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Enabling environments that South African teachers create to accommodate diversity in their classrooms: A case study on the Limpopo Province

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With this article, we investigate how primary school teachers create enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. In the study reported on here, we used the qualitative research approach and a case study research design was adopted. Five primary school teachers were recruited through purposive sampling to participate in the study. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. We employed pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Shulman,1986) as a theoretical lens to make sense of the findings. Four findings emerged from the analysis of the data. Firstly, teachers were knowledgeable about the legislation, policies and guidelines about inclusive education to leverage their efforts to create enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. Secondly, teachers' understanding of inclusive education was still entrapped in the medical model, and not in the social model. According to the medical model of disability people are regarded as disabled by their impairments or differences while according to the social model disability is caused by the way in which society is organised. Thirdly, teachers showed an understanding on how to use the principle of differentiation to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. Fourthly, teachers used their social capital to manage diversity in their classrooms. These findings have at least 3 implications. One, policymakers need to take teachers into consideration when they develop policies for inclusive education. Two, there is a need to empower teachers with a better understanding of what inclusive education is. Three, there is a need for parents, teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate in accommodating diversity in schools.

Keywords: accommodate; diversity; enabling environments; learners; teachers; teaching

Introduction

In the past, South African schools, as in other parts of the developing world and especially in emerging economy countries, have been criticised for not creating educational settings that are safe and could provide quality education (Van Jaarsveld, 2008). This criticism is informed by the fact that education is a driver of economic development (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006). Consequently, inclusive education is not only a social justice issue, but also an economic development issue. South Africa, as an emerging economy, needs a viable education that leaves no child behind.

Thus, after the demise of apartheid in South Africa, the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996) (hereafter the Act) heralded compulsory education for all children in mainstream classrooms irrespective of barriers to learning. The Act states that public schools must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating against them in any way. However, it appears that teachers find it arduous to accomplish this ideal because of challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, a lack of resources and a lack of requisite expertise on how to respond to diverse barriers to learning (Walton, Carrington, Saggers, Edwards & Kimani, 2022). These and other challenges inhibit the call for inclusive learning (Donohue & Borman, 2014; Mu, Wang, Wang, Feng, Deng & Liang, 2015). As a result, most learners are excluded because some teachers do not employ inclusive strategies in their teaching. To address these challenges, the Department of Basic Education has devised measures to capacitate teachers to function effectively.

Among the measures taken, workshops on inclusive education were organised, special and mainstream schools were merged, and in-service teachers were encouraged to enrol in short courses for inclusive education with accredited institutions of higher learning. The measures also included the introduction of policies such as White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) and the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support document (Department of Basic Education [DBE], RSA, 2011a).

Besides all these measures, little is known about what teachers in the Capricorn district of the Limpopo province are doing in their classrooms to accommodate diversity. To respond to this gap, we sought to investigate enabling environments that teachers create to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. We thought that this information would be important for policymakers and teacher education institutions as they are hard-pressed for answers on how best teachers can accommodate diversity in classrooms. To situate this study in its proper context, we provide a brief discussion on inclusive education in South Africa in the next section.

Literature Review

Inclusive education in South Africa

Inclusive education is generally recognised as a tool for delivering education for all learners regardless of their barriers to learning. However, its practice is different and inconsistent across countries because of its complexity and variability in implementation. For example, since South Africa is a diverse country with regard to ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and socio-economic background, the implementation of inclusive education poses unique challenges. This diversity has implications for the implementation of inclusive education, such as, how to teach in a multilingual classroom (Engelbrecht, 2006; Walton et al., 2022).

Despite, these challenges, the South African government is making efforts to address them. For example, various initiatives are undertaken by the government itself, universities, non-government organisations and education consultants to equip teachers with the relevant knowledge for inclusive education. This is done through several Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programmes.

Teachers' ongoing professional development in inclusive education

For teachers to create enabling environments conducive for the realisation of inclusive education, there is a need for their ongoing professional development. It is required that they should be lifelong learners to keep abreast with current developments (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Researchers (Maebana & Themane, 2019; Waitoller, 2020) have pointed out the need for teachers to be continually engaged in ongoing professional development.

Several continuous professional development models have been used to study how teachers could be equipped with knowledge, skills and values to capacitate them to create conducive environments for inclusive education. Lave and Wenger (1991) used the concept of communities of practice to study how teachers can link learning communities. Waitoller (2020) shows how teachers' interactions with others could influence their learning by imposing their norms of individual autonomy and collective responsibility.

However, despite the emergence of a number of systematic reviews (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013) on continuous teacher development, little attention is focussed on how Short Learning Programmes (SLP) contribute to the empowerment of teachers to create an enabling environment for the implementation of inclusive education. It is this gap that we sought to address with this a study.

Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) say that teaching as a profession requires knowledge of expertise in teachers' specialisation and ethical knowledge; teachers being lifelong scholars. In South Africa, the lack of professional knowledge on inclusive education has led to the development of standards for inclusive education (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016; Walton & Rusznyak, 2019). Walton and Rusznyak (2019) say that the standards were aimed at equipping teachers by supporting their professional status of teaching and improving learning goals in different ways (Florian & Rouse, 2009). Forlin, (2010) and Loreman, Deppeler and Harvey (2005) argue that apart from these standards, there is a slow rate of progress in teacher training institutions in making adjustments to their programmes to prepare teachers for diversity in their classrooms. While this is the case, Alnahdi (2020), Black-Hawkins and Florian (2012) and Heyder, Südkamp and Steinmayr (2020) acknowledge that teachers around the world have been exposed to legislations and policy guidelines regarding inclusive education. It seems that the exposure mentioned above is regarded as a milestone achieved as it is viewed from a policy perspective analysis. Despite the progress on inclusive education, Qu (2022) argues that a gap remains in the translation of the philosophical acceptance of inclusive education into effective practice, meaning that there should be a shift from theory to implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers as change agents

The implementation of inclusive education in South African schools has been centred on teachers as agents of change. Teacher agency is defined as the capacity and power to actively choose and deliberately take initiatives to bring about change (Anderson, 2010; Toom, Pyhältö & O'Connell Rust, 2015). Pantić (2015) avers that teachers are considered agents of change when they act strategically to minimise risks of exclusion and underperformance of learners by maximising outcomes of learners' performance in cultural and social contexts.

However, Themane and Thobajane (2019) caution that the majority of teachers who were trained before 2001 were not exposed to inclusive education. This may pose a big challenge, which could lead to wavering in their commitment to inclusive education. This doubt might be due to the lack of necessary skills and knowledge to embrace inclusivity (Engelbrecht, 2013; Pantić & Florian, 2015).

In considering the concept of teacher agency for inclusive education, it is important to note how teachers skilfully draw on their agency to shape their work (Wade, 2000; Wang, Mu & Zhang, 2017). However, issues of positive attitude towards diversity are viewed as important tools for teachers to use, but it can be more effective when it is backed up by skills such as knowledge and experiences (Finkelstein, Sharma & Furlonger,

2019). Therefore, teachers and teacher education institutions are encouraged to engage in collaborative activities which could enhance inclusive culture and practices in schools (Walton et al., 2022). While this collaboration is done, Walton (2017) contends that inclusive education would be better served if it is applied as practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge.

Against this background, teachers should be encouraged to accommodate all learners in their classrooms (Pantić & Florian, 2015). Vongalis and Macrow (2007) advocate for the acknowledgment of teachers' practices as complex and highly contextualised and those that cannot be simply regulated. Besides teacher agency being complex and a challenging endeavour, it is necessary for transforming schools to be enabling environments that accommodate diverse learners.

Diversity in the classroom

Diversity is articulated as a concept that is not easy to manage. Rose (2010) argues that it is unclear which skills and competencies are required by teachers in order to address diversity in classrooms. Hong, Hoon Ryoo, Lee, Noh and Shin (2020) argue that skills and competencies can be attained by working with learners who are different. Individual differences among learners include their unique interests, likes and dislikes, which impact their way of making meaning in the process of learning (Abongdia, Foncha & Dakada, 2015).

Diversity can be understood from five broad areas, namely, cognitive, communicative, psychosocial, sensory and physical, and societal factors (Roberson, 2006). Diversity in the classroom in the 21st century, as one of the significant factors, calls on curricula to be designed in ways that will benefit all learners' disabilities and differences, while teachers alter and adapt lessons to suit the learning needs of every learner in the classroom.

It is against this backdrop that we sought to answer the question: What are the enabling environments for inclusivity that teachers create to accommodate diversity in their classrooms? We considered this question important in understanding how teachers cope in diverse classrooms (Syed & Ozbilgin, 2015).

Research Methodology

Research Approach

To answer this research question, we used the qualitative research approach. We found the approach to generate the type of data we needed to understand how teachers created enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. The qualitative research approach is suitable to determine how people interpret their own experiences, and how they construct their own world and experiences (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Thus, since we sought an in-depth understanding of how teachers addressed diversity in their classrooms, we found the approach quite appropriate.

Research Design

Within the qualitative research approach, we used a case study design as it is based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2017; Zainal, 2007). Thus, the design was deemed proper to solicit teachers' views about how they addressed learner diversity in their classrooms.

Sampling

We recruited five teachers through purposive sampling to participate in the study (Patton, 2002). The teachers came from five primary schools (one teacher from each school) in the Pietersburg Circuit. The circuit is in the Capricorn District of the Limpopo province, South Africa. Learner diversity is interpreted differently by different people. Most people think of it as differences in race, gender and language. But it includes more than just observable differences. It may also refer to differences in socioeconomic status, religion and individual personalities. In this sample, diversity was manifested through socio-economic status and cognitive abilities.

The five schools were all quantile 2 and 3 schools (that is, no-fee-paying schools) and were situated in poor, rural areas. The learners in these schools were diverse regarding socio-economic status. Some came from child-headed families, as their parents worked far from home. The five teachers were only those who attended the Short Course in Inclusive Education. Besides having attended the short course, the teachers had to be the advocates or champions of inclusive education in their schools as it was part of the criteria for participation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire adapted from the Teaching for All Project (2019).

The questionnaire was developed by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and consists of five sections: Section A (biographical information); Section B (views about inclusive education); Section C (teachers' knowledge about pedagogies and materials used to accommodate diversity in their classrooms); Section D (teaching practice during their training) and Section E (how the teacher education programme has developed their skills, knowledge and attitudes during their teacher training). In this article, we only report on data from Section B.

The open-ended questionnaire is based on two scenarios. Scenario 1 is about Lerato who used to

live with her parents in the Limpopo province. Both her parents live with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). However, when her parents separated, her mother moved to Cape Town and left her behind in Limpopo. She is now in Grade 4. At 11 years, she is a little old for her Grade. Some of her teachers think that she has intellectual problems and tend not to bother with her in class. Her work suggests that she does not read or write well and she often seems too stressed and lonely and often neglects her personal hygiene.

Scenario 2 is about Tinyiko who is being physically abused by his father. He is often disruptive in class. The school has a problem with local gangsters hanging out around at the school field. Other learners are scared of him and claim that he is involved in gang activities. One day Tinyiko begins to taunt a girl in the class, which leads to a violent altercation between them.

The participants were required to respond to the following two open-ended questions on the two scenarios. On Scenario 1: How would you go about trying to address her needs to support her? In your response, please include policies or sets of guidelines you could turn to, and approaches you would use to address this problem. On Scenario 2: How would you go about addressing this situation in your classroom? In your response, please include teaching materials or teaching approaches you would use in your lesson for this.

Procedures of data collection

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC/84/2019: IR). The nature and purpose of the study was explained to the teachers. Consent for participation was then obtained from the teachers.

Data Analysis

Analytical procedures advocated by Moustakas (1994) and Tamkin, Whittaker, Saurez, Matthews, Cato, Timmons and Bobbett (2019) were followed in the study. We adopted a discourse analysis approach to analyse the data. This entailed reading through the questionnaire transcripts and highlighting significant statements ("horisontalisation"), grouping clustered statements into themes, coding, removing overlapping and repetitive statements, establishing themes, and writing textural descriptions of varying experiences of workshops. The structural descriptions were then linked to make sense of the underlying meanings and experiences and linkages made with the wider literature (Silverman, 2019).

Findings

Four findings emerged from our study. The teachers demonstrated their knowledge of the use of legislations and policy guidelines on inclusive education. They also showed their ability to use this knowledge in the two scenarios presented to them. Participant 1 demonstrated this knowledge as follows:

> *According to the South African Bill of Rights, every learner has the right to education, right to protection; meaning no child has to be discriminated despite (irrespective of ill-health of family background). Our curriculum in curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) document does not cover the learners with barriers so as an inclusive education I need to prepare my lesson plan in accordance with the different types of learners in my subject* [*sic*].

From this response it seems as though the teachers thinks that the CAPS document does not cater for learners with additional learning needs. Participant 3 commented as follows on Scenario 1:

> *In order to support Lerato very well the following policies must be visited: Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy, language policy, curriculum and policy statement and South African Schools Act* [*sic*]. *This knowledge of the legislative guidelines is what drives teachers to implement these policies in trying to accommodate all learners in their respective classrooms.*

The second finding was based on teachers' understanding of inclusive education. This showed that they were still caught up in the medical model approach of addressing barriers among learners. According to the medical model of disability people are disabled by their impairments or differences.

These attitudes were expressed by Participant 2, who said: "*She must be treated according to her ability and intellectual capacity*." The teacher believed that a learner with an intellectual barrier should be diagnosed and treated, meaning that the problem was with the learner and not necessarily with the system. However, instead of looking at the limitations of the learner, the teacher can employ differentiated instruction, which can be done in three ways: by content to address readiness level or ability; by the process to address learning style and by product, to address interests. Thus, by implication, the participant also employed differentiation by the learning style of the learner and by-product to address the needs of the learner.

Participant 3 responded as follows: "*social support is also needed for Tinyiko and through the School-Based Support Team (SBST) coordinator assistance will be requested for Tinyiko and his father*." In response to Scenario 1: Participant 4 argued:

> *The learner should be referred to the SBST to solve her problems. The learner needs to be supported because she has problems related to her family and she cannot cope with her school work. The social workers need to be contacted regarding the family background which contributes to the poor performance of the learner.*

These responses reveal that even though teachers were familiar with inclusive education policies and recommended documents, they still held the view

that learners with barriers needed to be fixed first in order to participate in classroom activities. The responses of Participants 2 and 3 are what Florian refers to as "bell-curve thinking and notions of fixed ability still underpin the structure of schooling" (Florian, 2014).

Our third finding was that teachers were familiar with the principle of differentiation to create an enabling environment to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. The participants showed an understanding of what differentiation meant. Participant 1 confidently said: "*In my assessment, I must also prepare my assessment taking into consideration that I have different learners with different types of barriers (use text, use pictorial tasks) and different assistive devices to help my learners to learn much easier*."

Participant 3 boldly declared that "*I will use the approach that will be able to address Tinyiko's behaviour as well as materials that will support my approach*." Tomlinson (2005) attests to differentiation as an approach to teaching based on the thinking that learners learn best when their teachers accommodate different attributes such as readiness levels, interests and learning profiles.

In this finding, teachers also showed expertise and knowledge of what content should be taught and how it should be taught as a way of addressing challenges and accommodating all learners. Participant 1 commented as follows: "*Teaching materials that I will use will include pictures and manual* [*sic*] *(practical) where he will be kept busy at all times*."

Additionally, we found that the teachers used different strategies to create an enabling environment to accommodate diversity in their classrooms.

> *I will also introduce group work for him to learn to socialize with others as to make him acceptable amongst other learners. I will teach him on how to speak with others show him respect than encourage others to respect as well. I will make him feel welcome in everything that we are doing* [*sic*]. (Participant 1)

Maintaining respect and the dignity of learners in the classroom promotes recognition and acceptance (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Group work is one of the most effective teaching strategies that teachers can employ for all learners to learn from each other. Group work has the potential of introducing learners' strengths and weaknesses. It was enlightening to learn that teachers acknowledged group work:

> *... she must be kept first and be given more chance to participate more in a group. must be given chance to be a group leader by doing that you will be encouraging him to move away from the Gang to engage himself to schoolwork* [*sic*]. (Participant 2)

The fourth finding was on collaboration with various stakeholders such as parents, health professionals and other organisations and structures. "*Social support is also needed for Tinyiko and through the SBST coordinator assistance will be requested for Tinyiko and his father*" (Participant 3). Participant 4 emphasised that "*social workers need to be contacted regarding the family background which contributes to poor performance of the learner*." On extending collaboration, Participant 5 argued as follows:

> *After that, the educator must draw the Individual Support Plan (ISP) will help the learner while supporting her they must collaborate with other departments. Welfare open broken social worker trying to relocate the two parents who are separated in order to help the child. Then the Department of Health will assess the parents who are living with HIV by giving them counselling after counselling they must get their Antiretroviral (ARVs). The school must call a meeting together with Tinyiko's father and SBST in order to help the learner. The school must sit with all stakeholders to discuss the situation and gangsterism at school* [*sic*].

Lunenberg, Dengerink and Korthagen (2014) assert that collaboration with other stakeholders requires a professional role deemed as a personal interpretation of a position based on expectations from the context and on a systematically planned programme translated into practice. In the next section, we discuss the four findings in some detail.

Discussion

The findings in our study are consistent with those of other studies (Alnahdi, 2020; Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Heyder et al., 2020). These authors also found that teachers were knowledgeable about legislation and policy guidelines in inclusive education. In these cases, teachers were generally predisposed to accommodate diversity in their classrooms.

However, the teachers in our study felt that the teacher training they had received did not prepare them well enough to face diverse classrooms. They indicated that their training did not focus on innovative practices to work in inclusive classrooms and schools (Forlin, 2010). We agree with Forlin (2010) and Loreman et al. (2005) state that teacher training institutions have been, to some extent, slow in making the necessary adjustments to their courses to prepare teachers for diversity in their classrooms. Bačáková and Closs (2013) advocate that continuing professional development should empower teachers in inclusive education practices. In a similar vein, Subban, Round and Sharma (2021) suggest that contemporary education requires teachers to understand learners' diverse needs and to master the skills of working with paraprofessional individuals.

Secondly, we found that the participants appeared to be still entrapped in the medical model

of inclusion as opposed to the social model. This observation was also made by Qu (2022) who reflects that despite progress made with regard to inclusive education, gaps remain in the translation of the philosophical acceptance of inclusive education into effective teaching practices. For example, support for segregated schools hinges on the positivist, medical model of disability. This view still challenges inclusive education that is driven by the interpretivist, social and rights-based models (Themane, 2017). The debates that are for or against inclusion usually take these two binary positions, which need to be openly addressed if teachers are to be wholly committed to creating enabling environments that accommodate diversity. This can be done by further research in the area of teachers' perceptions on the commitment to inclusion.

Regarding the third finding, teachers demonstrated an understanding of how to apply differentiation to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. They appeared to have honed their skills on how to apply differentiated teaching strategies to help learners. Finkelstein et al. (2019) stress that a positive attitude is of value in an inclusive classroom, and it is not enough if it is not backed up with the collection of skills, knowledge, and experiences of teachers for inclusive education to become a reality. Walton (2017) also contends that inclusive education would be better served if it is applied as practical knowledge rather than theoretical knowledge. Similarly, we also arrived at the same finding with Walton above as it revealed how teachers strive to design lessons and activities that will suit every individual learner.

However, one must caution that this teaching strategy could be regarded as discriminatory when teachers do not possess the required skills to employ it properly. Mabasa-Manganyi (2018) cautions that differentiation should be applied circumspectly, as it may lead to learners with additional needs being exposed to poor quality of education. Additionally, Westwood (2001) cautions that modifying the curriculum content might lead to content being reduced. This, he argues, violates the principle of equity and social justice.

Our fourth finding was on collaboration. Teachers reported that they leveraged on the support they received from their colleagues and other stakeholders to cope with diversity in their classrooms. They argued that implementing inclusive education was to be a collective effort as opposed to former conventions where teachers were regarded as being solely responsible for learners with diverse needs. Walton et al., (2022) regard collaboration as an important vehicle of supporting inclusive cultures and practices in schools.

Our research findings explain teacher agency and social capital in the creation of enabling environments for diverse classrooms. These findings are of particular relevance and importance to all who work in rural contexts like the Limpopo province. In these contexts, teachers work with children who are vulnerable, namely those who struggle with, for example, trauma, the adversities of poverty, and disability. Teachers need to create safe havens to confront inherited systemic problems experienced in the present and may continue in the future. Most children in these contexts exhibit disruptive behaviour that disrupts their schooling. The two scenarios we have drawn here are typical of these schools.

Teachers in our sample taught in under-resourced schools, which presents unique challenges to fully implementing inclusive education as compared to some well-resourced schools. As Bačáková and Closs (2013) argue, teachers are key to quality inclusive education. Against this background, it is important to highlight that international perspectives and their context are the point of reference for most inclusive education practices. This point of departure may ignore teachers' local contexts. For example, cultural and religious beliefs in contexts may act as stumbling blocks to the inclusion of diversity.

These findings have the potential to inform researchers, educational organisations, and different education sectors to plan an inclusive pedagogy, particularly in schools that serve a diverse range of learners.

We used two theoretical lenses to make sense of this finding. The first was that of Shulman's (1986) PCK (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987). By PCK, Shulman refers to the need for teachers to possess both knowledge and pedagogy to dispatch such knowledge. We found that teachers in this study had sufficient knowledge about the legislative frameworks and policy guidelines and they showed knowledge of PCK to make their classrooms inclusive. But, this appears to have not been applied to their classrooms. We could say that they only possessed knowledge without any practical application. This was evident from the fact that they appeared to be still engrossed in the medical model of disability. Teacher education institutions may need to look at this on a broader scale.

The second lens was that of Basil Bernstein (1975) who distinguishes between horizontal and vertical discourses. The former is the "everyday" discourse consisting of a reservoir of local communalised segments defined in contexts of use. Vertical discourse consists of a "coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure" that is either hierarchically organised as in the sciences (hierarchical knowledge structure) or takes the form of a series (vertical). We think that the teachers in our sample possessed horizontal knowledge because most of them came from

full-service schools, special schools, and pioneering schools where inclusive education is their daily discourse. However, they seemed to have had a deficiency in a coherent, explicit and systematically principled structure of knowledge.

Limitations of the Study

Any study is susceptible to some limitations. These limitations may put the credibility of the findings in question if the limitations are not identified and addressed timeously. In our study these were obvious in the methodological section. The five teachers who participated in the study were enrolled in a Short Course in Inclusive Education. This was likely to introduce bias in their engagement with us.

Besides this observation, our study has certain limitations because it was conducted with a smaller number of participants. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population. Nevertheless, they may be of great assistance to future researchers in terms of providing insight into the progress that is being made on inclusive education in rural contexts such as the Limpopo province.

Another potential threat was that the sampled schools were all from low socio-economic areas, which could have given a one-sided impression of how the teachers created conducive learning environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. We resolved this by clearly and directly identifying the potential problems and suggesting ways in which this could be addressed.

Conclusion

In this article we report on a study of how primary school teachers created enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms to answer the question: What do primary school teachers do to accommodate learners with diverse learning needs? We found that although teachers in our sample were knowledgeable about the legislative policies on inclusive education, they were not fully confident to apply these in their classrooms. We also found that teachers were willing to seek help or to collaborate with other stakeholders like parents to create enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms. However, we caution against broad generalisations about the practices, tools, and work of these teachers from a single study without regard for the complexities and idiosyncrasies of particular institutional contexts that may result in an unintended consequence.

Implications of the Study

Although these findings are not generalisable to a wider population of teachers in South Africa, our findings have at least four implications. Firstly, teachers have been exhaustively engaged in this research without paying heed to their voices. A decade ago, there was a surge of literature (Eloff & Kgwete, 2007; Majoko, 2016) in this field of direction. With this study we affirm the need to give teachers a voice. We think that the research methodology we adopted afforded us an opportunity to view their worlds and to listen to their own voices.

Secondly, in embracing the concept of inclusive education, CPTD activities relating to teaching practice and considering the context in which teachers work are of vital importance. Such activities should be tailor-made for their specific context. The result from our study suggests that student teachers as well as in-service teachers involved in CPTD programmes (such as SLP) need to be exposed to programmes to assist them in the mastery of contemporary teaching methods such as the use of online platforms, Blackboard Collaborate, Google Meet and many others. This will allow them to teach skilfully by adapting to new challenges such as the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to cater to all learners in diverse classrooms.

Thirdly, trainers, policymakers, and parents should recognise that teachers are professionals who are responsible for shaping the world, including making schools inclusive. No one should undermine them. In this sense, listening to their voices is a major step in supporting them to become more effective in their classrooms. The bottom-up approach and transformative leadership are preferred whereby teachers have opportunities to suggest and receive feedback about their requirements from school-based CPTD and practices. This will help build the necessary confidence. We also advocate for teachers to be foregrounded in the value of inclusivity to prevent pessimism and paranoia in appreciating and embracing inclusive education in response to Participant 4 who argued that this level of understanding and passion was still missing.

In fourth place, the findings in our study have far-reaching implications for the economic development of South Africa. The inclusion of all children regardless of their abilities implies that all children if given equal opportunities, could contribute to an increase in the country's intellectual capacity in much-needed areas such as science and technology. Teachers are central in identifying, nourishing, and developing hidden talents in children of all capabilities. South Africa, as a developing country, is desperately in need of such teachers who can create enabling environments to accommodate diversity in their classrooms.

Authors' Contributions

RB Mabasa-Manganyi conceptualised the article, did the data analysis, and wrote the discussion

sections. JM Mamabolo worked on the correction of the article, checking its scholarly soundness and academic integrity. MD Sepadi and SM Ndlhovu worked on the technical aspects of the paper, including references. F Kgopa helped with data collection process (arrangements with teachers). M Themane helped shape the introduction, research problem and literature review sections.

Notes

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