to implement the policy because they were overloaded with curriculum demands, which did not allow them to cope with the SIAS policy demands. For instance, they indicated that schools' timetables were packed with curriculum focus to a point where it became almost impossible for educators in both primary and secondary schools to have time to implement the SIAS policy administratively. They also indicated that secondary schools were more focused on reaching the set targets by the DBE, knowing that failure to reach the targets might cause them to face serious consequences of accountability. As a result, secondary schools became compelled to spend more time on increasing the percentage pass rates for most learners than focusing on a few learners who needed inclusive support. In a similar sense, school principals concurred with the DBST, but rather added that as principals they were also so overloaded with daily curriculum and management duties that they were unable to pursue SIAS application effectively. Some principals also confessed that they were still not able to implement the policy. For example, Principal 1 said that since they could not implement the policy at their school, they had employed a permanent school-based psychometric assessor to assist the school. Principal 1 said:

I don't know much about how SIAS has to be implemented and my teachers also do not know much. We depend on our School-Based psychometric assessor to do all the necessary paperwork that has to be done (Principal 1).

Principal 2 felt strongly about this, saying:

Schools are already overloaded with so many tasks to do but when there should be a policy that removes the burden on us about these unruly

children, here now comes something from nowhere that adds salt to our open wounds...it is paper after paper which does not help us nix (Principal 2).

Principal 5 added:

This SIAS thing is not working for teachers. It only enslaves them to no end and what is even painful is that the department is doing nothing, but keeps pushing and pushing (Principal 5).

These responses imply that instead of the SIAS 2014 policy providing a platform for educators to screen, identify, and assess learners with learning barriers, so that they can be assisted by the DBST, it rather creates a more stressful workload.

5.4 Factor 4: Insufficient role of the school-based support team (SBST) in the application of SIAS 2014 policy

DBST members seemed to believe that the SBSTs in schools were generally not functional. The reasons given included the fact that SBST members did not get satisfactory support from the rest of the school staff. For example, a member of the DBST stated that the duty of the SBST was exaggerated in schools. They agreed that, although it was the duty of the SBST to ensure that the application of SIAS happened, schools tended to regard their SBSTs as if they were the only ones to implement the policy. Some members of the DBST said that the mind-set of educators could be changed from believing that the SBST was a certain group of people in a school to an understanding that everybody in a school was an SBST member. The DBST disclosed another reason as being that a lot of schools had an SBST operating as a "one-man show". The DBST members also said most schools whose SBSTs were said to be non-functional were those that had their SBSTs run by one SBST member only. For example, T1 said:

The SIAS policy will never be effectively implemented in our schools for as long as teachers see their SBSTs as a group of people who have to deal with learning barriers in schools while the rest wait and watch the SBST deal with the problem. It is as if teachers don't know that the issue of intervention on learning barriers is everyone's business (T1).

T3 concurred with T1, saying:

SBSTs are often not supported in school communities because they are left to deal with almost everything that requires support of learners while their colleagues do nothing except to watch and complain (T3).

T4 added:

In secondary schools' cases that are reported to schools' principals end there and they are not cascaded to the SBST for recording and capturing by the administration clerks, so the principal affects the functionality of the SBSTs (T4).

By contrast, some school principals claimed that their SBSTs were functional, giving different reasons for their stance. Firstly, Principal 4 said that in their school, they have merged the SBST with the academic committee to avoid the

fragmentation which ends up causing a great deal of work for everyone. Principal 4 had the following to say:

I think there is no need to say there is an SBST committee and academic committee when we know we are talking about same people with exception of one or two members. It's causing too much work for these people unnecessarily (Principal 4).

Secondly, some principals said their SBSTs met every month and had briefing sessions with the rest of the committees and staff about cases experienced during that month. Principal 6 confirmed this in the following manner:

I can't say our SBST is perfect but at least they try to meet monthly to discuss with some committees what they are doing and if they need our assistance where there are problems (Principal 6).

Lastly, other principals said that their SBSTs were functional because their remedial educator assisted the SBST with tasks that were too much for the SBST. For example, Principal 7 acknowledged this as follows:

Our remedial teacher is always hands-on. She tries to help with whatever that has to be done by our SBST though sometimes I think the work becomes too much for her also (Principal 7).

The researchers have, however, noted that even though it might be true that there was functionality in these SBSTs, the principals of such schools did not relate the functionality of the SBST to the effective application of the policy. For example, none of the principals said there was effective application of the SIAS 2014 policy in their schools; instead, they all acknowledged that the policy application was still a problem.

6. Discussion

The personal traits of educators are regarded as some of the vital elements that can make teaching and learning process a success or a failure (Landsberg & Matthews, 2016). As has been established earlier, the effective application of SIAS 2014 policy largely depends on the attitudes of the educators. It is strongly believed that the negative attitude of some educators towards learners with learning barriers profoundly slows down the drive to effective application of inclusive education policies. Educators need not believe that they can efficiently become inclusive in their daily practice only when they are specialists in inclusive education; instead they must have willingness to assist all learners to achieve academically, regardless of their diversity (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). Inclusive education practices and policies need first to be embraced and viewed by classroom educators as a solution rendered to them for some existing short-term or long-term problem which may be having an impact in education practice (Florian et al., 2016; Sarton & Smith, 2019). For educators to be able to support learners who experience barriers to learning, they need to have a willing heart to help and a patient approach to challenging situations (Nel et al., 2016). At this juncture, it is reasonable to concur with Adewumi and Mosito (2019) that South African educators' attitudes towards inclusive education may have contributed to the ineffective application of the SIAS 2014 policy that is notably prevalent. Training and development of educators are also noted as influencing policy

application. Ireri, et al. (2020) report that, in Kenya, one of the hindering factors to realising effective inclusive education is inadequate training of educators and ineffective school strategies. In the context of the research results presented earlier, it becomes logical to note that educators in South Africa do not effectively implement the SIAS 2014 because they have not had adequate external or internal training about the policy. Tezera (2019) argues that educators are vital for successful implementation of policies, Therefore, the training of educators is important not only for the learners, but for the educators too, because their level of competence improves. Educators who have been well trained for their work are often willing to sacrifice their time to get the work that they love done.

Therefore education policies need to be entrusted in the hands of educators who understand their rationale (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Elder et al., 2016; Marais & Wessels, 2020). High educator workloads have been noted as contributing to poor application of inclusive education policies or practices. Educators whose workloads are too high are often known to be resistant to change or development (Irer et al., 2020; Sarton & Smith, 2019). The SIAS 2014 policy is probably suffering the same consequence, because the research established that educators were not able to satisfactorily focus on learners who experience barriers to learning because their workloads are too high to allow them to do so (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). An adverse result of this is that no effective administrative records of SIAS application are kept, hence the progress reports of learners being supported are sometimes not found in SBST files or are not captured on the South African-School Administrative Management System (SA-SAMS). However, the SIAS 2014 policy clearly stipulates that there should be adequate time given for every step of the policy to be executed (DBE, 2014). Adequate time is needed for educators to cover the syllabus, while at the same time rendering support to all learners including those that may be experiencing barriers to learning ((Adewumi & Mosito, 2019; Ireri et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2016). Such findings have dire implications for learners who experience learning barriers. The findings are against Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory because the identified factors are detrimental to the academic development of these learners.

7. Conclusion

This research has established the factors impacting the application of the SIAS 2014 policy at schools. Educators must screen the proximal barriers in learners competently and assess the support needs of such learners. Learners' support is linked to force characteristics such as requesting an intervention of the structural forces like the SBST and DBST. These force structures are advised by educators in relation to what works and what does not work. The unresponsive character of any structural force to learners with barriers causes educators to fail to sustain effective application of the policy Therefore, the researchers recommend that training and development of educators be intensified as per the provisions of the person characteristic of the bioecological theory. Teacher training institutions should capacitate aspiring educators about the policy's rationale, principles, and how to effectively implement it at schools. Induction and mentoring of novice educators are essential for them to adopt a positive mind-set towards being passionate about the policy. Personal attributes of educators may influence learners who experience barriers to learning to either incorporate or reject support

interventions rendered because they have their own perceptions about their educators. Similarly, educators need to realise that their learners' personal attributes can impact their efforts to support them on the barriers they face. It is through teacher training institutions and induction processes that educators may be sensitised regarding the influence of these person characteristics. This research further subscribes to the resource characteristic, which requires that teaching experience, skills, and content knowledge form part of the essential aspects of the human resources that educators should have. Specialised human resource personnel, such as a school-based psychometric assessor, are equally important. The DBE, through the DBST, would then coordinate with the school-based psychometric assessor on what and how to continuously train educators in the application of the policy.

8. References

- Amran, S. S., Yat, Y., & Iddrisu, I. (2017). Education policy implementation: A mechanism for enhancing primary education development in Zanzibar. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(3), 172-181. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.53015>
- Adewumi, T. M., & Mosito, C. (2019). Experiences of teachers in implementing inclusion of learners with special education needs in selected Fort Beaufort district primary schools, South Africa *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1703446>
- Bergin, T. 2018. *An introduction to data analysis*. Sage.
- Burns, T., Köster, F., & Fuster M. (2016). Education governance in action: Lessons from case studies, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264262829-en>
- Cologon, K. (2019). Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation. Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA). https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2019-10/apo-nid265286_1.pdf
- Creswell, J., & Creswell, D. (2018). *Research design*. Sage.
- Elder, B. C., Damiania, M. L., & Oswago, B. O. (2016). From attitudes to practice: Utilizing inclusive teaching strategies in Kenyan primary schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(4), 413-434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2015.1082648>
- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2017). *Raising the achievement of all learners in inclusive education: Lessons from European policy and practice*. European Agency. <https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Raising%20Achievement%20%20Literature%20Review.pdf>
- Florian, L., Black-Hawkins, K., & Rouse, M. (2016). *Achievement and inclusion in schools*. Routledge.
- Gallup. (2017). Education Gallup Historical Trends. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1612/education.aspx>
- Ireri, B. R., King'endo, M., Wangila, E., & Thurair, S. (2020). Policy strategies for effective implementation of inclusive education in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 12(1), 28-42. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJEAPS2019.0622>
- Johnson, R., & Christensen, L. (2017). *Educational research*. Sage.
- Kurth, J., Miller, A. L., Toews, S. G., & Thompson, J. R. (2018). Inclusive education: Perspectives on application and practice from international experts. *Intellectual*

- and *Developmental Disabilities*, 56(6), 471- 485. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-56.6.471>
- Landsberg, E., & Matthews, L. (2016). Learning support. In E. Landsberg, D. Kruger & E. Swart (Eds.), *Addressing barriers to learning* (pp. 69-105). Van Schaik.
- Mason, M. (2016). Is thorough implementation of policy change in education actually possible? What complexity theory tells us about initiating and sustaining change. *European Journal of Education*, 51(4), 437-440. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12193>
- Marais, A. M., & Wessels, E. (2020) Investigating the interpretation and implementation of policies that guide the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase. *Reading & Writing* 11(1), 106-113. <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v11i1.277>
- Muhdi, M. (2019). Framework for implementation of education policy in the perspective of education management in Indonesia. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 7(12), 2717-2728. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.071220>
- Nel, N., Nel, M., & Hugo, A. (2012). Inclusive education: The necessity of providing support to all learners. In N. Nel, M. Nel & A. Hugo (Eds.), (pp. 3-23) *Learner support in a diverse classroom*. Van Schaik.
- Nel, N. M., Tlale, L. D. N., Engelbrecht, P., & Nel, M. (2016). Teacher's perceptions of education support structures in the implementation of inclusive education in South Africa. *Koers*, 81(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.19108/KOERS.81.3.2249>
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016a). Qualitative research designs and data-gathering techniques. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 118-153). Van Schaik.
- Nieuwenhuis, J. (2016b). Analysing qualitative data. In K. Maree (Ed.), *First steps in research* (pp. 80-116). Van Schaik.
- Republic of South Africa. Department of Basic Education [DBE]. (2011). *Guidelines for responding to learner diversity in the classroom*. Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa Department of Basic Education [DBE]. (2014). *Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support*. Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa Department of Education [DBE]. (2001). *Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system*. Education White Paper 6. Government Printer.
- Salkind, N. J. (2018). *Exploring research*. Pearson Education.
- Sarton, E., & Smith, M. (2019). The challenge of inclusion for children with disabilities – experiences of implementation in Eastern and Southern Africa. S. Chakera & S. Tao (Eds.), *UNICEF education think piece series: Innovative thinking for complex educational challenges in the SDG4 era* (pp.60-71). UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office. <https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/4911/file>
- Swart, E., & Pettipher, R. (2016). A framework for understanding inclusion. In E. Landsberg, D. Kruger & E. Swart (Eds.), *Addressing barriers to learning* (pp. 3-26). Van Schaik.
- Tezera, D. (2019). Factors for the Successful Implementation of Policies. *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review*, 7(8), 92-95. <http://meritresearchjournals.org/er/index.htm>
- Viennet, R., & Pont, B. (2017). *Education policy implementation: A literature review and proposed framework*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP\(2017\)11&docLanguage=En](https://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=EDU/WKP(2017)11&docLanguage=En)